*This podcast helps you to understand the significance of the Reichstag Fire of 1933.*

When Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, there were only two other Nazis in the Cabinet of twelve – Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Goering. Hitler’s position was not strong because the Nazis and their allies, the Nationalist Party, did not have a majority in the Reichstag. Furthermore, von Papen, the conservative vice-chancellor, claimed that he would be able to control Hitler, especially as President Hindenburg detested him. However, it was soon clear that von Papen’s claim was utterly wrong.

Hitler immediately called a general election for the 5th of March, hoping it would give him a clear majority in parliament. If he controlled the Reichstag, then he would be able to make those laws that he needed to tighten his grip on the nation. It would all be done by the rule of law – Nazi law. Violence and terror were again seen in this election campaign with 70 deaths in the weeks leading up to voting day. Once again, Hitler received large amounts of money from leading industrialists to assist his campaign and, with access to the media, he knew that Goebbels would be able to put the Nazi message over unceasingly.

One week before the election, on evening of the 27th of February, the Reichstag building was set on fire. There is no conclusive proof for who started the fire, but Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch Communist, was found at the scene of the fire and arrested. Hitler and Goebbels made the most of this opportunity to claim that van der Lubbe had started the fire because the communists were about to stage a takeover of the government.

The day after the fire, Hitler used these fears to persuade President Hindenburg to sign the ‘Decree for the Protection of People and State’. The decree created a permanent state of emergency and suspended basic civil rights. It gave the Nazis the ability to imprison large numbers of their political opponents. In the week after the fire, 4,000 Communist Party members were arrested, including their leader Ernst Thälmann. This would give the Nazis a huge advantage over their rivals in the upcoming March 5th election.

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*This podcast is a conversation between two students that helps you to assess the significance of the Enabling Act of 1933.*

Student 1: You know what, I’ve been thinking a lot about what we’ve been doing in History, but I’m still trying to work out how Hitler became a dictator.

Student 2: I think it all goes back to the Reichstag Fire. I think that was a really important event because it was on the day following the Reichstag Fire that Hitler persuaded Hindenburg to sign the ‘Decree for the Protection of People and State’. That allowed the Nazis to attack and imprison their political opponents, like the Communist leader, Ernst Thälmann.

Student 1: Yes, and soon after the Nazi Party won 43.9 per cent of the vote in the March 1933 election and, after that, formed a coalition with the National Party, so Hitler had achieved a majority in the Reichstag. That was important because Hitler could use his majority to pass the Enabling Act.

Student 2: But, remember, he did need two thirds of the Reichstag to support the Act, so it was also important that he managed to get the Centre Party to support him by promising to respect the rights of the Catholic Church.

Student 1: And, because he had imprisoned the Communists and banned them from voting, he didn’t even need as many votes to pass the law.

Student 2: This was a really important law, too, because essentially it gave him the ability to do whatever he wanted. It was pretty much the end of democracy in Germany.

Student 1: So what did the Enabling Act allow him to do?

Student 2: Well, it allowed him to bring German society in line with Nazi philosophy through a policy called *Gleichschaltung.* This was the idea that the Nazis would control every aspect of life in Germany. The Enabling Act also meant that he could ban trade unions and strikes. Hitler said that trade unions were no longer needed, because the Nazi German Labour Front would replace them and would decide wages.

Student 1: Oh yes, wasn’t that when they opened the first concentration camp at Dachau, for the dissenting workers?

Student 2: Yes, they were sent there for political re-education. They also used the Act to ban other political parties, so in the election at the end of 1933 they won 95.2 per cent of the vote.

Student 1: How come it wasn’t 100 per cent, if there weren’t any other parties?

Student 2: Some people spoiled their ballot papers, so they didn’t count. The final consequence of the Act was that he abolished the *Länder* system, because they each had their own regional parliament and Hitler thought that this reduced his centralised power. He wanted to make all the decisions.

Student 1: That was really helpful, thanks!

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*This podcast helps you to understand the events of the Night of the Long Knives.*

The Night of the Long Knives is the name given to Hitler’s purging of his political and military rivals in the SA (*Sturmabteilung*).

The SA had helped to create an atmosphere of terror and intimidation in the first months of Nazi control. Some leading Nazis were worried that their violent activities might cause a backlash against Hitler and began to look for ways of controlling the SA. Furthermore, Hitler realised he needed the support of the army to establish his dictatorship. There was an ideological disagreement with Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA, who had hoped that the army would be incorporated into the *Sturmabteilung*. Röhm and the SA tended to favour the socialist elements of the Nazi Party because they were largely working class men looking for greater equality between German citizens. There was also tension for Hitler because his personal bodyguard, the SS led by Heinrich Himmler, wished to break away from the SA. It was Himmler who suggested to Hitler that Röhm was planning to use the SA to seize power. As a result of this suggestion, Hitler took action against the SA on 30 June 1934.

The 30 June became known as the Night of the Long Knives. Röhm and the main leaders of the SA, Karl Ernst and Edmund Hennes, were shot by members of the SS. Former Chancellor and rival Kurt von Schleicher was murdered, as was Gregor Strasser, an old rival in the Nazi Party who had similar ideas to Röhm. Figures vary, but it is thought that around 400 people in total were murdered in one night of violence.

The purge is often seen as the turning point for Hitler’s rule in Germany. He eradicated would-be opponents and secured the support of the army. The SA was relegated to a minor role and, if there was any doubt about Hitler’s rule, it was now clear that fear and terror would play a significant role.

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*The Nazi Party planned to control all aspects of life for German citizens. They called this* Gleichschaltung*. In order to establish this control, the Nazis used several organisations to instil fear into the people. This podcast runs through the features, aims and responsibilities of four key organisations.*

Number one: The *Schutzstaffel*, known as the SS.

The SS was originally formed in 1925 to act as a bodyguard unit for Hitler. In 1929 Himmler took over leadership of the SS and it established a clear identity. Members wore black and were expected to be fine examples of the Aryan race. They should marry racially pure wives and show loyalty to the Führer.

By 1934 there were 50,000 members of the SS. This had grown to 250,000 by 1939. After the Night of the Long Knives, the SS became responsible for the removal of all opposition within Germany. Within the SS, the SD had the task of maintaining security within the party and the country.

Number two: The *Sicherheitsdientz*, known as the SD

The SD was set up in 1931 as the intelligence body of the Nazi Party. It was placed under the command of Heinrich Himmler, who appointed Reinhard Heydrich to oversee the department. The Nazi Party employed members of the SD and it attracted many professional and highly educated people, such as lawyers, economists and social scientists. The main aim of the SD was to discover actual and potential enemies of the Nazi Party and ensure that they were removed.

Number three: The *Geheimestaatspolizei*, known as the Gestapo

The Gestapo was set up in 1933 by Goering to act as a secret police force for the Nazi Party. In 1936 it came under the control of Himmler and the SS. By 1939, the Gestapo was the most important police section of the Nazi state. It was tasked with arresting, interrogating and imprisoning those suspected of opposing the state. The most likely destination for prisoners would be a concentration camp run by the SS. It has been estimated that, by 1939, there were about 160,000 people under arrest for political crimes.

Number four: The concentration camps

At first concentration camps were set up to detain political opponents including Communists, Socialists, trade unionists, and others who had left-wing or liberal political views. In 1939, there were more than 150,000 people under arrest for political offenses. The SD and SS ran the concentration camps, though only the Gestapo had the authority to send people there. The earliest of these camps was in Dachau, near Munich. Others followed. Prisoners were categorised and their crimes denoted by a series of different coloured triangles. Those who wore black triangles were vagrants and ‘work-shy’, pink triangles denoted homosexual people and red triangles were for political prisoners. At first, work in the camps was hard, but pointless. Like breaking rocks. Gradually, prisoners were used as forced labour in quarries, coal mines or factories. Inmates were underfed and mortality rates were very high. If an inmate was killed in the camp, relatives would receive a note saying they had died of disease or were shot trying to escape.

These four elements of the police state were key in maintaining the Nazi dictatorship through a climate of fear.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the Nazi control of the legal system in Germany.*

Even though the Nazis controlled law making in the Reichstag, Hitler wanted to ensure that judges interpreted all laws in a Nazi fashion. Therefore the courts had to experience Gleichschaltung, just as any other part of society.

All judges had to become members of the National Society for the Maintenance of Law, or NRSB and, from 1936, they had to wear the swastika and Nazi eagle on their robes. The Nazi legal expert, Professor Karl Eckhardt, put forward an explanation of the judge’s role in 1936:

The judge is to safeguard the order of the racial community, to prosecute all acts harmful to the community and to arbitrate in disagreements.

The National Socialist ideology, especially as expressed in the party programme and in the speeches of our Führer, is the basis for interpreting legal sources.

The result was that, at all times, Nazi views were upheld in the courts.

In October 1933, the German Lawyers Front was established and there were more than 10,000 members by the end of the year. Lawyers had to swear that they would ‘strive as German jurists to follow the course of our Führer to the end of our days’.

In 1934, a new People’s Court was established to try cases of treason. The judges were loyal Nazis. Judges knew that the Minister of Justice would check to see if they had been lenient and sometimes Hitler would alter sentences if he felt they were too soft.

There was no independent legal system to interpret the law. The courts existed entirely to uphold the views of the Nazi dictatorship.

By the end of 1934, Hitler controlled the Reichstag, the army and the legal system. The Nazi police and security organisations instilled an atmosphere of terror. It was now impossible for anyone to escape the power and grip of the Nazis.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the Nazi policies towards the Christian Churches.*

Nazi ideals were fundamentally opposed to the beliefs and values of the Christian Church. The Nazis glorified strength and violence, despised the weak, believed in racial superiority and saw Hitler as a god-like figure.

However, Germany was essentially a Christian country, almost two-thirds of the population were Protestant, mostly in the north; and almost a third was Catholic, mostly in the south. Therefore, Hitler couldn’t immediately persecute Christianity for fear of losing support.

Hitler set up a Ministry of Church Affairs in 1935 in an attempt to gain control over the Church. He also encouraged the `German Faith Movement’. This aimed to revive German pre-Christian pagan practices and Hitler hoped it would replace Christian values and ceremonies. However, only about five per cent of the population joined it.

Although many Catholics supported the Nazis due to their opposition to communism, Hitler saw the Catholic Church as threat to his Nazi state for three main reasons:

* First, Catholics had split loyalties. Their first allegiance was not to Hitler but to the Pope. Hitler said that a person was either Christian or a German, but could not be both.
* Second, there were many Catholic schools and youth groups that educated young Germans with a message at odds with the views of the Nazi party.
* Third, Catholics had consistently supported the Centre Party, which Hitler intended to remove.

At first, Hitler decided to co-operate with the Catholic Church. In July 1933 he signed a concordat with Pope Pius XI. The Pope agreed to stay out of politics in return for Hitler’s promise not to interfere with the Church. Within a few months, Hitler had broken this agreement: Catholic schools and youth movements were shut down; priests were harassed, often ending up in concentration camps; and monasteries were closed.

There were some Protestants who admired Hitler. They were called ‘German Christians’. They established a new Reich Church, led by Ludwig Müller, which hoped to combine all German Protestants under one Church. However, many Protestants opposed Nazism, which they saw as conflicting with their Christian beliefs. They were led by Pastor Martin Niemöller and, in 1933, set up the Pastors’ Emergency League for those who opposed the Nazis.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the ways in which Goebbels and the Ministry of Propaganda attempted to control German culture and beliefs.*

Josef Goebbels used his Ministry of Public Propaganda and Enlightenment and the Reich Chamber of Culture to control the thoughts, beliefs and opinions of the German people using a variety of methods. Here are six of the key methods used.

The first method is mass rallies.

An annual mass rally was held at Nuremburg to advertise the power of the Nazi state and spectacular parades were held on other special occasions, such as Hitler’s birthday. The Nuremburg rallies lasted for several days and attracted almost one million people each year after the Nazis came to power.

The second method is literature.

All books, plays and poems were carefully censored and controlled to make sure they put across the Nazi message. In May 1933 students in Berlin burned 20,000 books written by Jews, communists and anti-Nazi university professors in a massive bonfire. Many writers were forced to write books, plays and poems that praised Hitler’s achievements. Some famous German writers, such as Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht, went into self-imposed exile rather than live under the Nazis. About 2500 writers left Germany in the years up to 1939.

The third method is newspapers.

Non-Nazi newspapers and magazines were closed down. By 1935, the Nazis had closed down more than 1,600 newspapers and thousands of magazines. The Reich Press Law was passed in October 1933 and it resulted in the removal of Jewish and left-wing journalists. Editors were told what they could print by the Ministry of Propaganda.

The fourth method is radio.

All radio stations were placed under Nazi control. Cheap, mass-produced radios were sold in order to reach as many people as possible. By 1939, about 70 per cent of German families owned a radio. Sets were installed in cafes, factories, schools and offices and loudspeakers were placed in the streets. It was important that the Nazi message was heard by as many people as much as was possible.

The fifth method is film.

Goebbels realised early on the popularity of the cinema. In 1933, cinema audiences in Germany exceeded 250 million. All film plots were shown to Goebbels before going into production. He realised that overtly political films bored many Germans, so instead love films were given a Nazi slant. All film performances were accompanied by a 45-minute newsreel which glorified Hitler and publicised Nazi achievements.

Finally, the sixth method is sport.

Success in sport was important to promote the Nazi regime. The major sporting showcase was the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Nazi Germany wanted to show to the world that Germany was a modern, well-organised society and that Aryans were superior. For the most part it was a great public relations success.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the ways in which the Nazis controlled culture and the arts in Germany.*

Interviewer: In order to help us understand the ways in which the Nazis attempted to control the arts, we’ve enlisted the help of a cultural historian. Can I start by asking the Nazi view on modern music at the time, such as jazz?

Historian: Well, Hitler hated modern music. For example, jazz music was banned as Hitler viewed it as racially inferior. Instead, the Nazis encouraged traditional German folk music together with the classical music of German composers, such as Brahms, Beethoven and especially Richard Wagner, Hitler’s favourite composer.

Interviewer: Fascinating. So, a much more traditional approach to music. Was art treated in the same way?

Historian: Yes. Of course, Hitler had lived as an artist and considered himself an expert in this area. He hated modern art, which he believed was backward, unpatriotic and Jewish. Such art was called ‘degenerate’, and was banned. He encouraged art that highlighted Germany’s greatness and glorified its past. He wanted art to reject the ugly and weak and elevate healthy, strong heroes. Paintings typically showed the Nazi idea of a simple peasant life or heroic hard work undertaken by perfect Aryan specimens, women as housewives and mothers, men as labourers.

Interviewer: I see, so art seems to have been used to reinforce the Nazi message. Was this reflected in building and architecture of the time?

Historian: Yes, Hitler took a particular interest in architecture. For public buildings he favoured classical or ‘monumental style’ stone buildings that were heavily influenced by Ancient Greece and Rome. Hitler particularly admired Roman and Greek styles as he said that Jewish people had not been able to ‘contaminate’ it.

Interviewer: They really did influence all aspects of life in Germany. One final question, if I may, did this translate onto the stage in the theatre?

Historian: Yes, theatre was encouraged to portray the glory of German history. Interestingly, cheap theatre tickets were made available to the general public to encourage people to see many plays with a Nazi political or racial theme.

Interviewer: Fascinating. Thank you very much!

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*There was opposition from both the Protestant and Catholic Churches to the Nazi Regime. This podcast helps you to understand the nature of this opposition.*

First, let’s look at Protestant opposition.

Pastor Martin Niemoller led the Protestant opposition to the Nazi government. He opposed Nazi control of the Church and became the leader of the Confessional Church, which followed traditional German Protestantism. He established the Pastors’ Emergency League, which opposed Nazi attempts to control the Protestant Church and saw membership rise to 7,000 by 1934. However, many pastors left in the face of Nazi persecution.

Niemoller was arrested in 1937 after preaching that people must obey God, not man. This undermined the Nazi belief in the *führerprinzip*. He was tried and sent to prison. However, the Gestapo deemed his punishment too lenient and from 1938 he was sent to first Sachsenhausen and then Dachau concentration camps.

After the end of the war Niemoller acknowledged that the Church hadn’t done enough to oppose the Nazis. His words became famous:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.

Secondly, the Catholic Church also presented opposition to the Nazi regime.

Despite the 1933 concordat, there was tension between the Nazis and the Catholic Church. In 1937, Pope Pius XI issued a letter, called an encyclical, to Catholic priests in Germany. In it he attacked the Nazi system, though he didn’t name Hitler or the Nazis in his criticisms. Priests read the letter to their congregations clearly showing they were trying to resist the Nazi attempts to control the church. However, the Nazi reaction was to take an even firmer line and close Catholic groups, prevent Catholics joining the Nazi Party and remove symbols such as the cross and the crucifix from Catholic schools.

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*This podcast helps you to understand the ways in which young people resisted the Nazi regime through a conversation between two students.*

Student 1: Do you think you would have been taken in by the Nazi indoctrination?

Student 2: That’s a really hard question: I’m not sure. I know that by 1936, before it became compulsory, many young people had joined the Hitler Youth, so I think that a lot of people must have been taken in by it all. However, I know it wasn’t popular with some of its members and not all young people accepted the Nazi ideas.

Student 1: Yes, indeed some young people rebelled against the Nazis and formed their own gangs. I like to think that I would have been an Edelweiss Pirate. The Edelweiss Pirates wore really outlandish clothes that the Nazis hated, they had skull and crossbones or edelweiss flower badges to recognise each other, they listened to banned swing music and wrote anti-Nazi graffiti.

Student 2: And they fought with the Hitler Youth groups in their cities and created no-go zones for Nazi youths.

Student 1: That’s right. They were mainly working-class teenagers and often went looking for Hitler Youth groups to beat them up. I like their song that goes: ‘Hitler’s power may lay us low, And keep us locked in chains, But we will smash the chains one day, We’ll be free again.’ Having said that, the Nazis didn’t see them as a threat, so I doubt they represented serious opposition to the regime.

Student 2: Neither were the Swing Youth. They would listen to forbidden music that the government classed as non-German and as developed by black or Jewish people. The girls wore bright make-up and the boys grew their hair long. However, although there was various youth opposition to the Nazis, I can understand why more people didn’t oppose the Nazis because they were scared or taken in by the propaganda of the regime.

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