LONGMAN 20th CENTURY

HISTORY SERIES

WEIMAR GERMANY

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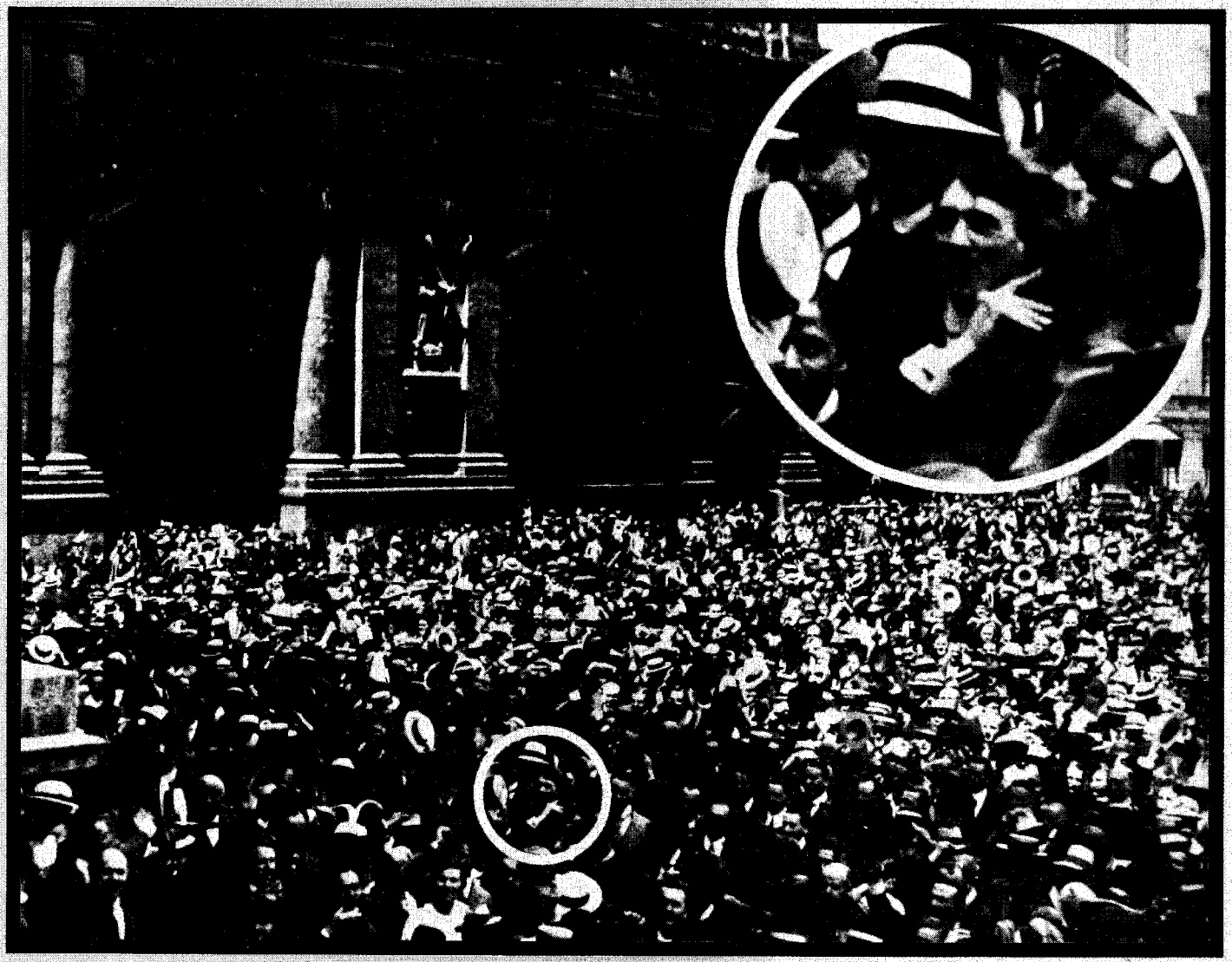
PART ONE

WAR AND REVOLUTION



Munich, 1914: a happy crowd singing patriotic songs after hearing that war has started

In the first week of August 1914, a week of scorching hot weather, seven countries in Europe went to war with each other – Germans and Austrians against Serbs, Russians, Belgians, French and British.

Germans felt much the same as their enemies when they heard the news: they were thrilled, fearful, brave, patriotic, uncertain. . . Their Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm, told his soldiers as they left: 'You will be home before the leaves have fallen.' They took him at his word. Like most soldiers in Europe, they thought it would be a short war. It would be a picnic! There was glory to be won under the hot summer skies and smart uniforms to win pretty girls. War fever gripped the Germans just as it gripped the rest of Europe.

The following extract was written exactly ten years after the start of the war by Adolf Hitler, the happy young man with a moustache shown in the photograph above. He remembers his feelings as he stood in the midst of that singing crowd:

> 'I am not ashamed to admit today that I was carried away by the enthusiasm of the moment and that I sank down on my knees and thanked Heaven out of the fullness of my heart for having been allowed to live at such a time.'

But the soldiers did not return before the leaves had fallen. Autumn lengthened into winter and one winter lengthened into the next. The 'short war' grew into a Great War lasting four years, and the war fever of 1914 turned into a cold, hopeless nightmare.

Part One of this book shows you how the Great War of 1914 – 18 ruined Germany and caused a revolution

1

GERMANY AT WAR, 1914 – 1918

The home front

Less than a year after the start of the Great War, some Germans were starting to complain and protest about it. This report, written in 1915 by the American Ambassador to Germany, shows us why:

> 'Early in the summer the first demonstration took place in Berlin. About 500 women collected in front of the Reichstag [*Parliament*] building. They were promptly suppressed by the police, and no newspaper printed an account of the occurrence. These women were rather vague in their demands. . . . There was some talk of high prices for food and the women all said they wanted their men back from the trenches.'

By the following year, 1916, such anti-war demonstrations were getting bigger, even though they were against the law. Many Germans, fed up with war and suffering, began to listen to anti-war speeches made by Communists and Socialists. In this extract, a German journalist and politician describes a meeting held in Berlin by the Communist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

> 'May Day 1916 was chosen for the first trial of strength. . . . At eight o'clock in the morning a dense throng of workers – almost ten thousand – assembled in the square, which the police had already occupied well ahead of time. Karl Liebknecht . . . and Rosa Luxembourg were in the midst of the demonstrators and greeted with cheers from all sides. Liebknecht's voice rang out 'Down with the war! Down with the Government!' The police immediately rushed at him. . . . For the first time since the beginning of the war open resistance to it had appeared on the streets of the capital. The ice was broken.'

Berlin, 1917: women queue up to exchange potato peelings for firewood

What were the demonstrations about? For many people they were about the lack of food. British ships were blockading Germany's ports, preventing food ships from getting into the country. But worse was to come. The winter of 1916 – 17 was a bitterly cold one, and hard frosts destroyed the potato crop. Most people had to live on turnips instead. Ethel Cooper, an Australian living in Germany during the war, gives us an idea of what the 'turnip winter' was like in this extract from her weekly letter to her sister in Adelaide:

11.2.17

'My dear Emmie,

We have got through a queer week – the worst week the German people has had to face up to the present. No coal, electric light turned off, the gas power turned down . . . and practically no food – there seems to be no more potatoes – each of us has been given half a pound of what they call potato-flocken. I know no English word for it – they seem to me to be the dried parings of potatoes – you have to soak them overnight, then rub them through a sieve. . . . We had that half pound, five pounds of turnips, 3½ pounds of bread, and that was all. I went the rounds of the restaurants and sometimes got some cabbage, or an infinitesimal [*tiny*] piece of chicken that cost 3/– [*3 shillings*] or edible toadstools, and I bought tinned fish at 5/– a pound, but it passes my understanding to know how the poor are managing. Any other people on earth would rise against a government that had reduced it to such misery, but these folk seem to have no spirit left. . . .

Very much love to you all,
from your loving Ethel'

The soldiers' war

So the war was starving German civilians. What about the armed forces? Food shortages were leaving them just as hungry as their families at home. When the rations of the sailors in the German fleet were cut in 1917 they started a mutiny. This letter was written by the leader of the mutineers, and this extract tells us a lot about their attitudes to the war:

'My Dear Parents,

I have been sentenced to death today, September 11, 1917. Only myself and another comrade; the others have been let off with fifteen years imprisonment. You will have heard why this has happened to me. I am a sacrifice of the longing for peace, others are going to follow. . . . I don't like to die so young, but I die with a curse on the German-militarist state. These are my last words. I hope that some day you and mother will be able to read them,

Always
Your son
Albin Köbes'

Many soldiers in the army also had hatred in their hearts. There was little glory in the war they were fighting. Trench warfare meant living in muddy dugouts for weeks on end, with the constant dread of being blown to bits by shell-fire or of being suffocated by poison gas. So when 1918, the fourth year of the fighting, began, many Germans were thoroughly sick of war.

Work section

A. 1. Using the documents in this chapter as evidence, list the ways in which conditions in Germany worsened during the war.
2. Give two reasons why the war caused such bad conditions for German civilians.

B. How can you tell from Ethel Cooper's letter to her sister that conditions were far worse for many people than they were for her?

C. Study the photograph on the opposite page. Why do you think the men on the cart are exchanging firewood for potato peelings instead of selling the wood for money? Explain your answer.

D. Some of the documents used in this chapter were recorded at the time of the event, others were recorded much later. We call these different types of documents **primary** and **secondary** sources. Look carefully at the documents, including the photograph, and answer the following questions:
1. Which of the documents are primary sources?
2. Which of the documents are secondary sources?
3. Which of the documents do you think is most reliable?
4. Which of the documents do you think is least reliable?
Give reasons for your answers.

2

THE START OF A REVOLUTION AND AN END TO THE WAR

German suffering

By 1918 the average adult German was living on 1000 calories a day – half the amount needed for a normal healthy diet. Coal was running short and, because gas and electricity were made from coal, there were power cuts as well. In many cities all public buildings, cinemas and theatres were closed down. Lights in apartment blocks were put out early. A German civilian describes life during the winter months:

> 'One of the most terrible of our many sufferings was having to sit in the dark. It became dark at four. . . . It was not light until eight o'clock. Even the children could not sleep all that time. And when they had gone to bed we were left shivering with the chill which comes from semi-starvation and which no extra clothing seems to relieve.'

There was worse to come. A killer virus, Spanish influenza, swept across Europe during the summer of 1918. Weak from years of hunger, 400,000 German civilians and 186,000 soldiers died of influenza in less than a year. On one day alone, 15 October, it killed 1700 people in Berlin.

In the armed forces conditions were just as bad. On 2 October, General Ludendorff, a leading army general, said this to shocked politicians in the Reichstag [*Parliament*]:

> 'We can carry on the war for a substantial further period, we can cause the enemy heavy loss, we can lay waste his country as we retreat, but we cannot win the war. . . . We must make up our minds to abandon the war as hopeless. Every day brings the enemy nearer to his goal, and makes him less likely to conclude a reasonable peace with us.'

So there was the choice: to fight on and risk total defeat in the end; or to make peace now on reasonable terms. 'The enemy' – the French, British and American Allies – *was* prepared to make peace with Germany, but there were strings attached.

Woodrow Wilson, President of the USA, said that Germany's government must be made more democratic before they could even start talking about peace. He said that Kaiser Wilhelm and the army generals must give up some of their power and that the Reichstag, Germany's parliament, must have a greater share in running the country.

But the Kaiser refused to make any changes. Encouraged by Socialists and Communists, people

Mutiny in the navy

The spark of revolution was lit on 28 October when Germany's navy chiefs ordered the warships in Kiel port to put to sea for battle with the British. Sailors on two of the ships refused the order and put out the fires in the boiler rooms. This was mutiny, and 600 sailors were arrested. But their comrades on the other ships remembered the savage punishments given out after the 1917 mutiny (see page 3) and held a mass meeting to protest against the arrests. At their meeting eight were shot dead.

Within hours the mutiny began to spread. Workers and soldiers joined the sailors and took control of the town of Kiel. The same thing happened in other ports nearby. Led by Socialists, they set up their own workers' and soldiers' councils to run the towns. The red flags of the Socialists flew over government buildings.

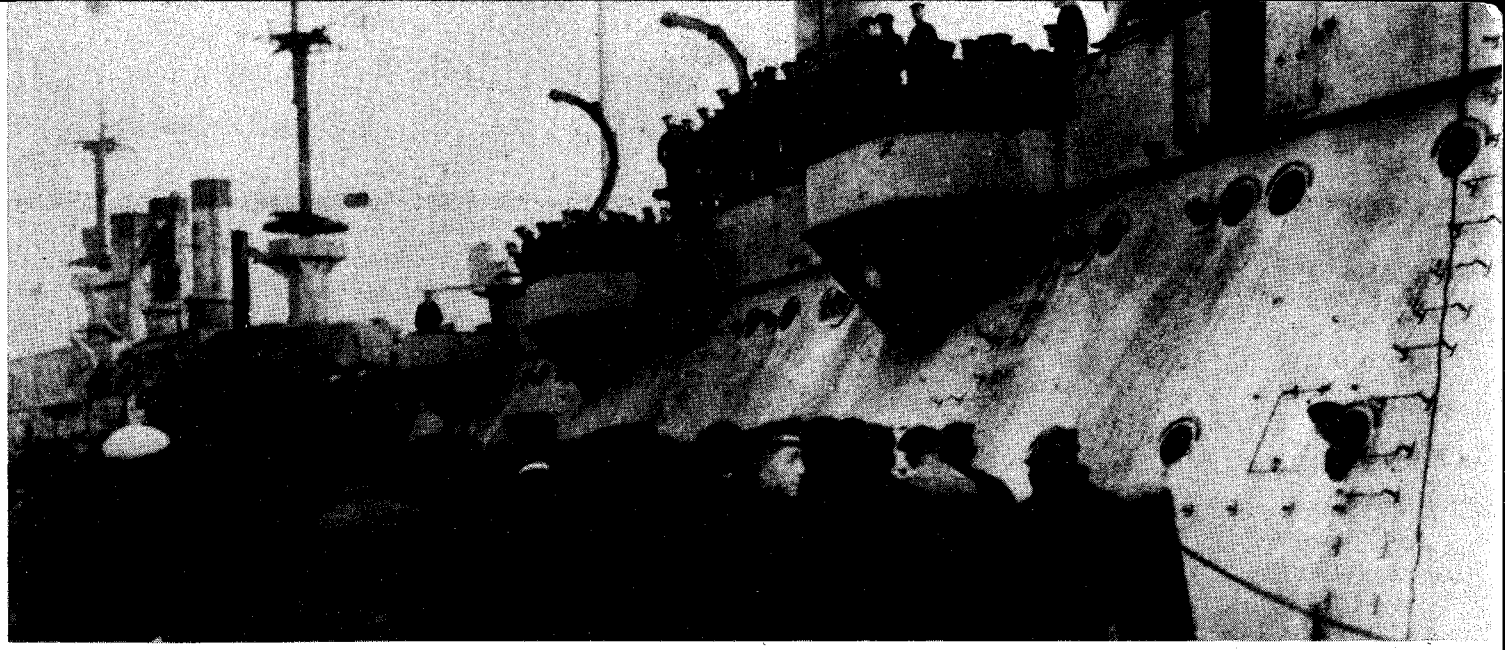
The mutiny in the ports quickly spread inland. It took only six days for cities all over Germany to join in. In the province of Bavaria in the south, Independent Socialists set up a republic. The same thing happened in Saxony. The country was breaking apart.

There was nothing that Kaiser Wilhelm could do to control his country, for the army generals refused to support him. All he could do was to abdicate [*give up his throne*]. On 10 November he secretly left Germany and went by train to Holland, never to return. Friedrich Ebert, leader of the Social Democratic party, took his place as leader of Germany. Ebert's first action was to sign an armistice with the Allies, bringing an end to the Great War.

The end to war

Many Germans were delighted that the war was over. But just as many were appalled. The young man whose face you saw in the Munich crowd in 1914 (see page 1) heard the news from a visitor to the hospital where he lay blinded after a gas attack. In 1924 he wrote:

> 'What! Was such a thing possible? I broke down completely when the old gentleman tried to resume the story by informing us that we must now end this long war. . . . It was impossible for me to stay and listen any longer. Darkness surrounded me as I staggered and stumbled back to my ward and buried my aching head between the blankets and the pillow. I had not cried since



Sailors meeting at Kiel, 28 October 1918

The German Socialists

Three groups of Socialists helped to start the revolution in 1918. They each had their own ideas about how to change Germany.

The Social Democratic Party Leader: Friedrich Ebert	*Aims* 1. to improve workers' conditions 2. to give democratic rights to all Germans – e.g. the right to vote	*Methods*: to support the government and try to make reforms by acts of parliament.
The Independent Socialists Leader: Hugo Haase	*Aims* 1. to improve workers' conditions 2. to give democratic rights to all Germans – e.g. the right to vote	*Methods*: to oppose the government and force it to make reforms by organising strikes
The Spartacists (This group took its name from Spartacus, a Roman gladiator who led a rebellion of slaves against the slave-masters.) Leaders: Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg	*Aims* 1. to improve workers' conditions 2. to give democratic rights to all Germans – e.g. the right to vote	*Methods*: to overthrow the government in a revolution. Councils of workers, or 'soviets' would then make reforms

Work section

A. Read these British newspaper headlines, then answer the questions beneath.

HAMBURG FOLLOWS KIEL. ALL POWER IN REVOLUTIONARIES HANDS.
RED FLAG HOISTED IN OTHER PORTS.
(*The Daily Chronicle*, London, 8 November 1918)

END OF THE HOHENZOLLERNS. KAISER ABDICATES. REVOLUTION ALL OVER GERMANY.
(*The Sunday Times*, London, 10 November 1918)

1. What happened in Kiel in the week before these headlines appeared?
2. What do you think happened in Hamburg and 'other ports'?
3. Give two reasons why Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated on 10 November.
4. Using the information you have read in this chapter, give evidence to support the statement that there was 'revolution all over Germany'.

B. Study the information about German Socialists above.
1. What did the three Socialist groups have in common?
2. In what ways were they different?

C. Study the photograph above.
1. Explain how this situation came about.
2. Why is it dangerous for a government when sailors or soldiers mutiny?

3

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION, 1918 – 1919

Germany looks to the future

The war was over, Kaiser Wilhelm had fled, a revolution had begun, and the people of Germany were now free to shape their own future. But nobody quite knew what should become of Germany now that the Kaiser was gone, so the riots and strikes and demonstrations went on.

Friedrich Ebert, the new socialist leader of Germany, tried to calm the situation. Two days after the Kaiser had abdicated he issued this statement:

> 'TO THE GERMAN PEOPLE!
> The Government which the Revolution has produced, whose political convictions [*beliefs*] are purely Socialist . . . now make the following announcements which will have the force of law: . . .
>
> 3. The censorship ceases to exist . . .
> 4. Opinion, whether by word of mouth or in writing, is free . . .
> 5. Freedom of religion is guaranteed . . .
> 9. The eight hour day will come into force. . . . An order *re* the support of the unemployed is ready. . . . The housing difficulty will be dealt with by the building of houses. Efforts will be made to secure the regular feeding of the people. . . .'

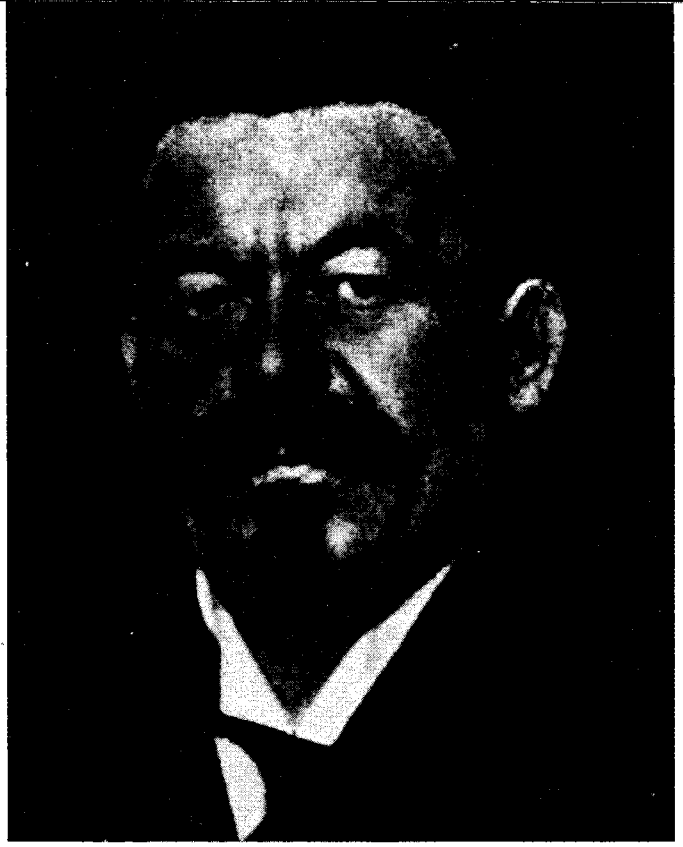
Surely this was what the people needed after four years of war: work, freedom, shelter, food? But, as you have found out, the Socialists were split into groups which disagreed about Germany's future. The Spartacists wanted Germany to be run by the councils which the sailors and workers had set up the previous week. The Social Democrats supported Friedrich Ebert and wanted an elected parliament to make decisions about the country's future.

Violence breaks out

The two groups clashed. The Spartacists held a demonstration in December but Ebert's government troops shot into the crowd, killing sixteen people.

Spartacists in Berlin mounting a machine gun onto the back of a captured lorry, January 1919

Rosa Luxemburg, Spartacist leader



Friedrich Ebert, first President of the German, or Weimar, Republic, February 1919

Ebert seemed to have the whip hand among the Socialists.

But two days before Christmas 1918, a thousand hungry and underpaid sailors broke into the government headquarters and held Ebert prisoner at gunpoint, demanding more pay. This time Ebert's troops did not shoot. Many joined the sailors' revolt and so Ebert had to give in to them.

The next sign of trouble came on New Year's Eve. The Spartacists renamed themselves the **German Communist Party** and decided to work for a communist revolution. One of their leaders, Rosa Luxemburg, wrote in their newspaper:

> 'To battle! There is a world to conquer and a world to fight against! In this last class war of world history . . . our word to the enemy is: Thumb in eye and knee on chest.'

The Spartacists began their revolution a week later, on 6 January 1919. But in the fortnight since Christmas, Ebert had gained the support of the **Free Corps**. These were ex-soldiers who had recently come home from the war. They were hard men who hated communism and loved brutality, so they were only too pleased to help Ebert fight off the Spartacists. On 10 January, 2000 of them attacked the Spartacists in Berlin. There was bitter street fighting for the next three days. On 15 January they arrested Rosa Luxemburg and her fellow leader Karl Liebknecht. After beating them savagely the Free Corps murdered them both and dumped Rosa's body in a canal.

The Weimar Republic

So the Spartacist, or communist, revolution had failed. Ebert was now able to hold an election for a parliament. His Social Democrats won more seats in parliament than any other party so, for the moment, Ebert's position was safe. The new parliament went to Weimar, a town in southern Germany, far away from the violence in Berlin, and on 11 February 1918 elected Ebert President of the new German Republic – the **Weimar Republic**.

Work section

A. Test your understanding of this chapter by explaining the following terms: Spartacists; Social Democrats; Free Corps.

B. 1. Make a time chart of the events of the German Revolution from 10 November 1918 to 15 January 1919. You should be able to find six events in this chapter.
2. At what time would you say the Communists had their best chance of seizing power? Explain your answer.

C. Using the information you have read in this chapter, make a list of the reasons why the Communists were unable to overthrow Friedrich Ebert.

4

THREATS TO THE NEW REPUBLIC

Threats to the new republic

When Germany's new parliament met in the peaceful city of Weimar in January 1919, it seemed that the revolution was over. Germany was now a republic, the Weimar Republic, run by a democratically elected government.

But there was more violence to come. In March 1919 the Communists organised riots and strikes in Berlin in another attempt to seize power. The government ordered anyone seen carrying weapons to be shot on sight. Again it called in the Free Corps to do this dirty work. Over the next few days the Free Corps shot over a thousand people dead; among them were thirty sailors who were doing nothing more dangerous than collecting their wages.

The next threat to the Weimar Republic came from the southern province of Bavaria. As you know, Independent Socialists in Bavaria had set up a republic in November 1918. Their leader, Kurt Eisner took power. But in February 1919 a right-wing student shot Eisner dead in the street. Over 100,000 people attended his funeral and the city of Munich went into mourning.

With Eisner dead, the moderate Socialists and the Communists argued about which of them should take his place. The Communists soon got their way and, in March 1919, made Bavaria into a Soviet Republic on Russian lines. They took houses from the middle-class people of Munich and gave them to the workers. They took food, cars and clothing from the rich. They formed a Bavarian Red Army to protect themselves.

The government in Weimar put Munich under siege. By the end of April food was so short in Munich that to give milk to anyone but the dying was a crime punishable by death.

On 1 May the siege suddenly ended. Government soldiers, helped by the Free Corps, smashed into the starving city. No Communist was spared – man, woman or child. At least 600 people were killed.

Not dead but asleep: a Communist soldier resting during the battle for Munich, May 1919

A Free Corps unit in Munich. The handwriting on the photograph means 'An armoured car which made a successful attack in the fighting', Munich, 2 May 1919

Peace terms

With the help of the Free Corps, the Weimar government had put down the Communists in both Berlin and Bavaria. But now it was faced with an even worse crisis. For the past four months, in Paris, the Allies had been working out a peace treaty with Germany. The German people were expecting it to be a fair treaty. After all, they had done what the Allies had demanded; the Kaiser had given up his throne and they had elected a democratic government to rule Germany in his place.

On 7 May the Allies announced the terms of the peace treaty. Germany was to lose one-tenth of her land, all her overseas colonies and most of her armed forces. She was blamed for starting the war and told that she must pay for the damage done in the fighting. The Germans were horrified. This was not the fair peace treaty they had expected. They had been betrayed, they said, not just by the Allies, but also by their own politicians who had signed the armistice in November. They called these politicians the '**November Criminals**' and said that they had 'stabbed Germany in the back' by making peace with the Allies.

The German government protested angrily against the peace terms but the Allies would not change them. They ordered the Germans to sign within five days, or else they would invade. After considering the situation the government decided not to sign the treaty and the ministers then resigned. On the same day, the captains of the German fleet, which was being held by the British in the port of Scapa Flow, sank their ships in protest. The German army drew up plans to defend the country against invasion. Ebert got ready to stand down as President. It seemed that the Great War was about to start all over again.

Work section

A. Test your understanding of this chapter by explaining the following terms: Weimar Republic; November Criminals.

B. Study the photograph of a Free Corps unit above, noting the date on which it was taken.

1. What do you think the symbols on the car's radiator and on the driver's helmet are supposed to show?
2. What do you think people in Munich felt when they saw armoured cars like this one?
3. Compare this photograph with that of a Spartacist machine-gun lorry on page 7. What similarities and what differences do you see?
4. What did Free Corps units like this one do in Munich on the day before the photograph was taken?

5

A DICTATED PEACE: THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

Many Germans would have preferred to fight again rather than sign the peace treaty being drawn up in Paris by the Allies. Field Marshal Hindenburg gave this advice to President Ebert:

> 'In the event of a resumption of hostilities we can . . . defend our frontiers in the east. In the west, however, we can scarcely count on being able to withstand a serious offensive. . . . The success of the operation as a whole is very doubtful, but as a soldier I cannot help feeling that it were better to die honourably than accept a disgraceful peace.'

The other senior generals took the same view. To fight would be suicide. There was no way out but to sign the treaty. So Ebert stayed on as President and formed a new government which was prepared to do so. With only ninety minutes to spare before the deadline for signing ran out, they sent a message to Paris saying that Germany accepted the treaty. Two ministers travelled to the palace of Versailles, near Paris, and on 28 June 1919 put their signatures to the document.

That day, a German newspaper carried this headline:

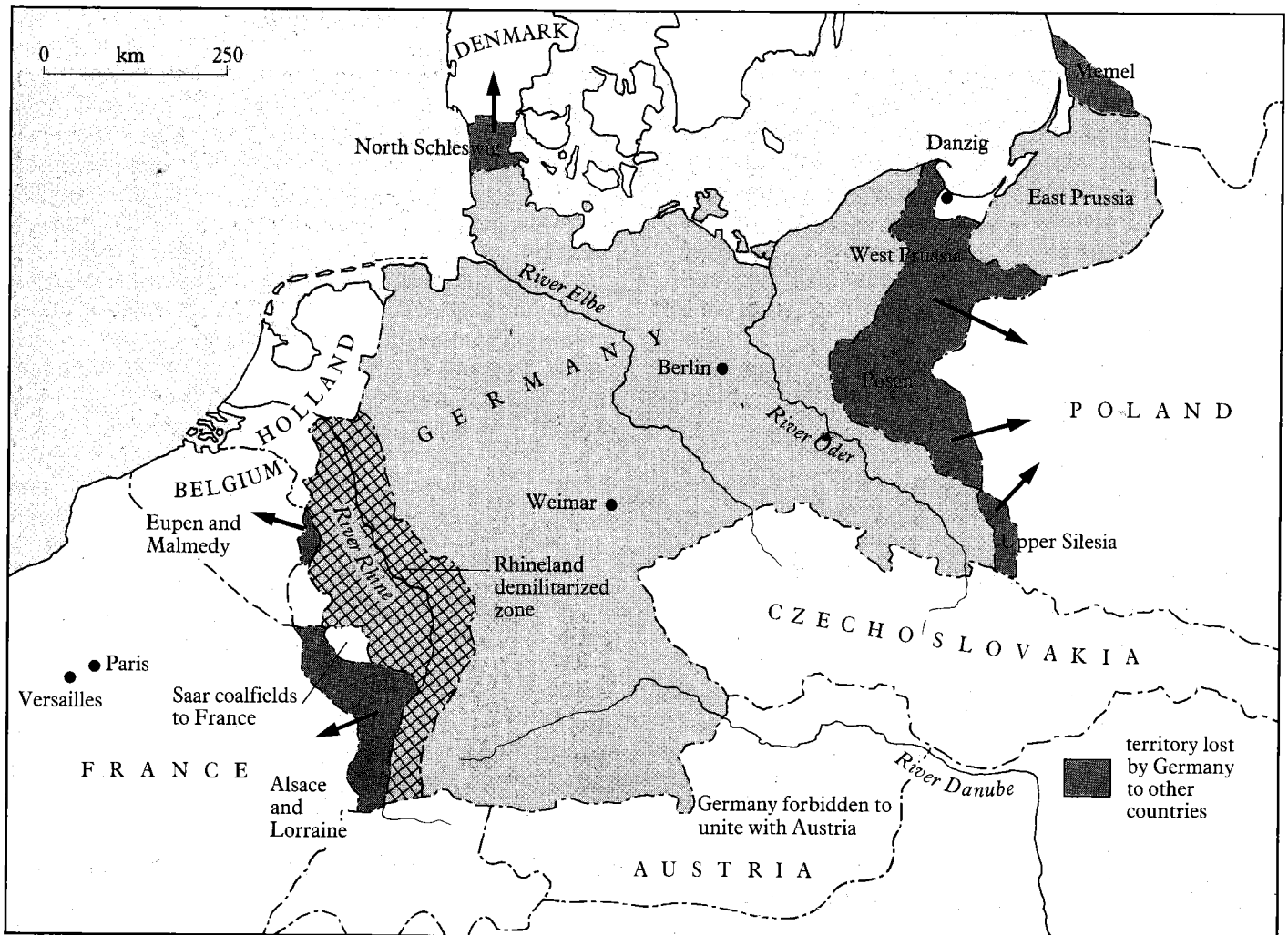
> 'VENGEANCE! GERMAN NATION!
> Today in the Hall of Mirrors a disgraceful treaty is being signed. Never forget it. There will be vengeance for the shame of 1919.'

Study these aspects of the Treaty of Versailles to find out why the Germans had such strong objections to it:

Land

The treaty took a great deal of land away from Germany and gave it to her neighbours. It also cut the country into two, as this map shows.

Losing all this land meant losing people, factories,



farms, mines. Germany lost 13.5 per cent of her land, 12.5 per cent of her population, 16 per cent of her coal production, 15 per cent of her farming production and 48 per cent of her iron production. In addition, the treaty took away all Germany's overseas colonies, a valuable source of raw materials and trade.

Arms

The treaty said:

> 'By a date which must not be later than March 31st 1920, the German army must not comprise more than seven divisions of infantry and three divisions of cavalry.
>
> After that date the total number in the army of Germany must not exceed one hundred thousand men. . . . The army shall be devoted exclusively to the maintenance of order within the territory and to the control of the frontiers.
>
> The total effective strength of officers must not exceed four thousand.'

The treaty also said that the army was not allowed into the Rhineland (see map). It cut down the navy to six battleships and banned it from using submarines. The entire air force was scrapped.

War guilt and reparations

The treaty said:

> '. . . Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her Allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her Allies.'

In other words, Germany was guilty of starting the war. So the treaty also stated that she must pay **reparations** for making good the damage.

Other aspects of the treaty

Germany was not allowed to unite with Austria, her German-speaking neighbour.

Allied armies were to occupy all German land west of the River Rhine for fifteen years.

As you can see, the Treaty of Versailles crippled Germany by taking away land, money and arms. The Germans had not been consulted about any of this, but were simply ordered to sign it without discussion. They called it a '**Diktat**' – a dictated peace.

And who was to blame for it all? At an enquiry Field Marshal Hindenburg was called to give evidence. His explanation was simple:

> 'The German army was stabbed in the back. No blame is to be attached to the sound core of the army. . . . It is perfectly clear on whom the blame rests.'

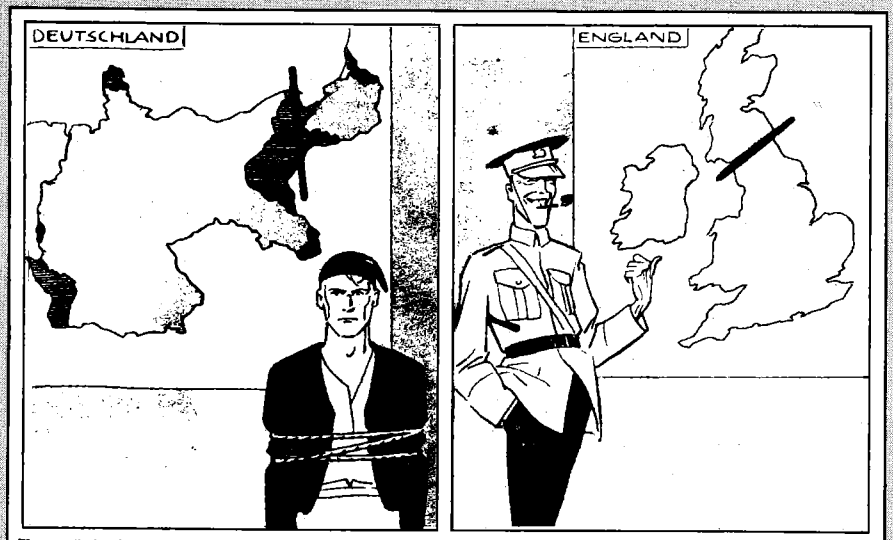
He didn't name them, but Hindenburg's meaning was clear; the army could have won the war but it had been betrayed by the Socialist politicians who signed the armistice in November 1918. These 'November Criminals' were to pay dearly for it.

Work section

A. Study the map opposite, then answer these questions.
1. Name the areas of land taken away from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles.
2. Which of these areas do you think Germans most disliked losing? Explain your answer.
3. Suggest why the treaty forbade Germany to unite with Austria.

B. Read the extracts from the treaty on this page. Explain how a German might have felt on reading them in 1919.

C. This cartoon appeared in a German magazine in 1937. The caption reads: 'What would the Tommy have said if the same was done to him as to the German Michael in 1920?'
1. Explain what you think was the point of the cartoon.
2. Do you think it was a fair or an unfair point? Explain your answer.



Was würde Tommy gesagt haben, wenn man ihm Ähnliches angetan hätte wie 1920 dem deutschen Michel?

D. Before going any further, make revision notes on what you have read so far. Use the revision notes on the next page to help you organise your notes.

Revision guide

These note headings and sub-headings are here to help you organise the information you have read so far. Use them as a framework for your notes if you are unsure about how to organise the information.

A. The effects of the Great War on Germany
1. War fever, 1914
2. Anti-war feelings, 1915 – 16
3. Food and fuel shortages
4. The 1917 naval mutiny

B. The naval mutinies of 1918
1. Causes
2. The spread of revolution, 5 – 10 November
3. The abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm
4. The Armistice, 11 November 1918

C. The German Revolution of 1918 – 19
1. Ebert's Socialist government
2. The Spartacist revolt
3. The Free Corps

D. Problems in Bavaria, 1919
1. The murder of Kurt Eisner
2. The 'Bavarian Soviet Republic'
3. The battle for Munich, April 1919

E. The Treaty of Versailles
1. The terms of the treaty
2. German hatred of the treaty

Revision exercise

In this word-square there are four names, four places and four political terms connected with the German Revolution of 1918–19. See whether you can find them all. As you find each one write it down in your notebook and then write a sentence about it.

G	G	B	I	B	B	F	O	N	M	F	A	K	I	E	L	C
E	A	A	U	L	E	R	Y	N	A	R	M	A	I	E	R	E
N	O	V	E	M	B	E	R	C	R	I	M	I	N	A	L	S
E	L	A	T	U	O	E	N	C	A	E	R	S	L	Y	L	P
R	E	R	T	N	O	C	U	T	T	D	A	E	Y	L	O	A
A	R	I	T	I	R	O	E	V	O	R	R	R	R	O	P	R
L	E	A	B	C	L	R	O	C	H	I	S	W	T	E	N	T
H	T	O	N	H	M	P	U	G	G	C	E	I	R	I	D	A
I	G	E	F	R	Y	S	L	O	X	H	S	L	Y	W	B	C
N	Z	T	C	R	P	Q	J	S	N	E	U	H	T	S	L	I
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E	L	P	N	K	V	T	I	D	C	E	R	L	B	W	A	T
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B	I	S	O	C	I	A	L	I	S	T	S	A	D	I	N	I
U	P	N	B	G	H	E	F	U	N	I	N	R	I	M	C	I
R	O	S	A	L	U	X	E	M	B	U	R	G	G	A	U	B
G	N	L	E	E	A	C	S	E	T	U	L	G	N	R	L	G

PART TWO

HATRED AND VIOLENCE

An anti–Communist poster issued in Berlin in 1919. It says 'Bolshevism will drown the world in blood'

The first five years in the life of the Weimar Republic were very violent ones. Almost every week there were strikes, riots and shootings. On several occasions there were attempts to overthrow the government.

What was wrong with Germany? Why was there so much violence? The poster above gives us a clue. Many Germans were terrified of communism, or 'Bolshevism' as they called it. They believed the message of the poster, that the Communists in Germany would organise a violent revolution, killing those who opposed them and taking over all property. Millions of Germans also thought that the Socialists who now governed the country were little better than the Communists. They called the Socialists 'November Criminals' and said that they had 'stabbed Germany in the back' by making peace in 1918.

When people are scared of something they often find it hard to listen to reason. Part Two of this book shows how many of the Germans who feared communism and socialism stopped listening to reason, and fought their fear with violence and bloodshed.

6

PUTSCHES AND MURDERS, 1920 – 1922

Free Corps soldiers entering Berlin during the Kapp Putsch, March 1920

13 March 1920 – the Kapp Putsch

Look at the photograph above. It shows one unit of a Free Corps brigade of 5000 men. They have just marched into Berlin to seize power. Ebert and the government have fled and the city is under Free Corps control. In short, a **putsch** – an attempt to take power by force – is taking place.

The rebels who took power that day were led by **Wolfgang Kapp**, an extreme nationalist who hated the government for signing the Treaty of Versailles. His aim was to make the German army stronger, to give Germans back their pride and, one day, to take back

Kapp was supported by the Berlin police, the Free Corps and some of the army. But he did not have the workers on his side. They organised a general strike in support of Ebert and the government and within a day Berlin was paralysed. There was no water, gas or coal. No trains or buses ran. Government officials refused to provide Kapp with money.

After just 100 hours as Germany's new ruler, Kapp gave in and fled to Sweden. Ebert and the government were able to return to Berlin as if nothing had happened.

21 March 1920 – 'Red rising' in the Ruhr

But now there was a new danger. The workers stayed out on strike and, in the Ruhr Valley, Germany's richest industrial area, the Communists formed a Red Army, 50,000 strong.

Government troops managed to defeat the Red Army after hard fighting but new risings broke out in other areas. Yet again, the Free Corps was sent in to put them down. They shot over 2000 workers before restoring order.

Increasing violence

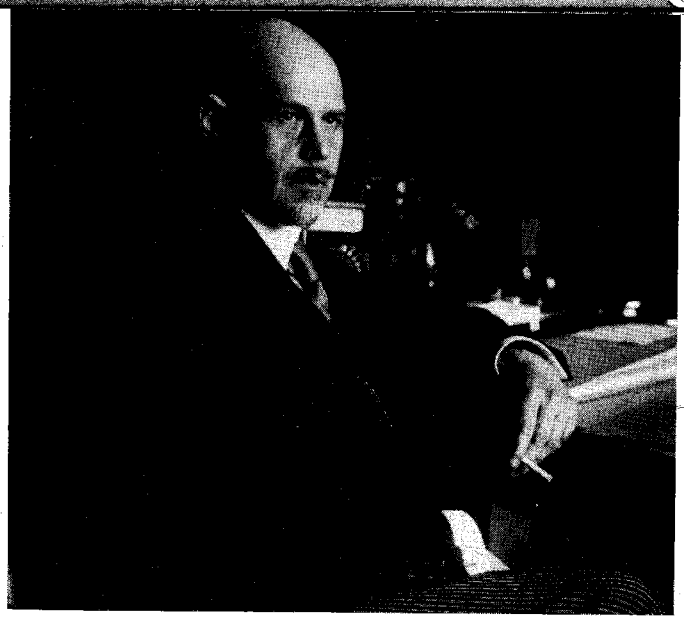
The '**red rising**' and the general strike scared many people and the authorites thought up tough new methods of dealing with the Communists. One right-wing police chief described what he would do it there was another big strike:

> 'You call the strike leaders together for a meeting and demand that the work be resumed the next day. If the first says no you shoot him and ask the second. If he says no you shoot him too. Then the third will say yes. Then you have a total of two dead; using your negotiation methods there would be weeks of fighting with thousands dead.'

Most right wingers simply talked tough. Some took the law into their own hands and did kill their opponents. Between 1919 and 1922 there were 356 political murders in Germany, most done by right-wing extremists. To find out more about why so many politicians were killed, read about the most famous murder of them all.

24 June 1922 – the murder of Walther Rathenau

Walther Rathenau was Germany's Foreign Minister. On Saturday 24 June 1922, four members of a killer group called **Organisation Consul** pumped bullets into him with an automatic pistol as he drove to work in an open top car. A hand grenade followed the bullets to make sure the job was finished.



Walter Rathenau in 1922

Years later, one of the killers, Ernst von Salomon, answered questions about why he had done it. This is part of his answer.

> 'The plan itself, how did that arise? It amounted to this: we must make an end to the policy of accepting the Versailles treaty and cooperating with the west. We had no wish to become a political party with mass support and all that that implies. So our means had to be different from those of the political parties. The only course open was to "eliminate" every politician who accepted the Versailles treaty. To eliminate in that context is, of course, to kill. What other means were there at our disposal? "Lists" were drawn up. And on one of our lists, among many others was Rathenau's name.
>
> "That list!" I said. It was, in fact, a single dirty sheet of paper with names crossed out, some written in again. Many of the names meant absolutely nothing to me and I had to take quite a lot of trouble to find out who they were. . . .'

Rathenau had been a popular minister. The day after his killing, a million people marched through Berlin in mourning. The killers and their accomplices were later sentenced to an average of four years in prison.

Work section

A. Study the photograph on the opposite page.
1. Why do you think the Free Corps soldiers are giving out news sheets?
2. What sort of message do you think the news sheets contained?

B. Read the police chief's account of how he would deal with strikers. Do you think that his methods would have been effective, or might they have created other problems? Explain your answer.

C. Read Ernst von Salomon's account of why the Organisation Consul killed Walther Rathenau.
1. What, judging by his evidence, was their motive for planning the murders of important politicians?
2. Why do you think they 'had no wish to become a political party' in order to achieve their aims?
3. How well organised was Organisation Consul, according to this evidence? Explain your answer.

D. Suggest why Rathenau's murderers were given only short prison sentences.

7

INVASION AND HYPERINFLATION: THE CRISIS OF 1923

The invasion of the Ruhr

In the Treaty of Versailles, Germany had to agree to pay for war damages, or **reparations**. The Allies argued about how much Germany should pay and did not decide until 1921. When they announced the exact figure the German government resigned in protest, claiming they could not possibly afford to pay. The sum was 132 billion gold marks – or £6,600,000,000 – to be paid off in equal instalments every year until 1987.

But the Germans had no real choice in the matter. Either they paid up or the Allies would invade. So a new government scraped up the first instalment of two billion gold marks and handed it over. Some of it was in the form of gold, the rest in goods such as coal, iron and wood.

That, however, was all Germany could pay. The first instalment had taken all she could afford and so, in 1922, she failed to pay the second instalment. The French refused to believe it. They said the German government was bluffing and decided to take what they were owed by force. They invaded Germany and occupied the **Ruhr Valley**, the richest industrial area.

Within days there were five French divisions and one Belgian division in the Ruhr. They took over coal mines, railways, factories, steel works. They set up machine-gun posts overlooking town squares. They took food and supplies and put anyone who did not co-operate into prison.

The German government replied to the invasion by issuing the following orders to the people who lived in the Ruhr:

> 'The action of the French government in the Ruhr area . . . [*is*] a gross violation of international law and of the Treaty of Versailles. As a consequence all orders given to German officials in the course of this action are legally invalid. The German government therefore orders all its officials not to obey the instructions of the occupying forces.'

In other words, the government was telling the Ruhr workers not to work for the French – to put up 'passive resistance'. The French responded with tough measures. When workers in the Krupp steelworks refused to take orders, the French opened fire, killing thirteen and wounding many more. They also expelled people from the Ruhr when they refused to co-operate. Over the next eight months they killed 132 people and expelled an estimated 150,000 from their

Hyperinflation

But passive resistance did the German governmen more harm than it did to the French. First, the riches part of Germany was no longer producing goods, s the rest of the country suffered as well. Second, the people who were expelled from their homes had to b fed and housed by the government since it had ordered the passive resistance in the first place. Yet it had n money to do this.

To solve these problems, the government began printing large amounts of paper money, but this simply caused prices in the shops to rise. The more money the government printed, the faster prices wen up, until 1923 became a year of **hyperinflation**. This table shows how severe it was.

The cost of one loaf of bread in Berlin

	1918	0.63 mark
	1922	163 mark
January	1923	250 mark
July	1923	3,465 mark
September	1923	1,512,000 mark
November	1923	201,000,000,000 mark

The hyperinflation of the mark did strange things t people's lives, as this woman living in Berlin recalls:

> 'May I give you some recollections of my own situation at that time? As soon as I received my salary I rushed out to buy the daily necessities. My daily salary, as editor of the magazine *Soziale Praxis*, was just enough to buy one loaf of bread and a small piece of cheese or oatmeal. I had to refuse to give a lecture at a Berlin city college because I could not be assured that my fee would cover the subway fare to the classroom, and it was too far to walk. . . .
> An acquaintance of mine, a clergyman, came to Berlin from a suburb with his monthly salary to buy a pair of shoes for his baby; he could only buy a cup of coffee.'

The faster prices went up, the faster people spen their wages. Workers were paid twice a day and, whe they were given their wages, threw bundles o banknotes out of factory windows to waiting member of their families, who would then rush to the shops t buy food or coal or clothes before the prices went u again.

Millions of people faced starvation as a result of th hyperinflation. People such as pensioners who wer

German middle-class women selling their family treasures in 1922

faster than their earnings. So even if they could afford to buy food they might not be able to pay for the gas to cook it. They lived in unheated houses because they could not afford coal, and they froze because they could not afford to buy clothes.

The well-to-do suffered along with the poor, especially people who had savings in the bank. People with thousands in the bank in 1918 now found that their savings would not even buy a slice of bread or a piece of coal.

All this was more than Germany could bear. A new government led by **Gustav Stresemann**, one of Germany's most able politicians, was formed in September 1923. Stresemann called off the passive resistance campaign in the Ruhr. In November he stopped the printing of paper money and abolished the mark, replacing it with a new currency called the **Rentenmark**.

In the long run these measures saved Germany from complete collapse. But, as we shall see, the immediate effect was to cause unrest in all parts of the country and to trigger off another **putsch** in Bavaria.

Work section

A. Study these figures of coal and coke production in the Ruhr Valley before and after the French occupation.

	Coal output	Coke output
1 January – 11 January	220,000 tonnes	250,000 tonnes
11 January – 15 July	480,000 tonnes	500,000 tonnes

1. Work out how many tonnes of coal were being produced *each day* before the French occupation on 11 January.
2. Now work out how much coal would have been produced between 11 January and 15 July if the rate of production had stayed the same.
3. Explain why the daily production of coal and coke fell so much during the French occupation.
4. In view of the above figures, do you think it was worthwhile for the French to occupy the Ruhr in order to get coal and coke? Explain your answer.

B. List the ways in which the hyperinflation of 1923 harmed the German people.

C. Study the photograph above.
1. Why do you think the women are selling their family treasures?
2. Why, in the long run, would they be likely to regret selling them?

D. This German banknote was issued in November 1923. It was worth 1,000,000,000,000 marks. Study the table on page 16 showing the cost of one loaf of bread in Berlin, and work out how much bread you could buy with this banknote.

8

ADOLF HITLER AND THE RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY

Adolf Hitler

Hitler at school in 1899, aged ten

You have already come across **Adolf Hitler**, the man in these photographs: you have seen him cheering the start of the war in 1914 (page 1) and you have read of his despair when the war ended in 1918 (page 4). Now you see him (above right) five years after the war, making an open air speech in Munich, the troubled capital of Bavaria. Before long he will try to overthrow the government in a putsch.

Before reading about the Munich Putsch of 1923 you need to know something about Adolf Hitler's background. Hitler was not a German. He was born in Austria and spent the first twenty-four years of his life there. He left school at sixteen after failing his examinations and left home at eighteen to live in

Hitler, making a speech in Munich in 1923

Vienna, the capital of Austria. Without a job and without qualifications, he ended up in a hostel for down-and-outs. A tramp in the hostel remembered his arrival:

> 'On the very first day there sat next to the bed that had been allotted to me a man who had nothing on except an old torn pair of trousers – Hitler. His clothes were being cleaned of lice, since for days he had been wandering about without a roof and in a terribly neglected condition.'

That was in 1909. For the next four years Hitler scraped a living by painting postcards and selling them in the streets. Then he left Vienna in a hurry to get out of doing national service in the army. He went across the border into Germany and settled down in the city of Munich.

Although he had dodged his army service in peacetime, Hitler was infected by the war fever of 1914. He volunteered to serve in the German army and quickly proved to be a brave soldier, doing the dangerous work of carrying messages across the trenches. He won six medals for his bravery, including an Iron Cross First Class, the highest award a German soldier could win. Yet he never got above the rank of corporal.

The war ended for Hitler in October 1918 when he was temporarily blinded by mustard gas in a British attack.It was while he was in hospital recovering his sight that he was told of Germany's surrender, and cried in despair.

Based in Munich, he worked as a V-man – an army spy whose job was to investigate new political groups and parties to find out whether they were dangerous to the government. One group he investigated was not at all dangerous, for it had only six members and funds of about 40 pence. But he liked many of its ideas and joined it in 1919. It was called the **German Workers' Party**.

The Nazi Party

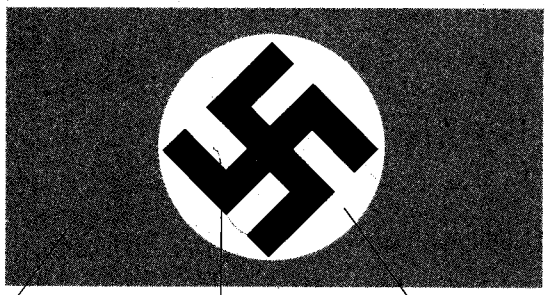
Before long, Hitler was running the party. He put advertisements in newspapers, stuck posters on walls and held meetings in public halls and beer cellars. Soon he was getting big audiences at his meetings, for he was an interesting and powerful speaker. One historian, Z.A.B. Zeman, has worked out that the frequency of his normal speaking voice was 228 vibrations per second, compared with 200 per second in the voice of an average man speaking in anger. This meant that 'the onslaught on the eardrums of the audience was tremendous'. It also meant that he could get his message across without microphones.

And what was his message? In 1920 he re-named the party the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, or **National Socialist German Workers' Party** and issued a twenty-five-point programme describing its aims. These are some of the twenty-five points:

1. We demand the union of all Germans to form a greater Germany . . .
2. We demand the abolition of the Peace Treaties of Versailles and Saint Germain.
3. We demand land and territory for the nourishment of our people . . .
4. None but those of German blood . . . may be members of the German nation. No Jew, therefore, may be a member of the German nation.

11. We demand the abolition of incomes unearned by work.
14. We demand profit-sharing in the big industries.
15. We demand a generous development of provision for old age.
16. We demand the creation and support of a healthy middle class.
25. We demand the creation of a strong central government in Germany.'

The **Nazi Party**, as some people mockingly called it, grew rapidly in 1920 and had 3000 members by the end of the year. A specially designed flag helped to attract attention – a **swastika**, or crooked cross, on a white and red background.



Nazi meetings were usually rowdy and violent. Members of opposing parties often came to heckle and boo so, in 1921, Hitler set up a 'Gymnastic and Sports Division' to deal with such people. It was really just a cover name for ex-soldiers in the party who liked a fight, especially with Communists. Hitler described a fierce battle between them and Communists at a meeting in a beer hall in 1921:

> 'A few angry cries, and a man suddenly leaped on a chair and yelled "Liberty!" In a few seconds the hall was filled with a yelling and howling mob, above which countless beer pots flew like howitzer shells. Chair legs smashed, glasses shivered. . . . My storm troops, as they were called from that day on, attacked. Like wolves they rushed in parties of eight or ten on the enemy and began gradually to sweep them out of the hall. . . . It had all taken about five and twenty minutes, by which time we were masters of the situation.'

So the Nazi Party was becoming more than just a political party. It had its own private army of thugs to beat up anyone who disagreed with them. Hitler re-named them the *Sturm Abteilung* (Storm Troopers) or **SA**.

Work section

A. Test your understanding of this chapter by explaining what these terms mean: Nazi Party; Swastika; *Sturm Abteilung*.

B. Study the twenty-five-point programme of the National Socialist German Workers' Party.
1. Make a list of the points which are nationalistic. What kinds of people do you think would be attracted to the Nazi Party by these points?
2. Make a list of the points which are socialist. What kinds of people do you think would be attracted to the Nazi Party by these points?
3. Which of the points are neither nationalistic nor socialist? What kinds of people would be attracted to the Nazi Party by these points?

9

THE MUNICH PUTSCH, 1923

The Putsch

In November 1923 Hitler decided that the Nazis were strong enough to overthrow the German government. Remember that this was the month when hyperinflation was at its worst, and that Gustav Stresemann had just given in to the French by ending the passive resistance campaign in the Ruhr. Hitler planned to march to Berlin at the head of the SA. There, he felt sure, people would flock to join him in overthrowing the government which had caused them so much hardship.

On 8 November he broke into a meeting being held by three leaders of the Bavarian government in a large beer hall. Outside were 600 Storm Troopers to back him up. He held a gun at the head of one Bavarian leader and forced all three to tell the audience that they would help him in his plan. Then General Ludendorff, a great German war hero who was in on the plot, entered the hall and announced that he too supported Hitler.

These promises of support convinced the audience. They cheered when Hitler told them:

> 'Now I am going to carry out the vow I made five years ago when I was a blind cripple in the army hospital: to neither rest nor sleep until the November Criminals have been hurled to the ground, until on the ruins of the pitiful Germany of today has risen a Germany of power and greatness.'

While he was speaking, Storm Troopers led by Ernst Röhm were already taking control of government offices and arresting officials.

But the next day, 9 November, the plan quickly went wrong. The three Bavarian leaders went back on their promise and ordered the army to attack Ernst Röhm and the SA. Hitler and General Ludendorff set off with 2000 Nazis to rescue Röhm, and marched towards the centre of Munich. But in a narrow street they came up against armed police. Shots rang out and sixteen Nazis died in a hail of gunfire. Hitler escaped with a dislocated shoulder and Ludendorff was unharmed, but the putsch was over. Hitler and Ludendorff were arrested later that day, taken to prison and charged with high treason.

The Munich Putsch: Nazi Storm Troopers arrest the Mayor of Munich. 9 November 1923

Hitler in prison in the Landsberg fortress in 1924

Trial and imprisonment

The **Munich Putsch** had failed and Hitler stood accused of high treason. It seemed that his short political career was over. In fact, it was just beginning. His trial lasted twenty-four days and was front-page news in every German newspaper. Everything that Hitler said in court was read by millions of people – the biggest audience he had ever had.

This is the sort of thing that Hitler said at his trial:

> 'I alone bear the responsibility but I am not a criminal because of that. . . . There is no such thing as high treason against the traitors of 1918. . . . I feel myself the best of Germans who wanted the best for the German people.'

and:

> 'It is not you, gentlemen, who pass judgement on us. That judgement is spoken in the eternal court of history. That court will judge us . . . as Germans who wanted only the good of their people and fatherland; who wanted to fight and die.'

The judges were impressed by what they heard. They set Ludendorff free and sentenced Hitler to five years imprisonment, with the chance of parole after six months. The other Nazis in the dock got away with equally light sentences.

Hitler served his sentence in the Landsberg Fortress, 80 kilometres west of Munich. The conditions were not hard. He was allowed as many visitors as he liked. There were newspapers and books and he had plenty of food. Much of his time was spent writing *Mein Kampf* [My Struggle], a long and rambling book in which he described his ideas about history, politics, race and the future of Germany. He hardly had time to finish it for, in December 1924, he was released from prison – after serving only nine months of his sentence. A police report on him said:

> 'The moment he is set free, Hitler will, because of his energy, again become the driving force of new and serious public riots and a menace to the security of the state.'

Work section

A. Study the extracts from Hitler's speeches in this chapter. Judging by this evidence, what do you think was Hitler's main motive for trying to seize power in 1923?

B. The German legal code stated that the punishment for high treason should be life imprisonment. Why do you think Hitler's judges sentenced him to five years in prison with the chance of parole after six months?

C. Study the photograph above of Hitler in prison. How can you tell from this scene that the conditions were not hard?

D. Before going any further, make revision notes on what you have read in Chapters 6 to 9. If you are unsure about how to organise your notes, use the revision guide on the next page to help you.

Revision guide

These note headings and sub-headings are here to help you organise the information you haveread about 'Hatred and Violence' in Weimar Germany. Use them as a framework for your notes if you are unsure about how to organise the information. They follow on from the notes you have already made.

F. Putsches and murders, 1920—22
1. The Kapp Putsch, 1920
2. The 'Red rising' in the Ruhr Valley, 1923
3. Political murders

G. The French occupation of the Ruhr Valley, 1923
1. The problem of reparations
2. The French invasion
3. The passive resistance campaign against the French

H. The hyperinflation of 1923
1. Causes of hyperinflation
2. The effects of hyperinflation on peoples' lives
3. Gustav Stresemann's government

I. Adolf Hitler and the rise of the Nazi Party
1. Adolf Hitler's background
2. The creation of the Nazi Party
3. The twenty-five point programme of the Nazi Party
4. The *Sturm Abteilung*

J. The Munich Putsch of 1923
1. Hitler's Plan
2. The putsch
3. The failure of the putsch
4. Hitler's trial
5. Hitler's imprisonment

Revision exercise

This is a scrambled set of dates and names, and things associated with them. Your task is to unscramble them, join them into threes and then explain the connections between them.

Example

November 1923	Ernst Röhm	Storm Troopers	Ernst Röhm was leader of the Nazi Party's Storm Troopers. In the Munich Putsch of 1923 they arrested government officials in Munich. They were the private army of the Nazi Party.

November 1923 Wolfgang Kapp Adolf Hitler Organisation Consul November 1923 1920

Storm Troopers Mein Kampf Free Corps Rentenmark Walther Rathenau 1922

1924 Ernst Röhm Gustav Stresemann

PART THREE

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

Hitler re-founding the Nazi Party in the back room of a restaurant in Munich in February 1925

In February 1925, three months after coming out of prison, Adolf Hitler called his followers to a meeting in the back room of a restaurant in Munich. At the meeting he re-founded the Nazi Party and told his followers how he intended to take power:

> 'Instead of working to achieve power by an armed putsch, we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag . . .'

In other words, the Nazis would stand in elections, just like any other party, to campaign for votes. They would win power by democratic methods instead of trying to grab it by force.

But Germany had changed while Hitler was in prison. Gustav Stresemann, who formed a new government during the crisis of 1923, had solved many of the country's problems. Germany now had a new currency, the Rentenmark, and there was no more inflation. The strike in the Ruhr Valley was over, and the French army was getting ready to leave. Life was quickly returning to normal.

In this new, calmer situation, many Germans supported what the government was doing. They stopped listening to the extreme ideas of Nazis and Communists, and voted instead for more moderate parties. And as long as times were good for Germany, the extreme parties did badly in elections.

Part Three of this book shows how Hitler and the Nazis had to wait for a new crisis to hit Germany before they stood any chance of gaining power in democratic elections.

10

THE STRESEMANN YEARS, 1924 – 1929

Stability returns to Germany

Between 1924 and 1929 life in Germany became calmer and more prosperous. This was largely the work of **Gustav Stresemann**. As you have already read (page 17) he called off the passive resistance campaign in the Ruhr Valley and agreed to start paying reparations again. He also introduced a new currency to replace the worthless mark.

In 1924 Stresemann became Germany's Foreign Minister. His first action was to attend a meeting about reparations with the British, French and Americans. The result was a new plan for paying reparations on easier terms. The **Dawes Plan** of 1924 was for Germany to pay what she could actually afford each year, starting with a sum of £50 million.

Now that Germany had a new currency and was paying reparations again, foreign businessmen were willing to lend money to help rebuild the economy. Over the next five years they lent 25,000 million gold marks. The Germans were able to build new factories, and new machinery, and new houses with the cash. And building meant more jobs. Slowly Germany became prosperous again.

Stresemann's greatest achievement was to make Germany's old enemies trust and respect her. He did this by signing the **Locarno Treaties** in 1925, promising never to change the borders between Germany, France and Belgium. As a result of the treaties, Germany was also allowed in 1926 to join the **League of Nations**.

By 1928 Germany seemed a happier country than at any time in the past ten years. An American journalist, William Shirer, who was then living in Berlin described the new mood:

> 'A wonderful ferment was working in Germany. Life seemed more free, more modern, more exciting than in any place I had ever been. . . . Everywhere there was an accent on youth. One sat up with young people all night in the pavement cafés, the plush bars, on a Rhineland steamer or in a smoke-filled artist's studio and talked endlessly about life. . . . Most Germans one met . . . struck you as being democratic, liberal, even pacifist. One scarcely heard of Hitler or the Nazis except as butts of jokes – usually in connection with the Beerhall Putsch as it came to be known.'

A Nazi parade in the town of Nuremburg, 1927

The Red Fighting League salutes the Communist leader, Ernst Thalmann, during a parade in 1926

Growth of the Nazi and Communist Parties

Beneath the surface, however, there were signs that little had really changed. The extreme parties, particularly the Nazis and Communists, continued to grow and continued to hate the Weimar Republic. After re-founding the Nazi Party in 1925 Hitler expanded the SA and set up a second military group, the black-shirted *Schutzstaffeln* (Protection squads, or **SS**). He set up Party branches in all parts of the country, and these in turn set up special organisations: the Hitler Youth, the German Girls' League, the Nazi Students' League, the Nazi Teachers' League, and many more. By the end of 1928, 108,717 Germans belonged to the Nazi Party.

Why was Hitler so keen on setting up organisations? The failure of the Munich Putsch made Hitler realise that the Nazis could not take control in Germany by armed revolution. Instead he would get to power by lawful means – standing for elections for the Reichstag (Parliament), holding rallies and mass meetings, putting out newspapers, posters, leaflets and all sorts of other propaganda. This could only be done if the Nazi Party was well organised with branches in all parts of Germany.

But the Communists were organising themselves too. Their **Red Fighting League** was the equivalent of the Nazi SA. It paraded in front of the Communist leader Ernst Thalmann, just as the SA paraded in front of Hitler. It fought street battles with the Nazis, especially in Berlin, the capital.

Nazis and Communists still hated each other and both were prepared to use violence against each other. For the moment, however, this did not win them votes. In the elections of 1928 the Communists won 54 seats in the Reichstag and the Nazis won only 12. The Social Democratric Party, the party of the 'November Criminals', came first with 153 seats, while the moderate Centre Party got 61.

Work section

A. The years 1924 – 29 in Germany's history are often called the 'Stresemann years'. Using the information in this chapter, make a list of the things that he did for Germany during this period, and explain why they were important.

B. Study William Shirer's memories of life in Germany in 1928.
1. Suggest why life in Germany seemed to have become exciting, especially for young people, by 1928.
2. Why do you think many people made jokes about Hitler at this time?

C. Compare the photographs of Nazi and Communist rallies in this chapter.
1. What similarites in their methods can you see?
2. In what way are the rallies different?

D. Suggest why the Nazis won only 12 seats in the 1928 elections, even though they were a highly organised party with more than 100,000 members.

11

GERMANY AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

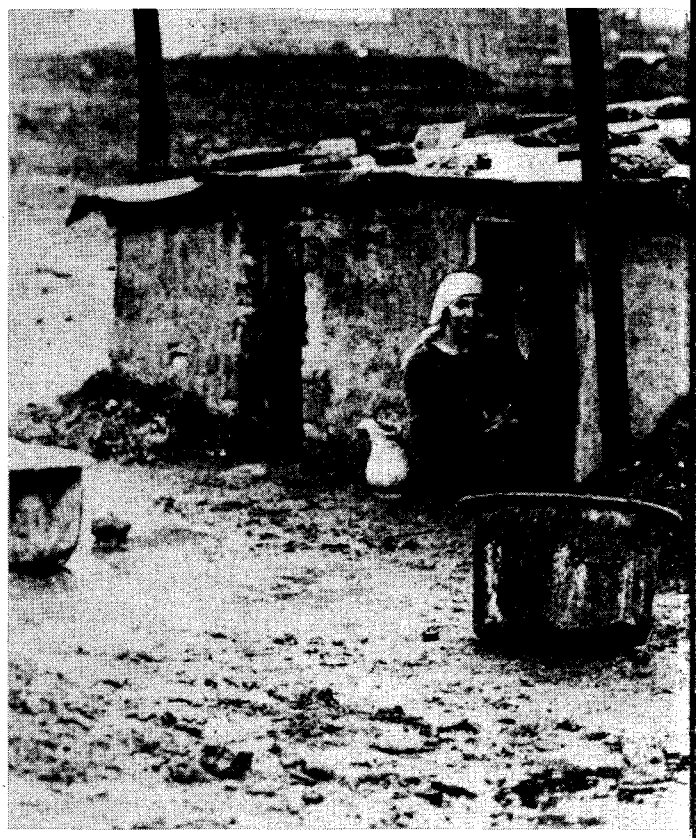
The Stresemann Years were good years for many Germans, with more money, more jobs and more homes than at any time since 1914. But shortly before his death in 1929, Stresemann himself warned them not to take any of it for granted. He said:

> 'The economic position is only flourishing on the surface. Germany is in fact dancing on a volcano. If the short-term credits are called in, a large section of our economy would collapse.'

Foreign loans

Stresemann was talking about the money that foreign bankers had lent to Germany. Much of it was American money and over half of it was lent on a short-term basis. This meant that the Germans had to pay loans back, or renew them, within a short period, usually ninety days. Normally the lenders were happy to renew the loans every time they were due. But suppose the lenders needed for some reason to get their money back quickly – then they would not renew the loans but demand repayment instead.

Sadly for Germany, this is exactly what happened in October 1929. The USA went into an economic depression after the value of shares sold on the Wall Street Stock Exchange collapsed in the **Wall Street**



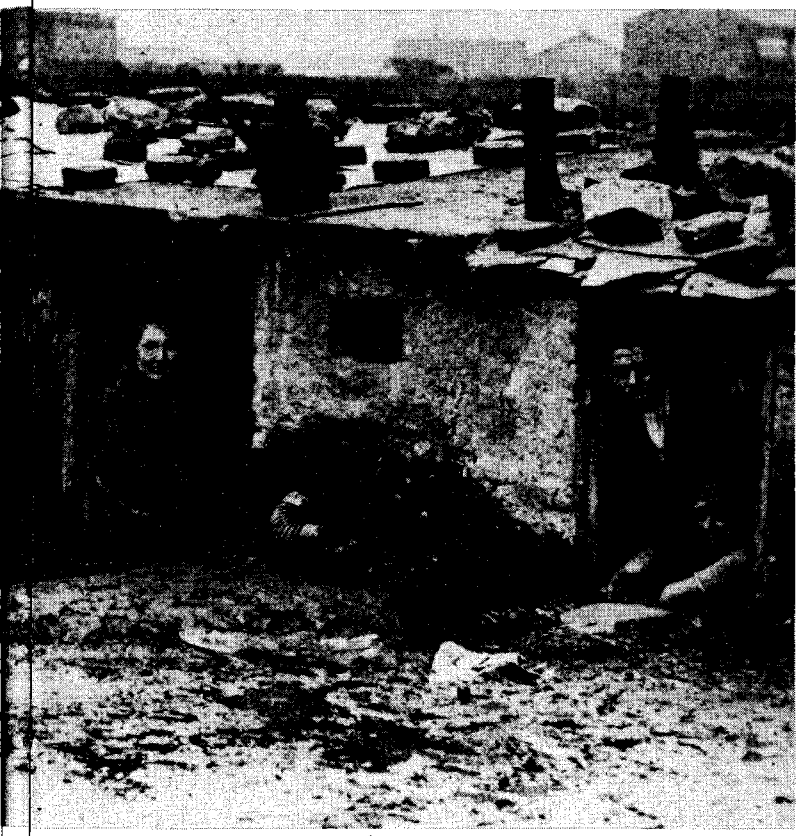
Homeless and unemployed, these men are living on waste ground in Berlin, 1930. The sign they have written on the wall says 'Golden Corner Boarding House'.

These men have paid to sleep 'on the line' in a warm room during the winter of 1930. The rope holds them up while they sleep.

Crash. Bankers and businessmen who had money tied up in stocks and shares were ruined. For many of them, their only hope was to demand repayment of the loans they had made. And of course they were in no position to lend any more money.

Economic crisis

The result was an economic disaster for Germany. The volcano that Stresemann had feared erupted with full force. Companies all over Germany went bankrupt, workers were sacked, and unemployment soared. These figures show how bad it was:



Unemployed coal miners and their families in Upper Silesia in 1931. They have had to move into these shacks on the edge of town because they have no money to pay the rent on their homes

Unemployment in Germany, 1928 – 33	
September 1928	650,000
September 1929	1,320,000
September 1930	3,000,000
September 1931	4,350,000
September 1932	5,102,000
January 1933	6,100,000

The British historian Alan Bullock comments on what these figures meant:

> 'Translate these figures into terms of men standing hopelessly on the street corners of every industrial town in Germany; of houses without food or warmth; of boys and girls without any chance of a job, and one may begin to guess something of the incalculable human anxiety and embitterment burned into the minds of millions of ordinary German working men and women.'

The Nazis saw the depression in a very different light, however. One of their leaders, Gregor Strasser, said this in 1931:

> 'All that serves to bring about catastrophe . . . is good, very good for us and our German revolution.'

What did he mean? The Nazis were finding that millions of Germans were now joining the party and voting for them in elections. People blamed the government for their misfortunes and turned to the politicians who promised an end to their hardship. When there was a general election in 1930, Hitler was hoping to get 50 or 60 seats in the Reichstag at most. He was surprised when he saw the results:

The 1930 Reichstag elections	
Social Democrats	143 seats
The Nazi Party	107 seats
The Communist Party	77 seats
The Centre Party	68 seats

Work section

A. Study the photographs in this chapter, then answer these questions.
1. List the problems and discomforts that the unemployed coal miners in Upper Silesia seem to be experiencing.
2. Suggest why the three men living out of doors in Berlin are dressed in suits, while one of them is shaving in front of a broken piece of mirror.
3. Why do you think the men 'on the line' have paid to sleep in such uncomfortable positions?

B. Explain in your own words why the German economy collapsed in 1929 – 30.

C. Study the unemployment figures above.
1. In which year did unemployment rise fastest in Germany?
2. What connection is there between the unemployment figures for that year and the Reichstag election results shown in the table above?

12

HITLER OVER GERMANY: THE 1932 ELECTIONS

Over six million Germans voted for the Nazi Party in 1930. The number doubled over the next two years. What made the Nazis so successful?

Support for the Nazis

Many people voted for them because they agreed with Nazi ideas. Look back to the twenty-five point programme of the party (page 19) and you will see that it offered something to most people – young and old, the working class and the middle class, people with jobs and people without jobs. And for anyone wondering who was to blame for Germany's problems, it pointed to the 'November Criminals' and to Jews as the culprits.

Propaganda was just as important as ideas in winning votes. Propaganda is the method of getting ideas across to masses of people. In the Nazi Party this was the job of **Joseph Goebbels**, a small, clever, malicious man. He used every trick in the book to get publicity for Hitler, and he invented a few new tricks of his own. He made records and films of Hitler's speeches. He put up millions of posters and flags all over the country. Above all, he held mass rallies, usually in sports arenas, where Hitler could make speeches. This description by a leading Nazi, Kurt Ludecke, of a big rally in 1932 gives us an idea of how good Goebbels was at his job.

A 'As I walked through the Berlin streets, the Party flag was everywhere in evidence. Huge posters and Nazi slogans screamed from windows and kiosks. Passers-by wore tiny lapel emblems; uniformed men elbowed a way through the crowds, the swastika circling their brawny arms.

By the time night began to steel over the field, more than a hundred thousand people had paid to squeeze inside, while another hundred thousand packed a nearby racetrack where loudspeakers had been set up to carry Hitler's words. And at home millions were waiting by the radio . . .

Suddenly a wave surged over the crowd, it leaned forward, a word was tossed from man to man: Hitler is coming! Hitler is coming! A blare of trumpets rent the air and a hundred thousand people leaped to their feet. . . . All eyes were turned towards the stand, awaiting the approach of the Fuehrer [*leader*]. There was a low rumble of excitement and then the crowd burst into a tremendous ovation, the 'Heils' swelling until they were like the roar of a mighty waterfall.'

Propaganda and mass rallies became vitally important in 1932 because there were three elections in that year. One was an election for the Presidency, the others were for the Reichstag. Goebbels hit on the idea of using a plane to take Hitler from one mass rally to the next. This allowed Hitler to make speeches in all parts of the country and to be heard by millions. Goebbels called this campaign 'Hitler over Germany'. Its success can be seen in the figures for the first election:

Elections for the Presidency, 1932	
Hindenburg (no party)	19,359,000
Hitler (Nazi Party)	13,418,000
Thalman (Communist Party)	3,706,655

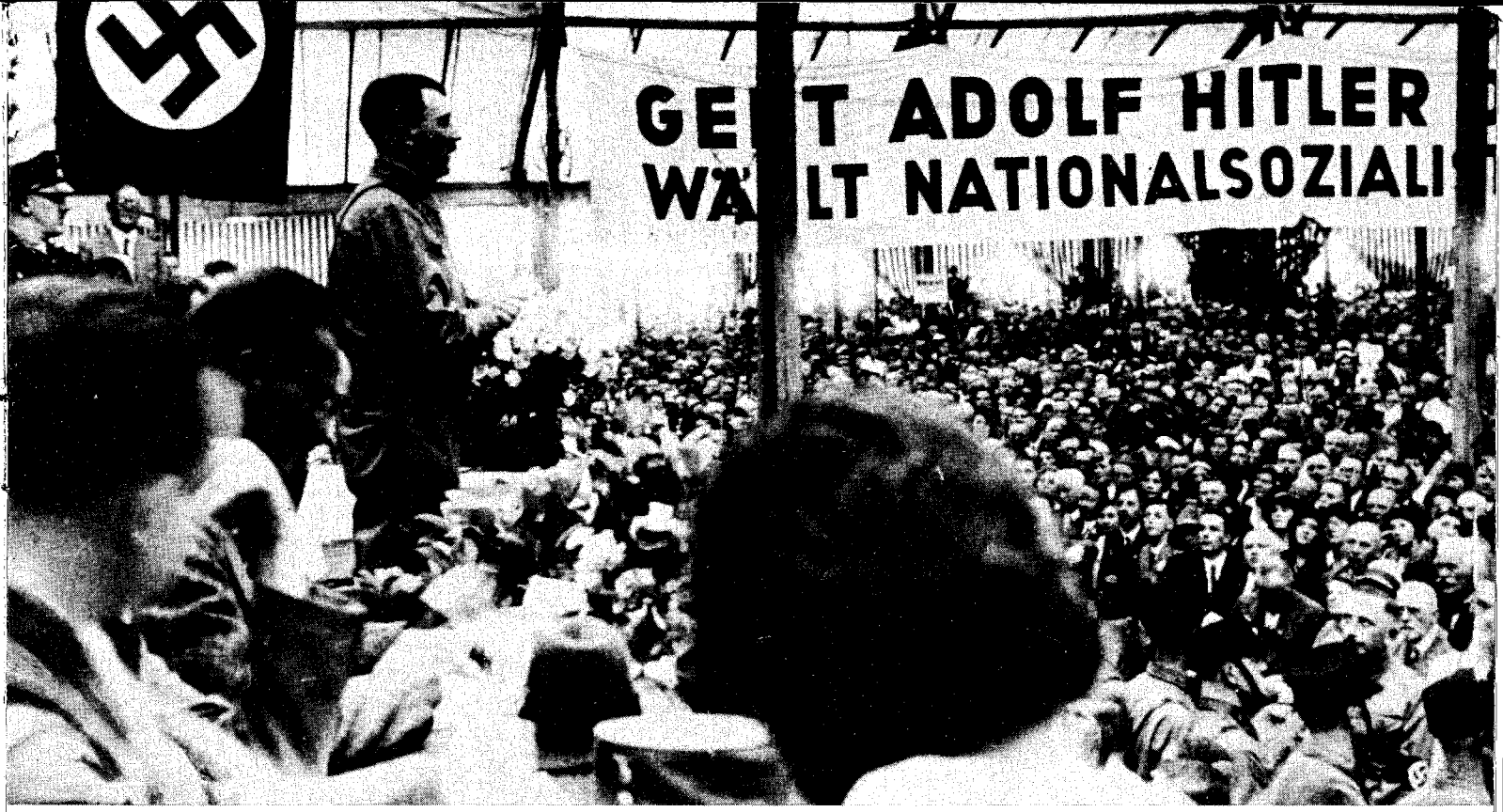
It wasn't just propaganda and rallies and speeches that won votes for Hitler. The SA played an important part too – by beating up Communists, smashing their meetings, and making it impossible for them to campaign freely in the elections. The English writer Christopher Isherwood was in Berlin at the time and he described a typical incident in his novel *Goodbye to Berlin*.

B 'Walking along the pavement ahead of me were three SA men. They all carried Nazi banners on their shoulders. . . . The banner-staves had sharp metal points, shaped into arrow heads.

All at once the three SA men came face to face with a youth of seventeen or eighteen . . . I heard one of the Nazis shout: "That's him!" and immediately all three of them flung themselves on the young man. He uttered a scream and tried to dodge, but they were too quick for him. In a moment they had jostled him into the shadow of a house entrance and were standing over him, kicking him and stabbing him with the sharp metal points of their banners. All this happened with such incredible speed that I could hardly believe my eyes – already the three SA men had left their victim and were barging their way through the crowd.

Another passer-by and myself were the first to reach the doorway. . . . As we picked him up I got a sickening glimpse of his face – his left eye was poked half out and blood poured from the wound.

Twenty yards away, at the Potsdamerstrasse corner, stood a group of heavily armed policemen. With their chests out, and their hands on their revolver belts, they magnificently disregarded the



The elections of 1932: Hitler at a party rally in Munich

Control of the Reichstag

So by the summer of 1932 millions of Germans were ready to vote for Hitler while the SA were able to rule the streets by violence. This became even more clear in an election for the Reichstag in July. During the election campaign 99 people were killed and 1125 wounded in street fights all over Germany. The result was a great victory for the Nazis:

The July 1932 Reichstag elections	
The Nazi Party	230 seats
Social Democrats	133 seats
The Centre Party	97 seats
The Communist Party	89 seats

As you can see, the Nazi party was now the biggest party in the Reichstag. Hitler demanded the job of Chancellor (Prime Minister) for himself. But the President of Germany, eighty-four-year old **Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg**, refused to give him the post. An eye witness to a meeting between the two men explains why:

> 'Hindenburg replied that because of the tense situation he could not . . . risk transferring the power of government to a new party such as the National Socialists . . . which was intolerant, noisy and undisciplined.'

Instead, Hindenburg would allow the present Chancellor, **Franz von Papen**, to stay in office and would use his power as President to make Papen's decisions into law. The country's constitution stated that, in an emergency, the President could make laws without the Reichstag's consent. So Papen would be able to get things done even though he had only 97 seats in the Reichstag.

So, for the moment at least, Hitler was as far away as ever from taking control of Germany.

Work section

A. Study Kurt Ludecke's account of a Nazi rally in 1932 (Source A).
1. List the different kinds of propaganda that he saw in the streets on his way to the rally.
2. Why do you think the crowd at the rally was so excited when Hitler appeared before them?

B. Read Christopher Isherwood's account of SA men beating up a young man (Source B).
1. In what way does he suggest that the SA were on the lookout for a fight?
2. How does he suggest that the SA could usually get away with this sort of crime?
3. Do you think that a novel like *Goodbye to Berlin*, based on real experiences, is a reliable source of historical evidence? Explain your answer.

C. What evidence can you find in this chapter to support President Hindenburg's view that the Nazi Party was 'intolerant, noisy and undisciplined'?

13

HITLER TAKES POWER, 1933

Power struggles in the Reichstag

When the newly elected Reichstag met on 12 September 1932, its first action was to vote on whether it had confidence in Papen's government. Only 32 members voted yes, 513 voted no. Faced with so much opposition, Papen arranged another election for November, hoping to get a Reichstag that would support him.

The November election results were a slight improvement for Papen, but they did not really help him:

November 1932 Reichstag elections

The Nazi Party	196 seats
Social Democrats	121 seats
The Communist Party	100 seats
The Centre Party	70 seats

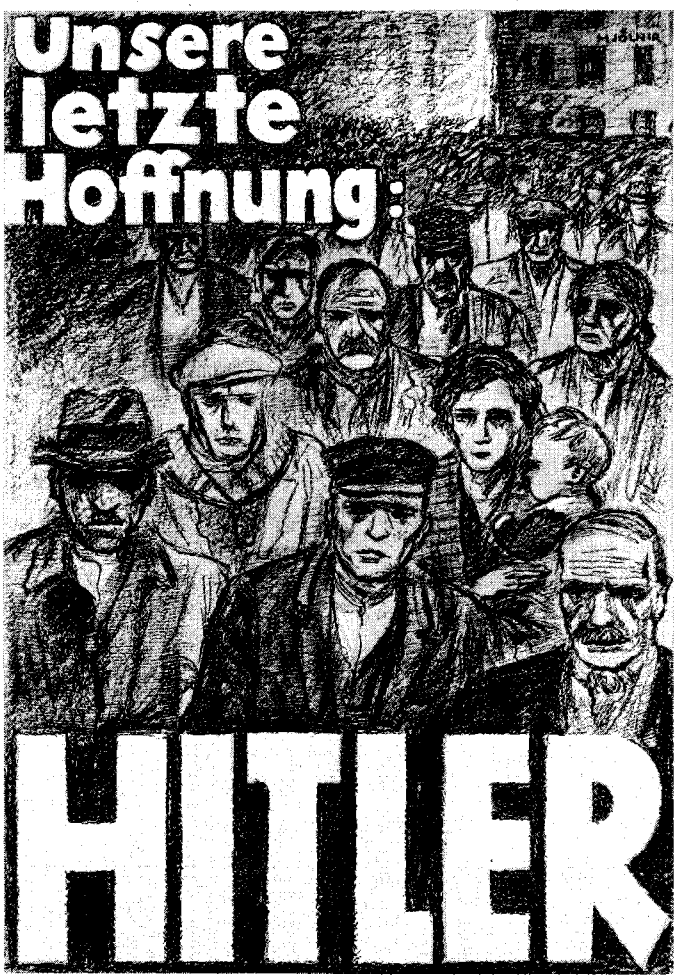
The Nazi vote had dropped but they were still the biggest party in the Reichstag. Hitler again demanded the post of Chancellor and again Hindenburg refused to give it to him. He said he did not trust Hitler to rule in a democratic way. Anyway, he preferred to let his friend Papen stay in the job and to make emergency laws for him.

At this point, however, a leading army general threw a new obstacle into Papen's way. He was **Kurt von Schleicher**, one of Hindenburg's closest advisers. He told Hindenburg that the army would not agree to Papen staying in office, that there would be a general strike – perhaps even a civil war – if he continued to rule with emergency laws. No government can exist without the support of the army, so Hindenburg had to get rid of Papen. He made Schleicher Chancellor instead.

Schleicher lasted for just fifty-seven days. The Reichstag would not agree to his decisions so he had to ask Hindenburg to make emergency laws for him. Naturally, Hindenburg smelt a rat. Only a few weeks before Schleicher had been warning him that there would be a civil war if he kept making emergency laws for Papen. Now he was asking for the same thing. Hindenburg refused and asked Schleicher to resign.

Hitler wins the power struggle

Two Chancellors had come and gone in less than a year. Who was left? Hindenburg had no choice but to give the job to the man he did not trust. He summoned Hitler to his chambers on 30 January 1933 and swore him into office.



'Our last hope: HITLER!' A Nazi election poster of 1933

Hindenburg thought he knew what he was doing, for he had been plotting with his old friend Papen. Papen was to be vice-chancellor and there would only be a few Nazi ministers in the government. All the other ministers would be supporters of Papen, men whom Hindenburg could trust. In this way, Papen and Hindenburg would be able to control what Hitler did.

But they lost control of him within days. Hitler persuaded them that there should be yet another election: he wanted to get a majority of Nazis into the Reichstag so that he could govern Germany democratically. This seemed reasonable enough, and they agreed.

The Nazis set out to make sure of a big win in the elections. Out came the flags and banners and posters again. There were monster rallies and radio broadcasts, while in the streets the SA fought with the Communists once more.

Then on the night of 27 February 1933, something happened which made sure the Nazis would win the elections. The Reichstag went up in flames.

The Reichstag fire

Hitler, Goebbels and Hermann Goering, chief of police, all hurried to the scene of the fire. Goering stood on the pavement shouting 'This is a Communist crime against the new government!' for a young Communist, Marianus van der Lubbe, had been caught inside the Reichstag with matches and firelighters in his pockets.

Nobody knows for sure what had actually happened. Van der Lubbe later told the police that he had started the fire and that he did so alone. But there is also evidence that Goering himself ordered the SA to do it, and that van der Lubbe was in the Reichstag building by coincidence.

For the moment, however, it made no difference who started the fire. The following day, Hitler issued this statement:

> 'This act of arson is the most outrageous act yet committed by Communism in Germany. . . . The burning of the Reichstag was to have been the signal for a bloody uprising and civil war. . . .'

It was a lie, but who was to know? It was the excuse that Hitler needed to smash the Communists. He went to President Hindenburg and persuaded him to sign an emergency **Law for the Protection of the People and State**. The law stated that there would be:

> 'Restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press; on the rights of assembly and association; and violations of the privacy of postal, telegraphic and telephonic communications. . .'

Power for the Nazis

This was the start of a 'brown terror' carried out by the SA. They arrested 4000 Communists and flung them into prison. Communist newspapers were shut down and their meetings were broken up. Truck loads of the SA roared around the streets, stopping only to beat up anti-Nazis or to break into people's homes. And all the while, Goebbels was putting the finishing touches to his 'masterpiece of propaganda'. Giant swastikas, torchlight parades, mass rallies, radio flashes, all hammered home the message – 'Vote Nazi'.

The results of the election look like a great Nazi victory:

The March 1933 Reichstag elections

The Nazi Party	288 seats
Social Democrats	120 seats
The Communist Party	81 seats
The Centre Party	73 seats
Others	85 seats

But look again: although the Nazis won more seats in the Reichstag than ever before, over half Germany's voters gave their votes to other parties. The Nazis still did not have a majority.

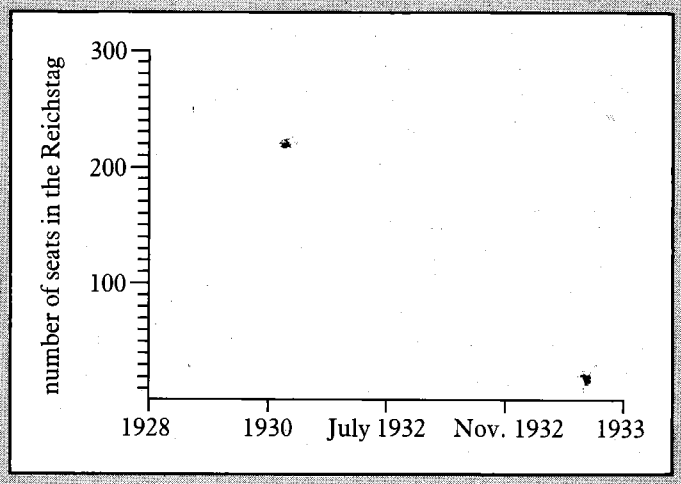
They were saved by one of the smaller parties. The Nationalist Party decided to join forces with the Nazis. Their 53 seats, added to the 288 of the Nazis, amounted to just over half the total number of seats. Hitler could now be sure that the Reichstag would vote for what he wanted.

And what he wanted was total power. He put an **Enabling Law** before the Reichstag and asked the members to vote for it. The Enabling Law said that Hitler would have the power to make laws for the next four years without having to ask the Reichstag for approval. Only ninety-four members voted against it. Hitler now had the legal right to do what he liked with Germany, which was to destroy the Weimar Republic and to create a strong, proud German empire – the **'Third Reich'**.

Work section

A. Make a graph like the one here. Use the voting figures on pages 25, 27, 29, 30 and 31 to chart the progress of the Nazis, the Social Democrats, the Communists and the Centre Party in the Reichstag elections of 1928 to 1933. Now answer these questions:

1. Why do you think the Nazi and Communist Party votes show such a sharp rise in 1930 and July 1932?
2. Suggest why the Nazi vote dropped in the November 1932 elections.
3. Suggest why the Nazi vote shows a sharp rise in 1933 while the Communist vote falls.



B. 1. Explain in your own words the ways in which the Law for the Protection of the People and the State reduced the freedom of German people.
2. Why do you think President Hindenburg was willing to make this emergency law?

C. Explain in your own words the message the Nazi poster on the opposite page was trying to put across.

Revision guide

These note headings and sub-headings are here to help you organise the information you have read about the years 1925–33. Use them as a framework for your notes if you are unsure about how to organise the information. They follow on from the notes you have already made.

K. The Stresemann years, 1924–9
1. Gustav Stresemann
2. The Dawes Plan, 1924
3. The Locarno Pact, 1925
4. The growth of the Nazi Party
5. The growth of the Communist Party

L. Germany and the Great Depression
1. The problem of foreign loans
2. The effects of the Wall Street Crash on Germany
3. Unemployment
4. The political effects of the Depression

M. The 1932 elections
1. Propaganda
2. The Presidential elections
3. The Reichstag elections

N. Hitler comes to power, 1933
1. Papen's government
2. The Reichstag elections of November 1932
3. Schleicher's government
4. Hitler becomes Chancellor
5. The Reichstag fire
6. The Law for the Protection of the People and State
7. The Enabling Law

Revision quiz

Who was who in Weimar Germany? Test your knowledge of the leading figures in Weimar Germany by doing this quiz. Match the ten descriptions in column A with the ten names in column B that fit each description.

A1 Emperor of Germany who abdicated in November 1918

A2 Leader of the Spartacists, killed by Free Corps in 1919

A3 First President of the Weimar Republic

A4 An extreme nationalist who led a putsch in Berlin in 1920

A5 Germany's foreign minister, assassinated in 1922

A6 Chancellor in 1923 and Foreign Minister from 1924 to 1929

A7 Second and last president of the Weimar Republic

A8 Leader of the Nazi Party

A9 Leader of the Germany Communist Party

A10 Organiser of propaganda in the Nazi Party

B1 Kurt Eisner

B2 Gustav Stresemann

B3 General Ludendorff

B4 Adolf Hitler

B5 Ernst Thalmann

B6 Kaiser Wilhelm II

B7 Field Marshal von Hindenburg

B8 Walther Rathenau

B9 Joseph Goebbels

B10 Rosa Luxemburg

B11 Doctor Wolfgang Kapp

B12 Friedrich Ebert

Short extracts taken from: Page 1: A. Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny*, Odhams 1952. Page 2: P. Vansittart, *Voices from the Great War*, Jonathan Cape 1981. Page 3: D. Denholm (ed.) *Behind the Lines: One Woman's War; The Letters of Caroline Ethel Cooper*, William Collins Pty Ltd, Australia 1982; P. Vansittart, op. cit. Page 4: J. Williams, *The Home Fronts: Britain, France and Germany 1914-1918*, Constable 1972; Gen. Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, Hutchinson 1919; A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Hurst and Blackett 1939. Page 5: P. Vansittart, op. cit. Page 6: G.A. Kersetz (ed.), *Documents in the Political History of the European Continent*, Clarendon Press 1968. Page 7: E. Davidson, *The Making of Adolf Hitler: The Birth and Rise of Nazism*, Macmillan 1977. Page 10: E. Davidson, op. cit. Page 11: R.W. Breach (ed.), *Documents and Descriptions: The World since 1914*, Oxford University Press 1966; W. Carr, *A History of Germany 1815-1945*, Edward Arnold 1969. Page 15: A. Brecht, *Aus Näster Nähe*, Stuttgart 1966; J.W. Hiden, *The Weimar Republic*, Longman 1974. Page 16: R. Wolfson, *From Peace to War; European Relations 1919-1939*, Edward Arnold 1981; J.W. Hiden, op. cit. Page 18: A. Bullock, op. cit. Page 19: T. Howarth, *Twentieth Century World History*, Longman 1979; J. Wroughton and D. Cook (eds), *Documents on World History 2*, Macmillan 1976. Page 20: A. Bullock, op. cit. Page 21: A. Bullock, op. cit.; J.A. Nicholls, *Weimar Germany and the Rise of Adolf Hitler*, St Martin Press 1969. Page 23: W.L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Secker and Warburg 1960. Page 24: W.L. Shirer, op. cit. Page 27: A. Bullock, op. cit.; D.M. Phillips, *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazis*, Edward Arnold 1968. Page 28: K. Ludecke, *I Knew Hitler*, Hutchinson 1938; C. Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, Hogarth Press 1940. Page 29: A. Bullock, op. cit. Page 31: W.L. Shirer, op. cit.; A. Bullock, op. cit.

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