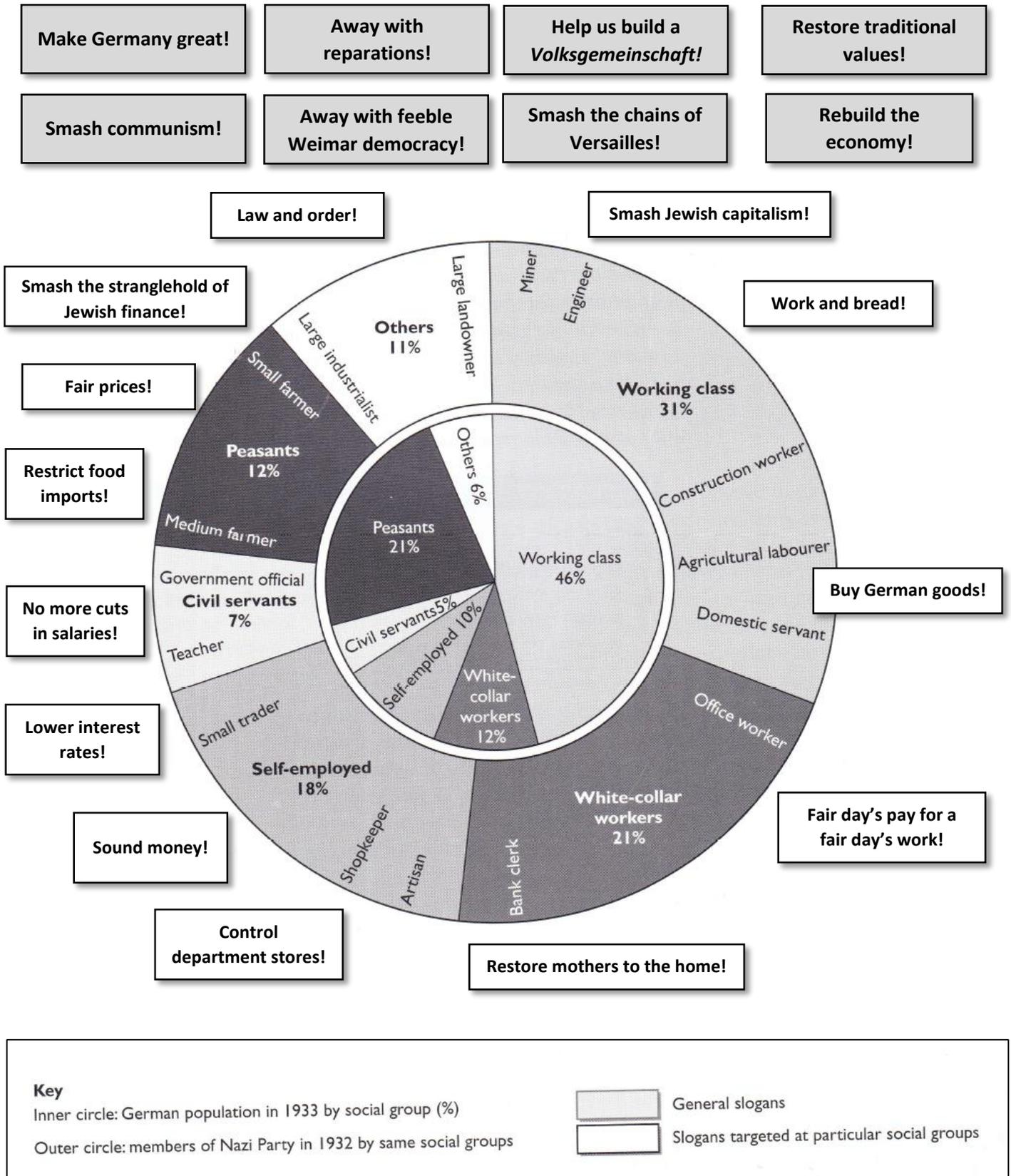


F) Review: Why did the Nazis become the largest party in Weimar Germany?

Chart 4 tries to summarise what you have learnt about the extent to which different social groups supported the Nazis, and what the Nazis offered. Then, to conclude, we look at two contemporary sources that shed light on the nature of support for the Nazis.

Chart 4 - Who supported the Nazis and why?



Source 36 - 'Why I became a Nazi.' An extract from an autobiography of a Nazi member submitted in 1934 to a prize competition organised by Professor Abel at Columbia University, New York, USA. The writer was a farmer and fought in the First World War against the Russian:

Then came November 9th 1918. Slowly and more strongly there grew up in me a hatred of this band of traitors and their followers. Soon the consequence of this betrayal of the nation became more and more evident.

[We lost West Prussia and Danzig; were hit by inflation; Jews became rich.] My inward aversion [hostility] to these men of a foreign race which has crucified the saviour and which now was betraying our people increased until one day it grew into hatred. The Jew was at fault for all the misery.

Then came November 9th, 1923. Great and brilliant, the name of Adolf Hitler, which we heard not for the first time in these agitated days, appeared before us. We were all marching in step; we all had the same desire to wipe out the existing system which had come into power by betrayal of the people and country. We wanted something that was to grow out of the common experience of the war and the front, that would know no estates [social groups] and classes but only the German people. The word, Hitler, became for me a symbol of our future.

These first members are still our best. They grasped National Socialism not with their minds but with their emotions. They had not learned National Socialism from books. Their blood, their natural instinct drove them to the movement. Like myself, they sought the road to the people and, like myself, found it by ridding themselves of class consciousness and seeing only the fellow-countryman in every German.

In July the leader came to Tilsit. I saw him for the first time. About 40,000 people from near and far had gathered to greet him. I wore the brown shirt for the first time. Those hours are never to be forgotten. The Leader spoke. For the first time I heard his voice. His words went straight to the heart. From now on my life and efforts were dedicated to the Leader. I wanted to be a true follower. The Leader spoke of the threatened ruin of the nation and of the resurrection under the Third Reich. What matter personal interest, and social status? How insignificant had all parties become to my eyes. How despicable [vile] was Communism.

Another thing the Leader gave us was faith in the German people. If we won, Germany was saved; if we were defeated, a gate would open up and Moscow's Red hordes would swarm in and plunge Europe into night and misery.

ACTIVITY 11

1. a) Which reasons for the growth of support for the Nazis are shown in Source 36?
b) Which reasons are not reflected?
2. a) What can you learn from Source 37 about the reasons for the rise of the Nazis?
b) What can be deduced from this poem about Brecht's political position?
3. A key reason for the Nazis' electoral success was that they offered both big ideas that could appeal to any German and also particular policies aimed at specific groups. How does Chart 4 support this view?
4. Do you think the actions and skills of Hitler and the Nazi Movement were more important in winning support than factors outside their control such as the economic depression?

Source 37 – 'Song of the SA Man' by Bertolt Brecht

*My hunger made me fall asleep
With a belly ache.
Then I heard voices crying
Hey, Germany awake!*

*Then I saw crowds of men marching:
To the Third Reich, I heard them say.
I thought as I'd nothing to live for
I might as well march their way.*

*And as I marched, there marched beside me
The fattest of the crew
And when I shouted 'We want bread & work'
The fat man shouted too.*

*The chief of staff wore boots
My feet meanwhile were wet
But both of us were marching
Whole heartedly in step.*

*I thought that the left road led forward
He told me that I was wrong.
I went the way that he ordered
And blindly tagged along.*

*And those who were weak from hunger
Kept marching, pale and taut
Together with the well-fed
To some Third Reich of a sort.*

*They told me which enemy to shoot at
So I took their gun and aimed
And, when I had shot, saw my brother
Was the enemy they had named.*

*Now I know: over there stands my brother
It's hunger that makes us one
While I march with the enemy
My brother's and my own.*

*So now my brother is dying
By my own hand he fell
Yet I know that if he's defeated
I shall be lost as well.*