

## **Rise of the Nazis**

Adolf Hitler was born an Austrian citizen and Roman Catholic at 6:30 PM on April 20 1889 at an inn called the Gasthof Zum Pommer in the town of Braunau-am-inn. Adolf's father- Alois Hitler- constantly reinforced correct behaviour with, sometimes very violent, punishment. After Adolf's elder brother- Alois- fled from home at the age of 14, Adolf became his father's chief target of rage. At the same time, Adolf's mother- Klara Pölzl- showered her son with love and affection, as any mother would.

When Adolf was three years of age, the Hitler family moved to Passau, along the Inn River on the German side of the border. The family moved once again in 1895 to the farming community of Hafield.

Following another family move, Adolf lived for six months across from a large Benedictine monastery. As a youngster, the young boy's dream was to enter the priesthood. However, by 1900, his artistic talents surfaced. Adolf was educated at the local village and monastery schools and, at age 11, Hitler was doing well enough to be eligible for either the university preparatory "gymnasium" or the technical/scientific Realschule (secondary school). Alois Hitler enrolled his son in the latter, hoping that he might become a civil servant. This was not to be.

Adolf would later claim that he wanted to be an artist and he deliberately failed his examinations to spite his father. In 1903, Alois Hitler died from a pleural hemorrhage, leaving his family with enough money to live comfortably without needing to work.

In 1905, Adolf left school for good. The following year he visited Vienna where he tried and failed to enter the School of Fine Arts, and the School of Architecture would not accept him without academic qualification.

In 1907, Klara Pölzl developed terminal breast cancer. After an operation and many expensive and painful treatments with a dangerous drug, she died on December 21, 1907. Traumatized by the loss of his mother, Adolf moved to Vienna and, once again, failed to enter the School of Fine Arts. He stayed in Vienna, living in hostels and earning money by drawing posters for shops and postcard views of the city for passers-by.

Adolf Hitler neither drank nor smoked. Being rather shy and awkward- with both men and women- he had few friends. Hitler read widely, losing all that remained of his religious faith, and replacing it with half-formed ideas of politics, philosophy and culture.

## **World War One And The Peace Treaty of Versailles**

In 1913, Adolf Hitler moved to Munich, Germany, to avoid the risk of conscription in Vienna. However, this does not mean that he was a coward. When the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by Slav terrorists in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, World War One began, and Hitler was quick to enlist in German Army. He joined the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment and, indeed, made a very good soldier. For once, his life had a purpose and he greatly enjoyed the comradeship, danger and the chance to wear a uniform. Excluding a short spell in hospital from 1916-1917, Hitler served as a company runner on the Western Front throughout the war. In reward for his brilliant service, Hitler was promoted to corporal and received two Iron Crosses, one of them the very rare Iron Cross First Class.

Hitler, having been temporarily blinded by mustard gas in October 1918, was in hospital when an armistice was reached and the Great War ended. To him, the defeat of German was extremely devastating.

The defeat was, in fact, devastating for all of Germany. The Treaty of Versailles, a peace treaty signed at Versailles in France on June 28 1919, punished Germany severely. In accordance with the treaty, Germany lost the following areas of land:

Alsace-Lorraine (taken from France in 1870).

Danzig (a strip of territory through East Prussia to form a Polish "corridor" to the sea).

Areas in Schteswig, Silesia and on the Belgian Frontier.

Saar Industrial region placed under international control but under French influence.

Germany was also forced to comply with the following restrictions:

Germany was forced to pay reparations for war damage. The price was fixed in 1921 at 132 billion gold marks.

9/10 of the German merchant fleet was confiscated.

German rivers were opened to international traffic.

Germany's overseas assets, totaling 16 billion marks, were seized.

German colonies were taken over by the League of Nations and distributed as territories to Britain, France and Japan.

The German army was confined to 100 000 men on long-service contracts.

Most military installations and training schools were shut down.

Military were withdrawn from the Rhineland and occupied by Allied Troops.

The German Airforce was completely abolished.

The German Navy was reduced to a maximum of 6 small battleships of only 10 000 tonnes each, 6 cruisers, 12 destroyers and 0 submarines.

In Clause 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to confess guilt for the war, this being the basis for Allied punishment.

### **The Formation Of The Nazi Party And Its Ideas:**

After World War One ended, Hitler remained for some time in the army. They put him to work gathering information on revolutionary political groups in Munich. On September 12 1919, dressed in civilian clothes, Hitler attended a meeting of the Deutsche Arbeiterpartie (German Workers' Party) in the back room of a Munich Beer Hall, with another twenty-five people. There, he listened to a speech by Gottfried Feder entitled, "How and by what means is capitalism eliminated?"

After the speech, Hitler rose to leave when a man stepped forward and made a speech supporting the state of Bavaria breaking away from Germany and forming a new South German nation.

This idea enraged Hitler to the point that he got to his feet and expressed his forceful opinion to the man for fifteen uninterrupted minutes. Anton Drexler, one of the founders of the party, allegedly whispered, "â€he's got the gift of the gab. We could use him."

After Hitler's outburst was complete, and Hitler started to leave, Drexler rushed to Hitler and invited him to read a forty-page booklet titled, My Political Awakening.

Hitler was delighted to find that the German Workers' Party reflected many of his own ideas- building a strong nationalist, pro-military, anti-Semitic party made up of working class people.

However, in Mein Kampf, Hitler describes the condition of the party:

'â€¦aside from a few directives, there was nothing, no program, no leaflet, no printed matter at all, no membership cards, not even a miserable rubber stampâ€¦ This absurd little organization with its few members seemed to me to possess the one advantage that it had not frozen into an 'organization,' but left the individual opportunity for real personal activity. Here it was still possible to work, and the smaller the movement, the more readily it could be put into proper form. Here, the content, the goal, and the road could still be determinedâ€¦"

After two days of thinking it over, Hitler chose to join the German Workers' Party and became member no. 55.

"â€¦I finally came to the conviction that I had to take this stepâ€¦ It was the most decisive resolve of my life. From here there was and could be no turning back."

Hitler's hatred of the Jews rapidly became part of the organization's policy. Advertising for their meetings appeared in anti-Semitic newspapers. On October 16 1919, during one such meeting, Hitler delivered an emotional speech that left the audience awestruck. Donations came in from every corner, and hundreds of Germans attended the frequent meetings to hear Hitler speak.

In February 1920, Hitler and Gottfried Feder prepared a 25-point summary for the German Worker's Party. The summary was fervently anti-capitalist and anti-Semitic. Among the 25 points was withdrawing the Treaty of Versailles, confiscating war profits, confiscating land without compensation, revoking civil rights for Jews and driving out Jews who had emigrated after World War One had begun. On February 24, in front of more than 2000 spectators, the summary was presented at a public meeting.

In April 1920, the party's name was changed to the National Socialist German Worker's Party or NAZI Party, and the red flag with the swastika was named as their party symbol. Hitler discovered that a local anti-Semitic newspaper was on the verge of bankruptcy and so he was able to purchase it for the party.

In 1921, Adolf Hitler was named chairman of the Nazi Party.

### **The Beer Hall Putsch and Mein Kampf**

Hitler's strengthening of the Nazi Party was meant not only to win more votes, but also to overthrow the Weimar Republic by a putsch or violent uprising.

Encouragement for attempting this came from Italy in October 1922, when Benito Mussolini, a 37-year-old former journalist, led a successful putsch. Marching with his paramilitary forces into Rome, Mussolini toppled the government. He named himself 'Il Duce' (leader) and his supporters the Fascisti (Fascists).

The Nazis copied Mussolini shamelessly. In November 1922, the colossal inflation of the German Mark triggered a state of emergency in Berlin and Munich. Seeing this as his chance, Hitler, on May 1 1923, tried to organize a putsch but it was never any threat to the Reichstag.

However, on November 9 Hitler tried again. One day earlier, Hitler had held a rally at the Munich Beer Hall and declared a revolution. Led by Hitler and former Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff, around 3000 SA (Sturmabteilung) brown shirts marched from the Bürgerbräukeller- the largest beer hall in Munich. However, the putsch fell to pieces when they were fired upon by police. Around a dozen of the SA were killed in the consequent fighting and many of the leaders of the putsch were arrested, whilst others fled the country.

Both Hitler and Ludendorff were captured and put on trial. Whilst the latter was cleared on a technicality, Hitler was not so lucky. He received the minimum sentence of five years imprisonment in Landsberg Fortress, though he only served close to nine months.

Hitler used this time to dictate the first volume of his political memoirs, which he titled- Mein Kampf (My Struggle). In Mein Kampf, Hitler argued for war in the east to create a Grossdeutschland- Greater Germany- by removing the Soviet Union.

The book also reiterated Hitler's hatreds, especially against the Jews and the Communists whom he saw as part of the Jewish conspiracy. The following is a passage from Mein Kampf:

"[The Jews'] ultimate goal is the denaturalization, the promiscuous bastardization of other peoples, the lowering of the racial level of the highest peoples as well as the domination of his racial mishmash through the extirpation of the folkish intelligentsia and its replacement by the members of his own people"

Released in 1927, the book had sold over 300 000 copies within 6 years, and Hitler was able to live off his earnings.

### **The Depression and the Elections of 1932-1933**

On his release from prison, Adolf Hitler was banned from public speaking and the Nazi party was temporarily outlawed. In February of 1925, Hitler reestablished the Nazi Party, and its popularity rose rapidly. By 1929, the number of members had risen from 27 000 to 108 000.

However, in the May 1928 elections, the Nazi party only polled a disappointing 2.5% of the vote. This was probably because, in recent years, the economic state of Germany had gradually improved. With Paul von Hindenburg as President, inflation eased, average wages rose, international agreement solved the problem of reparation costs and, in 1928, unemployment dropped below 1 million for the first time in years. The country was accepted back into the international community, and was accepted into the League of Nations in 1926.

After the Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler had accepted that his way to power was through politics rather than force. He did deals with nationalist parties, big businesses, landowners and the army. Before 1930, the Nazi Party began the Hitler Youth, the Student League and the Pupil League to win the support of the young Germans- Germany's future. The National Socialist Women's League even allowed women to get involved.

On 24 October 1929, the Wall Street Crash triggered the Great Depression. Germany's rising employment rate dropped drastically and, by 1932, 6 million- or 1 in 3 people- were unemployed.

Hindenburg decided to invoke Germany's emergency presidential powers, creating a new government made up of a chancellor and cabinet ministers to rule by emergency decrees, rather than by laws passed by the Reichstag.

In September 1930, there was another election. The Nazi Party, mostly due to the Depression and a successful propaganda campaign, captured 18.3% of the vote, making it the second largest party in the Reichstag.

In the July 1932 election, the Nazi Party's popularity once again rose, this time winning 37% of the vote. In the spring of that year, Hitler had opposed Hindenburg for the role of president in two democratic elections. The first, on March 13 1932, was disappointing for Hitler. He received just 30% of the vote, compared to Hindenburg's 49.6%. However, as the latter had just missed out on an absolute majority, another runoff election was scheduled for April 10 of that year. Hindenburg won the election again with 53% of the vote, but Hitler received 37%.

In another party election, called for November 6 1932, the Nazi Party lost 34 of its seats in the Reichstag. It looked as though Hitler was going to be unsuccessful.

Hitler and Franz von Papen- a former chancellor and leader of the Nationalist Party- agreed to form a coalition. Hitler disagreed to a co-leadership, but instead promised that, if he were made chancellor, Papen's supporters would be given important cabinet positions. They formed an alliance, though both were secretly planning to double-cross each other.

### **Hitler waves at supporters after being named Chancellor-**

January 30 1933When the current chancellor, Schleicher, was forced to resign, Hindenburg was pressured by many- including industrialists, the military and even his own son- to offer Hitler the chancellor position. On January 30 1933, Adolf Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor.

### **The Nazi Cabinet after when Hitler is named Chancellor**

January 30 1933Around noon, a teary-eyed Hitler emerged from the presidential palace. Surrounded by supporters, he got into his car and was driven down the street lined with cheery citizens.

"We've done it! We've done it!" he exclaimed exultantly.

### **The Reichstag Fire and the Enabling Acts**

Despite his being sworn in as Chancellor, Hitler's coalition with the Nationalists still did not give them a majority, with only 247 seats out of a possible 583. On his first day as Chancellor, Hitler called for yet another election- to be held on March 5 1933.

With the SS and the SA overcoming the police and ruling the nation, people who were being harassed or even murdered by the Nazis had nobody to go to. Several days passed and Hermann Göring, an important member of the Nazi Party, claimed that he had uncovered plans for a Communist uprising. In actual fact, he had come across a membership list of the Communist Party and intended to arrest every one of its four thousand members.

It is unknown what precisely happened on February 27 1933, but this is one rendition of the burning of the Reichstag Building.

In Berlin, a deranged Communist named Marinus van der Lubbe, 24, from Holland had, for the past week, been attempting to ignite government buildings to protest capitalism. It is thought that Nazi Storm troopers had befriended the arsonist and even encouraged him to set light to the Reichstag.

This happened at around 9 p.m. President Hindenburg and Vice-Chancellor Papen were dining at a club facing the Reichstag when they noticed the building was ablaze. Hitler was at the apartment of Joseph Goebbels- the Nazi in charge of Propaganda- at the time of the incident.

When Hitler arrived at the scene, he told reporters the following:

"You are now witnessing the beginning of a great epoch [era] in German history! Thus fire is the beginning! The German people have been soft for too long. Every Communist official must be shot. All communist deputies must be hanged this very night. All friends of the Communists must be locked up. And that goes for the Democrats and the Reichsbanner as well."

The following day, Hitler used the Reichstag fire to issue an emergency decree. Thousands of Communists, Social Democrats and Liberals were taken away to SA barracks to be beaten and tortured. Fifty-one anti-Nazis were brutally murdered.

### **Fire engulfs the Reichstag Building**

February 27 1933 On March 5, after an enormous propaganda campaign, the election results were in. The Nazis did not receive a majority- they were given only 44% of the vote or 17 277 180 votes. However, with their coalition with the Nationals, they did have a majority of 16 seats.

Hitler now had a new goal. If he could obtain a two-thirds majority, then he could alter the constitution and give himself dictatorial powers. Needing only another 31 seats to do this, Hitler made use of blackmail, threats and false promises to have his Enabling Act voted for by opposition parties.

The Enabling Act would, for four years, transfer power from the Reichstag to the Reich cabinet, including the power of legislation, budget, approval of treaties and constitutional amendments.

When the Reichstag voted on the Enabling Act, it passed 441 to 84. All opposing acts were from the Social Democrats.

Leader of the latter, Otto Wells, told Hitler subsequently:

"We German Social Democrats pledge ourselves solemnly in this historic hour to the principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and socialism. No Enabling Act can give you power to destroy ideas which are eternal and indestructible."

Hitler, shouting with rage, replied with:

"You are no long needed!.. The star of Germany will rise and yours will sink! Your death knell has sounded!"