**Reichstag Fire**

Hitler moved almost immediately to gain an overall majority in the Reichstag, calling fresh elections for 5 March 1933. The burning of the Reichstag building on 27 February gave him the opportunity to weaken the Communists’ election campaign. Because a Dutch communist – Marinus van der Lubbe – was captured at the scene, the Nazis blamed the Communists for the blaze. However there remained the suspicion that the Nazis were involved.

Hitler used the fire to exploit Hindenburg’s fear of a communist takeover, persuading him to approve the decree *For the Protection of People and State*. This gave the government the power to suspend many civil rights. It violently disrupted the election campaigns of opposition parties and intimidated voters.

Despite their advantages, the Nazis failed to win an overall majority in the Reichstag, winning 288 seats. However, with the support of the Nationalist Party, the Nazis could now count on just over 50 per cent of the votes in the Reichstag. This left Hitler in a stronger position within the coalition and the cabinet.

**Enabling Act**

Hitler moved to amend the Constitution to allow the government to introduce laws without the Reichstag’s approval for four years. This required the support of two-thirds of the Reichstag.

Hitler therefore ensured that most opponents were not there to vote against the measure.

With the Communist deputies already in jail, Hitler just needed the support of the Centre Party

to achieve the two-thirds needed. This was achieved by a promise to protect the rights of the

Catholic Church. When it came to the vote, only the Social Democrats opposed the measure.

***Gleichschaltung***

Within months, Hitler had eliminated most of the remaining political opposition in

Germany as the government implemented a process known as ***Gleichschaltung*** (co-ordination of all aspects of life to fit in with Nazi ideals).

◆ In April 1933 Jews and political opponents were removed from jobs in the civil service

and legal profession. Key positions within Germany’s state governments were taken over

by Nazis.

◆ In May 1933 all trade unions were outlawed and replaced by a Nazi union, the DAF

(German Labour Front).

◆ In July 1933 Germany became a one-party state. However, by this stage there were few

other parties to get rid of. The Social Democrats had already been banned, whilst the

Centre Party had dissolved itself.

◆ In January 1934 Hitler introduced the *Law for the Reconstruction of the State*. This

abolished all of Germany’s state governments apart from Prussia’s, which was to be run

by Herman Göring, a leading Nazi.

**Divisions Within**

Hitler’s position was still under threat; however, now the danger came from the SA,

commanded for the last two years by Ernst Röhm. Under his leadership, the organisation

had expanded to over two million members (some historians put it as high as 4.5 million).

Röhm believed that Hitler’s take-over would be followed by a second revolution in which

the power of Germany’s economic old guard and the army would be shattered and the SA

would become Germany’s new army. Röhm now wanted this second revolution to start.

Röhm’s plans worried the army, which made clear its displeasure to Hitler. This concerned

Hitler for two reasons:

◆ He feared the army. It was the only group that could challenge his power and authority.

◆ He needed the army. Many of its leaders supported his foreign policy aims.

Hitler acted on the night of 30 June 1934, an event that became known as the ‘Night of the

Long Knives’. Anyone he suspected of threatening his control of the party was eliminated.

Key SA leaders, including Röhm, were executed. So too were a number of old political

opponents, including General von Schleicher and Gustav von Kahr. In total, nearly 200

people were killed.

**Führer**

With the SA threat gone, the only remaining obstacle was Hindenburg. He died on 2

August 1934. A day earlier, a new law was passed combining the posts of Chancellor and

President and giving all powers to Hitler, who would become Führer and Reich Chancellor.

The army now demonstrated their gratitude to Hitler for the eradication of the SA threat

by swearing an oath of personal loyalty to the Führer. From this point on, their fate was

inextricably linked to his.