

**FOCUS ROUTE**

Explain the reasons why key members of the elite eventually favoured the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

## D Why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

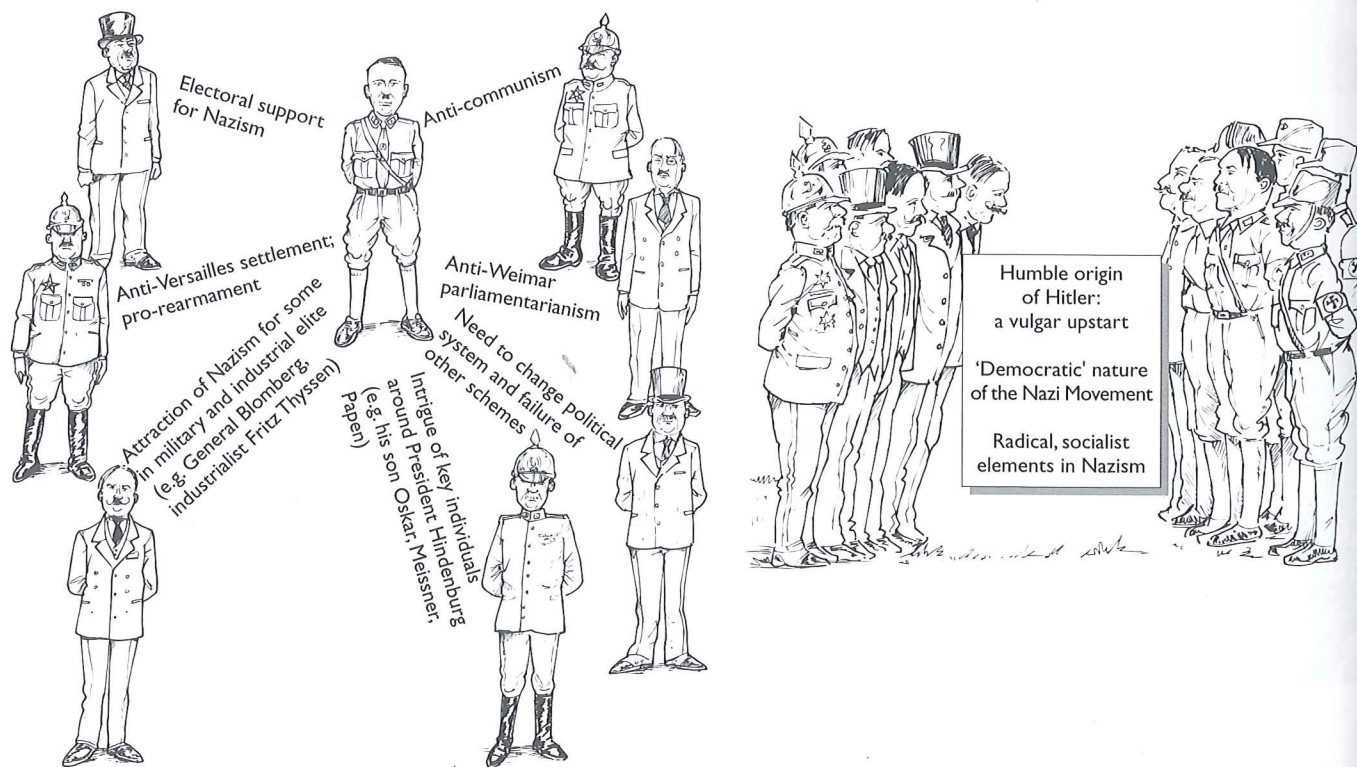
On 30 January 1933 President Hindenburg summoned Adolf Hitler to Berlin and appointed him Chancellor. In many ways this was a surprising development. Hindenburg disliked Hitler. In August 1932 he had refused to appoint him Chancellor after the Nazis' great electoral success. Since then Nazi support had declined and the movement had been torn by divisions. Many in the elite were also wary of the radicalism and the generally vulgar nature of the Nazi Movement.

Despite this, in January 1933, members of the elite persuaded Hindenburg to appoint Hitler Chancellor. By 1932, key industrialists and landowners were very concerned about the lack of effective government. They had never been committed to parliamentary democracy and now believed their fears were confirmed. Some saw the possibility of using the Nazis' popular support to channel the political system in a more authoritarian direction. The Junkers were also upset by Brüning's and later Schleicher's reform proposals to buy up bankrupt estates to resettle poor farmers. This was seen by landowners as 'agrarian Bolshevism', and contributed to the intrigue that persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss both Brüning and Schleicher.

Members of the elite used a number of tactics in what has been called their 'taming strategy' for the Nazi Party.

- 1 The first tactic was to make Hitler Vice-Chancellor under Papen; this was put forward in August 1932, but Hitler rejected it, demanding to be Chancellor. Hitler's rejection was risky, since he did not get the chancellorship, and it was seen as a great defeat by many Nazis.
- 2 The second tactic was used in December 1932. Schleicher, hoping to split the Nazis, proposed the idea of himself as Chancellor, with the Nazi Gregor Strasser as Vice-Chancellor. This failed, and Strasser left the Nazi Party.
- 3 The final tactic (arranged by a Cologne banker, Kurt von Schröder, members of the Reich Agrarian League, industrialists and Oskar von Hindenburg) was to put Hitler in office as Chancellor, but surrounded by Papen as Vice-Chancellor and other conservatives. The Nazis' current difficulties would make them easier to control. Hindenburg agreed, against his own judgement. Papen commented to a friend, 'We've hired him', but he was fatally wrong.

### 8F Factors bringing the elite and the Nazis together – and factors that kept them apart



## Hindenburg – a personal motive?

Some historians argue that Hindenburg's decision to appoint Hitler as Chancellor was partly a selfish move.

In the late 1920s, German agriculture suffered from low prices for farm products. Large landowners in the east used their influence on governments to get financial help. This resulted in the *Osthilfe* (Help for the East) programme. Funds were allocated to large landowners to help them stay afloat. Hindenburg had been given back his family's formerly bankrupt estate at Neudeck in East Prussia in 1927 as an eightieth birthday present. This was intended, successfully, to tie him close to Junker interests. However, in 1932 a Reichstag committee investigating the misuse of *Osthilfe* funds for gambling, supporting mistresses, etc. implicated the Neudeck estate in the scandal. This may have influenced Hindenburg's decision to appoint Hitler in the hope that the investigation would be ended.

### SOURCE 8.13 Industrialists' letter to Hindenburg, November 1932

*Your Excellency! Like you, we are imbued [filled] with an impassioned love of the German people and the Fatherland... together with Your Excellency, we agree that it is necessary to create a government independent of the parliamentary parties...*

*The outcome of the Reichstag elections of 6 November has demonstrated that the present cabinet, whose honest intentions no one among the German people would doubt, has failed to find sufficient support among the German people for its actual policies.*

*... It is quite apparent that another dissolution of parliament, leading to yet another general election with its inevitable frenzied party-political struggles, would be inimicable [harmful] to political as well as economic peace and stability. But it is also apparent that any constitutional change that does not have widespread popular support would have even greater negative economic, political and moral effects.*

*We therefore consider it to be our duty, Your Excellency, to humbly beg you to consider reconstituting the cabinet in a manner which would guarantee it with the greatest possible popular support.*

*We declare ourselves to be free from any specific party-political interests. But we recognise in the nationalist movement, which is sweeping through our people, the auspicious beginning of an era of rebirth for the German economy which can only be achieved by the surmounting of class conflict. We know that the rebirth will demand great sacrifices. We believe that these sacrifices will only be made willingly when the greater part of this nationalist movement plays a leading role in the government.*

*The transfer of responsibility for leading a Presidential cabinet to the leader of the largest nationalist group would remove the waste and slag that inevitably clings to any mass movement. As a result millions of people who at present still stand on the sidelines would be swept into active participation.*

*Fully trusting in Your Excellency's wisdom and Your Excellency's feeling for the unity of his people,*

*We greet Your Excellency with the greatest respect,  
Bosch Schacht Thyssen Krupp [and 20 other industrialists]*

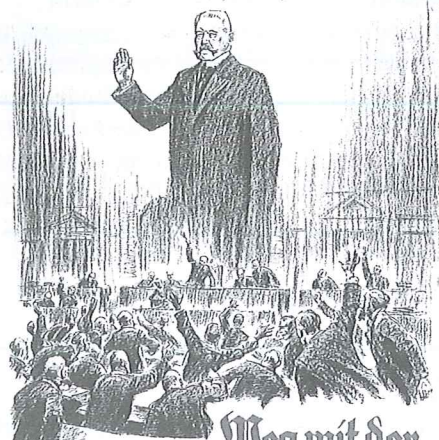
### SOURCE 8.14 An account by Otto Meissner, State Secretary in Hindenburg's office, made to the Nuremberg Tribunal after the Second World War

*Despite Papen's persuasions, Hindenburg was extremely hesitant, until the end of January, to make Hitler Chancellor. He wanted to have Papen again as Chancellor. Papen finally won him over to Hitler with the argument that the representatives of the other right-wing parties which would belong to the government would restrict Hitler's freedom of action. In addition Papen expressed his misgivings that, if the present opportunity were missed, a revolt of the national socialists and civil war were likely.*

### ACTIVITY

- 1 Why do the industrialists in Source 8.13 favour a government led by Hitler?
- 2 According to Meissner (Source 8.14), why was Hindenburg persuaded to appoint Hitler as Chancellor?
- 3 With reference to the origins and content of Sources 8.13 and 8.14, how valuable are they in explaining Hitler's appointment?

**Mehe Macht dem Reichspräsidenten!**

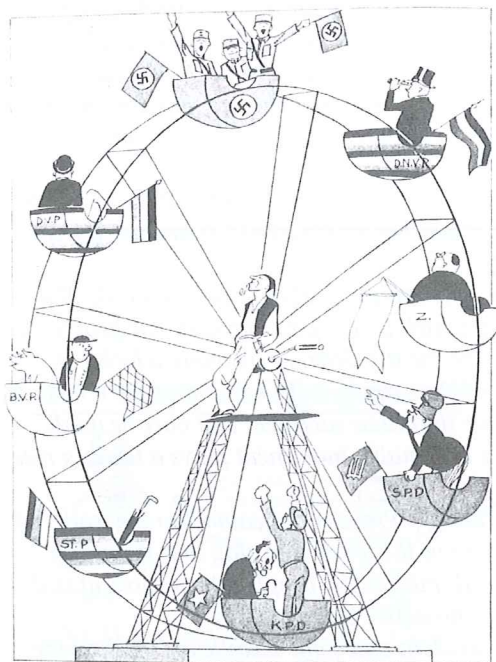


**Weg mit der Alleinherrschaft der Parlamente (Artikel 54) Wählt Deutschnational**

**SOURCE 8.15**  
A 1932 DNVP poster. It says: 'More power to the presidency! Away with the supremacy of Parliament (Article 54). Vote Nationalist'. (For Article 54, see page 26)

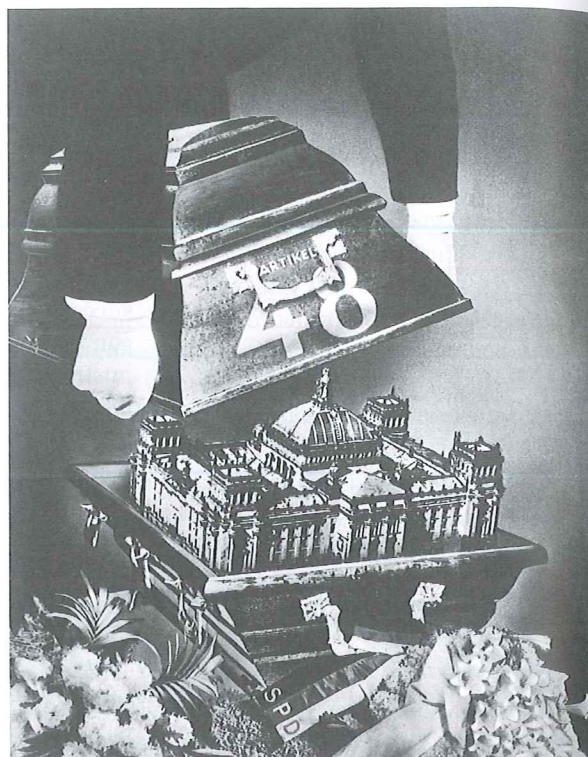
**SOURCE 8.16**  
A September 1932 cartoon by John Heartfield

**SOURCE 8.17** A 1932 cartoon: the big wheel of politics. The cartoon is captioned 'A breakdown of a pleasing phenomenon'



#### TALKING POINTS

- 1 It has been said that proportional representation was crucial in helping Hitler gain power. It has also been said that proportional representation would have stopped him gaining power, if it had not been for President Hindenburg. Can you explain both views?
- 2 Does Hitler's rejection of parliamentary democracy disqualify him from being considered a democratically elected leader?



#### ACTIVITY

Explain what each of Sources 8.15-17 shows about the Weimar Republic at this time.

#### Learning trouble spot

##### Did Hitler come to power legally and democratically?

It is sometimes said that Hitler was elected into office. This is not really the case. The way of being elected into office in a parliamentary system is to win a majority of members of parliament. Hitler never did this in free elections. As the Weimar Republic had a proportional representation electoral system, unlike Britain's first-past-the-post method, Hitler could only have become Chancellor directly through elections by winning 50 per cent of the vote. He peaked at 37 per cent.

Hitler came to power because Hindenburg, legally, appointed him Chancellor. If Hindenburg had not made this decision, Hitler could not legally have become Germany's leader. However, he did win 37 per cent of the vote (far more than any other party except the SPD in 1919); he led the largest party in the Reichstag, and thus had a 'moral' (if not constitutional) claim to be Chancellor. Having 'won' both Reichstag elections in 1932 he was appointed constitutionally by the democratically elected President.

However, some historians argue that Hitler's use of violence means that he cannot be seen as coming to power legally. The violence committed by the Nazis in the streets that intimidated communist opponents contributed both to the Nazis' electoral success and to the preparedness of the elite to use the Nazis and then tame them. This violence helped create an atmosphere where many favoured strong government to restore law and order, and also won the support of many of those who were worried by the threat of communism.

Some also consider the fact that Hitler's programme was fundamentally undemocratic relevant to this issue.

## E Review: Why did parliamentary government decline in Germany 1930-3 and why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

In this chapter you have studied the decline of parliamentary government and how within that context Hitler became Chancellor. Students can be confused about the relationship between the failure of the Weimar Republic and the appointment of Hitler. Was his appointment an abrupt end to Weimar democracy? Most historians now argue that seeing 30 January 1933 as marking the end of Weimar democracy is too simple. Indeed, it is argued that Weimar democracy was already in deep, perhaps terminal, trouble from 1930 onwards and that some form of authoritarian government was virtually inevitable. This could have taken many forms; the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor was just one of the options. In this view, the failure of the Weimar Republic happened for far deeper reasons than those behind Hitler's appointment, which might have been avoided.

Students also sometimes assume that they need to explain why many Germans wanted to create a totalitarian Nazi dictatorship. However, you need not look for deep reasons why Germany succumbed to totalitarianism. This was not the intention of the elite, but the result of its miscalculation of how it could use Hitler for its own purposes. In addition, the millions of Germans who voted for Hitler did not do so because they wanted to kill millions of Jews or start a world war. These were the eventual results of their actions, but not the reasons for them.

Our final two sources are powerful testimony to why many ordinary Germans were prepared to support the Nazis and have Hitler as their leader.

**SOURCE 8.18** The distinguished banker Johannes Zahn, writing in 1997, explains his feelings in the early 1930s

*You have to consider Germany's general position [in] 1930-33. An unemployed man either joined the Communists or became an SA man, and so business believed it was better if these people became storm troopers as there was discipline and order... you really have to say this today, at the beginning you couldn't tell whether National Socialism was something good with a few bad side-effects, or something evil with a few good side-effects; you couldn't tell.*

Finally, we end this chapter by reading Kershaw's summary of the reasons for Hitler's appointment.

**SOURCE 8.19** I. Kershaw, *Hitler*, 1991, p. 55

*Access to Hindenburg was the key to power. Accordingly, the presidential palace became the focal point of intrigues of power brokers, who, freed from institutional constraints, conspired with guile and initiative in private wheeler-dealings to further their own power ambitions. And behind the maverick power-brokers stood the lobbying of important elite groups, anxious to attain a political solution of the crisis favourable to their interests.*

*Few... had Hitler as their first choice. But by January 1933, with other options apparently exhausted, most, with the big landowners to the fore, were prepared to entertain a Hitler government. Had they opposed it, a Hitler chancellorship would have been inconceivable. Hitler needed the elite to attain power. But by January 1933, they in turn needed Hitler as he alone could deliver the mass support required to impose a tenable authoritarian solution to Germany's crisis of capitalism and crisis of the state.*

TALKING POINT

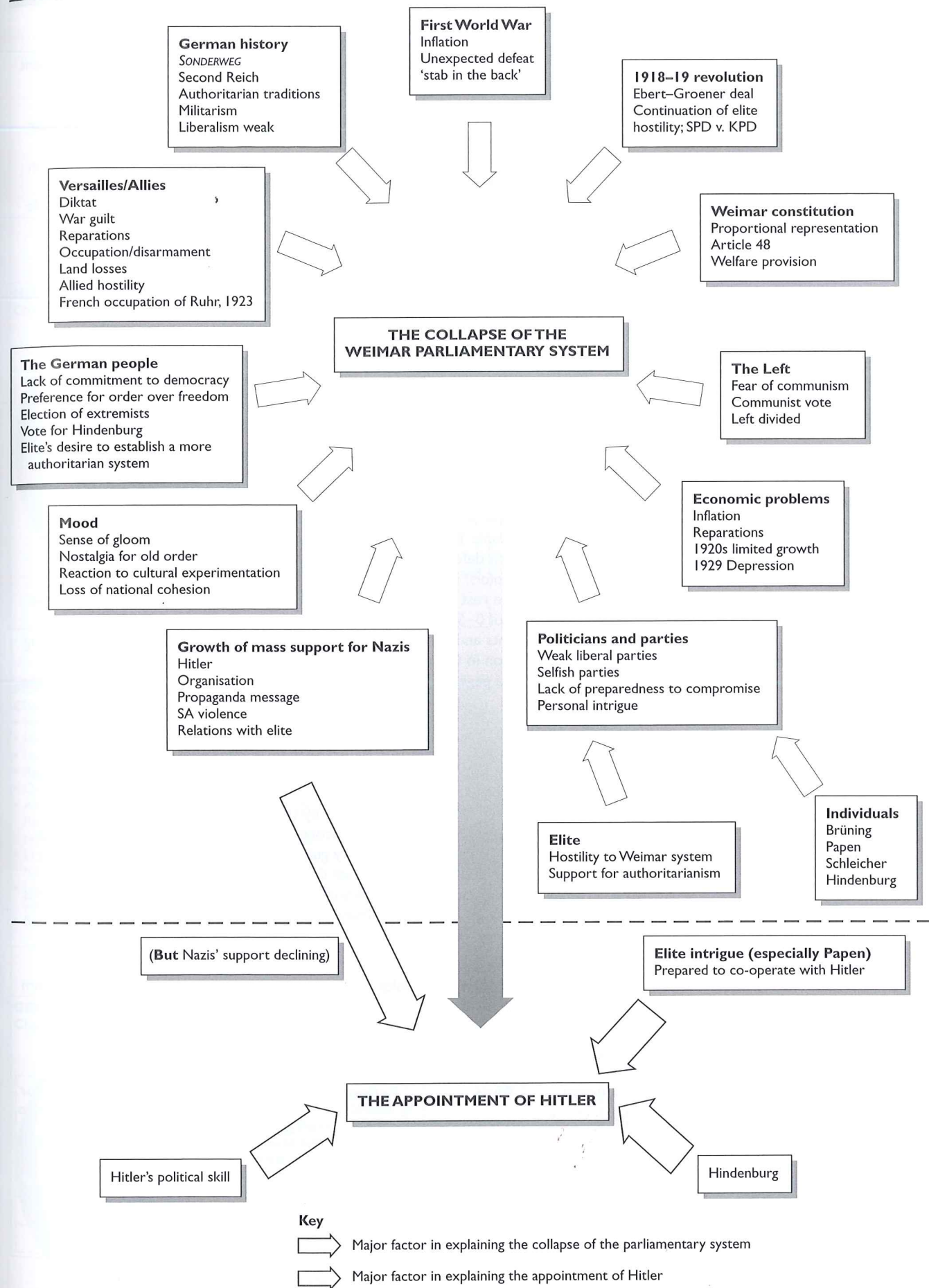
Which of the statements in question 1 of the Activity are facts and which opinions? Is what constitutes a fact sometimes a matter of opinion?

ACTIVITY

- 1 Take each of the following statements and explain why you agree or disagree with it.
  - a) After 1930 all Chancellors realised parliamentary government was not working and were looking for a more authoritarian solution.
  - b) By 1932 Hindenburg, Papen, Schleicher and probably even Brüning all shared the same broad aims, but disagreed on the best way to achieve them.
  - c) Once the Nazis became the largest party Hitler had to be appointed Chancellor.
  - d) Schleicher and Papen each thought he could use the Nazis for his own purposes.
  - e) Members of the elite preferred to change the political system by gaining support in the Reichstag or through using Article 48, as they were afraid of civil war if they just tore up the constitution.
  - f) After 1930, and even more by 1932, the composition of the Reichstag made reliance on Article 48 virtually inevitable.
  - g) Weimar democracy was safe in the hands of German voters; it was the elite who killed it.
  - h) Communism posed no real threat in 1932 and so is unimportant in explaining events.
  - i) By late 1932, tensions within the Nazi Party were in danger of causing a decline as rapid as its rise had been; it was saved by Hitler's appointment.
  - j) The decline in support for the Nazis in November 1932 actually helped Hitler's appointment as Chancellor.
  - k) Hitler's insistence on only joining a government as leader was a risky strategy that eventually paid off.
  - l) Hindenburg can be held primarily responsible for giving Hitler power, since in 1933 he still had a wide range of options.
  - m) The elites had good grounds for considering they could control Hitler as Chancellor.
  - n) Hitler benefited from the collapse of parliamentary government rather than being the cause of it.
- 2 There is a popular radio programme called *Just a Minute* where contestants have to talk for 60 seconds on any topic, without deviation, hesitation or repetition. This is surprisingly difficult. So we have been kind and you can talk for just 30 seconds on one of the following issues:
  - a) The impact of the Depression
  - b) The reasons why the Nazis became the largest party
  - c) The nature of German governments, 1930-2
  - d) The attitude of many of the elite to the Weimar Republic – and to the Nazis
  - e) The reasons why Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor.
- 3 Essay: 'Why did Hindenburg appoint Hitler as Chancellor in 1933?' Include:
  - how Hitler became undisputed leader of the Nazi Party
  - the effects of the Great Depression on Germany after 1929
  - why the Nazis became the largest parliamentary party in 1932
  - the failure of Weimar governments 1929-32
  - why the elite looked for a more authoritarian alternative to parliamentary democracy
  - Hindenburg's reluctant appointment of Hitler.

Chart 8G will help you.
- 4 Imagine it is January 1933. Hold a debate in front of a key adviser to President Hindenburg over whether he should appoint Hitler as Chancellor or not. Select four to five people for each side of the debate. Possible characters could be:
  - general
  - industrialist
  - professor
  - major landowner
  - small farmer
  - worker
  - ex-soldier
  - diplomat
  - economist.

8G The collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler



**ACTIVITY**

**Who killed Weimar democracy? A mock trial**

You have now investigated in detail the collapse of parliamentary government in Weimar Germany. You will probably have concluded that, although the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor put the last nail in the coffin of Weimar democracy, parliamentary government was doomed well before that – fatally wounded by the votes of the German people and the manoeuvrings of Weimar politicians. You have probably formed your own view as to who bears most blame for its demise. You now have the chance to review all you have studied as you put the main culprits on trial. Chart 8H shows the main culprits and summarises their contributions to the power struggles of 1930-3. The following four defendants are on trial for their role in destroying Weimar democracy:

- Brüning
- Papen
- Schleicher
- Hindenburg.

There are two charges to consider at the trial:

- a) that this person deliberately undermined Weimar democracy
- b) that this person was most to blame for bringing Adolf Hitler to power.

These charges are closely related but at the trial they are each to be considered and answered separately.

**Before the trial**

- 1 Allocate the following roles:
  - *Judge*: one person to preside over the court and run the trial.
  - *Four defendants*: Brüning, Papen, Schleicher, Hindenburg. (If you have enough people, each defendant could also have a defence lawyer.)
  - *Four prosecutors*: one to present the case against each defendant.
  - *The jury*: the rest of the group. You will be deciding how guilty each person is on a scale of 0-5.
- 2 The defendants and prosecutors will need to prepare their case in advance using the information in Chart 8H and in the rest of this chapter. They should refer particularly to pages 133 and 135, which outlines the attitudes and careers of the four accused.

**At the trial**

- 3 The first prosecutor makes his or her case on both charges.
- 4 The defendant and/or his lawyer replies, making a brief speech in his defence to explain his aims and actions.
- 5 The defendant is then cross-examined by the prosecutor.
- 6 The jury then gives the defendant a score out of 5 for each of the two charges (0 being not at all guilty, 5 being very guilty).
- 7 Steps 3-6 are repeated for the other defendants.
- 8 The jury then discusses the issues and reaches an overall conclusion as to who is the most guilty on each count. They can revise their own original score for a defendant if they wish.

**After the trial**

- 9 As a group, discuss the results of the trial and the issues that have emerged from it.
- 10 Copy and complete the chart below to give you a written record of what you have learned from the trial.

Person	Aims	Actions	Responsibility for undermining democracy	Responsibility for bringing Hitler to power
Brüning				
Papen				
Schleicher				
Hindenburg				

**8H Who killed Weimar democracy? The main players and their moves**

**GENERAL PAUL VON HINDENBURG**

- President 1925-34**
- Key power of appointing and dismissing chancellors
  - Able to issue decrees
  - Influenced by Schleicher, key civil servants, Junkers, bankers and his son Oskar
  - Acted within the letter of the constitution
  - Favoured a more authoritarian system
  - Concerned about investigations into his estate
  - Failed to support the Müller government in 1930
  - Supported presidential governments 1930-3
  - Hostile to Hitler, seeing him as an upstart
  - Refused to make Hitler Chancellor in August 1932
  - Appointed Hitler Chancellor in January 1933



**HEINRICH BRÜNING**

**Chancellor March 1930-May 1932**



- Tried to gain support from the Reichstag
- Came to favour more authoritarian system, possibly a monarchy
- Called elections July 1930 in which extremist parties such as the Nazis made major gains
- Tolerated by Reichstag for two years but had no working majority
- Increasingly used presidential decrees rather than Reichstag laws to govern
- Failed to take action to reduce impact of slump (nicknamed the 'Hunger Chancellor')
- Hoped to use the Depression to change the regime and end reparations
- Made some reforms, but upset Junkers and Hindenburg with agrarian reform plans
- Forced to resign by Hindenburg

**FRANZ VON PAPEN**

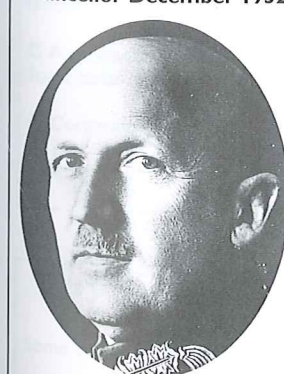
**Chancellor May-November 1932**

- Formed a non-party 'cabinet of barons' from the elite
- Had no Reichstag members in his government
- Had very little support in the Reichstag
- Relied on presidential decrees to govern
- Overthrew democratic government in Prussia
- After July 1932 elections favoured dissolving the Reichstag and not holding new elections; idea rejected by Schleicher who secured his dismissal
- In January 1933 did a deal with Hitler to become his deputy if Hitler was appointed Chancellor
- Helped persuade Hindenburg to replace Schleicher with Hitler
- Became Vice-Chancellor



**GENERAL KURT VON SCHLEICHER**

**Chancellor December 1932-January 1933**



- Concerned to protect the interests of the Reichswehr
- Great influence on Hindenburg
- At the centre of intrigues
- Responsible for the dismissal of Brüning and Papen
- Preferred to exercise power behind the scenes, but in December 1932 reluctantly became Chancellor
- Tried to gain support from the Gregor Strasser wing of the Nazi Party and trade unions
- Dismissed when Papen intrigued against him

**WHO KILLED WEIMAR DEMOCRACY?**

**ADOLF HITLER**

**Chancellor January 1933 onwards**

- Avowed enemy of democracy
- Tried to overthrow the Weimar Republic in 1923
- Led massive campaigns against the Weimar regime
- Nazis tried to disrupt the Reichstag
- Nazis violently attacked their opponents
- Leader of the largest party in 1932
- Papen intrigued to get him appointed
- Schleicher resisted his appointment
- Hindenburg appointed him as Chancellor
- Hindenburg backed him with emergency decrees
- Once in power, finally destroyed Weimar democracy
- When Hindenburg died in 1934 he declared himself President – and dictator of Germany

