

Background: Germany before 1919

Until 1871 there were many separate states that were German speaking, but there was not a country called Germany. In 1871 however, the German empire was created after the Germanic state of Prussia and its allies defeated the French. The King of Prussia became the ruler of the new Germany: he became the first German Emperor or **Kaiser**. Germany also had a Parliament, the **Reichstag**, but its powers were limited. By 1900 the new Germany was one of the most important countries in the world with powerful industries, a strong army and a newly created navy.

As a result of the growth of its industries a new class of industrial workers had been created in Germany, but the standard of living of many of these workers was quite low. A new political party called the **Social Democratic Party (SPD)** was formed to champion these workers. The Social Democratic Party thought that the Kaiser had too much power while the Reichstag did not have enough. By 1914 it was the single largest party in the Reichstag.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Social Democratic Party at first supported the Kaiser's government and the German war effort. However, by 1918 it became clear that Germany had no hope of winning the war and the Kaiser's rule collapsed. The German army commanders advised the Kaiser to end the war and give more power to the Reichstag. They did this in the hope that the politicians in the Reichstag would get the blame for ending the war and that the army could escape responsibility for Germany's defeat. The Social Democratic Party, as the largest party in the Reichstag, formed a new government under the leadership of Friedrich Ebert in November 1918. Meanwhile violent protests in several German cities persuaded the Kaiser to abdicate on 9 November 1918. The monarchy was finished: Germany was now a **republic**. On 11 November the German government signed an **armistice** with Germany's enemies: the war was over.



Source 1: Kaiser Wilhelm II

The impact of the First World War on Germany was far-reaching:

- The Kaiser's government had collapsed.
- Over 2 million Germans had died.
- Germany was close to bankruptcy as the war had lasted far longer than most people had expected.

- There were serious food shortages.
- There were serious political divisions between socialists, **communists** and other left-wing groups on the one hand and other political groups on the right-wing. These divisions often led to **violent protest** in the new German republic.

Impact of the First World War

What challenges were faced by the Weimar Republic from 1919-1923?

Impact of Versailles

Although Germany agreed to the armistice of November 1918 which ended the fighting of the First World War, the peace treaty was mainly decided by the victorious Allies (Britain, France and the USA). Germany was in no position to resist the Allies as its army had been defeated and its economy was weak. The terms of the treaty were drawn up in a former royal palace at **Versailles**, near Paris.

The German government were not allowed to take part in the negotiations at Versailles and it was presented with a dictated peace (a *Diktat*), which meant that the German government had either to take the terms on offer or refuse them and face the war starting again. Many Germans were outraged as they had agreed to the armistice in the hope that any peace would be based on the **Fourteen Points**, put forward early in 1918 by President Woodrow Wilson of the USA, as a plan to end the war. For example, Germans had hoped that the country would be given the right to decide its own future. This had been an important part of the Fourteen Points and Germans now felt betrayed as they were not given this right.

The terms of the treaty came not only as a shock but also as a huge blow to German expectations. Many had expected that, by removing the Kaiser and setting up a modern democratic government, Germany would be treated fairly and leniently by the Allies. A wave of protest followed the publication of the terms of the treaty. The army commanders made it clear to the government that further military operations would be a disaster and there was no choice but to accept the terms of the treaty. The majority of Germans felt **bitter resentment** at the terms and the new government was widely criticised for agreeing to them. The republic had got off to the worst possible start. Many Germans believed that they had been '**stabbed in the back**' by politicians who signed the unpopular treaty.



Map of Versailles Treaty

The main terms of the treaty were:

War guilt

Under Article 231 of the treaty, Germany was forced to accept complete responsibility for causing the First World War. The main reason for this clause was so that the allies could justify making Germany pay for the war (**reparations**).

Reparations

Germany had to pay for the damage caused by the war. The payments to the allies totalled £6,600 million – a figure that was finally settled on in 1921.

Loss of land

Germany was to lose 10 per cent of its population and 13 per cent of its territory, including valuable areas of coal, iron and steel production. For example, the Saar region, rich in coal, was given to France for 15 years, after which the inhabitants would vote on which country to belong to. Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, Belgium gained Eupen and Malmedy. Denmark gained northern Schleswig, Upper Silesia was given to Poland, which was also given a portion of German land called the Polish Corridor so that the new country of Poland had access to the Baltic Sea. Germany also lost all its overseas colonies.

One of the most damaging terms, which Germans saw as a great betrayal of the idea of self-determination, was a ban on the idea of *Anschluss*, the union of Germany and Austria.

Military terms

These terms were severe and a blow to the prestige of a country which had previously had a powerful army and navy. The army was reduced in size to **100,000** volunteers. The navy was reduced to six old battleships, six light cruisers and a few smaller craft. There were to be no submarines. Germany was not allowed to have an air force.

The **Rhineland**, an important area of western Germany, was demilitarised which meant that no German soldiers were allowed within 50 kilometres of the right bank of the River Rhine. The allies were to occupy the zone for 15 years.

It was not only the right-wing parties that were humiliated by this treaty; opposition to it was widespread. The Weimar Republic was always going to be linked to defeat and humiliation. The army could now, however, claim that it was all the politicians' fault: those who had signed the armistice in November 1918 were frequently referred to as the '**November Criminals**'.

Weaknesses of Weimar government; political instability – Spartacist, Kapp, Munich Putsches

The new government decided to hold elections for a new Reichstag in January 1919. However, due to on-going instability on the streets of Berlin it was decided that it would be safer for the new Reichstag to meet in the city of Weimar. This city therefore gave its name to the new government of Germany, even after the Reichstag had returned to Berlin. The new **constitution** made Germany one of the most advanced **democratic** countries in the world. Afterwards Germany's new government was known as the Weimar Republic.

The Weimar constitution

The key points of the new constitution were:

- All German men and women over the age of 20 were given the vote.

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- The Reichstag was given the right to make laws and control the government.
- The Reichstag was to be elected by **proportional representation** (each party would receive a number of seats in proportion to its total vote, so if a party won 20 per cent of the vote it would get 20 per cent of the seats).
- The head of the country was to be the President who was elected every seven years by the German people. The President had control of the armed forces and the power to dismiss the Reichstag and hold new elections. The President also had power in an exceptional emergency, under **Article 48** of the constitution, to suspend the constitution and rule on his own.

Although these were important changes in the way Germany was now governed there were also some **weaknesses** in the new constitution:

- The system of proportional representation could result in no political party having a majority of seats in the Reichstag. Governments often had to be made up of several parties – these were called **coalitions**. Although this could work well, when there were serious problems coalition partners could disagree about what to do and leave the government. This led to **weak, unstable government** at crucial times.
- When coalitions broke or could not be formed, the only person who could govern effectively was the President and this resulted in democratic government being suspended under Article 48.
- Not all Germans welcomed the new constitution. There were left-wing opponents, such as the communists, who believed that the Weimar government was too moderate and not left-wing enough. On the right wing there were political parties who wanted to see a return of the Kaiser and stronger government than the Weimar government could provide.
- Some groups, such as the civil service, judges and army, were very traditional and did not particularly like democratic government. These groups were needed to make the new republic work.

As a result of these factors there was a lot of **political instability** that led to attempts to overthrow the newly formed republic. The first important threat came from the German Communist Party. To begin with, it called itself the Spartacus League and its members were known as **Spartacists**. They were communists who believed in violent revolution to seize power for the working classes. The leaders of the Spartacists were **Karl Liebknecht** and **Rosa Luxemburg**. They opposed the new republic and in January 1919 led a revolt or **putsch** in Berlin. Similar revolts took place in other German cities, but Ebert's government acted quickly to end these revolts. With the help of the army, volunteers were recruited and trained to attack the communists. The recruits were mostly war veterans and junior army officers, who were violently anti-communist. They were known as the *Freikorps* (Free Corps). In Berlin the *Freikorps* put down the Spartacist revolt with brutality – Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were killed along with thousands of others. In Bavaria the *Freikorps* restored order with similar violence. One result of this violence was to ensure that in the future the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party would never cooperate because of the bitterness and bloodshed of 1919-20.

The other major threat to the Weimar Republic came from right-wing Germans, many of whom were used to violence, having been members of the *Freikorps*. They bitterly resented the Treaty of Versailles, blamed the Weimar Republic for the humiliation of the treaty and were strongly opposed to socialism and democracy. In 1920 rebel members of the *Freikorps* under **Dr Wolfgang Kapp** disobeyed the government's order to disband and tried to seize power in Berlin. Although badly organised, Kapp's supporters did manage to seize power for four days and Ebert's government fled Berlin. The army was reluctant to deal with many of its ex-members but in the end a general

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strike of workers in Berlin and the refusal of civil servants to obey Dr Kapp destroyed the so-called **Kapp Putsch**. The leniency with which those involved in the Kapp Putsch were punished and the lack of full support from the army for the new Weimar Republic were important signs of weakness in the new republic.

Another attempt to overthrow the republic came at a time of crisis. 1923 saw the French occupation of the Ruhr and hyperinflation, of which more be mentioned shortly. Former soldier Adolf Hitler had joined a right-wing nationalist political party The German Workers' Party in September 1919, taking control of it in 1921. The party was renamed the **National Socialist German Workers' Party**, or **Nazi Party**.

The party wanted to overturn the Treaty of Versailles and unite all German-speaking people, especially those in lands lost by the treaty, in a greater Germany. The party was openly racist and **anti-Semitic**. Under Hitler's leadership the party became more violent and intimidating: a paramilitary unit was set up, called the **SA**, to protect the party's meetings and disrupt those of other parties. The atmosphere of crisis that was prevalent in 1923 led Hitler to believe that the moment was right to attempt to seize power by launching a revolution in Bavaria, in its capital **Munich**. Hitler hoped that the right-wing government of Bavaria could be persuaded to join him.

Hitler was supported by General Ludendorff, one of Germany's war heroes, and on 8th November 1923 Hitler and the SA surprised a meeting of the Bavarian government in Munich by striding into the meeting, firing a pistol into the ceiling and bullying the Bavarian leaders into joining what Hitler called 'a national revolution'. The attempted **Munich Putsch** quickly lost support and a march headed by Hitler and Ludendorff was fired on by police: 16 people were killed. Hitler and Ludendorff were put on trial for treason. The trial was an opportunity for Hitler to make himself well known throughout Germany. The trial proved to be a superb propaganda platform for Hitler. In the end Ludendorff was acquitted and Hitler was given the comparatively light sentence of 5 years' imprisonment. In Landsberg prison, Hitler used the opportunity to write his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) which set out his main ideas. His good behaviour in prison persuaded the Bavarian government to release him after only nine months. He now had to rethink his strategy to gain power; he realised after the experience in Munich he could not just rely on violence to obtain it.



Source 3 - Nazi Stormtroopers outside Munich City Hall

Hyperinflation; events in the Ruhr 1923

As a result of the First World War, Germany already had serious debts. The Treaty of Versailles affected Germany's industrial output with the loss of many valuable areas where iron and coal were mined. This made the payment of reparations even more difficult. Fatally, the government decided to print more money to pay off debts. As a result, the value of the German currency began to fall and Germany fell behind with her reparations payments. In January 1923, France reacted by sending troops into the **Ruhr**, the main industrial area of Germany so that they could take the coal for themselves. The German workers in the Ruhr were ordered to strike by the German government and more money was printed to pay their wages. Inflation spiralled out of control – this is called **hyperinflation** – and an already weakened German economy collapsed. Here is an example of how the price of basic food, bread, was affected:

Year	Price of a loaf of bread
1918	0.6 mark
Jan 1923	250 marks
Sept 1923	1.5 million marks
Nov 1923	201 million marks

The experience of hyperinflation was terrifying. At one stage conditions in Germany became so bad that people turned to bartering for goods. The effect of hyperinflation was dramatic for most Germans, although not everyone was so badly affected:

- Landowners benefited as the value of land kept pace with prices and many were able to pay off mortgages.
- Large industrialists were able to repay loans and farmers benefited from the rise in food prices.

BUT:

- The savings of Germans, particularly the middle classes, were destroyed.
- Wages lost all value and Germans on fixed incomes, such as pensioners, were badly affected.
- There were serious shortages of food with widespread hunger and outbreaks of stealing.

The political effect of this was that Germans lost faith in the Weimar Republic which became very unpopular. Many Germans now turned to more extreme political parties to provide solutions to Germany's problems.

Germany's inability to keep to its reparation payments was no surprise. However, the new French president, Raymond Poincare, took a hard line, insisting that, unless Germany paid reparations, French and Belgian troops would occupy the main industrial area, the **Ruhr**, which produced 80 per cent of Germany's coal, iron and steel. As mentioned, in 1923 the threat was carried out and French and Belgian troops moved in to supervise reparation payments and take resources from the Ruhr. The occupation of the Ruhr was a final devastating blow to an already weak German economy. The German government responded by ordering the German people to carry out a campaign of passive resistance and by encouraging sabotage.

In response to the campaign of **passive resistance**, the French brought in their own workers and

sealed off the Ruhr. Tensions increased and there were clashes between French and Germans. Approximately 130 German civilians were killed by the French occupation forces. As a result of the crippling effects of the strikes on the German economy, which included a descent into hyperinflation and spiralling unemployment, the new government headed by **Gustav Stresemann** called off passive resistance. Although the French did make the occupation pay, the harsh attitude of the French won international sympathy for Germany and there were now attempts to improve international relations and help Germany pay its way.

Recovery of Weimar

Why were the Stresemann years considered a 'golden age'?

Recovery from hyperinflation; Dawes and Young Plans

Although Germany's economy was in a desperate state in 1923, it started to recover in the next few years mainly due to the policies of **Gustav Stresemann**, who became Chancellor of Germany for a few months in 1923 and was Foreign Minister until his death in 1929. So successful were his policies that this period is often known as the 'golden age' of the Weimar Republic.

One of Stresemann's first actions was to deal with the problem of hyperinflation. The old currency was abolished and destroyed and replaced with a new one, called the **Rentenmark**. The Rentenmark was backed not by gold (which Germany did not have) but by a mortgage on all industrial and agricultural land. When more money was needed, Stresemann refused to print more money and instead cut government spending, increased taxes and reduced salaries. He was also helped as Germany was not paying reparations at the time. Confidence at home and, importantly, abroad was brought back: hyperinflation was cured.

When a new government was formed in November 1923 Stresemann remained Foreign Minister. He was determined not only to restore Germany as a major power but also to ease the burden of reparations. He did this by repairing relations with France after the occupation of the Ruhr. Britain was keen to bring stability to Europe after these events and it encouraged the USA to investigate Germany's ability to pay reparations. The result in 1924 was the **Dawes Plan** which stabilised Germany's currency and balanced Germany's budget. Stresemann negotiated the new agreement with the USA. It was agreed that in future Germany would not repay in reparations more than it could afford. In addition, loans, mostly from the USA, would generate economic growth in Germany and back up its currency, so that reparations could be made regularly. The French also agreed to leave the Ruhr.

The Dawes Plan had always been regarded as a temporary measure. In 1929 it was replaced by the **Young Plan** which reduced reparations by two-thirds and also allowed Germany to make repayments over a longer period of time – 59 years (until 1988). In return the French and the British agreed to move their troops out of the Rhineland.

Stresemann also recognised the need to cooperate with Germany's former enemies and adopted a pragmatic approach to Germany's relations with other countries. He realised that the only way to get the hated Treaty of Versailles dropped was to improve Germany's reputation and position in the world. In this he was helped by his friendly demeanour and good personal relationships with many foreign leaders, who trusted his intentions as being honourable. As we have seen, the Dawes Plan of 1924 had provided a temporary solution to the problem of reparations. However, the following year Stresemann achieved an important step forward in restoring Germany's standing as a partner in European decision-making. The **Locarno Pact of 1925** declared that France, Germany and Belgium (guaranteed by Britain and Italy) would never go to war over Germany's western borders. This secured the status of the Rhineland, an important factor after the recent occupation of the Ruhr. Significantly, Stresemann made no guarantees about Germany's eastern front.

The Locarno Pact meant that Germany was fully accepted as a partner in solving problems left over from Versailles. This was reinforced the following year, in 1926, when Germany was accepted as a member of the **League of Nations**: Stresemann was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for this achievement. In 1928 the Kellogg-Briand Pact renounced war as a means to settle disputes. Germany under Stresemann's leadership signed up to this agreement, although there was nothing put in place to enforce the aim of the agreement which was probably more symbolic than real.

US investment; social and political developments

The result of these developments was a period of great prosperity for Weimar Germany. The relative economic stability that now prevailed meant that American banks and businesses were keen to invest in Germany. The recovery of this period was funded by **foreign loans**, principally from the United States, which added to the debt burden of the nation but increased trade and reduced unemployment. This gave the outward appearance of stability which further encouraged the inflow of loans to the country. It would be this growing dependence upon foreign credit that would prove to be Weimar Germany's Achilles heel.

The greater degree of economic stability was accompanied by relative political stability. The period 1924 to 1929 witnessed support for those parties who opposed the Weimar Republic diminish due to the recovery of the economy and Germany's improving position in world affairs. For example, the Nazi Party had 32 seats in the Reichstag in May 1924 but only 12 by May 1928. Led by Stresemann in the Reichstag the varying political parties generally managed to cooperate. The former wartime general **Paul von Hindenburg** was **President** during this period and this stability seemed to confirm the acceptance of the new Republic by the old order.

There were also many social developments during this 'golden age', particularly in terms of standards of living, culture and the position of women. For many German workers, real wages saw an increase which of course improved standards of living. However, this was not the case for many of the middle class who had been bankrupted by hyperinflation. Although unemployment fell throughout Germany, this was not really the case for those who worked in professions such as the civil service, law or education.

Standards of housing undoubtedly improved during this period as a massive programme of house building was implemented to deal with a chronic shortage. Between 1924 and 1931 more than two million new homes were built, to the effect that homelessness was reduced by 60 per cent. The Unemployment Insurance Law of 1927 also improved the provision of unemployment benefit, whilst changes were also made to the assistance given to former members of the armed forces, single mothers and the disabled.

The constitution of the Weimar Republic had given women the vote at the age of 20 and this move towards equality and an enhanced status for women continued during the decade. Equality measures were introduced in the fields of education, the civil service and in the professions in general, resulting in German women having more rights than most other European women. As in America, women also experienced greater social freedom, drinking and smoking in public with fashion reflecting the rapid changes in attitudes.

However, one of the most important features of the Weimar Republic were the cultural changes that took place. 1920s Germany was a hotbed for new ideas in art, cinema, literature, architecture and literature. Art was strongly influenced by a desire to reflect everyday life, with works by artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix achieving international prominence. In architecture, the *Bauhaus* movement influenced design and designers in many different fields. German cinema also flourished with probably the most famous film of the decade being the technically advanced *Metropolis* that was to influence generations of film makers. Literature also began to explore themes that were counter to what had been the norm before the First World War. Works such

as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the anti-war novel, challenged the glorification of war and were also extremely influential. The period was therefore one of great change, but it was events in America that would precipitate the collapse of the Weimar Republic and Germany's descent into a dictatorship that would itself radically alter the country.

End of the Weimar Republic

How and why did the Weimar Republic collapse between 1929 and 1933?

Social and political impact of the Depression on the Weimar Republic; Hitler's electoral appeal

In October 1929 the **Wall Street Crash** shattered the economy of the USA and plunged the world into economic depression. Germany's recovery in the 1920s had been dependent on trade with the rest of the world. Even before the Wall Street Crash some of the loans had ended when investors began to have doubts about how strong Germany's recovery had been. As a result, unemployment began to rise in 1929. The Wall Street Crash and Stresemann's death came as an additional and fatal double blow to confidence in the economy. Without financial support from other countries, especially the USA, German industry and agriculture cut back their production and more workers were sacked. This added to the unemployment figures which climbed to 3.5 million in 1930, over 5 million in 1931 and a staggering 6 million in 1932.

Germany's exports inevitably declined and the failure of several Austrian and German banks in 1931 made an already bad situation worse. Prices of farm products tumbled and German agriculture suffered, causing distress to farmers who had heavily mortgaged their farms in the 1920s. As a result of all these factors, the impact of the Depression on Germany was very severe, causing serious social discontent:

- The dramatic rise in unemployment caused widespread misery and poverty.
- The failure of the banks caused the middle classes to lose their savings once again.
- Many people found they could not keep up with mortgage or rent payments and became homeless.
- The government under Brüning reduced government expenditure from 1930 onwards to deal with the crisis and this affected benefit payments to the poorest sections of society.
- The Depression encouraged the growth of more extreme political parties like the Nazis and the Communists. It also brought about the end of democracy as Brüning's government increasingly relied in 1931 and 1932 on presidential emergency decrees to govern.

Hitler and the Nazis seemed to offer an attractive alternative just when the Weimar Republic was at its weakest. The fortunes of the Nazi Party were closely linked with the economic situation – the more unstable the economy the more seats the Nazis won. Many Germans were fed up with the **weak government** of the Weimar Republic. Proportional representation had resulted in endless elections and short-term governments. People now began to look to extreme parties who offered **strong, decisive** government.

The Nazis increased in popularity for many reasons and Hitler gave them great electoral appeal:

- They offered jobs for everyone and strong government. The slogan **Arbeit und Brot (work and bread)** was widely used. To many unemployed Germans this simple message had great appeal.
- They promised to get rid of the hated **Treaty of Versailles**. They claimed they would

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make Germany great again and would bring all German speakers into a single empire or Reich. This would involve uniting Germany and Austria and taking land in Poland and Czechoslovakia that had been lost under the Treaty.

- Many people like **wealthy businessmen** and **landowners** supported the Nazis because they were afraid of other parties like the Communists who might take their businesses and land away from them.
- Farming communities supported the Nazis because they promised to protect their land and traditions.
- The Nazis had their own private army, the **SA**, which young Germans could join. This was attractive for many young Germans.
- Hitler was a brilliant **public speaker** who could convince huge audiences that he was good for Germany. Large numbers of Germans looked at him as a God like figure who could solve Germany's problems. He had the ability to speak with passion and connect with the fears and beliefs of many Germans. In particular he could play on the fear of unemployment, outrage at the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, and the terror of communism and economic disaster.
- His ability to hold an audience, to seize opportunities and exploit the difficulties of the Weimar governments were key factors in his success. He had masterminded the growth of the Nazi Party from one of the smallest in the Reichstag to the largest by 1932.
- There was a great difference between the weak government of Weimar and Hitler's idea of strong government. The German people had been used to strong government during the rule of the Kaiser.
- The Nazis blamed the Communists and Jews for Germany's misfortunes. This provided the German people with someone to blame for the crisis.

Role of the SA; propaganda

During this period the *Sturmabteilung* or **SA (Stormtroopers)** played an important role in helping Hitler achieve power. Hitler repeatedly claimed that parliamentary democracy did not work and that strong government was the cure for Germany's ills. The SA were therefore used not only to protect Nazi meetings but also to disrupt those of their opponents, in particular the communists. By the end of 1931 its membership had grown to over 170,000 and these *Brownshirts* often engaged in streets fights with their opponents. They effectively served the purpose of demonstrating to the German public Hitler's desire and willingness to counter communist violence and the threat of a revolution.

The Nazi Party relied on **propaganda** to influence the way the German people thought and to propel them to power. This was organised by Dr Josef Goebbels. The Nazis proved to be extremely effective at making a direct appeal to the interest groups they most wished to target, especially the unemployed. Apart from the personal appeal of Hitler and the speeches he would make to vast crowds, posters played an important role in getting across the message the Nazis wished people to hear. Mass rallies and the displaying of banners wherever possible, also helped to give the impression that the Nazis were active everywhere.

Goebbels fully understood the value of propaganda as a means of influencing people. Use of mass media and a simple, repeated message ensured that Nazi ideas were kept at the forefront of the public's attention. By the early 1930s for example, the Nazis owned 120 daily or weekly newspapers, thereby reaching beyond the large cities and towns into more provincial areas. The use of **radio** also became a key weapon in spreading propaganda and the result was reflected in

the numbers of Germans now voting for the Nazis in elections.

Political extremism and scheming 1929-1932

In these circumstances support for the Communist Party and the Nazi Party increased as, one after another, the Weimar governments were increasingly blamed for Germany's situation. In 1930 the Communist Party won 77 seats and the Nazis 107. In July 1932 the Communists won 89 seats and the Nazis 230. By July 1932 therefore, the Nazi Party was the single largest party in the Reichstag.

The German Chancellor, Brüning, was head of the Centre Party and leader of a coalition with the Social Democratic Party. The government, faced with the growing threat of bankruptcy, could not agree on economic measures. Brüning wanted to cut government spending on unemployment and welfare benefits. The Social Democrats could not agree and withdrew from the government.

President Hindenburg decided in this crisis situation that under Article 48 of the constitution, the Brüning government could rule by emergency decree as it had no majority and the economic situation was serious. This was deeply unpopular and showed that Germany was no longer a true democracy.



Hitler bows to Reich President von Hindenburg

Hitler's position was now very strong and he challenged President Hindenburg in the 1932 presidential election, coming a respectable second with 13,400,000 to Hindenburg's 19,400,000 votes. As leader of the single largest party in the Reichstag, Adolf Hitler had made an enormous political comeback in less than nine years.

The generals who commanded the German army had become very worried about the crisis and had supported President Hindenburg's use of emergency powers after 1930 in an attempt to provide some sort of order in a Germany suffering from severe economic problems and political instability. The leading general who was very influential was Kurt von Schleicher and he was to play a key role in Hitler's rise to power.

Von Schleicher thought that he and the army could put together a deal with Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1932 which would provide Germany with a new and strong government. Von Schleicher had fallen out with Franz von Papen, a rival right-wing politician who had been made Chancellor by Hindenburg in June 1932.

Much of what happened next is explained by the rivalry between von Schleicher and von Papen.

Von Schleicher briefly became Chancellor in December 1932 but was dismissed by Hindenburg who was persuaded by von Papen to consider a von Papen/Hitler government. This took some doing as Hindenburg did not like Hitler and was appalled by the violence and intimidation of the SA. In the end the elderly Hindenburg was persuaded that if Hitler was made Chancellor (as leader of the largest party – even after a slight fall in the number of seats in the November 1932 election), von Papen as Vice-Chancellor would be able to control and moderate Hitler's policies. In the government of twelve ministers, only three were Nazis. The calculations of von Papen and Hindenburg were to prove catastrophically wrong. Hitler played his cards well in all of these negotiations, refusing to consider any coalition unless he was Chancellor of Germany. The government he led was a coalition and one of his first tasks was to rid himself of his coalition partners. He decided to call new elections to the Reichstag in 1933 so that he could govern with a clear majority.

Consolidation of power

How did the Nazis consolidate their power between 1933 and 1934?

Hitler as Chancellor; Reichstag Fire

Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor on 30 January 1933 and immediately there commenced a government clamp down on its opponents. Left wing meetings were banned and by mid-February the communists were increasingly suppressed. The election campaign that was now underway proved to be violent and the Nazi Party used its position in government to hinder the campaigning of its opponents. Communists were not allowed to demonstrate and their newspapers were restricted. The SA terrorised left-wing opponents and Hitler's Nazi colleague, Hermann Goering, now controlled most the police forces in Germany as a minister in the new government. As many as 50,000 members of the SA were drafted in as additional police officers. There were over 2 million Brownshirts by 1933, and violence towards and intimidation of the opponents of the Nazis were common.

The most spectacular event of the election campaign however, came on 27 February when the **Reichstag** building in Berlin caught **fire** and was severely damaged. The Nazis claimed that Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch communist, was responsible. Van der Lubbe was arrested at the scene and soon confessed to the crime, claiming to have acted alone. Hitler seized the chance to blame all left wingers for the fire and persuaded President Hindenburg to issue an emergency decree - the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspended basic rights such as freedom of speech, prevented the Communist Party from campaigning, closed the Social Democratic Party's newspapers and gave the police (now controlled by the Nazis) the right to arrest anyone without a fixed trial. Once again the emergency decree element of the Weimar constitution played a key role in undermining the rule of law and the chances of fair and free elections.



1933 Election and Enabling Act

The voting on 5 March 1933 gave the following results:

	Voters	Seats
Communist Party	4.8 million	81
Social Democratic Party	7.2 million	120
Centre Party	5.5 million	92
National Party	3.1 million	52
Nazi Party	17.3 million	288
Others	1.4 million	14

Although the Nazis were clearly the largest party, the campaign of intimidation and violence plus all the emergency measures still had not given Hitler the decisive outright majority he wanted. Hitler, however, had two advantages:

- He used the emergency decrees to ban the elected Communist Party members from taking their seats in the Reichstag.
- He made a deal with the Centre Party and the National Party to gain a working majority in the Reichstag. The Centre Party was afraid that unless it made a deal with Hitler, the Catholics in Germany would be threatened by the Nazis.

Hitler now used this majority to make the Reichstag pass a new law, the **Enabling Act**, which would give him the power to make laws without the approval of the Reichstag for four years. The SA and SS were on hand to ensure that Reichstag members voted Hitler's way in their temporary building, the Kroll Opera House. The Enabling Act was passed by 441 votes to 94 in March 1933.

From now on Hitler and his ministers could rule by decree, using President Hindenburg as a rubber stamp. The experiment with democracy in Germany was over: Hitler was to use his emergency powers in the next few months to crush opposition to his rule and to ensure that Germany became a one party state. Although the vote in the Kroll Opera House was technically legal, in reality violence, intimidation and rule by emergency decree had destroyed the Weimar constitution.

Trade unions and political parties; Night of the Long Knives; Hitler becomes Fuhrer

Hitler now began to establish his control over Germany in an attempt to 'coordinate' all aspects of German life along the lines of Nazi philosophy – a policy known as *Gleichschaltung*. On 2 May 1933 all **trade unions** were banned as they had opposed the Nazis. In their place Hitler set up the **German Labour Front** (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront* – DAF). This was led by Dr Robert Ley and workers and employers were forced to join. The DAF was a way of stopping the workers opposing the Nazis. Strikes were made illegal as they were not in the 'national interest' and protestors were sent to join the Communists and other 'enemies of the state' in the newly set up concentration camps, the first one of which was opened at Dachau in March 1933.

A further law made Germany a one party state – The Law against the Formation of Political Parties, passed on 14 July 1933. By this law the Nazi Party was declared the only political party in Germany. The Communist Party had already been banned and in May the Social Democratic Party had its property and newspapers seized. Within a few months therefore, Hitler had established complete political control over Germany.

The SA had played a major role in Hitler's climb to power. Its leader **Ernst Rohm** wanted to make

more of the socialist part of the Nazi Party's programme by nationalising Germany's industry. Hitler had never been very interested in this and now that he was in power he was suspicious of the power and influence of the SA. He was also worried that Rohm had plans to merge the German army with the SA. Not surprisingly, the German generals were anxious to get rid of the SA and Hitler had already decided that he needed the support of the army more than he needed the support of the SA. Hitler could not afford to upset the generals as he needed them to become President after Hindenburg's death. The SA was also damaging the reputation of the Nazi Party in the eyes of ordinary Germans due to the thuggish behaviour of many of its members, some of which were men with criminal records. Some of Hitler's closest allies, Hermann Goering and **Heinrich Himmler**, the leader of the SS, were also very jealous of Rohm's influence and persuaded Hitler that the SA needed to be destroyed.

By the summer of 1934, Hitler decided that the time had come to act. On 30 June 1934 Hitler dealt with his challengers in an event that became known as the **Night of the Long Knives**. Rohm and hundreds of others were brutally murdered by members of the black shirted **SS** (*Schutzstaffel*), led by Himmler. Hitler also took the opportunity to remove other potential rivals such as General von Schleicher. The Brownshirts or SA were now replaced by Himmler's SS, which became even more powerful. The army was also pleased at the outcome and supported Hitler. The events of 30 June 1934 sent shock waves around the world; it was now realised that the ruthless new leadership of Germany had no qualms about murdering its opponents.

A few weeks after this, on 2 August 1934, the 86 year old President Hindenburg died. Hitler had a law passed which made him not only Chancellor but also President in the new single position of Fuhrer (leader). This allowed him to become supreme commander of the armed forces and all members of them had to swear a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler as Fuhrer. As government officials soon had to do so as well. Hitler was to rule simply by issuing Fuhrer decrees: Germany was now a total dictatorship.

Nazi economic, social and racial policy

How did Nazi economic, social and racial policy affect life in Germany?

Reducing unemployment; policy towards workers

When the Nazis gained power they had no detailed plans for Germany's economic problems. Indeed Hitler was never much interested in economics and left it to others to work out the details of what he wanted. Hjalmar Schacht, the president of the Reichsbank, was given the task of controlling the economy from 1934. He was a skilled financial expert and had some success in meeting Hitler's policy demands. These demands were:

- to reduce unemployment;
- to expand and rearm Germany's army, navy and air force;
- to make Germany self-sufficient (a policy known as *autarky*) and not dependent on foreign trade. Hitler was haunted by the memory of the effect of the blockade of Germany during the First World War.

Schacht's policies did bring unemployment down by utilising four methods:

- To revive the economy a policy of massive public spending was followed. Unemployment was reduced and industrial output soared. Jobs were provided by employing young men on public work schemes such as building the *Autobahnen* (motorways), schools, hospitals and housing. The National Labour Service (RAD) provided jobs on public works for men aged 18-25 on very low pay. From 1935 it was compulsory for all men aged 18-25 to serve

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in the RAD for six months.

- Large scale rearmament provided jobs in the weapons industry.
- The conscription of young men into the armed forces further cut unemployment and created jobs in those industries responsible for supplying the military.
- The policy of autarky created jobs in German factories. In 1936 Hitler put Hermann Goering in charge of a Four Year Plan to make Germany self-sufficient. Instead of importing essential raw materials Germany began to produce her own. Artificial substitutes were sought to replace many products that could not be found in Germany. However, the plan was not entirely successful and in 1939 Germany was still importing one-third of her raw materials.

Generous marriage bonuses were also given to keep women at home and free up jobs for men. The thousands employed by the Nazi Party and government and the combination of the above factors all helped to bring down the numbers of unemployed from six million in 1933 to one million by 1935. However, some manipulation of the figures undoubtedly took place since unemployed Jewish workers were not counted and part-time workers were counted as fully employed.

Soon after achieving power the Nazis had taken measures to destroy the trade union movement, replacing it with the Nazi-controlled German Labour Front. This made sure not only that workers were disciplined but also that wages were kept low and hours of work regulated. The reduction in unemployment and increase in productivity was not accompanied by a rise on the standard of living of the workers. In fact prices went up, as did the hours of work. Wages struggled to keep up with prices and as a percentage of national income they actually declined. This meant that workers had less money to spend.

However, the Nazis did realise that workers needed to be incentivised. Two other organisations were set up to benefit workers. One was called **Beauty of Labour** (SDA) which tried to improve working conditions, such as ventilation, provision of hot meals, cleanliness, lighting and health and safety standards. It should be remembered however, that many firms were expected to make these improvements at the expense of their workers who had to do the painting, cleaning and building after normal working hours and for no additional reward. Threats of dismissal or the concentration camp faced those who did not help.

The other prominent organisation was called **Strength through Joy** (*KdF – Kraft Durch Freude*). This was set up to control the leisure time of workers, subsidising many activities such as concerts, sporting events, skiing trips and adult education classes. The KdF also operated two cruise liners that were used to take German workers in foreign holidays. In 1938 an estimated 180,000 people went on cruises to places such as Madeira and the Norwegian fjords. A scheme was also introduced to encourage workers to save for their own car – the *KdF-wagen* which later became the Volkswagen Beetle. Although the German worker paid for these benefits through compulsory deductions, the idea was to make longer working hours more acceptable through improved working conditions. Also, the image of people being given holidays and subsidised entertainment was of great propaganda value to the Nazi government.

Women and the Three Ks

Despite German women gaining the vote after the First World War and the advances made during the Weimar Republic in terms of equality, most political parties in the Weimar Republic agreed that the main role of a woman was at home, looking after the family. Hitler and the Nazis strongly agreed with this. In a speech to Nazi women in 1934, Hitler said that the woman's world was 'her husband, her family, her children and her home'.

These beliefs were put into practice. A law against the overcrowding of German universities and schools restricted the number of girls that could go to university. By 1936 the number of female

university students had been halved. As part of the Law on the Reduction of Unemployment of 1933, newly married couples would receive an interest-free loan of up to 1,000 marks provided the woman gave up her job and promised not to re-enter the labour market. The loan could be reduced by a quarter for each child born – by the birth of the fourth child the loan was completely cleared. Medals were awarded for mothers of large families. The gold **Motherhood Cross** was awarded for eight children, silver for six and bronze for four. Taking women out of employment certainly reduced the unemployment figures and was an important part of Hitler's economic policies.

This may have had a temporary effect in reducing unemployment but the number of working women actually increased by 1938. The onset of war in 1939 created a renewed demand for women workers, so much so that their wage rates started to increase. There has been much debate about whether the Nazi marriage laws actually increased the birth rate. There was a large rise in live births in 1934 and this level was maintained. From 1933 to 1939 the number of births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age rose from 58.9 to 84.8. The numbers might have risen as a result of the end of the Depression as much as the effect of Nazi policies.

The Nazis took great care to publicise their image of women as mothers of the new Reich. Make-up, lipstick and smoking were frowned upon. Hairstyles were meant to be traditional, in plaits. Whether this had much effect is doubtful – the cosmetics industry boomed in the 1930s. Goebbels' wife often appeared in public smoking and Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun, smoked when Hitler was absent and used Elizabeth Arden cosmetics.

Some women opposed Nazi policies, but like other sections of society they were ruthlessly dealt with. In October 1933 the first concentration camp for women was opened at Moringen. By 1938 the camp was unable to accommodate the growing number of women prisoners so two more camps were opened.

Controlling education; the Hitler Youth movement

Hitler was well aware of the importance of the **young**. He wanted to develop an education system that would provide political and military training. The man he chose to run Germany's schools was Bernhard Rust and under him German schools were Nazified.

As government employees, teachers were encouraged to be members of the Nazi Party. By 1936 as many as 36 per cent of teachers were already members of the Nazi Party and nearly all were members of the National Socialist Teachers' League. This was carefully controlled: Jews and left-wing teachers were sacked and children were encouraged to inform on 'unsafe' teachers who failed to follow Nazi ideas.

The content of lessons also changed. Teachers would have to be greeted at the start of lessons with a Nazi salute. The content of lessons and textbooks was carefully controlled to emphasize Nazi beliefs and values. In particular history and biology lessons gave the Nazi interpretation of the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles, the evils of communism, Jews and betrayal, and Nazi views on racial superiority. To start with, Jewish children were singled out for humiliating treatment in class. The amount of time given to physical education was dramatically increased.

School noticeboards were filled with Nazi propaganda posters. Schools celebrated Nazi festivals, including Hitler's birthday, and Nazi heroes like Horst Wessel. Boys' education emphasised different topics from girls' education; for example, more science and history for boys while girls did more domestic science.

The Nazis also started schools intended to train future Nazi leaders. There were several:

Napolas	For boys aged 10-18 who were entering the armed forces, especially the <i>Waffen-SS</i> , the military wing of the SS.
Adolf Hitler Schools	Intended to train the future members of the Nazi government.
The Ordensburgen or Order Castles	Named after fortresses built by the Teutonic Knights. The entry qualification was six years' attendance at an Adolf Hitler School, plus state labour service and Nazi Party work. A finishing school for young Nazis in their twenties.

Standards of education in all three categories proved inadequate compared with the established state grammar schools. The numbers involved were very small and confidential Ministry of Education reports revealed that achievements were disappointing.

The Hitler Youth movement was set up in 1925 well before the Nazis came to power. As other youth organisations were closed and harassed, the Hitler Youth movement had 4 million members by 1936. In that year membership was made compulsory and by 1939 there were 7 million members.

Under the energetic leadership of Baldur von Schirach, the main objective of the Hitler Youth was to indoctrinate the young with Nazi ideas and make them loyal Nazis. In 1933 the Hitler Youth was divided into two: the *Deutsches Jungvolk* (German Young People) for those aged 10-14 and from age 14 the *Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) proper. There were similar organisations for girls, the *Jungmadel* (Young Maidens) and the *Bund Deutsche Madel* (League of German Maidens). Whilst there was great emphasis on unquestioning obedience to Nazi beliefs, there is no doubt that only a minority were opposed to the movement. The conduct of the *Waffen-SS* army divisions in the Second World War suggests that their loyalty, determination and ferocity were no doubt inspired by Nazi propaganda and the indoctrination that took place in the 1930s and 1940s. It was also the case that the special status of the Hitler Youth caused discipline problems in state schools with the authority of teachers being called frequently into question by members of the Hitler Youth.

Propaganda films showed the excitement of life in the youth camps, but discipline was severe and the physical training was harsh. Boys were trained to march 50 miles on minimal rations. Members of the Hitler Youth attended training camps where they were taught to be loyal to the Fuhrer and to each other. They were trained in practical skills like map-reading, semaphore reading and how to lay telephone lines, as well as of course military fighting skills. Many of them enjoyed the outdoor experience, the wearing of uniforms and the excitement it offered. Girls also followed physical fitness programmes, as well as domestic skills in preparation for motherhood.

Treatment of the Jews

Hitler's hatred of the Jews (anti-Semitism) was extreme. He and his fellow Nazis saw the Jews as not merely an inferior race but a major threat to Germany and part of a world conspiracy to destroy Germany. In Hitler's mind the Jews were responsible for Germany's defeat in 1918, for communism, for the failure of the Weimar Republic and all political ideas Hitler detested, like democracy, pacifism and international cooperation.

The SA had always targeted Jews and after Hitler came to power in 1933 it organised, on Hitler's orders, a boycott of Jewish shops and businesses. A law of 7 April 1933 also banned Jews from having jobs in the civil service, the universities, the teaching profession and the judiciary. However, after this initial outburst of Nazi anti-Semitic behaviour, Hitler became more cautious because:

- The violence of the SA created bad publicity for the Nazis abroad.

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- The main priority to start with was to help the economy recover and the boycott of Jewish shops threatened the rather fragile recovery in 1933.
- President Hindenburg was opposed to anti-Semitic policies.

As a result Hitler bided his time and ended the boycott temporarily. By 1935, however, his position was considerably stronger:

- Hindenburg had died and Hitler was now undisputed Fuhrer.
- The SA had been destroyed.
- Anti-Semitic propaganda, particularly Julius Streicher's publication *The Stormer*, which appeared in most German workplaces, had made a great impression in 1934-5 on German society.

As a result the **Nuremberg Laws** were passed in September 1935. These laws were a concerted attempt to isolate Germany's Jews:

- Jews were deprived of German citizenship.
- Marriages between Jews and non-Jews were banned and made a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment.

Boycotts of Jewish shops, now organised by the SS, became more common, as did anti-Semitic road signs in the outskirts of towns and villages, usually displaying the message 'Jews are not wanted here'. There was a further attack on Jewish communities when Hermann Goering implemented the Four Year Plan for the German economy. All properties worth more than 5,000 marks owned by Jews had to be registered and could not be sold without permission. All Jews were ordered to add a name 'Israel' or 'Sarah' to their current name by 1 January 1939.

This increasingly severe persecution came to a violent climax in November 1938. A Jewish student, Herschel Grynszpan, bitter about the deportation of his parents from Germany marched into the German embassy in Paris and shot dead the first diplomat he saw. The Nazi government seized on the incident as a reason to attack Germany's Jewish community. The SS and Gestapo organised a wholesale attack on Jewish shops, premises, synagogues and school. At least 7,500 Jewish-owned shops were destroyed and 191 synagogues were burned on 9 November 1938 in an event known as **Crystal Night** (*Kristallnacht*). The death toll probably ran into hundreds and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested in the following week and sent to concentration camps.

The Jewish community was fined 1 billion marks as punishment for the murder of the German diplomat. Further laws banned Jews from going to cinemas, theatres and swimming pools; Jewish children were excluded from schools and universities. The removal of Jews from Germany's economic life followed; their property was taken over by the state, they were not allowed to work and had to be dismissed from jobs without compensation or pensions. In the next 12 months more than 115,000 Jews left Germany, probably bringing the total of those who had left Germany since 1933 to 400,000.

There was a fierce reaction to *Kristallnacht* abroad, with many foreign countries and newspapers reacting with horror to the events of that night. The true nature of the Nazis had now been clearly revealed and, ominously, Hitler declared in a speech to the Reichstag in January 1939 that if war broke out it would lead to the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

Terror and persuasion

What methods did the Nazis use to control Germany?

Use of SS and Gestapo; control of the legal system

The destruction of the SA in the 'Night of the Long Knives' saw the **SS** become a vital part of Hitler's dictatorship. Originally a bodyguard for the Nazi leaders, by 1934 it had become a powerful force in its own right under Heinrich Himmler. Now that the SA was destroyed, Himmler's SS took over all of Germany's police forces.

The police were split into two groups under Himmler: the ordinary police force and the political police force, which included the **Gestapo**, under the command of Reinhard Heydrich. Between them Himmler and Heydrich controlled a vast security operation which dealt ruthlessly with any opposition to the Nazi dictatorship. The Gestapo had the power to arrest people without trial and put people into what they called 'protective custody'. What this really meant was putting people into specially organised '**concentration camps**'. There were 18 of these to start with, organised by the SS. The first one was Dachau, near Munich, soon to be followed by others such as Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen. These were known as 'Death's Head units' and the treatment of prisoners was brutal. Many of the first inmates of the concentration camps were political opponents of the Nazis, such as communists and social democrats. Later, the concentration camps were to be used to put into practice Hitler's policies towards the Jews and other groups whom the Nazis hated.

Between 1934 and 1939, 534 people were sentenced to death and executed for political opposition. In 1939 alone, there were over 160,000 people under arrest for political offences. The treatment of prisoners tended to make sure that upon release, they 'toe the line' rather than face being returned to them.



Source 5: The first concentration camp, 1933

Nazi control over the security services also extended to the **legal system**, which was redesigned to interpret laws according to Nazi ideology. Just like other aspects of German society, the legal system was subject to 'coordination' or *Gleichschaltung*. Judges were required to become members of the National Socialist League for the Maintenance of Law, which ensured that Nazi views carried sway in court.

Lawyers were also subject to Nazi influence and control. October 1933 saw the establishment of the German Lawyers Front and there were more than 10,000 members within two months. The

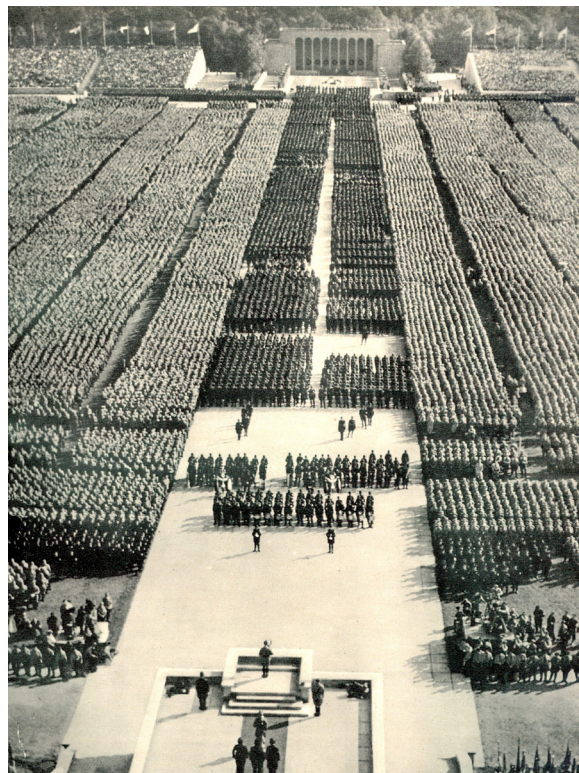
following year the **People's Court** was established, in which the judges were committed Nazis. This was set up to try cases of treason and sentences were often checked by the Minister of Justice or even Hitler himself, to ensure that they were not too 'lenient'. Safeguarding the Nazi state, Nazi ideas on racial community and preventing the spreading of ideas contrary to Nazi thinking were the overriding aims of the legal system during this period.

Goebbels and propaganda; use of rallies, radio and cinema; censorship of newspapers and the arts

The Nazi dictatorship relied on propaganda to influence the way German people thought. This was organised by **Dr Josef Goebbels** who became Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda as head of the propaganda ministry, set up in March 1933. Its purpose was essentially to brainwash people into accepting and believing Nazi ideas, beliefs and values. The messages of racial purity, national greatness and the cult of the Fuhrer were constantly reinforced. Hitler's public speeches attracted vast crowds as did the annual Nuremberg party rally, which was a masterpiece of Nazi propaganda. Their ideas were kept simple and repeated time and time again.

Goebbels set up the Reich Chamber of Culture in 1933 to check on everyone who wanted to work in newspapers, film, radio, art, literature, theatre and music. Obviously only those who were Nazis or sympathetic to Nazism were allowed to work in those areas.

A very powerful form of propaganda used by the Nazis was the **rally**. The most spectacular of these public displays of support for the Nazi dictatorship was the Nuremberg Rally which took place annually in a huge arena housing over 100,000 people. The film record of the 1934 Nazi Party Congress became recognised as a masterpiece of film technique. Shot by the female director Leni Riefenstahl, *The Triumph of the Will*, was shown in cinemas throughout Germany and beyond, presenting an impressive spectacle to all who watched it. Hitler also used the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin for propaganda purposes.



Source 6: Panoramic view of a Nazi rally in Nuremberg, September 1934

Radio stations were of great importance and by 1939 the majority of German families had a radio. Radios were placed in workplaces so that important messages could be heard during working

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hours. There were more radios per head of population in Germany than in any other country. The *Volksempfänger* or People's Receiver was a mass produced, cheap radio set that could even be bought by instalments. Goebbels made sure that the Nazi message was constantly put out on the radio and Hitler was also a frequent speaker on the radio.

Books were censored on a massive scale – the works of over 2,500 writers were banned. It was quite common for Nazi supporters to ransack libraries and burn books on large bonfires in the streets. Many writers were persuaded or in some instances forced to write in praise of Hitler and the Nazi regime. Rather than live and write under such circumstances, over 2,500 writers left Germany during the 1930s.

Goebbels allowed the film industry to make comedies and adventure films that were very popular, but he also made sure that political films made the Nazi message clear. He realised that **cinema** had great power among audiences – for example audiences exceeded 250 million in 1933. One of the most famous of these films was *Hitlerjunge Quex* about a youth who ran away from his communist family to join the Hitler Youth and was later murdered by communists. All films were accompanied by official newsreels that celebrated Hitler's leadership of Germany and Nazi achievements.

A Nazi press agency controlled the news and any **newspapers** opposed to the Nazis were quickly closed down. Goebbels regularly met with the editors of newspapers printed in Berlin to ensure that the Nazi message was consistently disseminated to the population. Failure to comply could mean arrest and a possible concentration camp sentence for newspaper editors. By 1935 the Nazis had taken measures to close more than 1,600 newspapers and thousands of magazines. Left-wing or Jewish journalists were dismissed and any foreign news could only be printed after it had been supplied by the Nazi-controlled German Press Agency.

The Nazis made sure that all aspects of the media were censored. Goebbels also realised that control of the arts was necessary to ensure all aspects of German life were controlled. **Music** was censored as Hitler hated modern music, considering jazz to be degenerate, 'black' music which was culturally inferior. Traditional German folk music along with the work of composers such as Wagner, Bach and Beethoven became the mainstay of music played on the radio. As an artist, Hitler took a keen interest in **art and architecture**. He saw public buildings as representative of the people and encouraged the 'monumental style' of architecture which was based on the grand structures of ancient Greece and Rome. New German houses were encouraged to be built in a traditional style, with shutters on the windows.

Hitler also disliked modern art and therefore the artistic changes brought in during the Weimar Republic were particularly anathema to him. Such art was called 'degenerate' and was banned. Art was to follow a more traditional form, but was also expected to reflect Germany's past greatness. Racial depictions had to conform to Nazi ideology regarding the Aryan family, normally set in a pastoral background. Depictions of Aryan life were expected to show hard work as heroic, women as the keeper of the home, the Aryan as being fit and physically attractive. There can be no doubt though that under the Nazis creativity was severely stifled by the incessant demands placed upon it by censorship.

The incessant exposure to propaganda and censorship had a huge impact on the way people thought about the Nazi government: the German people had few opportunities to see or hear an opposing point of view and the achievements of Hitler's government were constantly praised and put in the best possible light. Over 17 million men were conscripted into the German armed forces during the Second World War and fought a huge Allied coalition with determination and loyalty to the German state – some measure of the success of Nazi propaganda and leadership.

Hitler's foreign policy

What factors led to the outbreak of war in 1939?

Hitler's foreign policy aims; rearmament and conscription

It was well known that Hitler intended to reverse the Treaty of Versailles and particularly dear to his heart was *Anschluss* or union with his native Austria. Important though this was to him, nevertheless his objectives were even more ambitious. Hitler wanted *Lebensraum* in the east for Germans to colonise. This territory would be carved out of Poland, other east European countries and, especially, the USSR. Hitler's intentions were not merely colonial; he also saw the creation of *Lebensraum* as a racial war as well. Hitler's foreign policy is only understandable as an extension of his rabid anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism was, of course, nothing new: Hitler's unique contribution to it was to transform anti-Semitism into a highly organised extermination of Jews and communists. He often used these terms interchangeably. This extermination is often known as the 'Final Solution' and *Lebensraum* was part and parcel of the same policy.

As was seen with his anti-Semitic policies in Germany, Hitler moved cautiously at first, partly because Germany had to rearm and build its strength and partly because he did not want to alarm other powers before Germany was strong enough to deal with them. His foreign policy was also highly intuitive and opportunistic; he was very clear (and always had been in his writings and speeches to the party faithful) about his final objective but progress towards that objective had to be staged and take advantage of new opportunities. In this, Hitler was aided by his uncanny political skill: he understood Britain's and France's **appeasement** policies, he understood the importance of wrong-footing and dividing his opponents and he understood the importance appearing statesmanlike and peaceful when he very clearly was not. He may have been so successful in this that many Germans were genuinely shocked by the outbreak of war in 1939. But, however hard he tried, the mask often dropped, as was shown in his speeches to Nazi Party supporters or to the Reichstag or in events like *Kristallnacht* in November 1938.

The Second World War was Hitler's war – it may not have been the war he wanted at the start but the eventual attack on the USSR and *Lebensraum* had always been his objectives.

In 1933 Hitler made two decisions that clearly separated his policy from that of Gustav Stresemann. He ordered Germany to leave the Disarmament Conference attended by most European countries and he also ordered Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations. In 1935 this was followed up by an announcement that Germany now had an air force (*Luftwaffe*) and was introducing **conscription** to create a peacetime army of 550,000 men – both measures specifically banned by the Treaty of Versailles. Britain, France and Italy condemned Hitler's actions at a meeting at Stresa (called the Stresa Front) but significantly took no action to stop rearmament. Hitler had shrewdly calculated that the Allies had no stomach for armed action and quickly demonstrated his extraordinary ability to out-manoeuvre his opponents by negotiating a separate naval treaty with Britain, which allowed Germany to possess a navy of 35 per cent of the strength of Britain's Royal Navy. This was an important concession. To reassure France, he stated that Germany had no territorial claims on France after the return of the Saarland to Germany in 1935 which had been decided in a vote in the region held under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

The weakness of the Stresa Front was clearly shown the following winter when Britain and France half-heartedly tried to prevent Italy's attack on Abyssinia. The Abyssinian crisis also showed the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. Once it became clear that the Italian dictator Mussolini had won his war and conquered Abyssinia, Hitler decided the time was ripe for another calculated blow to the Treaty of Versailles.

The Rhineland 1936; *Anschluss* 1938

On 7 March 1936 Hitler ordered German troops to march into the demilitarised Rhineland. This was a breach not only of the Treaty of Versailles but also the Locarno Agreement that Stresemann had negotiated. Hitler once again calculated it was worth the risk as he thought Britain and France would be reluctant to intervene. The French army could quite easily, at this stage, have prevented the reoccupation of Rhineland. The French generals grossly overestimated German strength and Britain's policy was increasingly one of appeasement towards German demands to revise the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler overruled his own generals who had advised against the move on the grounds that the French army was too powerful.



Source 7: German troops entering the Rhineland in 1936

Hitler's confidence in his own ability and the wisdom of his strategy knew no bounds and his foreign policy actions now became even more radical and ambitious. The League of Nations had also shown itself to be powerless. Hitler also reinforced his position by signing the Rome-Berlin Axis with Mussolini in 1936, followed by the Anti-Comintern Pact with Italy and Japan to oppose the Soviet Union and all that it stood for.

In 1936-7 key decisions were made by Hitler and other Nazi leaders to prepare for a war of aggression. Rearmament was given top priority in Germany's economic plans and in a high-level conference with his military commanders in November 1937 Hitler emphasised his determination to acquire *Lebensraum* in the east and to solve Germany's economic problems, primarily shortages of food and resources, by force by 1943-4 at the latest. He was prepared to take risks in further challenges to the Versailles settlement as Britain and France had not put up serious opposition so far. Lord Halifax, a senior British government minister, on a visit to Germany a few days later, agreed that Germany had reasonable grievances over Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

In 1938 Hitler ordered the Nazi Party in Austria to wreck the government of Dr Schuschnigg with demonstrations, processions and protests. When Schuschnigg announced that he would hold a referendum on Austria's future, Hitler ordered the Germany army to the Austrian border in March 1938, as he could not risk a 'no' vote. Once again, Hitler's army generals advised against the action but Hitler's assessment of the reaction of Britain and France was correct, neither intervened to

stop this major breach of the Treaty of Versailles. Without backing from the west, Schuschnigg resigned, being replaced by a Nazi, Arthur Seyss-Inquart. The new leader then asked Hitler to send troops into Austria to 'restore order'. This was a major victory for Hitler, again boosting his confidence and personal prestige. Strategically it also meant that Czechoslovakia's defences in the west were now completely out-flanked. All Britain and France did was to protest.

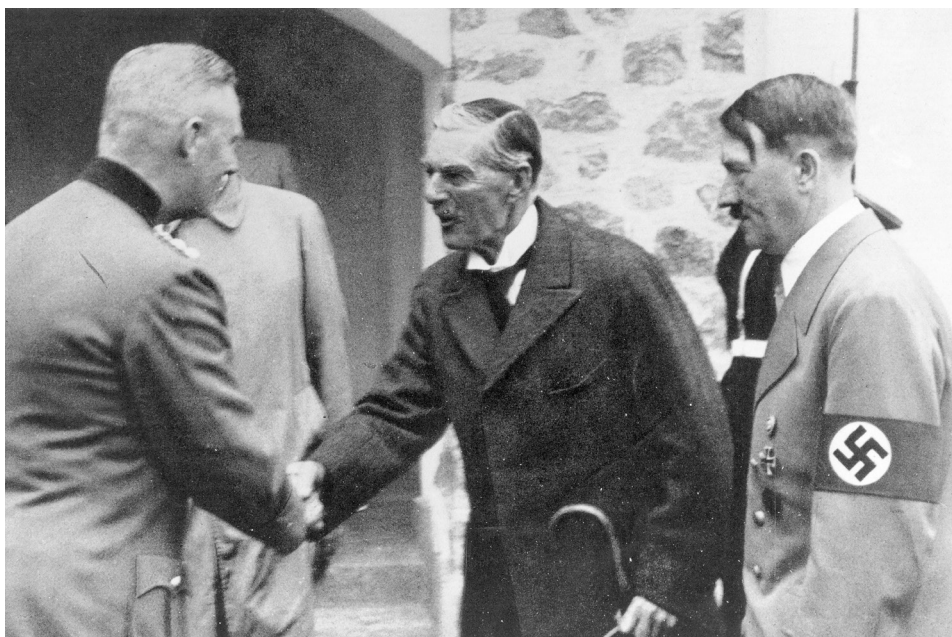
Sudetenland 1938; Nazi-Soviet Pact 1939

Hitler had never respected the new country of Czechoslovakia and there was a long-standing grievance over the position of 3.5 million Germans living in the Sudetenland region of western Czechoslovakia since the country had been created at the Paris Peace Settlement in 1919. The Sudeten Germans felt victimised and a strong local Nazi Party exploited these grievances.

Hitler intended to destroy the state of Czechoslovakia and, at the very least, annex the Sudetenland. The German army was ordered to draw up plans to attack Czechoslovakia and Hitler stepped up the pressure with threatening speeches demanding self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. Neither Britain nor France were keen to support Czechoslovakia in resisting German threats. The British Prime Minister, **Neville Chamberlain**, played a key role in negotiating a peaceful solution to the crisis. Hitler demanded that the Czechs give up the Sudetenland by 1 October or face attack.

Chamberlain assumed the role of peace maker and flew to meet Hitler on three occasions in Munich in meetings at which the Czechs were not even present. On 29 September at Munich, Britain, France, Italy and Germany made an agreement to solve the problem – the **Munich Agreement**. The Sudetenland was handed to Germany in return for guarantees about the new frontiers of Czechoslovakia. Hitler's army generals had come close to removing him from power, so worried were they by the possibility of a military reaction from Britain and France. Hitler then chose to negotiate with Britain and France, perhaps influenced by last-minute doubts, such as the reluctance of his ally Mussolini to go to war.

Chamberlain was impressed by the agreement with Hitler in which Hitler also promised never to go to war again with Britain. Hitler, by contrast, was annoyed and felt he had been cheated of his war despite his success in gaining the Sudetenland, winning more prestige within Germany and once again proving his generals wrong.



Source 8: Chamberlain meeting Hitler and General Keitel, 1938

1G. Germany in Transition, 1919-1939

Within weeks of the Munich settlement, Hitler had already made plans to attack what was left of Czechoslovakia. In this he was aided by the demands of the Slovak people for independence, further weakening the position of the Czech government. On 15 March 1939, German troops entered the Czech capital, Prague, and Hitler annexed Bohemia and Moravia to Germany on the grounds they once been ruled by a German emperor. Czechoslovakia had now been pulled to pieces and was now effectively under German control. Once more, Hitler had reckoned that Britain and France would not oppose his actions but this time he had miscalculated. Neville Chamberlain immediately gave a guarantee (which was not expected by Hitler) to Poland, as the presumed next target for Hitler's aggression, that its territories would be protected. Chamberlain also significantly increased rearmament in Britain and introduced conscription in the summer of 1939.

Hitler was enraged by the British guarantee and gave instructions to his generals to prepare for an attack on Poland. He realised that there was now a huge risk of a general war over Poland and he showed his political skill in wrong-footing his opponents. Secret negotiations were begun with the USSR which Hitler knew also had territorial ambitions in Poland and no great regard for a country which had defeated the Soviets in 1920-1. Hitler made a **non-aggression pact** with the USSR in late August 1939 and agreed a cynical division of Poland. *Lebensraum* and anti-communism were temporarily forgotten in his haste to destroy Poland. He thought that once Britain and France knew about his pact with the USSR, it would deter them from helping Poland. He ordered his armies to attack Poland on 1 September 1939, confident that neither Britain nor France would intervene because of his agreement with the Soviet Union. He was genuinely surprised when Britain and France did not back down and was even more annoyed when his ally Mussolini refused to join in. Nevertheless, the German attack went ahead and on 3 September 1939 Britain and France declared war on Germany. The Second World War had begun.

Acknowledgment

Source 1: Kaiser Wilhelm II - Wikipedia Public Domain (<https://goo.gl/JRFpNQ>)

Source 3: Nazi Stormtroopers outside Munich City Hall, November 1923 – Getty Images

Source 4: The Reichstag in flames - Wikipedia Public Domain <https://goo.gl/gJK8xP>

Source 5: The first concentration Camp, 1933 – AKG Images

Source 6: Nazi rally in Nuremberg, September 1934 – Rex Shutterstock

Source 7: German troops entering the Rhineland in 1936 – AKG Images

Source 8: Chamberlain meeting Hitler and General Keitel, 1938 - AKG Images