In January 1933 Hitler was appointed German chancellor. This was a powerful position but it fell short of the dictatorship. Indeed, in January 1933, there were still significant obstacles in the way of Hitler’s quest for total power. Hitler dealt with these over the course of 1933 and 1934, emerging as German Führer after the death of Hindenburg in August 1934.

The Weimar Constitution guaranteed the civil rights of citizens. It therefore placed significant limits on the power of the German government. Following the Reichstag fire in February 1933, the government passed the emergency Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State, which temporarily suspended civil rights in Germany.

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President Hindenburg

The Reichstag
The Reichstag had the power to make laws, and therefore could act as a check on Hitler’s power. However, the Enabling Act, passed in March 1933, gave Hitler supreme law-making power in his role as chancellor.

The Night of the Long Knives
The Night of the Long Knives, in June 1934, dealt with three sources of potential opposition to Hitler:
- The SA, the private army of the Nazi Party, had been pressing for a ‘second revolution’. Hitler did not want this as he needed the support of the conservative elites. Ernst Röhm, leader of the SA, was forced to commit suicide on the Night of the Long Knives, and the SA was effectively neutralised.
- Von Papen, the vice-chancellor, had spoken out against Hitler’s government. On the Night of the Long Knives he was imprisoned, and was later sent to Austria.
- The army, which had been lobbying for the neutralisation of the SA, swore an oath of allegiance to Hitler in the aftermath of the purge.

The president
President Hindenburg had both personal authority based on his war record and constitutional power as president. Immediately prior to his death, the cabinet passed the Law Concerning the Highest State Office of the Reich (August 1934), which led to the merger of the roles of chancellor and president on Hindenburg’s death.

Civil rights
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