

BBC Bitesize GCSE History - 20th century Germany

Episode 4 – Nazi consolidation of power, 1933-1934

Announcer: BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

Datshiane: I'm Datshiane Navanayagam.

Katie: And I'm Katie Charlwood.

Datshiane: And this is Bitesize GCSE History.

Katie: This is the fourth episode in a nine-part series on 20th-century Germany.

Datshiane: In the previous episode, we looked at Hitler and the Nazis' rise to power, up until 1933. In this episode, we're going to see how that power was consolidated and led to a dictatorship.

Katie: Get your pen and paper ready to take notes and fingers to press pause and rewind as and when you need to, to go over the tips and revision hints again. Listen back to the previous episode if you need a recap as to how Hitler had become Chancellor of Germany by 1933. And remember that although he was Chancellor, Hindenburg was the President. Datshiane, what happens next?

Datshiane: Okay. So, it all gets a bit sinister. Because, once he's in power, Hitler quickly works to dismantle the democratic structure of the Weimar Republic using legal and political means to consolidate his authority. He calls for a general election in February 1933, hoping that the Nazis finally get a majority of seats in the Reichstag; using propaganda to spread their message, and the SA, which was the Nazi's paramilitary group which he used to intimidate voters and opposition parties.

Katie: Mysteriously, one week before the election, the Reichstag was burned down. The blame was put on an unemployed Dutch construction worker Marinus van der Lubbe. But some have claimed he was brought to the scene of the crime by Nazi agents.

Datshiane: Well, whatever the truth, the fire gave Hitler the pretext to blame the Communist Party. And he declares a state of emergency convincing President Hindenburg to sign the Reichstag Fire

Decree which effectively suspended the Weimar Constitution and with it, civil liberties. This allowed for the arrest of political opponents, particularly communists.

Katie: He banned their newspapers, banned popular communists from standing in the election and then jailed four thousand more.

Datshiane: So that by the election in March 1933, the Nazis got more votes than ever. But, even so, they were only able to form a majority government with the support of the Centre Party. And, very quickly Hitler began to consolidate power by using the features of proportional representation to cement his power and create a dictatorship.

Katie: The Enabling Act allowed Hitler to pass laws without the Reichstag's approval or the President's signature. Effectively giving him ultimate powers. Hitler used intimidation and political manoeuvring to ensure the act was passed, including banning communist members from the Reichstag and pressuring other parties. This allowed the Nazis to rapidly implement their policies without opposition; and at the same time to eliminate opposition.

Datshiane: Exactly, the Communist KPD and the Social Democrats (SPD) were banned. And many of their leaders were arrested or forced into exile. Other political parties - well they were either dissolved or voluntarily disbanded. And, in signing the law against the formation of new parties, by mid-1933 Germany had become a one-party state. Also, all trade unions were banned.

Katie: Dealing with external opposition was one thing. But Hitler also felt threatened by individuals and groups within the Nazi party. Especially his private army, the SA, the very group who had helped Hitler achieve power, and its leader Ernst Rohm whom Hitler viewed as becoming too powerful.

Datshiane: This perceived opposition was dealt with during the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934 when Hitler purged his rivals.

Katie: In other words, they were murdered.

Datshiane: Exactly. And when President Hindenburg died in August 1934 at the age of 86, Hitler immediately abolished the role and position of the President. He merged its powers with that of the Chancellor, which conveniently was his, under the title of the Fuhrer.

Katie: It feels like Hitler's eventual ultimate power, oh, Datshiane let's call it what it is - he was a dictator, was down to a variety of factors. From the proportional representation system, political

scheming, violence and intimidation and a fair degree of chance and opportunity. An exam question might ask you to think about those factors and say how they allowed Hitler to gain ultimate power.

Datshiane: I bet Katie, that you've thought up a good mnemonic to remembering the key events of 1933 and 1934.

Katie: Well, naturally! You know I love a mnemonic to remember things. And in this case the word is R-E-N-D. REND. Because these events rendered power to Hitler and the Nazis. R is the Reichstag Fire. E is the Enabling Act. N is the Night of the Long Knives and D is the death of Hindenburg.

Datshiane: Katie, I think it's time for a test. Three questions on the Nazis' rise to power. Five seconds to answer and no prizes but the glory of just being right. Here we go.

Katie: Okay. So, which law gave Hitler the power to pass laws without Reichstag approval?

Datshiane: That's easy. The Enabling Act.

[correct bell sound]

Katie: And who was the main target of the Night of the Long Knives in 1934?

Datshiane: So, those were the opponents within the Nazi Party. Particularly, the SA and its leader Ernst Rohm.

[correct bell sound]

Katie: And, what title did Hitler eventually give himself when he became President as well as Chancellor?

Datshiane: The Fuhrer.

[correct bell sound]

Katie: So, how did you do? I'm sure you all aced it. So, quick final summary on how the Nazis rose to power. Datshiane, you want to start?

Datshiane: Sure. The Reichstag fire in February 1933 was blamed on communists leading to the suspension of civil liberties through the Reichstag Fire Decree.

Katie: The Enabling Act gave Hitler dictatorial powers allowing him to pass laws without Reichstag approval.

Datshiane: The Nazis then banned all political parties and silenced opposition, establishing a one-party state.

Katie: Hitler solidified his control through events like the Night of the Long Knives removing internal threats.

Datshiane: Remember REND - R E N D - if you need a reminder of the factors that led to his eventual control.

Katie: R is for the Reichstag fire. E is the Enabling Act. N is the Night of the Long Knives. And D is the death of Hindenburg.

Datshiane: And there's loads more 20th-century Germany revision hints and tips at the Bitesize website. And, in the other episodes in this series.

Katie: In the next episode, we'll begin to look at the experiences of German people during the Nazi dictatorship.

Datshiane: In the remaining episodes of the series, we'll continue to revise topics which have some distressing themes including the suffering of millions of innocent people. And some of the content may be upsetting or difficult to hear.

Katie: And, if at any point you feel overwhelmed, please take a break or speak to someone you trust. Remember, it's okay to feel emotional about these events. And it's important to approach this subject with great care and respect. Thanks for listening.

Datshiane: Bye.