

Weimar and Nazi Germany. 1918 – 1939: The Essentials

The Weimar Republic 1918 – 1929

The legacy of the First World War:

- Impact = 2 million dead German troops, 4 million wounded, massive debts, 750,000 dead civilians from starvation.
- The Kaiser abdicated after the November Revolution
- The Armistice signed between Germany and the allies 11/11/18

Strengths and weaknesses of the Weimar Constitution:

Constitution (rules) of the new Weimar Republic: President as head of state, Government consisting of the Chancellor and his cabinet ministers, the parliament (Reichstag) and all the electorate – men and women over 21.

Strengths: PR, Women voters, democratic and fair

Weaknesses: Article 48 meant allowed the president to make laws in an emergency, PR meant weak government coalitions.

Why the Republic was unpopular:

They signed the Treaty of Versailles (TOV) and were accused of the 'stab in the back' myth, of making Germany surrender when they were thought to be capable of winning still.

The TOV: LAMB!

- L – Land (13% given away, 6million Germans now not in Germany)
- A – Army (reduced to 100,000 men, no air force, no submarines)
- M – Money (reparations of £6.6 Billion!)
- B – Blame (War guilt clause, article 231 forced Germany to accept the blame!)

Challenges of the Left and Right:

Left = Communist and Spartacists – The Spartacist uprising in 1919 which failed due to poor planning and lack of support

Right = The Freikorps, groups of ex-soldiers – The Kapp Putsch in 1920 which failed after the government called for a general strike

The Challenges of 1923:

In 1923 Germany failed to make its reparation payment so the French and Belgians marched in to the Ruhr (which was demilitarised) to take coal etc. instead. There was passive resistance and the govt. printed money to pay the striking miners but this led to HYPERINFLATION, which meant that savings were wiped out and businesses went bankrupt. People were left sad and angry at the govt. for their handling of the situation.

Reasons for recovery:

- A new currency – The Rentenmark – was introduced which solved Hyperinflation.
- The Dawes Plan – a massive loan from the US to Germany to boost the Germany economy and a reduction in reparations payments
- The Young Plan – Reduced reparations by three quarters
- Improvements in the economy – Industrial output passes pre-WW1 levels

Stresemann's success at home and abroad:

Most important politician and as Foreign Secretary arranges deals with other countries:

- Locarno Pact 1925 – Agreed to respect the borders between countries
- Kellogg – Briand Pact 1928 – Agreed not to use war to settle arguments
- League of Nations – Germany allowed to join in 1926 as a major nation

Changes for workers and women:

Wages rise and working hours reduced, Unemployment insurance introduced, Lots of new housing built

New working opportunities for women, more freedom in their free time and fashion, women allowed to vote and there were several female members of the Reichstag

Cultural changes, 1924 – 1929 (The Golden Age of Weimar):

Art – New Objectivity shows the reality of life in a modern style

Cinema – Germany making some of the most advanced films in the world

Architecture – Bauhaus style of functional design pushing modern boundaries

Hitler's Rise to Power, 1919 – 1933

Hitler and the early growth of the party:

1919 – Hitler joins the German Workers Party

1920 – Changes name to The National Socialist Party (Nazis) & releases his 25-point programme

1921 – Hitler takes over as leader of the Nazis

The SA – The Stormtroopers or Brownshirts, Nazi thugs who beat up opposition supporters and disrupt their meetings

The Munich Putsch and its aftermath:

8th November 1923 – Beerhall Putsch: Hitler and 600 SA disrupt Bavarian Government meeting and force them to support him

9th November 1923 – March on Munich: Hitler, Rohm and 3000 Nazis march but are stopped by the police

Results – Short term – Putsch fails, Hitler is arrested and imprisoned

Long term – Hitler reorganises the party and writes Mein Kampf in prison

Growth in support, 1929 – 1932:

Wall Street Crash October 1929 – Germany becomes extremely poor, businesses close and unemployment soars. People become desperate; “Desperate times call for desperate measures” and start to vote for the Nazis.

The Hitler Appeal – Germans want a strong leader and think Hitler might be their man.

Propaganda – The Nazis use a variety of propaganda types to convince those in the cities and those in the countryside that the Nazis will give them what they want – jobs and food

Political developments in 1932:

April 1932 – Hindenburg beat Hitler in Presidential election

May 1932 – Von Papen becomes Chancellor

July 1932 – Nazis become the single biggest party in the election

December 1932 – Von Schleicher takes over Chancellorship from Von Papen

January 1933 – Von Papen persuades Hindenburg to make Hitler Chancellor with him as Vice-Chancellor to keep him under control

Nazi Control and Dictatorship, 1933 – 1939

The Reichstag Fire and the Enabling Act, 1933:

The German parliament building is burnt down and blamed on a Dutch Communist. Hitler uses this to clamp down and arrests 4000 communists and issues an emergency decree that bans opposition media and allows arrest of opponents.

There follows an election in March where the Nazis get a majority and then through intimidation and bribery Hitler gets the Enabling Act voted in which enabled him to become dictator.

Hitler becomes Fuhrer:

30th June 1934 – Night of the Long Knives:

Hitler and the Army see Rohm and the SA as a threat so Hitler uses the SS (blackshirts) to eliminate his opposition. Hundreds of SA leaders are killed including Rohm, along with political opponents including Von Schleicher, Von Kahr & Gregor Strasser.

August 1934 – President Hindenburg dies so Hitler combines the jobs of Chancellor and President and calls himself the Fuhrer, then gets the army to swear an oath of loyalty to him personally.

A police state:

The Nazis take total authoritarian control of the country and spread terror and fear.

The SS led by Himmler were Hitler's personal bodyguards and after the Night of the Long Knives expand rapidly and become far more powerful.

The Gestapo – secret police, led by Heydrich – use a network of spies and informers to keep people under control through fear of arrest and torture.

The legal system – All judges had to become Nazis and trial by jury was abolished

Concentration camps (up to 1939) – prisoners treated very badly in order to put people off from ever going back and to spread the message of fear to people in society.

Policies towards the churches:

Hitler and the Nazis feared the power and influence of the church in Germany. The Catholics were loyal to the Pope so Hitler made a deal with him – “The Concordat” – that he would leave the Catholic church alone as long as the pope didn't criticise Hitler.

The Protestant churches were joined together to form the “Reich Church” led by Nazis and using Nazi symbols instead of Christian ones.

The Confessional Church led by Martin Niemoller opposed the Nazis and was persecuted as a result

Propaganda and censorship:

Nazis were very effective in their use of propaganda. Under Goebbels, they used many different forms such as posters, films, speeches, art, plays, music and even the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Censorship – where you keep certain information from the public – was also important and involve banning or burning the plays, books, newspapers of opponents of the Nazis or those groups they disliked such as Jews or Communists.

Church opposition:

One of the only forms of open opposition within Germany came from the churches who prioritised God over Hitler. Pastor Martin Niemoller (leader of the Confessional Church) preached against the Nazis from 1933 onwards and openly spoke out against them from 1934 when he set up the Confessional Church. He was sent to a concentration camp from 1938 – 1945. In total about 800 Pastors and 400 Catholic Priests were sent to concentration camps where many died.

Youth opposition:

Various groups of disaffected youths worked against the Nazis.

The Edelweiss Pirates taunted Hitler youth members, sang anti-Nazi songs and painted anti-Nazi messages in public.

The Swing Youth were influenced by American fashions and music hanging out drinking and smoking and having a good time whilst complaining about the Nazis’ strict methods.

Life in Nazi Germany, 1933 – 1939

Women and the family:

The Nazis had a very conservative and old-fashioned view on how women should appear and behave. They believed they should be mothers and wives and not be at work. They encouraged them to have many children and marry good Aryan men and even paid them money and gave them medals to encourage them!

Nazi youth organisations:

The Nazis tried to brainwash the youth of Germany to be good Nazis. Ultimately, the end goal was for boys to be fit and obedient soldiers and for girls to be good wives and mothers.

The Hitler Youth had different organisations for boys and girls of different ages but there were similarities between the activities they all did. Examples for both would include hiking and camping, singing, sport, marching & fundraising. Boys tended to focus on the more physical aspects such as shooting, boxing and military drills, whilst the girls focussed more on domestic duties such as cookery and needlework.

Nazi education:

The Nazis took control of all aspects of education.

- Schools – All followed a set, Nazi approved, curriculum separate for boys & girls
- Teachers – All HAD TO be members of the Nazi Party and teach Nazi ideas
- Subjects – 15% devoted to PE, taught traditional German ideas and ‘Race Science’
- Propaganda – All text books re-written to suit the Nazi Party line & anti-Semitism

The aim – to make good Nazis, either wives and mothers or good soldiers (boys vs girls)

Policies to reduce unemployment:

Hitler believed unemployed were lazy and dangerous to a strong Germany.

- The National Labour Service (RAD) – Compulsory work for all men 18-25 for 6 months on public works such as road building
- Job creation – through building programmes such as schools and hospitals
- Rearmament – factories starting making military equipment creating jobs
- Invisible unemployment – Unemployment figures fell drastically but didn’t include Jews, women, RAD workers, conscripted men or prisoners in camps

The standard of living:

For well-behaved ordinary Germans the standard of living rose and the Nazis introduced programmes to make workers feel more valued:

- Strength through Joy (KdF) – offered workers excursions and holidays
- Beauty of Labour (SdA) – improved working conditions in factories & offices
- The Volkswagen (VW – People’s car) – workers paid a small amount of their salary towards a car, but by 1939 none were given and money went towards the war!

Racial beliefs and policies:

Nazis believed in a clear hierarchy of racial groups with Aryans (the ‘master race’) at the top and Jews at the bottom. Aryans were encouraged to marry and have large families, even setting up ‘race farms’.

Untermenschen – meant inferior people or ‘sub-humans’ and described other ethnic groups such as Jews, Slavs, gypsies or black people.

Other ‘Undesirables’ – other groups that could be Aryan by birth but still not fitting the Nazi ideal such as Homosexuals, mentally or physically disabled and vagrants or ‘work shy’ people. All of these could be sent to concentration camps.

Jewish persecution:

Jews had been persecuted historically for many reasons and as a minority group were often blamed, or ‘scapegoated’ for things that were not their fault. Ordinary Germans allowed this to happen because of the power of anti-Semitic propaganda and also fear of the Gestapo and SS.

Timeline of persecution:

1933 – SA organises a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses, Jewish teachers and civil servants are sacked

1934 – Jews banned from some public places

1935 – The Nuremberg Laws – Prevent Jews marrying Germans, force them to wear a yellow star and prevent them being German citizens

1937 – Jewish businesses taken over by Germans

1938 – Kristallnacht, November – the night when ‘discrimination’ turns to ‘persecution’, hundreds of synagogues, homes and businesses destroyed, over a hundred Jews killed, thousands sent to concentration camps. Goebbels blames the trouble on the Jews and forces them to pay 1 billion marks for the clean up.