

How did the Reichstag fire help Hitler Consolidate his power? (27th Feb 1933).

- Hitler couldn't get enough political support to take control in the Reichstag. When Hitler became Chancellor he didn't have a majority even with the support of the National Party. He only had two Nazis in the cabinet of twelve, Wilhelm Frick (Minister of Interior) and Hermann Goering (Minister of Prussia) and Hindenburg hated him. So he called an election for 5th March and started an extensive propaganda campaign and violence that resulted in 70 deaths.
- This might not have been enough to get Hitler enough votes to take control. However, on 27th February, the Reichstag building was set on fire. Marinus Van Der Lubbe, a Dutch Communist, was found at the fire and arrested. Hitler could now claim that the Communists were mounting a revolution and needed to be wiped out. 4,000 Communists were then arrested including Ersnt Thalmann. The Leftist newspapers were banned, the Nazis took control of the radio and 51 Nazi opponents were killed. This helped got rid of their opponents before the election and got rid of the symbol of the Reichstag However, despite all of this, in the March election in 1933 the Nazis still didn't win a majority of the votes, even though they were the biggest party with 288 seats, it was also well short of the 2/3 majority he needed for constitutional change.
- Therefore the most important aspect of the Reichstag fire was that it gave Hitler the power to take control with or without the election. In order to arrest the Communists he had Hindenburg sign the 'decree for the Protection of the People and the State.' Freedom of liberty, speech, the press and movement were abolished and the police were given the power to confiscate property, detain people indefinitely without trial and legalised the death penalty for a host of crimes. When the election didn't go his way he forced through the Enabling Act on 24 March 1933 which signalled the end of the Weimar Republic and democracy. This brought the state into line with Gleichschaltung – Nazi philosophy – all citizens were now under its control.

Why was the Enabling Act (1933) so important?

- It gave the Nazis power to make any law. The Reich Cabinet was authorised to enact any law regardless of the constitution.
- Unionism was banned. In May 1933 all TU's were banned and replaced by the German Labour Front which meant no workbook no job. Strikes were outlawed and any dissenters sent to Dachau.
- Political opposition was banned. In July, Hitler passed the Law against the Formation of Parties Act. This outlawed all other parties, creating a One Party State. The SDP and KPD were destroyed.
- Hitler centralised power in Germany. Formerly a union of 18 states. In March all state parliaments were shut and put the Nazis in charge and in January 1934 they were abolished entirely.

How did the Night of the Long Knives (Operation Humming Bird or the Blood Purge) help the Nazis consolidate power? (June 1934)

- It allowed Hitler to get rid of his main rivals for power within the Nazi Party, The SA. Hitler was struggling to control the leaders of the SA, they were alienating the army and threatening to seize control of the Nazi Party. Many of the SA were working class men who favoured the socialist views of the Nazi Programme, but their hope for workers' rights were crushed with the introduction of the German Labour Front (DAF). Rohm was also very powerful, with 2 million men, and he was pushing for a class revolution. On 30th June 1934, Hitler acted when he heard from Himmler and the SS that Rohm was about to seize power. He invited Rohm and 100 other SA leaders to the Bavarian Resort of Wiessee. There Rohm and numerous other key SA members and leaders, like Karl Ernst, were shot by the SS – 200 in total.
- It repaired the reputation of the Nazis with the people and the Army. Frick and Goering were concerned that the violence of the SA might lead to a backlash from the German people. Also Rohm's homosexuality had also done much to tarnish the reputation of the Nazis. Hitler needed to control them before the German people turned against them and the army stepped in. The Army was concerned by Rohm's desire to merge the SA and Reichswehr and saw Rohm's ideas as distinctly left-wing. He needed them on his side to win over Hindenberg and thus he also wooed them with his plans to rearm Germany and Lebensraum.
- It allowed him to kill political rivals and take revenge. Former Chancellor Von Schleicher was shot on his door step with his wife. Gustav Von Kahr, was taken out into the woods and hacked to death with axes, Strasser, was also shot. Although precise figures are unknown, 400 people are thought to have been murdered whilst Hitler attended a garden party.
- The army lent its support to Hitler's regime. The SS was separated from the SA and the SS put in charge. He also grew in confidence as on 3 July a law was passed which stated that the action taken on the Night of the Long Knives was legal.
- So nobody complained when Hindenberg died on 2 Aug. 1934 and Hitler combined the positions of Chancellor and President to become Der Fuhrer. The army swore an oath of allegiance to their Fuhrer and he received 90% approval from the people in a referendum.

Control and Dictatorship 1933-39

The Police State

- The Schutzstaffel (SS) were the elite police. They had ultimate responsibility for state security and had absolute power of arrest and detention, search and seizure. They ran the concentration camps.
- The Sicherheitsdienst (SD), headed by Reinhard Heydrich and part of the SS, was the intelligence division who identified enemies of the State and enemies within the Nazi Party.
- The Gestapo worked under the SS and were the police force. They used informants, tapped phones and had ultimate powers of search and seizure. They decided who went to Concentration Camps.
- They created detention centres, called Concentration camps, specifically for enemies of the State such as political opponents. People were sent there by the Gestapo.
- To enable this to happen the Nazis completely controlled the legal system, with Nazi judges who swore an oath to Hitler and presided over Nazi lead courts.