

## A) What role did Hitler play in the rise of the Nazis?

**Source 1** – Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), 1925

*Politics is the art of using men's weaknesses for one's ends.*

*Since the masses have only poor acquaintance with abstract ideas, their reactions lie more in the domain of feelings... And the driving force which has brought about the most tremendous revolutions on this earth has never been a body of scientific teaching which has gained power over the masses, but always a devotion which has inspired them, and often a kind of hysteria which has urged them into action. Whoever wished to win over the masses must know the key that will open the door to their hearts.*

*The receptive powers of the masses are very restricted, and their understanding is feeble. On the other hand, they quickly forget. Such being the case, all effective propaganda must be confined to a few bare necessities and then must be expressed in a few stereotyped formulas.*

*The art of leadership consists of consolidating the attention of the people against a single adversary [opponent] and taking care that nothing will split that attention... The leader of genius must have the ability to make different opponents appear as if they belonged to the one category.*

**Source 3** – E. A. Buller, *Darkness over Germany*, 1943. Buller was an anti-Nazi German teacher who left Germany.

*At one of the earlier congresses I was sitting around surrounded by thousands of SA men and as Hitler spoke I was most interested at the shouts and more often the muttered exclamations of the men around me, who were mainly workmen or lower-middle-class types. 'He speaks for me, he speaks for me.' 'Ach Gott [Oh, God], he knows how I feel.' Many of them seemed lost to the world around them and were probably unaware of what they were saying. One man in particular struck me as he leant forward with his head in his hands, and with a sort of convulsive sob said, 'Gott sei Dank [God be thanked], he understands.'*

**Source 2** – Otto Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 1940.

Otto Strasser and his brother Gregor were early supporters of the Nazi Party and held leading positions in its organisation. Otto became disillusioned and left the party in 1930.

*Adolf Hitler enters a hall. He sniffs the air. For a minute he gropes, feels his way, senses the atmosphere. Suddenly he bursts forth. His words go like an arrow to their target, he touches each private wound on the raw, liberating the mass unconscious, expressing its innermost aspirations, telling it what it most wants to hear... If he tries to bolster up his argument with theories or quotations from books he has only imperfectly understood, he scarcely rises above a very poor mediocrity. But let him throw away his crutches and step out boldly, speaking as the spirit moves him, and he is promptly transformed into one of the greatest speakers of the century.*

### ACTIVITY 2

1. List the main points Hitler is making in Source 1 about how to win support.
2. Which of Sources 2 and 3 do you think is more reliable as evidence of Hitler's skills?
3. What can you learn from Sources 2-4 about Hitler's skills in winning support?
4. Some have argued that modern advertising tactics are partly inspired by Hitler's views and approaches. Do you think there is a case for this?
5. Make summarised notes on:
  - a. Hitler's leadership qualities
  - b. Hitler's skills as a communicator



← Source 4 – Audience listening to Hitler speaking at a rally in Munich in 1922

In 1924 Hitler was in gaol, sentenced to five years for treason. His future looked bleak and it was possible that he might even be deported to Austria. However, within one year he had been released and was able to turn his failure at Munich to his advantage. He had gained national publicity from his bold defence at his trial. He had also used

the time in prison to reflect on politics and to write *Mein Kampf*.

Furthermore, the chaos into which the Nazi Party fell during his absence showed his indispensability to the movement. He virtually refounded the party in February 1925 and based it around the *Fuhrerprinzip*. This gave Hitler supreme power over both policy and strategy. He reorganised the party's strategy, structure and symbols. Only the Twenty-five Point Programme remained fixed, although its interpretation would become flexible. The Nazis would now use Weimar democracy to gain mass support rather than attempting another putsch.

The *Fuhrerprinzip* made the party an obedient tool of Hitler's will. He introduced the brown shirt for his SA storm troopers, adopted the outstretched right arm as a salute and personally designed the Nazi flag with the swastika and striking yet traditional red, black and white colours. At the party congress at Bamberg in 1926 he defeated more socialist-inclined rivals and became the undisputed Fuhrer of the party.

Hitler himself was central to the success of the Nazis. He provided charismatic leadership with his **MESSIANIC** mission to build a new Germany. He seemed to possess almost demonic willpower, which was both infectious and inspiring to others who accepted that what he said could come true. He was a powerful speaker; his timing, expression and the content of his speeches impressed his listeners. His hypnotic gaze from protuberant [staring] blue eyes helped fix his audience. He was able to identify with their emotions and expectations and gave people faith - an attractive commodity, particularly amidst the despair of economic crisis when other political parties appeared to lack a sense of direction.

Along with Josef Goebbels, Hitler realised the importance of propaganda and used it to target many German's specific grievances. He was very flexible in what he actually said to the German people. He was able to tailor his message to his audience, and was able to appeal both to the socially downtrodden and to the agrarian and industrial elites. He was the central rallying figure that gave the various groups within the party cohesion and attracted wider support. Hitler also has a good sense of opportunity and timing. However, he was clearly not infallible, as was exemplified by his near-disastrous meeting with Hindenburg in August 1932. Furthermore, in 1930 the Nazis did as well in areas where they had not organised mass rallies as in those where they had. It must also be said that many people who encountered Hitler were not impressed.