

The Night of the Long Knives and Hitler's Propaganda



Why did Hitler order the massacre of hundreds of
Nazis in June 1934?

Background

- Hitler was Chancellor (Prime Minister), but not yet completely in control.
- Opposition from outside the Nazi party was being strangled – Communists were banned and concentration camps set up.
- BUT – Some within the Nazi Party opposed Hitler. ALSO – Some important people wouldn't support Hitler while these opponents remained.

The SA

- SA – Sturm-Abteilung, or Stormtroopers, were also known as Brownshirts.
- They were formed in 1921 to protect the Nazi party.
- Ernst Roehm was their leader.



Why Were They Considered Disloyal?

- Some SA members were still keen on the original ideas of the Nazis – a National Socialist Revolution.
- They wanted rich landowners and big businesses to be swept away or taken over.
- Gregor Strasser was the main believer in this – and he had lots of supporters.



Gregor Strasser wasn't too keen on Adolf Hitler....



1932

liar – Hitler

pervert – Roehm

clubfoot - Goebbels

I am a man marked by death.

Whatever happens, mark what I say: From now on Germany is in the hands of an Austrian who is a congenital liar, a former officer who is a pervert, and a clubfoot.

And I tell you the last is the worst of them all. This is Satan in human form

Ernst Roehm

- Ernst Roehm, the leader of the SA, also clashed with Hitler.
- He wanted his Brownshirts to become the new German army. With him in charge, of course.



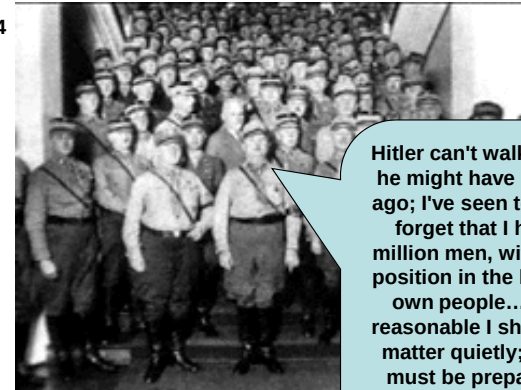
Did Roehm Know What Was Coming?

Adolf is a swine. He will give us all way. He only associates with reactionaries now. Adolf knows exactly what I want. Not a second edition of the old imperial army. Are we revolutionaries or aren't we? We've got to produce something new, don't you see? A new discipline. A new principle of organization. The generals are a lot of old fogies.



Was Roehm in a Strong Position?

Jan 1934



Hitler can't walk over me as he might have done a year ago; I've seen to that. Don't forget that I have three million men, with every key position in the hands of my own people...If Hitler is reasonable I shall settle the matter quietly; if he isn't I must be prepared to use force - not for my sake but for the sake of our revolution.

What Did Hitler do?

- He got his friends to compile hit-lists of disloyal SA men.
- Himmler, Heydrich and Goering were keen to do this.



Viktor Lutze, another SA chief was also very willing to help.

Can you think why?



This Was of Course, Done in Secret!

Watch
your
back,
Ernst....



Himmler, leader of the SS, was especially keen to rub out Roehm. He wanted control of the concentration camps and the police forces.

On 30 June, Hitler Strikes!

- The SS and the police arrest dozens of SA leaders.
- Many are shot dead in their homes, others are taken to camps for execution.
- Rohm is jailed, and shot the next day.
- Strasser is also shot dead.
- Hitler even takes the opportunity to have von Schleicher, the ex-chancellor, killed.

Hitler's Speech on 13 July

"In this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I become the supreme judge of the German people. I gave the order to shoot the ringleaders in this treason."

Hitler had wanted Roehm to be let off, for old time's sake. Himmler and Goering wanted none of it. Roehm was ordered to commit suicide. When he refused, two SS men shot him dead....



Results of the Night of the Long Knives

- Over 1,000 opponents were killed.



In August, President Hindenburg died.

Hitler made himself President as well as Chancellor, a new role called 'Der Fuehrer'.

He also made himself head of the armed forces, who had to swear an oath of loyalty to him.

He was now in complete control.

The Fuehrer Oath



I swear by almighty God this sacred oath:

I will render unconditional obedience to the Fuehrer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, and, as a brave soldier, I will be ready at any time to stake my life for this oath."

NOTE: This act makes the army a political force, loyal to Hitler and the Nazis Party.

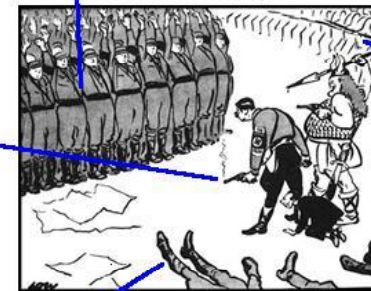
British cartoon by David Low, 1934



They salute with both hands, now!

The members of the SA are no longer a threat to Hitler they will fade away through a combination of fear and lack of leadership

The Night of the Long Knives was carried out on the orders of Hitler



The army have now been won over by the Nazis, making Hitler's bid to be the next President easier

Hundreds of the leaders of the SA (including Ernst Rohm) were killed by the SS. They were killed because Hitler feared Rohm was a threat to his leadership, and to gain the support of the Army who feared that the SA may take over the Army

Hitler and Propaganda

Nazi Propaganda and Control of Mass Media to Shape German Opinion

- Hitler's Propaganda- evil, yet successful and popular
 - eg. in August 1934- in a poll 95% of Germans registered their approval of Hitler, while only 4 million disapproved? Think why?
- Hitler believed Germany had lost World War I due to a failure of German propaganda.

- What did he think of the people?
 - “ The broad masses of the people are not made up of diplomats or professors...nor or persons who can form reasoned judgments...but a vacillating crowd of human children who are constantly wavering between one idea and another. “
- Was he right?
 - early 1933, bonfires of books, burned books by Jews, socialists, books on the merits of democracy, about the morality of protecting the weak from the strong, history texts (to be replace by new Nazi ones)
 - see Global Forces p. 45 picture



How did he do it?

- increased production of radios:
 - 1933 only 1/4 of German families had radios
 - 1942, 7 in 10 had one ,
 - also radios in offices, factories, restaurants, and cafes.. also international broadcasts (eg Brazil and Japan could listen to the new Germany, and Germans living outside of Germany, in Austria and Czechoslovakia)
- no independent news...
 - all Nazi controlled, Oct. 1933, law forbade all newspaper criticism of the government
 - between 1933-37, 1000 newspapers closed down

- Nazi party everywhere, in parades, posters, in "spontaneous demonstrations" for the Fuhrer, only muted a bit during the 1936 Olympics
 - Like all good propaganda and advertising, Nazi propaganda aimed not at the intellect, but at the emotions, keep national feeling at a fever pitch, people were to "think with the blood", no their heads
- Key elements of effective propaganda
 - simple message- black and white, no room for analysis or critique- "think with the blood"
 - endless repetition
 - Must have an element of truth

- But Hitler was popular NOT just due to propaganda and Gestapo - he also delivered:
 - by 1937, unemployment reduced from 6 million to 1.2 million
 - How ? public works, autobahn
 - armed forces steadily expanded after 1935
 - industrial production soared due to rearmament
 - He violated Treaty of Versailles and gets away with it



Hitler breaking ground on the first section of the autobahn.