
UNIT 27 COUNTER-REVOLUTION II: NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN GERMANY

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Background
- 27.3 German Politics in the Aftermath of War
- 27.4 **Formation and Early Years of Nazi Party**
- 27.5 Crisis of Parliamentary Republic
- 27.6 Political Consolidation of the Nazis
- 27.7 State and Society in the Third Reich
 - 27.7.1 Subordination of Judiciary
 - 27.7.2 Gestapo
 - 27.7.3 Workers and Peasants
 - 27.7.4 Women
 - 27.7.5 Ban on Art and Literature
 - 27.7.6 Press
 - 27.7.7 Policy on Education
 - 27.7.8 Religious Intolerance
- 27.8 Genocide of the Jews
- 27.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

27.0 OBJECTIVES

This is in continuation with the previous Unit which explained to you the general features of fascism as an extreme right-wing political formation. It also narrated the story of right-wing regimes of Italy and Spain. This Unit takes up the story of the rise of Nazi party in Germany as the classic fascist regime. After reading this Unit, you will:

- learn the historical antecedents to the rise of fascism in Germany;
- get an idea of the circumstances which led to the formation of Nazi party;
- discover the changes that came about in the German society after the Nazi take-over in 1933, and;
- understand the essence of German fascism.

27.1 INTRODUCTION

It is important to understand the ideological range that is covered by the right-wing regimes. All of them are not similar, and can cover a broad spectrum starting from conservative regimes to extreme fascist ones. The regime that took over in Germany in 1933 represented the most extreme form of fascism. This Unit gives you information about the roots of German fascism in the 19th century history of Germany. It then discusses the crisis of parliamentary democracy in Germany in the 1920s which created conditions for the rise of fascism. It also elaborates the nature of German fascism and the fundamental changes that it brought about in German society.

27.2. BACKGROUND

The German state associated with the name of Adolf Hitler earned for itself the distinction of being the **most criminal and destructive regime in world history**, a status linked not only with the provocations which launched the Second World War, but also with the use of industrial techniques for the performance of mass murder. The first resulted in the deaths of at least 55 million people, the second in the genocide of between 4 to 6 million European Jews and gypsies. In decades to come historians will still be looking for answers to how and why such deathly energies could have developed and been unleashed upon the world. This essay will set forth an outline of the formation and main features of the Nazi regime.

We may not assume that the ideological and structural features of Nazism were unique and had no roots in Germany's past. Many precursive elements were present in the late nineteenth century. The Wilhelmine Era, named after Kaiser Wilhelm II (1890-1914) a convinced German imperialist, was marked by a sea change in German politics, beginning with his dismissal of Bismarck, and by rapid economic development. These changes masked crucial problems such as the financial dependence of the central government upon the states; the paralysis of imperial policy because of the discrepancy between the conservative Prussian system and that of an Empire founded upon universal manhood suffrage. Since the Chancellor was not responsible to the Reichstag, parliamentary life seemed to be outside the sphere within which real decisions were made. The lack of constitutional reform deprived political parties of responsibility, leading to sectarian and doctrinaire tendencies; and the alliance of landed and industrial interests precluded the success of socialist revisionism, with its attempts to integrate the working class into the state. Furthermore, the existence of militaristic tendencies within the state bureaucracy was conducive to a culture of obedience, even in domestic life. In 1893 the strength of the Army was increased by 83,000, and by 1913 it had grown to 780,000 men. The internal tensions in the system were only forestalled by the outbreak of the First World War.

In the realm of ideology too, there were strong precursors to the doctrines of the Nazi era. Racialism and imperialism were powerful themes in the aspirations of the Wilhelmine German elite, for whom the phrase *Weltpolitik* signified their search for great-power status and a world mission. As he despatched his troops to China in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion, the Kaiser exhorted them to behave as Huns. Then again, from 1880 onwards, there developed in the German-speaking world the growth of anti-semitic politics, concurrent with what was happening in Russia. In Vienna, the Christian Socialist mayor combined social and administrative reform with virulent scapegoating of the Jews for all social ills. In Berlin the Protestant Christian Social Movement was led by the court chaplain, Adolf Stocker, who combined anti-semitism with puritanism in his attacks upon the emergent economic order.

The outbreak of the First World War saw the mainstream German socialist movement identifying with the government's war aims, declaring that Germany had to be protected against reactionary Russian aristocracy, and uniting behind the Kaiser in a solemn civil truce. With the exception of an extreme-left faction, German socialism fell in with the patriotic euphoria of the times. This is noteworthy if only to underline the fact that chauvinist sentiment had a popular base, providing a context within which the ultra-nationalist demagogues of the post-war period could find resonance and support for their programmes.

27.3 GERMAN POLITICS IN THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

The Weimar Republic (about which you have read in Unit 25) was born amidst military defeat and administrative collapse. Germany's war enemies insisted on a change of government as a pre-condition for an armistice, which was signed on 11 November 1918, after the Kaiser's abdication two days earlier. Political systems in terminal crisis tend to hand over power to their most bitter critics, and it is not surprising that the Social Democrats (the SPD) were the only political tendency with the legitimacy to defuse the acute social unrest that accompanied the end of the war. Meanwhile, inspired by the events in Russia in 1917, the extreme-left of German social democracy was implicated in efforts to organize a seizure of power. Their faction, known as the Spartacists, organised an insurrection in Berlin in the winter of 1918-19, during the course of which the leading Social Democrat in charge of government, Chancellor Ebert, came to an agreement with the army as his only bulwark of survival. For their part the Army saw an understanding with the former as a means of negotiating peace and quelling

working class upheaval. A consequence of this alliance was the continuing stability of one of Germany's most conservative institutions.

The accession to power of the social democrats and the subsequent murder of the Spartacist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht by the Freikorps (which consisted of demobilised soldiers), forever embittered the relations between the right and left wings of German social democracy. Germany was gripped by a revolutionary situation in 1919, with workers and soldiers' councils in Hamburg, Berlin, and a wave of unionisations. There was even a brief soviet republic in Bavaria. Thereafter the Communist Party (KPD) was founded which made several attempts at an insurrectionary overthrow of the hated "social-democratic" republic. In 1923 there was a severe round of inflation, along with the occupation of the Ruhr by France and Belgium. There was an attempted putsch in 1920 and a communist rising in Hamburg in October 1923, after which martial law was declared for a while. The repeated attempts by the communists to bring about a soviet-like seizure of power sharpened tensions, spread fear among the middle classes and conservative elements, and contributed to an atmosphere of extreme polarisation. The situation was compounded by the tendency on the part of demobilised soldiers to attribute defeat in war to betrayal in the rear by communists and social democrats alike (this was the notorious "stab in the back" theory); and the crippling war reparations imposed on Germany by the victorious powers under the Treaty of Versailles, which included heavy monetary payments, curbs on the size of the armed forces, and a temporary occupation of Germany's most heavily industrialised and mineral rich provinces.

27.4 FORMATION AND EARLY YEARS OF THE NAZI PARTY.

Anton Drexler in Munich founded the German Workers Party in 1919. Ideologically speaking, it combined socialist radicalism with extreme nationalism, a hatred of Slavs and Jews and a desire to find scapegoats for defeat. Hitler was first discovered by Drexler and acquired notoriety as a beer-hall demagogue. Among his earliest collaborators was the army officer Ernst Rohm, who was later to lead the Stormtroopers (SA). In 1920-21 Hitler emerged as the leader of the party, which soon after became the German National Socialist Worker's Party (NSDAP). Its programme was radical and chauvinist. It called for :

- a Greater Germany with land and colonies,
- the annulment of Versailles,
- the nationalisation of trusts and businesses,
- profit sharing in big firms,
- the abolition of unearned incomes,
- land reforms, and
- the lease of department store to small traders. It even called for the enhancement of the authority of Parliament. As these were radical slogans which were forgotten after they came to power in 1933.

The Weimar Republic underwent a crisis in 1922-23. The collapse of the monetary system resulted in hyperinflation, with one pound exchanging for 15 million marks in September 1923. In January 1923 the French army occupied the Ruhr in response to Germany's defaulting on reparations payments. Gustave Stresemann became the new Chancellor in September and followed a policy of keeping the terms of the Versailles treaty, a step that angered the Right. Meanwhile the success of Mussolini's March on Rome in 1922 had inspired Hitler, and he attempted a seizure of power in Munich in November 1923, with the co-operation of senior army officers such as Field Marshal Ludendorff. However the Reichwehr as an institution remained loyal to Weimar, and sixteen Nazis were killed in street clashes. Hitler himself underwent a (somewhat lenient) trial for someone accused of high treason, and was jailed for most of 1924, during which period he wrote *Mein Kampf*. The book was published in 1924, and is significant for explicit statements on his concept of *Lebensraum* (living space for the German people), an Eastern Empire, the struggle between races and nations, and an international Jewish conspiracy responsible for both capitalism and communism. Parliamentary democracy, wrote Hitler, "sins against the basic aristocratic principle of Nature"; "all human culture" was "almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan", who alone "was the founder of all

higher humanity"; and "in Russian Bolshevism we must see the attempt undertaken by the Jews in the twentieth century to achieve world domination".

The Nazi Party was banned during Hitler's incarceration, which ended in December 1924. The ban was lifted in 1925, and the party was re-organised, with Hitler as its first member. He quickly established his control over the 'left' wing controlled by Gregor Strasser in the north, where Goebbels became his new and longest lasting ally. New *Gauleiter* (district leaders) were appointed, the SA was given a new head, and the authoritarian role of the Leader formalised. In February 1926 Hitler met leading Hamburg industrialists and won them over with his radical anti-communist rhetoric. The Nazis' contempt for democracy could not have been more explicitly put than by Goebbels in 1928, "We become Reichstag deputies in order to paralyse the Weimar democracy with its own assistance. If democracy is stupid enough to give us free travel passes and per diem allowance for this purpose, that is its affair... We come as enemies! Like the wolf tearing into the flock of sheep, that is how we come..."

27.5 THE CRISIS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC

Ebert was the first President (1919-25) of Weimar, under whose constitution the Reichstag had considerably more powers than before. Nevertheless, it was the president who appointed the chancellor and possessed emergency powers to issue decrees. The principle of proportional representation resulted in the formation of splinter parties, which, along with the provision for plebiscites and limitations on provincial rights undermined constitutional functioning. The SPD and the Centre Party upheld the republic. After the death of President Ebert (1919-25), came the presidency of Field Marshal von Hindenburg, 1925-34: the avowed monarchist and Junker general, whose incumbency was to prove disastrous for democracy in Germany.

The Republic weathered the crises of 1922-23. The Stresemann government obtained the withdrawal of French troops from the Ruhr, stabilised the currency, negotiated the Dawes Plan with the Allied Powers which reduced reparations payments to acceptable levels and provided much needed foreign currency loans and signed the Locarno Pact with Britain and France in December 1925, under which Germany recognised her western borders as final. In March 1926 Germany was admitted to the League of Nations. Under the Young Plan of 1929, reparations were scaled down again, the payment period extended, and France and Britain agreed to withdraw troops from the Rhineland in 1930, five years ahead of the agreed schedule. On the other hand, there was high unemployment, far too great a dependence on foreign investment and stagnation in German agriculture. Political instability was endemic, with no single party majorities, as many as 15 ministries between 1919 and 1928, and a growing attractiveness of the radicalism of both Right and Left. Moreover, right-wing populism was becoming influential among senior army officers, with their intense dislike for the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty.

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 had a terrible impact on Germany, with the withdrawal of American loans, loss of export markets, and collapse of industrial production. Unemployment rose to 5.6 million in 1932. The government struggled to meet the financial burdens caused by a fall in tax receipts and a rise in unemployment benefits. The elections to the fourth Reichstag in May 1928 yielded hopeful results, with the Nazis kept to a low 12 seats out of 491 and the SPD gaining 22 seats to reach 153. The KPD had 54. (The SPD & KPD had a total of 42% of the seats). A coalition of moderate parties led by Muller was formed, which proved incapable of agreeing on economic policy. The crisis of the state remained unresolved. Muller's resignation in March 1930 marked the end of the parliamentary period of Weimar. Heinrich Brüning of the Centre Party became the next Chancellor, and began to implement unpopular financial policies by invoking Article 48, which allowed for legislation by presidential decree. The constitutional crisis, which resulted, was dealt with by a dissolution of the Reichstag. Thereafter several important deflationary measures reducing unemployment benefits, raising taxes, etc. were implemented by decree. Wages fell further, and so did purchasing power. In September 1930 Brüning put his policies to the test. The elections to the fifth Reichstag resulted in massive gains for the Nazis, who now held 107 seats. Their share of the vote had risen by 800%. With his moderate allies losing support, Brüning had to rely on the lukewarm support of the SPD.

Meanwhile political tensions were on the rise, with street clashes between the SA and the communists. It was clear that the old conservative alliance was being reversed, with Hitler now in a dominant position. The government's attempted ban on the SA in April 1932 angered Nazi sympathisers in the elite, which included Kaiser William's son. President Hindenburg replaced

Bruning by the end of May 1932 by Fritz von Papen, an aristocrat with strong right-wing leanings, who became the first Centrist politician to collaborate with Hitler. The ban on the SA and SS was lifted, the SPD provincial government in Prussia dismissed, and the Reichstag dissolved yet again. The election campaign was extremely violent, with the SA taking to the streets against real and perceived enemies. There were 99 deaths and over a thousand cases of injury. The sixth Reichstag saw the Nazis gaining 230 seats, with 37% of the vote. The SPD had 133 seats, and the KPD, 89. Hindenburg was still reluctant to make Hitler the Chancellor, as was the latter to accept anything less. During the next few months Hitler canvassed support among industrialists and bankers such as von Thyssen and Hjalmar Schacht, as well as members of the Reichslandbund, an organization of Prussian landholders. Papen soon decided to gamble on another general election, to be held in November 1932. The elections to the seventh Reichstag resulted in a decline of the Nazi vote and a loss of 34 seats, down to 196. The SPD had 121 seats, and the KPD 100 seats. Soon afterwards, Defence Minister Schleicher replaced Papen as Chancellor for a short period during which he attempted to obtain another dissolution of the Reichstag and a proclamation of a state of emergency. A series of political intrigues in January 1933 led to an agreement to a conservative coalition to be led by Hitler as Chancellor. There were to be only three Nazis in a twelve-member government, and the conservatives believed that they could use Hitler to suppress the left. In a series of ruthless political moves Hitler proved them disastrously wrong, as he consolidated his hold on power, crushed all real and potential opposition, and created a highly centralized state. In March 1933, elections took place for the eighth Reichstag. The Nazis won 288 seats, the KPD 81 (they were all immediately disqualified), and the SPD 120.

There had been five general elections from 1928 to 1933. The NSDAP had grown from a membership of 27,000 in 1925, to 49,000 in 1926, 72,000 in 1927, 108,000 in 1928, to 178,000 in 1929 - an increase of 559% in just five years. What were the reasons for this phenomenal growth? Essentially, it was the failure of republicanism and the unwillingness of political parties to compromise for a common cause. The ultra-left posture of the Stalinist KPD also worked in tandem with rightist attacks against the "system", and the ideological climate was deeply affected by the economic crisis, the degeneration of state organs, and the steady corrosion of the judiciary which increasingly began to protect right radicals. (An example of this was the Leipzig trial of spring 1930, during which three army lieutenants were tried for high treason. Hitler appeared in their defence, threatening the court in his deposition. The sentence was to last for only eighteen months). David Abraham stresses Marx's point that Germany suffered "not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from its incompleteness". He analyses the disproportionate influence over state policy of the East Elbian Junkers, who occupied vital state positions as a virtual ruling class; although the agricultural contribution to national GNP was less than 15%, and the agrarian population only a quarter of the total. The increased political importance of the peasantry under universal suffrage altered relations in the countryside. Moreover there were severe conflicts between fractions of the elite classes, between agriculture and industry as sectors, between grain estate owners and the electorally influential dairy and livestock peasants; the older cartellised heavy industrialists vs the new and dynamic capital intensive industries, etc. While these fractions adopted different positions towards political coalitions, organised labour, trade and fiscal policies, and reparations, the state proved unable to produce a balance between them workable within democratic institutions. For their part, the Junkers combined their control of the state and army bureaucracy with the advantage of avoiding the fragmentation of the bourgeoisie. After 1929 the locus of decision making narrowed, with parliament, the parties, and finally even cabinet ministers becoming irrelevant, and corporate interests like the RDI (the League of German Industry) exercising increasing influence over the state.

With the onset of the Great Depression the bourgeoisie had become alarmed by the SPD's programme of integrating and representing the interests of the working class. The economic and fiscal crisis made the costs of social collaboration coupled with the payment of reparations intolerable for the dominant classes. The capitalists abandoned their own programme of compromise and competition with the SPD, a policy that had provided the basis for stability between 1925 till 1930. The frequency of elections was a manifestation of a crisis in state legitimacy and served to further destabilise the situation. Once it was clear that the Nazis would support the social order, the leading industrial circles accepted the idea of splitting the party and co-opting its mass base, and then of calling upon them to take charge of the state to provide the state a popular base which it lacked since 1930. The crisis of the last years of the Weimar Republic stemmed in large part from the inability of the state to organise the interests of the members of the dominant classes in an autonomous fashion, going beyond

partial interests. The Republic was unable to safeguard existing social relations, not because of any revolutionary threat, but rather because of the conflicts and contradictions within the bloc of dominant classes, together with the results of the policy indeterminacy of the preceding years.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Write five lines on those 19th century elements which may be said to have laid the foundation of German fascism.

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- 2) Write ten lines on the foundation and Programme of the Nazi Party.

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- 3) What were the circumstances under which the Nazi party captured power?

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27.6 THE POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE NAZIS

The Enabling Act (Law for Removing the Distress of People and Reich) was passed on 23 March 1933. This became the legal basis for Hitler's dictatorship. Legislative power was transferred to the executive, politically undesirable and 'non-Aryan' civil servants dismissed. The age-old federal character of the state was destroyed through the institution of Reichs Governors. The Act was used on 31 March to dissolve all Diets save the Prussian, and to reconstitute the assemblies on the basis of votes polled in the elections. Communist seats were not to be filled. Basic constitutional rights were suspended by decree on 4 February 1933. After the Reichstag fire of 27 February 1933, a state of emergency was proclaimed the following day. A witness at the post-war Nuremberg trials stated that "it was Goebbels who first thought of



Fig. 1: Hitler Speaks

setting the Reichstag on fire", and the ex-chief of the Gestapo stated that Goering prepared a list of victims before the fire was started. Despite all this, and the May seizures of party buildings, shutting down of its papers, etc, the SPD voted in May 31 to support Hitler's foreign policy. On 2 August 1934 Hindenburg died and Hitler assumed the office of President. Henceforth all armed forces personnel were required to swear an oath to the Fuehrer and the Chancellor.

Hitler's attitude to the autonomous radicalism of the Storm Troopers (SA), was another demonstration of his aim of fusing Party and State. Once the Fuehrer, as he was known, achieved absolute power, Ernst Roehm's warnings (from mid-1933) of a stagnation in the revolution, his efforts to maintain the dominance of the 500,000-strong SA and the antipathy to it of the conservative army elite, sealed his fate. Roehm had proposed that the armed forces, the SA & SS and all veterans groups be given equal status under a new ministry of defence, which should integrate them all into a new People's Army. At the end of June 1934 Hitler ordered the SS to physically eliminate the SA leadership, and personally supervised the arrest of Roehm, who was later shot in his cell. The decisive curbing of dynamic tendencies being unleashed "from below", marked the transformation of the party into a machine for engendering total obedience to the supreme leader of the state. There were other indications of this transformation. Whereas 5.1% of employed workers and 3.8 % of farmers were Nazi party members in 1935; 20% of all civil servants and 30% of all teachers were already members by 1933-34. On 1 January 1933 the Law for Ensuring the Unity of Party and State was passed. On 14 July 1934 the NSDAP was declared the only political party in Germany, with attempts at forming other parties punishable under criminal law. During the next few years with its radical element fully subjugated, the Hitler state seemed to be influenced by the traditional conservative notions of order at least as much as by the dynamic force of the Nazi movement.

27.7 STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE THIRD REICH

In the first eighteen months of Nazi rule a tense and unstable balance existed between three centres of power: the Party monopoly, centralised governmental dictatorship and personal absolutism. Radical forces in the party/SA had helped Hitler overcome the 'containment' policy of the conservatives. In between he switched sides and used the state to prevent the radicals from completing the process of seizure of power. It was his absolutism that was strengthened by the conflicting processes of revolution and counter-revolution. But this very absolutism, far from resolving conflicts of interests within the state, tended to create an internally riven and brittle structure. Thus, the virtual separation and elevation of the Gestapo (the *Geheime Staatspolizei*) from the internal administration meant institutional independence from the ministry. The removal of military and economic experts such as Blomberg, Fritsch and Beck (senior generals who differed on military adventures such as the occupation of the Rhineland) and Schacht, organiser of the four-year Plans, reflect this internal fragmentation of the state. Hitler often used blackmail to destroy conservative critics such as Blomberg and Fritsch. His own indifference to the minutiae of administration and his abrupt and whimsical style, which obscured the meaning, and effects of his decisions, had a crippling impact upon legislation and administration. The cabinet was divided into ministers with more or less access to the Fuehrer. Government disintegrated into a polyocracy of separate departments, and departmental decrees and policies replaced the collegial style of governance. We give below a brief outline of the main characteristics of the new dispensation.

27.7.1 Subordination of Judiciary

The Weimar Republic was never formally abrogated by its worst enemies. Ironically, its own constitution was used as an instrument to subvert it beyond recognition. After the Enabling Act was passed, major changes were introduced which rapidly altered the juridical basis of the state. Thus, the legal lights of the Third Reich proudly proclaimed that "Hitler is the Law", and produced theories transforming the principle of the legal state into that of the leader state, or *Fuehrerstaat*. The extra-legal notion of the Leader, to whom the civil service and the Army swore "unconditional obedience" by "sacred oath", assumed crucial importance in administrative functioning and signified a decisive break with constitutionalism. The democratic notion of the 'general will' was supplanted by that of the will of the Leader, which became the basis for the legitimacy of law. All jurists were required to join a Nazi jurist organisation, and dismissals for unreliability were frequent. After three of the four communist defendants in the Reichstag

fire case were acquitted for want of evidence, treason cases were taken away from the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and transferred to a new People's Court, whose seven man bench was to have five Nazis. Most undertrials received death sentences from this tribunal. The Special Courts took over from ordinary ones all cases of political crime.

27.7.2 Gestapo

The Secret State Police Office or Gestapo, was created in 1933 under the Prussian Interior Ministry, and rapidly attained autonomy from the provincial government. From 1934 Heinrich Himmler became the head of the nation-wide Gestapo. Its Prussian section was headed by Reirhard Heydrich, who was also in charge of the SD, a party intelligence organisation affiliated to the dreaded SS. The SD had over 100,000 informers spread over the country, and among other activities it used to investigate the "no" votes in Hitler's plebiscites. The SS had originated in the early 1920's as Hitler's personal guard (since he was never completely sure of the loyalty of the SA) and had become an internal disciplinary executive of the Nazis in 1931. In 1935 the Prussian Supreme Court declared the decisions of the Gestapo to be beyond judicial review. In short, Heydrich acquired the untrammelled power of life and death over every German. In 1936 Himmler became the Reichsführer-SS. The unification of command over state police and party intelligence organizations resulted in the independence of the domestic terror machinery and was the germ of the SS state, which in the course of the following years developed its own political administration and bureaucracy, army units and machinery for mass murder. Its central agency was the RSHA, or Reich Security Office, under Heydrich. The SS was especially active in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe.

27.7.3 Workers and Peasants

Working people's lives were deeply affected by the policies of the new regime. The Nazis' militarist version of the Keynesian doctrine of state intervention in the economy drastically reduced unemployment figures, which declined from 6 million in 1932 to less than a million in 1936. National production rose by 102% by 1937. The regime began to define the economy as a "war economy", with the aim of preparing for total war. In a secret Defence Law passed on 21 May 1935, Hjalmar Schacht was appointed the economic Plenipotentiary for the War Economy, whose job included camouflaging violations of the Versailles Treaty. Businessmen, who had welcomed the Nazis now were subjected to heavy taxes, "special contributions" and compulsory membership of the Reich Economic Chamber. But heavy industry, especially the armaments sector, made good profits. The wage bill declined (in real terms) and strikes ceased. These changes were effected at the cost of the total obliteration of the trade union movement and left-wing political formations, in particular the Social-Democratic party and the KPD.

Wages were fixed by "Trustees" appointed by the owners (workers were not consulted about their appointments). Piece-rates and intensification of labour were announced as the only means to increase incomes. Though unemployment declined, the share of the German workers in the National Income fell from 56.9% in 1932 to 53.6 % in 1938. Income from capital rose from 17.4 % to 26.6%. Because of near total employment, total income from wages and salaries rose by 66 %. But income from business and capital rose by 146%. A Labour Front was created in October 1934 to function as the "organisation of creative Germans of brain and fist". It operated not as a trade union but as a propaganda machine, and included employers and professionals as members. Its stated aim was the maximisation of work, and its officials had to be Nazis. Feudal values were inscribed in its rules - employers were enjoined to look after the well-being of their workers who in turn, were asked to be faithful to their employers. Workers' freedom of movement was severely restricted by government decrees and subject to controls by the bureaucracy and employers alike. The "Strength through Joy" movement provided regimented leisure to millions, and millions of embezzled deutschmarks to its swollen bureaucracy which included the Labour Front leader, Dr Ley.

In 1933, agricultural income was at its lowest since the war, and indebtedness stood at 12 billion marks. Much of Hitler's populist demagoguery was directed at the peasants. But the Nazis never dared disturb Junker landholdings. The Farm Law of 29 September 1933 declared all farms of up to 125 hectares to be indivisible hereditary estates. Peasants were virtually bound to the soil, but gained slightly in the prices of agricultural commodities.

27.7.4 Women

The new regime's attitude to women and the family was an admixture of ultra-conservative patriarchal sentiment and the racist biologistism characteristic of Nazi ideology. One of the earliest Party ordinances excluded women from all leading positions in the organization. The slogan "*Kinder, Kirche, Küche*" (kids, church, kitchen), became the favourite mode of referring to the social role of women, even as economic and sociological necessity diversified their lives and forced them into the labour force. In 1933 women formed 37% of the total employed labour force in Germany. (Skilled women workers earned only 66% of the wages of males for the same jobs). In 1933 women formed one fifth of the student force in the universities - the Nazi regime passed regulations restricting this proportion to not more than one tenth - a measure which was revoked at the outbreak of war. Women had "the task of being beautiful and bringing children into the world", stated Goebbels, who also announced that the regime's "displacement of women from public life occurs solely to restore their essential dignity..". The production of "racially pure" babies became the Nazi's obsession, and various financial and ideological incentives were offered to females to give birth to more children. These incentives ranged from marriage loans and child subsidies to parents with large families, to awards such as the Honour Cross of the German Mother in bronze, silver and gold, for mothers of four, six, and eight children. These policies were juxtaposed to compulsory sterilizations for mentally retarded, physically deformed, deaf or blind persons, abortions of half-Jewish embryos, etc. For all their ideological talk of elevating the family, the reality was an increasing divorce rate in the peacetime years, an increase in juvenile delinquency, and once the war began, a growing reliance on female labour, the decimation of large numbers of men in the battlefields and the bizarre phenomenon of Himmler's officially sponsored illicit impregnation of unwed women by SS men and other "racially valuable" German men in order to produce children "for the Fuehrer".

27.7.5 Ban on Art and Literature

The Nazis were highly antipathetic to liberal and cosmopolitan culture. From May 1933, book burning began under Goebbels's supervision. The German writers whose writings were proscribed included Stefan Zweig, E.M. Remarque, Albert Einstein and Hugo Preuss, who had drafted the Weimar Constitution. Banned foreign authors included H.G. Wells, Sigmund Freud, Andre Gide, Emile Zola and Upton Sinclair. The regimentation of culture was unprecedented for any western nation. Chambers whose decisions had the validity of law were set up for every sphere of cultural life, including the fine arts, music, theatre, literature, press, radio and films. Jews were hounded out of cultural life, and 6500 paintings of painters such as Cezanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Picasso were removed from art galleries and museums. A House of German Art was set up. An interesting measure of the public response to this vandalism lies in the fact that an exhibition of "Degenerate Art" had to be shut down because of its popularity.

27.7.6 Press

The Press was completely controlled by standing directives and oral instructions issued by Goebbels. Editors had to be politically and racially 'clean'. Liberal and Jewish-owned newspapers were forced to close down. From 1933 to 1937 the number of dailies declined from 3607 to 2671. The ex-sergeant Max Amann became the German Press financial dictator, and two-thirds of the daily circulation, of 25 million came under direct Nazi control. Radio and motion pictures also became organs of propaganda. Hissing at films became so rampant that the Interior minister had to warn against "treasonable behaviour on the part of cinema audiences."

27.7.7 Policy on Education

It is a sign of the destructive impact of Nazism on social life that the educational policy of Germany was entrusted to a stormtrooper. On 30 April 1934 Bernhard Rust, a local leader of the SA became Minister of Science, Education, and Popular Culture. Rust had been dismissed from a schoolmaster's position in 1930 due to mental instability. All education from primary school curricula to university instruction was Nazified, and the educational jurisdiction of local authorities and provincial governments was eliminated. Textbooks were re-written and *Mein Kampf* was elevated to the status of unfailing pedagogical guiding star. Teachers were required to join the Nazi Teachers League and swear allegiance to Hitler. A vast majority of university and school teachers had, in any case, held deeply conservative and anti-semitic views, and had

helped undermine the Weimar republic by influencing a huge mass of students of the virtues of Nazism. A small number of liberal professors left, some being murdered where they had fled. Most others succumbed, including the famous philosopher Heidegger, who remained a member of the Nazi party till the end of the war. A contemporary observer characterized these developments as "a scene of prostitution that has stained the honourable history of German learning."

Jews were forbidden to teach. "Racial Science" was introduced in curricula, which required teaching the racial theories of the Aryan-German master race and the Jews as the breeders of all evil. (From 1905 to 1931, 10 German Jews had won Nobel Prizes in science) Great teachers such as Einstein and Franck (Physics), and Haber and Warburg (Chemistry) were dismissed or retired or forced to emigrate. Those who remained began to teach "German" physics, mathematics, etc. One professor declared Modern Physics to be "an instrument of World Jewry for the destruction of Nordic Science". Relativity (an invention by Einstein, a Jew) was denounced as a plot. After six years of nazification the number of university students dropped from 127,920 to 58,325; and the numbers studying technological courses fell from 20,474 to 9554. Academic standards fell abysmally. Youth leagues by 1937 had 7.7 million members of all ages from 6 to 21. Parents who resisted were warned with the loss of their children. Promising young Nazis were recruited into the "Order Castles".

27.7.8 Religious Intolerance

Given the deeply emotive nature of Nazism's ideological appeal, it is not surprising that the regime sought to control popular religious affiliations. Hitler was nominally a Catholic. However, his stance toward the churches of various denominations was hostile, and at best utilitarian. The Nazi party programme spoke of the need for a "positive Christianity". On 20 July 1933 a Concordat with the Vatican was signed, which spoke of the Church's freedom to regulate her own affairs—a pledge which was systematically violated. But the agreement gave the Third Reich much-needed respectability, and in the perceptions of its leaders, it was the signal to launch an offensive. The Catholic Youth League was dissolved on 30 July 1933. Over the following years thousands of Catholic priests, nuns and lay preachers were arrested and a prominent leader murdered in 1934. On 14 March 1937 Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical entitled "With Burning Sorrow", charging the Nazi government with violations of the concordat and accusing it of sowing the seeds of hatred, calumny and "fundamental hostility to Christ and His Church". He warned against the "threatening storm clouds of destructive religious wars which have no aim other than that of extermination." As things turned out, this was one of the most prescient insights into the nature of the regime.

Within the Protestant tradition too, there was conflict, but Nazism fed upon the anti-semitic prejudices of the Lutherans. (Martin Luther was ferociously anti-Jewish and a staunch believer in absolute obedience to authority.) Fanatical Nazis organised separate congregations such as the "German Christians' Faith Movement". Hitler personally intervened in the elections to the Synod, which elected the Reich Bishop, although privately he spoke of Protestants as "insignificant little people, submissive as dogs". The 'German Christians' Berlin leader advocated the abandonment of the Old Testament "with its tales of cattle merchants and pimps" and a re-writing of the New Testament, with Jesus's teachings revised to "correspond entirely with the demands of National Socialism". Congregations demanded "One People, One Reich, One Faith", and the exclusion of converted Jews. Pastor Niemoller, who had welcomed the events of 1933, was disillusioned within a year and organised the resistance of the "Confessional Church", which denounced anti-semitism and demanded an end to state interference. Hundreds of pastors were arrested, murdered, or sent to concentration camps. On 1 July 1937, Niemoller was arrested after his last sermon, where he uttered the memorable words, "No more are we ready to keep silent at man's behest when God commands us to speak". He remained in concentration camp till 1945. On the whole however, the churches remained loyal to the regime and fulfilled its needs by ordering all pastors to swear allegiance to the Fuehrer. During the war the 30 point programme for the National Reich Church of Germany outlined Nazi church policy, which included the elimination of Christian teaching, the cessation of the publication of the Bible and the placement on altars of nothing except a copy of *Mein Kampf* and a sword.

27.8 GENOCIDE OF THE JEWS

The most oppressive aspect of Hitler's regime was a systematic persecution of the Jews. The

ideology of the Nazi Party was informed by a strong hatred of the Jews and an obsession with maintaining the Aryan purity. The Nuremberg Laws of 15 September 1935 deprived Jews of German citizenship, confining them to "subject" status. Marital or extra-marital relations between Jews and 'Aryans' were forbidden. Three more laws over the next few years outcast them completely. In the year of the Berlin Olympics half of all Jews were unemployed. Social ostracism included blatantly vicious signboards and hoardings. Between 1933 and 1938, (the year of the infamous Crystal Night 9 November, 1938), about half the Jewish population of about half a million had emigrated. "Metaphysically as well as materially, the roots of the German heaven were deeply embedded in the Jewish hell" (Grunberger, 579).

The first concentration camps came up in 1933 under the SA. After the Roehm purge of June 1934, the camps were turned over to the SS, with guard duty being assigned to the Death's Head units. Thus did the names of obscure villages and towns such as Dachau, Auschwitz, and Buchenwald acquire notoriety. The actual process of extermination was begun with the so-called euthanasia practised on 70,000 mentally infirm Germans between 1938 and 1941. In late 1941 this method was applied to concentration camp victims unfit to work - camouflaged gas vans were employed to gas 150,00 Jews. Mass extermination in gas chambers began in Belzec, in Lublin district of Poland in March 1942. Jewish slave labourers were also systematically machine-gunned. The largest camp was Auschwitz-Birkenau, where between 2 to 3 million Jews, along with gypsies, Poles, and Soviet prisoners of war were murdered. As Bracher argues, "the genocide of the Jews was not the result of either war or terror. Neither individual guilt, nor internal conflicts, neither a deterrent function nor the necessity of war was the determining factor. The extermination grew out of the biologicistic insanity of Nazi ideology, and for that reason it is completely unlike the terror of revolutions and wars of the past: Here we are faced by the completely impersonal, bureaucratic "extermination" of a people classified as a species of inferior subhumans, as 'vermin', a problem which the former Himmler handled as though it were a biological disease".

In his well-known biography *Hitler*, Joachim Fest suggests that "Hitler's rule should not be regarded in isolation, but viewed as the terrorist or Jacobin phase of a widespread social revolution that propelled Germany into the twentieth century and that has not reached its end to this day". It was only with Hitler, he believes, that the nineteenth century in Germany came to an end. Despite his anachronisms, he was more modern than his conservative opponents, because he grasped the necessity for changes:

Under the demands of the totalitarian leader state, venerable institutions collapsed, people were wrenched out of their traditional slots, privileges were done away with, and all authorities that were not derived from or protected by Hitler were smashed. At the same time, Hitler succeeded in muting those anxieties and fears of uprooting that generally accompany any breach with the past.

For Fest, Hitler's rule has served to denude the term revolution of its moral or progressive connotation. He contradicts himself here, for his notions of modernity, the need for changes and the end of the 19th century are linked to a positive notion of 'progress'. He also attempts a comparison between Nazism and Stalinism in his citation of "Caesaristic tendencies stretching all the way from the totalitarian cult of personality in Stalin's Soviet Union to the autocratic style of President Roosevelt." Addressing the problems inherent in this kind of juxtaposition, J.P. Stern stresses the fundamental difference between Marxism, which in howsoever degenerate a form was still based upon a belief in human equality and the Hitler regime's racial imperialism which ascribed congenitally irremediable defects and sub-human qualities to Jews, Gypsies and other peoples, rendering them suitable for mass extermination. Ultimately the dark history of the Third Reich defies a completely rational analysis in terms of functional and material causes. As Stern remarks, "not conquest but indiscriminate annihilation" was Hitler's aim. And, in the words of another scholar of the Nazi regime "The Third Reich could be compared to a double-ended gun trained both on the twentieth century and the Treaty of Versailles, with nostalgia for a pre-industrial past speaking out of one barrel and streamlined preparation for war out of the other". (Grunberger, 325).



Fig.2: Nazi Picket during the boycott of Jewish owned shops. The Placard reads: "Germans! Strike back! Don't buy from Jews!"



Fig.3: A picture of a Nazi Concentration camp where Jews were massacred

Check Your Progress 2

1) What was Nazi party's attitude towards education and religion?

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2) What according to you are the basic features of the Nazi regime?

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27.9 LET US SUM UP

Extreme centralisation, subordination of institutions like church, army and the judiciary, complete loyalty towards the leader and hatred for the Jews and gypsies on biological grounds, belief in the superiority of the Aryans were some of the features of German fascism. It was a product of the specific context of the post war Europe, even though it had historical roots going back to the 19th century. The humiliation for Germany at Versailles, the political uncertainty during the 1920s and the depression of 1929 created conditions for the rise of the Nazi party, the organisation of German fascism. It had a particular appeal for those German whose nationalism had been wounded by the events of the 20th century.

Once in power, the horrors of fascism became visible. Any dissent was suppressed ruthlessly. Judiciary was subordinated. Absolute power was concentrated in the hands of Hitler. A Secret Police (GESTAPO) was used to identify Hitler's political opponents. The Nazi notions of racial and biological superiority of the Aryans were now carried into the realm of polity. Women

were debarred from positions of responsibility. As a part of Nazi ideology, Jews were subjected to unprecedented discrimination. They were deprived of German citizenship. Jews along with gypsies were frequently put in concentration camps and killed. Two to three million Jews were killed in one single concentration camp.

27.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sec.27.2.
- 2) See Sec.27.4.
- 3) In your answer you should mention the crisis of the Weimar Republic, the impact of the economic crisis and the subsequent political instability. See Sec.27.5.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-secs.27.7.7 and 27.7.8
- 2) A totalitarian regime, complete subordinate of society to state and to one party, all power in the hand of the Fuehrer, a conservative and discriminatory attitude towards women, total state control over art, literature and other forms of culture, education to be used only as Nazi propaganda, religious intolerance and above all, an attitude of utmost contempt for the Jews leading to their genocide. See secs.27.7 and 27.8.