

ACTIVITY**Who killed Weimar democracy? A mock trial**

You have now investigated in detail the collapse of parliamentary government in Weimar Germany. You will probably have concluded that, although the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor put the last nail in the coffin of Weimar democracy, parliamentary government was doomed well before that – fatally wounded by the votes of the German people and the manoeuvrings of Weimar politicians. You have probably formed your own view as to who bears most blame for its demise. You now have the chance to review all you have studied as you put the main culprits on trial. Chart 8H shows the main culprits and summarises their contributions to the power struggles of 1930–3. The following four defendants are on trial for their role in destroying Weimar democracy:

- Brüning
- Papen
- Schleicher
- Hindenburg.

There are two charges to consider at the trial:

- a) that this person deliberately undermined Weimar democracy
- b) that this person was most to blame for bringing Adolf Hitler to power.

These charges are closely related but at the trial they are each to be considered and answered separately.

Before the trial

- 1 Allocate the following roles:
 - *Judge*: one person to preside over the court and run the trial.
 - *Four defendants*: Brüning, Papen, Schleicher, Hindenburg. (If you have enough people, each defendant could also have a defence lawyer.)
 - *Four prosecutors*: one to present the case against each defendant.
 - *The jury*: the rest of the group. You will be deciding how guilty each person is on a scale of 0–5.
- 2 The defendants and prosecutors will need to prepare their case in advance using the information in Chart 8H and in the rest of this chapter. They should refer particularly to pages 133 and 135, which outlines the attitudes and careers of the four accused.

At the trial

- 3 The first prosecutor makes his or her case on both charges.
- 4 The defendant and/or his lawyer replies, making a brief speech in his defence to explain his aims and actions.
- 5 The defendant is then cross-examined by the prosecutor.
- 6 The jury then gives the defendant a score out of 5 for each of the two charges (0 being not at all guilty, 5 being very guilty).
- 7 Steps 3–6 are repeated for the other defendants.
- 8 The jury then discusses the issues and reaches an overall conclusion as to who is the most guilty on each count. They can revise their own original score for a defendant if they wish.

After the trial

- 9 As a group, discuss the results of the trial and the issues that have emerged from it.
- 10 Copy and complete the chart below to give you a written record of what you have learned from the trial.

Person	Aims	Actions	Responsibility for undermining democracy	Responsibility for bringing Hitler to power
Brüning				
Papen				
Schleicher				
Hindenburg				

GENERAL PAUL VON HINDENBURG

President 1925–34

- Key power of appointing and dismissing chancellors
- Able to issue decrees
- Influenced by Schleicher, key civil servants, Junkers, bankers and his son Oskar
- Acted within the letter of the constitution
- Favoured a more authoritarian system
- Concerned about investigations into his estate
- Failed to support the Müller government in 1930
- Supported presidential governments 1930–3
- Hostile to Hitler, seeing him as an upstart
- Refused to make Hitler Chancellor in August 1932
- Appointed Hitler Chancellor in January 1933



HEINRICH BRÜNING

Chancellor March 1930–May 1932



- Tried to gain support from the Reichstag
- Came to favour more authoritarian system, possibly a monarchy
- Called elections July 1930 in which extremist parties such as the Nazis made major gains
- Tolerated by Reichstag for two years but had no working majority
- Increasingly used presidential decrees rather than Reichstag laws to govern
- Failed to take action to reduce impact of slump (nicknamed the 'Hunger Chancellor')
- Hoped to use the Depression to change the regime and end reparations
- Made some reforms, but upset Junkers and Hindenburg with agrarian reform plans
- Forced to resign by Hindenburg

WHO KILLED WEIMAR DEMOCRACY?

FRANZ VON PAPEN

Chancellor May–November 1932

- Formed a non-party 'cabinet of barons' from the elite
- Had no Reichstag members in his government
- Had very little support in the Reichstag
- Relied on presidential decrees to govern
- Overthrew democratic government in Prussia
- After July 1932 elections favoured dissolving the Reichstag and not holding new elections; idea rejected by Schleicher who secured his dismissal
- In January 1933 did a deal with Hitler to become his deputy if Hitler was appointed Chancellor
- Helped persuade Hindenburg to replace Schleicher with Hitler
- Became Vice-Chancellor



ADOLF HITLER

Chancellor January 1933 onwards

- Avowed enemy of democracy
- Tried to overthrow the Weimar Republic in 1923
- Led massive campaigns against the Weimar regime
- Nazis tried to disrupt the Reichstag
- Nazis violently attacked their opponents
- Leader of the largest party in 1932
- Papen intrigued to get him appointed
- Schleicher resisted his appointment
- Hindenburg appointed him as Chancellor
- Hindenburg backed him with emergency decrees
- Once in power, finally destroyed Weimar democracy
- When Hindenburg died in 1934 he declared himself President – and dictator of Germany



GENERAL KURT VON SCHLEICHER

Chancellor December 1932–January 1933



- Concerned to protect the interests of the Reichswehr
- Great influence on Hindenburg
- At the centre of intrigues
- Responsible for the dismissal of Brüning and Papen
- Preferred to exercise power behind the scenes, but in December, 1932 reluctantly became Chancellor
- Tried to gain support from the Gregor Strasser wing of the Nazi Party and trade unions
- Dismissed when Papen intrigued against him

C Was Hitler's rise to power inevitable?

Some commentators would give a clear 'yes' to this question. However, one would then need to consider when Hitler's appointment became inevitable – in 1930, or 1932, or not until the last days of January 1933, or was it inevitable as far back as 1919 when the new Weimar government signed the Treaty of Versailles?

Many historians object to this degree of DETERMINISM. If one argues that Hitler's rise was inevitable right from the beginning, it undermines the reasons for studying the events of 1920 to 1933. One would just be tinkering with a development that had already been determined. Partly for this reason, most historians are very cautious about the word 'inevitable'. Some react against it to such an extent that they maintain that nothing is inevitable until it happens. It is probably wiser to use phrases such as 'more likely' or 'highly probable' rather than 'inevitable'.

Here we are going to look at two issues that shed light on the possible inevitability of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor.

- Was Hitler lucky to be appointed Chancellor just as the Nazis were on the verge of disintegration?
- Were there viable alternatives, either authoritarian, liberal or communist?

One intriguing aspect of the debate on the inevitability of Hitler's coming to power is the evidence that the Nazi Movement was in severe difficulties by late 1932: it seems possible that if Hitler had not been appointed Chancellor in January 1933 the Movement might well have declined. Hitler's options in those circumstances might also have been limited. For example, he might have tried to repeat his putsch of 1923. Given his greater mass support, his prospects for success looked brighter, and there were radical elements in the Nazi Party, and especially the SA, who urged a seizure of power after he had been refused the chancellorship in August 1932. Hitler himself, however, seems to have abandoned the idea of a putsch. His strategy was based on winning electoral support to gain the chancellorship, ideally through controlling a majority of the Reichstag, but, if that proved impossible, by being in such a position that there was no alternative to Hindenburg's appointing him. With Nazi electoral support falling, if Hindenburg had not appointed him Hitler's prospects looked bleak.

■ 8E The Nazis' position in late 1932 and early 1933

1 Election results

a) Reichstag

- In November 1932 the Nazis lost 2 million votes and 34 seats, partly because some voters were disillusioned as they had failed to gain power. Their protest vote seemed to be getting nowhere.
- The inexorable (unstoppable) advance of the Nazi Movement had thus been reversed.
- Some middle-class voters were alienated by Nazi moves to attract more working-class support, e.g. by supporting the Berlin transport strike in November 1932, and by the party's radical propaganda.
- The Nazis were still the largest party in the Reichstag where anti-parliamentary parties had a majority.

b) State elections

- The Nazis did badly in local elections in November and December 1932, e.g. they lost 40 per cent of their vote in the Thuringian municipal elections.
- In January 1933 the Nazis poured resources into the elections in the small state of Lippe; they increased their vote and claimed a comeback.

2 Finances

- By the end of 1932, Nazi finances were very low due to the cost of competing in so many elections.

3 Organisation

- The SA had 400,000 members in 1932 – making it four times larger than the Reichswehr.
- Party membership stood at 850,000, but there was a high turnover.

4 Internal disagreements

- There was considerable discord in the party and SA; some in the party criticised the SA's unruly behaviour and its lack of commitment to electioneering in November.
- The internal disagreements in the Nazi Party were evident enough for General Schleicher to believe that he could split the Nazi Movement.
- Hitler's 'all or nothing' tactics worried some: e.g. Gregor Strasser, who resigned in December 1932.
- There were internal Nazi Party reports of low morale.

5 Other points

- The SPD newspaper *Vorwärts* predicted in December 1932: 'The decline [of the NSDAP] will hardly be less rapid than its rise has been.'
- The Nazis had to be successful to keep the party together and to maintain their sense of momentum.
- In April 1932 Goebbels said, 'We must come to power in the foreseeable future. Otherwise, we will win ourselves to death in elections.'
- Apart from the KPD, the Nazis were the only party not associated with a discredited government.

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Study Sources 8.6–9 and Chart 8E. What evidence is there that
 - a) the Nazis would have been in difficulty if Hitler had not been appointed Chancellor in January 1933
 - b) the Nazi Party was still a powerful movement that could influence the course of German history?
- 2 Explain why the awareness of Nazi weaknesses and divisions in late 1932 might actually have encouraged the elite to risk recommending Hitler's appointment.

SOURCE 8.6 Secret report by the Reich Propaganda Leadership (a Nazi organisation), November 1932

We are of the opinion that little can be salvaged by way of propaganda... New paths must be taken. Nothing more is to be done with words, placards and leaflets. Now we must act... It must not come to another election. The results could not be imagined.

SOURCE 8.7 Extracts from Josef Goebbels' diary for 1932

13 Aug: *Nothing is more difficult than to tell victory-flushed troops that victory has been snatched out of their hands.*

14 Aug: *Great hopelessness reigns among the party comrades.*

15 Oct: *Party workers become very nervous as a result of these everlasting elections. They are overworked.*

8 December: *Severe depression prevails... Financial worries render all systematic work impossible... The danger now exists of the whole Party going to pieces... Dr Ley telephones that the situation in the Party is becoming more critical from hour to hour... [Gregor Strasser's] letter to the Führer [resigning his offices] is dialectic pettifoggery [argumentative quibbling]... Treason! Treason! Treason!... For hours on end the Führer walks anxiously up and down the hotel room... Once he stops and merely says: 'If the Party should ever break up, I'll make an end of things in three minutes with a revolver.'*

15 December: *It is hard to hold the SA and the Party officials to a clear course... If we succeed in holding the movement together we shall also succeed in saving the situation.*

29 December: *It is possible that in a few days the Führer will have a conference with Papen. There a new chance opens.*

SOURCE 8.8 H. Heiber, *The Weimar Republic*, 1993, p. 205

[By late 1932 the Nazis were in barren opposition] wavering between claims to legitimacy and revolutionary slogans, between socialistic promises and conservative contacts.

SOURCE 8.9 T. Childers, *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency*, 1986, p. 254

After an ascent of unparalleled swiftness, the NSDAP had reached the limits of its electoral potential and now [in December 1932] faced almost certain decline. The policy of legality, of mass mobilisation for electoral campaigning had reached a dead end.

The political situation in 1932

During 1932 the Brüning, Papen and Schleicher governments embarked on public works programmes. Unemployment reached its peak in December 1932, then started to fall. To some, it seemed that the worst of the crisis was over and that the Weimar Republic had weathered the storm. For example:

- Allied troops had withdrawn from Germany in 1930.
- Reparations had been virtually ended in July 1932.
- In December 1932 Germany was granted the right to equality of armaments at the Geneva Disarmament Conference.

However, these developments did not stop the communist vote increasing in the November 1932 Reichstag election.

Was there an alternative to Hitler?

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Copy and complete the following table to assess the political possibilities in Germany from 1932, using the material below and any other knowledge you have.
- 2 a) Which of the options do you consider provided the most realistic alternative to the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor?
b) How strong was your choice of alternative?
- 3 When, if at all, did Hitler's appointment as Chancellor become inevitable?

Possible form of government	Factors favouring this option	Factors against this option
Nazi dictatorship		
More authoritarian system, e.g. restored monarchy		
Parliamentary democracy		
Communist dictatorship		

Was there an authoritarian alternative?

In many ways the most likely outcome to the political crisis of 1930-2 was some form of more authoritarian government, involving a permanent reduction in the powers of the Reichstag and the formation of a government less dependent upon popular elections. This, of course, was what had been happening in an improvised way with the Brüning, Papen and Schleicher governments reliant on Article 48. The elite were actively exploring revision of the constitution, and perhaps even a return to something similar to the Second Reich with a powerful monarchy.

The problems with this approach were that to carry it out constitutionally needed a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag, and this reactionary programme had limited mass appeal. To revoke (overthrow) the constitution unilaterally (on their own initiative) might have provoked civil war, and the politically powerful army was very concerned about such an eventuality. Papen was prepared to risk civil war, but Hindenburg initially favoured Schleicher's ingenious scheme to try to get a broader basis of support. When this failed, Hindenburg's options were clearly limited.

However, many ordinary Germans were as disillusioned with Weimar democracy as were the elite, so a restoration of the successful Second Reich might be attractive to many. In the end, Hindenburg took the advice of Papen and others by trying to use Hitler, with his popular appeal, to enhance their own power. This turned out to be a fatal, though understandable, miscalculation. Many historians consider this decision was a very narrow one and that other authoritarian options might well have succeeded.

Could Weimar parliamentary democracy have survived?

This seems a more unlikely option, given the problems the Weimar system was already facing, even before the Great Depression. The mass misery this caused was largely blamed on the weak Weimar governments and their acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles and reparations. With the majority of Germans in 1932 voting for parties hostile to the parliamentary system, with the decline of liberal parties and with key elements within the two largest democratic parties (SPD and Z) hostile to each other, the prospects looked bleak. Many historians also stress that Weimar had a fundamental problem in its lack of legitimacy in the eyes of millions of Germans. Many of the elite had never been committed to parliamentary democracy and by 1930 they had moved decisively against it.

However, the economic and international situations were improving by the end of 1932. If these trends had continued, it is possible that the moderate parties might have regained their electoral support at the expense of the extremists (as they had done in 1928) and formed a government backed by a majority in the Reichstag.

Could Germany have gone communist?

Fear of communism was a vital factor in the history of the Weimar Republic. The first socialist government had won the provisional support of the elite in order to co-operate against the Bolshevik threat. The Communists probably had their best chance of gaining power in the chaos of 1919 and 1923, but failed to exploit the situation. From 1930 communism seemed on the advance again but its efforts were concentrated on elections rather than on organising a revolution. However, its renewed electoral support and massive presence in the streets (especially its paramilitary wing) encouraged members of the elite in their hostility to the weak Weimar state and their preparedness to co-operate with the anti-communist Nazis.

The Communists were never able to gain more than 20 per cent of the vote, as their appeal was mainly to the working class, who made up about 50 per cent of the population but who were split politically. Membership of the KPD was very fluid. The limited appeal of the Communists was in stark contrast to the cross-class appeal of the Nazis. Further, Hitler, as the leader of a nationalist, anti-communist movement, could reasonably look for potential co-operation from the elite and the authorities, whereas the KPD was an explicitly revolutionary movement which could not gain their co-operation. Thus the KPD would have to obtain power either through gaining a majority electorally or joining a coalition (neither of which was likely), or by seizing power in a revolution.

The Communists could only have gained power legally in co-operation with the Socialists, but the two Marxist parties remained bitter enemies. Ebert's SPD-led government had suppressed the communist risings of 1919-23 and in the eyes of the Communists had betrayed the working class and sold out to the elite. The SPD remained the main supporter of the Weimar democracy it had founded, whereas the Communists rejected the parliamentary system. The KPD's close identification with the Soviet Union also alienated some potential supporters. In the late 1920s the KPD followed the line laid down in Moscow by the Communist International, which viewed Socialists as rivals and delayers of the world revolution. This reinforced the split between the KPD and SPD, as illustrated in the KPD's slogan: 'All party forces must be thrown into battle against social democracy.' The KPD further crucially underestimated the power of fascism, considering it would be the prelude to a communist victory. 'After Hitler, us,' they chanted.

SOURCE 8.10 Membership of the KPD

Date	Numbers		
	Joined	Left	Total members
1923	250,000		
1929	50,000	39,000	130,000
1930	145,000	95,000	180,000
1931	210,000	130,000	260,000



SOURCE 8.11 May day demonstration by the Communist Party in Berlin in 1930

SOURCE 8.12 'Religion is the opium of people': a 1923 communist election poster on the side of a lorry. Beneath it says 'There is no higher being, no God, no Kaiser, no tribune to save us'



D Why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

FOCUS ROUTE

Explain the reasons why key members of the elite eventually favoured the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

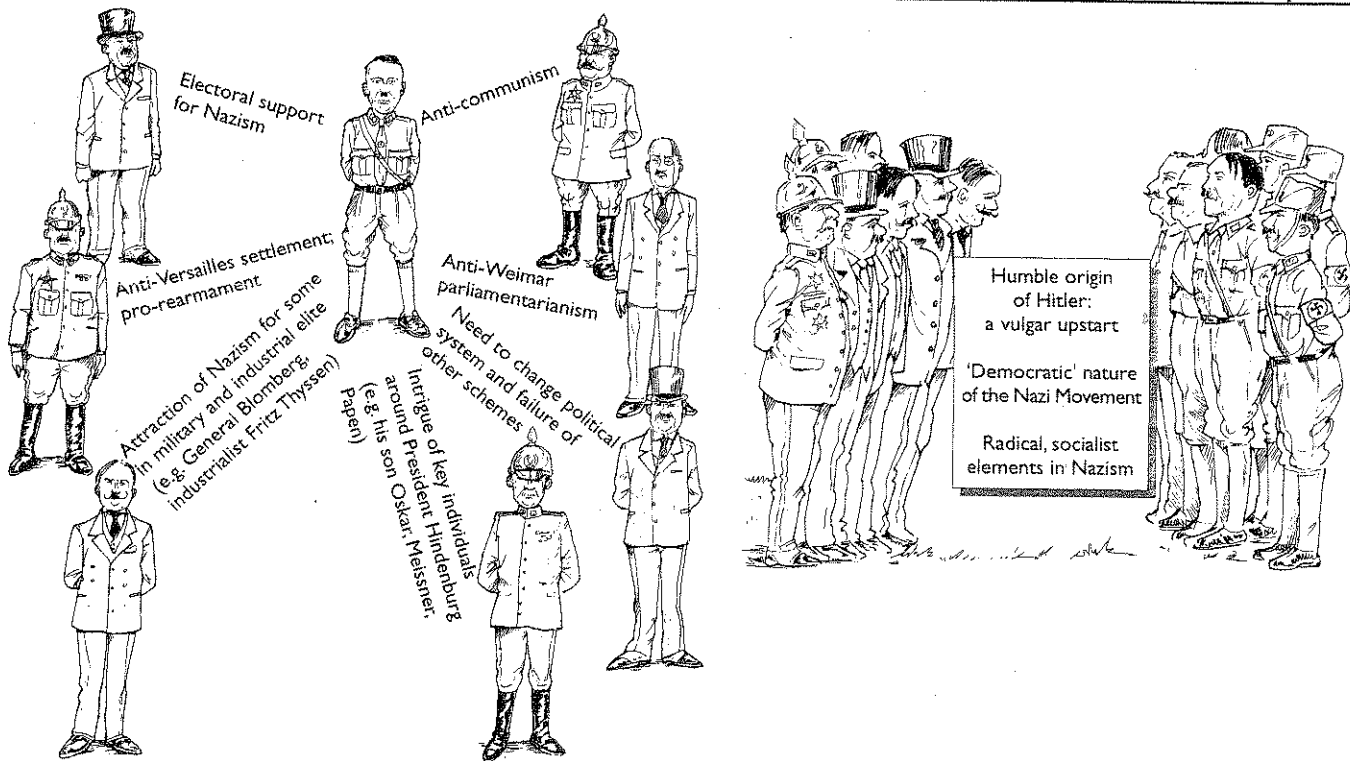
On 30 January 1933 President Hindenburg summoned Adolf Hitler to Berlin and appointed him Chancellor. In many ways this was a surprising development. Hindenburg disliked Hitler. In August 1932 he had refused to appoint him Chancellor after the Nazis' great electoral success. Since then Nazi support had declined and the movement had been torn by divisions. Many in the elite were also wary of the radicalism and the generally vulgar nature of the Nazi Movement.

Despite this, in January 1933, members of the elite persuaded Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor. By 1932, key industrialists and landowners were very concerned about the lack of effective government. They had never been committed to parliamentary democracy and now believed their fears were confirmed. Some saw the possibility of using the Nazis' popular support to channel the political system in a more authoritarian direction. The Junkers were also upset by Brüning's and later Schleicher's reform proposals to buy up bankrupt estates to resettle poor farmers. This was seen by landowners as 'agrarian Bolshevism', and contributed to the intrigue that persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss both Brüning and Schleicher.

Members of the elite used a number of tactics in what has been called their 'taming strategy' for the Nazi Party.

- 1 The first tactic was to make Hitler Vice-Chancellor under Papen; this was put forward in August 1932, but Hitler rejected it, demanding to be Chancellor. Hitler's rejection was risky, since he did not get the chancellorship, and it was seen as a great defeat by many Nazis.
- 2 The second tactic was used in December 1932. Schleicher, hoping to split the Nazis, proposed the idea of himself as Chancellor; with the Nazi Gregor Strasser as Vice-Chancellor. This failed, and Strasser left the Nazi Party.
- 3 The final tactic (arranged by a Cologne banker, Kurt von Schröder, members of the Reich Agrarian League, industrialists and Oskar von Hindenburg) was to put Hitler in office as Chancellor, but surrounded by Papen as Vice-Chancellor and other conservatives. The Nazis' current difficulties would make them easier to control. Hindenburg agreed, against his own judgement. Papen commented to a friend, 'We've hired him', but he was fatally wrong.

8F Factors bringing the elite and the Nazis together – and factors that kept them apart



Hindenburg – a personal motive?

Some historians argue that Hindenburg's decision to appoint Hitler as Chancellor was partly a selfish move.

In the late 1920s, German agriculture suffered from low prices for farm products. Large landowners in the east used their influence on governments to get financial help. This resulted in the *Osthilfe* (Help for the East) programme. Funds were allocated to large landowners to help them stay afloat. Hindenburg had been given back his family's formerly bankrupt estate at Neudeck in East Prussia in 1927 as an eightieth birthday present. This was intended, successfully, to tie him close to Junker interests. However, in 1932 a Reichstag committee investigating the misuse of *Osthilfe* funds for gambling, supporting mistresses, etc. implicated the Neudeck estate in the scandal. This may have influenced Hindenburg's decision to appoint Hitler in the hope that the investigation would be ended.

SOURCE 8.13 Industrialists' letter to Hindenburg, November 1932

Your Excellency! Like you, we are imbued [filled] with an impassioned love of the German people and the Fatherland ... together with Your Excellency, we agree that it is necessary to create a government independent of the parliamentary parties ...

The outcome of the Reichstag elections of 6 November has demonstrated that the present cabinet, whose honest intentions no one among the German people would doubt, has failed to find sufficient support among the German people for its actual policies.

... It is quite apparent that another dissolution of parliament, leading to yet another general election with its inevitable frenzied party-political struggles, would be inimicable [harmful] to political as well as economic peace and stability. But it is also apparent that any constitutional change that does not have widespread popular support would have even greater negative economic, political and moral effects.

We therefore consider it to be our duty, Your Excellency, to humbly beg you to consider reconstituting the cabinet in a manner which would guarantee it with the greatest possible popular support.

We declare ourselves to be free from any specific party-political interests. But we recognise in the nationalist movement, which is sweeping through our people, the auspicious beginning of an era of rebirth for the German economy which can only be achieved by the surmounting of class conflict. We know that the rebirth will demand great sacrifices. We believe that these sacrifices will only be made willingly when the greater part of this nationalist movement plays a leading role in the government.

The transfer of responsibility for leading a Presidential cabinet to the leader of the largest nationalist group would remove the waste and slag that inevitably clings to any mass movement. As a result millions of people who at present still stand on the sidelines would be swept into active participation.

Fully trusting in Your Excellency's wisdom and Your Excellency's feeling for the unity of his people,

*We greet Your Excellency with the greatest respect,
Bosch Schacht Thyssen Krupp [and 20 other industrialists]*

SOURCE 8.14 An account by Otto Meissner, State Secretary in Hindenburg's office, made to the Nuremberg Tribunal after the Second World War

Despite Papen's persuasions, Hindenburg was extremely hesitant, until the end of January, to make Hitler Chancellor. He wanted to have Papen again as Chancellor. Papen finally won him over to Hitler with the argument that the representatives of the other right-wing parties which would belong to the government would restrict Hitler's freedom of action. In addition Papen expressed his misgivings that, if the present opportunity were missed, a revolt of the national socialists and civil war were likely.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Why do the industrialists in Source 8.13 favour a government led by Hitler?
- 2 According to Meissner (Source 8.14), why was Hindenburg persuaded to appoint Hitler as Chancellor?
- 3 With reference to the origins and content of Sources 8.13 and 8.14, how valuable are they in explaining Hitler's appointment?

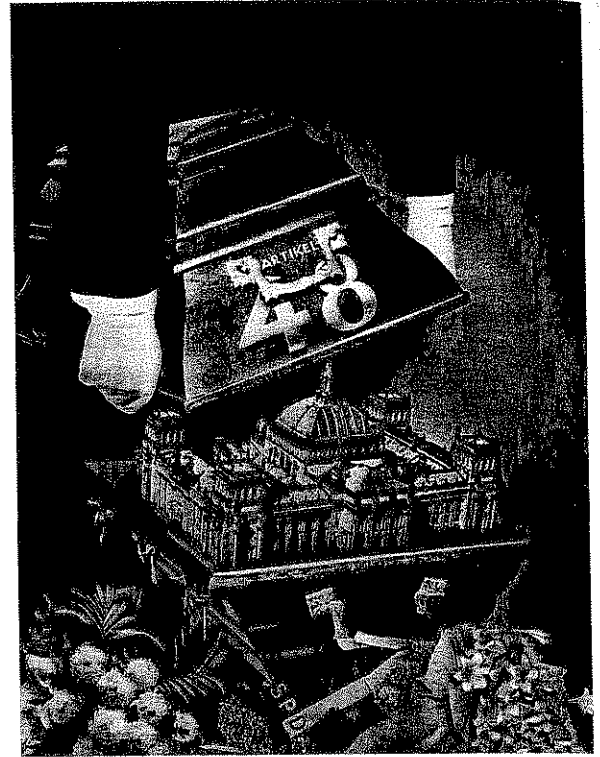
**Mehe Macht
dem Reichspräsidenten!**



**Weg mit der
Alleinherrschaft
der Parlamente (Artikel 54)
Wählt Deutschnational**

SOURCE 8.15

A 1932 DNVP poster. It says: 'More power to the presidency! Away with the supremacy of Parliament (Article 54). Vote Nationalist'. (For Article 54, see page 26)

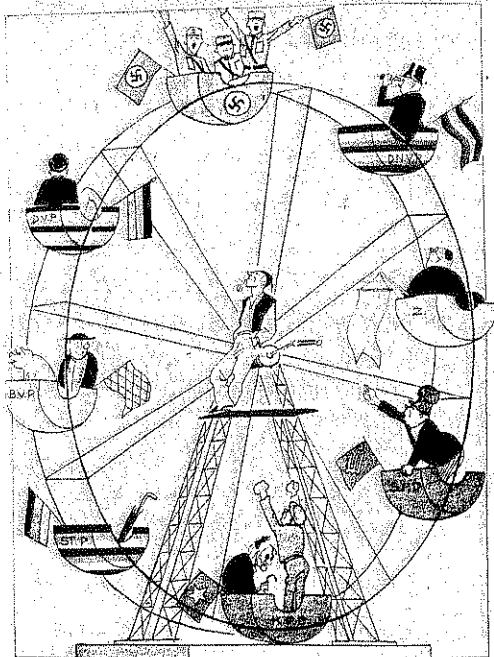


SOURCE 8.16

A September 1932 cartoon by John Heartfield

SOURCE 8.17

A 1932 cartoon: the big wheel of politics. The cartoon is captioned 'A breakdown: a pleasing phenomenon'



ACTIVITY

Explain what each of Sources 8.15–17 shows about the Weimar Republic at this time.

■ **Learning trouble spot**

Did Hitler come to power legally and democratically?

It is sometimes said that Hitler was elected into office. This is not really the case. The way of being elected into office in a parliamentary system is to win a majority of members of parliament. Hitler never did this in free elections. As the Weimar Republic had a proportional representation electoral system, unlike Britain's first-past-the-post method, Hitler could only have become Chancellor directly through elections by winning 50 per cent of the vote. He peaked at 37 per cent.

Hitler came to power because Hindenburg, legally, appointed him Chancellor. If Hindenburg had not made this decision, Hitler could not legally have become Germany's leader. However, he did win 37 per cent of the vote (far more than any other party except the SPD in 1919); he led the largest party in the Reichstag, and thus had a 'moral' (if not constitutional) claim to be Chancellor. Having 'won' both Reichstag elections in 1932 he was appointed constitutionally by the democratically elected President.

However, some historians argue that Hitler's use of violence means that he cannot be seen as coming to power legally. The violence committed by the Nazis in the streets that intimidated communist opponents contributed both to the Nazis' electoral success and to the preparedness of the elite to use the Nazis and then tame them. This violence helped create an atmosphere where many favoured strong government to restore law and order, and also won the support of many of those who were worried by the threat of communism.

Some also consider the fact that Hitler's programme was fundamentally undemocratic relevant to this issue.

- 1 It has been said that proportional representation was crucial in helping Hitler gain power. It has also been said that proportional representation would have stopped him gaining power, if it had not been for President Hindenburg. Can you explain both views?
- 2 Does Hitler's rejection of parliamentary democracy disqualify him from being considered a democratically elected leader?

E Review: Why did parliamentary government decline in Germany 1930–3 and why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

In this chapter you have studied the decline of parliamentary government and how within that context Hitler became Chancellor. Students can be confused about the relationship between the failure of the Weimar Republic and the appointment of Hitler. Was his appointment an abrupt end to Weimar democracy? Most historians now argue that seeing 30 January 1933 as marking the end of Weimar democracy is too simple. Indeed, it is argued that Weimar democracy was already in deep, perhaps terminal, trouble from 1930 onwards and that some form of authoritarian government was virtually inevitable. This could have taken many forms; the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor was just one of the options. In this view, the failure of the Weimar Republic happened for far deeper reasons than those behind Hitler's appointment, which might have been avoided.

Students also sometimes assume that they need to explain why many Germans wanted to create a totalitarian Nazi dictatorship. However, you need not look for deep reasons why Germany succumbed to totalitarianism. This was not the intention of the elite, but the result of its miscalculation of how it could use Hitler for its own purposes. In addition, the millions of Germans who voted for Hitler did not do so because they wanted to kill millions of Jews or start a world war. These were the eventual results of their actions, but not the reasons for them.

Our final two sources are powerful testimony to why many ordinary Germans were prepared to support the Nazis and have Hitler as their leader.

SOURCE 8.18 The distinguished banker Johannes Zahn, writing in 1997, explains his feelings in the early 1930s

You have to consider Germany's general position [in] 1930–33. An unemployed man either joined the Communists or became an SA man, and so business believed it was better if these people became storm troopers as there was discipline and order . . . you really have to say this today, at the beginning you couldn't tell whether National Socialism was something good with a few bad side-effects, or something evil with a few good side-effects; you couldn't tell.

Finally, we end this chapter by reading Kershaw's summary of the reasons for Hitler's appointment.

SOURCE 8.19 I. Kershaw, *Hitler*, 1991, p. 55

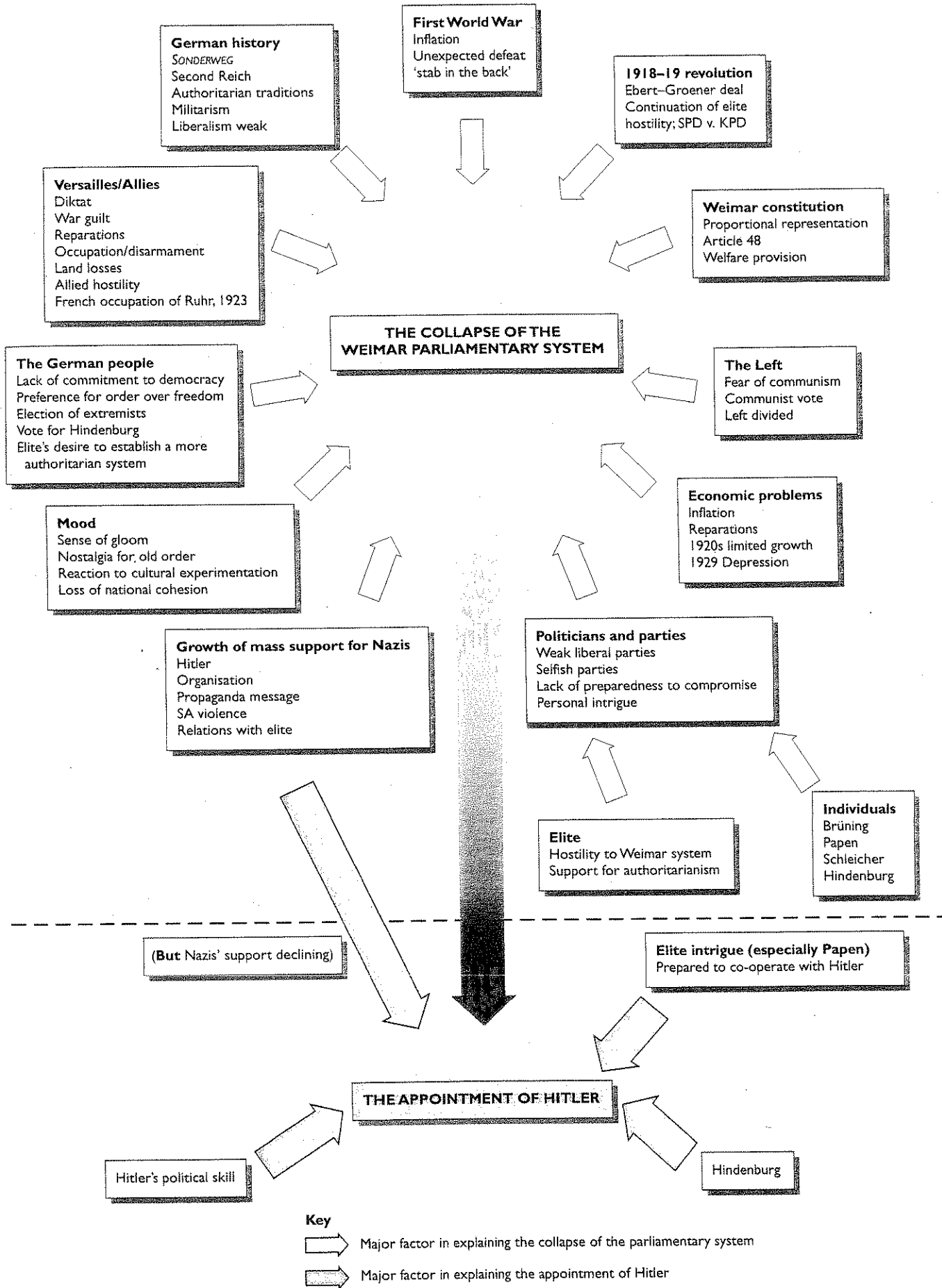
Access to Hindenburg was the key to power. Accordingly, the presidential palace became the focal point of intrigues of power brokers, who, freed from institutional constraints, conspired with guile and initiative in private wheeler-dealings to further their own power ambitions. And behind the maverick power-brokers stood the lobbying of important elite groups, anxious to attain a political solution of the crisis favourable to their interests.

Few . . . had Hitler as their first choice. But by January 1933, with other options apparently exhausted, most, with the big landowners to the fore, were prepared to entertain a Hitler government. Had they opposed it, a Hitler chancellorship would have been inconceivable. Hitler needed the elite to attain power. But by January 1933, they in turn needed Hitler as he alone could deliver the mass support required to impose a tenable authoritarian solution to Germany's crisis of capitalism and crisis of the state.

Which of the statements in question 1 of the Activity are facts and which opinions? Is what constitutes a fact sometimes a matter of opinion?

ACTIVITY

- 1 Take each of the following statements and explain why you agree or disagree with it.
 - a) After 1930 all Chancellors realised parliamentary government was not working and were looking for a more authoritarian solution.
 - b) By 1932 Hindenburg, Papen, Schleicher and probably even Brüning all shared the same broad aims, but disagreed on the best way to achieve them.
 - c) Once the Nazis became the largest party Hitler had to be appointed Chancellor.
 - d) Schleicher and Papen each thought he could use the Nazis for his own purposes.
 - e) Members of the elite preferred to change the political system by gaining support in the Reichstag or through using Article 48, as they were afraid of civil war if they just tore up the constitution.
 - f) After 1930, and even more by 1932, the composition of the Reichstag made reliance on Article 48 virtually inevitable.
 - g) Weimar democracy was safe in the hands of German voters; it was the elite who killed it.
 - h) Communism posed no real threat in 1932 and so is unimportant in explaining events.
 - i) By late 1932, tensions within the Nazi Party were in danger of causing a decline as rapid as its rise had been; it was saved by Hitler's appointment.
 - j) The decline in support for the Nazis in November 1932 actually helped Hitler's appointment as Chancellor.
 - k) Hitler's insistence on only joining a government as leader was a risky strategy that eventually paid off.
 - l) Hindenburg can be held primarily responsible for giving Hitler power, since in 1933 he still had a wide range of options.
 - m) The elites had good grounds for considering they could control Hitler as Chancellor.
 - n) Hitler benefited from the collapse of parliamentary government rather than being the cause of it.
- 2 There is a popular radio programme called *Just a Minute* where contestants have to talk for 60 seconds on any topic, without deviation, hesitation or repetition. This is surprisingly difficult. So we have been kind and you can talk for just 30 seconds on one of the following issues:
 - a) The impact of the Depression
 - b) The reasons why the Nazis became the largest party
 - c) The nature of German governments, 1930-2
 - d) The attitude of many of the elite to the Weimar Republic – and to the Nazis
 - e) The reasons why Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor.
- 3 Essay: 'Why did Hindenburg appoint Hitler as Chancellor in 1933?' Include:
 - how Hitler became undisputed leader of the Nazi Party
 - the effects of the Great Depression on Germany after 1929
 - why the Nazis became the largest parliamentary party in 1932
 - the failure of Weimar governments 1929-32
 - why the elite looked for a more authoritarian alternative to parliamentary democracy
 - Hindenburg's reluctant appointment of Hitler.
 Chart 8G will help you.
- 4 Imagine it is January 1933. Hold a debate in front of a key adviser to President Hindenburg over whether he should appoint Hitler as Chancellor or not. Select four to five people for each side of the debate. Possible characters could be:
 - general
 - industrialist
 - professor
 - major landowner
 - small farmer
 - worker
 - ex-soldier
 - diplomat
 - economist.



WHY DID PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT DECLINE IN GERMANY 1930-3 AND WHY WAS HITLER APPOINTED CHANCELLOR IN JANUARY 1933?

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 8: Why did parliamentary government decline in Germany 1930-3 and why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

- 1 In 1930, Müller's SPD-led coalition fell; it was the last government to be based on support in the Reichstag. This can be seen as the real end to Weimar parliamentary democracy.
- 2 After 1930 the popular vote for extremist parties made it hard for any government to get majority support in the Reichstag.
- 3 Brüning has been accused of exacerbating the situation to achieve his own conservative ends.
- 4 From 1930 onwards, Chancellors Brüning, Papen and Schleicher had to rely on presidential decrees under Article 48.
- 5 Members of the elites looked for alternatives to Weimar democracy. They increasingly realised they might have to use the mass support behind Hitler to establish a more authoritarian system.
- 6 After his election success of July 1932, Hitler failed in his demand for the chancellorship.
- 7 Hitler needed the support of the elites to get appointed, just as the elites needed his popular support to achieve their aims.
- 8 Both Papen and Schleicher failed to persuade the Nazis to join a government in a subordinate role.
- 9 Eventually, elements in the elites persuaded Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor, hoping to use, then discard, him.
- 10 Thus under the dual challenge of the masses who voted for radical parties and the elites who disliked democracy, the Weimar Republic declined and Hitler took over.

Review: Interpretations of Weimar Germany 1918–33

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

'One doesn't read history, one reads historians.' This saying reminds us that history has two meanings: the past, and the historian's account of the past. In order for us to study the past we have to rely on historians who investigate evidence, make selections and assessments and write their accounts. Thus in the second meaning of history, all history is interpretation. Given that every historian has his/her own outlook, it follows that different views and controversy are inherent in history. This is especially the case with the Weimar Republic.

- A** Historical controversy (pp. 151–2)
- B** The controversy over the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler (pp. 153–7)
- C** Historians' assessments (pp. 158–60)

FOCUS ROUTE

Using the material on these pages and your own knowledge, explain why the Weimar Republic has been the source of so much historical controversy.

A Historical controversy

Chart 9A identifies many of the reasons why historical controversies arise. Of course, not all points are relevant in all cases.

■ 9A Reasons for historical controversy

1 THE HISTORIAN

The following points about a historian may influence his/her interpretation.

A Viewpoint

- The individual historian's political, moral, religious beliefs; gender; nationality; personality; experience
- Historians' different theories as to the nature of history
- Historians' different assessments of the value of different types of source

B Purpose

The purpose and nature of the account a historian makes will also lead to different views, e.g. a textbook or research article or TV, etc; is it to entertain, convert, enlighten or make a profit?

C Approach

Some historians may be more careful in handling sources than others.

D Context

- The context in which the historian lives, e.g. period, place, ideological climate

2 THE SOURCES

A The amount of sources

Too many/too few

- Too few sources leave gaps which the historian can fill with different interpretations; too many sources require the historian to make a selection.

Availability

- New sources can emerge which may allow later historians to have a better picture of a past event than earlier ones; sources which once existed may be destroyed.
- New techniques, e.g. computers, aerial photography, can enable historians to make better use of existing sources.

B The nature of sources

Ambiguous

Sources are open to different interpretations and selections, and may contain no clear message.

Contradictory

Sources may contradict each other.

3 THE NATURE OF THE TOPIC BEING STUDIED

Some topics attract more debate.

■ Learning trouble spot

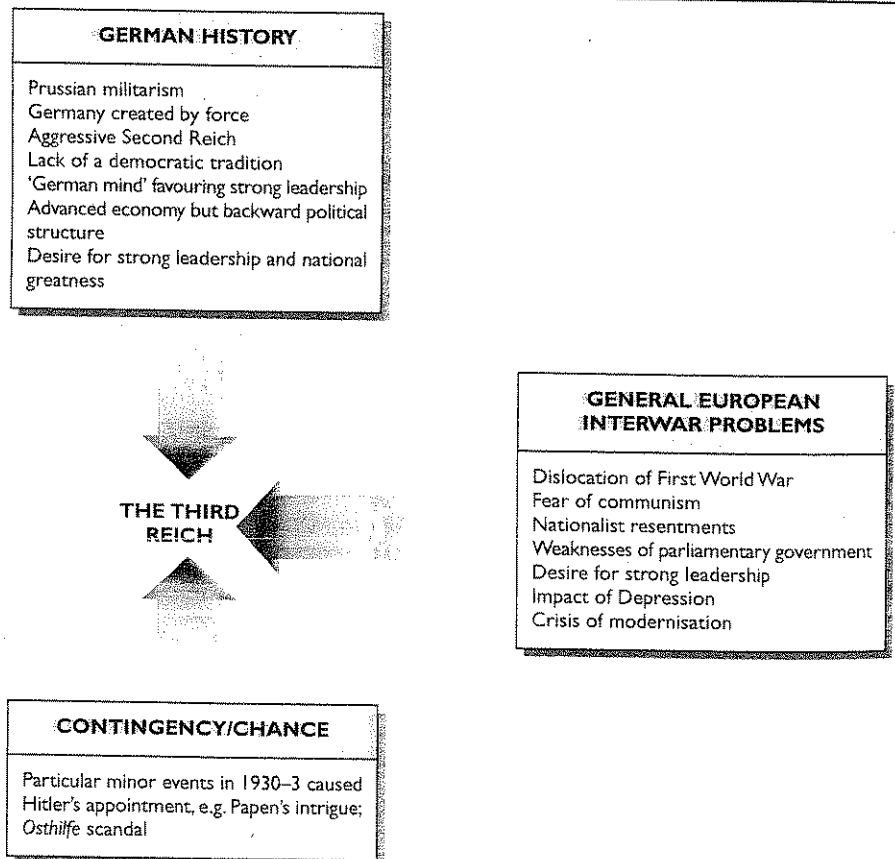
What determines the particular historical viewpoint of a historian?

Students nowadays are quite adept at detecting differences in historians' views and at understanding the nature of historical research that can lead to a great variety of interpretations. They often have more trouble when asked to explain why a particular historian holds a particular view. There is a tendency to retreat into generalisations: for example, 'He is a German, therefore he will argue ...' or 'She is writing in the 1960s, so her view will be ...'

Sometimes such an assessment, based on a general point about the historian, may be reasonable - for example, for a Marxist - but even here one must add a note of caution. Not all Marxist historians hold the same views, and you need to be very cautious when attributing a historian's views simplistically to, for example, her/his nationality. German history reveals this well. Some of the greatest exponents of the continuity view of German history, identifying authoritarian and aggressive trends within German history, have been German historians: for example, Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler. So it is best to be cautious: to analyse the information you have about a historian in an open-minded way and to suggest tentative judgements.

Some historians stress the German nature of the Third Reich, and explain it largely as a product of Germany's history. Others see Nazism as one manifestation of a broad authoritarian trend in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, which saw a series of dictatorships established. Yet other historians stress the 'bad luck' of Hitler gaining power: that it was fortuitous (a matter of luck) rather than the product of deeper forces. Chart 9B shows these varying viewpoints in diagrammatic form.

■ 9B Why the Third Reich: German history or general trend?



B The controversy over the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler

Since the 1980s, an explosion of new historical techniques, along with access to new sources, particularly after the collapse of communist East Germany in 1990, has added to the diversity of historical interpretation. In the 1990s the influence of Marxism, once powerful not just in communist regimes but also (in more varied forms) in Western European universities, has declined. This has led to greater criticism of class-based perspectives. Closer examination of local areas and access to new sources have led to more diversified interpretations. Much research has been done into the actions and attitudes of Germans at the local level, with historians stressing how heavily people were influenced by their experience in their local community, rather than as members of a general group.

Some historical topics, such as the Weimar Republic, are particularly controversial. As we saw in the introduction to this book, the horrors of the Third Reich cast a shadow over the study of German history in general and the Weimar Republic in particular. Although some historians try to look at Weimar Germany in its own right, the reasons for its failure are vital in trying to understand how Hitler came to power. It is a sensitive issue and has raised great controversy, as the following comments by one of the most interesting but provocative historians of Germany illustrate.

ACTIVITY

Select points from Source 9.1 to support the view that Taylor was:

- a) a flawed historian
- b) an unfairly criticised historian.

SOURCE 9.1 A. J. P. Taylor in the 1961 Preface to *The Course of German History*, first published in 1945

This book was written in the last days of the Second World War. It had a curious origin. The chapter on the Weimar Republic was written as a separate piece to be included in one of the many compilations which were being put together in order to explain to the conquerors what sort of country they were conquering. My piece proved unacceptable; it was, I learnt, too depressing. The Germans were enthusiastic for a demagogic dictator and engaged on a war for the domination of Europe. But I ought to have shown that this was a bit of bad luck, and that all Germans other than a few wicked men were bubbling over with enthusiasm for democracy or for Christianity or for some other noble cause which would turn them into acceptable allies once we had liberated them from their tyrants. This seemed to me unlikely. I therefore went further back into German history to see whether it confirmed the argument of my rejected chapter; and this book was the result. It was an attempt to plot the course of German history; and it shows that it was no more a mistake for the German people to end up with Hitler than it is an accident when a river flows into the sea, though the process is, I daresay, unpleasant for the fresh water. Nothing, it seems to me, has happened since to disturb the conclusions at which I then arrived.

When the book appeared, some reviewers expostulated [complained] that it 'indicted' [condemned] a nation and that no country's history could survive such hostile scrutiny. I made no indictment; the facts made it for themselves... Far from treating Germans as barbarians or eternal aggressors, I was anxious to discover why a nation so highly civilised have failed to develop political balance. On almost every test of civilisation, philosophy, music, science, local government, the Germans come out at the top of the list; only the art of political behaviour has been beyond them.

This essentially critical view of Germans, though largely rejected now by most academic historians, still survives in more populist versions and appeals to some deep sentiments in British society. Study of the Weimar Republic also raises a range of other issues, as identified by Richard Bessel who has written: 'The debates about Weimar Germany are not just arcane [obscure] disagreements amongst historians. They involve fundamental questions about the viability of democracy, the relationship of economics to politics, the degree to which a society and economy can bear the costs of social welfare programmes, the relationship between state and society, the stability of modern industrial society.' (*Weimar Germany: The Crisis of Industrial Society, 1918-1933*, 1987, p. 5.)

SOURCE ACTIVITY

(Marks are given in brackets.)

- 1 Read Source 9.2.
 - a) What traits in the 'German mind' does Shirer identify? What political results did this have? (3)
 - b) Referring to specific phrases, discuss the tone of the source. (4)
- 2 a) How does Wehler (Source 9.3) explain Germany's comparative political and social backwardness under the Weimar Republic? (3)
 - b) To what extent does Wehler agree with Shirer about the nature of German history? (4)
- 3 To what extent does Blackbourn (Source 9.4) agree with Wehler's view of continuity and the concept of a *Sonderweg*? (4)
- 4 a) What different perspective on the explanation for Nazism does Ritter (Source 9.5) have? (3)
 - b) Explain whether you think Ritter would agree more with Wehler or Blackbourn. (4)
- 5 Where does Kershaw (Source 9.6) put the emphasis in his explanation of the Nazis' success? (3)
- 6 Of which of the other historians would Anderson (Source 9.7) probably be most critical? Why? (4)
- 7 a) Briefly explain:
 - i) which two historians imply that both the failure of Weimar democracy and the rise to power of Hitler were inevitable
 - ii) which two historians make the clearest distinction between the failure of Weimar democracy and Hitler's rise to power. (4)
 - b) What possible reasons could you suggest for this difference in perspective? (4)
- 8 Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain why historians disagree on the likelihood of Hitler coming to power in Germany. You might like to refer to the following issues, as well as others:
 - possible continuities in German history
 - the relationship between German history and that of other countries
 - deterministic views of history and the role of chance
 - racial stereotyping in history
 - the particular perspective and approach of individual historians. (10)

(Total: 50 marks)

Some of these different views on German history are illustrated in the extracts below. (When you tackle the Source Activity, you may find it useful to refer to the Learning trouble spot on historical interpretation on page 367.)

SOURCE 9.2 William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 1960, p. 29

The mind and the passion of Hitler – all the aberrations [mental disorders] that possessed his feverish brain – had roots that lay deep in German experience and thought. Nazism and the Third Reich, in fact, were but a logical continuation of German history...

Acceptance of autocracy, of blind obedience to the petty tyrants who ruled as princes, became ingrained in the German mind. The idea of democracy, or rule by parliament... did not sprout in Germany. This political backwardness of Germany... set Germany apart from and behind the other countries of the West. There was no natural growth of a nation. This has to be borne in mind if one is to comprehend the disastrous road this people subsequently took and the warped state of mind which settled over it. In the end the German nation was forged by naked force and held together by naked aggression...

There thus arose quite artificially a state born of no popular force nor even of an idea except that of conquest, and held together by the absolute power of the ruler, by a narrow-minded bureaucracy which did his bidding and by a ruthlessly disciplined army... The state, which was run with the efficiency and soullessness of a factory, became all: the people were little more than cogs in the machinery...

In contrast to the development of other countries, the idea of democracy, of the people SOVEREIGN, of the supremacy of parliament, never got a foothold in Germany, even after the twentieth century began... The middle classes, grown prosperous by the belated but staggering development of the industrial revolution and dazzled by Bismarck's policy of force and war, had traded for material gain any aspiration for political freedom they may have had. They accepted the Hohenzollern autocracy. They gladly knuckled under to the Junker bureaucracy and they fervently embraced Prussian militarism. Germany's star had risen and they – almost all the people – were eager to do what their masters asked to keep it high.

SOURCE 9.3 Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire 1871-1918*, 1985, pp. 245-6. Wehler is the most famous German historian to argue the case for a special German *Sonderweg*

The ruling elites [of the Second Reich] showed themselves to be neither willing nor able to initiate the transition towards modern social and political conditions when this had become necessary. This... culminated in the breakdown of the German Empire in revolution and the end of the old regime [in 1918]... The fact that this break with the past did not go deep enough and that the consequences of the successful preservation of outworn traditions remained everywhere visible after 1918, accounts for the acute nature of the problem of continuity in twentieth-century German history...

In the years before 1945, and indeed in some respects beyond this, the fatal successes of Imperial Germany's ruling elites, assisted by older historical traditions and new experiences, continued to exert an influence. In the widespread susceptibility towards authoritarian policies, the hostility towards democracy in education and political life, in the continuing influence of the pre-industrial ruling elites, there begins a long inventory [list] of serious historical problems... A knowledge of the history of the German Empire between 1871 and 1918 remains absolutely indispensable for an understanding of German history over the past decades.

SOURCE 9.4 English historian D. Blackbourn, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany*, 1984, pp. 290-2

I have not sought to deny the elements of continuity that link the history of Imperial Germany with the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. It would hardly be necessary to make such a disclaimer, perhaps, had apologist [sympathetic] historians not insisted on portraying the Third Reich as an 'accident'. The real question about continuity is not 'whether' but 'in which ways'...

We should not write [the history of Germany] as if it were quite unlike the history of anywhere else. The distinctiveness of German history is probably best recognised if we do not see it [before 1945] as a permanent falling away from the 'normal'. In many respects ... the German experience constituted a heightened version of what occurred elsewhere. This is true of Germany's dynamic capitalism, and of the social and political consequences it generated ... It is true of a widespread sentiment like cultural despair ... And it is true, I believe, although not all want to accept this, of the way in which these and other phenomena ... combined to produce Germany's exceptionally radical form of fascism ... Germany was much more the intensified version of the norm than the exception ... There is much to be said for shifting our emphasis away from the Sonderweg and viewing the course of German history as distinctive but not sui generis [the only one of its kind].

SOURCE 9.5 German historian G. Ritter, 1955, pp. 22–3

The Weimar Republic failed because it did not succeed in winning general confidence, in becoming genuinely popular through successes which could be appreciated from a distance. So the rejection of democratic slogans became one of the essential conditions for the rise of Hitler's party. But to attribute this rejection simply to 'the Germans' lack of sense of liberty' explains nothing; it only disguises with a grand phrase the true historical problem: the reasons why the chances of liberals have much diminished in this century, particularly in Germany after the First World War ...

... in order to examine the historic foundations of National Socialism, one must first of all see what [it] was in twentieth-century Europe that gave the totalitarian state, composed of one single party, such a good opportunity of taking the place of the constitutional liberal parliamentary state. For the totalitarian state, composed of one single party, is a European, and not solely a German phenomenon.

SOURCE 9.6 British historian I. Kershaw, *Hitler*, p. 38

There was nothing inevitable about Hitler's triumph in January 1933. Five years earlier, the Nazi Party had been a fringe irritant in German politics, but no more ... External events, the Young Plan to adjust German reparations payments, the Wall Street Crash, and Brüning's entirely unnecessary decision to have an election in summer 1930 – put the Nazis on the political map. Though democracy had by that time an unpromising future, a Nazi dictatorship seemed far less likely than some other form of authoritarian dictatorship or even a reversion to a Bismarckian style of government, possibly under a restored monarchy. In bringing Hitler to power, chance events and conservative miscalculation played a larger role than any actions of the Nazi leader himself.

SOURCE 9.7 American historian E. Anderson, 'The Struggle for Democracy in Germany', in J. Snell and A. Mitchell (ed.), *The Nazi Revolution: Germany's Guilt or Germany's Fate?*, 1959, p. 194

It would be wrong to conclude that Nazism grew inevitably from the German past. This theory would imply fatalism [that an event must happen] which is entirely out of place in any serious study of history. A careful analysis of the events of 1932–1933 shows that at that time a substantial majority of the German people favored an extraordinary increase in governmental authority necessary to solve their problems but opposed National Socialism, that this majority was increasing, and that the recession [lessening] of the economic crisis would have entailed further losses of Nazi popular support. A relatively small group of Junkers, industrialists, and militarists actually achieved Hitler's appointment as chancellor and utilized the senility of President von Hindenburg to accomplish its purpose. The group expected to control the Nazis and to exploit the Nazi power for its own purposes; but the National Socialists proved too clever and too ruthless for it.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using brief extracts, such as these, from historians' work?



Historians' assessments

We conclude with a selection of short extracts from the work of a number of historians, showing the different emphases they place on the various factors in Weimar's collapse and Hitler's rise.

THE FAILURE OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

SOURCE 9.8 Jackel

The principal predicament of the Weimar Republic was not defeat nor the difficulties which its government faced in the post-war years, but the social and political structure of German society ... [with] their origins in the nineteenth century.

SOURCE 9.9 Geary

No one in their right mind would claim that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles did not play a major role in the collapse of the Weimar Republic.

SOURCE 9.10 Craig

The Republic's basic vulnerability was rooted in the circumstances of its creation, and it is no exaggeration to say that it failed in the end partly because German officers were allowed to put their epaulets [i.e. uniforms] back on again so quickly and because the public buildings were not burned down, along with the bureaucrats who inhabited them.

SOURCE 9.11 Kolb

The first German republic was encumbered [hampered] by a basic weakness due to the circumstances of its foundation. In the form it took in 1919, parliamentary democracy was truly accepted and zealously defended by only a minority of the population.

SOURCE 9.12 Raff

Without the sympathy and assistance of the various [foreign] powers, the republic had proved unable in the end to withstand the stresses and strains of the lost war. The Allies' lack of sympathy burdened the fledgling republic from its earliest days with handicaps which even a firmly entrenched government, heir to a long democratic tradition, could scarcely have borne. How much less ... in Germany, habituated to an omnipresent [always there] and authoritarian government.

SOURCE 9.13 Geary

The Weimar Republic had failed to build on the fundamental compromises achieved in 1918 and to use them to create a deep rooted legitimacy of its own; it had lost the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people.

SOURCE 9.14 Peukert

Perhaps the miracle of Weimar is that the Republic survived as long as it did ... The Republic had already been heading for the crossroads before the immediate crisis of 1929-30 occurred. Everything had been pointing towards a possible crash.

SOURCE 9.15 Geary

The economic crisis acted as a trigger, occasioning the abandonment of a political system that had already lost its legitimacy.

SOURCE 9.16 Kershaw

The future [for Weimar] looked promising. And without the onset of the world economic crisis from 1929 it might have remained so.

SOURCE 9.17 Salmon

If Weimar had some chances of survival before [the Depression], it had very little chance afterwards.

SOURCE 9.18 Ardagh

Gloom was such that already by the mid 1920s many Germans were losing faith in the very principle of parliamentary democracy; this was above all the cancer that killed Weimar ... A growing number of politicians ... came to feel that democracy was unworkable ... Probably by 1930 a period of authoritarian rule had become inevitable.

SOURCE 9.19 Hiden

No single problem 'caused' the downfall of the Weimar Republic ... the interaction of ... problems, many of which pre-dated the Republic, progressively weakened the new German state.

HITLER'S RISE TO POWER

SOURCE 9.20 Holtfrerich

The Nazi rise to power was essentially linked to the Great Depression which was a world-wide phenomenon and had little to do with the domestic conflict.

SOURCE 9.21 Salmon

Nazism came to power as a result of a miscalculation by conservative politicians and the military after a large number, but by no means a majority, of the electorate had put it in a position to contend for power.

SOURCE 9.22 Kershaw

The handover of power to Hitler on 30th January 1933 was the worst possible outcome to the irrecoverable crisis of Weimar democracy. It did not have to happen. It was at no stage a foregone conclusion.

SOURCE 9.23 Kolb

It can no doubt be said that the Nazi seizure of power was not objectively inevitable even after the summer of 1932. But, given the attitudes, aims and relative strength of the parties and individuals concerned, and the degree to which the constitution had been undermined, the trend towards a Hitler solution was unquestionably very strong from then on.

SOURCE 9.24 Taylor

There was nothing mysterious in Hitler's victory; the mystery is rather that it had been so long delayed.

SOURCE 9.25 Laffan

There was nothing predestined [inevitable] about Hitler's triumph in 1933. Like the democrats in 1918, the National Socialists came to power more because of their enemies' weakness and failures than because of their own strength.

SOURCE 9.26 Nicholls

[Hitler's] appointment was quite unnecessary... The Nazis could not have threatened the state if they had been denied power. Their movement was waning [declining], a further period of frustration might have finished them off.

SOURCE 9.27 Feuchtwanger

The personality of the Führer became a significant historical factor. [He had a] combination of demagogic gifts and political instinct... Luck was also with him, mainly because all other players in the field turned out to be so inadequate and mistaken in their judgements.

SOURCE 9.28 Harman

The generals and industrialists estimated late in 1932 that ruling with a Nazi movement that would destroy the working class organisations was preferable to ruling with a Social Democratic movement that would try to buy off the workers.

SOURCE 9.29 Klaus Fischer

The rise of Nazism [was due] to special conditions within a sixty-year span – anti-Semitism, nationalism, imperialism, defeat in war, the Versailles Treaty, the vindictive attitude of the Western powers, catastrophic economic circumstances, Germany's unstable political institutions and parties, the myopia [short-sightedness] of Hindenburg and his conservative clique, and the charismatic genius of Adolf Hitler.

ACTIVITY

- 1 From Sources 9.8–29, pick out what you consider to be
 - a) the five most important reasons why the Weimar Republic failed
 - b) the five most important reasons why Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933.
 Write a paragraph explaining the importance of each.
- 2 Find examples of quotations which disagree on
 - a) the importance of the Great Depression
 - b) the likelihood of Hitler coming to power.
- 3 Find examples of historians who stress the importance of
 - a) broader trends in German history
 - b) external factors
 - c) chance.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Was Weimar doomed? Divide into two groups. One should draw up a list of reasons why the Weimar Republic was unlikely to succeed, the other should identify reasons why it might well have done so. Debate the issue.
- 2 If Weimar was doomed, from when was it doomed? List dates when it has been said that Weimar was doomed. Explain your preferred option to the class.
- 3 'Instead of seeing the Weimar Republic as a prelude to the Third Reich, it should be seen as a considerable success.' Do you think such a statement can be justified?
- 4 Plan or write one of the following essays:
 - a) Why did Hitler fail to gain power in the 1920s yet succeed in the 1930s?
 - b) Why did the Weimar Republic fall to the Nazis and not the Communists?
 - c) Why did parliamentary government survive in the period 1918-23 but fall in the period 1930-3?
 - d) 'The collapse of the Weimar Republic was inevitable. Hitler's rise to power was not.' Discuss.

KEY POINTS FROM SECTION 1: Germany 1918-33: Why did Weimar democracy fail?**Part 1.1 Weimar Germany 1918-23: Creation and crises. Chapters 1 and 2**

- 1 The Weimar Republic was set up in the aftermath of Germany's defeat in the First World War. It was burdened with blame for the much resented Treaty of Versailles. Although it had a new, democratic constitution creating parliamentary government, key structures in Germany were not changed as the 1918-19 German Revolution was very limited.
- 2 Between 1919 and 1923 the Republic faced a series of revolts from the extreme Left and Right, and a major inflationary crisis, but it survived.

Part 1.2 The Weimar Republic 1924-9: Years of recovery and achievement? Chapters 3, 4 and 5

- 3 From 1924 the economy recovered, and moderate parties gained more support in elections.
- 4 Stresemann's conciliatory foreign policy brought Germany back from diplomatic isolation, but it aroused opposition from nationalists.
- 5 Weimar Germany became famous for its cultural experimentation, but this alienated many traditionalists.

Part 1.3 Germany 1929-33: Why did the Weimar Republic fail and Hitler gain power in 1933? Chapters 6, 7 and 8

- 6 The Wall Street Crash led to a major depression, with 6 million unemployed. The Depression made it harder for parliamentary government to work, and created a mood of despair.
- 7 Extremist parties did well in the 1930 elections; in 1932 they obtained a majority of Reichstag deputies, with the Nazis gaining 37 per cent.
- 8 After 1930 parliamentary government declined, as a series of presidential governments tried to solve Germany's mounting economic and political problems. In January 1933, influenced by sections in the elite, President Hindenburg reluctantly appointed Hitler Chancellor.

Review: Interpretations of Weimar Germany 1918-33. Chapter 9

- 9 Historians disagree as to whether the Weimar Republic could have survived, why it failed and why Hitler came to power.
- 10 When explaining Hitler's appointment it is important to realise that the people behind it did not intend to create a murderous, totalitarian Nazi state.

General Ludendorff's prophecy

In January 1933, Ludendorff commented to Hindenburg just after the President had appointed Hitler to be Chancellor: 'You have delivered up our holy German Fatherland to one of the greatest demagogues of all time. I solemnly prophesy that this accursed man will cast our Reich into the abyss and bring our nation to inconceivable ruin. Future generations will damn you in your grave for what you have done.'

Let us now turn to consider how accurate Ludendorff's prophecy was.

