

Today we go back in time to August 11 1919, and to GERMANY, which the year before had not only lost WORLD WAR I to the British and the French and the Americans - but it had also lost its leader, KAISER (pronounced 'Ky - zer': it comes from 'Caesar') WILHELM II, the German king who had stupidly led Germany into World War I, thinking that Germany would walk all over France and Russia and become the biggest power in Europe. The Kaiser abdicated (gave up his throne) on November 9 1918, and two days later Germany agreed to an armistice (a permanent cease-fire) in World War I, to start at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month - 11 am on 11 November. Having lost the Kaiser (who moved to Holland, and died on 4 June 1941, while WORLD WAR II was raging, and Holland had been occupied by Germany), Germany decided that it should become a democracy and that its leaders should be elected. And this led to the creation of the WEIMAR (pronounced 'Vy - mar') REPUBLIC, named after the town, Weimar (in the centre of Germany), where the democratically elected German government met and decided how it would rule Germany.



And it was on 11 August 1919 that the rules that governed how the Weimar Republic would be run - its CONSTITUTION - were signed and made law by the then President of Germany. The Weimar Republic would last 14 years, until 1933. After that Germany would no longer be a democracy but came under the rule of one man - ADOLF HITLER, the leader of the German NAZI PARTY. How did this happen? It may be that it was inevitable. The winners of WORLD WAR I wanted to take their revenge on Germany for starting the war, and made Germany agree - in the peace treaty that finally brought World War I to an end (the TREATY OF VERSAILLES (pronounced 'Ver - sigh')) - that Germany pay huge sums to Britain and France to compensate them for the losses they had suffered fighting World War I. These payments were known as REPARATIONS.

In order to afford to pay them, Germany had to PRINT MONEY. Well, what happens to the value of something if loads more of that thing are produced? What would happen to the value of shirts signed by Ronaldo if suddenly millions of shirts signed by Ronaldo became available? Each shirt would be worth a lot less - instead of paying £500 for a shirt, you could be able to get one for £50. So if you print loads and loads of German marks (the money Germans used in those days), each mark starts to lose its value. And what happens if money loses its value? The price of everything else goes up - you have to spend a lot more money to get the same amount of goods. And when



the price of everything goes up, that's called INFLATION. And the Germans didn't just suffer from inflation - they suffered from HYPERINFLATION. Money started losing its value at terrifying rates - in the morning you would have to take a wheelbarrow full of marks to the bakers to get a loaf of bread. In the evening the same loaf of bread might cost two wheelbarrows full of marks. People had to get rid of their money and spend it as soon as they got it. And people started losing their minds, and wondering who would get them out of the mess Germany was in.

And then in 1929, the WALL STREET CRASH happened, where the American stock market suffered a huge fall in value, and loads of people lost a huge amount of money. This triggered a worldwide DEPRESSION, with millions of people losing their jobs. And Germany was affected by the Depression as much as anyone. In Germany, four million people were unemployed by 1930. Again, people started losing their minds, wondering who would get them out of the mess Germany was in.



And while all this was happening, an Austrian who had served in the Germany army during World War I was watching, and waiting for his chance. His name was ADOLF HITLER. After the war ended, he could have become a street artist, but his connections in the military meant that he was paid by the German government to keep an eye on some dangerously radical groups that were forming in the South of Germany, claiming that Germany had been 'stabbed in the back' during World War I and didn't deserve to lose the war, and should try again to become the biggest power in Europe. Hitler fell in love with these ideas, and switched sides, becoming the leader of the 'NATIONAL SOCIALIST' (or 'Nazi') PARTY that these groups had formed. In 1923, Hitler made his move, trying to start a revolution from his party's base in BAVARIA, in Southern Germany. But the time wasn't right. No one wanted to listen to Hitler and the government easily crushed his rebellion and threw him and his fellow Nazi leaders into prison.



While he was in prison, Hitler (who was then only 35 years old) dictated his autobiography, MEIN KAMPF (pronounced 'Mine Kamp-ff'), to his deputy RUDOLF HESS. ('Mein Kampf' is German for 'My Struggle' or 'My Fight'.) One of the most disgusting books ever written, it contained plenty of promises about what Hitler would do if he ever got into power. The problems Germany went through with hyperinflation and unemployment made people more and more willing to listen to Hitler's promises that if only he were elected into power, he would solve all of Germany's problems. And others listened to the COMMUNISTS, who promised working people that they would reorganise Germany and redistribute its wealth to make sure that the interests of working people were protected. And the powerful the Communists got, the more respectable middle class and wealthy people who were scared of

communism were willing to take another look at Hitler, and think, 'Maybe he's the guy who will protect us from the communists.'

In 1930, Hitler got 19% of the vote in national elections, and an equivalent number of seats in the German Parliament - the REICHSTAG (pronounced 'Rikes - tag'). Two years later, with more elections, he got 37.3% of the vote and the Nazis became the largest party in the Reichstag, but all the other parties combined to keep Hitler out of power. And in 1933, more elections were held and this time the Nazis got fewer votes - 33%. Some people had seen they were on the brink of something very bad and had tried to back away from the edge. But it didn't matter - Germany went tumbling over the edge nonetheless. The President of Germany, scared of the Communists coming into power, appointed Hitler to become CHANCELLOR OF GERMANY - the equivalent of Britain's Prime Minister.



Now that he had power, Hitler wasn't going to let anything take it away from him. He had his thugs burn down the Reichstag, and Hitler blamed the communists and demanded emergency powers to deal with the threat that they posed. He then called more elections but only scraped a majority - too many people weren't buying what Hitler was selling. But it didn't matter. He passed an Act which said that whatever Hitler said was law, and that was the end of the Weimar Republic. Hitler no longer needed to go through the Reichstag to pass laws, and he used his powers to take control of all aspects of German society. And things got very dark, very quickly in Germany. And a washed-up British politician called WINSTON CHURCHILL started warning of the terrible threat that Germany was starting to pose to the civilised world. And just like Hitler, he had to watch and wait for his chance to get power to do something about Hitler. I've told you Churchill's story already (April 29 and May 1), and I will tell you the rest of Hitler's story some other time.

