

# How the Nazis took power, Part 3 of 3:

## The Nazis in power

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### Warm-up:

1. What are some of the ways a political party can take over the government of a country?
2. What are some of the ways a political party can be kicked out of the government of a country?

After Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, vast numbers of Stormtroopers marched in celebration through the streets of Berlin for hours. They were joined by the Steel Helmets, the militia of the nationalist party. Soon the Steel Helmets were combined into the Stormtroopers, making Hitler's forces even greater.

The aging President Hindenburg, watching from his balcony, thought he was back in the War. He barked at a fellow general, 'Ludendorff! How well your men are marching, and what a lot of prisoners they've taken!'

A Nazi leader named Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'Prepare the election campaign. The last. We'll win it hands down.'

### The Reichstag Fire

An election was called for March 1933. The Nazis wanted to increase their vote because currently there were only 3 Nazi ministers out of 13 in the cabinet.

There were now two million Stormtroopers, and they dominated the election campaign, harassing and threatening their opponents.

On February 27<sup>th</sup> a Dutch left-winger named Marinus van der Lubbe was in Berlin. He felt isolated and depressed due to Hitler's victory. He wanted to strike back at the Nazis any way he could. So he broke into the Reichstag (parliament) and set it on fire. But he ended up helping Hitler. The Nazis seized upon the Reichstag Fire and claimed that it was supposed to be the signal for a communist seizure of power. The Reichstag Fire was so beneficial to the Nazis that many people at the time believed they had set the whole thing up.

### The Enabling Act

The Nazis were still well short of a majority. But they had the power of the Stormtroopers.

Hitler argued that the country was in an emergency situation and that he must be allowed to rule by decree. He proposed the Enabling Act to allow him to do this.

The Reichstag deputies gathered at an opera house to vote on the Enabling Act. But the Stormtroopers took over the building and refused entry to the Communist Party deputies.

All the conservative and liberal parties voted for Hitler's Enabling Act. Only the Social Democratic party voted against. The Communists were unable to vote because they were refused entry.

After the Enabling Act, Hitler could effectively do as he liked, backed up by the Stormtroopers.

But many of the Stormtroopers, especially their leader Ernest Rohm, were growing angry and impatient. Hitler had promised them that he would take on not just the Jews, but the capitalists. But there was no sign of Hitler's promised anti-capitalist policies.

### **The Nazis cement their rule**

In May the Social Democratic and Communist parties were banned. Nazi supporters and police agents rooted out their members in every town and every neighbourhood. It helped that the Stormtroopers had hundreds of barracks where they imprisoned and tortured their opponents.

The Communist Party went **underground** and attempted to resist the Nazis through secret networks. The Social Democratic Party, on the other hand, surrendered meekly, hoping that Hitler would treat them well if they behaved. The trade unions were also abolished.

Jewish businesses saw a severe boycott, enforced by Stormtroopers. There was a constant campaign of press attacks, intimidation, frame-ups and attacks on wealthy or prominent Jewish people.

In March 1933 **Dachau** concentration camp was opened. **Concentration camps** had been used in the past by Britain and other imperial powers in Africa and Asia, or during war or revolution. But the Nazis constructed a vast network of such camps in peacetime. Opponents of the Nazis - first the communists, socialists and social democrats - were locked up for years performing backbreaking labour, suffering violence and humiliation.

Between June and July all other political parties were liquidated. The night of 30 June/ 1 July also saw the **Night of the Long Knives** (see slide).

In 1934 President Hindenburg died. Rather than allow a new presidential election, Hitler combined the offices of Chancellor and President to create a new single leadership post: Fuhrer (leader).

1. **What do you think Goebbels meant when he wrote that the next election campaign would be 'the last'?**
2. **From the information above, list what you believe were the three most important advantages the Nazis had over their opponents. Explain your answers.**