*This podcast helps you to understand how Hitler’s early life and career shaped his worldview and led him to join the Nazi party.*

Adolf Hitler was born in the village of Braunau am Inn Austria-Hungary in 1889. Not especially successful at school, his life was shaped by three events as he grew up.

First, the death of his father in 1903 brought Adolf much closer to his mother. He frequently said that he had never been close to his father and it is thought that they disagreed about Adolf’s choice of career. Adolf wanted to attend Art College, whereas his father wanted him to become a civil servant.

The death of his mother in 1907 was the second important event. On his mother’s death, the family doctor said, ‘I have never seen anyone so prostrate with grief as Adolf Hitler.’

That same year saw the third event. Hitler’s application to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna was rejected, as was a further application the following year. For the next five years he spent an odd existence, spending the money he had inherited pursuing a career in art. Hitler ended up living rough in Vienna, earning a living by selling his own hand-painted postcards.

Hitler fled to Munich in 1913 to avoid military service in the Austrian army. However, on the outbreak of the First World War he volunteered to join the German army, feeling this now provided him with a purpose in life. Because he was not a German citizen, a special dispensation allowed him to join up. He served in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment and saw action on the Western Front, including the Battle of the Somme. He was a brave soldier, winning the Iron Cross Second Class in 1914 and Iron Cross First Class in 1918. He reached the rank of *Gefreite* – lance corporal – and was temporarily blinded in a gas attack at the end of the war.

Hitler was angered by the German surrender in 1918. He accepted the idea of *Dolchtoss* – the stab-in-the-back theory. This theory said that the German army didn’t lose the First World War but was betrayed by politicians who overthrew the monarchy who they named the ‘November criminals’.

Hitler stayed in the army at the end of the war and became an informant for the intelligence department in Munich. One of his duties was to attend a meeting of the DAP, the German Workers’ Party, in September 1919. After impressing the Party with a powerful speech, he was encouraged by his army superiors to join. This started Hitler on a political journey, which saw him become the leader of Germany within fourteen years.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the early growth and features of the Nazi Party.*

The NSDAP was founded as the DAP – German Workers’ Party – in 1919 by Anton Drexler. After Adolf Hitler attended a meeting of the DAP in September 1919, he wrote in a letter that he had found a political movement in keeping with his own ideas. Hitler quickly rose through the ranks of the Party. In February 1920, he and Drexler set out their political manifesto, their philosophy for how Germany should be governed. They called this their ‘Twenty-Five Point Programme’. At the same time ‘National Socialist’ was added to the party name and the NSDAP or ‘Nazi’ Party was formed. Hitler would stick by the early ideas of the Nazi Party for the rest of his life, demonstrating their importance to him. So, what were the key features of the early Nazi Party?

The party believed in the *Dolchtoss* theory, that Germany had not lost the war, but been betrayed by civilians who stabbed the country in the back and signed the armistice. Because of this they hated the Treaty of Versailles and describe the Weimar government as the ‘November criminals’. In some ways they were quite socialist – wanting to restrict the profits of companies and more equality between German citizens. However, the Party was very nationalistic. They stressed the ‘*völkisch*’ notion of a pure German people and linked the Treaty of Versailles to a communist-Jewish conspiracy bent on destroying Germany.

These ideas were reflected in the ’Twenty-Five Point Programme’, which promised the union of all Germans to form a Greater Germany, the scrapping of the Treaty of Versailles, citizenship and voting rights to be restricted to people of German racial heritage and government control over businesses that had been formed into corporations.

Hitler’s influence grew and he became leader of the party in 1921, developing his own ideas about his leadership. He proposed the principle of ‘*Führerprinzip*’, which said that he should have absolute power and authority in the Party and be answerable to no one. As leader, Hitler began to make some changes. He adopted the swastika as the emblem of the party and the use of the raised hand salute.

Political meetings in Munich in the early 1920s generated much violence, particularly from their Communist rivals. In order to protect Nazi speakers, protection squads were organised and these developed into the *Sturmabteilung*, or SA, more commonly known as the ‘Brownshirts’ due to the colour of their uniform. The SA swore a pledge of loyalty that required them to be ready to ‘stake life and limb in the struggle for the aims of the movement’ and ‘give absolute military obedience’ to their superiors and leaders’. During the period 1921–23 the SA was commonly used to disrupt the meetings of other political parties, such as the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party.

Membership of the party grew from around 1,100 in 1920 to around 55,000 in November 1923. Hitler’s speeches contained the usual Weimar criticisms, but also increasingly referred to the purity of the German race and contained vitriolic comments about Jews. For Hitler and his followers, the Jewish people were becoming the scapegoats for all Germany’s problems.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the events of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.*

News anchor: I’m afraid we interrupt the current programme to cross live to a breaking news story from our correspondent in Munich.

Reporter: Last night, the night of 8 November 1923, the Nazi Party, led by the outspoken Adolf Hitler, seized control of the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich. They were attempting a putsch, or takeover, of the government of Bavaria, one of the larger German *Länder*. A move very much resembling Italian leader, Benito Mussolini’s, successful ‘march on Rome’ last year, where he seized power in Italy.

600 Nazis broke into the beer hall where the leader of the Bavarian government, Gustav von Kahr, the chief of police, Seisser, and the army chief, von Lossow, were attending a political meeting of supporters. It seems that Hitler demanded they support his takeover after they had been held at gunpoint. Remarkably, we have heard that these three men were then allowed to leave custody, at which point they reneged on their support and organised a military and police force to resist Hitler’s putsch.

It seems that the putsch was motivated by the Nazi Party’s detest of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, made worse by the current French occupation of the Ruhr and the hyperinflation these have caused. The Nazi Party has certainly been growing in recent months, winning the support of General Ludendorff, the popular ex-commander-in-chief of the army. Today there were close to 2000 Nazi brownshirts on the streets of Munich, although, after a short exchange of gunfire with a force led by the chief of police, they have now dispersed. The putsch is seemingly a failure, although 16 Nazis and four police officers were killed.

News anchor: And what’s the significance of this putsch?

Reporter: The significance of this attempted takeover is yet to be discovered, but it seems that Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, has been arrested and will be charged with treason. A guilty verdict could see him sentenced to five years in prison. The Nazi Party itself is to be banned in Germany. Obviously, this is going to have a serious effect on the strength of the party, nevertheless, the publicity they have gained over the past two days has certainly helped to spread their ideas to a wider audience.

News anchor: Thank you very much.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the importance of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.*

News anchor: Well, the big story of the day is the release of Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler from Landsberg Prison after serving just nine months of his five-year sentence. Let’s cross live to our reporter outside the prison who has more.

Reporter: Yes, I’m here outside the prison where we have just heard that Adolf Hitler has been released. Hitler was serving a, some might say lenient, five-year sentence in Landsberg Prison after his failed takeover of the Bavarian government in 1923. The minimum sentence for the charge of treason levelled at him.

As he is released, many people are viewing the trial and subsequent prison sentence as a huge success for the Nazi Party leader. The trial gave him nationwide publicity and introduced the German public to his ideas. Hitler consistently denied the charge of treason, insisting that he was simply attempting to restore Germany’s greatness and resist the weak and feeble Weimar government.

During the trial, the judges appeared sympathetic to his ideas and allowed him to make long speeches to the court in which he poured scorn on the ‘November Criminals’ as he sees them, the Treaty of Versailles and those so-called ‘Jewish bolshevists’ who betrayed Germany. Additionally, his co-conspirator, General Erich Ludendorff, was let off without charge.

News anchor: And how has he made use of his time in Landsberg?

Reporter: Well, it appears that during his time in prison Hitler has had time to reflect on his personal views. He had a relatively easy time inside and was allowed as many visitors as he wanted, receiving large amounts of mail and accessing whatever books he requested. He has formed his ideas into a new autobiography, completed while in jail, called Mein Kampf, or My Struggle. The book sets out Hitler’s political views: his belief in the abolition of the Versailles Treaty and the scapegoating of the Jews; his suggestion that the strongest races should dominate the weaker ones in Germany, which he calls Volksgemeinschaft; and the aim to gain Lebensraum or living space for a greater Germany where all German-speaking people would be incorporated into one nation.

At the same time, it seems that Hitler has learned the lesson of his failed Putsch. He has suggested that he needs full control over the party to guarantee its success and has realised that an armed takeover will not work. He needs to gain power democratically if he is to become leader of Germany.

News anchor: Fascinating! That all suggests that the development and direction of the Nazi party will change dramatically in the years ahead. Thank you very much.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the reorganisation of the Nazi Party from 1924–28.*

The fortunes of the Nazi Party declined while Hitler was in prison. It had been banned but survived secretly with Alfred Rosenberg as replacement leader. Rosenberg had few leadership qualities and the party split into rival groups.

On his release, Hitler persuaded the President of Bavaria to lift the ban on the Nazi party. In February 1925 the Nazi party was re-launched and Hitler began to take control again with his renewed belief in the importance of his total control.

It was decided to create party branches, each was called a Gau. Each Gau was led by a Gauleiter, appointed by Hitler from his closest associates and allies. The Gauleiter helped to push the idea of the Führerprinzip – that Hitler would have complete control over the party.

Possible rivals to Hitler’s leadership, such as Gregor Strasser and Josef Goebbels were won over at the Bamberg Conference in 1926. Strasser was made propaganda leader for the party and Goebbels was appointed Gauleiter of Berlin.

Hitler set about eliminating his rivals. He forced Ernst Röhm to resign as leader of the SA. He was worried about the power of the SA and the consequences if he failed to control them. He set up his own bodyguard – the Schutzstaffel or SS – who would swear loyal to his leadership alone. He set about indoctrinating the youth of Germany with his message through the establishment of the Hitlerjugend or Hitler Youth.

By 1926, Hitler was the undisputed leader of the party – der Führer. The Twenty-Five Point Programme became the cornerstone of Nazi Party policy and the Nazis set about using endless propaganda to push this message.

Before 1928, Hitler had appealed mainly to urban voters, however, he now decided that rural Germans should be targeted. Farmers were already beginning to experience economic difficulties and were finding Nazism increasingly attractive.

Hitler’s reorganisation of the party succeeded in securing his authority and gain members, increasing from 27,000 in 1925 to over 100,000 by 1928. It was now a nationwide party that began to attract all classes. However, this popularity failed to translate into electoral success. In the 1928 election the Nazi Party won only 12 seats, falling from 32 in 1924.

Therefore the mid to late 1920s are often described as the ‘lean years’ of support for the Nazi party. Nevertheless, the political and economic events of 1929 would help the party rise from relative obscurity to become one of the leading parties in the country. The ‘lean years’ were at an end.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the key reasons for the growth in support for the Nazi party in the late 1920s and early 1930s.*

Here are the top five reasons for the growth in support for the Nazi party between 1929 and 1933.

In at number five: Josef Goebbels and Nazi propaganda

The Nazis were most fortunate in having a person who understood how to use the mass media and also manipulate huge audiences. Josef Goebbels ensured that the Nazi message was simple and frequently repeated. By the early 1930s, the Nazis owned 120 daily or weekly newspapers regularly read by hundreds of thousands of Germans. The Nazi message was heard everywhere, especially on the radio.

Coming in at number four: The financial support received by the Nazis

The Nazi party received funds from leading industrial backers, such as Thyssen, Krupp and Bosch. These industrialists were terrified of the communist threat and were also concerned at the growth of trade union power. They knew that Hitler hated communism and that he would reduce the influence of the unions. By 1932, the Nazis had also developed close links with the National Party (the DNVP). The National Party leader, Alfred Hugenberg, was a newspaper tycoon and permitted the Nazis to publish articles that attacked Chancellor Brüning. Hugenburg’s support meant that the Nazis stayed at the forefront of people’s minds.

Linked to this, at number three: The fear of a communist takeover, particularly among the middle classes and business owners

During the years of the Weimar republic, the German Communist Party, known as the KPD and led by Ernst Thälmann, was the largest in Europe, usually polling at 10 per cent of the vote.

At number two: The role of Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler

Hitler could be all things to all people. The image he created was that his whole existence was given over to Germany and there were no distractions to prevent him achieving his goals. He had created a philosophy which all could comprehend and, furthermore, his vision of the future revolved around making Germany the strongest nation in the world. Hitler had the one characteristic which most other politicians lacked – charisma.

And in at number one: The impact of the Wall Street Crash of October 1929

The economic collapse in America caused loans to be recalled from Germany, resulting in huge unemployment and homelessness. By January 1932, 4 out of every 10 Germans were unemployed – that is over six million people. If a political party could offer clear and simple solutions to the economic problems, it would readily win votes. The Nazi party was ready to offer that solution.

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*This podcast helps you to analyse and explain the success of the Nazi Party in Reichstag elections from 1929 to 1933.*

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 had a huge impact on Germany. American financiers called in the loans promised under the Dawes Plan and German industry ground to a halt. The German people were looking for a solution and the Nazis responded with a simple message. They reopened the old war wounds of the Treaty of Versailles and scapegoated the Jews. At the same time their anti-communist beliefs won them the backing of German business. The Nazi Party won 107 seats in the Reichstag in September 1930.

By 1932, the Nazis had mastered the art of propaganda and political campaigning. Hitler had stood against Hindenburg for President, coming in second to the war hero. Josef Goebbels, the Nazi propagandist, made sure that the Nazi message was heard right across the country. Hitler was able to speak in as many as five cities a day, using an aeroplane to fly from one venue to the next. Nazi policies were heard on the radio, in film and at mass rallies. The Nazis could not have conducted their campaigns without the financial backing from leading industrialists and businessmen. One example of how funds were crucial came in 1932, when 600,000 copies of the Nazi economic programme were produced and distributed in the July Reichstag elections. The Nazi Party won 230 seats in the July 1932 Reichstag election and was now the largest party in Germany.

However, the Chancellor at the time, Franz von Papen, was convinced that the Nazis could not continue to make gains and would begin to lose momentum. He was right; as in the November 1932 election the Nazis won 196 seats, 34 fewer than in July. Nevertheless, they were still the largest party in Germany and their leader, Adolf Hitler, would take up the position of Chancellor in January of the next year.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the political developments in 1932 that led to Hitler becoming Chancellor of Germany.*

In early 1932 Hitler had stood for election as President of Germany. He had been quite successful, coming second to the First World War hero Paul von Hindenburg. The Nazis had mastered the art of the political campaign and were now the second largest party in Germany.

When a general election was called for 31 July 1932, the Nazis were optimistic about improving on the number of votes they had won in the previous election. There was much violence in the run up to the election. About 100 people were killed and more than 1,125 wounded in clashes between political parties. The Communists had their own militia, the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (Red Front Fighters), and there were countless fights between them and the SA.

The Nazis won 230 seats in the July 1932 election and became the largest party in the Reichstag. However, Franz von Papen of the Centre Party, although not having the most seats, did not relinquish the position of chancellor to Hitler, and began to scheme with President Hindenburg. Hitler demanded the post of chancellor but Hindenburg refused. With no majority, it was not possible for any party to control the Reichstag and Papen dissolved it in September with new elections set for November. Papen held the belief that the Nazis were losing momentum and if he held on they would slowly disappear from the scene. They did lose some support in the November elections, dropping to 196 seats. However, Papen did not secure a majority and could not organise a coalition. Once again, Hitler demanded the post of Chancellor. Papen suggested abolishing the Weimar constitution as a solution, but the Minister of Defence, Kurt von Schleicher, convinced Hindenburg that this could result in civil war. Papen lost Hindenburg’s confidence and resigned, succeeded by Schleicher, whose name translates as ‘sneaky’. Schleicher hoped to control the Reichstag by forming a cross-front of left and right parties.

Papen was determined to regain power. He met with Adolf Hitler in January 1933 and they agreed that Hitler should lead a Nazi-Nationalist coalition with Papen as vice-chancellor. The army, major landowners and leading industrialists were concerned that Schleicher was opening the door to communism, so convinced Hindenburg to back Hitler and Papen’s proposal. Papen claimed that he would be able to control Hitler – that he would ‘make Hitler squeak’. Hindenburg agreed and on 30 January 1930, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. He had achieved his political aim by legal and democratic means.

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