

A: Hitler's role in rebuilding the Nazi Party

In 1924 Hitler was in gaol, sentenced to five years for treason. His future looked bleak and it was possible that he might even be deported to Austria. However, within one year he had been released and was able to turn his failure at Munich to his advantage. He had gained national publicity from his bold defence at his trial. He had also used the time in prison to reflect on politics and to write *Mein Kampf*.

Furthermore, the chaos into which the Nazi Party fell during his absence showed his indispensability to the movement. He virtually refounded the party in February 1925 and based it round the *Führerprinzip* (see page 55). This gave Hitler supreme power over both policy and strategy. He reorganised the party's strategy, structure and symbols. Only the Twenty-five Point Programme remained fixed, although its interpretation would become flexible. The Nazis would now use Weimar democracy to gain mass support rather than attempting another putsch.

The *Führerprinzip* made the party an obedient tool of Hitler's will. He introduced the brown shirt for his SA storm troopers, adopted the outstretched right arm as a salute and personally designed the Nazi flag with the swastika and striking yet traditional red, black and white colours. At the party congress at Bamberg in 1926 he defeated more socialist-inclined rivals and became the undisputed Führer of the party.

Hitler himself was central to the success of the Nazis. He provided charismatic leadership with his MESSIANIC mission to build a new Germany. He seemed to possess almost demonic willpower, which was both infectious and inspiring to others who accepted that what he said could come true. He was a powerful speaker; his timing, expression and the content of his speeches impressed his listeners. His hypnotic gaze from protuberant [staring] blue eyes helped fix his audience. He was able to identify with their emotions and expectations and gave people faith – an attractive commodity, particularly amidst the despair of economic crisis when other political parties appeared to lack a sense of direction.

Along with Josef Goebbels, Hitler realised the importance of propaganda and used it to target many Germans' specific grievances. He was very flexible in what he actually said to the German people. He was able to tailor his message to his audience, and was able to appeal both to the socially downtrodden and to the agrarian and industrial elites. He was the central rallying figure that gave the various groups within the party cohesion and attracted wider support. Hitler also had a good sense of opportunity and timing. However, he was clearly not infallible, as was exemplified by his near-disastrous meeting with Hindenburg in August 1932 (see page 111). Furthermore, in 1930 the Nazis did as well in areas where they had not organised mass rallies as in those where they had. It must also be said that many people who encountered Hitler were not impressed.

B: The importance of the SA and violence in rebuilding the Nazi Party

'We must struggle with ideas, but if necessary also with fists.' Hitler's words neatly summarise the main role of the *Sturm-Abteilung*, or SA. They were formed in 1920 as the *Sportabteilung*, or sports detachment of the Nazi Party, intended primarily to protect Nazi speakers. More aptly renamed the *Sturm-Abteilung* (storm detachment) in 1921, they had developed into a mass organisation of 500,000 by 1933. SA members were provided with a distinctive brown shirt, emblazoned with the swastika after, in 1924, the Party bought a stock of cheap, surplus German army tropical shirts. This was the origin of their other name, the Brownshirts.

From 1921 to 1923 and from 1930 to 1934, they were led by Ernst Röhm, who had participated in the 1923 Munich Putsch and was a friend of Hitler. He was eager for the Nazis to seize power and saw the SA as the army of a new Nazi state. Röhm represented the more radical, socialist aspect of Nazism, although, unlike fellow radicals the Strasser brothers, he was not a sophisticated thinker. He once explained his approach: 'Since I am an immature and wicked man, war and unrest appeal to me more than good bourgeois order.'

The original core of ex-soldiers expanded into a vast army of young men, attracted for a variety of reasons, ranging from hatred of communism, commitment to Hitler and love of excitement and violence to a desire for free soup and a new purpose in life. Over half came from the working class, especially the unemployed. Many were just ruffians and bullies. They were provided with a uniform, meals and sometimes accommodation in SA hostels. The SA ran occasional camps, with the stress on sport and military training. As an SA leader explained, the SA offered recruits 'what they almost always lack at home, a warm hearth, a helping hand, a sense of comradeship'.

The SA's work entailed distributing propaganda leaflets, protecting Nazi meetings and trying to drive the hated Communists from the streets. From 1930 to 1932 city streets saw increasing violence between political paramilitaries. Although these groups were not allowed to carry arms, many members were killed - nearly 100 in July 1932 alone. SA casualties were held up as martyrs for the cause. In 1932 Chancellor Brüning banned the SA. They formally obeyed but paraded without shirts. Brüning's successor as Chancellor, Papen, in an attempt to appease the Nazis, ended the ban.

The SA played a major role in Hitler's success. Their 'propaganda by deed' focused attention on the communist threat and the Nazis' determination to smash it. Despite the violence and disorder they caused, their disciplined marches created the impression that the Nazis would offer firm government to restore Germany to law and order. The fear of an SA seizure of power persuaded some in the elite to favour Hitler playing a role in government, since they thought he was the only one who could control the SA.

C: The importance of organization in rebuilding the Nazi

Party

The Nazis' success partly stemmed from their organisational structure throughout Germany. The party was organised in a series of areas, or *GAUE*, headed by a local leader, the *GAULEITER*, appointed by Hitler and subordinate to his orders. Outside these orders, the *Gauleiter* enjoyed considerable latitude to develop the party according to local circumstances. The Nazis also built up a series of associated organisations for young people, women, students, lawyers, factory workers, etc. Especially important was the Nazi Welfare Organisation which ran soup kitchens and organised food donations to people in distress, putting into practice their idea of a *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT* or national community. Under its organisation chief, Gregor Strasser, the party built up an efficient structure that allowed it to exploit the economic deterioration after 1929.

Although the Nazis had a centralised party propaganda machine under Goebbels, they also paid great attention to local propaganda. Most Nazi members and voters were won over by personal contacts or by attending a meeting addressed by a local speaker, not through direct contact with Hitler, despite his energetic campaigning. The Nazis targeted key individuals in a local community, such as a butcher or teacher, and hoped he would influence others. Their growing membership allowed them to organise concerted door-to-door campaigning and leafleting. They also used direct mailing and the publication of pamphlets. For example, they distributed 600,000 copies of their Immediate Economic Programme during the July 1932 election campaign. Posters conveyed simple messages: simple in both what was offered and how they portrayed their opponents.

The Nazis put great effort into training speakers. Over 6,000 had passed through their training school by 1933. Speakers were licensed by the party to ensure quality and were provided with booklets on policies and propaganda techniques. The Nazis used the latest technology – loudspeakers, slide shows, films and even planes – as in, for example, the 1932 presidential election campaign, 'Führer over Germany'. Initially, they relied on traditional forms, such as mass rallies, marches in uniform and drill. Music, lighting and the display of disciplined enthusiasm fostered the message as much as the words. Once in power, they made great use of radio and films.

Success was also due to the campaigning effectiveness of the Nazi Movement (*Bewegung*). (The Nazis called themselves a movement to distinguish themselves from other parties.) Firstly, they developed a powerful message. The Nazis promised to restore hope and create a new national community for all Germans (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Economic problems would be solved and the people provided with work and bread. The interests of all Germans would be looked after, but especial attention was given to the needs of the true German peasant and small trader who would be saved from 'the clutch of Jewish moneylenders'. The feeble Weimar democratic system would be replaced with strong leadership, which would smash communism, end Jewish influence, destroy the Versailles settlement and end reparations. Germany's new military might would allow it to secure vital living space (*Lebensraum*) and Germany would be a great nation once more.

Nationalism was crucial to the Nazi appeal, providing a form of ideological cement to hold together potentially diverse and conflicting interest groups. Anti-semitism was prominent in the early stages in the 1920s, but was not a major reason for their mass support in the 1930s.

The Nazis' ability to convey their message gained a great boost from their 1929 anti-Young Plan alliance with Alfred Hugenberg's Nationalist Party. This alliance gave Hitler access to Hugenberg's vast media empire. Their ideas now reached beyond the party's own paper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, to a range of mass-circulation papers. Funds were also attracted so that the party could compete in the numerous Reichstag, presidential and state elections that marked the final years of the Weimar Republic. Initially, the Nazi Party had some funding from the army and wealthy patrons, but most of its money came from ordinary members, through donations and charges for attending meetings.

The rapid expansion of the Nazi Movement created an aura of success, which further boosted membership and resources. After their startling electoral success of 1930, the Nazis immediately intensified their propaganda in readiness for the next elections. In the following year, membership rose from 390,000 to 800,000. On the other hand, turnover was rapid, as some apparently became disillusioned, especially late in 1932, with their apparent failure to gain power.