

How did the Nazis change their tactics between 1924 and 1929?

THE FAILURE OF the Munich Putsch convinced Hitler that the only sure way of getting power was by legal means.

SOURCE 1 Hitler speaking in the mid-1920s

“ Instead of working to achieve power by armed coup, we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the opposition deputies. If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own constitution. Sooner or later we shall have a majority, and after that – Germany. ”

The Nazi Party was banned in the immediate aftermath of the putsch. However, while Hitler was still in prison the Nazis – under another name – entered the Reichstag elections for the first time. In the afterglow of the trial, they won 32 seats in the May election. However, just seven months later there was another election. The Nazis did disastrously, their seats reduced to just fourteen.

Reorganising the party

Clearly electoral success would require a different kind of Nazi Party. Two weeks after his release from prison in December, the ban on the party was lifted and it was officially re-launched at a rally (in the Munich beer hall!) on 27 February 1925. Hitler began to reorganise the party to make it more effective in elections.

Winning over the working classes

Through the late 1920s the Nazis worked steadily. They ran many public meetings and tried harder to win the support of the working classes. They discovered that it was their anti-Jewish message which had most appeal among the working classes and they increased their anti-Jewish propaganda.

Mein Kampf

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was published in 1925. His national fame was now such that it became a best-seller.

1. Why might each of the points in Source 2 appeal to people in Weimar Germany?
2. Critics said that *Mein Kampf* contained nothing new but just recapped all the old Nazi ideas. Do the extracts in Source 2 support this view? You may need to refer back to pages 33–35.

SOURCE 2 Extracts from *Mein Kampf*

“ There must be no majority decisions. The decisions will be made by one man, only he alone may possess the authority and right to command.

Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures. All who are not of good race in the world are chaff.

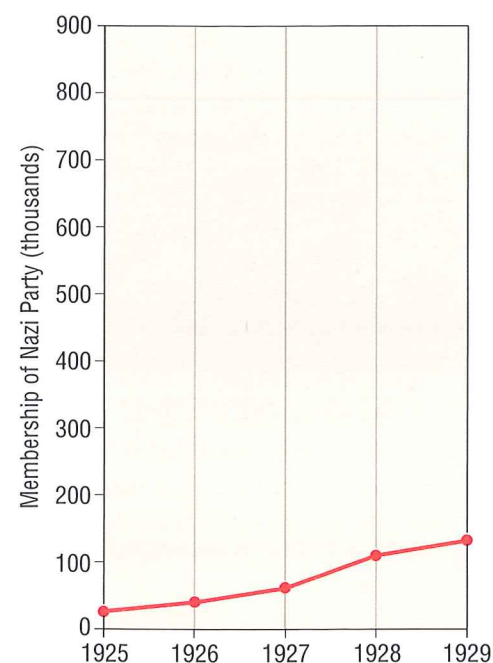
The danger to which Russia has succumbed is always present for Germany. In Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews to achieve world domination.

History proves that the German people owes its existence solely to its determination to fight in the East and to obtain land by military conquest. ”

Increased membership

Gradually, year by year, the Nazis increased their membership.

SOURCE 3 Nazi Party membership, 1925–29



Despite this rise in membership, the Nazis were actually losing ground in the only place it now really mattered – in the Reichstag. After four years of campaigning and reorganisation, in the 1928 Reichstag elections the Nazis were reduced to just twelve deputies. They hated rivals the Social Democrats had 153 seats. Even the Communists had four times as many seats as the Nazis.

Winning over the middle classes

In 1928 the Nazis decided on another change of policy. They were increasingly convinced that they were getting nowhere in their appeals to the working classes. But they were doing well among the middle classes and among farmers, and this is where most of their new members were coming from. They began to focus on the parts of their message which would appeal to this section of society.

SOURCE 4 From a resolution passed at a Nazi meeting for farmers, January 1928

“ We have recognised that the distress of agriculture is inseparably bound up with the political misery of the German people. Let us do away with this Marxist-capitalist extortion system that has made Germany, our homeland, powerless, without honour, defenceless, and has turned free German farmers into poor, misused slaves of the world stock exchange. ”

Public meetings

Whereas political parties today have television as their main way of communicating with the public, parties at that time depended mainly on public meetings. The Nazis were the only party in Germany to run evening classes for their members to train them in public-speaking skills. Nazi activists in villages and towns throughout Germany would put on meetings with visiting speakers. If a subject proved popular then they would repeat it. In this way the Nazis developed a very sensitive system of propaganda. They learnt the skill of focusing on the issues that people thought were important. If this also meant changing their policies to fit, then they seemed prepared to do so.

As you can see from Source 3, Nazi membership almost doubled between 1927 and 1928. Would this growth have continued? Maybe. But in 1929 other events over which the Nazis had no control brought about a change in their fortunes which launched them on the path to power.

TASK

One historian has said of Hitler in the summer of 1929 that he was ‘no more than the leader of a small splinter party, scarcely known outside Bavaria and very likely doomed to remain forever on the fringe of political life’. Does the information on pages 44–45 support this viewpoint? Explain your answer carefully.



SOURCE 5 1924 election poster criticising Stresemann's policies – suggesting the Dawes Plan and Jewish bankers holding Germany to ransom



SOURCE 6 1928 election poster. The Nazis present their ‘building blocks’ for the reconstruction of Germany – work, freedom, bread – as opposed to the unemployment, social spending cuts, corruption and lying of the other parties