



## Part 4. The Nazis in Power

### 13. Political controls

As the Nazis had promised, they moved quickly to transform Germany from a constitutional democracy into an authoritarian dictatorship. An early step they took was to eliminate rival political parties. Some were banned outright; the rest were pressured to dissolve themselves; and in July of 1933, the Nazi government banned the formation of new political parties.



Hitler, *der Führer*

In 1934, the Nazis further consolidated their power and augmented Hitler's. Hitler had almost always had a strong grip on the internal politics of the Nazi party, but it had not been absolute. 1934 brought an internal purge and an elimination of Hitler's rivals. The triggering event was Ernst Röhm's attempted rebellion. Röhm had been head of the SA, the *Sturmabteilung* or Storm Division, the paramilitary wing of the party. Röhm had used his position to form a rival power bloc within the party and planned a rebellion. Hitler was warned of the rebellion ahead of time and was able to suppress it. In the purge that followed, forty-three conspirators and rivals were executed. Along with the purge, there were many unofficial as-

sassinations as old scores were settled. The result of the blood-letting was a Nazi party even more strongly united around Adolf Hitler.

In August of the same year, President Hindenburg died. Paul von Hindenburg had been the grand old man of German politics, holding the office of the presidency, which was along with the chancellorship one of the two highest political offices in the land. Upon Hindenburg's death, Hitler merged the positions of president and chancellor, thus augmenting his power further. In a nation-wide plebiscite to confirm the merging of the two positions, almost 90% of Germans voted in favor of granting Hitler greater powers.

The Nazis now controlled all the major political offices, they had cleaned house internally, and they had eliminated all rival parties. In firm control, they next set about re-shaping all of German society.

## **14. Education**

Political tools such as physical force and authoritarian laws are necessary tools for a dictatorship, but long-term control of a people also requires control of their minds. The Nazis recognized this and made re-shaping Germany's educational system a priority. They already had a good head-start.

When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, about 2.5 million Germans were members of the Nazi Party. Seven percent of the Party's members were from the upper class, seven percent were peasants, thirty-five percent were industrial workers, and fifty-one percent were from the professional and middle class. Surprisingly, in the latter group, the professional and middle class, the largest occupational group represented was elementary school teachers. Hitler and the Nazis thus already had a core group of committed followers in a position to help them shape the minds of the next generation.