

The West Between the Wars, 1919-1939

THE STORY MATTERS...

Bitterness over the Treaty of Versailles and severe economic problems helped the rise of Adolf Hitler's Nazi movement in Germany. The Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*) organization was created in 1926 to win over young people to the Nazi cause. When Hitler took power in 1933, the Hitler Youth had about 100,000 members. Boys and girls in the Hitler Youth were indoctrinated to be race-conscious, obedient, and to put the needs of the nation above their own. By the early years of World War II, about 90 percent of the country's young people belonged to the Hitler Youth.

Lesson 28-3

Hitler and Nazi Germany

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

require prohibit

Content Vocabulary

Nazi concentration camp Aryan

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What can cause economic instability?
- How might political change impact Society?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Recovering from the loss of World War I and from the Great Depression, Germans found extremist parties more attractive. Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party promised to build a new Germany, and his party's propaganda appealed to the German sense of national honor.

Hitler and Nazism

GUIDING QUESTION What was the basis of Adolf Hitler's ideas?

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria in 1889. A failure in school, he traveled to Vienna to become an artist but was rejected by the academy. Here he developed his basic political ideas. At the core of Hitler's ideas was racism, especially anti-Semitism (hostility toward Jews). Hitler was also an extreme nationalist who knew how political parties could effectively use propaganda and terror.

After serving four years on the Western Front during World War I, Hitler remained in Germany and entered politics. In 1919, he joined the little-known German Workers' Party, one of several right-wing extreme nationalist parties in Munich.

By the summer of 1921, Hitler had taken total control of the party. By then the party had been renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, an abbreviation of the German name), or **Nazi**, for short. Within two years, party membership had grown to 55,000 people, with 15,000 in the party militia. The militia was variously known as the SA, the Storm Troops, or the Brownshirts, after the color of their uniforms.

An overconfident Hitler staged an armed uprising against the government in Munich in November 1923.

This uprising, called the Beer Hall Putsch, was quickly crushed, and Hitler was sentenced to prison, where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, or *My Struggle*, an account of his movement and its basic ideas.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler links extreme German nationalism, strong anti-Semitism, and anticommunism together by a Social Darwinian theory of struggle. This theory emphasizes the right of "superior" nations to Lebensraum (LAY • buhnz • ROWM) – "living space" – through expansion. It also upholds the right of "superior" individuals to gain authoritarian leadership over the masses.

Rise of Nazism

In prison, Hitler realized that the Nazis would have to attain power legally, not by a violent overthrow of the Weimar Republic. This meant that the Nazi Party would have to be a mass party that could compete for votes.

When out of prison, Hitler expanded the Nazi Party in Germany. By 1929, it had a national party organization. Three years later, it had 800,000 members and had become the largest party in the Reichstag – the German parliament.

No doubt, Germany's economic difficulties were a crucial factor in the Nazi rise to power. Unemployment had risen dramatically, growing from 4.35 million in 1931 to about 5.5 million by the winter of 1932. Hitler also promised a new Germany that appealed to nationalism and militarism.

The Nazis Take Control

After 1930, the German government ruled by decree with the support of President Hindenburg. The Reichstag had little power. Increasingly, the right-wing elites of Germany – the industrial leaders, landed aristocrats, military officers, and higher bureaucrats – looked to Hitler for leadership. Under pressure, Hindenburg agreed to allow Hitler to become chancellor in 1933 and to create a new government.

Within two months, Hitler had laid the foundation for the Nazi Party's complete control over Germany. Hitler's "legal seizure" of power came on March 23,

1933, when a two-thirds vote of the Reichstag passed the Enabling Act. This law gave the government the power to ignore the constitution for four years while it issued laws to deal with the country's problems. It also gave Hitler's later actions a legal basis. He no longer needed the Reichstag or President Hindenburg. In effect, Hitler became a dictator appointed by the parliamentary body itself.

With their new power, the Nazis quickly brought all institutions under their control. They purged the civil service of democratic elements and of Jews – whom they blamed for Europe's economic woes. They set up prison camps called **concentration camps** for people who opposed them. All political parties except the Nazis were abolished.

By the end of the summer of 1933, only seven months after being appointed chancellor, Hitler had established the basis for a totalitarian state. When Hindenburg died in 1934, the office of president was abolished. Hitler became sole ruler of Germany. People took oaths of loyalty to their *Führer* (FYUR • uhr), or "Leader."

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Central Issues How did the Enabling Act contribute to Hitler's rise to power?

The Nazi State, 1933-1939

GUIDING QUESTION How did Hitler build a Nazi state?

Hitler wanted to develop a totalitarian state. He had not simply sought power for power's sake. He had a larger goal – the development of an Aryan racial state that would dominate Europe and possibly the world for generations to come. (**Aryan** is a term used to identify people speaking Indo-European languages. The Nazis misused the term by treating it as a racial designation and identifying the Aryans with the ancient Greeks and Romans and twentieth-century Germans and Scandinavians.) The Nazis thought the Germans were the true descendants and leaders of the Aryans and would create an empire.

To achieve his goal, Hitler needed the active involvement of the German people. Hitler stated:

PRIMARYSOURCE

"We must develop organizations in which an individual's entire life can take place. Then every activity and every need of every individual will be regulated by the collectivity represented by the party. There is no longer any arbitrary will, there are no longer any free realms in which the individual belongs to himself.... The time of personal happiness is over."

– quoted in *Hitler*, 2002

The Nazis pursued the creation of the totalitarian state in several ways. For one thing, they used mass demonstrations and spectacles to make the German people an instrument of Hitler's policies. These meetings, especially

the Nuremberg party rallies that were held every September, usually evoked mass enthusiasm and excitement.

The State and Terror

As sole ruler of Nazi Germany, Hitler relied on instruments of terror to maintain control. The *Schutzstaffeln* ("Guard Squadrons"), known as the SS, were an important force for maintaining order. The SS was originally created as Hitler's personal bodyguard. Under the direction of Heinrich Himmler, the SS came to control not only the secret police forces that Himmler had set up but also the regular police forces.

The SS was based on two principles: terror and ideology. Terror included the instruments of repression and murder – secret police, criminal police, concentration camps, and later, execution squads and death camps (concentration camps in which prisoners are killed). For Himmler, the chief goal of the SS was to further the "Aryan master race."

Economics

In the economic sphere, Hitler used public works projects and grants to private construction firms to put people back to work and end the depression. A massive rearmament program, however, was the key to solving the unemployment problem. Unemployment, which had reached more than 5 million in 1932, dropped to less than 500,000 in 1937. The regime claimed full credit for solving Germany's economic woes. Its part in ending the depression was an important factor in leading many Germans to accept Hitler and the Nazis.

Women and Nazism

Women played a crucial role in the Aryan state as bearers of the children who, the Nazis believed, would bring about the triumph of the "Aryan race." The Nazis believed men were destined to be warriors and political leaders, while women were meant to be wives and mothers. In this way, each could best serve to maintain the entire community.

Nazi ideas determined employment opportunities for women. Jobs in heavy industry, the Nazis thought, might hinder women from bearing healthy children. Professions such as university teaching, medicine, and law were also considered unsuitable for women, especially married women. The Nazis instead encouraged women to pursue occupations such as social work and nursing. The Nazi regime pushed its campaign against working women with poster slogans such as "Get hold of pots and pans and broom and you'll sooner find a groom!"

Anti-Semitic Policies

From its beginning, the Nazi Party reflected the strong anti-Semitic beliefs of Adolf Hitler. When in power, the Nazis translated anti-Semitic ideas into anti-Semitic policies.

In September 1935, the Nazis announced new anti-Semitic laws at the annual party rally in Nuremberg. These Nuremberg laws defined who was considered a Jew – anyone with even one Jewish grandparent. They also stripped Jews of their German citizenship and civil rights,

and forbade marriages between Jews and German citizens. Eventually, German Jews were also required to wear yellow Stars of David and to carry identification cards saying they were Jewish.

A more violent phase of anti-Jewish activity began on the night of November 9, 1938 – *Kristallnacht*, or the “night of shattered glass.” In a destructive rampage, Nazis burned synagogues and destroyed some 7,000 Jewish businesses in Germany, Austria, and in the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. Thirty thousand Jewish males were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Jews were now barred from all public transportation and all public buildings, including schools and hospitals. They were prohibited from owning, managing, or working in any retail store. Finally, under the direction of the SS, Jews were encouraged to emigrate from Germany. The fortunate Jews were the ones who managed to escape from the country.

THINKING LIKE A *Historian*

In 1934 Adolf Hitler commissioned Leni Riefenstahl to film the 1934 Nazi party rally in Nuremberg. The resulting film, *Triumph of the Will*, is considered an important documentary – and a chilling piece of Nazi propaganda.

Ultimately, Riefenstahl was cleared of complicity in Nazi war crimes, but she was blacklisted as a director. Riefenstahl later said of the film, “It reflects the truth that was then, in 1934, history. It is therefore a documentary, not a propaganda film.” As a record of an actual event that happened at a specific time, it is a documentary. However, Riefenstahl’s powerful and positive images of Hitler as a kind of savior attempt to influence the audience’s attitude toward the Nazis – which is the goal of propaganda.

Culture and Leisure

A series of inventions in the late 1800s had led the way for a revolution in mass communications. Especially important was Marconi’s discovery of wireless radio waves. By the end of the 1930s, there were 9 million radios in Great Britain. Full-length motion pictures appeared shortly before World War I. By 1939, about 40 percent of adults in the more developed countries were attending a movie once a week.

Of course, radio and the movies could be used for political purposes. Radio offered great opportunities for reaching the masses. The Nazi regime encouraged radio listening by urging manufacturers to produce inexpensive radios that could be bought on an installment plan.

Film, too, had propaganda potential, a fact not lost on Joseph Goebbels (GUHR • buhlz), the German propaganda minister. Believing that film was one of the “most modern and scientific means of influencing the masses,” Goebbels created a special film division in his Propaganda Ministry. The film division supported the making of both feature films and documentaries – nonfiction films – that carried the Nazi message.

The Nazis also made use of the new mass leisure activities that had emerged by 1900. Mass leisure offered new ways for totalitarian states to control the people. The Nazi regime adopted a program called *Kraft durch Freude* (“Strength through Joy”). The program offered a variety of leisure activities to amuse the working class. These activities included concerts, operas, films, guided tours, and sporting events. Hitler used sporting events like the Olympic Games, which were held in Berlin in 1936, to show the world Germany’s physical strength and prestige.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Predicting Consequences How do you think the Nazi control of media such as radio and film helped keep the regime in power?

REVIEWING VOCABULARY

- Nazi** shortened form of the German *Nazional*, or the National Socialist German Workers' Party; a member of such party
- concentration camp** a camp where prisoners of war, political prisoners, or members of minority groups are confined, typically under harsh conditions
- Aryan** a term used to identify people speaking Indo-European languages; Nazis misused the term, treating it as a racial designation and identifying the Aryans with the ancient Greeks and Romans and twentieth-century Germans and Scandinavians