

NAZISM IN GERMANY

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The Weimar Republic (1919-1929)

To understand why Nazism and Adolf Hitler came to power born in Germany in 1930s, we have to first take a look at the situation in Germany in the 1920s. After World War I Germany became a **democratic republic**. It was not an easy process because the situation was very difficult.

At the end of World War I Germany was shaken by many revolts, especially by the socialists. The Kaiser Wilhelm II had lost his power to the military circles long before that but now even the generals were not in control either. On 9 November 1918 the Kaiser abdicated.

Socialist Friedrich Ebert became the new leader of the **Republic of Germany**. Immediately, on 11 November he signed an armistice with the Allies.

In the first free election in 1919 Ebert's Socialist Party won. However, it was still opposed by the old politicians and the new Communist Party. The new government met in the small town of Weimar (to demonstrate the new start), hence the name of the new republic.

In June 1919 the new government signed the **Treaty of Versailles**. Most German people resented it and called it a "diktat." The Socialists were blamed for having accepted its conditions and thus harming Germany. However, they had no choice but to sign the treaty.

TASK 1:

What were the terms of the Treaty of Versailles?

The atmosphere was very useful for the new extreme groups:

- The extreme left - in 1919 the **communists** tried to overthrow the Weimar government. One group was called the **Spartacists** and was led by **Karl Liebknecht** and **Rosa Luxemburg**. They launched a rebellion but failed. Another communist rebellion was in Bavaria but failed too.
- Both communist revolts were crushed by the **Freikorps** who were anti-communist ex-soldiers. However, they represented the power of the extreme right and could harm the republic too. In 1920 five thousand Freikorps were led into Berlin in a rebellion called the **Kapp Putsch** (led by Dr. Wolfgang Kapp). This time, the government was saved by the workers.
- In **1923 Adolf Hitler** led another rebellion in Munich – the **Munich Putsch**. The revolt was unsuccessful and Hitler was arrested.

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles, especially the reparations and the occupation of the Ruhr were still a big issue. Because of German payment problems, **French and Belgian troops entered the Ruhr in 1923** and began to confiscate raw materials and goods. The German government ordered the workers passive

resistance but the French killed over 100 workers. The **country was in crisis**. To solve the situation, the government decided to simply **print out more money**. The advantage was that the state could pay off its debts with these worthless marks. However, the drawback of this solution was – **hyperinflation**. The money was suddenly worthless.

TASK 2:

Study the information below. How do you think this affected everyday life in Germany?

Source A: The rising cost of a loaf of bread in Berlin:

1918	0.63 marks
1922	163 marks
January 1923	250 marks
July 1923	3,465 marks
September 1923	1,512,000 marks
November 1923	201,000,000,000 marks

Source B:

Children playing with the worthless money.



Source C:

Banknotes were even used to start a fire.



Source D: A German one-billion mark banknote



Soon it was clear that action had to be taken. In 1923 a **new government** led by **Gustav Stresemann** as the new chancellor took over.

- cancelled the passive resistance in the Ruhr
- replaced the useless currency with new
- negotiated reparation payments
- negotiated loans from USA under the **Dawes Plan**

The situation stabilized but the hyperinflation had already done great damage to the Weimar Republic.

Stresemann was the most influential member of the German government from 1923 to 1929. He returned prosperity to Germany. He agreed to pay the reparations again and French troops left the Ruhr.

Also, in 1925 Germany signed the **Locarno Pact** and in 1926 it was accepted to the **League of Nations**.

In October 1929 Stresemann died and three weeks later the Wall Street stock exchange in New York crashed.

HITLER AND NAZISM – RISE TO POWER

Gustav Stresemann's government succeeded in stabilizing Germany. However, there was much **opposition**, especially among the **extreme rightist** groups.

The Nazi Party

It began as the German Workers' Party led by Anton Drexler.

Adolf Hitler joined the party in 1919 and soon he was put in charge of propaganda and political ideology of the party.

In 1920 the party came up with the **Twenty-Five Point Programme** and changed its name to the **National Socialist German Workers' Party** (the Nazi Party, NSDAP). Among other things, the Programme said that

- the Treaty of Versailles should be abolished
- Germany and Austria should form a union
- only "true Germans" should be allowed to live in Germany (of course, the Jews were not considered true citizens)
- large industries and businesses should be nationalized
- Germany should have a strong centralized government

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)

TASK 3:

For your homework, find information about Hitler's life before 1923.

Hitler knew how to appeal to the audiences, for example by twisting facts and giving the people somebody to blame for Germany's problems.

TASK 4: Which groups of people or nationalities would Hitler blame for Germany's problems?



By 1923 the Nazis were still a minority party. In November **1923** the government was dealing with the economic crisis and the crisis in the Ruhr. So Hitler announced he was taking over the government of Bavaria. He was helped by the war hero Ludendorff. The Nazis began taking over official buildings. However, the forces of the Weimar Republic rounded them up and defeated the rebellion. Hitler escaped but was soon arrested and faced trial together with other party leaders. He managed to get off with 5 years only (finally served 7 months).

TASK 5:

What was the name of this event?

Nazi ideology

As he was in prison, Hitler had time to write his ideas down. He wrote *Mein Kampf* (=My Struggle). Here he explained his views on:

- **National Socialism** –
- **Racism** –
- **Armed forces** –
- **Living space** –
- **the Führer** –

The Nazi Party waiting for the big time 1924 – 1929

Hitler decided to rebuild the Nazi Party to make it capable of seizing the power by democratic means. He was inspired by the youth organizations and recruitment drives of the Communists. So he created a network of local Nazi organizations - the _____ (the Hitler Youth), Nazi Students' League etc.

In 1925 he created the **SS** (Protection Squad) who were similar to SA (the Storm Troopers) of the Nazi Party but were fanatically loyal to Hitler himself. **Joseph Göbbels** was appointed to take care of the Nazi propaganda.

In 1924 they took part in the Reichstag election for the first time and they won 32 seats. Despite that they were not strong enough to take control.

The Depression and the rise of Adolf Hitler

October **1929** – the **Great Depression** - the American stock market crashed and caused a devastating economic depression. In a chain reaction, other countries in the world could feel the effects, too. Especially Germany was affected very badly because the American bankers suddenly needed the money they lent to the German banks. The result was a **major economic collapse in Germany** (bankruptcy, unemployment). Moreover, Germany still had to pay the reparations!

Hitler knew how to use the situation in his programme and speeches. He offered the people his solutions to the major problems. They were based on the Twenty-Five Point Programme.

TASK 6:

Read the list of Germany's problems and try to guess how Hitler wanted to solve them.

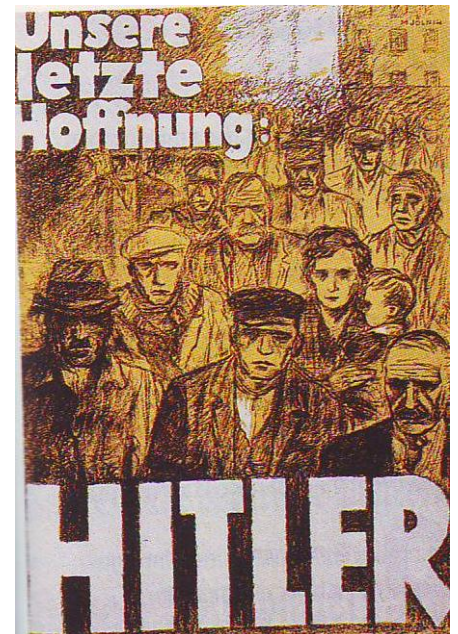
1. The Weimar government is weak and indecisive. →

2. The reparations are adding to Germany's problems. →

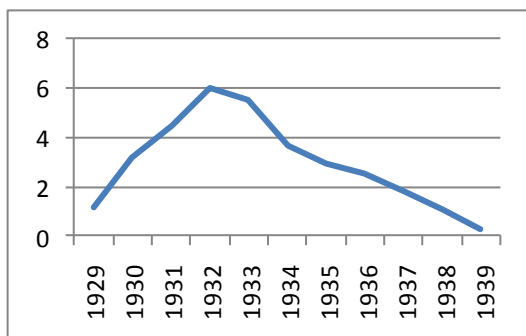
3. Unemployment has increased greatly. →

In the election of 1930, the Nazis got 107 seats and in 1932 they got nearly 200 which made them the biggest single party. The communists did well in the election, too. (The Depression was the reason for the success of both parties.)

However, the communists' rise in power helped the Nazis because many people (especially the rich) were afraid of them and because the Nazis were strongly opposed to communism, the industrialists began to help the Nazis financially. The middle classes, on the other hand, hoped that a strong Nazi government would prevent further inflation. Working class wanted more jobs. And why would the ex-servicemen (soldiers) support the Nazis? They hoped to be saved from unemployment and were attracted by the militarism. Thus it happened that Hitler was **supported by groups with such different expectations.**



The Nazi Party election poster, 1932



This graph shows the unemployment in Germany in millions. Did or did not the development help win Hitler the public opinion?

Also, Hitler's personal power and magnetism were very attractive and helpful. Hitler's powerful **propaganda** formed public opinion.

After the election of 1932 Hitler demanded the post of chancellor from Weimar **President Paul von Hindenburg** (an old war hero). The president refused at first and protected the current one - Franz von Papen. But then in **January 1933** surprisingly, Hindenburg **appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany**.

The weaknesses in the Weimar system of government were one of the causes of Hitler's access. The constitution was too democratic and the German parliament (the Reichstag) was not able to act quickly and decisively.

The Nazis did not have a decisive majority in the Reichstag so Hitler decided to hold another election in 1933. However, in February, shortly before the election, the **Reichstag building burned down**.

Hitler blamed this on the communists. In the election the Nazi Party won more seats. The fire also gave Hitler an excuse to ban the Communist Party. Soon he banned all others.

In March 1933 Hitler passed the **Enabling Act** – a law which gave him the right to pass emergency laws without the Reichstag. In fact, this made him a **dictator**.

To secure his position, Hitler needed to get rid of the army officers who still were not loyal to him. He was also suspicious of the SA and its leader Ernst Röhm. So, on the night of **29/30 June, 1934** SS units attacked the SA officers including Röhm and about 400 were executed. This purge is called **the Night of the Long Knives**.

In 1934, after Hindenburg's death, Hitler made himself the **Führer** and the entire army swore an oath of loyalty to him.

Hitler's Germany 1933 - 1945

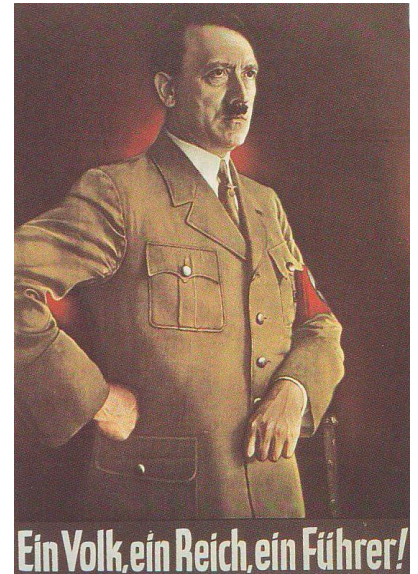
Very soon Hitler started to take complete control of the life in Germany. Democracy changed into a **totalitarian regime**.

Thanks to the _____ Act, Hitler could change laws without the parliament.

People who opposed him were arrested by the **Gestapo** (the secret police) and could be sent to **concentration camps**.

To achieve his goals, Hitler surrounded himself with people who were personally loyal to him and shared his ideology.

- **Hermann Göring** - Reichsmarschall, a pilot, founder of Gestapo, chief of Luftwaffe (German air force), Hitler's right hand
- **Joseph Göbbels** – minister of propaganda, personally closest to Hitler
- **Heinrich Himmler** – leader of SS and Gestapo, he coordinated the Final Solution (the Holocaust)
- **Reinhard Heydrich** – Himmler's close colleague and second highest SS leader, he co-designed the Holocaust, in 1942 he was assassinated in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.



A Nazi poster from 1930. It reads
"One people, one state, one leader!"

Hitler himself spread his **personal cult**. The people were always reminded of him in their everyday life.

For example, in the typical and obligatory Nazi greeting:

“If people belong to the same social group, it is customary to raise the right arm at an angle so that the palm of the hand becomes visible. The appropriate phrase that goes with it is ‘Heil Hitler’ or at least ‘Heil’. ... The greeting should always be carried out with the left arm if one’s right arm is engaged by a lady.”

(a German newspaper, 1936)

Nazism in Germany was glorified by the film industry (director Leni Riefenstahl).

Young people were coordinated and shaped towards the ideology in **Hitler Youth**. At schools, they were influenced from the youngest years. They were brought up close to militarism as well.

“All subjects – German language, History, Geography, Chemistry and Mathematics – must concentrate on military subjects, the glorification of military service and of German heroes and leaders and the strength of a rebuilt Germany. Chemistry will develop a knowledge of chemical warfare, explosives, etc. while Mathematics will help the young to understand artillery, calculations, ballistics...”

(A German Nazi newspaper, 1939)

Children’s camps were another popular thing. Indoctrination was, of course, a primary goal.

“Password: Adolf Hitler.

Motto for the day: Hitler is Germany and Germany is Hitler.

Words: We owe to our leader Adolf Hitler the fact that we can open our camp today.”

(Guidelines for activities for a camp, Friday 10 July 1937)

To “purify” the nation, Hitler wanted to **get rid of the Jews**:

- He claimed them to be an inferior race. The only true German race was proclaimed to be the **Aryan race** (fair hair, blue eyes)

In a letter written in 1922 Hitler expressed his terrible hatred towards the Jews so clearly:

“If I am ever really in power, the destruction of the Jews will be my first and most important job. As soon as I have the power, I shall have gallows after gallows erected...Then the Jews will be hanged one after another and they will stay hanging until they stink...then the next group will follow and that will continue until the last Jew in Munich is exterminated. Exactly the same procedure will be followed in other cities until Germany is cleansed of the last Jew.”

In *Mein Kampf* he then transformed his ideas into a doctrine.

“To read the pages [of Hitler’s Mein Kampf] is to enter a world of the insane, a world peopled by hideous and distorted shadows. The Jew is no longer a human being, he has become a mythical figure, a grimacing devil invested with infernal powers, the incarnation of evil.”

(A. Bullock, a leading expert on Hitler)

- The Jews were accused of having caused many problems to Germany (e.g. the Depression).
- Propaganda spread **anti-semitism** everywhere.
- He banned the Jews from most of public life (swimming pools, cinemas, restaurants, parks). Jewish shops and businesses were boycotted.
- In **1935** Hitler passed the **Nuremberg Laws**. The Jews were denied their citizenship rights and marriages between Jews and non-Jews were banned. They had to wear the yellow **Star of David**.

- In **1936** the persecution calmed down a little during the **Olympic Games in Berlin**. Hitler wanted to glorify the Nazi Party and the Aryan race. He was angry when a black athlete, **Jesse Owens** from USA, defeated many Aryan champions and won four gold medals!
- Finally, on 9 November **1938 (the Crystal Night)** persecution of the Jews was escalated when over seven thousand Jewish shops and businesses were attacked, synagogues were burned down and over thirty thousand Jews were sent to concentration camps.



A cartoon from a Nazi newspaper, 1935.

- Many Jews decided to leave Germany but most of them stayed because they could not believe the situation could get worse. They did not know that in January **1942** Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler would introduce the **Final Solution** – a systematic **genocide of the Jews**. (see chapter on World War II)
- It needs to be said that not only the Jews were persecuted in Germany. Also the Gypsies, homosexuals, communists and other groups which did not fit Hitler's idea of a true and loyal German.

TASK 7:

Comment on the following attitudes of the German people on the persecution of the Jews. Why were they different?

SOURCE A: A member of the Hitler Youth, 1938.

"[The day after Kristallnacht] the teachers told us: don't worry about what you see, even if you see some nasty things which you may not understand. Hitler wants a better Germany, a clean Germany. Don't worry, everything will work out fine in the end."

SOURCE B: Another member of Hitler Youth, 1938 (interviewed for a TV programme in 1989)

"Untill Kristallnacht, many Germans believed Hitler was not engaged in mass murder. [The treatment of the Jews] seemed to be a minor form of harassment of a disliked minority. But after the Kristallnacht no German could any longer be under any illusion. I believe it was the day that we lost our innocence. But it would be fair to point out that I myself never met even the most fanatic Nazi who wanted the extermination of the Jews. Certainly we wanted the Jews out of Germany, but we did not want them to be killed."

SOURCE C: A Labour Corps Leader, 1938.

"I hate the treatment of the Jews. I think it is a bad side of the movement and I will have nothing to do with it. I did not join the party to do that sort of thing. I joined the party because I thought and still think that Hitler did the greatest Christian work for twenty-five years. I saw seven million men rotting in the streets, often I was there too, and no one seemed to care...Then Hitler came and he took all those men off the streets and gave them health and security and work..."

SOURCE D: An anonymous letter from a German civil servant to the British consul, 1938.

"I feel the urge to present to you a true report of the recent riots, plundering and destruction of Jewish property. Despite what the official Nazi account says, the German people have nothing whatever to do with these riots and burnings. The police supplied SA men with axes, house-breaking tools and ladders. A list of the addresses of all Jewish shops and flats was provided and the mob worked under the leadership of the SA men. The police had strict orders to remain neutral."



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

REVISION:

TASK 8:

What was Germany's situation after the end of World War I?

TASK 9:

What factors helped Hitler to rise to power?

TASK 10:

Describe Nazi ideology:

TASK 11:

What was the life like for Jews in Hitler's Germany?