

MODERN HISTORY: *GERMANY*

Explain how Hitler's position was transformed from 'legal chancellor' to 'legal dictator' in the period 1933 to 1934.

Adolf Hitler's transformation from 'legal chancellor' to 'legal dictator' in the period 1933 to 1934 was due to the extremities of his relentless pursuit to consolidate power. By annihilating the feeble facets of the Weimar Republic, Hitler desired to instil principles of Lebensraum, Herrenvolk and Fuhrerprinzip to exemplify his innate belief of Social Darwinism. With such an immense transition, Hitler's malign paradigm shift quelled the general consensus of misery yet dichotomously manifested fear. As to how this was achieved at such a magnitude one must analyse Hitler and the mitigating circumstances that ensued from the appointment of Hitler as chancellor in 1933 to when dictatorship was firmly embedded in society by the end of 1934. Thus, this essay will encompass why Hitler decided to become chancellor constitutionally, how this affected his actions and role of propaganda whilst delving into the beneficial events such as; the Reichstag fire, the 'Decree of Defence of People and State', the March Elections, the Enabling Act, the process of 'Gleichschaltung', the Night of the Long Knives, and the swearing allegiance, that were catalytic to becoming a 'legal dictator'.

To analyse the aforementioned events that created the legal dictatorship, it is imperative to understand why Hitler decided upon pursuing chancellorship constitutionally. The fundamental reason for this transition in Hitler's mentality is due to the abysmal failure of the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. Indeed, Hitler through his violent approach using the small and relatively unknown Nazi party exuded political naivety as he was swiftly arrested for treason. Albeit this embarrassment, Hitler became a national figure as his unforeseen oration in court proved to be a success. Thus, with the capability to morph the dire situation to be beneficiary, Hitler encapsulated the intelligence to learn from his dire mistake. The following primary source epitomises his manipulative intentions, as Hitler declared: 'it will be necessary to pursue a new policy... if outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the result will be guaranteed by their own constitution... we shall have a majority and after that – Germany.' Hence, by coming to power constitutionally and becoming chancellor in January 1933, there could be no opposition to Hitler as his credibility overruled any apprehensions.

Furthermore by constitutionally ascending to chancellorship it is undeniable that Hitler would have to sustain this practice as a Chancellor to uphold his credibility. However, Hitler's Nazi Party was in a precarious position as only 100 seats were held due to the results of the November election and hence, obscured the road to dictatorship as an absolute majority was not held. Adding to this degree of difficulty, Hitler had a mere 3 Nazi cabinet seats due to the underlying motives of Von Papen and was labelled the 'chancellor in chains' and hence various political figures underestimated his abilities. Thus, Hitler's desire for an absolute majority in the Reichstag was exacerbated and an election to meet Hitler's aim was to be held in March 1933.

Additionally, is it plausible to believe that the timely incident of the February 1933 Reichstag fire allowed Hitler to exploit circumstances and inevitably manifest the first signs of his sinister intentions to become dictator. The reason as to why this incident was so advantageous to Hitler's pursuit of dictatorship is that a Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe was caught at the crime scene and later arrested. However, a plethora of historians have counteracted this argument due its convenient timing, putting the blame instead on Hitler and the Nazis. One such renowned historian, Alan Bullock stated 'the question, who started the [Reichstag] fire? Remains open, but there is no doubt about the answer to the question, who profited by it? Hitler needs no prompting.' Undoubtedly, the fact that van der Lubbe was a communist substantiated Hitler's views on communism. As an opportunist, Hitler unleashed a wave of anti-communist hatred that intensified fear amidst Germany to strengthen his Nazi election campaign. Hermann Goring also exhibited his hatred of communism as he declared: 'This is the beginning of the Communist revolution! We must not wait a minute. We will show no mercy. Every Communist official must be shot, where he is found.' It is irrefutable that

such hostility amongst the Nazis would then resonate with average German citizens as their support for the Nazi party was amplified and the likelihood of an absolute majority in the upcoming elections seemed promising.

In direct response to the outcry of an assumed Communism uprising against the government, President Hindenburg issued a 'Law for the Protection of the People and State'. Enacted under the infamously controversial emergency decree in Article 48 of the Weimar constitution it was one of the first legal steps undertaken to establish a single-party dictatorship in Germany. By issuing the decree, constitutional protections on civil liberties were suspended. Such a step taken away from the supposed democracy unmistakably was detrimental to the Communist election campaign. For instance, Stormtroopers arrested over 4000 Communists, shut down the Communist newspapers and broke up their meetings by means of brutality and intimidation. Furthermore, this blatant subversion of the Constitution under Article 48 held the mark of legality and Hitler was able to continue his reign of power.

Despite Hitler's steadfast refusal to succumb to failure, the results of the March elections were disappointing as he did not initially gain absolute majority. Having an unprecedented 44.9% of the total vote undoubtedly due to the ramifications of the Reichstag fire, Hitler overcame this setback by persuading the Nationalist Party to join forces with the Nazi Party, resulting in an absolute majority. Although with this majority, dictatorship was not in Hitler's grasp. Therefore, Hitler wanted the Reichstag to pass an 'Enabling Law' and so to change Germany's constitution. The Enabling Law essentially allowed Hitler to personally control the executive and the legislative power, as consent was no longer needed. It seems as if the chances of the law becoming a reality were minimal however through the unknown process of arresting and excluding 81 Communist deputies, the law was passed and Hitler was bestowed with dictatorial powers for four years. Democracy ceased to exist. This vote not only reflects a government bereft of intelligence, it also emphasised how much power Hitler held without the Enabling Law.

To further consolidate his power and strengthen his dictatorship, Hitler had to take his actions to unprecedented levels and thus initiated the process of Gleichschaltung. The notion of this term derives from the practice of 'enforced coordination of all levels and interest groups in society' or simply put, 'bringing into line'. Indeed, emphasising Hitler's paramount hatred towards democracy yet ironically he still tried to maintain his supposed integrity through law-abiding acts, no matter how unjust they were. Hence, with the unparalleled authority that Hitler held solely due to the Enabling Act, Hitler succeeded in bringing various facets of society into line. These facets included the states, trade unions and political parties. Despite the blatant difficulty in instigating the formidable overhaul, Hitler brought the aforementioned into line systematically with ease, exemplifying his resilience and supremacy. The eighteen state parliaments were the first to have its system altered as from 31 March 1933 it was completely reorganised with the majority of seats belonging to the Nazis. Moreover, Trade Unions also suffered the full brunt of Gleichschaltung on 2 May as they were effectively merged in a 'German Labour Front' that unsurprisingly was directed by a Nazi. Lastly, parties such as the Social Democrats and the Communists were consequently annihilated and resulted in one sole party in existence by July – the Nazi Party. Furthermore, on the first anniversary of Hitler's accession to power, all eighteen state parliaments were formally eradicated under the passing of the Law for the Reconstruction of the Reich. Ultimately, Gleichschaltung was simply a euphemism for annihilation as it aided Hitler in his transition from chancellor to dictator under the facade of a legal premise.

Propaganda itself was pivotal to morphing Hitler's legal chancellorship to legal dictatorship. As every brutal action instigated by Hitler and his Nazi parties created a negative reaction, the practice of indoctrination had to become prevalent in Germany. Nazi propaganda was essentially designed to foster indoctrination as it made it difficult to distinguish between nationalism and the radical and revolutionary implications of the Nazi racialist principles. Indeed, with the plethora of atrocities being committed by Hitler, the general populous had to be severely indoctrinated. This was partly done through Joseph Goebbels as the Minister of Enlightenment and Propaganda contributed to the movement of dictatorship. Examples of the indoctrination through propaganda includes; the

communist fear through the Reichstag fire creating beneficial results in the March elections and the propaganda used in concentration camps. Moreover, those directly involved in the opposition were sent to these prison camps and inmates had accumulate over 33,000 and thus propaganda was established to emulate 'benign' activities, concealing the true extent of the suffering caused by the extremities of torture. Thus, propaganda was critical to enabling the reality of the unjust dictator-like actions undertaken by Hitler to be hidden.

Within a span of a year and a half, Hitler seemed to easily make significant progress in the transformation from his position from chancellor to a dictator. Although despite what supposedly was a smooth phase from the two conflicting embodiments, there were foreboding threats to Hitler and his newfound success. The SA, Reichswehr, and Hindenburg all together posed as a threat through varying circumstances. The SA and its leader Ernst Rohm was a threat from the beginning as their 3 million strong force could potentially create an uprising. Indeed, this was possible as Rohm sought a radical Germany that could include the removal of Hitler himself. Furthermore, Rohm as an ambitious person, desired to merge his army with the already existing Reichswehr who was neglected in the first year of Hitler's chancellorship. Adding to this potential threat, Hindenburg pressured Hitler to subdue the SA or face the possibility of losing chancellorship through the declaration of 'martial law'. With such a looming possibility, Hitler reacted immediately with the help of the SS, Goebbels and Goring. Otherwise known as the 'Night of the Long Knives', the termination of Rohm, SA leaders, along with the murders of former chancellor von Schleicher and Geyr Strasser ensued. Evidently, Hitler abandoned his legal regime as the blatant murders were necessary for Hitler to retain his chancellorship. Continuing with the theme of deaths, Hindenburg conveniently passed away from old age in August 1934. With all threats removed, Hitler was able to continue with his dictatorship.

Moreover, the poignant event of Hindenburg's death was marked by the emanation of the Fuhrerprinzip. By coalescing the positions of President and Chancellor, Hitler became the Fuhrer of Germany, once again reaffirming his legitimacy as leader. To further cement his power, members of the armed forces took an oath of allegiance to Hitler. Thus, the belief that Hitler was the Fuhrer that held absolute obedience of the people is conceivable as Hitler's power was unassailable.

In conclusion, Hitler's transformation from the 'legal chancellor' of Germany to the 'legal dictator' in the period 1933 to 1934 was due to extenuating circumstances. Ultimately, Hitler as an individual exuded resilience as his unwavering quest to obtain and consolidate power was indeed phenomenal. Albeit this trait, Hitler also revealed the unjust ramifications due to one's innate desire to harness extraordinary power and exploit millions.