

GERMANY, 1918-1939

Key Topic 1: The Weimar Republic, 1918-33

The Origins and Early Problems of the Weimar Republic

The German people had gone to war in August 1914 expecting a quick and easy victory, but the failure of the Schlieffen Plan followed by four years of trench warfare had devastated Germany. By 1918, Germany was on its knees, but the German High Command, headed by Hindenburg and Ludendorff, was encouraged by the collapse of Russia and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and decided on one last throw of the dice. They ordered a massive offensive (Operation Michael) in March 1918. The German forces advanced fifty miles, but failed to break the Allied line. In August, the Allied counter-attack was a great success and Ludendorff described 8th August as the 'black day'. The war was lost.

On 29th September, Ludendorff admitted that Germany had been defeated, although he had a subsequent change of heart and claimed that the war could be continued until the spring of 1919. However, the collapse of Germany's allies, Bulgaria and Austria, meant that Germany would have had to fight on its own. Ludendorff suggested an appeal to President Wilson, hoping that the 'Fourteen Points' would result in a generous peace, but Woodrow Wilson refused to consider an armistice unless the Kaiser abdicated.

On 28th October, the Reichstag agreed to the creation of a constitutional government, but Wilhelm II ignored the Reichstag and went to the Army HQ. The High Seas Fleet was ordered to sea to take on the Royal Navy. The refusal of the Kaiser and the High Command to accept the decision of the Reichstag resulted in massive protests. The fleet mutinied and sailors seized control of Kiel. Workers' and Soldiers' Councils (Soviets) took control of many major cities. It was clear that support for the Kaiser was minimal. On 9th November, von Baden, the Chancellor, announced that the Kaiser had abdicated and handed over power to Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the Socialist Party. The Kaiser fled to Holland, where he lived until his death in 1941. Ebert was horrified when he heard from the generals how bad the situation was and called for a cease-fire on November 11th, 1918. At 11.00 a.m. on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. That meant that Germany would have to accept whatever conditions the allies imposed in the peace treaty.

Unfortunately, the news that Germany could not go on any longer was not shared with the German people. The German people had been told that the war was defensive and so did not understand why the government surrendered when Germany had not been invaded. The true state of the German armed forces had been successfully concealed for many months and the sudden collapse was greeted with disbelief by many. Furthermore, some units of the German army had seen little action and did not understand why the Armistice was signed and unconditional surrender accepted. One person who thought like this was Adolf Hitler. He had served in the German army throughout the war and had been decorated for bravery. On 16th October, he had been blinded in a gas attack and had spent the last weeks of the war in hospital in eastern Germany. Like many he did not understand why the government had surrendered and came to believe in a Jewish conspiracy to save property in Germany. He accused the 'November Criminals', the politicians who had signed the Armistice, of betraying Germany. The failure to appreciate the true state of affairs was made worse by the Allies who allowed German soldiers to return home in uniform and carrying their weapons. This gave the impression that the army had not been defeated. It also meant that ex-servicemen could therefore be easily formed into the Freikorps.

Ebert's first task was to form a government, which meant writing a constitution. The constitution would establish rules for elections, a parliament and how Germany would be governed. Most Germans wanted democracy, but the communists, who had gained support after the Revolution in Russia in 1917, wanted a revolution. While the work on the constitution was going on, extreme communists formed the Spartacus Union and tried to seize control of Berlin on 5th January 1919. The Spartacists were led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. It was a hopeless attempt because few communists were actually prepared to support them. The Spartacists were easily cut off and attacked by government troops and units of the Freikorps. The latter were gangs of ex-soldiers which had been formed by right wingers who were angry that the Armistice had been signed so easily. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were arrested and murdered on 15th January. However, the Spartacist Revolt had one important effect; the unrest in Berlin resulted in the government being moved to the town of Weimar and the foundation of the Weimar Republic.

German troops with weapons captured from the Spartacists



For more information about the Spartacists, click here [Spartacists](#)

The Spartacist Revolt was only one of a number of communist risings in Germany in early 1919. In April, communists seized control of Bavaria in the south of Germany and set up a Soviet Republic. All revolts were crushed, usually by the Freikorps, who acted with great violence. This encouraged right wing nationalists to believe that the Weimar Government was weak and could be overthrown by force. It was against this background that the Treaty of Versailles was published in May 1919 and signed six weeks later.

The Treaty of Versailles

The Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June, five years to the day after the assassination of the Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo. The German delegates had not been allowed to attend any of the meetings at Versailles, but had been shown the terms of the treaty in May. When they saw the terms, they were horrified. They had expected that the Treaty would be based upon Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', which recommended 'Self-Determination', but the Treaty was heavily influenced by Clemenceau's desire to 'make Germany pay'. The German delegates considered restarting the war, but this was impossible.

The main terms of the Treaty of Versailles

Land - Germany lost about 10% of her land, Alsace-Lorraine was given back to France, the Polish Corridor was created to give the new country of Poland a way out to the Baltic. This cut Germany into two. Germany also lost land to Belgium, Denmark and Czechoslovakia.

Colonies - all German colonies were taken away and were handed to Britain and France to look after under League of Nations mandates until they were ready for independence.

Armed forces - the German army was reduced to 100,000 men and conscription was banned; the navy was reduced to six ships and submarines were banned, all other warships were to be handed over to the Allies; the airforce was to be completely destroyed.

The Rhineland - this was to be demilitarised, no soldiers or military equipment were to be kept within thirty miles of the east bank of the river. The Allies would occupy it for fifteen years.

The Saar - this was to be occupied for fifteen years and France would be able to mine coal in it for those years.

War Guilt - Germany was to accept the blame for the war, alone.

Reparations - In 1919 the Germans were required to pay for all of the civilian damage caused during the First World War. The final bill was presented on 1st May 1921 and was fixed at £6,600,000,000, to be paid over thirty years.

Why was the Treaty very unpopular in Germany?

The German people had not been told much about the war: they thought they were fighting a defensive war against aggressive neighbours; they did not know about the scale of Germany's defeat in autumn, 1918. The terms therefore came as a huge surprise to many of the German people. The Reparations were regarded as very severe as they punished the German people for years to come, not the Kaiser who had fled to Holland. The War Guilt Clause was also regarded as very unfair. The war had been sparked off by the murder of an Austrian by a Serb, Germany had only been one of the countries which became involved. Many Germans believed that they were being used as scapegoats for all of the other countries.

Was the German reaction justified?

Some of this was justified - the negotiations had been opened on the basis of the 14 Points, and Reparations had more to do with revenge and with French war-debts than with fairness. The losses of territory and resources were not that great. The German economy revived rapidly and successfully in the later 1920s. Also, Germany had rejected the 14 Points while they stood a chance of winning the war and their own treatment of Russia at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 was very punitive.

Checkpoint: How much do you know about the Treaty of Versailles?

Fill in the correct terms in the left-hand column.

	This had to be completely destroyed.
	This was demilitarised, no military equipment within thirty miles of the east bank of the river. Allies to occupy it for fifteen years.
	Germany had to pay for the cost of the war. The sum was fixed at £6,600,000,000 in 1921.
	This had to be handed over to the Allies.
	This was to be occupied for fifteen years and France would be able to mine coal in it for those years.
	This was to be returned to France
	Germany was responsible for the war. It alone was to blame.
	This was banned.
	These were taken over by the League of Nations and given to Britain and France to look after
	This was restricted to 100,000 men and border duties.
	This divided Germany into two parts.

For more information about the Treaty of Versailles, click here [Versailles](#)

The Weimar Constitution

The Constitution was published in July 1919. The overall aim was to try to prevent one party seizing power as had happened in the years before the First World War. Consequently, the Constitution was based upon proportional representation. This gave numbers of deputies in the Reichstag in proportion to the numbers of votes cast for their party in elections. This meant that it was very difficult for one party to gain an overall majority in the Reichstag, the lower house of the German parliament. The Allies hoped that this would prevent a strong government coming to power. In fact it meant that all German governments were coalitions made up of more than one party, many were weak and were unable to take decisions. Because Berlin was in chaos, the new democratic government met in the small town of Weimar. The constitution said:

Everyone over 20, male and female, had the vote. Freedom of speech and religion were guaranteed. There was an elected parliament, called the Reichstag. The Chancellor, (as the Prime Minister was called), had to have the voting support of the Reichstag. There was a President, elected every 7 years. It was expected that the President would just be a figurehead, but there were plans for the President to rule without democratic support in the Reichstag in a crisis. Article 48 of the Constitution allowed the President to suspend the Reichstag and rule by decree. It was expected that this power would only be used in extreme circumstances. In fact, proportional representation resulted in a long series of coalition governments which often prevented decisive action being taken. This became a serious issue in 1929 when Germany was hit by the effects of the depression after the Wall Street Crash. The President began to intervene more often and allowed his power under Article 48 to be used by chancellors to try to tackle the effects of the Depression.

Why did the Constitution of the Weimar Republic create problems?

The constitution of the Weimar Republic was intended to make it impossible for a strong government to emerge in Germany. In fact, it prevented governments actually governing because they could often not command a majority in the Reichstag. The Weimar constitution was one of the most democratic in the world, but it created difficulties. Proportional representation meant that it was worthwhile setting up new parties and the result was that no one party ever had a majority in the Reichstag. All governments had to be coalitions and these were frequently changing.

Checkpoint: The Weimar Constitution

How did each of the following contribute to the weakness of the Weimar Government?

Proportional Representation	
Article 48	
Coalitions	

Reactions to the Weimar Constitution

The publication of the Constitution of the Weimar Republic only a month after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles had dramatic effects in Germany. To right wing nationalists, people who believed that Germany had not been defeated in 1918, it was further evidence that Germany had been, and was being, betrayed. In November 1919, Hindenburg told a committee set up by the Reichstag that the German armed forces had been 'stabbed in the back' and that the Treaty of Versailles had been a 'diktat'. He blamed the Socialists who had taken power in November 1919 and were in most of the coalitions in the 1920s. The terms became popular slogans of abuse, to which Adolf Hitler added the 'November Criminals'; as a description of the politicians who had signed the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

In the second half of 1919, it seemed as if law and order in Germany was breaking down and the Allies became very concerned. Ebert was ordered to ban the Freikorps, who seemed to be causing most of the trouble, but when he did, the Freikorps reacted by trying to seize power in Berlin in March 1920; it was the Kapp Putsch. Wolfgang Kapp, one of the leaders of the Putsch, attempted to overthrow President Ebert and the Weimar government. Government buildings were seized in Berlin and the government fled to Stuttgart. Many within the army supported the putsch. It was defeated by a general strike organised by the trade unions. After the Kapp Putsch, the Freikorps were disbanded but the army and police forces did little to tackle the militarily styled right wing associations which were their successors. In the next two years there were more revolts, by both left and right. There were also more than 400 political murders between 1919 and 1923. The most famous were the murder of Paul Erzberger in 1921 he was one of the ministers who had signed the Treaty of Versailles. Walter Rathenau was murdered in 1922. He had just negotiated the Treaty of Rapallo with Russia. He was accused of doing a deal with the communist government in the Russia. In fact Rathenau had reached an agreement so that the German armed forces could train in secret inside Russia and so break the Treaty of Versailles.

For more information about the Kapp Putsch, click here [Kapp](#)

The Occupation of the Ruhr

In early 1921 the London Conference met to set the exact figure of reparations. It was immediately agreed that there would be sanctions against Germany if she refused to accept their proposals. An initial figure was set for repayment at 226 billion gold marks, but this was rejected by the German government and the final demand for reparations was fixed in April 1921 at 132 billion gold marks (£6,600,000,000). The German government accepted the figure. However, payment was going to be difficult because by late 1922, the national debt was a staggering 469 billion marks. To cope with the situation, the government began to print money to cover its debts. The result was inflation and in January 1923 prices had increased by 350% since 1918.

The new German government made its first reparations payment in 1921, but in August 1922 asked to be allowed to delay the next instalment. In December 1922 it announced that it would not be able to make any further payments. In January 1923 the Germans stopped coal shipments. The Allied Reparations Commission declared Germany in default and on January 11th the French and Belgian governments retaliated by sending troops into the Ruhr. They intended to force the Germans to hand over coal and iron ore in place of the payments. The German workers in the Ruhr went on strike and the Weimar government called for passive resistance to the French and Belgians and paid strike pay to workers by printing paper currency. This made hyperinflation in Germany even worse.

The French attempted to set up a separatist movement in the Rhineland, but then cut off the Ruhr from the rest of Germany and brought in their own workers to work in the coalmines. Civil servants, the police and other government officials were expelled from the Ruhr and violence broke out in which a number of French soldiers were killed. The French government was really trying to make up for what it believed was the lenient treatment of Germany at the Treaty of Versailles. The French had wanted the Rhineland to become part of France and were angry that this had been prevented. Instead, therefore, they used reparations as a way of turning the screw on Germany; firstly they had tried to get the figure set as high as possible, now they were using non-payment as justification for occupying the Ruhr.

Checkpoint: Unrest in Germany**How did the following contribute to unrest in Germany?**

The Spartacists	
The Freikorps	
The Kapp Putsch	
Reparations	
The Ruhr	
Passive Resistance	

What were the results of the occupation of the Ruhr?

From January 1923 inflation in Germany reached ridiculous proportions as the government printed money to pay the strikers. Eventually 62 factories were working around the clock to keep up with demand. By August prices were rising by up to 400% every day. People who had saved money lost everything. The middle classes were worst hit. War pensioners and anybody on a fixed income were also hit very hard. Many were soon out of work as businesses collapsed and for those with a job, wages were paid every hour and then people rushed to spend their money as quickly as possible, buying anything that they could. Shopkeepers tried to keep their shops closed, but the government forced them to open. A loaf of bread which cost 29 pfennigs in 1913, cost 1200 marks by summer 1923 and 428,000,000,000 marks by November 1923.

But some people benefited. Anybody who had borrowed money could repay the loan very easily, speculators and gamblers did very well and multi-millionaires appeared overnight. Foreigners flocked into Germany to buy up works of art as Germans desperately tried to make ends meet. Industrialists who had borrowed to finance expansion could repay their debts at a stroke.

In other words, it was people who had been careful and who had put money away for a rainy day who suffered. Ex-soldiers who had fought for Germany in the war suddenly found themselves in inescapable poverty. But, on the other hand, people who had been reckless and borrowed sums that they could not afford to repay suddenly found themselves wealthy overnight.

Prices index in Germany: each figure shows how much prices had increased since 1914

July 1914	1.0
Jan 1919	2.6
July 1919	3.4
Jan 1920	12.6
Jan 1921	14.4
July 1921	14.3
Jan 1922	36.7
July 1922	100.6
Jan 1923	2,785.0
July 1923	194,000.0
Nov 1923	726,000,000,000.0



German postage stamps, 1921-1923. Each stamp is worth ten times the value of the stamp to its left.



This banknote was issued in November 1923. On November 1, 100 Billion Marks would buy 3 pounds of meat. Bread was 3 Billion Marks a loaf. On November 15, 100 Billion Mark would buy 2 glasses of beer. Bread was 80 Billion Mark a loaf.

How did hyperinflation affect the Weimar Government?

Despite the chaos, the Weimar government became relatively popular for the first time. Its support for the strikers began to swing public opinion behind it. Hyperinflation was seen as something forced upon Germany from outside. In August Gustav Stresemann came to power. He immediately offered to call off passive resistance and restart reparations if the French and Belgians would withdraw. Passive resistance ended in September, and Stresemann then immediately tackled hyperinflation. Stresemann issued a new currency called the Rentenmark, which was based upon German land and not gold. The old marks could be exchanged for Rentenmarks at the very good rate of 300,000,000 to 1. To encourage people to adopt the new currency, the old notes were burnt on huge bonfires all across Germany.

The Rentenmark was a stroke of genius. The old currency had become worthless because people knew that the government had simply printed masses of notes in an effort to pay its debts. There was nothing to back them up; Germany's gold reserves were ear-marked for Reparations. But the Rentenmark was based on the value of German land. Therefore anyone who did not accept it at its face value was in effect stating that Germany itself was worthless. It was all a trick of course, but it worked and Stresemann got away with it. At the same time, 700,000 government employees were sacked to reduce government expenditure and help him balance the books.

Checkpoint: The effects of hyperinflation

Who gained from Hyperinflation?	Who lost from Hyperinflation?

To find out more about hyperinflation, click here [Hyperinflation](#)

The Recovery of the Republic under Stresemann, 1924-29

Gustav Stresemann became chancellor in August 1923 but, because he was the leader of a small party, he was replaced in November and took the post of Foreign Minister. He kept this until his sudden death in October 1929. By the end of 1923 he had called off passive resistance in the Ruhr, cancelled the old mark and introduced a new currency, the Rentenmark, so ending inflation. He then persuaded the Allies to agree to the Dawes Plan. They agreed because they were impressed by Stresemann's readiness to implement the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the conciliatory tone he had adopted over the occupation of the Ruhr, which was finally ended in January 1925.

The Dawes Plan

The Dawes Plan was financed mainly by US banks and was the brainchild of Charles H. Dawes. Under the Plan, the Ruhr area was to be evacuated by Allied occupation troops; Reparation payments would begin at one billion marks for the first year and would increase over a period of four years to two and one half billion marks per year. Foreign loans (primarily from the United States) would be made available to Germany, which could be used to finance reparations to other European nations. 800 million marks flowed into Germany in the next few years. The plan was accepted by Germany and the Allies and went into effect in September 1924. Although German business picked up and reparation payments were made promptly, it became obvious that Germany could not continue those huge annual payments for long. As a result, the Dawes Plan was eventually replaced in 1929 by the Young Plan.

The Dawes Plan provided short term economic benefits to the German economy. It softened the burdens of war reparations, stabilized the currency, and brought increased foreign investments and loans to the German market. However, it made the German economy dependent on foreign markets and economies, and therefore ensured that problems with the US economy would severely hurt Germany. After World War I, this cycle of money from US loans to Germany, which then made reparations to other European nations, which then used the money to pay off their debts to America, locked the western world's economy on that of the U.S.

The Locarno Pacts

Stresemann's success was not limited to economics; his readiness to cooperate with the Allies also enabled him to win political concessions. As relations between Germany and her neighbours improved, Stresemann was able to persuade the Allies to agree to the Locarno Pacts.

The Locarno Pacts were signed in October 1925 by France, Belgium and Germany. They guaranteed the borders between France and Belgium and Germany. Britain and Italy signed as guarantors of the treaty. A second set of agreements finalised arbitration treaties between Germany and France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland. These were intended to bring an end to the bitterness that had prevailed after the First World War. A third section created mutual defence pacts between France and Poland and Czechoslovakia. These were intended as protection against any future German aggression.

Why were the Locarno Pacts important?

At the time they were seen as important steps in the process of Collective Security. There was talk of the 'spirit of Locarno', which seemed to offer the prospect of a Europe free from war. Locarno marked the re-emergence of Germany onto the European stage, thanks to the leadership of Stresemann. In 1926, Germany was admitted to the League of Nations and became one of the Permanent Council Members; they were responsible for upholding the Covenant of the League. Germany had been banned from membership in 1920, when the League of Nations had been set up, as part of its punishment for the First World War. Being admitted so soon was a remarkable achievement. Becoming a Permanent Member of the Council was an even greater success and was an enormous triumph for Stresemann. It seemed to suggest that Germany had recovered completely from the effects of the war. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the whole episode was that France sponsored the German application for membership. Only seven years before, some French politicians had demanded the dismemberment of Germany in order to prevent a further world war.

In 1928, Stresemann signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact. This was originally an agreement between the USA and France which other countries were invited to join. Thirteen other countries did so, including Germany, and a further thirty-one agreed to accept the terms of the Pact. In essence, the Pact simply asked member states to renounce the use of war. In fact, the Pact had little effect because three of the signatories, Japan, Italy and Germany (all Permanent Members of the Council of the League of Nations) ignored it in the 1930s.

The 'Golden Years'

By 1926, Germany appeared to have recovered from the effects of the war and the political unrest that had succeeded it. There was growing support from many Germans for the Weimar government, however, coalitions continued to come and go regularly and there was a new chancellor on average every twelve months. There was increasing support for Democracy, from Germans who wanted their country run on democratic lines for the first time. Trade unions worked with the biggest party, the Socialists, and were in most governments. In the later 1920s, under Stresemann's recovery, wages improved.

Businesses prospered again under the recovery programme. New industries, like cars, radios, telephones, aircraft as well as shipbuilding all did very well. Coal exports increased in the latter 1920s, partly boosted by the General Strike and coal miners strike in Britain. Artists enjoyed the new freedom from censorship that Weimar offered after the heavy hand of the Kaiser. Film-makers, like Fritz Lang, and architects like Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus School, led the world. Jazz clubs and cabarets were popular as people spent the money they now had. Berlin became one of the most popular and freest cities in Europe. The film 'Cabaret' illustrates the atmosphere of Weimar and the entertainment that was available.

The recovery marginalised extremist politicians. The Nazis, had twenty-four deputies in the Reichstag in 1924, but in the 1928 election fell to only twelve and attracted no more than 800,000 votes. They were saved from total defeat by the proportional representation that had been introduced to prevent domination by any one party.

On the other hand, there were writers and artists who attacked the liberal ideas of Weimar. They longed for the more disciplined days of the Empire and the traditions of the nineteenth century. Some writers ridiculed liberalism and even argued that war was natural and the only way of

achieving man's goals. These writers and their ideas helped to pave the way for the success of the Nazis. One factor in the determination of Hitler to overthrow Weimar was its liberalism and attacks on the traditions of Germany.

Furthermore, this recovery was unfortunately only skin-deep and was financed by US loans. Consequently, there was always the risk that it could be easily upset by unforeseen events. By 1928, farmers in the north of Germany were complaining of falling prices for their produce and were beginning to support more radical policies. In 1929, unemployment began to rise and reached 1.5 million and unemployment often led to desperation and extremism. In the meantime, however, Stresemann had one last success to enjoy.

The Young Plan

In 1929, he managed to arrange the Young Plan, which reduced Germany's reparations still further. The amount payable by Germany was reduced to 1,707,000,000 marks per year, of which only 660,000,000 had to be paid. The rest could be postponed for up to two years. Payments would gradually increase for thirty-six years and would end in 1988. Because the payments under the Young Plan were less than Germany was making under the Dawes Plan, most people expected this to be a final settlement of the reparations problems.

However, the Young Plan was unpopular with right wing nationalists who saw it as accepting the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Right wing parties in the Reichstag launched an Anti-Young Plan campaign and forced the government to hold a referendum before the Plan was approved. The vote was heavily in favour of acceptance of the Plan, but one of the politicians who was invited to take in the campaign was Adolf Hitler. This marked his return from obscurity after the disastrous Munich Putsch in 1923.

Checkpoint: Gustav Stresemann

How did Stresemann help Germany to recover? Tick the correct column on the left

	Economically	Internationally
The Rentenmark		
Ending Passive Resistance		
The Dawes Plan		
Restarting Reparations		
Persuading the French to leave the Ruhr		
The Locarno Pacts		
The League of Nations		
The Kellogg-Briand Pact		
The Young Plan		

To find out more about Gustav Stresemann, click here [Stresemann](#)

The impact of the Great Depression, 1929-33

On 3 October 1929, Gustav Stresemann died suddenly. He had been responsible, more than any other politician, for Germany's recovery in the 1920s. Since 1923, he had been in every coalition and exuded confidence in Germany's future. The suddenness of his death meant that there was little opportunity to plan for his replacement. This was particularly significant because on Thursday, 24th October 1929, Wall Street, the American Stock Exchange, crashed. There was a temporary recovery over the weekend but there was a further major fall on Tuesday 29th October. The boom that had sustained the US economy for the previous eight years suddenly came to an end.

Throughout the 1920s, the USA had experienced a great economic boom. It was partly brought about by the First World War, when US companies had supplied the European Allies and partly by the invention of the assembly line which enabled goods to be produced and sold at much lower prices. The US government had encouraged the boom by refusing to intervene in the economy. Consequently, as profits rose, share prices went sky high. But much of the boom was financed by borrowing; even shares could be bought 'on the margin' - ten per cent down and the balance paid off when the price went up and the shares were sold. Finally, in October 1929, the bubble burst. Share prices fell by up to eighty per cent and fortunes were lost. By 1930, a Depression had begun; businesses were closing down and unemployment was rising.

How was Germany affected by the Depression?

Germany was much more badly hit by the effects of the Depression than any other country. It had relied upon loans from the USA since 1924 and now the loans dried up. By 1932, 6,000,000 Germans were out of work. Unemployment pay only lasted six months. After that came real poverty and homelessness. Millions of Germans found themselves thrown out of work and forced to live in poverty on the streets of Berlin and the other big cities.

The Weimar government seemed unable to deal with the crisis (along with most governments in the world). The task of dealing with the effects of the Depression fell to Chancellor Heinrich Brüning, who took office in March 1930. He was faced with a Budget deficit of 1,700,000,000 marks and realised that desperate measures were needed and persuaded the Allies to agree to Germany stopping reparation payments. He then proposed restrictions on all pay settlements, reductions in welfare payments, cuts in government spending, big tax increases and tight controls on credit. But his proposals were rejected by the Reichstag, which was controlled by the Socialists. The Socialists refused to cut unemployment pay and so went into opposition. Brüning used Article 48 to enforce the Budget by presidential decree. When a majority in the Reichstag demanded the withdrawal of the decree, Brüning called a general election in September 1930.

Brüning hoped that the election would give him a majority in the Reichstag, but in fact it only made his situation worse. The most significant result was an increase in the numbers of Nazi and Communist deputies. The Nazis deputies in the Reichstag rose from 12 to 107 and the Communists went up from 54 to 77. Brüning was forced to rely even more on Article 48 of the Constitution and used presidential decrees to force through his measures. For the next two years, President Hindenburg interfered time and time again to keep Brüning's government going. Consequently, Hindenburg and his close adviser, General Kurt von Schleicher, became increasingly involved in the government of Germany. They really wanted to undermine the Reichstag and establish some sort of military government in Germany.

Unfortunately, the general election led to many foreign investors withdrawing money from Germany. Within a couple of months, more than 600 million marks left the country in foreign currencies and gold. This made it much more difficult for Germany to pay for imports and weakened the economy still further. The full effects of the withdrawal did not become really serious until July 1931, when an Austrian bank, the Kreditanstalt, went bust. The shock resulted in a 'run on the banks'; people with money in German banks trying to withdraw their savings as quickly as possible. However, within a few days all the banks were forced to close. The problem was that the banks just did not have enough money to be able to allow people to make the withdrawals. This led to a major crisis of confidence in the banking system. However, Brüning showed economic skill and was able to tackle the situation by providing one billion marks to help the banks out of the mess.

In fact, Brüning had a number of good ideas that might well have tackled the effects of the Depression. The most important was the setting up of the Labour Service, in which young men aged 18-20 spent six months doing public works. This was an effort to tackle unemployment and was later taken over by Hitler after he came to power in January 1933. Brüning managed to balance the budget by cutting government expenditure, particularly on wages and, raising taxes. He also planned a customs union with Austria in 1931, which would have encouraged German industry, but this was banned under the Treaty of Versailles.

Unfortunately, Brüning did not get the opportunity to put his plans into operation. Hindenburg wanted Brüning, who was a member of the Centre Party (Catholics), to take more right wingers into the government. Brüning was against this because the Nazis were brutal and intolerant; when he banned the Sturm Abteilung in April 1932, Hindenburg and his advisers decided to get rid of him. He was sacked in May 1932 and replaced by Franz von Papen. The latter was also member of the Centre Party, but had virtually no support at all in the Reichstag. Consequently his appointment came as a complete surprise. He was probably appointed at the suggestion of von Schleicher, who wanted to take power himself. The problem that both men faced was that the Nazis were the largest Party by far in the Reichstag with 230 seats after the July 1932 general election.

The power struggle that developed in Germany in 1932 completely undermined all attempts to tackle the effects of the Depression. Only Brüning had any real long term plans; both von Papen and von Schleicher were interested in little more than political power for themselves. The squabble that developed between them only served to pave the way for Adolf Hitler to come to power.

To find out more about President Hindenburg, click here [Hindenburg](#)

Why were German governments unable to tackle the effects of the Depression from 1929 to 1932?

Obviously one major reason was the fact that Germany had relied so heavily on US loans since the Dawes Plan of 1924. When US banks demanded the return of their money, the German government faced a financial crisis. Another long term reason was the Weimar Constitution which made large majorities in the Reichstag almost impossible. In 1930, Brüning had hoped to form a coalition using a group of parties, but when the Socialists, the largest party, dropped out, he was left in a weak position. He was forced to rely on presidential decrees to get his policies through. Brüning called a general election, hoping that he would win a majority, but instead found that the Nazis and Communists became much stronger.

Nevertheless, despite all of these problems, Brüning had the right ideas; his policies might well have worked, if he had been given the opportunity. Unfortunately, there were three reasons why he

failed. The first was the success of the Nazis led by Hitler. Brüning had no answer to the propaganda and dynamism of the Nazis, who appeared to offer new hope to a nation in distress. Secondly, many of Brüning's policies made the situation worse in the short term; unemployment rose and wages fell. By contrast, Hitler offered simple solutions and promised that Germany would recover.

In many ways, however, the most important reason for Brüning's failure was neither his policies nor the appeal of the Nazis; it was the plotting of Hindenburg and von Schleicher. Both men were army officers. Hindenburg had been commander-in-chief during the First World War and von Schleicher was a general. They wanted a return to the style of government that Germany had had before the First World War. Political parties had been less important and the Kaiser, his ministers and the army had held more power. Hindenburg refused to back Brüning in 1932 and forced his resignation. This resulted in a squabble between von Schleicher and von Papen and Hitler becoming chancellor. You will find full details of these events in the next section.

Heinrich Brüning



Checkpoint: Bruning and the Depression

Methods used by Bruning to tackle the Depression	Problems he faced in trying to tackle it

Key Topic 2: Hitler and the growth of the Nazi Party, 1918-33

The founding and early growth of the Nazi Party, 1919-23

Adolf Hitler was born in 1889 in the Austrian town on Braunau-am-Inn. Hitler later claimed that his father, who was a customs official, beat him while he was a child and also attacked his mother, whom he loved. His father died in 1903 and his mother in 1907. Hitler dropped out of school and moved to Vienna in 1905. He twice tried applied to be admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts, but was rejected on both occasions. He tried to earn a living painting postcards and from 1909 lived in hostels or lodgings.

Vienna had a large Jewish community and Hitler later claimed that it was there he acquired his anti-Semitic ideas. In fact, he was often entertained by Jewish merchants who bought his paintings. He more likely picked up anti-Semitic ideas after the First World War and the defeat of Germany and Austria.

When war broke out in 1914, Hitler enlisted in a Bavarian Regiment in the German Army. He served in Belgium and France and ended the war as a Lance-Corporal. He was a messenger, who carried orders about the battlefield, a very dangerous role. He was awarded the iron Cross Second Class in 1914 and First Class in 1918. It was very rare for someone of his rank to receive the Iron Cross First Class. On 15th October 1918, Hitler was blinded in a mustard gas attack and was in hospital until the middle of November. It was during this period that he claimed he became convinced that his purpose was to 'save Germany'.

Hitler (on the left) with soldiers during the First World War



Hitler remained in the army at the end of the war and eventually got a job as a spy for the German army. In September 1919, he was ordered to join the German Workers' Party (DAP) and became member number 555. The party started numbering its members at number 500 to try to make out that there were more than there really were. Anton Drexler, the leader, was fanatically anti-Semitic. Whether this was the origin of Hitler's hatred of Jews is uncertain. Some historians believe that Hitler was bullied by a Jewish boy at school; there is also the theory that he began to hate Jews in pre-war Vienna. Hitler joined the Party Committee, becoming Number 7, and was appointed to be in charge of propaganda.

To find out more about the life of Hitler, click here [Hitler](#)

A copy of Hitler's membership card of the German Workers' Party



In 1920, Hitler and Drexler composed the 25 Point Programme, which was a statement of the aims of the DAP.

1. We demand the union of all Germany in a Greater Germany on the basis of the right of national self-determination.
2. We demand equality of rights for the German people in its dealings with other nations, and the revocation of the peace treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain.
3. We demand land and territory (colonies) to feed our people and to settle our surplus population.
4. Only members of the nation may be citizens of the State. Only those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. Accordingly, no Jew may be a member of the nation.
5. Non-citizens may live in Germany only as guests and must be subject to laws for aliens.
6. The right to vote on the State's government and legislation shall be enjoyed by the citizens of the State alone.
7. We demand that the State shall make it its primary duty to provide a livelihood for its citizens. If it should prove impossible to feed the entire population, foreign nationals (non-citizens) must be deported from the Reich.
8. All non-German immigration must be prevented. We demand that all non-Germans who entered Germany after 2 August 1914 shall be required to leave the Reich forthwith.
9. All citizens shall have equal rights and duties.
10. It must be the first duty of every citizen to perform physical or mental work. The activities of the individual must not clash with the general interest, but must proceed within the framework of the community and be for the general good.
11. The abolition of incomes unearned by work.
12. In view of the enormous sacrifices of life and property demanded of a nation by any war, personal enrichment from war must be regarded as a crime against the nation. We demand therefore the ruthless confiscation of all war profits.
13. We demand the nationalization of all businesses which have been formed into corporations (trusts).

14. We demand profit-sharing in large industrial enterprises.
15. We demand the extensive development of insurance for old age.
16. We demand the creation and maintenance of a healthy middle class, the immediate taking over of big department stores, and their lease at a cheap rate to small traders.
17. We demand a land reform suitable to our national requirements, the passing of a law for the expropriation of land for communal purposes without compensation; the abolition of ground rent, and the prohibition of all speculation in land.
18. We demand the ruthless prosecution of those whose activities are injurious to the common interest. Common criminals, usurers, profiteers, etc., must be punished with death, whatever their creed or race.
19. We demand that Roman Law, which serves a materialistic world order, be replaced by a German common law.
20. The State must consider a thorough reconstruction of our national system of education with the aim of opening up to every able and hard-working German the possibility of higher education and of thus obtaining advancement.
21. The State must ensure that the nation's health standards are raised by protecting mothers and infants, by prohibiting child labour and by promoting physical strength through legislation providing for compulsory gymnastics and sports.
22. We demand the abolition of the mercenary army and the foundation of a people's army.
23. We demand controls on the press to prevent deliberate lies being spread about political parties. The publishing of papers which do not support to the national welfare must be forbidden.
24. We demand freedom for all religious denominations in the State, provided they do not threaten its existence not offend the moral feelings of the German race.
The Party, as such, stands Christianity, but does not commit itself to any particular denomination.
25. To put the whole of this programme into effect, we demand the creation of a strong central state power for the Reich.

The leaders of the Party promise to work ruthlessly -- if need be to sacrifice their very lives -- to translate this programme into action.

Checkpoint: Which of the 25 Points later became Nazi policies? Which did Hitler later ignore?

Nazi Policies	Ignored by Hitler

The Twenty-Five Point Programme was a surprising list. On the one hand, there are elements of Hitler's later policies when he took power in 1933; on the other, there are demands which sound much more like communism. The explanation is that although Anton Drexler was a nationalist and anti-Semitic, he was also a socialist. He was concerned to build a strong Germany, but he also wanted to ensure that working people benefited from the changes. The following year, 1921, the differences between Hitler and Drexler came to the fore.

In 1921, Hitler became the leader of the DAP in rather unusual circumstances. While Hitler was away in Berlin in July, Drexler put forward a plan to unite the DAP with a group of socialists. Hitler was horrified and threatened to resign. He hated socialists because he blamed them for the 'stab in the back'; the betrayal of the Army in November 1918. Like many Germans, Hitler believed that the War had not been lost; the Socialist Party had taken power in the first weeks of November and had then decided to bring the war to an end and signed the Armistice on 11th November 1918. Hitler coined a name for the politicians who had betrayed Germany; he called them the 'November Criminals'.

After some discussion, the committee backed down and asked Hitler to stay as a member. He agreed, but on condition that he replaced Drexler as leader with unlimited powers. Eventually the decision was put to a vote of Party members and Hitler won by 543 votes in favour to 1 against. As leader, Hitler changed the name of the Party to the 'National Socialist German Workers' Party' (NSDAP) because he wanted to attract as many supporters as possible, National was intended to attract right-wing nationalists, and Socialist to attract workingmen. The party soon became nicknamed the Nazis by their opponents. But this was a term never used by Hitler. He always referred to his followers as National Socialists.

The Nazis were just one of a number of extremist fringe parties in Bavaria in the early 1920s. They had a few thousand supporters, but were unknown in the other parts of Germany. Their main appeal was through the speeches of Hitler, who soon gained a reputation as a powerful orator, despite his Austrian accent. He tried to pose as a strong man who could solve Germany's problems. Hitler set up his own private army, the Sturm Abteilung (SA), led by a violent ex-soldier Ernst Roehm, and used it to attack his opponents in the streets. Hitler soon attracted popular support; at one of his speeches, a crowd of more than 6,000 turned up to hear him. Two early recruits were Rudolf Hess and Hermann Goering, both of whom became leading figures in the Nazi Party in the 1930s.

To find out more about the early history of the Nazi Party, click here [NSDAP](#)

The Munich Putsch and the lean years, 1923-29

One of the supporters who was drawn to the NSDAP was Erich Ludendorff, who had been the most senior general in the German Army in 1918. He had launched the offensive in March 1918 that the High Command hoped would win the war and at one point he had wanted to try to hold out until the spring of 1919. Like many Germans, he came to believe the 'stab in the back' idea, which was actually coined by his close colleague Field Marshall Hindenburg. Ludendorff supported the Nazis because they planned to re-establish a right wing government and restore Germany's prestige. Hitler, for his part, believed that he could use Ludendorff, who was widely respected throughout Germany, as the figurehead in an attempt to seize power. His opportunity came, or so he believed, in 1923.

The German government's refusal to pay the second instalment of reparations and the French occupation of the Ruhr, threw Germany into crisis. Worse still followed when the German workers in the Ruhr went on strike and the government began to print money in order to pay the strikers. Hitler believed that the chaos that resulted from hyperinflation gave him a perfect opportunity to try to seize power. He had already tried to stage a coup in May, but this had been easily broken up by the authorities. This time, therefore, he delayed as long as possible; in fact, he took so long to make his move that members of his own party demanded action.

Looking back, the Munich Putsch was doomed to failure. The Nazis could only muster a few thousand supporters and by November 1923, Stresemann was in power and was getting hyperinflation under control. Why did Hitler take such a gamble, which could have resulted in death or long term imprisonment? One reason is that he completely misunderstood the situation. He was a small time politician in Bavaria in southern Germany. This was an area that had seen a great deal of political activity since the end of the war, but in the rest of Germany the situation was quite different.

In September 1923, Hitler had announced that he would hold fourteen mass meetings to challenge the Bavarian government. This prompted the Bavarian government to declare a state of emergency and appoint three officials to keep order; they were, von Kahr, von Seisser and von Lossow. Hitler came to believe that von Kahr would support him if he tried to seize power. He was also influenced by the apparent success of the Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, who had been appointed prime minister after leading a March on Rome in October 1922. Hitler planned to seize power in Munich and then March on Berlin. However, he was almost certainly unaware that the March on Rome had been little more than a bluff and that there was wide support for the Fascists in Italy. Even the King was a secret admirer of Mussolini and appointed him at the first opportunity. Other right wing groups promised to support Hitler if he made a move, but in reality, he had only a small following in Bavaria and the governments of both Bavaria and Weimar were opposed to the Nazis.

Nevertheless, Hitler went ahead with his plan and involved Ludendorff as a figurehead. He discovered that a meeting would take place at the Burgerbraukeller (a beer hall) in Munich on the evening of 8th November, and that three Bavarian officials were due to be present, he decided to act. At exactly 8.30 p.m., Hitler broke up the meeting; he fired a gun at the ceiling and announced that he was going to try to take over the government the following morning. The officials, von Kahr, von Seisser and von Lossow present agreed to support him, but in the confusion they were released and the authorities were warned of the plot. The night was apparently spent drinking and the owner of the beer hall later claimed that the Nazis had drunk nearly 2,391 pints of beer and caused considerable damage.

A painting of Hitler addressing the crowd in the Burgerbraukeller on the night of 8th November 1923; this was painted by a Nazi artist in 1937.



List as many ways as possible that the artist has tried to paint a favourable picture of Hitler

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

To find out more about the Munich Putsch, click here [Munich](#)

It soon became clear that the Putsch had little chance of success. When Nazis tried to leave the Beer Hall to arrest the Munich City Council they were ambushed. Attempts to whip up support in local army units and the police failed. In contrast, the Head of the Munich Police Force ordered his men to seize the telegraph office and the telephone exchange and the local commander of the army, Major-General Danner, ordered his men to stop the Putsch and open fire if necessary.

By morning, Hitler realised that the Putsch was a fiasco, but to keep a brave face, he and the war-hero Ludendorff led the march into Munich at about 11.00.a.m. They had about 2,000 supporters. The marchers passed through the outskirts of the city but were stopped by 100 soldiers in the city centre. In a brief exchange of fire, four police officers and 16 Nazis were killed, including Hitler's bodyguard who dived on top of Hitler to protect him.

What happened to Hitler?

In a Nazi biography, Hitler claimed that his shoulder was dislocated when the man next to him was shot. Other versions of the story suggest that he fell to the ground to avoid being shot. Whatever the truth, what is certain is that Hitler fled and was arrested a few days later and put on trial for high treason. Under normal circumstances, that would have been the end of the matter and the end of Hitler. He had committed a very serious crime which had resulted in the deaths of twenty people. There was no doubt of his guilt and he made no attempt to deny his responsibility at his trial. However, events did not go as expected.

The judge at Hitler's trial, in February 1924, allowed him considerable freedom in making his defence and he was permitted to make a long speech in which he attacked the Weimar government. He also went over all his beliefs about Germany's defeat and who was to blame. He should have been told to stop, but he was allowed to continue for several hours. This was important for two reasons. Firstly, the judge, and probably other important people in Bavaria, supported Hitler's aims to re-establish a strong government in Germany; overthrow the Weimar Republic and destroy the Treaty of Versailles. Secondly, there is no doubt that Hitler was a powerful and persuasive speaker. Many people who heard him speak described how he influenced them. In this case, not only was his speech heard in court, but it was printed in many newspapers and read by people all over Germany. Many people simply ignored as the ramblings of a mad man, but to some, it marked Hitler out as somebody to watch for the future. Several very wealthy businessmen, Franz von Thyssen and Alfred Hugenberg, were very interested in what Hitler had to say and saw him as a way of achieving their political and economic aims.

In the meantime, however, Hitler was a convicted traitor and he had to be left to his fate. Once again, however, events went his way. Considering the serious nature of his crime, he should have been given a lengthy prison sentence. In fact, he was only sentenced to five years and sent to Landsberg Prison, which was far from being uncomfortable. Clearly, there were people on his side other than the judge. Hitler was not the only person to be given a lenient sentence; Ludendorff was found not guilty and let off completely. However, he never had anything to do with Hitler after 1924. When the latter had fallen to the ground when the soldiers had opened fire, Ludendorff had continued to march straight forward, right through the soldiers and had been unharmed. From that moment, he regarded Hitler as a coward.

Checkpoint: The Munich Putsch**SOURCE A**

Hitler shouted, 'Close the ranks' and linked arms with his neighbours. The body of the man with whom Hitler was linked shot up into the air like a ball, tearing Hitler's arm with him, so that it sprang from the joint and fell back limp. Hitler went to the man and stood over him. A boy was severely wounded. Blood was pouring from his mouth. Hitler picked him up and carried him on his shoulders. 'If I can only get him to the car', Hitler thought, 'then the boy is safe'.

A description of the events of 9 November in Munich in a biography of Hitler published by the Nazi Party in Germany in 1934

	Details	Significance
Nature		
Origin		
Purpose		

SOURCE B

At about noon on 9 November, a procession of 2000 Nationalists marched, twelve abreast, through the town. At the first shot, Hitler flung himself to the ground. He sprained his arm, but this did not prevent him from running. He found his car and drove into the mountain.

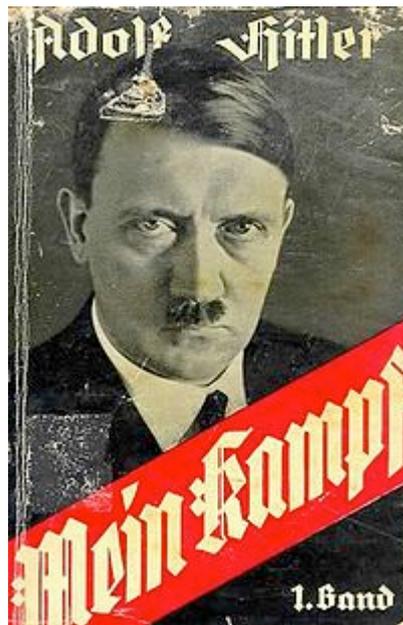
From '*Hitler the Pawn*', this was written in 1936 by a member of the German SDP; it was published outside of Germany

	Details	Significance
Nature		
Origin		
Purpose		

Mein Kampf

Even after he was sent to prison, Hitler's good luck continued. A famous photograph of Hitler shows him in prison with various visitors; one was Rudolf Hess, who had also taken part in the Putsch and would become Hitler's deputy in the 1930s. Both men are wearing traditional Bavarian costume, not prison uniform. There is a bottle of beer (or may be wine) on the table in front of them. Clearly, Hitler was allowed privileges that most prisoners would have been denied. In fact, he was allowed many visitors and access to papers and books. Consequently, he took the opportunity to start work on 'Mein Kampf' (My Struggle), which was a cross between his autobiography and a list of his political ideas. In it he set out his plans for Germany and explained his hatred of Jews.

The cover of the first edition of Mein Kampf



In the book, Hitler stated that:

The German people were a master race, a 'herrenvolk'.
 All other races (Slavs, Jews, black people) were inferior.
 Germany should be re-united and seize land to the east.
 To make Germany great again, a new leader was needed.
 Democracy was a weak system and should be replaced by dictatorship.
 Communism was also evil.

Anyone who read it would have been left in little doubt about how he intended to act in the future.

To read extracts from Mein Kampf, click here [Kampf](#)

However, there was still one final stroke of good luck in store for Hitler. He had been expecting to be held in prison for five years, but instead, he was released after only nine months. His sentence was reduced to eleven months but as he had already served two before his trial, he was out in

December 1924. Nevertheless, his time in prison had given Hitler time to reconsider the tactics of the Nazi Party and the reasons for the

failure of the Putsch. He realised that a violent attempt to seize power would not work a second time; if the Nazis were to be successful, they would have to behave much more like normal political parties and that would mean major changes in the ways that the Party was organised and how it went about its business. Consequently, when Hitler left Landsberg Prison, he had a great deal to do.

The reorganisation of the Nazi Party

At first, the situation seemed to be quite hopeful for the Nazis. They put up candidates for the first time in the general election in May 1924 and won 32 seats in the Reichstag; it appeared that the Munich Putsch had not been such a disaster after all. But in a second general election later in the year, the number of Nazi deputies fell to 14. The failure of the Putsch and the growing success of Stresemann were beginning to have an effect. Hitler was helped once again by the authorities in Munich. After the Putsch, the Nazi Party had been banned in Bavaria, but in January 1925, the ban was lifted, consequently, Party headquarters could be set up in Munich. Rudolf Hess took charge of the Party structure. He also built the cult of the Fuhrer in order to draw together support from different right wing groups.

Nationally, the Nazi Party was divided into thirty-five regions or 'Gau'. Each 'Gau' was led by a 'Gauleiter', who controlled the local branches in his region. In addition, however, there were also national organisations which were responsible to Hitler directly. The SA, the Nazi Teachers' Association, the Hitler Youth and other organisations did not come under the control of the Gauleiters; they were controlled by Hitler. This gave him great power within the Party and enabled him to deal with any opposition. The most important group that Hitler controlled in person was the black-uniformed SS (Schutz Staffel). This was Hitler's personal bodyguard and was formed in 1926.

Most of the leading figures in the Nazi Party had known Hitler for some years, but he made one new appointment; Josef Goebbels was made head of propaganda. His job was to put the Nazi message across as clearly as possible. In many ways Goebbels was an unlikely Nazi. He was disabled and a Catholic; unlike most Nazis, he came from the Rhineland. He was also an intellectual, whereas the Nazis usually attacked higher education and proclaimed that the solutions to problems were simple. Goebbels was, however, very important. He was able to portray the Weimar Republic as weak and feeble and Hitler and the Nazis as the saviours of Germany.

As Germany recovered from the effects of the war under Stresemann, Hitler found that the tactics that he had used in the years 1921 to 1923 were no longer effective. Consequently, attacks on the Jews began to be toned down. They were still common in Nazi newspapers, like the *Volkischer Beobachter*, but Hitler's speeches to the general public were more moderate. He began to concentrate on the need to rebuild Germany, rather than blaming scapegoats. He also reined in the SA, the Brownshirts, who had been used to attack political opponents. Many ex-soldiers and unemployed workers had joined the SA because they were paid a few marks a week; were given a uniform and could take part in fights with Communists. Their leader until 1923 had been Ernst Roehm, a violent ex-soldier, who wanted to bring about a revolution in Germany in favour of the workers. After the Munich Putsch, Roehm resigned and left Germany for South America; he only returned in 1930 to take over leadership of the SA once again. This helped Hitler to tone down SA activity after 1923. Most Germans were not in favour of street violence while the German economy appeared to be doing well, but by 1930, the picture was very different.

Checkpoint: The Reorganisation of the Nazi Party

What part was played by each of the following?

Rudolf Hess	
Schutz Staffel	
Gauleiters	
Josef Goebbels	
Volkischer Beobachter	
Nazi organisation	

For pictures of Nazi leaders, click here [Nazis](#)

The growth in Nazi support in the years 1929-32

In the 1928 elections to the Reichstag, the Nazis won only twelve seats, a drop of two since 1924, but there were already signs of increased support. In 1928, unemployment in Germany began to rise and the economy began to suffer. The worst effects were felt in rural areas of northern Germany, where farmers had been struggling with low prices for a number of years. Consequently, for the first time, the Nazis were able to win support in an area outside of Bavaria. However, their real chance came in 1929, when Hitler benefited from a series of strokes of luck.

The first came when Stresemann negotiated the Young Plan with US banks. This was intended to reduce reparation payments but would have meant that Germany would have had to go on making payments until the 1980s. Nationalists opposed the Young Plan and Alfred Hugenberg, the multi-millionaire leader of the German National Party, invited Hitler to take part in the Anti-Young Plan

campaign. He was so impressed with Hitler's oratory that he subsequently decided to back the Nazis in successive election campaigns. Without Hugenberg's financial support, the Nazis would never have been able to mount such effective campaigns as they did from 1930 to 1932.

The second stroke of luck was the sudden death of Gustav Stresemann on 3rd October 1929. He had been responsible for Germany's recovery from economic disaster after the end of the war and had rebuilt Germany's international position since 1924. He had organised both the Dawes and Young Plans. However, his greatest contribution had probably been his presence in every coalition government since the summer of 1923, firstly as Chancellor and then as Foreign Minister. Unfortunately for Germany, and fortunately for Hitler, there was no one capable of taking Stresemann's place. His death left a huge void in German politics, which Hitler was able to exploit.

The third stroke of luck came only three weeks after the death of Stresemann. On 24th October and again on 29th October, Wall Street crashed and the German economy went with it. As US banks struggled to meet their commitments, loans to Germany under the Dawes Plan were withdrawn and unemployment began to rise. Brüning's attempts to deal with the situation by reducing expenditure and raising taxes played into Hitler's hands. He was able to pose as the champion of the ordinary people of Germany and could offer simple solutions to deal with the problems that Germany faced.

In the 1930 general election, the Nazis launched a massive propaganda campaign to attract as much support as possible. Hitler told the German people that the problems of the Depression were not their fault. He blamed the Jews and the Weimar democrats for Germany's problems. He used them as a scapegoat. Hitler said that he would be able to solve the problems. He offered strong leadership and easy solutions. He claimed that he would do away with the Treaty of Versailles, which had treated Germany so badly and make the country great again. Hitler was always backed up by large numbers of disciplined and uniformed followers. Membership of the SA rose from 30,000 in 1929 to 440,000 in 1932. The discipline, the processions and the uniforms gave the impression of toughness and knowing what was needed. It reminded people of the old days under the Kaiser. Violence increased with the return of Ernst Röhm in 1930. This gave the impression of action and purpose. They particularly attacked Communists, which pleased middle class and business people. The chaos that resulted from street battles also made the Weimar system look as though it could not keep order.

The Nazi Party propaganda chief, Goebbels, made the most of the opportunity. He had Hugenberg's money and newspapers to back Hitler. This enabled him to hire a private plane to fly Hitler around Germany; he was the first politician to do this. He also had two high-powered Mercedes to take him from airports to town halls to make speeches. The result was that Hitler was able to speak to far more voters than any of the other politicians in Germany. To back up this programme of speeches and appearances, Goebbels organised torchlight processions, rallies, radio broadcasts and films. Nazi propaganda was far ahead of any of their rivals and won increasing support from people all over Germany.

In terms of electoral success, the Nazis' achievements were remarkable. In the 1928 elections they had won just twelve seats, but in 1930, the number of Nazis in the Reichstag increased to 107. Hitler achieved national popularity for the first time.

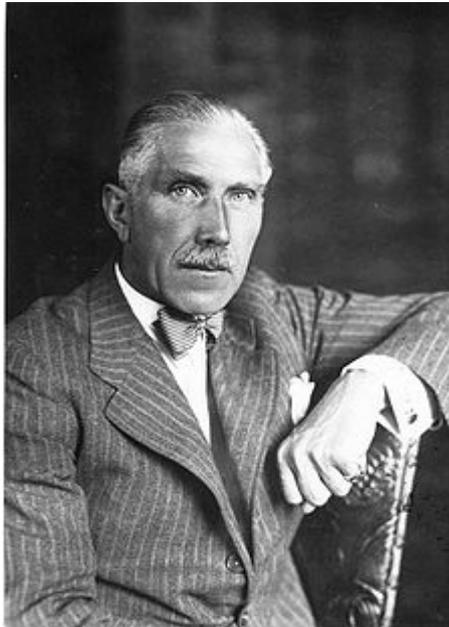
Checkpoint: Why did Nazi support increase from 1928 to 1932?

The Anti-Young Plan campaign	
The death of Stresemann	
The Wall Street Crash	
The Depression	
Nazi propaganda	
Hitler's speeches	
Alfred Hugenberg	
The SA	

When the Nazis won the largest number of seats in the July 1932 general election, Hindenburg refused Hitler's request to be appointed Chancellor. In fact, Hindenburg had been partly responsible for the calling of the election only two years after the previous one. He had refused to back Brüning and was hoping to restore military style government with General Kurt von Schleicher. Instead of Hitler, he appointed Franz von Papen, a little known politician with almost no experience of politics.

Hindenburg's interference and scheming was an important factor in Hitler becoming Chancellor. Von Papen was unable to form a government and was forced to resign in November 1932 and call a further general election. This time, the Nazis won 196 seats and appeared to have shot their bolt, at least as far as some politicians were concerned. This time, Hindenburg appointed General von Schleicher as Chancellor, but he was even less successful than von Papen and stood no chance of forming a government. The problem was that the two largest parties in the Reichstag were the Nazis and the Communists and neither were in the government. This meant that it was impossible to get a majority of votes to take action.

Franz von Papen



General Kurt von Schleicher



Von Papen, who was furious that von Schleicher had taken his place and was determined to get rid of him, believed that there was a solution. He suggested to Hindenburg that Hitler should be appointed Chancellor in order to gain the Nazi votes to create a majority in the Reichstag. Von Papen would take the post of Vice-Chancellor and the government would be a coalition with a minority of Nazi ministers. Von Papen believed that Nazi support was falling and that Hitler was a nobody who could easily be controlled. He promised Hindenburg that he would be in charge and that Hitler would be no more than a figure-head

Hindenburg, against his better judgement, agreed. On 31st January 1933 Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. He led a coalition cabinet with three Nazi ministers. Why Hindenburg did this is difficult to explain. He did not like Hitler and he did not particularly like von Papen either. Hindenburg wanted Germany to be governed by the traditional ruling class; people like himself and von Schleicher. He preferred a military style government, with less democracy and more central control. There are a number of possible explanations for his decision. Firstly, he was a very old man,

almost eighty-six, and he was probably persuaded too easily. He may well have been taken in by von Papen's claims and believed that Hitler could be controlled. However, almost certainly he did not see von Papen as a long term solution; he would have much preferred von Schleicher to take control and that was probably his long term aim. Whatever the reason, his decision was fateful. Von Papen was out of his depth and Hitler's coalition government lasted little more than a month; by 6th March, Hitler was in control.

Checkpoint: Why was Hitler appointed Chancellor in January 1933?

What part did each of the following play in his appointment?

Hindenburg	
Von Papen	
Von Schleicher	

For more information about Franz von Papen, click here [Papen](#)

For more information about General Kurt von Schleicher, click here [Schleicher](#)

Key Topic 3: The Nazi Dictatorship, 1933-39

The removal of Opposition, 1933-34

When Hitler was appointed Chancellor on 31st January 1933, Germany was already beginning to recover from the worst effects of the Depression. The policies of Brüning had begun to work and unemployment was on the way down from a peak at 7 million. Hitler was only too ready to adopt Brüning's Labour Front to get young men out of unemployment for six months at the age of eighteen and take the credit for its success. In fact, Hitler and the Nazis had almost run out of steam by late 1932. They had little funds for further campaigns and the fall from 230 deputies to 196 in November genuinely reflected a loss of appeal for many voters. If Hindenburg had not allowed himself to be persuaded by von Papen, Nazi support would almost certainly have fallen still further as the German economy recovered. Instead, Hitler was presented with an opportunity of which he was determined to take the utmost advantage.

Von Papen, like most German politicians, had been convinced that Hitler was a minor figure who could easily be controlled. The educated, middle and upper class figures in the German establishment were fooled by Hitler's rabble-rousing approach to politics. They assumed that there was nothing more to Nazism than the bully-boy tactics of the SA and Hitler's violently anti-Semitic speeches. They believed that Hitler, with his dreadful Austrian accent, would be easy prey for experienced politicians. They were wrong. They had not read *Mein Kampf*, or taken serious note of the Twenty-Five Point Programme. They had never seen how easily Hitler could sway an audience with his powerful oratory. Nor were they aware of how effective he was in taking advantage of opportunities.

To von Papen and Hindenburg it appeared that they had stitched Hitler up well and truly when he was lured into a coalition government with nine non-Nazis in the Cabinet. However, they were easily outflanked when Hitler persuaded the other members of the Cabinet to call another general election on 5th March. He then appealed to the German people to allow the Nazis four years to show what they could do for Germany, after the other Weimar parties had had fourteen years. He then used Article 48 to ban all political meetings and opposition newspapers. However, it was the Reichstag Fire that gave Hitler his greatest opportunity.

At about 9.15 p.m. on 27th February, just one week before the general election, the Reichstag burst into flames. Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch former member of the Communist Party, was found inside the Reichstag and arrested. Other leading communists were also arrested and were subsequently put on trial along with van der Lubbe. In the event, all were found not guilty with the exception of van der Lubbe, who was sentenced to death and executed by beheading. Hitler used the fire as an excuse to issue the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which allowed the government to arrest people, open the post and search private houses. If state governments refused to obey, they could be dismissed and the central government would take over. In fact the Decree gave Hitler dictatorial powers, which he was only too ready to use. The Communist Party was accused of starting the Fire and its leaders were arrested and sent to Concentration Camps; the first was at Dachau outside Munich.

The Reichstag Fire: A Case study

Source A: The Reichstag on fire on the morning of 28th February 1933



SOURCE B: Van der Lubbe's statement to the police, shortly after his arrest

At the outset, I must insist that my action on 27 February was inspired by political motives. I was a member of the Communist party until 1929. In Holland I read that the Nazis had come to power in Germany. Since the workers would do nothing, I had to do something myself. I thought arson a suitable method. I did not wish to harm people, but something that belonged to the system. As to the question whether I acted alone, I declare emphatically that this was the case. No one at all helped me.

SOURCE C: An extract from Goebbels's diary for 27 February 1933. Goebbels was entertaining Hitler to dinner on the evening of 27 February 1933.

At nine the Führer came for supper. We had a little music and talked. Suddenly the telephone rang. The Reichstag is burning. I thought the news pure fantasy and wouldn't even tell the Führer about it. After a few more calls I got the terrible confirmation it was true. I informed the Führer, and we raced downtown at 70 m.p.h. The whole building was in flames. Goering met us, and soon von Papen arrived. It had already been established that the fire was due to arson. There was no doubt that the Communists had made a final attempt to seize power by creating an atmosphere of panic and terror.

SOURCE D: The official announcement about the Reichstag Fire by the Prussian Government, 2 March 1933 [Berlin was in the part of Germany known as Prussia]

This act of incendiarism (arson) is the most monstrous act of terrorism so far carried out by Communism in Germany. Government buildings and essential factories were to be burned down. The burning of the Reichstag was to have been the signal for a bloody revolt and civil war. Today was to have seen throughout Germany, terrorist acts against individual persons, against private property, and against the life and limb of the peaceful population.

SOURCE E: The testimony of Karl van Ernst, SA Gruppenführer. He was killed in a purge in 1934. His testimony turned up in Paris soon afterwards.

I suggested to Goering that we use the subterranean passage because that would minimise the risk of discovery. Goebbels insisted on postponing the fire from 25 February to 27 February because 26th was a Sunday, a day on which no evening papers appeared so that the fire could not be played up sufficiently for propaganda purposes. Goering and Goebbels agreed to throw suspicion on the Communists. The Dutchman had to climb in the Reichstag after we had left and the fire was already started. Van der Lubbe was to be left in the belief that he was working by himself.

SOURCE F: From a British journalist's interview with Hitler, March 1933

It is nothing but a damned lie and a malicious libel. It is ridiculous. Europe, instead of suspecting me of false play, should be grateful to me for my drastic action against the Bolsheviks. If Germany went Communist, as there was every prospect of it going until I became Chancellor, the rest of civilised Europe would fall prey to this pest. The attack on the Reichstag was just one of a whole series of terrorist activities which the police are able to prove were planned by the Communists. We have seized hundred-weights of material in the secret cellar of the communist headquarters proving that these fires were to be the beacon signals for a nation-wide campaign of dynamiting and mass murder.

For more information about the Reichstag Fire, click here

[Photographs](#)

[Video](#)

[Description](#)

Study the sources and then fill in the table on the next page

Checkpoint: The Reichstag Fire

What evidence is there to back each of the following statements?

The Fire was started by van der Lubbe
The Fire was started by Communists
The Fire was started by Nazis

On the next page, explain what you believe was the most likely reason for the Reichstag Fire.

Who did start the Fire remains a mystery. It is certain that van der Lubbe could not have done it alone, not only because he was mentally subnormal, but he could not have got around the Reichstag to all the starting points of the blaze. In 1942, Hermann Goering is reported to have claimed responsibility, but the investigations of Rudolf Diels, a Berlin policeman, suggested that it was started by members of the SA who were then shot by the SS to prevent the truth being discovered. The leader of the group, Karl Ernst, was killed in the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934. However, what is not in doubt is that the Nazis were able to make very effective use of the Fire. Goering, who was Interior Minister of Prussia, used the police to round up Communists and spoke on the radio only minutes after the Fire was discovered. A book published soon after the Fire described it as an attempt by Communists to overthrow the government.

What is certain is that the Nazis used the Fire to attack the Communists.

The cover of a book published in Germany after the Reichstag Fire. The title is 'Armed Uprising'.



However, despite the Fire and the Nazis attempts to use it as anti-Communist propaganda, Hitler did not win an overall majority in the March general election. The Nazis won 288 seats and 43.9% of the vote; it looked, therefore, as if they would have to rely on the German National Party for a majority in the Reichstag, when it met on 17th March. However, Hitler did not want to appear to rely on other parties, he was determined that he was going to get his way and dominate the Reichstag with overwhelming force. In fact, he was planning to give himself dictatorial powers by passing the Enabling Bill, which would allow him to rule without reference to the Reichstag for a period of four years. Consequently, intense pressure was put on deputies either to vote for the Bill or not to attend when the Bill was discussed. As a result, on 23rd March, the day of the vote, the Communists were all absent, either in Concentration Camps or in hiding. Most of the minor parties voted for the Bill and only the Socialists voted against and the Bill was passed by 444 votes to 94.

The passing of the Enabling Act meant that Hitler had gained dictatorial power legally, as he had decided he had to while he was in prison after the Munich Putsch. Anyone or any body that opposed him was acting unlawfully. There were now only two ways in which he could be stopped: he could be dismissed by Hindenburg, the president, or he could be deposed by opponents within the Nazi Party. Hindenburg was beyond his control, but the old man was now senile and unlikely to take a stand against such a popular Chancellor. Opponents within the Nazi Party were far more serious and Hitler knew that he would have to deal with them sooner rather than later. In the meantime, however, he had the opportunity of removing all potential opposition in Germany using his powers under the Enabling Act.

Hitler's intentions were made clear very quickly. In April there were boycotts of Jewish shops organised by the SA. Although, as they all took place on Saturdays, when most Jewish shops were closed, they had little effect. Much more sinister was the occupation of all trade union offices from 2nd May and their subsequent banning. They were replaced by the German Labour Front. The Socialist Party was banned in June and the Law against the New Formation of Parties ordered all political parties to be dissolved and made the Nazi Party the only legal political party in Germany. All other organisations were either abolished or taken over by the Nazis.

By the end of July 1933, Hitler was in effective control of Germany and most opposition was at an end. He now had to deal with opposition within his own Party and the greatest threat came from Ernst Roehm, the leader of the SA, which he now claimed had 3 million members. Roehm belonged to the Socialist wing of the Nazi Party. He had been attracted to Hitler when he renamed the 'German Workers' Party' as the 'National Socialist German Workers' Party' in 1921. The name had been nothing more than a ploy to attract as many supporters as possible and it had worked. Some Nazis were first and foremost nationalists, others, including Roehm were Socialists. Now that Hitler had completed the 'first revolution', Roehm wanted to start the 'second revolution', which would impose Socialism on Germany.

Roehm wanted a complete break with the past, including ending the power of the army and people like von Papen, Hindenburg and von Schleicher. Instead, he wanted a Germany in which German workers were the dominant force and the first step would be the integration of the army into the SA, with control being in the hands of SA leaders. To make his point, Roehm began to make extravagant speeches, in which he appeared to threaten Hitler, and the SA began to attack its opponents and behave as if it were a law unto itself. By October 1933, the police were beginning to protest at the behaviour of SA units, which they were unable to control.

By the spring of 1934, Hitler found himself in a very serious situation. Ernst Roehm was demanding a Socialist revolution and he had the SA to back him up. The army generals were horrified at the prospect of being taken over by the SA and Hitler needed their support if he were to carry out his plans for Germany. To make matters worse, Hindenburg was in poor health and seemed likely to die in the near future. If the situation had not been sorted out when he died, the army might seize power to prevent Roehm taking over. On 17th June, von Papen criticised the excesses of the SA and hinted at the possibility of martial law. Hindenburg said much the same when he met Hitler on 21st June. It was clear that something had to be done, and quickly.

Fortunately, for Hitler there was already a plan and it was put into practice on 30th June. Roehm had announced that the SA would stand down for the month of July and summoned the leaders to a conference in Bavaria. Isolated, Hitler ordered the leaders to be murdered and eliminated other potential opponents at the same time. The SS was given the job. General von Schleicher and his wife were shot in Berlin and Gregor Strasser, the most important socialist in the Nazi Party was also killed. Altogether, more than 400 people were eliminated. Hitler completed the job by dismissing von Papen.

For more information on the Night of the Long Knives, click here [Night](#)

When Hindenburg obligingly died on 1st August 1934, Hitler combined the posts of Chancellor and President and gave himself the new title of Fuhrer. The armed forces were made to swear an oath of loyalty to him personally. These decisions were approved by a massive majority in a referendum in August. There was now nobody who could stop Hitler.

Checkpoint: The Night of the Long Knives

Why did Hitler order the Night of the Long Knives?

	Yes	No
To weaken the SA		
To increase the power of the SA		
To get rid of Ernst Roehm		
To ensure the support of the German Army		
To create the post of Fuhrer		
To destroy the socialist wing of the Nazi Party		
To eliminate political opponents		
To destroy opponents within the Nazi Party		
To avoid martial law being declared by Hindenburg		
To secure his position before Hindenburg died		

The Police State

It had already become clear by August 1934 life under the Nazis was going to be very different from life under the Weimar Republic. To put it simply, the Nazis wanted to dominate every aspect of German society and anyone who disagreed with their policies had to accept them or shut up. Opposition was not tolerated and opponents were dealt with ruthlessly. On 22nd March, 1933, the first Concentration Camp had been opened at Dachau to hold Communists; it, and others, came to be used for anyone who spoke out against Nazi policies. Although at first detainees were sent to camps to keep them away from other Germans, conditions gradually got worse and by 1945 they were little better than the Extermination Camps such as Auschwitz. Prisoners were made to do forced labour on construction sites and could be executed without reason.

A photograph of Dachau in 1933



At first, Dachau and other camps were run by the *Gestapo* (*Geheime Staats Polizei*- Secret State Police), which had been set up in 1933 by Hermann Goering. It was responsible for investigating cases of espionage, treason and sabotage and was exempt from the jurisdiction of the courts. That meant that complaints against it could not be made and cases could not be brought against its actions. Consequently, the *Gestapo* could take any action that it wished without fear of protest or restraint. This power became even greater in 1934, when Goering handed the *Gestapo* over to Heinrich Himmler and in 1936 it was merged with the *SS*. The *Gestapo* favourite tactic to deal with opponents of the regime was 'protective custody'. This involved the arrest and detention of individuals, who then had to sign a document stating that they had requested being given protection against personal harm

From 1937, the camps were run by the *SS*. In fact, Dachau became the headquarters of the *SS* education and medical services. The *SS* had been set up as a small protection squad for Hitler in 1925, but grew enormously under its leader Heinrich Himmler. By 1934, it had more than 50,000 members and they acted as if they were above the law. *SS* officers were attached to army units to ensure that regular officers obeyed Nazi instructions. Eventually, the *SS* had three sections. One section operated as a form of political police force, which became very powerful after it was merged with the *Gestapo* in 1936. The *Waffen SS* was a fighting force with superior weapons to the army; by 1945 it had 950,000 members. The final section was the *Death's Head SS*, which ran the Concentration and Extermination Camps. Members of this group were selected for their sheer brutality.

For more information about concentration camps, click here [Camps](#)

However, the *Gestapo* and the *SS* could never have maintained control of *Germany* on their own; they used a network of spies and informers who kept watch on people all over *Germany*. Every block of flats had a warden who checked on people when they went out and wrote down details of visitors. Informers mixed with shoppers and listened for anti-Nazi comments or criticisms of Hitler. People who made them could be arrested and sent away for 're-education', which usually meant a spell in 'protective custody'. Children were encouraged to report their parents' activities when they attended Hitler Youth meetings. At first, questions would be quite innocent, but later on children would be asked what books their parents read and whether or not they had listened to Hitler's speeches on the radio. It all seemed harmless, but it enabled the Nazis to exercise control over the German through fear.

Known opponents of the Nazis were ruthlessly suppressed. By the end of 1934, all political opponents, communists, socialist and other political parties were either in concentration camps or had fled abroad. It was more difficult to tackle opposition from Churches and the Nazis adopted two different approaches.

Checkpoint: The Police State

How did the Nazis use the following?

Concentration Camps	
The <i>Gestapo</i>	
The <i>SS</i>	
Informers	
Children as Spies	
Wardens	
Protective custody	

The Catholic Church

Hitler himself claimed to be a Catholic, but he rejected Christianity because he believed that defended the weak and was Jewish in origin. Nevertheless, he was reluctant to come into conflict with the Catholic Church and in 1933 made an agreement (Concordat) with the Church. He agreed to safeguard the rights of the Catholics if the Church kept out of politics. No agreement was made with the Protestant Churches.

Despite the regime's apparent acceptance of Christianity and the Concordat with the Roman Catholic Church in 1933, it became increasingly obvious that Nazism and religious belief did not mix. Criticisms of brutality and changes in education began in 1935 and resulted in priests being arrested, often on trumped up charges. In March 1937, Pope Pius IX attacked Nazis in an encyclical (open letter) and the regime reacted by arresting hundreds of priests. The problem that the Nazis faced in dealing with the Roman Catholic Church was that they faced, as Hitler well knew, an organisation that was better organised than the were and which had a more powerful propaganda machine than National Socialism. However, many priests were arrested, sent to concentration camps and even shot.

The Protestant Churches

Unlike Catholics, Protestants belonged to many different Churches, consequently, the Nazis believed that they would be able to deal more effectively with them. The Nazis were supported by 'German Christians', an organisation which believed that National Socialism and Christianity shared common values. In church elections in 1933, the organisation was able to take control of many churches and replace ministers who did not support the Nazis. Opposition to Nazification was led by Martin Niemoller who set up the Confessional Church; this soon claimed 75% support amongst church ministers. When attempts at compromise failed, the Nazis reacted by declaring the Church illegal and arresting ministers; 800 alone in 1937, many of whom were sent to concentration camps. These tactics enabled the 'German Christians' to gain control of the Confessional Church but did not end opposition to the Nazi regime. Church ministers continued to speak out against the Nazis until 1945. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Protestant minister, criticised Nazi policy during the Second World War and the Bishop Mainz attacked killings of Jews in 1941, but most Christians were prepared to keep quiet for their own safety. Even the Confessional Church tried to avoid outright criticism of the Nazis.

Checkpoint: The Nazis and Churches, how did the Nazis deal with Churches

The Catholic Church	The Protestant Churches

Censorship and propaganda

Terror could be very effective as a means of keeping control of Germany, but the Nazis knew that on its own it would not be sufficient in a country with a population of 70 million people. There would have to be an effective propaganda machine if the German people were to accept the changes that the Nazis wanted to impose. The Nazis wanted to change German society completely and although they gave the impression that working men and women would feel the real benefits, in fact, the opposite was going to be true.

In his speeches before he became Chancellor, Hitler had often stated that we believed that workers and farmers needed to be put first in Germany. The Nazis talked about a 'golden age' of small-holders, when people lived on the land and produced for themselves. In power, they encouraged a return to 'peasant' values; women were expected to wear traditional, simple dresses, without make-up or fashions. However, preparation for war could not be carried out using traditional methods. Peasant farmers and craftsmen were of no use if the German armed forces were to be rebuilt; consequently, the Nazis encouraged the development of big business and massive corporations, in which workers were insignificant. In fact, workers rights were all but destroyed and wages and the standard of living fell. Somehow, the German people had to be persuaded that all of these sacrifices were in their own interests.

The main architect of Nazi propaganda was Josef Goebbels, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1926 and became Minister for Propaganda and Enlightenment in 1933. His job was to persuade the German people to accept the changes being imposed by the Nazis and to believe that Hitler knew best. He had total control of all forms of media in Germany and used them to the utmost. On the night of 31st January, immediately after Hitler became Chancellor, the Nazis staged a massive parade through Berlin celebrating the event. Goebbels arranged for the parade to be filmed, so that it could be seen in cinemas across Germany. This was a major and very expensive undertaking because it was filmed in colour and at night, but it had the desired effect. Goebbels understood the impact that rows of disciplined men in uniform could have on a country that had been in chaos for years.

Films and parades became major features of Nazi propaganda. The Nazis produced hundreds of films all glorifying themselves and Germany. Feature films were made about German heroes, such as the Teutonic Knights and Frederick the Great, who had created the state of Prussia in the eighteenth century. Thousands of extras were used to create massive battle scenes in which the Germans were always successful. Newsreel films were made by directors like Leni Riefenstahl, who filmed the Olympic Games in 1936. Her most famous film was 'The Triumph of the Will', which encouraged people to fight against the odds. These films were intended to emphasise the superiority of the German people and show how much progress had been made under the Nazis.

For more information about Leni Riefenstahl and the 1936 Olympic Games, [click here](#)

[Riefenstahl](#)

The final scene of the 'The Triumph of the Will'



Parades and rallies were even more important because they could involve hundreds of thousands of people. The most famous were the Nuremberg Rallies which were held every November. They were a perfect example of the success of Nazi propaganda because they commemorated the Munich Putsch of 1923, when Hitler had tried to seize power in Bavaria. The Putsch had actually been a disaster and Hitler had run away, but Nazi propaganda created a new version of the facts in which Hitler had acted heroically.

The Nazis were among the first to realise the potential of the radio for propaganda. Goebbels took charge of all broadcasting and made programmes that reflected Nazi values and virtues. Hitler's speeches were broadcast regularly and cheap radios were produced so that all Germans could listen. It was expected that a Nazi flag would be flown from a window when Hitler was speaking, which was an easy way of finding out if someone was actually listening.

All newspapers had been taken over in 1933 and the surviving ones were dominated by Nazi propaganda. The most well known was the *Volkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer), which was in effect the official paper of the Nazi Party, but the most effective was *Der Stürmer*, edited by Julius Streicher, which had first appeared in May 1923. For twenty-two years, it attacked Jews in crude, vicious and vivid ways and contained reports of scandals involving Jews. Its visual material was often sexually explicit and attracted younger readers. It aimed to spread anti-Jewish propaganda and was directed to a mass audience. Its sentences were short and its vocabulary elementary. By 1925, there were cartoons in every issue. Photographs were added in 1930. The

number of pages in each issue increased over the years. In 1927, it had a weekly circulation of 14,000 copies. This was a very low figure and only increased slowly after the Wall Street Crash. When Hitler came to power in 1933, this figure had only risen to 25,000.

The big jump in circulation came after Hitler became Chancellor and reached its highest figure of 486,000 in 1935. The paper could be read free of charge in public places, consequently, its readership was higher than its circulation. On the occasion of the annual Nuremberg rallies, print runs were as high as 2 million. Since it relied on scandalous material supplied by Nazi members, production costs were low and it sold cheaply. The profits it made were then used to finance other party activities.

After 1940, circulation dropped sharply, in part due to wartime paper shortages although Hitler guaranteed enough paper to keep publication going. The final issue appeared in February 1945 with Streicher attacking the Allied invasion as a Jewish conspiracy.

A great deal of propaganda was directed at young people. The Nazis were aware that if the Reich was to last 'a thousand years' they would need to get the youth of Germany on their side. Education was completely re-structured and children were indoctrinated from the earliest possible age. The Nazis even produced nursery rhymes for mothers to recite to babies.

A Nazi Nursery Rhyme

What puffs and patters?
 What clicks and clatters?
 I know what, oh what fun!
 It's a lovely Gatling gun

The real aim of the Nazis was to break down family relationships. They wanted children to be loyal to Hitler first and to their parents second. Consequently, Hitler was described as their father in schoolbooks. Children were bombarded with Nazi propaganda at school and in the youth movements, which they attended after school and at weekends. This appears to have been successful. There seems to have been no mass feeling of resentment against Hitler, at least until the middle of the war.

Part of a speech made by Adolf Hitler on 18 June 1933

We will educate our youths to that which we wish later to see in them. If there are folk here and there who think they cannot change their outlook, then we will take their children away from them and train them up into that which is necessary for the German people.

Posters continually reminded Germans about the basic Nazi ideas. Men and women had separate and quite distinct roles in society. Women were mothers and housewives; men were soldiers and workers. These ideas were reinforced by films and the radio. Newsreels showed events in Germany, roads being opened, rallies and speeches by Hitler. Some films were made in colour to catch people's attention. They showed the successes of the Nazis.

Nazi posters showing Hitler sowing peace and as the Führer



Sport played a key role in Nazis propaganda. If Germany was to rise from the ashes, the German people had to be fit and healthy. Men had to be fit so that they could fight in the armed forces; women so that they could have large numbers of healthy children. The marriage loan and the Mutterkreuz (Mothers' Cross) (see next section) both encouraged women to give up work, stay at home and have as many children as possible. Cross-country was encouraged for all and boxing was made compulsory for boys. German had to become used to pain and have the desire to win. The most important example of sport as propaganda was the Olympic Games in 1936. Persecution was toned down and visitors only saw the enormous progress that Germany had made under Nazi control. Hitler hoped that German athletes would dominate the Games, which they did in many sports. However, the greatest achievement was the winning of four events by Jesse Owens, the black American athlete. Hitler stormed out of the stadium rather than present the awards.

The Nazis encouraged sport, but were not nearly so keen on the arts. This was partly because they despised intellectuals, who they believed did little or nothing for Germany. They preferred action to thinking. Consequently, intellectuals and academics were forced to join Nazi organisations or be banned from taking part in national life. Musicians, playwrights, authors, photographers, teachers and others were all required to abide by the rules of their organisations, which prohibited criticism of the Nazis. They became members of the Reich Chamber of Culture. Expulsion from the Chamber meant being banned from working. Only approved artists, writers and musicians were allowed to practise and have their works displayed or performed. That meant that composers like Mendelssohn, Hindemith and Schoenberg were all banned and the writings of Jewish authors were censored. On the other hand, Hitler's favourite composer, Wagner, was played regularly and Hitler attended many performances. Beethoven was acceptable, but the Nazis liked performances to be as energetic and fast as possible. The Ninth Symphony, which usually takes about sixty-five minutes, was performed in forty-five minutes under the Nazis.

Censorship was the other side of the propaganda coin. News from abroad was strictly controlled and the vast majority of people only ever heard the Nazi version of events. This portrayed the

Allies conspiring against Germany in 1918-19 and now suffering far worse than the German people under the Nazis. Most Germans had no access to any sources of news from outside the country, and those that did usually kept it to themselves. From 1933, libraries were ransacked and books written by Jews, or displaying anti-Nazi ideas were burnt. 'All Quiet on the Western Front', and anti-war novel was rooted out as were copies of H G Wells' novels 'Things to Come'. It predicted a third world war in which humanity would be all but destroyed.

For more information about the 'Burning of the Books', click here [Books](#)

So effective was Goebbels and the Ministry of Propaganda, that there was very little opposition to the Nazis before 1939 and almost none until 1942, after three years of war. Hitler's claim that unemployment had fallen from 6 million to 500,000 and his successes abroad satisfied most people. The promise of a Volkswagen was an even greater inducement to accept Nazi rule and get on with life. Just what sacrifices that involved will be explained in the next section.

Checkpoint: Propaganda

How did the Nazis use the following?

Films	
Der Sturmer	
Volkischer Beobachter	
Posters	
The Arts	
Censorship	

Key Topic 4: Nazi domestic policies, 1933-39

Nazi policies towards women and the young

During the Weimar Republic, women had had full, legal equality with men. That did not mean that there were equal numbers of women in all professions and all jobs, but they were not officially discriminated against in law. There were 100,000 female teachers, 3,000 female doctors and 13,000 female musicians and women working for the government got the same pay as men. There was a strong women's movement in Germany. Women had the vote and there were 30 women representatives in the German parliament.

All of that changed when Hitler came to power. He had made his views very clear about the role of women in Germany. Their purpose was to produce babies, bring up children and care for their homes and husbands. Outside certain specialist areas, Hitler saw no reason for women to work. In 1921, the Nazis had banned all women from their party leadership and committees. Only 3% of Party members were women.

Within months of Hitler coming to power, all married women doctors and civil servants and most married teachers were dismissed. Women were barred from all involvement in the law courts, whether as judges, lawyers or jurors. All women MPs were dismissed. There was some logic in the idea that, in a time of high unemployment, women should leave the paid jobs for men and concentrate on the unpaid job of housework. Consequently, in 1933, women formed 37% of the labour force, but in 1939, the figure was only 33%. However, it was higher in clothing and textiles and in distributive trades and catering. By the start of the Second World War, there were even fewer German women in work. However, such was the skills shortage that in 1937 a law was passed forcing women to do a 'Duty Year'. This meant that they could work in a factory to help the Nazi 'Economic Miracle'.

Under Nazi rule only 10% of university places were for women and one third of high school places. Girls were prevented from taking university entrance exams and the high school syllabus was changed so that girls studied mainly domestic subjects. From their earliest years, girls were taught that all good German women got married at a young age to a German man and that their task was to keep a good home for her husband and to have children.

The Nazis also tried to change the role of married women. Shortly after coming to power in 1933, all women's groups were merged into a single 'German Women's Enterprise', the *Deutsches Frauenwerk*. It had 6 million members and organised Mothers' Schools to train women in household and parenting skills. In 1933, the Nazis also introduced The Law for the Encouragement of Marriage. It stated that all newly married couples would receive a government loan of 1,000 marks. This was about 9 months average income and 800,000 newly weds took up the offer. They had to agree that the future wife should give up her job. This loan was not to be simply paid back. The birth of one child meant that 25% of the loan did not have to be repaid. Two children meant that 50% of the loan did not need to be paid back. Four children meant the clearing of the whole loan. The law aimed to encourage newly weds to have as many children as possible but it had more long term and sinister aspects. As Germany grew, she would need more soldiers and mothers. Hence, a booming population was needed with young boys groomed as soldiers and young girls as mothers. If 'lebensraum' (living space) was to be achieved, Hitler needed German people to fill the spaces gained in Eastern Europe. It was therefore essential to boost Germany's population.

The marriage loan system encouraged many young people to marry early but did not result in more babies. In 1900, the average births per thousand were 33.0. By the mid-1920s, this had fallen to 20.3. In 1933, when the Nazis took power, it had dropped further to 14.7. It did not rise throughout the 1930s. This was despite the creation of the 'Mutterkreuz' (Mothers' Cross). Women who had four children were presented with the bronze 'Mutterkreuz' on Hitler's mother's birthday. For six children a woman received the silver cross and four eight children the gold cross.

A Mutterkreuz and the accompanying certificate; it reads, 'To the Women of the German People'.



The Nazi Party was quite simply a man's party. There were no women in senior positions. Hitler and the Nazis did not believe in equality for the sexes. Women had to stay at home, produce more children and look after the family. This was for both racial reasons, to produce more racially-pure Germans and for economic reasons to solve unemployment by removing women from the labour market.

There was a great deal of propaganda about the ideal German family. Photographs and posters showed the woman looking after the children and the man going out to work and protecting the wife. Nazi propaganda also discouraged wearing make-up, high heels, perfume, smoking in public because women were not expected to waste money on themselves. Women's roles could be summarised as three 'Ks', Kinder, Kirche, Küche or Children, Church, Cooking. Women with hereditary diseases or mental illness were sterilised so as to keep the German race 'pure'. Unmarried women could volunteer to have a child by a 'pure Aryan' SS member.

To view a powerpoint on women in Nazi Germany, click here [Powerpoint](#)

To try an exercise on women in Nazi Germany, click here [Exercise](#)

Checkpoint: Women in Nazi Germany**How did the Nazis use the following to control the role of women?**

Education	
Propaganda	
Youth Movements	
Mutterkreuz	
KKK	
Marriage Loan	
Deutsches Frauenwerk	

Education

All schools now came under Nazi control. All school books were rewritten and included Nazi ideas about hatred of the Jews and war. All teachers had to join the Nazi Teachers' League. They had to be careful what they said in class. Children were encouraged to inform the authorities if a teacher said something that did not fit in with the Nazi thinking. There was always potential for conflict between teachers and pupils because Nazism was anti-intellectual. It emphasised physical strength and power and played down the importance of the intellect. Despite this, 32% of German teachers were Nazi Party members by 1936 and they made up 14% of the Nazi Leadership Corps. Party leaders encouraged the involvement of teachers because it gave a front of respectability when other members could be more violent and brutal.

Boys and girls went to separate schools so that they could be taught different subjects. The curriculum was changed. Subjects concentrated upon German history and nationalism. Girls were prevented from studying science and could only learn the mathematics necessary to be a housewife. They did not study any foreign languages. In history, students were taught about great events of German history, from a pro-German point of view. The Nazis view of the First World War, the 'stab in the back' was included as 'the truth'. In geography, students studied a possible invasion of Poland and looked for the best routes and possible obstacles to be overcome. Science covered the development of new weapons and problems of ballistics. In biology, students were taught the phoney 'race science' called eugenics, which was designed to 'prove' the superiority of the German race. In PE, pupils got much more physical exercise. Boxing became compulsory for boys and girls had to become fit and healthy for childbirth. One mathematics problem even asked students to calculate the financial cost to Germany of looking after the disabled and mentally ill.

Part of the report of the German delegation to the Fourth International Education Conference in Geneva, August 1935

Courses of instruction in Biology shall deal primarily with heredity, the theory of the survival of the fittest. The importance of physical exercise and gymnastics for the development of will power and healthy thinking are recognised in the form of three compulsory gymnastic exercises each week. Stress is not so much to be laid on mere instruction, but upon positive character-building. In other words, the schools should teach not only how to think, but also how to act.

Indoctrination was common in all subjects. Teachers were expected to use every opportunity to attack the Jews. Textbooks and library books were re-written to include anti-Jewish propaganda. Books by Jewish authors were burnt. From 1935 onwards, Jewish children were not allowed to attend schools. In 1937, pupils were given the choice of studying Religious Instruction or not. The Nazis were to lessen the influence of Catholic schools. Within two years of their coming to power, 76 of the 93 Catholic elementary schools in Munich had become non-denominational.

For boys considered special, different schools were created. Those physically fitter and stronger than the rest went to Adolf Hitler Schools where they were taught to be future leaders of Germany. Six years of tough physical training took place and when the boys left at 18, they went to the army or university. The very best pupils went to Order Castles. These schools took pupils to the limits of physical endurance. War games used live ammunition and pupils could be killed. Graduates from the Order Castles could expect a high position in the army or the party.

Nazi policies on education often had detrimental effects. Whilst the grammar schools generally maintained their high status, standards in elementary and vocational schools fell. Teacher morale also appears to have suffered. In 1938, the size of the teaching force was 17,000 lower than in the Weimar period. Some became disillusioned by constant changes in government policy. Others were unhappy about the greater importance apparently given to the Hitler Youth.

Checkpoint: Education

In what ways were boys and girls educated differently in Nazi Germany?

Boys	Girls

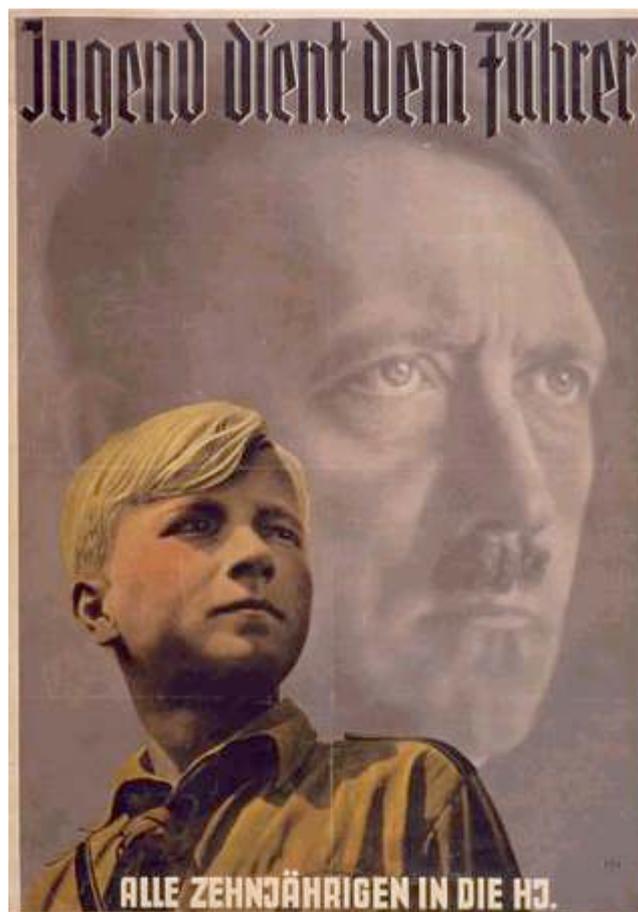
To find out more about education in Nazi Germany, click here [Education](#)

What happened in the Nazi Youth Movements?

In the early years of the Nazi Party, Hitler made it clear what he expected of German children. He said, *'The weak must be chiselled away. I want young men and women who can suffer pain. A young German must be swift as a greyhound, as tough as leather and as hard as Krupp steel'*. Nazi education schemes fitted in with this but Hitler wanted more control of the minds of young Germans - hence The Hitler Youth. It began in the 1920s and by 1932 its membership was 35,000. A year later when Hitler came to power, it claimed 100,000 members. Baldur von Shirach led the Hitler Youth and was personally responsible to Hitler himself. As other youth organisations like the Scouts and Protestant and Catholic groups were banned, the movement grew. In 1936, it had 4 million members - in the same year, membership became compulsory. Youths could avoid active service if they paid their subscription but this became virtually impossible after 1939.

The Hitler Youth was a collection of several movements. Boys between the ages of 6 and 10 were enrolled in the Pimpfen (Little Fellows) where they were taught to enjoy exercise, hiking and camping and were introduced to Hitler's ideas. Boys aged 10 joined the Deutsches Jungvolk (German Young People). Here they swore personal allegiance to Hitler and became more familiar with military discipline and military music. Between 14 and 18, boys were expected to devote themselves to the Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth). This placed much greater emphasis on military training.

A poster for the Hitler Youth; it reads 'Youth serves the Führer. Ten Years in the Hitler Youth



At the age of 10, girls joined the Jungmadelbund (League of Young Girls) where they were trained for health and motherhood. This was taken further between the ages of 14 and 21 in the Bund Deutscher Madel (League of German Maidens) At the age of 17, some girls left and joined the organisation known as 'Faith and Beauty' with its emphasis on physical culture.

Part of the memoirs of a German woman remembering her time in the League of German Maidens

One day, fittingly enough on Hitler's birthday, my age group was called up and I took the oath: 'I promise always to do my duty in love and loyalty to the Fuhrer.' I was not, however, thinking of the Fuhrer when I raised my right hand, but of the attractive prospect of games, sports, hiking, singing, camping and other exciting activities away from the home and from school. A uniform, a badge, a salute there seemed to be nothing to it. Thus unquestioningly I acquired membership.

It was not long however, before plain-faced leaders taught us marching drill and marching songs. I hated marching. There were lectures on Nationalism Socialism, stories about modern heroes and about Hitler, while extracts from Mein Kampf were used to put forward the new racial doctrines.

Meetings of the various sections took place in the evenings but there were also weekend activities often outdoors. These often took the form of camps. These appear to have been greatly enjoyed, as were the annual camps. In 1936, 100,000 members of the Hitler Youth and Girls League attended the Nuremburg Rally. The Hitler Youth emphasised commonality, a communal or collective approach with the individual being given less importance. To the outside world, the Hitler Youth personified German discipline. In fact, this image was inaccurate. Schoolteachers complained that boys and girls were so tired from attending evening meetings of the Hitler Youth that they could scarcely stay awake at school the next day. By 1938, attendance at Hitler Youth meetings was barely 25%. In 1939, it was decided to make attendance compulsory. After this, it reached 90%.

To find out more about the Nazi youth movements, click here [Youth](#)

To watch a film of a Hitler Youth camp, click here [Camp](#)

To see photographs of the League of German Maidens, click here [Maidens](#)

Employment and the standard of living

When the Nazis took power in 1933, they inherited an economy with high unemployment. There were 6 million unemployed - a third of the nation's labour force. Average weekly earnings for those in work had dropped by 33% as a result of the Depression. By January 1939, the unemployment figure was 302,000, a spectacular reduction over six years. Hitler and the Nazis were therefore credited with an "economic miracle". Was this true or was the Nazi propaganda machine particularly successful in persuading the nation of the success of party policies?

In reality, the peak of mass unemployment had already been passed in the autumn of 1932. The economy was beginning to revive as part of a natural cycle. In the November elections of that year, the Nazi vote declined by 2 million. Nevertheless, the Nazis adopted a number of strategies causing unemployment to fall. Women were no longer included in the statistics. This meant that any woman who remained out of work did not exist as far as the statistics were concerned. The unemployed were given a simple choice - do whatever work is given to you by the government or be classed as 'work-shy' and be sent to a concentration camp.

The Nazis used various tricks to give the impression that unemployment was falling rapidly. Jews lost their citizenship in 1935. As a result, they were not included in the unemployment figures even though they may have been without work since 1933.

Many young men were removed from the unemployment figures when conscription was introduced in 1935 and they had to serve in the armed forces. By 1939, the army was 1.4 million strong. Supplying these men with weapons created many new jobs. In fact, by 1937-38, workers became a scarce commodity and by 1939 the demand for labour exceeded supply by half a million.

German re-armament gave a huge boost to industry, which soon had millions of new jobs. From 1935, at first secretly, then quite openly, Hitler ordered the building of submarines, aircraft and tanks. This was quite contrary to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The army was increased from 100,000 to 1,400,000 by 1939. Every man had to do two years military service when he left the Labour Service.

Nazi propaganda attempted to convince workers that their living standards had risen since 1933. Compared to the low levels of 1932, they had. Compared to the higher levels of 1929, they had not. Great efforts were put into organising workers and keeping them satisfied and under control.

The Labour Service

In the spring of 1933, German trade unions offered their support and cooperation to the new Nazi regime. On May Day 1933, they were smashed. Throughout Germany, workers were shepherded into local sports stadia whilst SA members seized trade union buildings and financial assets. Any who spoke out against this faced arrest and imprisonment. Strikes became illegal. In June 1936, a 17 minute stoppage at the Russelheim Opel Works, during which, 262 workers protested against a wage cut, led to the immediate arrest of seven 'ringleaders'.

The Nazis introduced new ways of organising workers. One of them was the Reichsarbeitsdienst or RAD - The National Labour Service. The Labour Service built many of Germany's autobahns.

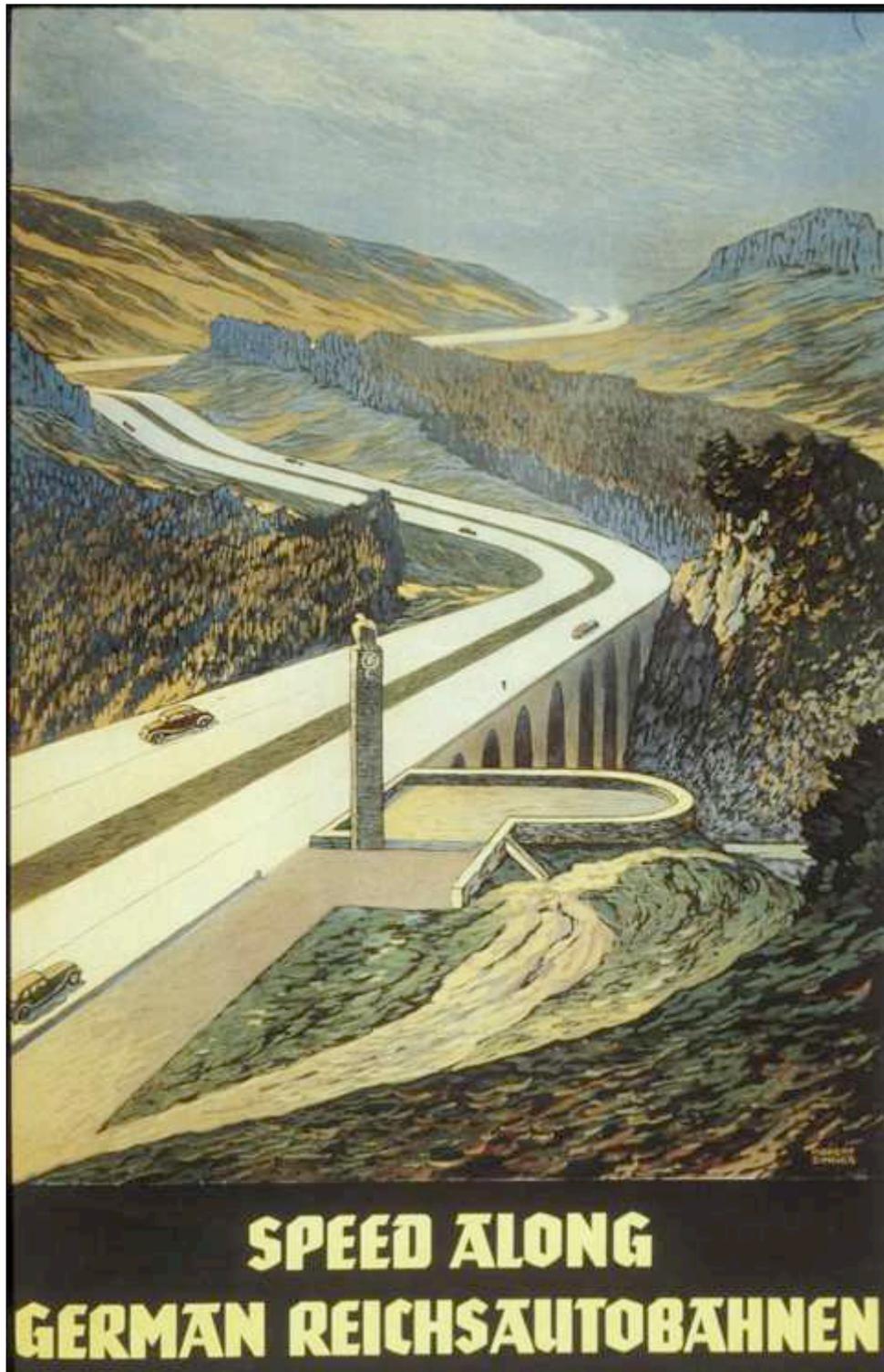
The men of the RAD wore military style uniforms, lived in camps near to where they were worked and received what may be termed 'pocket money'; about 50p a week. A period of six months in the Labour Service became obligatory for eighteen year olds. Much of the work was done by hand, even though machinery was available, because that created more jobs and toughened men up for military service, which came next.

The Labour Service also allowed the Nazis to extend their control of young people for another six months. After their education and period in the youth organisations, young people were subject to Nazi propaganda throughout their time in the Labour Service.

Hitler starting work on the first autobahn in 1934



A Nazi poster advertising the new autobahns



For more information about, and pictures of, the autobahns, click here [Autobahns](#)

Many parents were pleased that it appeared to give young Germans some sense of purpose. The National Labour Service also had a women's section. Its members were trained in a severe way. They were taught to do without cosmetics, to dress simply, to display no individual vanity, to sleep on hard beds and to forgo all culinary delights. May Day became National Labour Day and overshadowed every other event in the Nazi calendar in terms of mass participation.

Checkpoint: Tackling unemployment

Hitler claimed that unemployment fell from 6 million in 1933 to less than 500,000 in 1939; was this a genuine fall?

<i>Genuine because</i>	<i>Not genuine because</i>

The Labour Front

To 'protect' those in work, the *German Labour Front* (DAF) was set up, led by Dr. Robert Ley. The Labour Front took over the role of the banned trade unions, which it did – to an extent. Ley ordered that workers could not be sacked on the spot but he also decreed that a worker could not leave his job without government permission. Workers had to pay membership dues to the Labour Front, which were deducted from their wages. This method of collection was introduced after door-to-door collections were discredited as dishonest. By 1939, the Labour Front had increased the number of weekly hours worked from 60 to 72 (including overtime). Strikes were outlawed. However, the average factory worker was earning ten times more than those on dole money and there were few complaints. In enforcing legislation on wage levels and working conditions, the Labour Front backed large firms rather than small ones when they were in dispute with workers. Wage levels remained low.

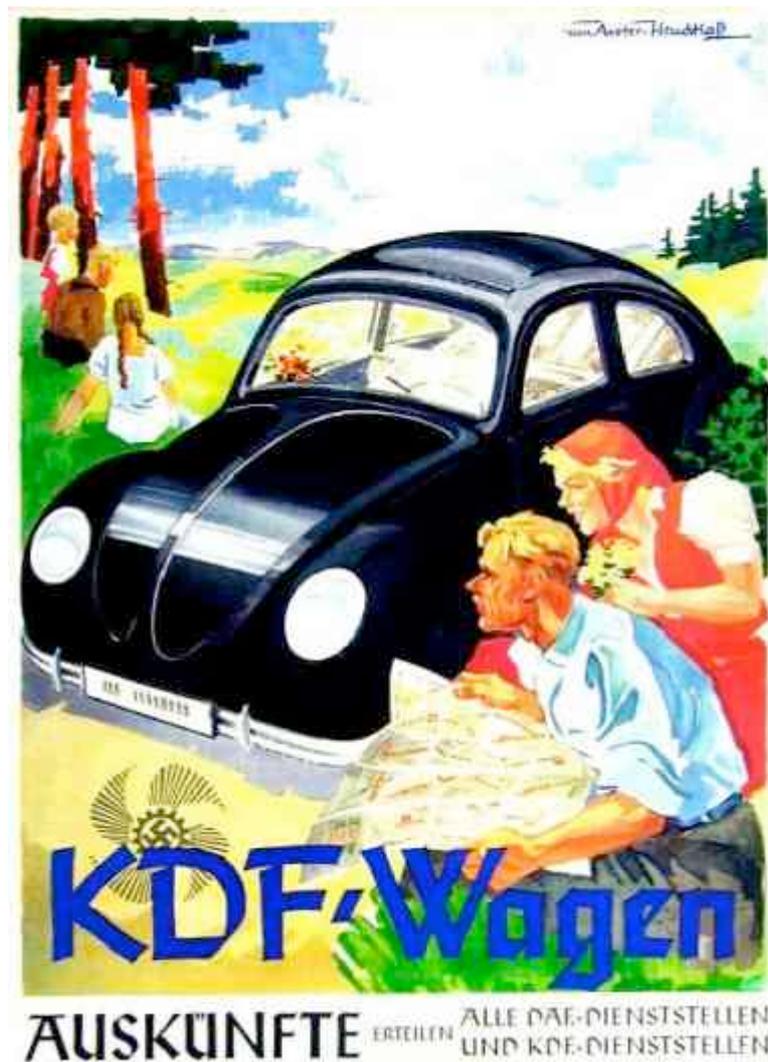
'Kraft durch Freude' (KdF) – Strength through Joy

The Nazi belief in controlling the lives of *German workers* extended to their leisure time. Ley and the KdF calculated that each worker had 3,740 hours per year free from work to pursue leisure activities. The state, through the KdF, would provide these. There was a long list of activities for workers to select from. They included, theatre performances and concerts, hikes and sporting events, holidays and cruises, museum tours and exhibitions, weekend trips and courses and lectures organised by the *German Adult Education Office*. In the Berlin area, between 1933 and 1938, KdF organised 21,146 theatre performances involving 11,507,432 people. They also arranged 61,503 museum tours for over 2½ million people.

Workers in the Third Reich averaged between 6 and 15 days paid holiday each year. Under Weimar, the figure was between 3 and 8 days. The prospect of cheap holidays organised by KdF was a sure way to win the support of many ordinary *Germans*. A cruise to the Canary Islands cost 62 marks – easily affordable for many. Walking and skiing holidays in the Bavarian Alps and Hartz Mountains cost 28 marks. A 14-day tour of Italy cost 155 marks. In 1938, 10 million *Germans* took part in KdF holidays. The vast majority were trips of a few days or a week. Of that 10 million, 138,000 took part in longer cruises. The specially built cruise ships had identical accommodation for crew and passengers. The aim was to elevate the status of the workers, but in reality, the number of workers participating in KdF cruises was limited. Cruise places were often filled by Nazi Party officials.

The KdF also organised P.E. sessions and provided sports facilities in factories and workplaces. By the middle of the war, 5 million KdF certificates had been issued for sporting achievements. Belief in 'folk community' again ran through many KdF activities – the idea of individuals losing their identities within groups was very strong.

A poster advertising the Volkswagen and its benefits for the German family



In 1938, the KdF launched the Volkswagen (The People's Car), designed by Ferdinand Porsche. It was priced at below 1,000 marks-repayable over 4 years. The VW would involve buyers in weekly instalments (plus insurance) of 6 marks per week, exclusive of running charges. In theory, when the account reached 750 marks, the worker would be given an order number leading to him receiving a car. The foundation stone of the VW plant was laid in 1938, two months after the Anschluss. Show models were exhibited at the Munich and Vienna autumn fairs. By November 1940, there were 300,000 potential purchasers but no cars were produced - only a few show models. No one received a car. The millions of marks invested were re-directed into the expanding weapons industries. This accelerated as World War Two approached.

Schonheit Der Arbeit (Beauty of Labour)

This was a movement aiming to improve working conditions in factories. It introduced features not seen in many workplaces before such as washing facilities and low-cost canteens. Beauty of Labour was a section of the German Labour Front created by Robert Ley on 30th January 1934. It organised factory celebrations, folk dancing and political education. It existed alongside the similar Strength through Joy movement.

Checkpoint: The standard of living**Were workers better off in Nazi Germany?**

Yes, they were	No, they were not

Jews in Weimar Germany

During the Weimar years, German Jews were citizens in every respect. They were found in all walks of life, especially the professions such as law, medicine, the universities and the civil service. During the time the German economy was recovering under Stresemann, Hitler's attacks on the Jews were listened to by only a few.

In 1933, Jews made up 1% of the total German population, but 16% of all lawyers practising in the Reich were Jews. They also accounted for 10% of all doctors and dentists and 5% of university lecturers. In the financial world, 17% of German bankers were Jewish. In the same year however, 1 in 3 Jewish taxpayers had an annual income of less than 2,400 marks and 1 in 4 Jews in Berlin were receiving charity.

The treatment of Jews under the Nazis

After January 1933, the Jews became the 'Untermenschen' - the sub-humans. In April, the first official boycott of Jewish shops, doctors and lawyers began. Nazi Stormtroopers stopped Germans shopping in Jewish shops. The purpose of the boycott was to bankrupt Jewish shopkeepers and to destroy what they had spent years building up. Later the same month, the Civil Service excluded Jews from government jobs. In 1934, they were forbidden from taking legal and pharmaceutical examinations. On buses, trains and in parks, Jews had to sit on seats labelled for them. In school, children were taught anti-Semitic ideas. Jewish children were ridiculed by their teachers and their bullying in the playground by other children went unpunished. If Jewish children responded by not wanting to go school, this served its purpose.

Stormtroopers outside a Jewish shop, however, it is closed because the boycotts were on Saturdays.



The Nuremberg Laws

In these laws passed in September 1935, Jews lost their right to be German citizens and marriage between Jews and non-Jews was forbidden. After this, violence against the Jews began in earnest. Those that could pay fines were allowed to leave the country. Many could not and many shops refused to sell food to those who remained. Medicines were difficult to get hold of - many chemists would not sell to them. In fact, between 1933 and 1939, about 250,000 Jews left Germany. In 1936 and 1937, the professional activities of Jews were restricted or prohibited. These professions included teachers, dentists, surveyors, auctioneers, nurses and chartered accountants.

A chart used to explain the Nuremberg Laws. It lists which people are to be considered Jews.



During the course of the Olympic Games, held in Berlin in 1936, open violence towards the Jews was suspended, largely to give a favourable impression of the regime to the international press. But persecution began again in earnest the following year. On 12th June 1937, a secret decree from Heydrich declared that Jewish women who had sexual intercourse with Germans were to be sent to concentration camps. On 17th August 1938, all male Jews were ordered to add the name 'Israel' and all female Jews the name 'Sara' to their non-Jewish first names. On 30th September, the qualifications of Jewish doctors were cancelled.

Kristallnacht

On 7th November 1938, Ernst von Rath, a German diplomat, was murdered in Paris by Herschel Grunspan, a Jew. In retaliation, Hitler ordered a seven-day campaign of terror against German Jews organised by Himmler and the SS. The campaign began on 9th November with 'Kristallnacht' - The Night of Broken Glass. 10,000 Jewish shops were destroyed and their contents stolen. Homes and synagogues throughout Germany were set on fire and left to burn. Fire brigades showed their loyalty by letting the buildings burn. Massive damage was done to Jewish property but the Jews themselves were ordered to pay a fine of 1 billion marks to pay for the clear up. They were even forced to scrub the streets clean. After 'Kristallnacht' over 30,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps. They were later released after they had promised to leave the country.

Damage caused during Kristallnacht and Jews being arrested



The period of terror beginning with 'Kristallnacht' was a major escalation of the violence towards German Jews. On 15th November 1938, Jewish children were excluded from schools and universities. On 3rd December, Jewish shops were closed and compulsorily sold. In 1939, with war approaching, anti-Jewish measures became particularly harsh. In February, they were forced to hand over all gold and silver objects and jewels in their possession. On 1st September, a curfew was imposed on all Jews - 8 pm in winter and 9 pm in summer. On 23rd September, all Jewish owned radios were confiscated. Towns and villages put up notices on their approach roads - 'Jews not wanted here'. Holiday resorts advertised themselves as 'free of Jewish taint'. In towns, it was usual to see outside a swimming pool the notice 'Bathing prohibited to Dogs and Jews'.

Checkpoint: Anti-Semitism

What happened in each year?

Date	Action	Purpose
1933		
1935		
1938		
1939		

But despite all of the propaganda and regulations, many people found themselves getting better off; transport improved, there was more security. Germany seemed to be recovering. In 1936 the Olympic Games were held in Berlin and the Rhineland was reoccupied. Both these events made Germans proud of their country. The 'Strength Through Joy' campaign gave workers cheap holidays, concerts, sport. The attempt to build a cheap car, the Volkswagen, failed until after the war. After what had happened to their country in the years after 1919 and during the Depression, many people were prepared to accept Nazism. They preferred to close their eyes to the arrests of opponents, the mistreatment of the Jews, the Nazi corruption. At least until the war started going badly, about 1942, most people were quite ready to go along with the Nazis.

For more information about the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany, and some revision, click here [Jews](#)