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The Rise of Adolf Hitler

Great Depression Begins

When the stock market collapsed on Wall Street on Tuesday, October 29, 1929, it sent financial markets worldwide into a tailspin with disastrous effects.

The German economy was especially vulnerable since it was built upon foreign capital, mostly loans from America and was very dependent on foreign trade. When those loans suddenly came due and when the world market for German exports dried up, the well oiled German industrial machine quickly ground to a halt.

As production levels fell, German workers were laid off. Along with this, banks failed throughout Germany. Savings accounts, the result of years of hard work, were instantly wiped out. Inflation soon followed making it hard for families to purchase expensive necessities with devalued money.

Overnight, the middle class standard of living so many German families enjoyed was ruined by events outside of Germany, beyond their control. The Great Depression began and they were cast into poverty and deep misery and began looking for a solution, any solution.

Adolf Hitler knew his opportunity had arrived.

In the good times before the Great Depression the Nazi Party experienced slow growth, barely reaching 100,000 members in a country of over sixty million. But the Party, despite its tiny size, was a tightly controlled, highly disciplined organization of fanatics poised to spring into action.

Since the failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923, Hitler had changed tactics and was for the most part playing by the rules of democracy. Hitler had gambled in 1923, attempting to overthrow the young German democracy by force, and lost. Now he was determined to overthrow it legally by getting elected while at the same time building a Nazi shadow government that would one day replace the democracy.

Hitler had begun his career in politics as a street brawling revolutionary appealing to disgruntled World War I veterans predisposed to violence. By 1930 he was quite different, or so it seemed. Hitler counted among his supporters a number of German industrialists, and upper middle class socialites, a far cry from the semi-literate toughs he started out with.

He intentionally broadened his appeal because it was necessary. Now he needed to broaden his appeal to the great mass of voting Germans. His chief assets were his speech making ability and a keen sense of what the people wanted to hear.

By mid-1930, amid the economic pressures of the Great Depression, the German democratic government was beginning to unravel.

Gustav Stresemann, the outstanding German Foreign Minister, had died in October 1929, just before the Wall Street crash. He had spent years working to restore the German economy and stabilize the republic and died, having exhausted himself in the process.

The crisis of the Great Depression brought disunity to the political parties in the Reichstag. Instead of forging an alliance to enact desperately need legislation, they broke up into squabbling, uncompromising groups. In March



Fallout from the Great Depression - A young and hopelessly unemployed Berliner panhandles for spare change. Below: A run on a bank in Berlin.



Below: May Day 1930 brings a huge turn-out of pro-communist Berliners expressing admiration of Soviet Russia.

of 1930, Heinrich Bruening, a member of the Catholic Center Party, became Chancellor.

Despite the overwhelming need for a financial program to help the German people, Chancellor Bruening encountered stubborn opposition to his plans. To break the bitter stalemate, he went to President Hindenburg and asked the Old Gentleman to invoke Article 48 of the German constitution which gave emergency powers to the president to rule by decree. This provoked a huge outcry from the opposition, demanding withdrawal of the decree.

As a measure of last resort, Bruening asked Hindenburg in July 1930 to dissolve the Reichstag according to parliamentary rules and call for new elections.

The elections were set for September 14th. Hitler and the Nazis sprang into action. Their time for campaigning had arrived.

The German people were tired of the political haggling in Berlin. They were tired of misery, tired of suffering, tired of weakness. These were desperate times and they were willing to listen to anyone, even Adolf Hitler.



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The Rise of Adolf Hitler

Germans Elect Nazis

Adolf Hitler and the Nazis waged a modern whirlwind campaign in 1930 unlike anything ever seen in Germany. Hitler traveled the country delivering dozens of major speeches, attending meetings, shaking hands, signing autographs, posing for pictures, and even kissing babies.

Joseph Goebbels brilliantly organized thousands of meetings, torchlight parades, plastered posters everywhere and printed millions of special edition Nazi newspapers.

Germany was in the grip of the Great Depression with a population suffering from poverty, misery, and uncertainty, amid increasing political instability.

For Hitler, the master speech maker, the long awaited opportunity to let loose his talents on the German people had arrived. He would find in this downtrodden people, an audience very willing to listen. In his speeches, Hitler offered the Germans what they needed most, encouragement. He gave them heaps of vague promises while avoiding the details. He used simple catchphrases, repeated over and over.

His campaign appearances were carefully staged events. Audiences were always kept waiting, deliberately letting the tension increase, only to be broken by solemn processions of Brownshirts with golden banners, blaring military music, and finally the appearance of Hitler amid shouts of "Heil!" The effect in a closed in hall with theatrical style lighting and decorations of swastikas was overwhelming and very catching.

Hitler began each speech in low, hesitating tones, gradually raising the pitch and volume of his voice then exploding in a climax of frenzied indignation. He combined this with carefully rehearsed hand gestures for maximum effect. He skillfully played on the emotions of the audience bringing the level of excitement higher and higher until the people wound up a wide-eyed, screaming, frenzied mass that surrendered to his will and looked upon him with pseudo-religious adoration.

Hitler offered something to everyone: work to the unemployed; prosperity to failed business people; profits to industry; expansion to the Army; social harmony and an end of class distinctions to idealistic young students; and restoration of German glory to those in despair. He promised to bring order amid chaos; a feeling of unity to all and the chance to belong. He would make Germany strong again; end payment of war reparations to the Allies; tear up the treaty of Versailles; stamp out corruption; keep down Marxism; and deal harshly with the Jews.

He appealed to all classes of Germans. The name of the Nazi Party itself was deliberately all inclusive – the National Socialist German Workers' Party.

All of the Nazis, from Hitler, down to the leader of the smallest city block, worked tirelessly, relentlessly, to pound their message into the minds of the Germans.

On election day September 14, 1930, the Nazis received 6,371,000



A typical campaign scene with Nazi posters on display next to the Center Party, Communists, Socialists and others. Below: Repeated propaganda marches became a cheap and effective form of publicity - sometimes leading to violence between rival political groups. **HÄ**rst Wessel, pictured at the front, was killed during such a brawl in 1930 and raised to the status of a martyr by Nazis via the "HÄ

votes – over eighteen percent of the total – and were thus entitled to 107 seats in the German Reichstag. It was a stunning victory for Hitler. Overnight, the Nazi Party went from the smallest to the second largest political party in Germany.

It propelled Hitler to solid national and international prestige and aroused the curiosity of the world press. He was besieged with interview requests. Foreign journalists wanted to know – what did he mean – tear up the Treaty of Versailles and end war reparations? – and that Germany wasn't responsible for the First World War?



Gone was the Charlie Chaplin image of Hitler as the laughable fanatic behind the Beer Hall Putsch. The beer hall revolutionary had been replaced by the skilled manipulator of the masses.

On October 13, 1930, dressed in their brown shirts, the elected Nazi deputies marched in unison into the Reichstag and took their seats. When the roll-call was taken, each one shouted, "Present! Heil Hitler!"

They had no intention of cooperating with the democratic government, knowing it was to their advantage to let things get worse in Germany, thus increasing the appeal of Hitler to an ever more miserable people.

Nazi storm troopers dressed in civilian clothes celebrated their electoral victory by smashing the windows of Jewish shops, restaurants and department stores, an indication of things to come.

Now, for the floundering German democracy, the clock was ticking and time was on Hitler's side.

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The History Place™

The Rise of Adolf Hitler

Hitler Runs for President

Just three weeks after the suicide of his beloved niece, Adolf Hitler met the 84-year-old President of Germany, Paul von Hindenburg, for the first time.

Hitler pulled himself out of the severe depression he fell into after her death. Twice before he had sunk into the abyss of despair, only to emerge stronger – in 1918, lying in a hospital, blinded by poison gas, after hearing news of the Germany's defeat ending World War I – and in 1924, in prison after the failed Beer Hall Putsch.

In October 1931, the former Austrian Corporal was presented to the former Field Marshal. Hitler was a bit unnerved by the Old Gentleman and rambled on at length trying to impress him. Hindenburg was not impressed and later said Hitler might be suited for Postmaster, but never for a high position such as the Chancellorship of Germany.

October of 1931 marked the beginning of the political intrigue that would destroy the young republic and ultimately make Hitler F hrer of Germany.

Constant political squabbling among the numerous political parties in the Reichstag resulted in ineffective government.

Adding to the problem, there were now over a hundred elected Nazis in the Reichstag. Under the leadership of Hermann G ring, they regularly disrupted proceedings with vulgar, rowdy behavior to help undermine democracy in Germany.

The German people were desperate for relief from the tremendous personal suffering brought on by the Great Depression, now two years old. Millions were unemployed, thousands of small businesses had failed, homelessness and starvation were real possibilities for everyone.

Civilization itself was unraveling in Berlin where people were fighting in the streets, killing each other in the chaos.

But from their elected leaders, the people got nothing but indecision. In ever growing numbers they turned to the decisive man, Adolf Hitler, and his promises of a better future.

The republic now faced another problem. In 1932, there was supposed to be a presidential election, according to law. But Hindenburg, the glue holding the floundering democracy together, was getting too old and said he was not interested in running again.

Even if he could be convinced to run, he would be 92 by the time the seven-year term ended, with Hitler looming in the background the whole time. If he didn't live the entire term, considered likely since he was failing, then Hitler would have his chance even sooner.

Early in 1932, Adolf Hitler received a telegram from Chancellor Bruening inviting him to come to Berlin to discuss the possibility of extending Hindenburg's present term. Hitler was delighted at the invitation.



Hitler seen in the midst of tough negotiations with Chancellor Bruening about extending President Hindenburg's term. Below: After the negotiations failed - the race for the presidency is underway. Left: Nazis tack up a stark-looking Hitler poster that only shows his face and name. Right: A large handshake billboard for President Hindenburg that says "With Him."

"Now I have them in my pocket! They have recognized me as a partner in their negotiations!" Hitler told Rudolf Hess.

He went to the meeting and listened to the proposal, but gave no response. There was no reason to help the chancellor and thus help keep the republic alive.

In February 1932, President Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to run again and announced his candidacy for re-election. Hitler decided to oppose him and run for the presidency himself.

"Freedom and Bread," was the slogan used by Hitler to great effect during the Nazi campaign against tired old President Hindenburg.

Joseph Goebbels waged a furious propaganda campaign on behalf of Hitler, outdoing the previous election effort of 1930. Nazi posters were plastered everywhere. There was a whirlwind schedule of speeches for himself and Hitler. The Nazis held thousands of rallies each day all across Germany. They gave out millions of pamphlets and extra copies of Nazi newspapers. Goebbels also used new technology, making phonograph records and films of Hitler to distribute.

President Hindenburg essentially did nothing. He was content to ride on his reputation and counted on the votes of Germans who wanted to keep the radicals out of power. Goebbels had high hopes that Hitler might pull an upset and sweep into office. Hitler, however, had his doubts. He campaigned knowing he was unlikely to unseat the Old Gentleman. But the campaign was also an opportunity to win support for himself and his Party and extend Nazi influence.

Many in Germany saw the Nazis as the wave of the future. After the stunning success of the 1930 election, thousands of new members had poured into the Party. Now, in the spring of 1932, with six million unemployed, chaos in Berlin, starvation and ruin, the threat of Marxism, and a very uncertain future – they turned to Hitler by the millions.

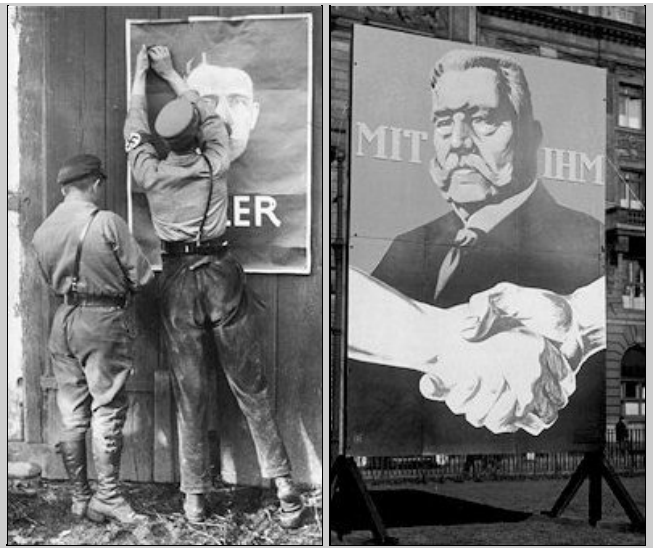
In the presidential election held on March 13, 1932, Hitler got over eleven million votes (11,339,446) or 30% of the total. Hindenburg got 18,651,497 votes or 49%.

Hindenburg failed to get the absolute majority he needed, making a run-off election necessary. Goebbels and many of the Nazi leaders were quite disappointed.

But Hitler immediately urged them to start a vigorous campaign for the run-off to be held on April 10, less than a month away.

In the campaign that followed, Hitler criss-crossed Germany in an airplane, descending from the clouds into the arms of growing numbers of fanatics, at ever larger rallies. He gave them a positive message, promising something for everyone, then ascended back into the clouds. "In the Third Reich every German girl will find a husband!" Hitler once promised.

But like any politician, Hitler was subject to scandal. A newspaper run by one of the opposition parties, the Social Democrats, somehow got hold of letters between SA Chief Ernst Röhm and a male doctor, concerning their mutual interest in men. Hitler knew Röhm was a homosexual and had ignored it for years because of Röhm's usefulness to him.



Below: A radio broadcast by the elderly Hindenburg who limited his campaigning to a few radio speeches and select social gatherings.



Below: A speech by candidate Hitler to a large crowd in Berlin's Lustgarten in April 1932.



The issue as far as Hitler was concerned was whether R  hm had abused any underage males. Nazi lawyer Hans Frank investigated this and assured Hitler he had found no evidence. Hitler was a little more at ease. Thus, Ernst R  hm, the battle scarred, aggressive storm trooper leader would stay, at least for now, as leader of the SA, now numbering over 400,000.

The campaign for president continued with the Nazis mounting another furious campaign effort with Hitler making several campaign stops a day. President Hindenburg did less than before and didn't make a single speech, causing rumors about ill health.

On a dark, rainy Sunday, April 10, 1932, the people voted. They gave Hitler 13,418,547 or 36%, an increase of two million, and Hindenburg 19,359,983 or 53%, an increase of under a million.

The Old Gentleman, now 85, was elected by an absolute majority to another seven-year term. But no one was at ease. Hitler and the Nazis had shown massive popularity.

Berlin was now a swirling mess of fear, intrigue, rumors, and disorder. Out of that mess arose a man named Kurt von Schleicher, a highly ambitious Army officer, driven by the idea that he, not Hitler, might possibly rule Germany.

The German republic was now as unsteady as the teetering Old Gentleman leading it and up against Schleicher and Hitler, was soon to be buried.

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The History Place™

The Rise of Adolf Hitler

The Republic Collapses

Amid the swirling mess in Berlin of political intrigue, rumors, and disorder, the SA, the Nazi storm troopers, stood out as an ominous presence. In the spring of 1932, many in the German democratic government came to believe the Brownshirts were about to take over by force.

There were now over 400,000 storm troopers under the leadership of SA Chief Ernst Röhm. Many members of the SA considered themselves to be a true revolutionary army and were anxious to live up to that idea. Adolf Hitler had to rein them in from time to time so they wouldn't upset his own carefully laid plans to undermine the republic.

Hitler knew he could not succeed as Führer of Germany without the support of existing institutions such as the German Army and the powerful German industrialists, both of whom kept a wary eye on the revolutionary SA.

In April of 1932, Heinrich Brüning, Chancellor of Germany, invoked Article 48 of the constitution and issued a decree banning the SA and SS all across Germany. The Nazis were outraged and wanted Hitler to fight the ban. But Hitler, always a step ahead of them all, knew better. He agreed, knowing the republic was on its last legs and that opportunity would soon come along for him.

That opportunity came in the form of Kurt von Schleicher, a scheming, ambitious Army officer who had ideas of leading Germany himself. But he made the mistake (that would prove fatal) of underestimating Hitler. Schleicher was acquainted with Hitler and had been the one who arraigned for Hitler to meet Hindenburg, a meeting that went poorly for Hitler.

On May 8, 1932, Schleicher held a secret meeting with Hitler and offered a proposal. The ban on the SA and SS would be lifted, the Reichstag dissolved and new elections called, and Chancellor Brüning would be dumped, if Hitler would support him in a conservative nationalist government. Hitler agreed.

Schleicher's skillful treachery behind the scenes in Berlin first resulted in the humiliation and ousting of General Wilhelm Groener, a longtime trusted aide to President Hindenburg and friend of the republic. In the Reichstag, Groener, who supported the ban on the SA, took a severe public tongue lashing from Hermann Göring and was hooted and booed by Goebbels and the rest of the Nazis.

"We covered him with such catcalls that the whole house began to tremble and shake with laughter. In the end one could only have pity for him. That man is finished," Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary in 1932.

Groener was pressured by Schleicher to resign. He appealed without success to Hindenburg and wound up resigning on May 13. Schleicher's next target was Chancellor Brüning.

Heinrich Brüning was one of the last men in Germany who stood up to Hitler with the best interest of the people at heart. He was



Above Left: Chancellor Heinrich Brüning - the last in a long line of noble politicians who tried to preserve the Republic. Above Right: General Kurt von Schleicher - contemptuous of the struggling Republic and determined to grab power for himself. Below: Franz von Papen who became deeply involved in the political intrigue that brought Hitler to power.

responsible for getting Hindenburg re-elected as president to keep out Hitler and preserve the republic. He was also hard at work on the international scene to help the German economy by seeking an end to war reparations. But his economic policies at home brought dismal results. As Germany's economic situation got worse, with nearly six million unemployed, Bruening was labeled "The Hunger Chancellor."

Bruening had also continued the dangerous precedent of ruling by decree. He invoked Article 48 of the German constitution several times to break the political stalemate in Berlin.

To Schleicher and Hitler, he was simply in the way and had to go. Schleicher went to work on him by undermining the support of Hindenburg. Bruening was already in trouble with Hindenburg, who blamed him for the political turmoil that had made it necessary to run for re-election at age 85 against the 'Bohemian Corporal' Adolf Hitler.

Bruening also made an error in proposing that the huge estates of bankrupt aristocrats be divided up and given to peasants, sounding like a Marxist. Those same aristocrats, along with big industrialists, had scraped together the money to buy Hindenburg an estate of his own. When Hindenburg took his Easter vacation there in mid-May, he had to listen to their complaints about Bruening. All the while, Schleicher was at work against Bruening as well.

On May 29, 1932, Hindenburg called in Bruening and told him to resign. The next day, Heinrich Bruening handed in his resignation, effectively ending democracy in Germany.

Schleicher was now in control. He chose as his puppet chancellor, an unknown socialite named Franz von Papen who had grave doubts about his own ability to function in such a high office. Hindenburg, however, took a liking to Papen and encouraged him to take the job.

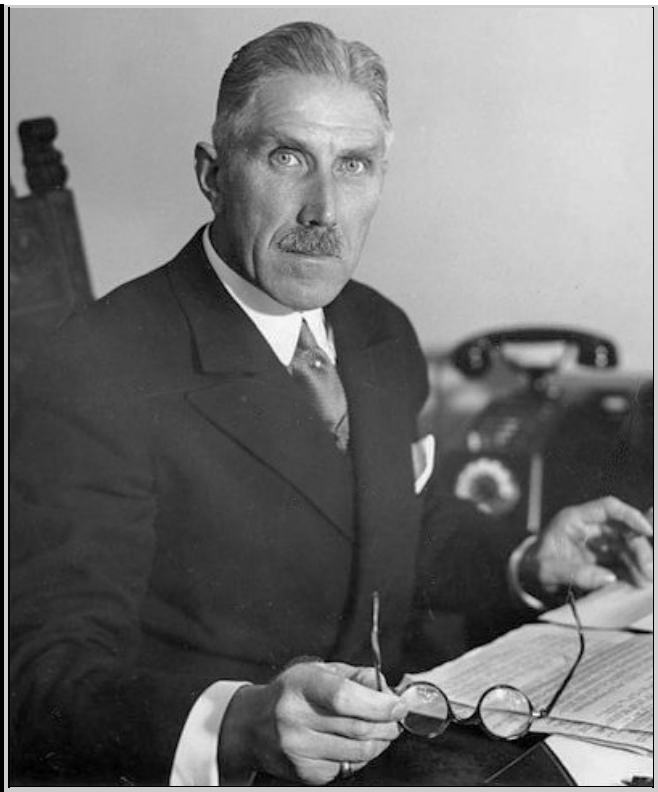
The aristocratic Papen assembled a cabinet of men like himself. This ineffective cabinet of aristocrats and industrialists presided over a nation that would soon be on the verge of anarchy.

When Adolf Hitler was asked by President Hindenburg if he would support Papen as chancellor, he said yes. On June 4th, the Reichstag was dissolved and new elections were called for the end of July. On June 15, the ban on the SA and SS was lifted. The secret promises made to the Nazis by Schleicher had been fulfilled.

Murder and violence soon erupted on a scale never before seen in Germany. Roaming groups of Nazi Brownshirts walked the streets singing Nazi songs and looking for fights.

"Blut muss fließen, Blut muss fließen! Blut muss fließen Knuppelhaegeldick! Haut'se doch zusammen, haut'se doch zusammen! Diese gotverdamnte Juden Republik!" the Nazi storm troopers sang.

Translation: "Blood must flow, blood must flow! Blood must flow as cudgel thick as hail! Let's smash it up, let's smash it up! That goddamned Jewish republic!"



May 1932 - A mass gathering of the unemployed outside a government-run job office in Berlin. Such gatherings sometimes led to street riots. Below: Chancellor Papen (third from right) with his befuddled Cabinet in June 1932.

The Nazis found many Communists in the streets wanting a fight and they began regularly shooting at each other. Hundreds of gun battles took place. On July 17, the Nazis under police escort brazenly marched into a Communist area near Hamburg in the state of Prussia. A big shoot-out occurred in which 19 people were killed and nearly 300 wounded. It came to be known as "Bloody Sunday."

Papen invoked Article 48 and proclaimed martial law in Berlin and also took over the government of the German state of Prussia by naming himself Reich Commissioner. Germany had taken a big step closer to authoritarian rule.

Hitler now decided that Papen was simply in the way and had to go.

"I regard your cabinet only as a temporary solution and will continue my efforts to make my Party the strongest in the country. The chancellorship will then devolve on me," Hitler told Papen.

The July elections would provide that opportunity. The Nazis, sensing total victory, campaigned with fanatical energy. Hitler was now speaking to adoring German audiences of up to 100,000 at a time. The phenomenon of large scale 'Führer worship' had begun. On July 31st, the people voted and gave the Nazis 13,745,000 votes, 37% of the total, granting them 230 seats in the Reichstag. The Nazi Party was now the largest and most powerful in Germany.

On August 5th, Hitler presented his list of demands to Schleicher – the chancellorship; passage of an enabling act giving him control to rule by decree; three cabinet posts for Nazis; the creation of a propaganda ministry; control over the Ministry of the Interior; and control of Prussia. As for Schleicher, he would get the Ministry of Defense as a reward.

Schleicher listened, didn't say yes or no, but would let him know later.

With gleeful anticipation, Hitler awaited Schleicher's response and even ordered that a memorial tablet be made to mark the place where the historic meeting with Schleicher had occurred.

Meanwhile, the SA began massing in Berlin anticipating a takeover of power. But old President Hindenburg soon put an end to Hitler's dreams. Hindenburg by now distrusted Hitler and would not have him as chancellor, especially after the behavior of the SA.

On August 13, Schleicher and Papen met with Hitler and gave him the bad news. The best they could offer was a compromise – vice chancellorship and the Prussian Ministry of the Interior.

Hitler became hysterical. In a display of wild rage that stunned Schleicher and Papen, he spewed out threats of violence and murder, saying he would let loose the SA for three days of mayhem all across Germany.

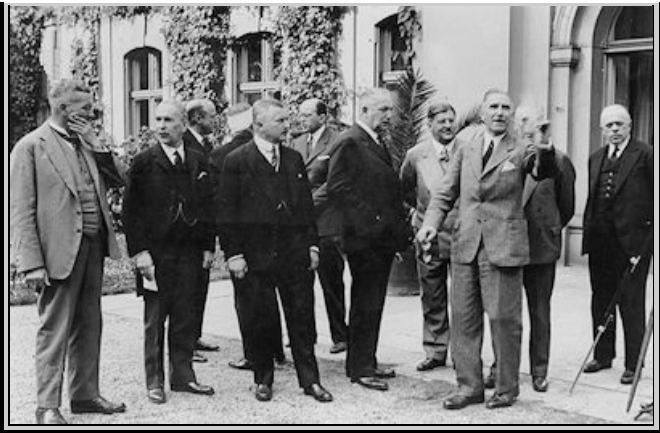
Later that same day, Hitler was called on the carpet by President Hindenburg. The former Austrian Corporal got a tongue lashing from the former Field Marshal after once again demanding the chancellorship and refusing to cooperate with Papen and Schleicher.

In the presence of the steely-eyed old Prussian, Hitler backed down. The gamble for total victory had failed. He put the SA on a two week furlough and went to Berchtesgaden to lick his wounds. They would all have to wait, he told them. Just a little longer.

On September 12, the Reichstag under the new chairmanship of Hermann Göring gave a vote of no confidence to Papen and his government. But just before that vote was taken, Papen had slapped an order on Göring's desk dissolving the Reichstag and calling yet again for new elections.

This was a problem. Everyone was getting tired of elections by now. Goebbels had a hard time getting the Nazi effort up to the same level of a few months earlier.

In the middle of the campaign, Hitler's girlfriend Eva Braun shot herself in the neck during a suicide attempt. Hitler was still



haunted by the suicide of his beloved niece a few years earlier. Eva Braun was deeply in love with Hitler but didn't get the attention she craved. Hitler rushed to the hospital and resolved to look after her from that moment on.

This distraction served to slow down the already sluggish Nazi campaign. More problems came after Goebbels and a number of Nazis went along with the Communists in a wildcat strike of transport workers in Berlin, thus alienating a lot of middle class voters.

Bad publicity from siding with the Reds plus the bad publicity Hitler got after his meeting with Hindenburg combined to lose them votes. Adding to all this were the wild antics of the SA. On November 6th, the Nazis lost two million votes and thirty four seats in the Reichstag. It seemed the Nazis were losing momentum. Hitler became depressed.

But there was still no workable government in Berlin. Papen's position as chancellor was badly weakened. And Schleicher was now at work behind the scenes to further undermine him. On November 17, Papen went to Hindenburg and told him he was unable to form any kind of working coalition, then resigned.

Two days later, Hitler requested a meeting with Hindenburg. Once again Hitler demanded to be made chancellor. Once again he was turned down. This time however, Hindenburg took a friendlier tone, asking Hitler, soldier to soldier, to meet him half way and cooperate with the other parties to form a working majority, in other words, a coalition government. Hitler said no.

On November 21st, Hitler saw Hindenburg again and tried a different approach. He read a prepared statement claiming that parliamentary government had failed and that only the Nazis could be counted on to stop the spread of Communism. He asked Hindenburg to make him the leader of a presidential cabinet. Hindenburg said no, and only repeated his own previous requests.

The Government of Germany had ground to a halt.

Meanwhile, a group of the country's most influential industrialists, bankers, and business leaders sent a petition to Hindenburg asking him to appoint Hitler as chancellor. They believed Hitler would be good for business.

Hindenburg was in a terrible bind. He called in Papen and Schleicher and asked them what to do. Papen came up with a wild idea. He would be chancellor again and rule only by decree, eliminate the Reichstag altogether, use the Army and police to suppress all political parties and forcibly amend the constitution. It would be a return to the days of Empire, with the conservative, aristocratic classes ruling.

Schleicher objected, much to Papen's surprise. Schleicher said that he, not Papen, should head the government and promised Hindenburg he could get a working majority in the Reichstag by causing a rift among the Nazis. Schleicher said he could get Gregor Strasser and as many as 60 Nazi deputies to break from Hitler.

Hindenburg was dumbfounded and finally turned to Papen and asked him to go ahead and form his government. After Hindenburg left the room, Papen and Schleicher got into a huge shouting match.

At a cabinet meeting the next day, Schleicher told Papen that any attempt by him to form a new government would bring the country to chaos. He insisted that the Army would not go along and then produced a Major Ott who backed up his claims. Schleicher had been at work behind the scenes to sway the Army to his point of

A determined-looking Hermann G ring enters the Reichstag building in August 1932 - helping to stifle the democratic government for Hitler. Below: Hitler is cheered and saluted as he heads into a big meeting with President Hindenburg in November 1932.



Below: Hitler's car is mobbed by admirers after his meeting with Hindenburg on November 19th.



view. Papen was in big trouble.

He went running to Hindenburg, who, with tears rolling down his cheeks, told Papen there was no alternative at this point except to name Schleicher as the new chancellor.

"My dear Papen, you will not think much of me if I change my mind. But I am too old and have been through too much to accept the responsibility for a civil war. Our only hope is to let Schleicher try his luck," President Hindenburg told Papen.

Thus Kurt von Schleicher became Chancellor of Germany on December 2, 1932. There now began an incredible amount of behind-the-scenes political intrigue and backstabbing that would put Hitler in power in only 57 days.

To begin with, Schleicher made good on his promise to try to split the Nazis. He held a secret meeting with Gregor Strasser, a Nazi who had been with Hitler from the start, and offered him the vice-chancellorship and control of Prussia.

To Strasser, the offer was quite appealing. The Nazi Party's recent decline, losing millions of votes and now experiencing terrible financial problems, seemed to indicate that Hitler's rigid tactics might not be the best thing for long-term success. Strasser had also acquired a distaste for the brutal men who now made up Hitler's inner circle.

Through Papen, Hitler found out what was going on. On December 5th, Strasser and his infuriated F hrer met, along with other Nazi leaders, in a Berlin hotel. Strasser insisted that Hitler and the Nazis cooperate or at least tolerate the Schleicher government. G ring and Goebbels opposed him. Hitler sided with them against Strasser.

Two days later, Strasser and Hitler met again and wound up getting into a huge shouting match. Strasser accused Hitler of leading the Party to ruin. Hitler accused Strasser of stabbing him in the back.

The following day, Strasser wrote a letter to Hitler, resigning all of his duties as a member of the Nazi Party. Hitler and the Nazi leaders were stunned. One of the founding members and most influential leaders had abandoned them. The Nazi Party seemed to be unraveling. Hitler became depressed, even threatening to shoot himself with a pistol.

Strasser headed for a vacation in Italy.

"Whatever happens, mark what I say. From now on Germany is in the hands of an Austrian, who is a congenital liar (Hitler), a former officer who is a pervert (R hm), and a clubfoot (Goebbels). And I tell you the last is the worst of them all. This is Satan in human form," declared Gregor Strasser in 1932.

As for Hermann G ring:

"G ring is a brutal egotist who cares nothing for Germany as long as he becomes something."

Regarding Strasser, Goebbels wrote in his diary: "Strasser is a dead man."

Hitler assigned his trusted aid, Rudolf Hess, to take over Strasser's duties. Over the Christmas season, Hitler became quite depressed over the failing fortunes of his Party.

And it seemed to many political observers that the danger of a Hitler dictatorship had passed.

But the new year brought new intrigue. The big bankers and industrialists who had petitioned Hindenburg on behalf of Hitler still liked the idea of Hitler in power. And Papen was now out to bring down Schleicher. On January 4, 1933, Hitler went to a meeting with Papen at the house of banker Kurt von Schroeder. Papen surprised Hitler by offering to oust Schleicher and install a Papen-Hitler government with himself and Hitler, both equal partners.

Hitler liked the idea of ousting Schleicher but insisted that he would have to be the real head of government. He would, however, be willing to work with Papen and his ministers. Papen gave in and agreed.

When Schleicher found out, he went running to Hindenburg, charging Papen with treachery. But Hindenburg had a soft spot for Papen and would not go along.

Schleicher's position was already badly weakened. He was unable to get the government moving because nobody trusted him enough to join him in a working coalition. The German government remained at a standstill with the people and Hindenburg getting more impatient by the day. Something had to be done. Hindenburg authorized Papen to continue negotiating with Hitler, but to keep it secret from Schleicher.

In the small German state of Lippe, local elections were scheduled for January 15. Hitler and the Nazis took this opportunity to make a big impression. They saturated the place with propaganda and campaigned heavily, hoping to win big and prove they had regained

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momentum.

They received a small increase in votes over their previous election total. But they used their own widely circulated Nazi newspapers to exaggerate the significance and to once again lay claim that Hitler and the Nazis were the wave of the future. It worked well and even impressed President Hindenburg.

On Sunday, January 22, 1933, a secret meeting was held at the home of Joachim von Ribbentrop. It was attended by Papen, Hindenburg's son Oskar, along with Hitler and Göring. Hitler grabbed Oskar and brought him into a private room and worked on him for an hour to convince him that the Nazis had to be taken into the government on his terms. Oskar emerged from the meeting convinced it was inevitable. The Nazis were to be taken in. Papen then pledged his loyalty to Hitler.

Next, Schleicher went to Hindenburg with a proposal to declare a state of emergency to control the Nazis, dissolve the Reichstag, and suspend elections. Hindenburg said no.

But word of this proposal leaked out, bringing Schleicher the wrath of the liberal and centrist parties. Schleicher then backed down, bringing him the wrath of anti-Nazi conservatives. His position was hopeless.

On January 28th, he went to Hindenburg and asked him once again to dissolve the Reichstag. Hindenburg said no. Schleicher resigned.

Papen and the president's son, Oskar, moved in on the Old Gentleman to convince him to appoint a Hitler-Papen government. Hindenburg was now a tired old man weary of all the intrigue. He seemed ready to give in. Hitler sensed his weakness and issued an additional demand that four important cabinet posts be given to Nazis.

This did not set well with the old man and he started having doubts about Hitler as chancellor. He was reassured when Hitler promised that Papen would get one of those four posts.

On the 29th, a false rumor circulated that Schleicher was about to arrest Hindenburg and stage a military takeover of the government. When Hindenburg heard of this, it ended his hesitation. He decided to appoint Adolf Hitler as the next Chancellor of Germany.

However, a last minute objection by conservative leader, Alfred Hugenberg, nearly ruined everything. On January 30, while President Hindenburg waited in the other room to give Hitler the chancellorship, Hugenberg held up everything by arguing with the Nazis over Hitler's demand for new elections. He was persuaded by Hitler to back down, or at least let Hindenburg decide. With that settled they all headed into the president's office.

Around noon on January 30, 1933, a new chapter in German history began as a teary-eyed Adolf Hitler emerged from the presidential palace as Chancellor of the German Nation. Surrounded by admirers, he got into his car and was driven down the street lined with cheering citizens.

"We've done it! We've done it!" a jubilant Adolf Hitler exclaimed.

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The Rise of Adolf Hitler

Hitler Named Chancellor

When Adolf Hitler walked into the presidential office of Paul von Hindenburg to become chancellor, the Old Gentleman was so annoyed he would hardly look at him.

He had been kept waiting while Hitler and conservative leader Alfred Hugenberg argued over Hitler's demand for new elections. It was the final argument in what had been a huge tangled web of political infighting and backstabbing that finally resulted in Adolf Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany.

Germany was a nation that in its history had little experience or interest in democracy. In January 1933, Adolf Hitler took the reins of a 14-year-old German democratic republic which in the minds of many had long outlived its usefulness. By this time, the economic pressures of the Great Depression combined with the indecisive, self-serving nature of its elected politicians had brought government in Germany to a complete standstill. The people were without jobs, without food, quite afraid and desperate for relief.

Now, the man who had spent his entire political career denouncing and attempting to destroy the Republic, was its leader. Around noon on January 30th, Hitler was sworn in.

"I will employ my strength for the welfare of the German people, protect the Constitution and laws of the German people, conscientiously discharge the duties imposed on me, and conduct my affairs of office impartially and with justice to everyone," swore Adolf Hitler.

But by this time, that oath had been repeatedly broken by previous chancellors out of desperation and also out of personal ambition. Chancellors Schleicher and Papen had seriously suggested to Hindenburg the idea of replacing the republic itself with a military dictatorship to solve the crisis of political stagnation. He had turned them both down.

When a teary-eyed Adolf Hitler emerged from the presidential palace as the new chancellor, he was cheered by Nazis and their supporters who believed in him, not the constitution or the republic.

"We've done it!" Hitler had jubilantly shouted to them.

He was to preside over a cabinet that contained, including himself, only 3 Nazis out of 11 posts. Hermann Göring was Minister without Portfolio and Minister of the Interior of Prussia. Nazi, Wilhelm Frick, was Minister of the Interior. The small number of Nazis in the cabinet was planned to help keep Hitler in check.

Franz von Papen was vice-chancellor. Hindenburg had promised him that Hitler would only be received in the office of the president if accompanied by Papen.

This was another way to keep Hitler in check. In fact, Papen had every intention of using the conservative majority in the cabinet along with his own political skills to run the government himself.

"Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far in the corner that he'll squeak," Papen boasted to a political colleague.



Chancellor Hitler chats with Göring as Papen and other Cabinet members look on. Behind Papen is Hugenberg who had nearly ruined the whole day for Hitler. Below: Nazi stormtroopers parade through the Brandenburg Gate to celebrate the dawn of a new era.

Papen and many non-Nazis thought having Hitler as chancellor was to their advantage. Conservative members of the former aristocratic ruling class desired an end to the republic and a return to an authoritarian government that would restore Germany to glory and bring back their old privileges. They wanted to go back to the days of the Kaiser. For them, putting Hitler in power was just the first step toward achieving that goal. They knew it was likely he would wreck the republic. Then once the republic was abolished, they could put in someone of their own choosing, perhaps even a descendant of the Kaiser.

Big bankers and industrialists, including Krupp and I. G. Farben, had lobbied Hindenburg and schemed behind the scenes on behalf of Hitler because they were convinced he would be good for business. He promised to be for free enterprise and keep down Communism and the trade union movements.

The military also placed its bet on Hitler, believing his repeated promises to tear up the Treaty of Versailles and expand the Army and bring back its former glory.

They all had one thing in common – they underestimated Hitler.

On the evening of January 30th, just about every member of the SA and SS turned out in uniform to celebrate the new Führer-Chancellor, Adolf Hitler. Carrying torches and singing the Horst Wessel song, they were cheered by thousands as they marched through the Brandenburg gate and along the Wilhelmstrasse to the presidential palace. Cops on the beat who used to give them trouble now wore swastika armbands and smiled at them. Everywhere was heard the rhythmic pounding beats of jackboots, drums and blaring military parade music.

They saluted Hindenburg as he looked out from a window of the presidential palace. Then they waited at the chancellery for Hitler in a scene carefully staged by Joseph Goebbels. A sea of hand held burning torches cast flickering light on red and gold Nazi banners amid the slow beating of drums in anticipation of seeing the Führer. Men, women and children along with the SA and SS waited. He kept them waiting, letting the tension rise. All over Germany, people listened to this on the radio, waiting, and hearing the throngs calling for their Führer.

When he appeared in the beam of a spotlight, Hitler was greeted with an outpouring of worshipful adulation unlike anything ever seen before in Germany. Bismarck, Frederick the Great, the Kaiser, had not seen this.

"Heil! Sieg Heil!," (Hail! Hail Victory!) went the chorus of those who believed the hour of deliverance had come in the form of this man now gazing down at them.

"It is almost like a dream – a fairytale. The new [Third] Reich has been born. Fourteen years of work have been crowned with victory. The German revolution has begun!" Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that night.

Meanwhile, an old comrade of Hitler's sent a telegram to President Hindenburg regarding his new chancellor. Former General Erich Ludendorff had once supported Hitler and had even participated in the failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.

"By appointing Hitler Chancellor of the Reich you have handed over our sacred German Fatherland to one of the greatest demagogues of all time. I prophesy to you this evil man will plunge our Reich into the abyss and will inflict immeasurable woe on our nation. Future generations will curse you in your grave for this action," the telegram from Ludendorff stated.



Below: Hitler in the spotlight gazing at the cheering throngs.



Below: Close-up of both Hitler and Goebbels acknowledging the cheering crowd.



Within weeks, Hitler would be absolute dictator of Germany and would set in motion a chain of events resulting in the Second World War and the eventual deaths of nearly 50 million humans through that war and through deliberate extermination.

To begin, Hitler would see the German democratic republic go down in flames, literally. In February 1933, the Nazis hatched a plan to burn the Reichstag building and end democracy once and for all.

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The Rise of Adolf Hitler

Hitler Becomes Dictator

After the elections of March 5, 1933, the Nazis began a systematic takeover of the state governments throughout Germany, ending a centuries-old tradition of local political independence. Armed SA and SS thugs barged into local government offices using the state of emergency decree as a pretext to throw out legitimate office holders and replace them with Nazi Reich commissioners.

Political enemies were arrested by the thousands and put in hastily constructed holding pens. Old army barracks and abandoned factories were used as prisons. Once inside, prisoners were subjected to military style drills and harsh discipline. They were often beaten and sometimes even tortured to death. This was the very beginning of the Nazi concentration camp system.

At this time, these early concentration camps were loosely organized under the control of the SA and the rival SS. Many were little more than barbed-wire stockades known as 'wild' concentration camps, set up by local Gauleiters and SA leaders.

For Adolf Hitler, the goal of a legally established dictatorship was now within reach. On March 15, 1933, a cabinet meeting was held during which Hitler and Göring discussed how to obstruct what was left of the democratic process to get an Enabling Act passed by the Reichstag. This law would hand over the constitutional functions of the Reichstag to Hitler, including the power to make laws, control the budget and approve treaties with foreign governments.

The emergency decree signed by Hindenburg on February 28th, after the Reichstag fire, made it easy for them to interfere with non-Nazi elected representatives of the people by simply arresting them.

As Hitler plotted to bring democracy to an end in Germany, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels put together a brilliant public relations display at the official opening of the newly elected Reichstag.

On March 21st, in the Garrison Church at Potsdam, the burial place of Frederick the Great, an elaborate ceremony took place designed to ease public concern over Hitler and his gangster-like new regime.

It was attended by President Hindenburg, foreign diplomats, the General Staff and all the old guard going back to the days of the Kaiser. Dressed in their handsome uniforms sprinkled with medals, they watched a most reverent Adolf Hitler give a speech paying respect to Hindenburg and celebrating the union of old Prussian military traditions and the new Nazi Reich. As a symbol of this, the old Imperial flags would soon add swastikas.

Finishing his speech, Hitler walked over to Hindenburg and respectfully bowed before him while taking hold of the old man's hand. The scene was recorded on film and by press photographers from around the world. This was precisely the impression Hitler and Goebbels wanted to give to the world, all the while plotting to toss aside Hindenburg and the elected Reichstag.

Later that same day, Hindenburg signed two decrees put before him by Hitler. The first offered full pardons to all Nazis currently in prison. The prison doors sprang open and out came an assortment of Nazi thugs and murderers.

The second decree signed by the befuddled old man allowed for



March 21, 1933 - With the eyes of Germany and the whole world on him - a respectful stroll by Hitler toward the Garrison Church in Potsdam for ceremonies opening the new Reichstag session. Below: Reassuring to all - Hitler greets President Hindenburg in the manner of the age-old German custom - hand outstretched and head bowed.

the arrest of anyone suspected of maliciously criticizing the government and the Nazi Party.

A third decree signed only by Hitler and Papen allowed for the establishment of special courts to try political offenders. These courts were conducted in the military style of a court-martial without a jury and usually with no counsel for the defense.

On March 23rd, the newly elected Reichstag met in the Kroll Opera House in Berlin to consider passing Hitler's Enabling Act. It was officially called the "Law for Removing the Distress of the People and the Reich." If passed, it would in effect vote democracy out of existence in Germany and establish the legal dictatorship of Adolf Hitler.

Brown-shirted Nazi storm troopers swarmed over the fancy old building in a show of force and as a visible threat. They stood outside, in the hallways and even lined the aisles inside, glaring ominously at anyone who might oppose Hitler's will.

Before the vote, Hitler made a speech in which he pledged to use restraint.

"The government will make use of these powers only insofar as they are essential for carrying out vitally necessary measures...The number of cases in which an internal necessity exists for having recourse to such a law is in itself a limited one," Hitler told the Reichstag.

He also promised an end to unemployment and pledged to promote peace with France, Great Britain and Soviet Russia. But in order to do all this, Hitler said, he first needed the Enabling Act. A two-thirds majority was needed, since the law would actually alter the constitution. Hitler needed 31 non-Nazi votes to pass it. He got those votes from the Catholic Center Party after making a false promise to restore some basic rights already taken away by decree.

Meanwhile, Nazi storm troopers chanted outside: "Full powers â€ or else! We want the bill â€ or fire and murder!!"

But one man arose amid the overwhelming might. Otto Wells, leader of the Social Democrats stood up and spoke quietly to Hitler.

"We German Social Democrats pledge ourselves solemnly in this historic hour to the principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and socialism. No enabling act can give you power to destroy ideas which are eternal and indestructible."

Hitler was enraged and jumped up to respond.

"You are no longer needed! The star of Germany will rise and yours will sink! Your death knell has sounded!"

The vote was taken â€ 441 for, and only 84, the Social Democrats, against. The Nazis leapt to their feet clapping, stamping and shouting, then broke into the Nazi anthem, the HÃ¶rst Wessel song.

Democracy was ended. They had brought down the German Democratic Republic legally. From this day onward, the Reichstag would be just a sounding board, a cheering section for Hitler's



Below: Inside the Garrison Church - Hitler speaks as President Hindenburg (lower right) and Germany's old guard listen.



Below: Outside the church, a bemused Chancellor Hitler chats with the Kaiser's son and heir, Crown Prince Wilhelm.



Below: Two days later - March 23rd - Hitler appears before the Reichstag in Berlin to reassure them that - if granted - his new powers under the Enabling Act will be used sparingly.

pronouncements.

Interestingly, the Nazi Party was now flooded with applications for membership. These latecomers were cynically labeled by old time Nazis as 'March Violets.' In May, the Nazi Party froze membership. Many of those kept out applied to the SA and the SS which were still accepting. However, in early 1934, Heinrich Himmler would throw out 50,000 of those 'March Violets' from the SS.

The Nazi Gleichschaltung now began, a massive coordination of all aspects of life under the swastika and the absolute leadership of Adolf Hitler.

Under Hitler, the State, not the individual, was supreme.

From the moment of birth one existed to serve the State and obey the dictates of the Führer. Those who disagreed were disposed of.

Many agreed. Bureaucrats, industrialists, even intellectual and literary figures, including Gerhart Hauptmann, world renowned dramatist, were coming out in open support of Hitler.

Many disagreed and left the country. A flood of the finest minds, including over two thousand writers, scientists, and people in the arts poured out of Germany and enriched other lands, mostly the United States. Among them were writer Thomas Mann, director Fritz Lang, actress Marlene Dietrich, architect Walter Gropius, musicians Otto Klemperer, Kurt Weill, Richard Tauber, psychologist Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein, who was visiting California when Hitler came to power and never returned to Germany.

In Germany, there were now constant Nazi rallies, parades, marches and meetings amid the relentless propaganda of Goebbels and the omnipresent swastika. For those who remained there was an odd mixture of fear and optimism in the air.

Now, for the first time as dictator, Adolf Hitler turned his attention to the driving force which had propelled him into politics in the first place, his hatred of the Jews. It began with a simple boycott on April 1st, 1933, and would end years later in the greatest tragedy in all of human history.



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