

FEARNHILL SCHOOL HISTORY DEPARTMENT – KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER – HITLER’S RISE TO POWER

Key events

20 April 1889: Adolf Hitler was born in the small Austrian town of Braunau am Inn, in Upper Austria on the Austrian-German border.

Feb 1908: Hitler dreamt of a career as an artist. His father had rejected the idea but after he died in 1903 Hitler would try to make his dream a reality.

He applied to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts but was promptly rejected in October 1907.

Aug 1914: Hitler was keen to prove his loyalty to Germany. In August 1914 the world plunged into a war unlike any seen before. Hitler quickly enlisted. In the army he finally found purpose; a cause with which he could wholly identify. Serving in both France and Belgium, he was twice decorated for bravery.

Nov 1918: Hitler was wounded for a second time following a British gas attack. While recovering in Pasewalk, the unthinkable happened – Germany surrendered. Before the surrender, facing serious discontent at home and the prospect of defeat at the front, Germany's High Command sought to shift the blame. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated days before Armistice. Like others, Hitler was enraged by what he saw as the betrayal of an undefeated German Army by Jews and socialists at home. He resolved to go into politics.

Jun 1919: To the victors the spoils: when the Treaty of Versailles was signed in summer 1919, Germany was forced to accept sole responsibility for the war.

Just as damaging, the peace obliged Germany to pay large amounts in reparations. The huge loss of territory it also dictated came as a devastating blow. Hitler bitterly resented it. Defeat and then humiliation at Versailles challenged his whole sense of worth.

Jul 1921: Hitler’s oratory skills helped him rise quickly through the ranks of his new party. In February he spoke before a crowd of nearly 6,000 in Munich.

To publicise the meeting, he engaged in propaganda tactics – sending out party supporters in trucks with swastikas to leaflet the area.

Nov 1923: Hitler sought to start a revolution. On 8 November, Bavarian Prime Minister Gustav Kahr addressed a meeting of businessmen at a beer hall in Munich. Hitler burst in with his storm troopers (the SA) – a motley crew of far-right paramilitaries. At gunpoint, Kahr was forced to pledge support. The next day, Hitler led 3,000 men onto the streets. But the police were waiting. In the ensuing violence, 16 Nazis and 3 policemen died. Hitler was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for treason.

Jan 1933: Now a German citizen, Hitler led the Nazis to become the largest party in Germany with over 37% of the popular vote in the elections of July 1932.

German President von Hindenburg's concern at growing Communist support persuaded him to give Hitler the post of Chancellor in January. Hitler quickly consolidated his position. By March he had dictatorial powers courtesy of the Enabling Act, which allowed him to pass laws without Reichstag approval. Political parties, organisations and unions unassociated with the Nazis were soon disbanded. But Hitler still needed the support of the army to fulfil the vision he had outlined in Mein Kampf.

Jun 1934: The leader of the SA, Ernst Röhm, was among hundreds assassinated in one night as Hitler purged his party. Röhm's commitment to 'continuing revolution' was not conducive to Hitler's own ambitions. He could not tolerate opposition to his plans to suppress workers' rights and make Germany ready for war. The army, however, approved and after President Hindenburg died in August, they supported Hitler's elevation to Führer. Hitler was now in total control.

Sep 1935: Since 1933 the Nazis had tried to exclude Jews and other 'undesirables' from public life. In 1935 a new phase began – enforced biological segregation.

At the annual Nuremberg rally Hitler announced laws denying Jewish people citizenship and prohibiting marriage or sexual relations with people of "German or related blood". Anyone with three or more Jewish grandparents was affected, irrespective of their own religious identity.

Sep 1938: With his vision under way domestically, Hitler set his sights beyond Germany's borders. Lebensraum – territorial expansion – was next on his agenda.

In March Hitler triumphantly led Nazi troops into Austria, achieving his goal of unifying the country of his birth and the country he ruled. His next target was the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. Convinced that neither Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, nor his French counterpart Edouard Daladier wanted war, Hitler pressed his demands. At a conference in Munich organised by Chamberlain, those demands were met. Nazi troops marched into Czechoslovakia and took the Sudetenland.

Key people

The Big Three: The three most important men at the Versailles Conference were:

- Georges Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France
- Woodrow Wilson, the President of America
- David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister of Britain

Anton Drexler: The German Workers’ Party was founded in January 1919 by a railway worker called Anton Drexler. It was one of many small political parties in Munich at this time. The small group met in beer halls and Hitler attended regularly because he liked what was being said. Hitler soon joined the party, becoming their 55th member (the party started numbering at 500 to make it look like they had more members).

The SA (Sturmabteilung or Storm Detachment) was better known as the Brownshirts or Storm Troopers. The SA got their nickname from the colour of the shirts they wore. From 1921 to 1933 the SA disrupted the meetings of Adolf Hitler’s political opponents as well as defended the halls where Hitler was making a speech in public.

Schutzstaffel (SS) - Led by Heinrich Himmler, the SS was the most important of these organisations and oversaw the others. Initially set up as Hitler’s personal bodyguard service, the SS was fanatically loyal to the Führer. It later set up concentration camps where ‘enemies of the state’ were sent.

Gestapo - This was the Nazis’ secret police force. Its job was to monitor the German population for signs of opposition or resistance to Nazi rule. It was greatly helped by ordinary German people informing on their fellow citizens.

The German people had suffered terribly during both the First World War and the Depression and a huge part of the Nazis’ appeal was that they promised to make Germany’s economy strong again. Hitler aimed for full employment and by 1939 there was virtually no official unemployment in Germany.

Marriage and family: Hitler wanted a high birth rate so that the Aryan population would grow. He tried to achieve this by:

- introducing the Law for the Encouragement of Marriage which gave newlywed couples a loan of 1,000 marks, and allowed them to keep 250 marks for each child they had
- giving an award called the Mother’s Cross to women who had 8 children
- allowing women to volunteer to have a baby for an Aryan member of the SS
- The result was that a Nazi ideology claiming women should be restricted to three things: Kinder, Küche, Kirche, or ‘children, kitchen, church.’

Children: from the age of 10 boys and girls were encouraged to join the Nazis’ youth organisation, the Hitler Youth (the girls’ wing of which was called the League of German Maidens). Membership from age 10 was made compulsory in 1936 and by 1939 90 per cent of German boys aged 14 and over were members.

Historical terms

Treaty of Versailles: The Treaty of Versailles was signed after World War One had ended in 1918. The Treaty set out what punishment Germany should receive for their involvement in the war. The treaty was signed at the vast Versailles Palace near Paris - hence its title - between Germany and the Allies. **The main terms of the treaty were:**

1. Germany had to accept the Blame for starting the war (Clause 231). This was vital because it provided the justification for...
2. Germany had to pay £6,600 million (called Reparations) for the damage done during the war.
3. Germany was forbidden to have submarines or an air force. She could have a navy of only six battleships, and an Army of just 100,000 men. In addition, Germany was not allowed to place any troops in the Rhineland, the strip of land, 50 miles wide, next to France.
4. Germany lost Territory (land) in Europe. Germany’s colonies were given to Britain and France
5. The formation of a League of Nations

Democracy: a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives.

Dictatorship: a country, government, or the form of government in which absolute power is exercised by a dictator.

Nazis: a member of the National Socialist German Workers' Party.

Hyperinflation: monetary inflation occurring at a very high rate.

Depression: the financial and industrial slump of 1929 and subsequent years.

Self determination: Main idea of Woodrow Wilson during discussions. It meant that people should have the right to rule themselves and not be ruled by an empire

Reparations: The money Germany was forced to pay as punishment for starting WW1. Set at £6.6 bn to be paid over 42 years

Demilitarised: Germany was forced to demilitarise the Rhineland (area on German/ French border) This meant they had no military there

Diktat: The idea popular amongst many Germans that they had peace dictated to them, having no say