To what extent was the Nazi consolidation of power in the years 1933 and 1934 achieved by legal means?

The Nazi’s consolidation of power in the years 1933 to 1934 can be seen as achieved by legal means as the Enabling Act and other laws that were passed allowed the Nazis to convert Germany from a democracy to a dictatorship via legal means.

The Nazis passed the Enabling Act at their first meeting of the new Reichstag on 23 March. This is extremely significant as it illustrates the Nazis immediate assertion of power. This was also a vital component in the Nazi consolidation of power as the Enabling Act provided the legal basis for the Nazi dictatorship as it gave Hitler the power to issue decrees without the support of the Reichstag and without needing Hindenburg’s agreement, therefore it greatly contributing to the Nazi consolidation of power via legal means.

The Nazis can be seen as further legally consolidating their power, from March 1933 to August 1934 as Germany underwent the process of Gleichshaltung meaning the coordination or ‘bringing into line’ of Germany. This was extremely crucial since from July 1933, the Nazi party was the only legal political party in Germany. This was a result of the Nazis issuing a ‘First Law against the Formation of New Parties’ on 14 July 1933 which was extremely significant as the Enabling Act allowed the Nazis to make the forming of non-Nazi parties as illegal. It also allowed them to legally ban the existing non-Nazi parties as well as trade unions. This was a vital step of Gleichshaltung as it eliminated any potential threat against the consolidation of Nazi power via legal means. The Nazis however, did sign the Concordat with The Centre Party between the Nazi regime and the Roman Catholic Church. This was significant as it was the Nazis way of merely appeasing The Centre Party in order to eliminate them as a threat.

The Nazis asserted their control over government and legally contributed in their consolidation of power as multiple laws were passed between 1933 and 1934. This was significant as the laws were passed which replaced the German people with Nazis in order to gain total control over Germany. For example, the ‘Law for the Coordination of the Federal States’ resulted in the dissolving of elected assemblies in the federal states. This is extremely significant as it allowed the Nazis to replace them with Nazi dominated assemblies which was a crucial step towards the consolidation of power as it gave the Nazis much more control outside of the Reichstag. Furthermore, the Nazis reinforced their power by controlling the Civil servants more tightly. This was significant as it created fear and uncertainty since where their loyalties were in doubt, local officials were forced to resign and were replaced by Nazi party members despite having no experience in government. This was crucial as it suggests that these changes were not made to benefit Germany but instead to reinforce the Nazi control and consolidate their power via legal means. It also illustrates the consequences of not being loyal to the Nazis therefore creating using fear as a means of control. This is significant as it illustrates that the Nazis consolidated their power via a combination of laws, manipulation and fear which is crucial as it suggests that it was not only via legal means.

The Night of the Long Knives is significant as although the SA had contributed greatly towards the rise of the Nazi party, after July 1933 when they lost their police status and lacked any clear role, Hitler viewed them as a hinderance to the Nazis consolidation of power. This is significant as the SA was led by Rohm and threatened to undermine Hitler’s relationship with Hindenburg and the army. Furthermore, the SA violence was embarrassing for the Nazis and did not gain support or contribute toward their consolidation of power but instead did the opposite. The SA went to head with the army and began to attack army convoys and steel weapons. This was significant as it resulted in further tarnishing the image of the Nazis since they were attacked via Papen’s speech and the army threatened to crush the SA. This threat was crucial as the army was was the only institution with the power to remove Hitler from power. This was significant as their loyalties were to Hindenburg not Hitler illustrating that they could prevent the Nazi consolidation of power.

As a result of this, Hitler and the Nazis in order to consolidate their power legally needed to eliminate the threat of the SA completely and they could not delay any longer. This was extremely significant as Hitler arguably legally eliminated the threat of the SA in the ‘Night of the Long Knives on 30 June 1934. Hitler purged Rohm and the SA by presenting the massacre as necessary to prevent a SA coup, this was significant as it resulted in the Nazis gaining public support for their actions. 84 were executed and 1000 were arrested. This was extremely significant as the Nazis not only used this opportunity to neutralise the threat of the SA, but also used it in order to eliminate any other political opponents, including Schleicher, while Papen was arrested. The Night of the Long Knives, although it was well justified and gained public support, can be viewed as an illegal means of the Nazis consolidating their power as they arguably forcefully asserted their power and manipulated the public into thinking it was for their benefit.

It can be further argued that the Nazis did not consolidate their power via legal means but instead it can be seen as a result of the death of Hindenburg who died in August 1934. This was a revolutionary moment in the consolidation of power for the Nazis as it allowed Hitler to merge the offices of Chancellor and president, this therefore made Hitler the Fuhrer – the undisputed leader and dictator of Germany. After the Night of the Long Knives, the army had to objection to this. This was crucial as the soldiers were made to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler as their commander in chief as oppose to the country which was greatly significant as it increased his control and the Nazis were able to fully consolidate their power.

In conclusion, the Nazis consolidate their power via legal means to a large extent. However, it can be argued that ultimately, it was the death of Hindenburg which completely transformed Germany from a democracy to a dictatorship. It can also be argued that the Nazis used legal means in order to justify and disguise their corrupt and illegal actions such as the use of the Night of the Long Knives in order to eliminate all political opponents. Furthermore, the Nazis can be seen to manipulate the public via the effective use of propaganda which further contributed towards their consolidation of power.