

## The consolidation of power: Step Three

By the end of 1933 Hitler's power was extensive but not total. His power was potentially at risk from three sources: the President, the army and his SA (Stormtroopers). Hindenburg could still, in theory, dismiss Hitler and the other Nazis in the Cabinet, the army could use its strength to force Hitler from office and the SA could endanger Hitler's relations with the army by carrying out further acts of hooliganism and demanding more power for themselves. By the end of 1934, all three problems had been largely solved.

### The SA and the 'second revolution'

When Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, the SA, which represented the more working-class element of the Nazi Party, felt that their efforts on the streets had been vindicated. Now Germany would undergo the political *and social* revolution that she so badly needed and members of the SA would be rewarded with positions of authority and a status equivalent to that of the German army. Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA and long time friend of Hitler, was vehement in his expression of such beliefs. He was determined not to allow the SA to become simply a propaganda tool which took part in 'shining torchlight processions and impressive parades.' Instead, he wanted the SA to merge with the army, with him in overall control, so that the German revolution could be taken forward. He felt badly let down when it became clear that in fact, Hitler had no intention of carrying through a 'second revolution' once his political power had been established, nor was he prepared to reward the SA with a higher status. In fact, the SA was becoming something of an embarrassment to Hitler were, its tactics of street brawls and hooliganism; at odds with Hitler's efforts to appease the German elite and portray his actions as legal. Relations between Röhm and Hitler reached a low point in early 1934, when Röhm declared privately to a friend:

#### Source 7

Adolf is a swine. He will give us all away. He only associates with the reactionaries now...Getting matey with the East Prussian generals. They're his cronies now...Adolf knows exactly what I want. I've told him often enough. Not a second edition of the old imperial army. Are we revolutionaries or aren't we?...If we are, then something new must arise out of our elan, like the mass armies of the French Revolution. If we're not then we'll go to the dogs. We've got to produce something new, don't you see that? Don't you understand that what's coming must be new, fresh and unused? The basis must be revolutionary. You can't inflate it afterwards. You only get the opportunity once to make something new and big that'll help us lift the world off its hinges. But Hitler puts me off with fair words.

Meanwhile, the army was making clear its opposition to the behaviour of the SA. In February, for example, General von Blomberg alerted Hitler to the growing military activities of the SA in areas that the Treaty of Versailles had demilitarized. Hitler had to make a choice. Either he attempted to win the full backing and trust of the army by effectively removing power from the SA or he risked alienating the army by remaining loyal to the SA. In the end, Hitler chose the army.

#### Timeline

##### Step Three: Jan – Aug 1934

**January** Landtage (state parliaments) abolished

**30 June** Night of the Long Knives

**2 August** Death of President Hindenburg. Army swears an oath of allegiance to Hitler.

**19 August** Hitler proclaims himself both Chancellor and President and adopts the title 'führer' of Germany.

#### Think about

- ▶ What exactly is Rohm saying in Source 7?
- ▶ How do you think Hitler would have reacted to this?

#### Cross reference

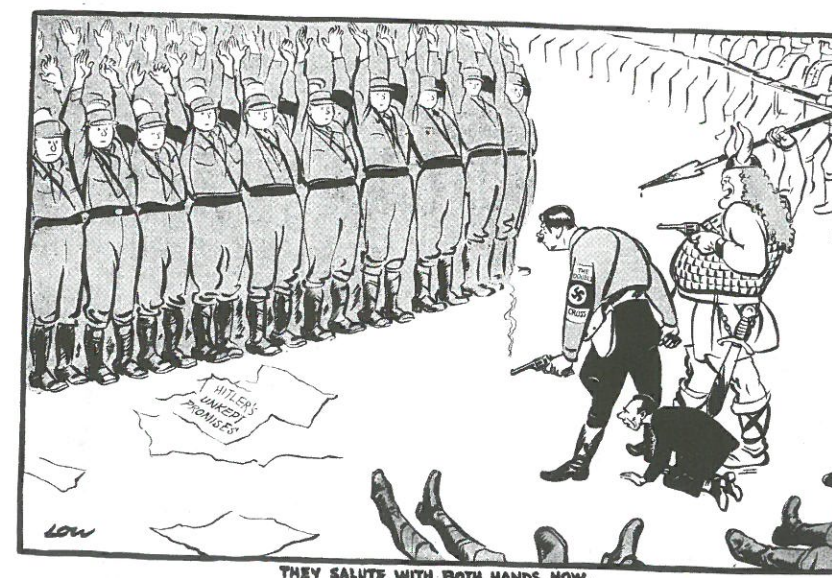
For more information on the SS, see page 180.

#### Note

Both Strasser and Schleicher had betrayed Hitler in 1932. In an attempt to split the Nazis, Schleicher persuaded Strasser to offer the government the support of the left wing of the Nazi Party which Strasser represented. It was only with Hitler's direct intervention that Strasser abandoned the plan. Hitler forgave neither of them for such treachery.

## The Night of the Long Knives

On the night of 30 June, Röhm and other leaders of the SA were shot by members of the SS. It was clear that the army lent a helping hand by providing transport and weapons, although it was probably unaware that it was supporting what became a bloodbath. Hitler seized the opportunity to remove any old enemies and men such as Strasser and Schleicher were amongst the 400 murdered that night. Afterwards, Hitler claimed that he had responded to a treason plot and was thanked by the Cabinet for his 'determined and courageous action'. Both Blomberg, in the name of the army, and President Hindenburg thanked Hitler publicly for his actions. Thus, Hitler had succeeded in gaining the approval and support of the army which was to be so crucial if he was to achieve his ambitious aims abroad. The SA ceased to be a serious military presence and became what Röhm had feared – a propaganda showpiece which could be displayed at events like the giant Nuremberg rallies. The SA was also wheeled in to carry out acts of vandalism and thuggery against oppressed minorities, in particular the Jews in 1938. But their role as the prime para-military wing of the party was eclipsed by the SS, originally conceived as Hitler's personal bodyguards in 1925. Their role in the Nazi state is considered in more detail in the next chapter.



#### Source 8

▶ A British cartoon about the Night of the Long Knives, published on 3 July 1934.

#### Think about

▶ Study Source 8 carefully. Using the information on these two pages to help you, identify:

- The figures standing behind Hitler
- The victims whose feet appear at the bottom of the cartoon
- The men with both arms raised
- The line of men in the top right hand corner

- ▶ What is meant by 'unkept promises'? Was this a justified accusation?
- ▶ What is the meaning of the phrase 'They salute with both hands now'?
- ▶ How accurate is this cartoon as a portrayal of the Night of the Long Knives?