Totalitarian Terror in Nazi Germany

The totalitarian state of Nazi Germany was defined by the government’s use of police terror and persecution to keep its citizens in line. In addition to ruling its citizens with an iron fist, the Nazi government also perpetrated the Holocaust, an act of calculated genocide that resulted in the deaths of millions of people, including up to 6 million Jews (“Documenting Numbers”). The Nazi government utilized police terror to ensure that the citizens of Germany would do little to protect their fellow citizens from the imprisonment and mass executions (“German Police”). In addition, the Nazis relied on widespread persecution of its citizens, inciting an environment of fear and repression, to ensure that the Holocaust could proceed with little resistance from the German people (“Mosaic…”). To a large degree, the Holocaust was possible because Nazi Germany used proven totalitarian tactics such as police terror and persecution to repress and subdue any resistance to their political and ideological agenda.

In order to maintain control over the people of Germany during the Holocaust, the Nazi converted the German police force into an instrument of terror. Hitler and the Nazis gained control of the police force through several acts: ending media scrutiny of police actions through censorship; subduing Communist forces that had brought civil unrest; increasing training and staff and providing more modern equipment (“German Police”). As part of this process, the *Sicherheitsdienst* and security service merged with the German Police (“German Police”). Under Heinrich Himmler’s supervision, the Nazi government gave the police the ability to make preventative arrests without evidence (“German Police”). The German police force would become a crucial element in executing the Holocaust since they would maintain “order” as they enacted the relocation and systematic murder of the groups designated as enemies of the state (“German Police”). Without the support of Germany’s police force, the Nazis would never have been able to execute the Holocaust on such a large scale and in as effective a manner.

Such oppression extended to systematic persecution of all groups labeled as enemies to the Aryan race. These groups were those identified by the Nazi government as “Other”; that is, the Nazis considered the Aryan race as normal and grouped all non-Aryans as inferior or dangerous (“Mosaic…”). Jewish people were their primary targets, and the Nazis backed their persecution of Jews through the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, which had legalized anti-Semitism (“Anti-Jewish Legislation”). However the Nazis persecuted other groups as well, such as political opponents (including trade union leaders, socialists, and communists) who were sent to Dachau, a concentration camp which was established in 1933 (“Mosaic…”). The Nazis also targeted the Roma (or gypsies), the Polish and people of Slavic descent, Soviets, homosexuals, disabled people, and people they accused of “asocial” actions (“Mosaic…”). Persecuted on the basis of their race, heritage, actions, or ideology, millions of people were discriminated against, imprisoned, or murdered (“Mosaic…”). By breaking down any kind of social connections between the groups they targeted and the people of Germany, the Nazi successfully manipulated Germans into supporting the Holocaust or at least looking the other way despite its immense death count.

When police enforcement became the instrument of persecution in Nazi Germany, targeting non-Aryan groups and enforcing racist legal and political beliefs, the environment was ripe for an atrocity like the Holocaust. The Nazis used police terror to make sure the people of Germany were afraid to stand up to mass imprisonments and executions. This fed into the acceptance of widespread persecution that sent millions to their deaths in the gas chambers of Dachau, Auschwitz, and other concentration camps (“Mosaic…”). The German police’s involvement in the oppression of the Nazi’s domestic enemies in combination with the persecution of the groups targeted in the Holocaust created a climate that would enable one of the largest atrocities in human history to occur with little resistance from the citizens of the country that perpetrated it.

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