

# Modern History: Germany Dot Point Summary

## 1 WEIMAR REPUBLIC

### Emergence of the Democratic Republic and the impact of the Treaty of Versailles

#### Background

- As Germany began to feel the effects of the First World War in 1917, the *Burgfrieden* that had existed began to break down; the USPD split off from the main Socialist party and demanded peace, and in April 1917 the Reichstag voted for a peace resolution but was ignored.
- Ludendorff saw a way to preserve his reputation, get revenge on the politicians whom he detested so much, and perhaps get Germany a better deal; he advised the Kaiser to transform the Second Reich into a parliamentary democracy, with the Socialists in power. This was the 'revolution from above'. This new government would have to surrender and end the war – in fact, Ludendorff made sure of it by arranging an armistice before the transferral of government.
- The German people were shocked at the defeat. At the time, German troops were well into France and Belgium, and at no time during the war had enemy troops invaded Germany herself. This surrender from an apparently strong position lent credence to the 'stab in the back' myth – the idea that Socialist politicians (the November Criminals) had surrendered without reason and subjected the whole of Germany to the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

#### Revolution from below

- The formation of a new government under Prince Max of Baden was not enough. Economic problems and war weariness encouraged popular unrest; when the German people realised that they had lost the war, a wave of unrest erupted.
- The Kiel mutiny signalled the start of serious trouble. In October 1918, the sailors at Kiel refused to obey a suicidal order to sail out and salvage German honour in a final battle. They took over Kiel and raised the red flag. This encouraged the formation of workers', soldiers' and sailors' councils, Soviet-style, all over Germany, which challenged the authority of the state parliaments (Länder). Alarmed at what appeared to be the beginnings of a communist uprising and desperate to prevent a full revolution, Prince Max announced the abdication of the Kaiser and handed the Chancellorship to Friedrich Ebert.
- Radical Socialists were calling for a soviet state; to outmanoeuvre them, Philipp Scheidemann declares a socialist republic on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November. Ebert was furious, he had hoped to replace the monarchy at a later date, but he had to accept the new republic. Two days later the new government signed the armistice.
- On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November Ebert made a deal with the German Army; in exchange for assurances guaranteeing the continued authority of existing officers, the army promised to defend the new government. The problem was that the army contained many reactionary, conservative, pro-

- monarchy elements, since many of the officers belonged to the old Junker class. This was to cause problems later.
- This was symptomatic of a more general failure of the revolution to remove old elites from positions of power in the new government. Ebert asked all the old, experienced civil servants to stay on, as well as the judiciary. These 'old guard' harboured resentment towards the Socialists and Hitler was later able to tap into this sense of distrust.

### Constitution and the establishment of new government

- Ebert was elected president, Scheidemann as chancellor in early 1919.
- The SPD hoped to gain a majority but did not; this set the tone for the rest of the Weimar elections. No party was ever able to gain a majority, which made the role of the President vital, since he could appoint and dismiss the Chancellor.
- The Constitution was extremely democratic, but was too broad and vague, and included the much-maligned Article 48, whereby the President could bypass the Reichstag and issue decrees.

### Impact of the Treaty of Versailles

- Germans were outraged at the harsh Treaty of Versailles. They had been expecting a great victory and now the Allies were making demands that the Germans felt were far too harsh.
- The government was divided on whether to accept the treaty, but really they had no choice; if the Allies resumed the war then Germany would be devastated.
- It was felt that President Wilson's 14 Points, proposed in 1917 as the basis for a treaty, could provide a fair settlement for all. However, the Allies applied the points selectively so that millions of Germans were denied their national rights. The German government was excluded from negotiations.
- Some of the terms of the treaty were:
  - *Anschluss* with Austria was forbidden
  - Germany and her allies were blamed for the war
  - The Rhineland was demilitarised and temporarily occupied for France's security
  - Germany was split in two to grant Poland access to the sea
  - German U-boats and a military air force of any kind were banned
  - Germany was forced to make reparations to the Allies
- The opponents of the Weimar Republic laid the blame for the treaty at the feet of the 'November Criminals', and the Republic suffered from this negative publicity for its entire duration.
- Germany lost 13% of its territory, 12% of its population (6.5 million), 48% of its iron ore, 16% of its coal, and 15% of its agricultural production
- Germany had to pay 132,000 million gold marks over 30 years
- The actual impact of the treaty, it can be argued, was not that large; France had failed to achieve its goal of a permanently weakened Germany, Germany was now surrounded by a number of small, weak states, especially in the east, and reparations by themselves were not

- enough to break the German economy. (It is no longer acceptable to blame the ultimate failure of the Republic on the Treaty of Versailles – J. Hiden)
- The real problem lay in the attitudes of Germans towards the treaty, however misplaced they may have been. (The real damage the treaty did to Germany was to disillusion more moderate men who might otherwise have supported their new republic – A. Nicholls)

## Political, economic and social issues in the Weimar Republic to 1929

### POLITICAL

#### Spartacist revolt and other Far Left insurrections

- In January 1919 mass protests at the dismissal of a radical official turned into a spontaneous rising which the Spartacists tried to take control of in the hope that it would develop into a communist revolution. Ebert's government suppressed the rising with the army and the Freikorps, and the Spartacist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were shot. The KPD remained a bitter enemy of the SPD from then on; the Communists felt betrayed by their supposed left-wing allies.
- In Bavaria in March 1919, a soviet style communist government was set up, which was then brutally suppressed by the Freikorps.
- In response to the Kapp Putsch of March 1920, the Communists organized the Ruhr Army of some 50,000 workers and seized control of the region. The protestors were split over government concessions and were eventually crushed by the army and the Freikorps.
- The KPD suffered from poor leadership and organisation, and usually tried to take advantage of existing revolts rather than start and organize its own. Internal divisions and lack of support in numbers and depth of commitment also contributed to the failure of the revolutions in this period.

#### Challenges from the Right

- When the government tried to disband two Freikorps divisions in March 1920 (it had less need of them as things stabilised, and it was trying to reduce the size of the army to comply with Versailles requirements) they rebelled and, together with the leader of the Fatherland Party Wolfgang Kapp, marched on Berlin to try and take over the government. Ebert's government ordered the army to stop the revolutionaries but they refused, saying 'Reichswehr does not fire on Reichswehr'. The Kapp forces entered the city unopposed and the government had no choice but to flee. Before they did, however, they organized a nationwide general strike that the Kapp government was unable to overthrow. After four days Kapp and his forces fled and Ebert's government returned. In some areas there were clashes between workers and the army as some workers tried to extend the successful strike into more radical changes in the government.
- Extreme right-wing Germans assassinated prominent Weimar politicians, including Walter Rathenau, head of the AEG electrical firm.
- Hitler's Munich Putsch of November 1923 also failed. Rightists in Bavaria were angered at Stresemann's decision to call off passive resistance in the

- Ruhr, and Hitler's Nazi Party tried to take over Bavaria by taking hostage the political leaders of the area and announcing a national revolution. However, they failed to gain the support of the army, which checked the advance of Hitler's men when they marched on Munich. Hitler and Ludendorff were arrested; Hitler was sent to jail, whereupon his party nearly disintegrated without him.
- Overall the right-wing challenge was more threatening to the republic if only because it was better organized. Also, the right wing often had the support of parts of the army, which retained anti-republican elements.

### Instability

- Because of Germany's proportional representation voting system and its multi-party tradition, no party was ever able to form an absolute majority. Governments were always formed from coalitions of two or more parties, and no chancellor was ever able to hold a government together for more than two years.
- Parties would leave the government in protest, the chancellor would lose the confidence of the Reichstag, the army, or the President, and coalitions would squabble over every issue.
- There were six Weimar governments between 1924 and 1929, with most not having a secure support base in the Reichstag. Chancellors began to rely more and more on Article 48 to get things done.

## ECONOMIC

### Hyperinflation, 1923

- In January 1923, the French invaded the Ruhr region (adjacent to the Rhineland that the Allies occupied) over a reparations payment of telegraph poles that allegedly had not been received. The government ordered passive resistance as the French tried to force German workers to continue production. Since this was Germany's primary industrial area, national production virtually ceased, and the already weakened German economy collapsed.
- The roots of this weak economy stemmed from the policy of the government during the First World War. In order to finance the war, the government simply printed and borrowed more money, expecting to be able to pay its debts by extracting reparations from its defeated enemies. When Germany lost the war, it was left with a massive deficit which was increased by the huge indemnity imposed by the Allies. The governments of 1919-1921 continued this policy of spending in an attempt to solve the deficit problems by simply printing more money.
- As inflation rose and rose, the German people lost confidence in their currency, which resulted in hyperinflation. Wages rose to compensate initially, but eventually fell behind; prices could rise between 20% and 100% in a day. The mark effectively became worthless.
- Food shortages grew as farmers became less willing to exchange food for worthless money.
- Some people benefited from hyperinflation; people in debt paid their loans off easily, exporters were paid in foreign currency which they could then convert to billions of marks, and industrialists such as Hugo Stinnes used cheap Reichsbank credit to buy out their competitors.

- However, the crisis was disastrous for most Germans, as their real incomes fell dramatically. The historian Peukert warns against generalisations: 'Two individuals from the same social class might be affected very differently...It was precisely through the confusion experienced by individuals...that the real psychological impact of the inflation made itself felt.'
- In the end the crisis was solved as quickly as it had begun; Stresemann called off passive resistance, introduced a new currency (the Rentenmark, one of which was worth 1000 billion marks) and cut government expenditure. This move was not popular with extremists, but was necessary to end the crisis.
- The government lost many of its debts (the new currency meant that its old debts were now tiny) but also lost popular support; those who had lost out blamed the Weimar system, and the government was plagued with demands for compensation soon after (these people even formed their own party).

## SOCIAL

### The old elites

- The revolution had failed to remove reactionary elements from positions of power. Left over from the old aristocratic Junker class, these people had a deep-seated dislike of democracy, especially when that democracy was so strongly associated with the defeat of Germany and the hated Treaty of Versailles. They occupied key positions in the army, the judiciary and the civil service, forming a bastion of resistance against the new republic.

### Social experimentation and conservative reaction

- These were years of cultural growth for Weimar Germany. Mass culture began to develop with the advent of the wireless, cinema and gramophone, as well as the spread of urbanisation.
- Traditional art forms became a form of cultural criticism and expression.
- Jazz and nightclubs became popular.
- Conservatives reacted against this trend; Hitler famously rejected the new styles of art, favouring more traditional artworks.

## **Collapse of the Weimar Republic 1929–1933**

### Long-term problems

- Conservative and military traditions in Germany
- Limited nature of the 1918-1919 Revolution
- 'Stab in the back' myth
- Reactions to defeat in 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles
- Constitution
- Hyperinflation crisis of 1923

Wall Street Crash and the Depression, 1929 – discussed in next dot point

## The presidential governments, 1930-33

- As the party system in the Weimar Republic gradually became more fragmented, with extremist, splinter and narrow-interest parties gaining more popularity, it became more and more difficult to form governments, as parties violently disagreed with each other and refused to co-operate.
- Hindenburg and his associates were looking for a way to establish a more authoritarian method of government, bypassing the ineffective, squabbling Reichstag.
- In May 1928, Hermann Muller became Chancellor and formed a coalition government of five parties. This government got the Young Plan through the Reichstag. However, it failed to agree on how to fund unemployment payments caused by the Depression. Muller lost his office when Hindenburg made it clear that he no longer enjoyed the support of the presidency. Hindenburg refused to use Article 48 to issue decrees, rendering Muller relatively powerless.
- The last four governments of the Weimar Republic were presidential governments; that is, Hindenburg would appoint the Chancellor (who did not necessarily have to be from the party with the most seats in the Reichstag) who would then govern using Article 48 exclusively. The Reichstag was threatened with dissolution if it opposed the presidential decrees. Effectively, Muller's 'grand coalition' marked the end of parliamentary government in Weimar Germany.
- Brüning was the next Chancellor; when the Reichstag failed to pass his finance bill he had it issued under Article 48. The Reichstag was dissolved when it opposed the presidential decree and new elections were called, in which the extremist KPD and Nazi parties made major gains.
- In the presidential election of 1932, Hindenburg defeated Hitler, who nonetheless got 37% of the vote.
- Brüning's government fell when his land redistribution plan offended the agrarian elite, who persuaded Hindenburg to sack him.
- Franz von Papen was the next Chancellor. His was a 'government of barons'; it did not contain any members of the Reichstag. New elections had no discernable effect, with the radicals still forming over half of the Reichstag assembly. Hindenburg refused to make Hitler chancellor, and in December 1932 Papen was replaced with General Schleicher.
- Schleicher's government was short-lived as von Papen intrigued against him and eventually formed a government with Hitler as Chancellor and himself as vice-Chancellor in January 1933.

## **Impact of the Great Depression on Germany**

- The slump of 1929 was part of the worldwide depression caused by the Wall Street Crash.

## Factors that contributed to the slump

- The German economy was still relatively weak and suffered from long-term problems.
- After the slump, foreign investors (on which Germany was depending heavily) began to withdraw their interests out of self-concern. The biggest withdrawal was in 1930 as a reaction to the success of extremist parties in the elections.

- The government was frightened of causing another inflationary crisis like the one of 1923, so they did not attempt to spend their way out of the depression. Also, it was hard to come to any major policy decisions within the coalition governments; Muller's government fell apart over a dispute like this.
- The government found it difficult to borrow money; many investors had lost their savings in the inflationary crisis of 1923.
- Restrictions on the Reichsbank as part of the Young Plan meant that it couldn't devalue the mark or print huge amounts of extra money.

### Effects of the Great Depression

- By 1932, 6 million Germans were unemployed. Unemployment rather than inflation was the problem; prices actually fell as demand lessened.
- Agriculture and industry both suffered.
- The psychological effects were also large; the unemployed felt rejected and useless, and the blame for the whole crisis came to land on the shoulders of the Weimar Republic, increasing the vote for the extremist parties of both left and right.

### Government reaction

- Initially the government did nothing; Germany had recovered from the minor slump of 1926 without government intervention.
- The main approach after this first stage was to reduce expenditure in order to cope with decreased tax revenue as a result of falling wages and declining economic activity. These cuts included cuts to pension allowances and other welfare systems, resulting in bad feeling towards the government.
- Eventually, the government became more interventionist. Once reparations were suspended, Brüning initiated some public works schemes and von Papen began to allocate unused land to dispossessed workers and peasants. All this was a case of too little, too late, though, and while the economy did start to recover in late 1932, it was to be Hitler that took all the credit.

## 2 THE RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY

### **Rise of the Nazi Party from 1923**

#### Timeline

1923: Hitler's Munich Putsch fails, the party is reorganised with Hitler as its Führer

1924: Hitler turns his trial into a soapbox to declare his views; Nazi popularity and, more importantly, awareness, grows. Hitler is sent to jail but is released after nine months, and the party nearly falls to pieces in his absence

1925: Hitler reorganises the party more efficiently

1930: Nazis make major gains in elections

1932, July: Nazis gain 37% of the vote, but Hindenburg refuses to make Hitler Chancellor. Hitler loses the presidential election to Hindenburg, but gets 37% of the vote.

1932, November: Nazis lose 2 million votes in elections and are suffering massive problems with finance and morale. There is radical pressure to take control

1933: Hitler is made Chancellor in January

### Hitler's role

- Hitler provided the charismatic leadership which was so conspicuously absent from Weimar politics. He refounded the party in 1925 and based it around himself, making it totally dependent on the Führerprinzip and making himself master over both policy and strategy.
- Hitler was a gifted orator and was able to tailor his message to his audience. His apparent confidence and single-mindedness were appealing to Germans living in a country where politicians were all too often wavering and ineffectual.

### Party organisation

- The party was organised in a series of areas, or *gaue*, with each area headed by a local leader or *gauleiter*. These leaders were subordinate to Hitler's orders but otherwise enjoyed a degree of flexibility in their administration.
- The Nazis developed a series of associated organisations such as the Nazi Welfare Organisation, which ran soup kitchens and organised food donations; this was part of the Nazi bid to foster a cross-class appeal.
- The Nazis put huge effort into training speakers, which were then sent out to organise and speak at mass rallies. They used the latest technology to get their message across.
- The Nazis had a central propaganda machine headed by Goebbels which coordinated and controlled campaigning efforts.
- The SA played an important role. They appeared at rallies and demonstrations, and their military appearance encouraged the idea that the Nazis were strong and would form a strong government if elected. By 1933 there were over 500,000 SA men. They would often engage in violence towards political opponents of the party, which escalated as Hitler's bid for the Chancellorship went on.

### **Hitler's ascension to power**

- Hitler's party was, by 1932, the largest in the Reichstag; he thus had a moral (if not constitutional) right to be Chancellor. He could only come to power democratically if his party held a majority in the Reichstag, which no party had ever done in the history of the Weimar Republic. President Hindenburg appointed Chancellors.
- Hitler demanded to be made Chancellor in August 1932, after the elections. A compromise had been proposed with Papen as Chancellor and Hitler as his vice-chancellor; Hitler rejected this idea, preferring an all-or-nothing approach. This was dangerous, as Nazi support was falling and the party was in a financial crisis. Hitler had also lost the presidential election to Hindenburg.
- After the November elections the Nazis had lost 2 million votes. Schleicher, as part of his attempt to split the Nazi party, proposed himself

- as Chancellor with the Nazi Gregor Strasser as Vice-Chancellor. This failed and Strasser left the Nazi Party.
- The last tactic was to appoint Hitler as Chancellor, but surround him with Papen as Vice-Chancellor and other conservatives in the cabinet. President Hindenburg reluctantly did this in January 1933.
  - The elite were concerned about the ineffectiveness of parliament and were searching for other solutions. Key industrialists sent Hindenburg a letter recommending that he appoint Hitler as Chancellor, with von Papen, members of the agrarian elite (who were upset at the proposed land reforms) and Hindenburg's own son, Oskar, recommending the same thing. Papen thought that Hitler could be controlled, famously remarking that he could back Hitler 'so far into a corner that he'll squeak'. This proved a fatal underestimation.

## Initial consolidation of Nazi power 1933–1934

### Legislation and political measures

- Once Hitler was Chancellor, he persuaded Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag and hold new elections. Hitler wanted a two-thirds majority so he could change the Constitution legally. Surprisingly, the Nazis only got 44% of the vote, with their Nationalist allies taking 8%.
- On 27 February, the Reichstag caught fire. Hitler blamed the event on communist intrigue and used it as an excuse to pass the Reichstag Fire Decree, or the Decree for the Protection of People and State. Hindenburg passed this into law under Article 48. It suspended constitutional civil rights, including freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, personal freedom as well as personal privacy and privacy of communications. The Nazis used this law to escalate their campaign of violence via the 500,000 strong SA. Targeted were deputies of opposing parties, especially communists, as well as members of the general public as part of a campaign of terror.
- On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March the Enabling Act was voted into law by the Reichstag. Hitler and his Nationalist allies didn't have the two-thirds majority needed to pass it, but he got the Centre Party on side after promises had been made to them. Hitler's campaign of terror had worked; the KPD was banned and only 94 of the 120 SPD deputies attended the session. Hitler's SS and SA men crowded the Opera House where the Reichstag was meeting and shouted intimidation and threats. Only the SPD were brave enough to oppose the Enabling Act, so it was passed by a majority of 441 to 94.
- The Enabling Act allowed the government (in effect, Hitler) to pass laws without the consent of the Reichstag. This enabled Hitler to pass pretty much whatever law he liked as long as the President didn't veto it (Hindenburg was going senile and favoured authoritarian government anyway). The Nazis promptly used this law to:
  - ban all other political parties
  - purge the civil services of 'alien elements' (Jews and political opponents)
  - incorporate all unions into the German Labour Front (DAF).
 The Enabling Act was renewed in 1938 and again in 1942. It was the basic governing law of the Third Reich.

## Gleichschaltung (co-ordination)

- The Nazis began a process of simplifying the German state machine in an attempt to bring all elements of political and social life under the control of Hitler.
- On 13 March 1933, the Nazis established the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. The Reich Chamber of Culture was established in 1933 and coordinated all aspects of cultural life, bringing them into line with Nazi ideology. (more in propaganda dot point)
- In January 1934 the Law for the Reconstruction of the State was passed. SA violence had already overthrown many state governments; this law formalised the situation and dissolved the remaining state parliaments. The Nazis replace the parliaments with *Gauleiters*, making sure that orders from the top are implemented without the interference of people without complete loyalty to the regime.
- On 1 August 1934, the Nazis merged the offices of Chancellor and President. On 2 August Hindenburg died and Hitler assumed his office, removing the threat of presidential intervention.
- The last remaining way to remove Hitler was by organising an army-supported coup against him. This was extremely unlikely anyway, and became impossible after the army swore an oath of loyalty to Hitler. At the end of 1934 there was no legal way to remove Hitler, and the Nazis controlled most key institutions. (*Far from creating a dependence of Hitler on the army, the oath marked the symbolic moment where the army chained itself to Hitler.* Kershaw)

## Night of the Long Knives, 30 June 1934

- The SA was a potential hotbed of radical ideas. Led by Ernst Rohm, who confessed that 'since I am an immature and wicked man, war and unrest appeal to me more than good bourgeois order', and who supported further left-wing radical revolution, the SA was becoming an irritant.
- Rohm wanted to merge his 3-million strong SA with the German army to create a vast people's militia.
- Hitler had needed the SA to control the Communists and to present a show of strength to the people. Now that he was in power, he had less need of them. Also, the elite that Hitler was depending on for support were growing wary of the radical tendencies and brutality of the SA.
- On the night of 29 June, 1934, Hitler's SS murdered up to 90 people, including 50 top SA men. Robbed of their radical leaders, the SA (which was primarily made up of lower-class people who were attracted by the promise of a hot meal and a uniform) became much less of a threat, and they were eventually merged with the SS, which inherited the idea of a state-wide police and military organisation.

## 3 NAZISM IN POWER

### **Hitler's role in the Nazi state**

#### The Hitler Myth

- In the early days of the Nazi Party, Hitler reorganised the party around the *Fuhrerprinzip* (Fuhrer principle), a kind of personality cult where Hitler was the unquestioned authority figure; infallible and in complete control. Once they were in power, the Nazis extended this idea into the Hitler Myth.
- The Hitler Myth was the idea that Hitler, rather than being a self-serving politician (like those of the Weimar Republic), was the personification of the wishes of the people. He stood aloof from selfish interests, knew exactly what the people wanted, and gave it to them.
- Under this idea, Hitler was the defender of Germany against its enemies (Jews and Communists), the architect of Germany's economic miracle (actually begun by the last Weimar governments), the representative of popular justice, and responsible for all the major successes of government.
- While the extremes of the personality cult probably did not affect all Germans, the general idea became influential, manifesting itself in a general attitude of 'Hitler knows what is best for the people'. This attitude was partly a reaction to the indecisiveness of Weimar politics.
- Although the idea of the Hitler Myth seems ludicrous, it developed and gained credence partly for the following reasons:
  - It was a reaction to the weakness of the Weimar Republic
  - It satisfied the emotional need for a strong government
  - It appealed to the German authoritarian tradition
  - It developed from the *Fuherprinzip* in the Nazi Party
  - It was reinforced by Goebbels' propaganda machine.
- Hitler's own myth eventually became his downfall. He started to believe that he was, in fact, infallible, and moved away from being a calculating, rational politician. He assumed that just because he wanted something done, it would be accomplished (Moscow). ('The day on which Hitler started to believe his own myth marked in a sense the beginning of the end of the Third Reich.' Kershaw)

### Decision making in the Third Reich

- Hitler was unquestioned head of state and supreme commander, but he was also lazy, disliked reading documents and fostered a sense of competition in the ranks below him. Most of the time he lived at the Berghof rather than in Berlin.
- The Fuhrer system meant that there was no real need for law – Hitler's will was law. But Hitler did not make his will clear in all situations, and he certainly did not confirm it by writing it down in official orders. Those below Hitler were left to make their own progress as a kind of experiment in Social Darwinism. Hitler believed that, left to themselves, the strongest of his subordinates would rise to the top and would therefore deserve any power they derived from that position.
- Policy decisions were usually implemented in the following way. An official or Cabinet minister would draft a proposal and submit it to the Reich Chancellery under Lammers, which would either notify Hitler or not. Hitler would give his approval or disapproval, often verbal, and the relevant laws would be drawn up by the Chancellery.

- A confused power struggle emerged in the party as a result of this policy. Party officials were expected to 'work towards the Fuhrer' in their ambitions, and those Nazis who controlled access to Hitler became immensely powerful.
- Evidence for 'strong' dictatorship:
  - Hitler shaped the direction of the party and was totally unquestioned as leader
  - Hitler was in ultimate control of all policy decisions
  - Traditional system of law was replaced with Hitler's all-powerful will
  - Access to Hitler was the key to power
  - 'The point cannot be stressed more strongly: Hitler was master in the Third Reich.' Rich
- Evidence for 'weak' dictatorship:
  - Hitler did not initiate many major policy decisions
  - Subordinates battled beneath him for true power, Hitler was merely a figurehead
  - Hitler was quite happy to give merely verbal permission to many requests
  - There was confusion in the ranks as overlapping bodies competed for power
  - 'Hitler was unwilling to take decisions, frequently uncertain...influenced in the strongest fashion by his current entourage' Mommsen
- More likely is a mixture of the two. Hitler allowed his officials to compete with each other and absented himself from the decision making process, often only emerging to endorse the policy of the strongest official. However, his overall vision shaped the direction of the party, his endorsement was necessary to make major party decisions, and the power struggle was largely an attempt to get closer to Hitler. Hitler was crucial, but he did not need to send out a stream of directives.

## Nazism as totalitarianism

- The traditional or popular view has Nazism as a classic totalitarian state. This view, however, is simplistic. The Nazi state under Hitler was much more complex and involved many factors that undermined the idea that Nazism was just straight totalitarianism.
- The defining characteristics of a totalitarian state are often taken to be:
  - a single mass party with an all-powerful leader
  - official ideology
  - total control over economy
  - system of terror
  - state control of the army.

Nazi Germany contained all of these to an extent, but there were complicating factors.

- Arguments for straight totalitarianism:
  - Political opposition banned

- Ideology central to Nazi regime, huge amounts of time and effort spent promoting Volksgemeinschaft and other Nazi ideals
  - State-controlled economy towards late 1930's; autarky introduced
  - State-run organisations that became compulsory (Hitler Youth, DAF)
  - SS, SD and Gestapo maintained tight control on civilians
  - Propaganda influenced single state mentality
  - Government very powerful, civil liberties suspended in a lot of cases
  - 'Cult of personality'
  - Use of violence as a control
- However, Nazism is more complicated than this simple picture.
  - There is evidence that most Germans supported the regime and so SS and Gestapo presence may not have been as invasive as previously thought.
  - The chaotic nature of government under Hitler presents a 'polycratic' idea of government, with many rulers each having total control over a part of the Nazi state.
  - Nazism definitely had totalitarian elements, but it was subtly different from the traditional conception of the term.

## **The role of propaganda, terror and repression; SA and SS; opposition to Nazism**

### Propaganda

- Propaganda was all-pervasive in the Third Reich. It made its way into every facet of everyday life in a Nazi attempt to influence the ideas of the populace. The regime wanted to produce a Volksgemeinschaft, or People's Community, with all Germans in agreement and working for the good of the State. Most propaganda was focused towards this goal.
- The central controlling agency for propaganda was the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda created in 1933 and headed by Goebbels. It regulated media output by direct ownership, by controlling workers, by directing the media what to produce, and by prosecuting non-conformists.
- The Reich Chamber of Culture, established in 1933 and working alongside the Ministry, also helped to spread propaganda throughout Germany. It was divided into seven subsections that dealt with the press, radio, film, literature, theatre, music, and fine arts, and membership was compulsory for anybody involved in cultural activities. The Chamber regulated cultural output by producing lists of banned artists, writers, filmmakers and other composers, who were prevented from contributing to the new Nazi culture.
- Press was controlled by extending Nazi ownership of the press, controlling individual workers and through the state-controlled Press Agency. It was made illegal to spread false news and rumours, and editors were made responsible for any infringements of government directives.
- Radio was made available to huge numbers of Germans through the subsidised and mass-produced People's Receiver. It had one station and a limited range, and by 1939 70% of households owned one. While mainly used for light entertainment, Hitler's key speeches were also broadcast through it, with public loudspeakers extending the audience still further.

Radio was Goebbels' favourite medium, describing it as 'the spiritual weapon of the totalitarian state'.

- Film was used more as an entertainment tool to keep the people happy than as overt propaganda. Leni Riefenstahl made several films depicting festivals and mass rallies. The emphasis on ideology was subtle, glorifying the ideals of Nazism. Audiences rejected films that were too overtly propagandist, such as *The Eternal Jew*, where many viewers fainted. Hitler wanted more politically focused films (he insisted that *The Eternal Jew* be reworked twelve times, being made more horrific) but Goebbels thought that their main value lay in entertainment.
- Photographs and posters were used to display simple messages to the public. Hitler would often make use of posed photographs depicting him with children. Some photographs would be mass produced on postcards or cigarette packets.
- Meetings and rallies were used as a form of propaganda. The main aim was to indoctrinate the people with Nazi ideas and ideology through speeches, but the rallies also demonstrated the power and strength of the Nazi regime through extravagant light shows, army demonstrations and stirring music. The rallies made people want to belong to such an impressive organisation. They also emphasised the Nazi ideal of a national community.
- Social policy can be seen as propaganda, as much of it was aimed at transforming people's consciousness far more than their social position. Schemes such as *Winterhilfe* (winter help) and the *Eintopf* (one pot) meal illustrated the people's community in action, as did the DAF in its *Beauty of Work and Strength through Joy* sections, which provided many benefits for workers.

### The role of terror and oppression

- The goal of a racially pure 'people's community' had no room for outsiders or those who were deemed unworthy. These people were ruthlessly oppressed, the Nazi view being that their suffering was a way of increasing the strength of Germany.
- The hereditarily ill were sterilised against their wishes in order to prevent them from spreading their inferior genes.
- 'Asocials', a broad term for anybody who did not fit into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, were rounded up and either given work or sent to concentration camps.
- Homosexuals were persecuted and sent to camps. They were viewed as endangering the health of the state by failing to produce children.

### SA and SS

- In 1934 the SA had 3 million members, but after the Night of the Long Knives it was increasingly marginalised (it had been disarmed and restructured) and the SS took over its function.
- The SS was a vast repressive organisation, with many different roles and functions.
- The Gestapo – the Prussian secret state police – eventually covered all German states. In 1936 it came under the control of Himmler as Chief of Police, becoming an SS organisation. It became the most important security agent of the state, able to decide for itself what the law was. The

- traditional view is of a vast organisation that infiltrated every aspect of everyday life, but evidence suggests that the Gestapo were much too small for this (records show that there were 28 Gestapo officials covering the million people who lived in the Wurzburg area). A large part of their power stemmed from voluntary denunciations by the public of neighbours or acquaintances who were behaving 'suspiciously'. The Gestapo fostered the myth of omnipresence in order to maintain their oppression and intimidate opposition.
- The SS as an organisation had the overall objective of creating Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft. By 1940 they had grown to incorporate a vast range of functions, all directed ultimately towards realising their ultimate goal. It defended Hitler by rooting out potential enemies within the State; the SD (internal intelligence organisation) made reports on public opinion; the Death's Head formations ran the death camps and enacted the Holocaust, and the Waffen-SS grew to be a military organisation to rival the Wehrmacht. The SS also established a vast economic empire.

### Opposition to Nazism

- Even though the SPD was banned, it went into exile, basing itself in Paris and later London, and producing reports on the state of life in Germany under Nazism.
- Much of opposition to Nazism was merely non-compliance rather than active resistance. It included reading banned literature, telling anti-Hitler jokes, listening to the BBC and other methods of non-identification with the Nazi regime.
- It was impossible for the most part to form resistance cells as Nazi control was so strict and as the repressive machine grew ever larger. Resistance tended to be fragmented and disorganised, and therefore largely unable to take on a system that was huge, systematic and all-pervasive.
- Some resisters distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets, such as SOPADE (Social Democratic Party in Exile) and the White Roses, an organised university student group. They were influenced by Bishop Galen, who had published a paper denouncing the euthanasia effort. They printed details on the euthanasia program and the atrocities on the Eastern Front. They were eventually arrested and their leaders, Sophie and Hans Scholl, were executed.
- Alternative youth organisations existed, although most of these were merely a way to escape the Hitler Youth rather than a politically motivated society. The Edelweiss Pirates were a loosely organised group of youth who spent their time going on picnics in the highlands and generally not submitting to Nazi ideology. There were also numerous 'swing' groups who listened and danced to forbidden American jazz as a form of protest.
- The Confessional Church that broke away from the nazified national church was generally hostile to Nazi ideas but was more concerned with protecting its own institution than with challenging Nazi rule.
- Assassination attempts on Hitler became more common as the war went on, with several army officers attempting to kill him with bombs.
- Workers had the numbers to overthrow the Nazis but lacked any legal organisations in which to mount effective opposition. Many workers maintained their ties to their illegal political parties, some of which ran

- spy organisations (KPD), distributed leaflets and started whispered propaganda campaigns.
- Overall, though, Hitler's popularity as expressed through Gestapo, SS and SOPADE reports seems to have been largely genuine, with opposition fragmented and very much in the minority. It grew towards the end of the war, though, when it became apparent to everybody but Hitler that defeat was only a matter of time.

## **Social and cultural life in the Nazi state: role of Hitler Youth, women, religion**

### Hitler Youth

- The aim of the Hitler Youth and associated youth movements was to bring up German children virtually from birth as good National Socialists and to make sure that Nazi ideological influences predominated over the potentially non-Nazi influences of parents and the Church.
- In 1933 all youth organisations other than the Concordat-protected Catholic groups were taken over by the Hitler Youth and then in 1936 all other youth organisations were banned. Membership swelled when it became compulsory, but it could be argued that the Hitler Youth became less successful as it grew, because it incorporated less committed youngsters and focused on military preparation more than other, more popular activities.
- The Hitler Youth was similar to the Scouts that we know today in that it organised activities, outings and camps. However, it also organised military training and members were expected to attend lectures in which Nazi ideology was taught. Hitler thought that the best chance of success for National Socialism was to create a hard, dedicated youth that had been brought up on Nazi principles and was not corrupted by the excesses of the Weimar regime.

### Women

- Nazi policy towards women was that their natural place was in the home, that their main concern should be looking after their husband and family, and that they should have many children.
- The Nazis viewed women as having a different, but equally vital role in the new Germany. The race could not continue without new Germans being born all the time, so women were told that it was their national duty to contribute to the Volksgemeinschaft and produce children for the state. These children would be educated in Nazi ideology and grow up as good National Socialists.
- Nazi policy towards women was largely reactionary; they sought to undo the gradual liberalization that had occurred under the Weimar system, such as increased employment opportunities, the vote, and a declining birth rate due to increased access to contraception. The Nazis stressed the family as a microcosm of the Volksgemeinschaft, thus emphasising the role of woman as caretaker of the nation.

- Women were removed from employment and encouraged to marry and have children. Medals existed for those women who had more than four children.
- However, much of Nazi policy towards women clashed with political and other needs. During the war, women were ushered back into the workforce, making munitions and other essentials.

## Religion

- Hitler, in his election campaigns, publicly acknowledged the role of Christianity and even professed to be a Christian in some speeches in order to appeal to the maximum amount of people; he didn't want to alienate the Church. However, his core beliefs, racial and otherwise, meant that Nazism was in fact in opposition to Christianity, and Hitler vowed to eliminate it.
- Many Christians initially supported Nazism because of its anti-communism and emphasis on traditional cultural values. Also the churches' own conservatism, their belief that one's spiritual life should be separate from political affairs (especially in the Catholic Church, where the Concordat had prevented political involvement) and their tradition of subservience to the State (especially in Lutheranism) meant that initially there was little to no resistance to Nazism.
- Hitler talked of the need for a 'positive Christianity' and, in line with the national policy of Gleichschaltung, created a Reich Church to bring all the denominations of Protestantism under one umbrella organisation. The Nazis hoped that this would make Protestantism easier to control.
- The German Christians emerged as a major force in the Reich Church. Led by Ludwig Müller, a strong nationalist and anti-semitic, the German Christians wanted to restructure Protestantism into a new, racially based brand of Christianity. In 1933 they called for the cleansing of the Gospels of 'un-German elements'. This is indicative of the plans the Nazis had for the church as a whole.
- However, the attempt to integrate Protestant Christianity and Nazism failed. In 1934 the Confessional Church broke away from the Reich Church as a reaction to the nazification of Christianity that was occurring. It was not based on opposition to Nazism as such, but it was concerned to protect the church against state interference and against the false theology of the German Christians.
- Hitler realised that the Catholic Church would be harder to control because of its international influence, so he initially sought an agreement with it where the Catholic Church would withdraw from political activities in exchange for state guarantees of its role and safety. However, the Nazis did not abide by the Concordat and in 1937 the Pope issued an encyclical complaining of the breaking of the Concordat, the harassment of priests and the personality cult of the regime.
- The Nazis attempted to install a replacement religion – the German Faith Movement, a kind of neo-paganism – largely failed. It was slightly successful initially (there were 3.5 million members in 1939), but people drifted back to Christianity during the war years.

- There was more resistance from individual Christians than from the church as an institution. Bishop Clemens von Galen preached a number of sermons criticising the Nazi regime, and in 1941 he voiced a protest against euthanasia. He was seen as too popular to be punished; von Galen has been described as the only effective protestor in the Third Reich.
- The relation between church and state seems to have been based on mutual fear; the Nazis were afraid of mass protest if they interfered with the churches, and the churches were afraid of Nazi retaliation if they protested against elements that they saw as hostile to Christianity.

### **Nazi racial policy; anti-Semitism: policy and practice to 1939**

#### Nazi racial policy

- Nazi racial policy was based on and worked towards the creation of Volksgemeinschaft; a community of healthy Aryans working for the good of the nation. People who did not fit the Nazi ideal of a good person had to be excluded. The Nazis did this on three grounds:
  - ideological – people with conflicting ideas such as Communists
  - biological – people whose genes were inferior, such as Jews or the mentally ill
  - social – people whose behaviour was unacceptable, such as the work-shy.
- In 1933 a law for the sterilization of mentally ill people was passed. Mentally ill patients could be sterilized even against their wishes. By 1945 about 350,000 people were sterilized.
- By 1939 this policy had developed into the murder of the mentally ill. A special unit, T4, was introduced to supervise and carry out the euthanasia of the mentally and physically disabled. They were killed by starvation, by lethal injection, or by gas chambers, with many of these techniques used later in the Holocaust. The deaths of the disabled were justified on terms of the end of suffering and also by stressing the financial cost of keeping them alive. Propaganda films were produced to reinforce this concept.
- Asocials were also targeted. This was a broad term that could be applied to anybody who did not fit into the Volksgemeinschaft. In 1938 'asocials' were defined as vagabonds, gypsies, beggars, prostitutes, alcoholics, eccentrics, the workshy and juvenile delinquents – in short, anybody who could weaken the German race by being inferior. With unemployment disappearing, those without jobs were targeted and many were sent to concentration camps. The Nazis stressed the biological, genetic origins of asocial behaviour and used this as an excuse to remove them from the community.
- The Nazis did not initiate hostilities to gypsies; there was already a general suspicion of them in many countries. They were not regarded as a threat as long as they did not contaminate the German gene pool. However, they gradually became victims of the general radicalization, with gypsies in Germany being transported to Poland before being sent to death camps near the end of 1942. More gypsies became victims of Nazism as it spread throughout Europe; it has been estimated that about 500,000 gypsies were killed.
- Homosexuals were seen as dangerous as they impacted the birth rate negatively, causing Germany to fall behind in population. Homosexuality

was also seen as unnatural by traditionally minded Nazis. Between 10,000 and 15,000 homosexuals were sent to concentration camps. Some were castrated and became the object of medical experiments to correct their 'unnatural' feelings.

Anti-semitism: policy and practice to 1939

*Coming soon! sort of...*

#### 4 NAZI FOREIGN POLICY

##### **Nature of Nazi foreign policy: aims and strategies to September 1939**

###### Aims

- Germany had been humbled after the defeat of 1918; Hitler's overriding aim was to 'restore' Germany to a place of greatness in Europe. Hitler was convinced that Germans were the 'master race' and as such had the right to take what they wanted by force at the expense of other countries. *(The acquisition of soil is always linked with the employment of force – Hitler's Second Book)*
- Hitler wanted Lebensraum (living space) for the people of Germany. He felt that the German race needed more room to expand and grow (since he was trying to lift the birth rate). Lebensraum was always considered to lie in the east; there were lots of German-speaking areas there (especially in the Czechoslovakian area) and land had been taken from the Germans after World War One in that direction. Germany had actually been split in two to give Poland access to the sea, and one of Hitler's aims was to reunite the two parts of Germany by taking the land back from Poland.
- The humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles was still affecting Germany and Hitler wanted to get rid of it. This involved secret rearmament, the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and the retaking of other former German lands, eventual Anschluss with Austria and the end of reparations. This was also a domestic policy decision; by smashing the Treaty of Versailles Hitler gained popularity and showed that Germany was in a strong position to bargain. The constant capitulation of the Allied powers in regards to Hitler's demands reinforced the image that Hitler was a strong leader who was able to look after Germany's interests, as opposed to the Weimar governments.
- Hitler was convinced that Germany and Russia would come to blows and so prepared for this development. *(If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states – Mein Kampf)*

###### Strategies

- Europe was still affected by World War One and was fragmented. France was having economic difficulties and had been through a series of weak

- governments by 1933. France had also spent their military budget on building the defensive Maginot Line rather than building up the army. Britain's resources were overstretched and there was a strong determination to avoid another war; this led to the policy of appeasement before 1939. The world trade slump had led to more insular, nationalist attitudes (protectionism) and undermined the internationalism of [\(insert president here\)](#).
- Hitler also made treaties and pacts with other countries. Germany was still weakened by the Treaty of Versailles and Hitler didn't want to go to war before he was ready. For example, Germany made a non-aggression pact with Poland – surprising given Germany's hostility towards and territorial claims to Poland, but the agreement weakens France's security. France was building up a Little Entente with all the states that had benefited from the Versailles agreement, including Czechoslovakia and Romania. Germany had also had economic and secret military links with the USSR since the 1922 Rapallo Pact. These were reinforced with the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, which included ten years of non-aggression and a secret carve-up of Poland and Baltic states. This was a huge blow to the West, which had been trying to form an alliance with the USSR. Hitler had isolated Poland and prevented a two-front war with one stroke.
  - Hitler was not afraid to use force where necessary though. In March 1935 he announced that Germany had a military air force; a week after this he announced that Germany was introducing conscription to build up a force of 750,000 troops. The French and British do nothing except to denounce Germany and threaten action over further changes to Versailles. In March 1936 he remilitarized the Rhineland, sending 20,000 men into the area. Hitler had gambled on a lack of French military resistance and was prepared to withdraw if necessary, but the French again did nothing. Hitler was greatly emboldened by this, and began to use his army more frequently. He sent forces to aid General Franco's uprising in Spain in 1936, invaded Austria to enforce Anschluss in 1938 (this action was supported by many Austrians) and threatened war if not given the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia immediately in September 1938.

### Historical debate

- There is considerable debate as to whether Hitler engineered events in the lead up to September 1939. Some historians, notably Hugh Trevor-Roper, maintain that Hitler had a clear vision that included a master plan for war. Others such as A.J.P Taylor, argue that he had no clear aims and was essentially a pragmatist – the views expressed in Mein Kampf and elsewhere were only daydreams and didn't form the basis of any foreign policy.
- Most historians now take a compromise view; that Hitler had a general overall plan for war but that he was prepared to be flexible within this plan. He had originally planned to remilitarize the Rhineland in 1937 but did it a year early because conditions seemed favourable. Likewise, he took advantage of the unwillingness of the Western powers to declare war to achieve some of the things he originally intended on acquiring by force.

## Impact of ideology on Nazi foreign policy to September 1939

- Hitler was convinced of an international Jewish conspiracy, which he linked (without apparent explanation) to Bolshevism. According to Nazi ideology, international Jewish financiers ran the world to suit their own ends, exploiting other countries. Nazism was determined to eliminate the 'Jewish threat'.
- Hitler's Social Darwinist beliefs held that nations, like animals, competed for survival, and that the strongest nation deserved to exploit weaker nations. This had a number of implications. It meant that right from the beginning Hitler was preparing Germany for war, as he believed it to be inevitable (and also a justifiable way to acquire land for Germany). Also it meant that Hitler viewed the lands around him belonging to weak Poland and Czechoslovakia as his by right, based on the power of Germany.
- Racial beliefs also played a part. Poland was always planned to be turned into an inferior state where Germany could dump its unwanted people, exploit the natural and human resources and install pure Germans as lords over their Slavic slaves.
- The creation of the Volksgemeinschaft affected foreign policy as well. All pure Germans had to be drawn into the national community, and for Hitler it was a crime against German blood to leave the enclaves of ethnic Germans where they were, being ruled over by an inferior race. This was the reason for the annexing of the Sudetenland – there were over 300,000 ethnic Germans living there.