Anschluss with Austria
Background

- Austria forbidden to unite with Germany under the Treaty of Versailles
- Hitler (Austrian) was determined to unite the two countries.
- 1934 - Abortive attempt at Anschluss after Mussolini massed Italian troops on the Austrian border.
- 1936 - Austrian-German agreement where Germany agreed not to intervene in Austria and allowed Austrian Nazis to enter the government. This development undermined Austrian independence as the Austrian Nazis were under German control.
- 1937 - Germany and Italy had grown closer - Rome - Berlin Axis.
- They had co-operated over intervention in the Spanish Civil War.
Hossbach Memorandum

- Hitler set out his Foreign Policy plans and it was sent to key Nazi officials.
- Included a timetable.
- Germany needed living space
- It was not self-sufficient economically - it would have to expand territorially
- Two stages to expansion
  1. The occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia.
  2. a major conflict with the major powers no later than 1943 -
     • Could gain the first objective without general war because Britain, Hitler believed, had already written off Austria and Czechoslovakia and without Britain, France was unlikely to fight.
- He needed an opportunity to strike.
One of Hitler's major goals had always been to unite all German-speaking people into one great nation. Austria, the land of his birth, contained the largest number of German-speaking people outside of Germany. Therefore, they became a top priority in his plans for German expansion.
How did it all start? – Early 1938

• France was in the middle of a crisis as the Government had collapsed on 10 March. - two days before Hitler marched into Austria

• Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, had just resigned

• Public opinion in Britain and France was that Hitler could not be prevented from swallowing up Austria in the near future.

• Italy was engaged in the Spanish civil war, had indicated that it would not intervene or object to the Anschluss
Under orders from Hitler, the Austrian Nazi Party began riots, burned buildings, staged street fights and, in general, caused various problems for the Austrian government. In response, the Austrian government passed a law banning the Nazi party. Hitler used this as an excuse to meet with the Austrian leader, Kurt Schuschnigg.
During the meeting, Hitler threatened to invade Austria unless all important government positions were given to members of the Nazi party. Hitler could then take over the country from within, control it from Berlin, but not threaten the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

He demanded that an Austrian Nazi (Seyss-Inquart) be appointed as Minister of the Interior.

Schuschnigg reluctantly agreed to this, but said that the people would have to vote on joining Germany. Hitler agreed, but he did not trust the Austrians. Therefore, he moved his army to the border before the vote to intimidate them.

Austrian Nazis caused disturbances all over the country.
The Austrian government then appealed to England, France and Italy to help them from being taken over by Germany. All rejected the pleas by the Austrians. With no support from other European countries, Schuschnigg resigned, and appointed the Austrian Nazi party leader, Seyss - Inquart as his replacement.

German troops occupied Austria, 11th March 1938
Results:

• German troops occupied Austria.

• Austria had become the first country to fall victim to Hitler's aggression.

• Persecution of the Austrian Jews began.
The banner reads, "Those of the same blood belong in the same Reich!"
(April 1938)
Hitler on a celebratory tour of Graz following the Anschluss.

March 1938 – Hitler entered Austria in triumph
Reaction in Britain

• Chamberlain in Cabinet: 'Nothing short of an overwhelming show of force would have stopped it' - Britain did not have such force even if they had wanted to defend Austria (which they did not)

• Chamberlain reproached Hitler for the Anschluss; this had shocked British public opinion; but there was no use 'crying over spilt milk'

• Chiefs of Staff warned the Government that fighting Hitler now would not only involve a 'limited European war' but 'world war' as Japan and Italy would take advantage of British distraction in Europe

• Lord Lothian - at last the Anschluss 'ends a disastrous period when the League attempted to deny to the Germans...their national unity'

• Lord Tweedsmuir - 'I do not see what the fuss is about'

• Churchill called the Anschluss 'a programme of aggression, nicely calculated and timed' and that Britain should take 'effective measures while time remains' - Churchill was in a minority

• Opinion that Austria could not be defended by Britain given its geographical position

• Did not have the capability to do defend Austria

• Public still on the whole pacifist

• Opinion that it was only giving Germany what was denied under the discredited Versailles Treaty

• Appeasing Hitler was seen as the best way of securing peace and security. This was in Britain's national interest, given its worldwide/imperial commitments.
This cartoon from 1938 shows Hitler as a poacher, stealing Austria. Mussolini is shown as a bad game-keeper. ‘I never heard a shot, Adolf’, he is saying.
A plebiscite was held on April 10th when Hitler could ensure that the vote would be in his favour.

99% of the German and Austrian population voted for the Anschluss (union between Germany and Austria).
Adolf Hitler, speech at Koenigsberg (25th March, 1938)

Certain foreign newspapers have said that we fell on Austria with brutal methods. I can only say; even in death they cannot stop lying. I have in the course of my political struggle won much love from my people, but when I crossed the former frontier (into Austria) there met me such a stream of love as I have never experienced. Not as tyrants have we come, but as liberators.
Source A is a cartoon by David Low, April 12, 1938.

**Plebiscite**

Question: Do you approve of having your pants kicked?

**Vote JA!**

—or else...

Not only the Austrians voted.