



The Rise of Hitler, 1919-1929

This is a transcript of the [Rise of Hitler 1919-1929](#) podcast from www.mrallsophistory.com

Adolf Hitler left the German Army in January 1919. He'd spent the last weeks of the war in hospital recovering from gas blindness, and he believed that Germany had not been defeated but had been 'stabbed in the back' by the politicians who signed the armistice. He referred to them as the 'November Criminals' since they had signed the armistice on the 11th November 1918.

When the war ended, Hitler secured a job working as a spy for the German Army. He was sent to a meeting of the German Workers Party in September 1919, which was led by Anton Drexler who was very anti-Semitic. Hitler soon joined the party, and took over the leadership in 1921.

Hitler wanted to attract as many people as possible to the party, so he changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers Party. He hoped that the word 'national' would attract traditionalists who wanted to rebuild Germany after the First World War. He also hoped that 'socialist' would attract those who wanted to improve the lives of working people in Germany.

The National Socialists – or Nazis as they began to be called – were often violent. They would attack their opponents in meetings, and this put many people off supporting them. The Nazis' private army known as the SA, the brownshirts or the storm troopers, were led by a particularly violent ex-soldier called Ernst Rohm. The SA's role was to take violent action against anyone who opposed the Nazis.

In 1922 and 1923, Germany was hit by hyperinflation. The confusion and desperation that this caused led Adolf Hitler to believe he could overthrow the Bavarian government and take power in Munich. Stresemann had seemingly given in to the occupying forces and called off the workers' strike and, while the government remained focused on ending the French and Belgium occupation, Hitler launched his attempt on November 8th 1923. This attempt to topple the government is known as the Munich or Beer Hall Putsch.

Hitler launched the Putsch with the belief that the government of Germany was so unpopular that many people would support his bid for power. He secured the support of the respected German army general Ludendorff, and even planned to march on Berlin after securing Munich. In the end, however, the Putsch failed with the deaths of 16 Nazis, while Hitler was arrested for high treason. Although he was found guilty and consequently sentenced to spend five years in Landsberg prison, Hitler turned both his trial and imprisonment to his advantage. Firstly, Hitler used the trial to gain exposure for Nazi ideology since the newspaper reporters



often published details of his defence speeches. Secondly, Hitler used his time in the surprisingly comfortable surroundings of Landsberg prison to write *Mein Kampf*, which translates as *My Struggle*, a cross between his autobiography and details of his political ideas.

The years after 1923 saw a new age of Weimar politics that were dominated by Gustav Stresemann. He oversaw dramatic changes that made it appear as though Germany had recovered from the humiliation of Versailles and had been accepted by the other countries of Europe once again. I go into more detail about Weimar Germany in the 1920s in another podcast, which you can find at www.MrAllsopHistory.com.

While Stresemann went about rebuilding Germany, Hitler realised that he would have to change his tactics if he were to have any chance of gaining power. He only spent a few months in prison before he was released, after which he immediately set about trying to gain power through legal means – he famously said that the Nazis would have to ‘hold their noses’ in a reference to how unpleasant he found the democratic system that he would have to work within.

One of Hitler’s key actions was to restructure the Nazi party as a national organisation. Previously the Nazis had only been well-known in Bavaria, but Hitler knew that he needed to win as many votes as possible if he was to gain a majority in the Reichstag (the German parliament). In their first Reichstag election in May 1924 the Nazis secured 32 seats, and this gave him the confidence to expand the network of local party branches. The following year, Hitler enlarged the SA and introduced the SS – a personal bodyguard who swore loyalty to Hitler himself.

Over the next few years the Nazis established sections within the party for teachers, women, and children. Key examples of these were the Hitler Youth and the Nazi Students’ League. He also appointed Josef Goebbels as his propaganda chief, whose job was to put the Nazi message across as clearly as possible. These changes saw Nazi party membership grow to more than 100,000 people by 1928.

Despite the formalisation of the party structure, the clarity of Goebbels’ message, and the growth of party membership, the 1928 Reichstag elections saw the Nazis’ share of the vote drop to just 12 seats. It was clear that the workers, whom the Nazis had hoped to win over, were not looking for an extremist party during the years of Weimar recovery after 1923. They did, however, make significant gains among the peasant farmers and the middle-class who were not benefitting as much from the Weimar renaissance. By 1929, therefore, the Nazis were still a minority party. But, as the next podcast will explore, events in October that year would bring about a huge change in their fortunes.