

**Mehe Macht
dem Reichspräsidenten!**



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.

TALKING POINTS

- 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.

TALKING POINT

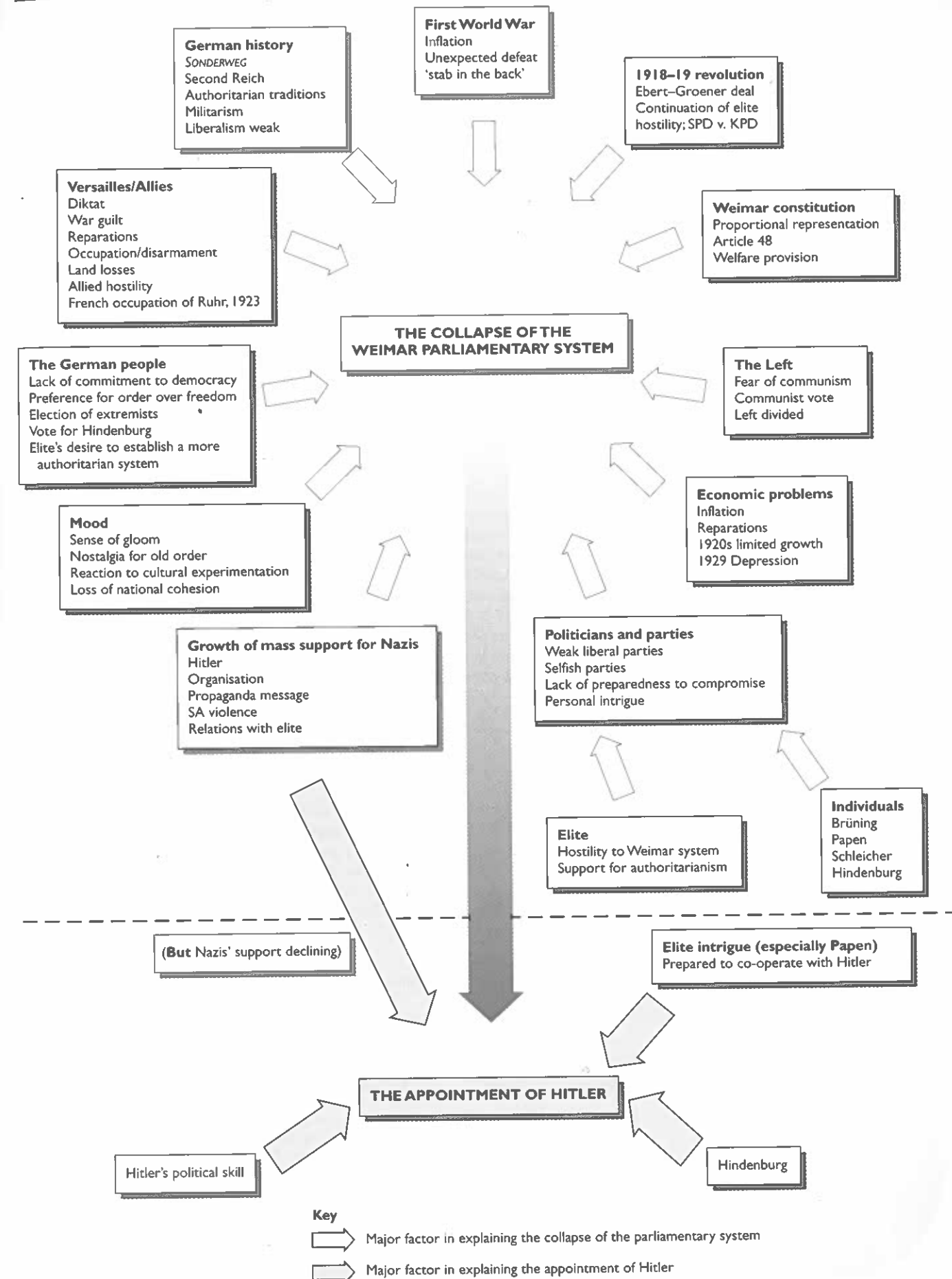
Which of the statements in question 1 of the Activity are facts and which opinions? Is what constitutes a fact sometimes a matter of opinion?

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.

8G The collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler



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.

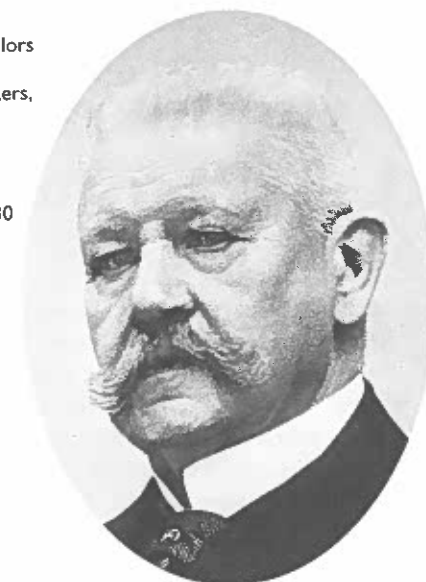
Person	Aims	Actions	Responsibility for undermining democracy	Responsibility for bringing Hitler to power
Brüning				
Papen				
Schleicher				
Hindenburg				

8H Who killed Weimar democracy? The main players and their moves

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

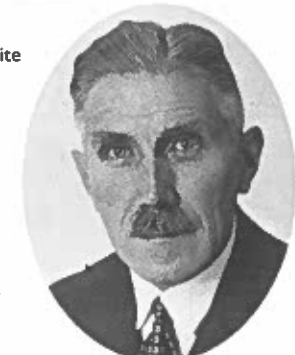
Chancellor March 1930–May 1932



- 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

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

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

WHO KILLED WEIMAR DEMOCRACY?

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



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.

9

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.

4 THE NATURE OF THE DISCIPLINE

It is one job of an historian to disagree or refute others' viewpoints. That is how they make their name!

■ Learning trouble spot

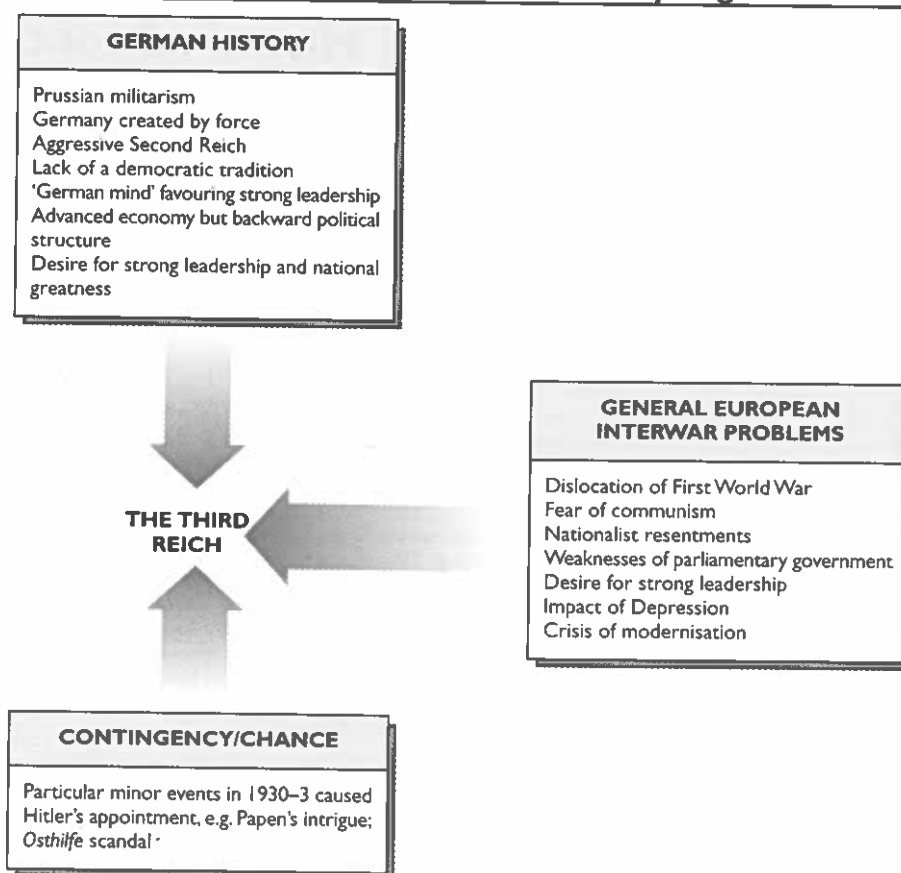
What determines the particular historical viewpoint of a historian?

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.

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.)

ACTIVITY

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

- a flawed historian
- an unfairly criticised historian.

9C Historians and the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler



View 1: Hitler as a product of Germany's history
Hitler and Nazism were a natural product of Germany's authoritarian history and the Germans' worship of power. The Germans failed to develop a democratic tradition, preferring instead a strong state led by a powerful individual. Hitler was the natural, even inevitable, culmination of this trend.

View 2 is a particular variant of View 1.



View 2: Germany deviates from the proper course of European development
Germany developed a *Sonderweg*, a peculiar path of development, compared to the rest of western Europe. Although Germany became economically advanced, the aristocratic ruling elite kept power and failed to democratise. The middle class, which elsewhere fostered representative government, merely supported the successful AUTOCRATIC state. The limited 1918 revolution failed to break free from these authoritarian tendencies, and so Weimar failed. Some form of authoritarianism was thus likely to occur.



Other views locate Nazism in a broader European context, more than in German history.

View 3: In Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, war and the Depression create dictatorship
Conditions after the First World War fostered dictatorship in many countries. Hitler's success must be seen in the light of Fascism's rise in Italy and the drift to dictatorship in much of Europe.



View 4: Nazism as a product of capitalism in crisis
Many Marxist historians see Nazism as part of a general crisis of capitalism that hit Europe after 1929. The Weimar Republic was overthrown by frightened Big Business, who used Hitler to protect their threatened interests and to delay the final crisis of capitalism.



View 5: Nazism as an emotional response to a crisis
Disorientated Germans, hit by an economic and political crisis, sought firm leadership and were emotionally attracted to a strong, charismatic leader, offering the 'totalitarian temptation'.

Other views see Nazism's success as due to particular rather than general factors.



View 6: Nazism as the product of the fanatical determination of one man, Adolf Hitler
Hitler was a brilliant demagogue who fooled many Germans into supporting him, and then outmanoeuvred the elite to establish a personal dictatorship. The key to explaining Nazism is thus not German history and society but the evil genius of one man.



View 7: Hitler was just bad luck
Hitler came to power due to chance events that might well not have happened. If only Brüning had not called elections in 1930, or if Papen had not intrigued against Schleicher, or Hindenburg had not been persuaded to appoint Hitler, then German history would have been very different.

TALKING POINT

What lessons, if any, can be learnt from studying the failure of Weimar and the rise of Hitler? Are any of these relevant to the modern world?

ACTIVITY

Match up each of the following criticisms with one of the seven views expressed in Chart 9C.

- a) Such a major event as Hitler's coming to power cannot be seen as a mere accident. This view looks suspiciously like an attempt to avoid the question of the Germans' responsibility for Hitler rather than being a proper historical perspective.
- b) German history must be studied in its own right, and not compared to some supposed 'normal' form of development.
- c) Nazism was a unique phenomenon, developing in a particular national context, and cannot be seen primarily in general terms.
- d) There was considerable variety in German history, with a rich cultural mix, rather than trends all developing in one particular direction.
- e) Mass support was more important than that of the elites in putting Hitler into power. Hitler reflected a deep feeling in Germany and was not just a capitalist stooge.
- f) Nazism gained support from rational calculation, not as a form of psychological fix.
- g) Nazism cannot be dismissed as just the product of one man; it reflected deeper trends in history at that time.

TALKING POINT

When you encounter Germans are your thoughts and reactions ever influenced by Hitler?

TALKING POINTS

- 1 One attempt to understand the past is known as hypothetical (conjectural) history. Do you think it is useful for historians to speculate on what might have happened if one particular event had not happened?
- 2 A. Doblin wrote in 1924: 'An age is always a farrago [mixture] of different ages. Whole parts of it are unleavened and undercooked; it contains the husks of old forces, and the seeds of new ones.' What do you think he meant? What relevance has this comment to the debate on the nature of the Weimar Republic?
- 3 The historian Heiber, in his conclusion to his book *The Weimar Republic* (p. 218), has wistfully commented: 'The Weimar state, even decades after its demise, still has many more friends than it ever had during its lifetime.' Why do you think he said this?

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.

TALKING POINT

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

C 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

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

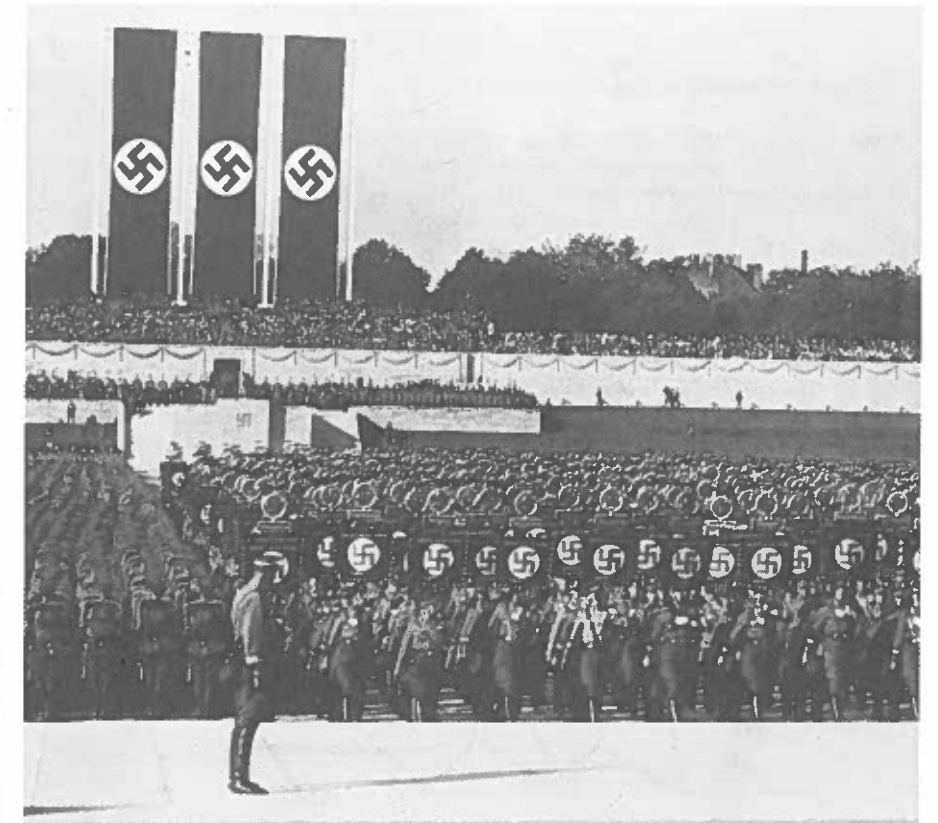
section

2

GERMANY 1933–45:

What impact did Nazism have on the German people?

SOURCE 1 A Nazi rally in 1935. What does this picture suggest about the Third Reich?

**Part 2.1: How did Hitler secure his regime?**

- 10 Why was Hitler able to consolidate his position in power?
- 11 Where did power lie in the Third Reich?
- 12 How successful was Nazi economic policy?
- 13 What role did propaganda play in the Third Reich?

Part 2.2: How far did Hitler succeed in creating a Volksgemeinschaft?

- 14 Did the Nazis succeed in winning the hearts and minds of German youth?
- 15 How successfully did the Nazis impose their ideology on German women?
- 16 Did the Churches collaborate with or resist the Nazi regime?
- 17 How much opposition was there to the Third Reich?
- 18 Why did the Nazis commit mass murder?
- 19 Review: What impact did Nazism have on the German people?

Section 2 looks at the impact of Nazism on Germany in its twelve years in power. We have divided the section into two parts. Chapters 10–13 look at how Hitler secured his regime; they concentrate on political and economic developments. Chapters 14–18 examine the success of the Nazis in creating their much vaunted *Volksgemeinschaft*, a new, unified Germany or 'community of the people'. These chapters concentrate on social policy and the extent to which the Nazis changed the way Germans thought.