

How powerful was Hitler?

Taken from Weimar and Nazi Germany
'Hite and Hinton'

In this unit you are going to examine the nature of Hitler's power. By the end of this Unit you should be able to:-

- define what is meant by the Fuhrerprinzip
- Hitler's formal position as Fuhrer and his relationship with the German people
- understand the nature of Hitler's charismatic authority and the Hitler Myth
- understand how decisions were made in Hitler's Germany.

You will use the pack of resources that go with this pack to complete the exercises. However, you should also use further resources to help in your understanding of this topic.

Further Resources:-

Discussion Point

Can one individual ever represent the wishes of a whole people?

Do you believe that any individual, however, important, should be above the law?

Task

Read sources 11.2 and 11.3 and decide which statements best summarises the view of the writers of these sources. Underline your choice.

- Hitler is an absolute dictator who is free to do whatever he wants
- Hitler is all powerful because he represents the will of the people
- Hitler has to act according to popular wishes.

Hitler dominated Germany from 1933-1945. After the enabling Act he was formally able to issue decrees. This gradually became the normal way laws were made. But his wishes and even his official's interpretations of his wishes served as laws. Hitler's power was based on his unique relationship with the German people. He alone knew what the Germans wanted and he alone could fulfil their needs. Thus Hitler's power did not just rest on his formal position within a system of government.

Task: Read sources 11.4 and 11.5 taken from Ian Kershaw's 'Hitler Myth'
How did Hitler's popular support strengthen his position at home and abroad?

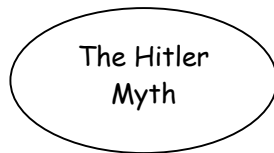
What effect did his popularity have on the overall development of the regime?

In source 11.4 what reasons does Kershaw give for Hitler's popularity?

'Even now millions of Germans draw a distinction between the Fuhrer and the party, refusing their support to the latter while believing in Hitler'. What key aspect of the Hitler Myth does this comment made by Goebels in 1941 illustrate?

Why did most Germans not see through the Hitler Myth?

Task: Look at the diagram 11A The Hitler Myth and complete a diagram with what you think are the main points in the Hitler Myth



How were decisions taken in Nazi Germany

Task: To complete this task you must read the relevant section carefully in the pack. Write a couple of paragraphs explaining how Hitler worked as Fuhrer. Try to include how things worked in the Chancellery. Look at diagram 11B to help your understanding

Hitler's decision making

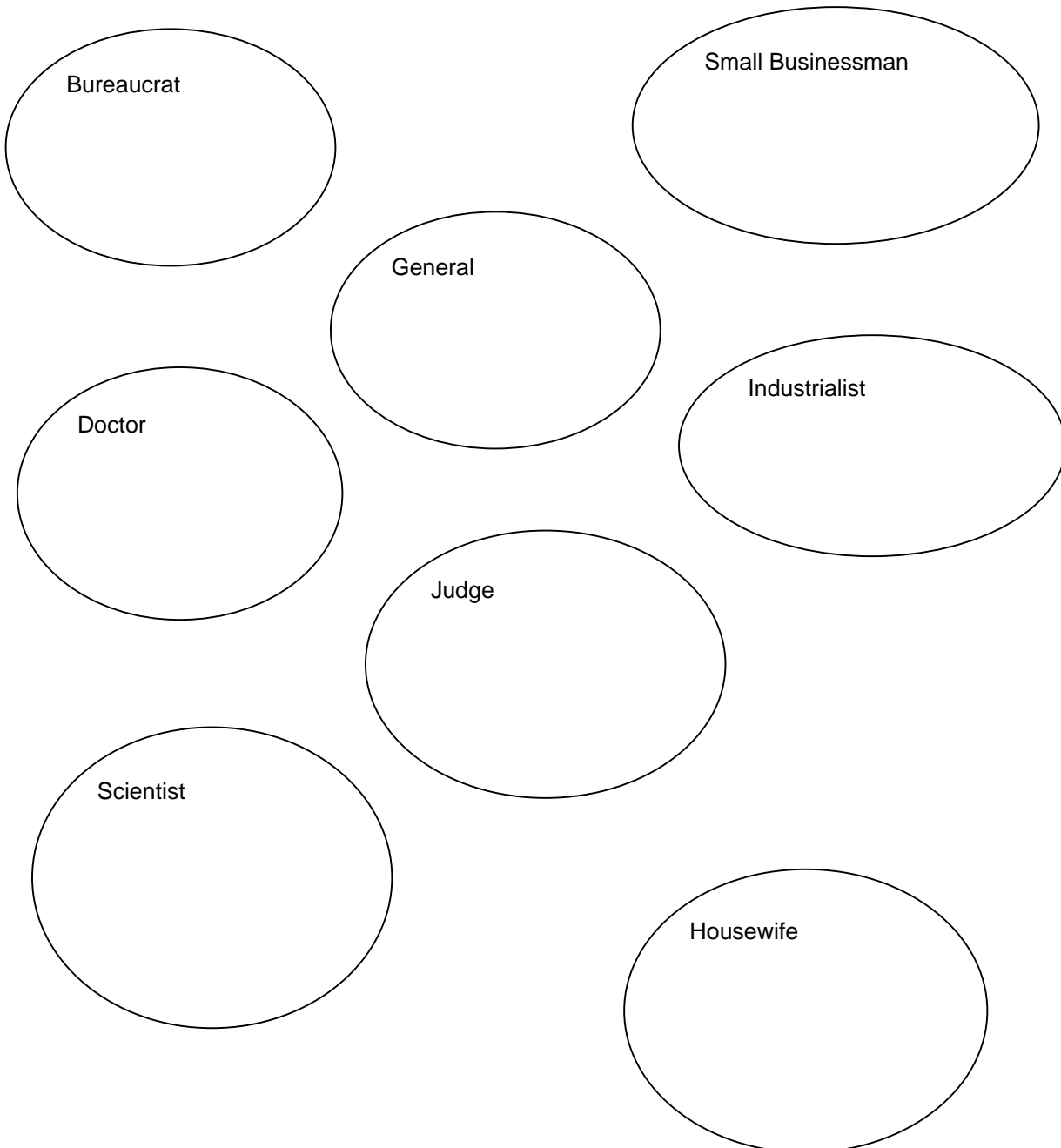
The Chancellery

Read sources 11.7 and 11.9 and suggest the differences given for Hitler's unwillingness to take decisions

11.7

11.9

Task Look at diagram 11c and give reasons why the characters below would support Hitler



Can you see a common reason for any of these people supporting Hitler?

Was Hitler an all-powerful dictator?

At the moment there is a debate about the nature of Hitler's dictatorship. The traditional view suggests that Nazi Germany, like Soviet Russia, was a totalitarian dictatorship. However, since the 1960's this interpretation has been challenged.

Task: Using the diagram 11D show the differing interpretations and the most recent consensus

Traditional view:

Historians

Revisionist view

Historians

Consensus

Historians

Decision making

Task : Choose one of the examples and briefly show how the decision making process worked.

Why did the Third Reich become more radical

The Third Reich was inherently unstable, and self destructive. It was unlikely to last very long let alone a thousand years. The competitive nature and chaotic structure led to a war of all against all. Hitler was surrounded by officials, all seeking to win his favour by advocating the most radical option to fulfil his ideological goals.

Task: Either by writing or using a diagram show how the Nazi state steadily became more radical