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# eGUIDE//History

## Historical Investigations and Interpretations

Unit AS 1

Option 5: Germany 1919-1945

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## Introduction

In this option, students examine the history of Germany between 1919 and 1945. The initial focus is on the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933, including an analysis of the factors involved in the decline of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party from 1929 to 1933. Students examine the political, economic and social developments during the Third Reich until 1939. The political, economic and social consequences of the Second World War are explored in relation to both Nazi Germany and the occupied territories in Eastern Europe by 1945.

This option is assessed in a written examination lasting One hour 30 minutes. Candidates answer two questions. Question 1 is a short response question and candidates answer one question from a choice of two. Question 2 is a source-based question with two parts. In Question 2(a) candidates assess the usefulness of a contemporary source to an historian studying a particular historical event or development. In Question 2(b) candidates assess which of two different interpretations of a particular historical event or development they find more convincing.

Question 1 targets Assessment Objective A01: the candidate's ability to demonstrate, organise and communicate knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate the key features related to the periods studied, making substantiated judgements and exploring concepts, as relevant, of cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. Question 2(a) tests Assessment Objective A02: the candidate's ability to analyse and evaluate appropriate source material, primary and/or contemporary to the period, within its historical context. Question 2(b) targets Assessment Objective A03: the candidate's ability to analyse and evaluate, in relation to the historical context, different ways in which aspects of the past have been interpreted.

For ease of consultation, the following study is divided into four sections:

1. The Weimar Republic 1919–1929
2. The decline of the Weimar Republic 1929–1933 and the rise of the Nazis
3. Developments in Nazi Germany 1933–1939
4. The impact of the war on Nazi Germany and the occupied territories in Eastern Europe 1939–1945



# 1. The Weimar Republic 1919-1929

## (a) The National Constituent Assembly, the Weimar Constitution and the main terms of the Treaty of Versailles

Elections for the new National Assembly were held in January 1919. The main responsibility of this new assembly was to draw up a constitution for Germany. The abdication of the Kaiser in November 1918 had left a power vacuum; it was vital to decide how the new republic would be run and by whom. All men and women over 20 years could vote in this election. The results were promising: the SPD, DDP and Centre parties between them polled 76% of the vote. Therefore, the parties who were strongest in their support for the republic polled most votes. Philip Scheidemann was made Chancellor, with Friedrich Ebert as President. The new assembly met in Weimar in February 1919 and began work on the new constitution. However, the January 1919 election proved to be the high point in support for the republic; the next election in 1920 witnessed a fall in support for the pro-Weimar parties, whilst support for the anti-Weimar parties like the DNVP grew. The Weimar Constitution established a Federal system with a series of checks and balances. If used carefully, these may have led to a stable government. It was a much more democratic regime than the Second Reich of 1871-1918.

### **The main features of the Weimar Constitution:**

There were four main branches to the Weimar Constitution which was drawn up by the National Assembly in 1919. An elected President replaced the Kaiser as the Head of State and was elected every seven years by men and women over the age of 20. The president had a lot of power in Germany as he not only appointed the Chancellor (Head of Government) usually leader of the largest party in the Reichstag, but could also dismiss him. Under Article 48 the President could rule by decree during an emergency and side-line the Reichstag. He had the power to dissolve the Reichstag and arrange for new elections to be held. The President also commanded the army, therefore increasing his potential power. There has been some criticism of the power the Constitution gave to the President, particularly Article 48, since the definition of an 'emergency' in Article 48 was open to interpretation or abuse. However, the aim behind it was to protect Germany and safeguard democracy in a time of crisis.

The second element was the Reichstag, the German Parliament, which was the main law making body. There were to be elections to the Reichstag every four years using a system of Proportional Representation (PR). As with the Presidential elections the electorate was made up of men and women over the age of 20. The electorate voted for a party and each party produced a list of candidates numbered in order of importance. The PR electoral system was more democratic and fairer to smaller parties and Germany soon had a significant number of political parties. The PR system prevented a single party from ever having an overall majority and instead often resulted in unstable coalition governments. This is borne out by the fact that there were 11 different Chancellors and 21 different Cabinets in the Weimar Republic's 14 year history. The longest government lasted two years. This political chaos caused many to lose faith in the new democratic system. The Chancellor and his ministers were accountable to the Reichstag and governments could be removed by a vote of no confidence in the Reichstag. The Reichstag could overrule the Reichsrat with a 2/3 majority but, as mentioned previously, the President did have the power to dissolve the Reichstag.



The Constitution created a federal system with political authority split between a national government, as outlined above and the third branch which consisted of 17 state governments. This was potentially dangerous, as by allowing different states to have control over their own affairs, the threat was that these states could be hostile to the National government and could even try to overthrow it. The Reichsrat which represented the German states was elected by men and women over the age of 20 but could be overruled by the Reichstag or by a referendum.

The Weimar Constitution was a liberal constitution for its time. The fourth area of the Constitution promoted and protected basic rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of travel, a free press without censorship and equality and protection by the state were all guaranteed within it. The premise behind the Constitution was to introduce greater democracy to Germany and safeguard the 'social rights' specified in the Constitution itself. The Constitution of the Weimar Republic allowed the people to force a referendum on issues. In order to do this 10% of the electorate needed to sign a petition in favour of a proposal. If the Reichstag chose to dismiss the proposal, it then had to go to a referendum. This would allow the people to vote on the issue, answering a single question with a 'Yes' or 'No' vote. There is no doubt that the Weimar Constitution was a compromise drawn up by a number of different political parties. However, it was agreed by a majority of 262 votes to 75 and only the DVP and DNVP directly opposed. It was a compromise and, as such, was unlikely to please everyone.

## **The Treaty of Versailles**

The Treaty of Versailles, subsequently signed in June 1919 undoubtedly dealt the fledgling Weimar Republic a hammer blow. At the end of World War One no part of Germany had been invaded; there was no real sense of defeat.

### **The main Terms:**

- League of Nations - The first 26 articles contained the Covenant of the League of Nations. This was to be a permanent organisation with 45 members although it was hoped that this number would grow as former enemy powers were accepted into the League. Its primary purpose was to avoid conflict through peaceful negotiation and disarmament. Germany lost out diplomatically as it was not allowed to be involved in the League of Nations at the start
- Germany was reduced to a third rate military power as German armed forces were not allowed to exceed 100,000 and all tanks, military and naval aircraft, submarine and heavy artillery were forbidden. Only 6 battleships were permitted
- The 'War Guilt Clause' also known as Article 231 of the Treaty contained Germany's acceptance of responsibility for the war and made Germany liable for war damage costs
- A Reparations Commission was set up and in 1921 it fixed reparations at £6,600 million which would have a huge economic impact on the new Weimar government
- Germany was not allowed to form an *Anschluss* with Austria and lost out both territorially and colonially. Large industrialised areas had been removed from Germany. Added to this was the loss of trading partners and land including, for example, the Polish Corridor, Schleswig-Holstein, Memel, Danzig and Alsace



The Treaty of Versailles was unpopular, not only with the Germans, but also with the people who had drawn it up. In Germany the Treaty was seen as a 'diktat', a dictated peace. Even at the time, the peace-makers left the conference feeling that they had failed to make a treaty that would keep the peace. The terms did not reflect Wilson's 14 Points. For example, the principle of Self Determination was not applied properly. Historians ever since have blamed the Treaty of Versailles for helping to cause the Second World War. According to the Versailles settlement over 6 million ethnic Germans would be living in other countries, with 1.5 million ethnic Germans now living within Poland's new borders. The military restrictions were difficult for a state with a strong military tradition to accept. Article 231 'the war guilt clause' added further humiliation. The Treaty was inevitably exploited by anti-Weimar parties and right wing nationalists who accused 'the November criminals' for ending the war prematurely and not protecting Germany's interests.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Weimar Constitution?
2. In what ways could the Treaty of Versailles be regarded as fair?
3. To what extent was the Treaty of Versailles responsible for the downfall of the Weimar Republic?

**(b) The political threats to the Weimar Republic from the Left and Right 1919–1923**

From the very outset the new regime encountered challenges from both the political left and right.

**(i) The Left Wing threat:**

The Spartacist uprising led by the Independent Socialist Party of Germany (USPD) and members of the Spartacus League was launched on 5 January 1919. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht helped in the organisation of the revolt and both were brutally murdered during the course of events. The use of the Freikorps to subdue the unrest caused bitter recriminations within the Left. Relations between the Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) remained poisoned for years to come.

In April 1919 Communists took over Bavaria, proclaiming the "Bavarian Soviet Republic". They refused to collaborate with the regular army of the city, and also organised their own army, the Red Army. Soon after, in May 1919, government troops and some Freikorps entered the Bavarian Soviet Republic and defeated the Communists; bitter street fighting caused the deaths of over 1,000 volunteer supporters of the government. About 800 men and women were arrested and executed by the victorious Freikorps.

The Red Rising in the Ruhr came two days after the Kapp Putsch. It was a call for a general strike by the Social Democrats mainly because of the government's response to the Kapp Putsch and the government's leniency. In the Ruhr region a 'Red Army' was formed by socialist workers. The Weimar Republic reacted promptly. This time they were able to rely on the regular army which had proved so reluctant to crush the Kapp Putsch and the uprising was easily suppressed. They sent the German Army in to the Ruhr to crush any on-going trouble which was being stirred up by around 50,000 members of the Ruhr Army. The reaction of the German government once again showed their firm action against the left wing. The army responded with brutality and there were numerous on the spot executions.



In October 1923 there was a wave of Communist uprisings in Saxony, Thuringia and Hamburg, known as German October. This took place against a backdrop of financial instability provoked by the reparations crisis. In Saxony and Thuringia the KPD uprisings were crushed before the risings could get off the ground, however, in Hamburg the army was used to crush the rising. This resulted in the SPD leaving the government in protest. This represented a missed opportunity for the Communists.

**(ii) The Right Wing threat:**

The Kapp Putsch took place in response to the Defence Minister's order for two Freikorps brigades to disband in March 1920. General Von Luttwitz refused the request and, along with other disgruntled army officers and Kapp, planned to overthrow the government. The right wing journalist and leader of the Fatherland Party, Wolfgang Kapp despised the new Weimar Republic. Following the march of 12,000 Freikorps on Berlin, the government fled to Stuttgart. Significantly it was the workers' strike called by Ebert, rather than the army which brought the putsch to an end, despite the Ebert-Groener deal of November 1918.

Political Assassinations were carried out by nationalist opponents of the new Republic. In August 1921 Matthias Erzberger, Germany's representative on the Reparations Commission, was assassinated. The Commission was responsible for fixing the sum of money which Germany had to pay the Allies for war damage. His assassination was followed in June 1922 with the assassination of Germany's Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau.

By the autumn of 1923 hyper-inflation and the invasion of the Ruhr had damaged the Weimar government. Moreover, the decision to end the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr infuriated nationalists. Believing he had the support of the Bavarian state government and the local army, Hitler and his followers embarked upon the Munich Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923. What followed was a fiasco. Sixteen Nazis were killed in the scuffles in Munich; Hitler was arrested and accused of treason. In the subsequent trial, Hitler was sentenced to the lightest possible sentence of five years' imprisonment.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Which posed the greater threat to the Weimar Republic: the Left or the Right?
2. Was the Ebert-Groener deal of November 1918 a help or a hindrance to the new Weimar regime?
3. Was the Weimar Republic doomed from the beginning?



**Teaching and Learning Activity - Short response question**

Analyse the political challenges to the Weimar Republic 1919-1923.



### **(c) The reasons for the economic instability of the Weimar Republic 1919–1923**

There were chronic problems in the Weimar economy stemming from before the 1923 crisis. By November 1918 industrial and agricultural production had dramatically decreased. National income was two-thirds of its pre-war levels. Printing more money as well as borrowing also continued after the end of World War One. The former policy caused massive inflation; for example in 1922 the German mark was worth 1% of its pre-war level. The economic terms of the Treaty of Versailles together with the reparations sum fixed at £6,600 million exacerbated this dire situation.

The French invasion of the Ruhr followed in January 1923 when the Weimar government had signalled that they would be unable to keep up with reparations payments. On 11 January 1923 Poincaré sent 60,000 French and Belgian troops across the River Rhine to occupy the Ruhr. This region, the industrial heartland of Germany, not only produced 80% of the nation's steel and 71% of its coal but it also supplied the resources essential to industrial production elsewhere in the country. It was the region on which the whole German economy was dependent. The occupying force included teams of French, Belgian and Italian engineers sent to supervise the running of the Ruhr's factories and mines. Their aim was to seize resources in lieu of payments that were overdue. As the issue escalated into a trial of strength between France and Germany the Weimar government ordered an indefinite suspension of all reparations payments and instructed German workers not to cooperate but to engage in a campaign of passive resistance. Some went further and became involved in acts of sabotage. Confrontation became inevitable once French soldiers attempted to round up and deport strikers. During a number of clashes some 150 Germans were killed. Abroad the French action was criticised by both the British and American governments. There is no doubt that Passive resistance and the subsequent policy of deficit financing proved to be a disaster for the economy. Hyperinflation with a steep fall in the value of the mark and an extraordinary rise in prices left many Germans facing financial ruin.

Stresemann's appointment as Chancellor in August 1923 proved critical. Passive resistance was withdrawn in September 1923 and the currency stabilised. A new currency, the Rentenmark, was introduced in November 1923.

### **(d) The strengths and weaknesses of the economy 1924–1929 and the extent of economic recovery**

The extent of economic recovery between 1924 and 1929 has been the subject of debate. In contrast to the early years of the Weimar regime, certainly the latter part of the 1920s may appear to be 'golden years'. The Dawes Plan 1924 had reorganised the Reichsbank, reduced the reparations due and spread out the payments of 1 billion marks annually until 1929 and 2.5 billion marks thereafter. It also allowed for a loan of 800 million marks from the Allies; this paved the way for considerable investment, mostly American. The Young Plan 1929 further revised the reparations total to 112,000 million marks and also fixed for the first time a time limit for repayment. This period witnessed increased industrial production, wage increases, regulation of working hours and new welfare schemes, including a new unemployment insurance system in 1927.

However, not everyone benefitted from such advances. Groups such as the *Mittelstand* and farmers continued to experience grim economic prospects. Agricultural output stood at 74% of its pre-war level and agricultural debt discouraged farmers from investing in



new machinery. Germany's export market was also impacted by unfavourable worldwide trading conditions in the 1920s. Reliance on overseas loans, chiefly from America, also signalled shortcomings in the economic recovery. Historian James argues that there were fundamental fault lines in the Weimar economy before the 1929 Crash: 'Some of the causes of Germany's problems stemmed from the world economic setting, but many of them were endogenous (growing from within)'. Shortly before his death in 1929 Gustav Stresemann acknowledged the superficial nature of the economic recovery, 'The German economy is doing well only on the surface. Germany is in fact dancing on a volcano.'

**Web Article**

For an interesting article on Gustav Stresemann, see '*Could he have saved Weimar?*'

<https://www.economist.com/node/1325117>

**(e) The development of the Nazi Party 1923–1929, including the Munich Beer Hall Putsch, the significance of the Bamberg Nazi Party conference, the creation of the national party structure and the contributions of Strasser and Goebbels**

In November 1923, Hitler felt that the time was right for revolution. By then hyper-inflation and the invasion of the Ruhr had damaged the Weimar government. Moreover, the decision to end the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr infuriated nationalists. Believing he had the support of the Bavarian state government and the local army, Hitler and his followers embarked on a botched rebellion on 8 November, 1923 in a Munich Beerhall where Gustav von Kahr was addressing a meeting of around 3,000 businessmen. During the meeting Hitler took Kahr, Otto von Lossow (the commander of the Bavarian Army) and Hans von Seisser (the Commandant of the Bavarian State Police) into an adjoining room, while one of Hitler's associates telephoned Ludendorff, the World War I general, hoping he would be the figurehead to lead a march on Berlin to overthrow the Weimar Republic. When Ludendorff arrived at the hall, he convinced the three Bavarian leaders to give in to Hitler's demands for the march on Berlin. However, the following day when Hitler and his Nazis went into Munich, for what they thought would be a triumphal march to take power, they discovered that von Kahr had called in police and army reinforcements. What happened next is not clear but shots were fired during which time sixteen Nazis and three policemen were killed. Hitler was arrested and charged with treason. In real terms the Putsch was a military failure. The rising was easily put down and the demonstrators were quickly dispersed. Added to this was the fact that the rising failed to spread beyond Munich. The Nazi Party was banned and Hitler was banned from political activity and speaking in public. However, in his subsequent trial, Hitler managed to use this platform to win further support, even from the Bavarian judiciary and served just nine months in Landsberg Castle.

The period 1924-29 certainly represented a challenging time for Hitler and the fledgling Nazi movement. During his imprisonment the party had come close to disintegration. At the same time, Hitler was able to write *Mein Kampf*, reflecting on the impact of the failed putsch and the future direction of the party. Upon his release from prison in December 1924, Hitler set about changing the tactics, policies and organisation of the NSDAP. Violent tactics would be abandoned in favour of winning electoral support. The Nazis would attempt to destroy the Weimar Republic from within.



Moreover, he succeeded in imposing his own personal authority over what had become a deeply divided party.

In February 1926 at a party meeting in Bamberg Hitler managed to thwart an attempt by colleague Gregor Strasser to move the party in a more socialist direction. Hitler dominated the conference turning what should have been an open debate into a 5-hour monologue. From now on, the Führer's will was paramount as the Führerprinzip was established. Believing that the Republic's new found stability would not last, Hitler wanted to make sure that his Party would be in a position to exploit the situation once circumstances changed in his favour. Therefore the Party began to organise itself on an impressive scale. Changes were made in the NSDAP national structure. Germany was divided into 35 Gaue in line with the Reichstag electoral districts, each controlled by a Gauleiter. Joseph Goebbels, a previous supporter of Gregor Strasser, but now a close ally of Hitler, was appointed Gauleiter of Berlin. Nazi Party membership increased from 27,000 in 1925 to 72,000 by 1927. The Nazis also established associations such as the Hitler Youth in 1926 and the National Socialist teachers association in 1929 to increase support for the Party. In spite of such efforts, electoral success for the Nazis remained elusive. In the 1928 Reichstag election the NSDAP won only 12 seats, polling 2.6% of the total vote, in contrast to the May 1924 election where they had won 32 seats, polling 6.5% of the total vote. It would appear that the rebranding of the Nazi Party following the 1923 Putsch had been in vain.

### Questions for discussion:

1. To what extent could the Munich Putsch be considered a triumph or a failure?
2. How can the disastrous 1928 election result for the Nazi Party be explained?



### Teaching and Learning Activity - Short response question

Analyse the development of the Nazi Party in the period 1923-1929.



### Teaching and Learning Activity - Source evaluation and analysis

Read the source and answer the question which follows:

### Source 1

Extract from the memoirs of Kurt Ludecke, a former close associate of Hitler. The memoirs were published in 1937, while Ludecke was in exile after fleeing Germany in 1934. He is recalling a conversation conducted with Hitler in 1924. At that time Hitler was serving a prison sentence in Landsberg Castle.

During my conversation with Hitler, he made a statement which I can still recall. Hitler said: "From now on we must follow a new line of action. No major reorganisation should be attempted until I have been freed. I am not going to stay here much longer. When I resume active work, it will be necessary to pursue a new policy. Instead of working to achieve power by an armed putsch, we shall adopt a legal approach and use the parliamentary route by participating in Reichstag elections. Any lawful process is slow. But, as you know, this new strategy has already achieved success through the election of 32 Nazi deputies to the Reichstag in May 1924. Sooner or later we shall have a majority. I am convinced that this is our best line of action, now that the economic conditions in the country have improved so fundamentally."



I was surprised to hear the Führer talking in this way. Only a few weeks earlier he had expressed his strong opposition to any participation in the election of May 1924 and was furious with Party members who had participated in the election despite his ban. The unexpected success in the election had undoubtedly changed his mind.

**Study Source 1.**

**How useful is it as evidence for an historian studying the political strategy of Hitler and the Nazis in their rise to power between 1923 and 30 January 1933?**



## 2. The decline of the Weimar Republic 1929–1933 and the rise of the Nazis

### (a) The economic and political impact of the Wall Street Crash on the Weimar Republic 1929–1933

The Wall Street Crash in October 1929 had a devastating impact upon the Weimar Republic. The German economy had barely recovered from World War One and the effects of the hyperinflation crisis. In the period after 1924, German prosperity was largely dependent on American loans. In 1927 and 1928 Germany borrowed almost 5 times the amount needed for reparation payments. As the economic crisis in the USA developed, American bankers called in existing loans lurching Germany into crisis. Mindful of what happened in 1923 people rushed to convert their savings into gold or a stronger foreign currency. Large quantities of gold and foreign exchange left the country and in the first 2 weeks of June 1931 alone, foreign funds totalling 1,000 million Marks went overseas. The clamour for gold led to a run on banks. In the summer of 1931 a number of banks collapsed and to counter this panic-selling the government ordered the banks to close and placed restrictions on the movement of money. The shortage of ready-made money caused inconvenience and hardship. In this period, German heavy industry was particularly badly hit and between 1929 and 1932 the demand for steel, machine goods, shipping and chemicals fell rapidly and, as a result of the slump in world trade, the value of German exports fell by 55%. German agriculture was in difficulty before the Wall Street Crash and this intensified as a result of the world-wide slump. Unemployment, just 132,000 in 1929, rose to 3 million within a year and by mid-1932 there were nearly 6 million registered unemployed. The rise in unemployment created further division in German politics. Incomes fell, people lost their savings and 50,000 small businesses went bankrupt by 1932. Five major banks collapsed by 1932; there were major cutbacks in welfare spending and industrial production by 1932 had halved from pre-1929 level.

There were also political consequences of the Wall Street Crash. In such a crisis the weaknesses of the Weimar political system became clear. Decisive action was necessary at this point to tackle the foremost problem of unemployment. However, the main political parties disagreed on the course of action. At this time of crisis the electorate was also becoming more polarised; both the Nazi and the Communist share of the vote was increasing.

### (b) The decline of parliamentary government and the rise of presidential government

Hermann Müller of the SPD was appointed Chancellor of the 'grand coalition' in 1928. This represented five main political parties from the left (SPD) to the moderate right (DVP). The 1929 Crash exacerbated their differences. The government was facing both a budget deficit and an inadequate unemployment relief scheme. As a result the government had to contribute to the relief scheme thereby deepening the budget deficit. Political stalemate developed as the SPD wanted to increase the relief payments to the unemployed whilst the right wing parties such as the DVP wanted the reverse. Müller was unable to summon enough support in the Reichstag to pass laws so turned to Hindenburg for support in using Article 48. Hindenburg refused to support Müller's government and subsequently the Chancellor resigned.



### **(c) The collapse of Müller's Grand Coalition and the impact of Brüning's policies**

Parliamentary government effectively ended with the resignation of Müller in March 1930; the appointment of Brüning as his successor signalled the rise of presidential government and increasing reliance on the use of Article 48. Brüning's appointment as Chancellor was also important in that it reflected the increasing influence of the ambitious von Schleicher in President Hindenburg's decision-making. The Cabinet which followed significantly excluded members of the SPD, still the largest party in the Reichstag. With a lack of support in the Reichstag, Brüning had to rely on Article 48 to pass laws by presidential decree. Indeed, Article 48 was used on sixty-six occasions in 1932 in contrast to five times in 1930. Brüning became known as the 'Hunger Chancellor' due to his unpopular economic policies. Under his Chancellorship welfare payments were reduced, salaries cut and taxation increased. By February 1932 over six million people were unemployed and both the President and von Schleicher had lost faith in Brüning. He had failed to tackle unemployment and the growing street violence between the Nazis and Communists. Moreover, Hindenburg was frustrated that Brüning had failed to convince other parties such as the DNVP and NSDAP to allow him to extend his presidency. Instead, Hindenburg had to face a second presidential election in 1932 at the age of eighty-five years. Furthermore, Brüning's plans to break up bankrupt Prussian estates and convert them into peasant smallholdings had incurred the wrath of many Junkers who were facing financial ruin.

### **(d) The electoral breakthrough of the Nazis in Presidential and Reichstag elections 1929–1933**

The fortunes of the Nazi Party changed dramatically as a result of Brüning's risky decision to dissolve the Reichstag after deputies rejected part of his finance bill. Under the Weimar Constitution there was no need for a further election until 1932. The September 1930 election proved to be a breakthrough for the Nazis. They increased their share of the vote to 18.3%, winning 107 seats in the Reichstag. The Nazis and the KPD were the main beneficiaries of the government's failure to address the economic crisis. However, the Nazi leadership had learned lessons from the disappointing 1928 election. In his powerful speeches, Hitler focused on winning over the middle class and farmers who had been particularly badly affected. The Nazi messages of strong government and consistent opposition to Communism were attractive especially to the middle class. Goebbels's propaganda machine proved effective. The 'Führer over Germany' strategy during the 1932 presidential campaign was highly innovative. Now Adolf Hitler was developing the profile of a statesman on the national stage. His growing prestige was demonstrated by Hitler winning 37% of the vote in the second round of the presidential election. The July 1932 election was a defining moment for the Nazi Party, winning 230 seats thereby becoming the largest party in the Reichstag. However, the Nazis could not take such support for granted. In the subsequent November 1932 election the Nazis suffered a loss, winning 196 seats. Various reasons for this setback have been suggested including financial difficulties and Nazi in-fighting.



### **(e) The roles of von Schleicher, von Hindenburg and von Papen and 'political intrigue', leading to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor on 30 January 1933**

The use of presidential governments from 1930 onwards promoted the message that the Weimar Republic was ineffective. Key individuals such as von Schleicher, von Papen and Hindenburg further undermined Weimar democracy and enabled the Nazi rise to power. Brüning had been replaced on von Schleicher's recommendation by a political unknown, Franz von Papen and his 'Cabinet of Barons'. This government was noteworthy in that none of the ministers were members of the Reichstag, nor had ties to any political parties. Von Papen intended to continue Brüning's approach of using Article 48. Yet, his position became increasingly untenable. After the success of the July 1932 election, Hitler demanded the Chancellorship and refused to support von Papen as Chancellor. By September the Reichstag had passed a vote of no confidence in von Papen. The November 1932 election did not offer any respite for von Papen. Despite losing 34 seats, the Nazis remained the largest party in the Reichstag. At this point von Schleicher became aware that von Papen was threatening to dissolve the Reichstag, use the army to crush any dissent and move the regime in a more authoritarian direction. Amidst fears of civil war, von Schleicher persuaded the President to sack von Papen. On 2 December 1932 von Schleicher was appointed Chancellor; a furious von Papen plotted revenge for this betrayal.

Von Schleicher's Chancellorship proved to be short-lived. He attempted to widen support for the government by bringing in the more socialist elements of the Nazi Party, such as Gregor Strasser as Vice-Chancellor and developing links with the trade unions. Neither of these attempts succeeded. In fact his overtures to the trade unions only served to alarm key figures in industry. At this point von Papen seized his chance for revenge. He agreed on a government led by Hitler with him as Vice-Chancellor, convinced that a minority of Nazis in the Cabinet could be controlled. Both von Papen and Oscar von Hindenburg managed to persuade the President. The drop in Nazi support in the November 1932 election served to reinforce the elite's belief that Nazi support was on the decline and, as a result, Hitler could be manipulated. Von Schleicher resigned on 28 January 1933 following the President's refusal to grant his request to dissolve the Reichstag. On 30 January 1933 Hindenburg offered the post of Chancellor to Adolf Hitler with a Cabinet totalling three Nazis and nine conservatives, including von Papen as Vice-Chancellor.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

1. Outline the factors involved in the decline of the Weimar Republic by 1933. Which was the most important factor and why?
2. To what extent did the Wall Street Crash contribute to the fall of the Weimar Republic?
3. Was the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazis inevitable?

**Teaching and Learning Activity - Historical interpretations**

Read Interpretation A and Interpretation B and answer the question which follows:

**The reasons for the Nazis' rise to power from 1930 to 30 January 1933****Interpretation A**

Extract from Frank McDonough, *Hitler and the Rise of the Nazi Party*, published in 2003.

It was during the period from 1930 to 1933 that electoral support for the Nazi Party grew remarkably. Once the depression hit Germany, Hitler's careful construction of an efficient party machine, as well as effective propaganda and his own charismatic leadership, started to pay off. The Reichstag election in September 1930 provided Hitler with an ideal opportunity to play on the anxiety of middle-class and rural voters. The Nazi Party increased its number of seats from 12 to 107 to become the second largest political party. In one election, the Nazi Party had advanced from insignificance to national prominence. Hitler was passionately committed to destroying Weimar democracy, and the growth of support for the Nazi Party from 1930 onwards destabilised democracy more than any single factor.

**Interpretation B**

Extract from Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936*, published in 1998.

There was no inevitability about Hitler's rise to power. With Germany turning the corner of the economic depression, and with the Nazi movement facing potential break-up if power were not gained soon, the future might have been very different. Even as the new cabinet argued outside Hindenburg's door on the morning of 30 January 1933, keeping the President waiting, there was a possibility that a Hitler chancellorship might not materialise. Political miscalculation by those with regular access to the corridors of power rather than any actions on the part of the Nazi leader played a larger role in placing him in the chancellor's seat.

**Study Interpretation A and Interpretation B.**

Historians have different views about particular issues. Using both interpretations, and your understanding of the historical context, which of these different interpretations of the reasons for the Nazis' rise to power from 1930 to 30 January 1933 do you find more convincing?

**Web Article**

For a summary on the reasons why the Weimar Republic collapsed see:  
[https://dailyhistory.org/Why\\_did\\_the\\_the\\_Weimar\\_Republic\\_Collapse%3F](https://dailyhistory.org/Why_did_the_the_Weimar_Republic_Collapse%3F)



## 3. Developments in Nazi Germany 1933–1939

### (a) The creation of the Nazi dictatorship 1933–1934: the ‘Legal Revolution’, co-ordination, creation of a one party state and the defeat of the ‘Second Revolution’

Once appointed Chancellor in January 1933, Hitler set about destroying the Weimar Republic from within and creating a Nazi dictatorship. Although the largest party in the Reichstag, the Nazis still did not have an overall majority. Within days Hitler had persuaded Hindenburg of the need to call for further elections. There followed a period of sustained intimidation and propaganda directed against political opponents, starting with the Communists. In Prussia, Göring took over control of the police and directed them towards terrorising Nazi enemies. The Nazis exploited the Reichstag fire on 27 February to encourage the President to pass the Law for the Protection of People and State. As part of the crackdown on political opponents, 4,000 Communists were arrested. The government also suspended civil liberties and restricted freedom of movement and assembly. In such circumstances it is surprising that in the 5 March election the Nazis did not win an overall majority of seats, securing 288 seats and 43.9% of the vote. The KPD managed to win 81 seats in spite of the repression they had endured. The subsequent Enabling Act effectively signalled the end of Weimar democracy. Hitler could now pass laws without consulting the Reichstag or President for a period of four years. Again it is noteworthy that despite the huge SA intimidation at the Kroll Opera House, 94 SPD deputies voted against the Enabling Bill. Hitler secured the support of the DNVP and the Centre Party deputies to push the bill through: the support of the latter group was facilitated by Hitler’s assurances not to interfere in Catholic Church affairs.

The Nazis next proceeded to Nazify the rest of Germany by bringing key interest groups into line. The policy of *Gleichschaltung* was underway by April 1933: by then state police forces and governments had been brought under Nazi control. The historian Bracher refers to the ‘façade of legality’ in connection with the events of 1933. Hitler wanted to ensure his ‘national revolution’ had an air of legality. His actions against the state governments were legalised in a series of laws in late March and early April. Subsequent laws dissolved the trade unions, outlawed the SPD and dismissed Jews from the civil service. By July 1933 Hitler had concluded the Concordat with the Catholic Church and passed the Law against the Formation of New Parties, effectively making Germany a one-party state.

By 1934 Hitler faced three remaining threats to his power: the SA, Army and President Hindenburg. Ernst Röhm had become frustrated at Hitler’s unwillingness to proceed with the ‘second revolution’ as well as the likelihood that the SA would not be rewarded with higher status within the Nazi movement. In reality the SA was becoming an embarrassment to Hitler who was cultivating the air of respectability in his dealings with the elite. The army meanwhile was keen to assert its dominance over the SA. Moreover, General von Blomberg had alerted Hitler to the SA conducting military activities in the demilitarised Rhineland zone. The SS acted decisively on 30 June 1934. It is estimated that around two hundred were killed including old enemies such as von Schleicher and Strasser as well as key SA leaders such as Ernst Röhm. In the aftermath of the Night of the Long Knives both Blomberg and Hindenburg thanked Hitler for the suppression of the perceived SA threat. With the death of Hindenburg on 2 August 1934 Hitler combined the



roles of Chancellor and President, naming himself Führer of Germany. Hitler was now also the Supreme Commander of the German army and the army oath of personal loyalty to Hitler now guaranteed the total allegiance of the army. Within eighteen months Hitler's power was now seemingly complete and any potential challenges to his authority had been removed.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Outline the key factors in the Nazi consolidation of power in the period 1933-1934.
2. Which is the most important factor and why?
3. Why was there so little opposition to Hitler in his first eighteen months in power?
4. To what extent could the Nazi consolidation of power be considered 'a legal revolution'?
5. How far was the Night of the Long Knives crucial for Hitler's survival?
6. How were the Nazis able to establish a dictatorship so rapidly?



**Web Audio**

For an excellent discussion by Professor Ian Kershaw on Hitler's place in History: The Lecture Podcast at:

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/hitlers-place-history-the-lecture-podcast>

**(b) Anti-Semitism, including legal discrimination, emigration, propaganda and indoctrination, and terror and violence, including the Night of Broken Glass, 1938**

Anti-Semitism was one of Hitler's core principles. In *Mein Kampf* he had expounded upon his views that the Jewish people were responsible for Germany's troubles. He argued they were planning to undermine and destroy German values; they had invented Communism to win over the support of the masses. According to Hitler, the German army had not been defeated on the battlefield in 1918, but rather by the Jews. However, on gaining power in January 1933, he had no clear anti-Semitic policy. His two key objectives were securing his hold on power and economic recovery. Hitler recognised that any severe penalties against the Jews might jeopardise these two objectives.

Although NSDAP members were keen to promote anti-Jewish measures, Hitler was keenly aware that he had to be seen as restoring law and order. A nationwide boycott against Jewish businesses was launched on 1 April 1933. It was, however, restricted to one day under pressure from influential conservatives in the government. The success of the boycott was limited: in places there was violence, in others the German public was apathetic and ignored the pickets. Overall, it was evident that the boycott did not win the overwhelming public support the Nazis expected.

Anti-Semitic laws followed in April 1933. The law of 7 April expelled Jews from the legal profession and the civil service; the law of 22 April banned Jewish doctors from working in the state health system; and the number of Jewish students at a school or university was limited to 5% of the total according to a law of 25 April. Such legislation served to marginalise the Jewish community; however, the application of the Hindenburg clause meant that 75% of Jewish doctors and 70% of Jewish lawyers remained in their positions for the time being. Goebbels subsequently commenced his campaign against 'Jewish intellectualism' in the book burnings organised in May 1933.



By 1934 the Jewish population was being subjected to a constant barrage of anti-Semitic propaganda in titles such as *Der Stürmer* as well as the threat of intimidation and terror. However, it was the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 which marked a key turning-point in Nazi policy towards the Jews. Now Jews were categorised as second class citizens: they were denied German citizenship and marriages between Germans and Jews were banned. Jews were further prohibited from employing German female servants under the age of 45 years. It now became essential for the Nazis to define Jewishness: a Jew was classed as someone with three or more Jewish grandparents. The term *Mischlinge* was applied to those with one or two Jewish grandparents. There was simultaneously a drive to define Aryan heritage; for example, those men applying for entry to the SS had to prove Aryan ancestry back to 1650.

Further discrimination followed. Those civil servants who had survived the 1933 purge due to the Hindenburg clause were now dismissed. Jews could no longer be employed in all state services. In the aftermath of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Göring intensified anti-Semitic legislation, this time targeting Jewish property and assets. As Minister for the Four Year Plan he started an initiative of Aryanisation, buying up Jewish firms and confiscating Jewish assets. Despite the widespread intimidation, by April 1938 there were still an estimated 40,000 Jewish businesses in Nazi Germany. Following the *Anschluss*, Göring issued the Decree for the Registration of Jewish Property in April 1938 according to which all Jewish property worth more than RM 5,000 had to be registered and could not be sold or leased without government permission. Further discrimination followed: in June, Jewish doctors were prohibited from treating German patients. This ban was extended subsequently to Jewish lawyers, vets and dentists.

Nazi terror against the Jews reached a climax in Kristallnacht 9-10 November 1938. The murder of a German embassy official in Paris by a Jewish youth unleashed a wave of violence against the Jewish community in Germany. Exploited by Propaganda Minister Goebbels in an attempt to win back favour from Hitler, over 8,000 Jewish businesses, synagogues and homes were destroyed, an estimated 100 Jews were killed and a further 20,000 arrested. The event caused widespread revulsion. It also caused recrimination within the Nazi leadership. Göring, angered by the impact on his Aryanisation policy called a conference to co-ordinate Nazi policy against the Jews on 12 November 1938. He called for a fine of RM 1 billion to be paid by the Jews for the damage sustained during Kristallnacht. A further law banned all Jews from economic activity.

The increasing role of the SS in control of Jewish policy was becoming more evident. At the 12 November conference SS Deputy Heydrich suggested that Jews be forced to wear an identity badge. This came into force in 1941. In the interim, the *Anschluss* with Austria in March 1938 had incorporated a further 200,000 Jews into the Reich. A Central Office for Jewish Emigration was set up in Vienna by the SS Jewish expert Adolf Eichmann. Within six months he had succeeded in forcing out 25% of Austria's Jews. Eichmann pursued a fierce policy of compulsory emigration: Jewish property was either seized or used to finance the emigration. In February 1939 a similar office was established in Berlin and the SS also set up a Reich Association to organise all Jewish organisations and assist in plans for emigration. By 1939 the SS directed Nazi Jewish policy.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Outline the milestones in Nazi anti-Semitic policy in the period 1933-1939.
2. In what ways did individual Nazi leaders shape anti-Semitic policy in the 1930s?



### **(c) The economic recovery of 1933–1936, including the role of Schacht, and the main aims and impact of the ‘New Plan’**

When Hitler became Chancellor the German economy was starting to show limited signs of recovery. However, the number of unemployed was probably closer to 8 million people rather than the official records of six million. The Nazis had no clear economic strategy; Hitler’s first priority was to tackle the issues arising from the Depression. In March 1933 Dr Hjalmar Schacht was appointed as President of the Reichsbank. Schacht’s appointment reassured the business community and he immediately set about dealing with unemployment. To this end, Schacht endorsed deficit financing; by the end of 1933 RM 3,000 million had been poured into public work schemes including the construction of housing, railways and the network of motorways. This would benefit the German economy in the longer term by ensuring people had money to spend on goods and services. By 1935 unemployment had fallen to just over 2 million. In 1935 the National Labour Service (RAD) was established; it was compulsory for men between 19-25 years to work on projects for six months. This coincided with the introduction of conscription in the same year.

Undoubtedly, Hitler’s consistent aim remained the preparation of Germany for war. In February 1933 Hitler told his cabinet ‘for the next four to five years the main principle must be: everything for the armed forces.’ Rearmament was enabled by Schacht’s clever accounting mechanism of Mefo bills, credit notes provided to armaments manufacturers instead of payment. Half of Nazi Germany’s rearmament programme was financed in this way between 1934 and 1936.

However, by mid-1934 the Nazi economy was facing a balance of payments crisis which threatened to destabilise the recovery and rearmament. Schacht, now appointed Economics Minister, was given wide-ranging powers to deal with the deficit. In the subsequent New Plan of 1934 Schacht imposed tight government controls over imports. In the interests of rearmament, priority was given to the import of raw materials; non-essential items could only be imported in much smaller quantities. This pitted the consumer industries and armaments businesses against each other. Germany’s import bill was increasing steadily as rearmament intensified. By the winter of 1935 a further crisis was developing. German farmers were not producing sufficient agricultural produce and as a consequence, Walther Darré asked Schacht for permission to import items from abroad. Schacht refused Darré’s request. However, in the aftermath of Göring’s arbitration in Darré’s favour, Schacht recognised that the New Plan would not produce a lasting solution. It was only disguising more fundamental problems. Schacht was keen to see exports increase at the expense of weapons manufacture, whilst imports of food rations decreased through rationing. It was simply not possible to reconcile the competing Nazi demands of “Guns and Butter”.

### **(d) The introduction, aims and impact of the Four Year Plan, including the role of Göring 1936–1939**

A more radical phase in economic policy followed. Hitler’s memorandum of August 1936 outlined his vision of a German economy ready for war within four years. To this end Göring, who had no economic expertise, was made responsible for the Four Year Plan. The economy would therefore be based around the needs of war; only by doing this would Nazi Germany avoid the mistakes of the First World War when the German economy had proven unable to sustain a lengthy war. Meantime, Schacht remained as Minister for Economics, though his position became isolated. In November 1937 Schacht resigned to be replaced by the less competent Walther Funk.



The Four Year Plan organisation was a vast bureaucratic apparatus characterised by inefficiency and internal rivalries. Its main aims included autarky in raw materials especially metals, oil and rubber; an increase in agricultural production; regulation of imports and exports; and retraining of some sectors of the workforce. Through the auspices of the Four Year Plan, Göring also set about developing his own private wealth and influence. He had almost total control over the allocation of investment, raw materials and labour. Those businesses which co-operated with the Plan benefitted from significant government investment and contracts. Göring himself established the *Reichswerke Hermann Göring* which became the largest industrial enterprise in Europe by 1939.

Undoubtedly the Four Year Plan did achieve some success. For example, output in most key areas was increased; however, planned targets were not achieved. Göring's objective of autarky was similarly not realised. By 1939 Germany still relied on foreign imports for one third of its raw materials. Yet, it is clear that the economy was being geared towards the needs of war. Between 1936 and 1939, two-thirds of investment was poured into war industries. By 1939, 40-50% of the workforce was employed in rearmament activities.

Debate remains over the aims of the Nazi economy by 1939. It is clear that the economy was not fully mobilised. Several historians argue that Hitler had planned a series of short wars of plunder deliberately; this would allow living standards in the Third Reich to remain largely unaffected. After all, Hitler had been concerned that any fall in living standards in the 1930s would adversely affect morale. For this reason, Hitler had insisted that consumer production remained at a consistent level.

Other historians contend that Hitler had more ambitious plans. Overy suggests 'Total war, not blitzkrieg, was the end product of German preparations.' The Nazi economy was caught between preparing for an immediate war and developing the infrastructure for a larger scale and longer conflict. Hitler's misreading of Britain and France in 1939 plunged Nazi Germany into a war much sooner than he expected according to Overy.

Mason puts forward a further interpretation of the link between the Nazi economy and the timing of World War Two. He emphasises the effect of economic crisis and domestic unrest in driving Hitler into a war of plunder. Certainly Hitler was sensitive to public opinion and there were significant shortages in skilled labour, however, there is little evidence to suggest that serious domestic dissent was likely.

#### Questions for discussion:

1. Why did Hitler place Göring in charge of the Four Year Plan?
2. In what ways was the Nazi economy a success or failure in the years 1933 to 1939?
3. Was the Nazi economy in crisis by 1939?
4. What evidence is there that Hitler was planning for war in 1939?



#### Teaching and Learning Activity - Historical interpretations

For source materials see page 46 of the EEP document at:

<http://ccea.org.uk/history/>



### **(e) Culture in the Third Reich as a means of control, such as the use of the arts, including music, literature and visual arts, and the media, including radio, the press and cinema**

Goebbels reflected in 1934 'Propaganda was our sharpest weapon in conquering the state, and remains our sharpest weapon in maintaining and building up the state.' Hitler and Goebbels both acknowledged the importance of propaganda in bringing the German people into line with Nazi ideas and values. Control of the arts and media was a key instrument in suppressing opposition and in directing public opinion. To this end, a Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda was established in March 1933. Subsequently, a Reich Culture Chamber was set up in September 1933. It consisted of seven sub-chambers: Reich Press Chamber; Reich Radio Chamber; Reich Chamber of Film; Reich Chamber of Music; Reich Chamber of Literature; Reich Theatre Chamber; and Reich Chamber of Fine Arts. It exercised control of artistic life; membership was compulsory for those involved in culture. Those who were seen as extolling non-Nazi views were banned, some fled abroad and others stayed quiet.

#### **i. Use of the arts, including music, literature and the visual arts**

The Nazis had consistently criticised the culture of the Weimar Republic, arguing that it had subverted traditional Aryan values. Production of music was controlled by the Reich Chamber of Music. Germanic folk songs, marching music and classical pieces by the likes of Bach, Beethoven and Hitler's favourite, Wagner were promoted. Any music regarded as subject to Jewish influences such as Mendelssohn was removed, as was Jazz, which was deemed unsuitable due to its racial origins.

The destruction of 'degenerate literature' was organised by Goebbels to 'cleanse' German literature. Book-burnings took place at several universities, including Berlin on 10 May 1933 when 20,000 works of literature were destroyed. Book shops and libraries were ransacked to remove any literature deemed as un-German or Jewish. Goebbels favoured literature promoting 'blood and soil' tales or those reflecting heroic stories of comradeship on the battlefield. It was expected that German writers espouse Nazi values in their writings: those who refused faced imprisonment or went into exile. The latter group included Erich Maria Remarque and Thomas Mann. Other writers chose to remain silent.

Given his earlier forays in the arts, Hitler was particularly interested in art and architecture. He had a profound distaste for the visual art produced during the Weimar Republic, deeming it unpatriotic. The House of German Art was set up in 1937 which held an exhibition in Munich of Great German Art including scenes of rural life, valour on the battlefield and the Aryan master race. Alongside this there was a separate exhibition of 'degenerate art' with exhibits by the likes of Picasso, Gauguin and Beckmann. Remarkably more people visited this latter exhibition. Much of this 'unsuitable' artwork was subsequently looted by Nazi leaders, sold or destroyed.

Hitler was convinced in the power of architecture in propaganda. Indeed he referred to it as 'the word in stone'. The creation of the Thousand Year Reich with impressive public buildings to match remained a major preoccupation of Hitler even in the final days of the war. Intricate plans for the new world capital of Germania which would supersede Berlin were completed by the Führer alongside his architect and confidante Albert Speer. Further plans for the remodelling of thirty other German cities were also drawn up. At Nuremberg a vast complex was constructed to house the annual rallies hosting approximately 500,000 visitors. Most designs favoured a neo-classical, monumental style, although



Hitler was also known to favour the traditional Germanic architecture for homes. A law of 1934 ordered that all new public buildings must display sculptures typifying Nazi ideals. Favoured sculptors such as Arno Breker and Josef Thorak were provided with studios to mass produce sculptures of healthy, virile young Aryans and powerful animals, such as eagles to project a message of superiority, purity and power.

## ii. Use of the media, including radio, the press and cinema

The Reich Radio Company took over German radio, much of which had previously been under local control. This was crucial for Goebbels and Hitler who both believed that the spoken word was more influential than the written word. The production of the 'People's Receiver' enabled Nazi propaganda to reach a much wider audience. This radio set only had one station but by 1939 70% of homes owned a radio. Loudspeakers were also constructed to relay various items including Hitler's speeches, German history content and 'appropriate' German music. In fact, work was suspended on occasions of Hitler's key speeches so that the public could listen in on loudspeakers: attendance at such events was monitored. It has been estimated that some of Hitler's speeches in 1935 reached an audience of 56 million people.

In 1933 there were over 4,700 local daily newspapers in Germany. The Reich Culture Chamber subsequently set about controlling the flow of information to the public: editors, publishers and reporters had to join the Reich Chamber of Press; the content of newspapers was controlled by the Press Agency; the distribution of rumours or false reports was regarded as treasonable; editors were held accountable for the content of their newspapers; and anti-Nazi newspapers were closed down. The Nazi newspaper the *Völkischer Beobachter* had an important role in the campaign against German Jews in the 1930s. By 1939 the Nazi propaganda ministry controlled the news agencies and Eher-Verlag (the Nazi publishing house) had taken over two-thirds of Germany's newspapers. By 1944 there were only 1,000 daily newspapers in Germany.

Film-making had flourished under the Weimar Republic. Goebbels recognised its popularity and importance as a propaganda tool; however, he was also concerned that any overtly political messages might put off German audiences. The Reich Film Chamber controlled the content of home grown and foreign films. Over one thousand films were produced during the Third Reich: most were adventures, comedies or romances. Only around 1/6 of films were explicitly political in nature. Some famous Nazi propaganda films include works by Leni Riefenstahl: 'Triumph of the Will' documenting the 1934 Nuremberg rally and 'Olympia', which focused on the 1936 Berlin Olympics. There were distinct differences of opinion between Hitler and Goebbels on the role of cinema in disseminating anti-Jewish propaganda, best exemplified by the notorious *Der Ewige Jude* and the subsequent *Jud Süß*. The latter film produced by Goebbels was much more effective in entertaining German audiences whilst at the same time conveying an anti-Semitic message.

### Questions for discussion:

1. Outline the successes and failures of Nazi control of the arts and media
2. How effective was Goebbels as Minister for Propaganda?
3. Did the Nazis succeed in winning the hearts and minds of the German people?



**Teaching and Learning Activity - Short response question**

Analyse Nazi control of the arts and the media 1933-1939.



**Teaching and Learning Activity - Short response question**

Analyse Nazi control of the arts and the media 1933-1939.



## 4. The impact of the war on Nazi Germany and the occupied territories in Eastern Europe 1939–1945

### (a) The war economy, including the roles of Speer and Todt, and the start of ‘Total War’

Hitler was determined to avoid the problems faced by Germany in the First World War and to fight the war with an economy that was well-prepared for a major and perhaps extended conflict. To this end a series of war decrees was issued by Hitler in December 1939 outlining vast programmes for every possible aspect of war production, for example submarines and aircraft. These plans suggest that the Nazis went well beyond the demands of Blitzkrieg and a limited war. In real terms, German military expenditure doubled between 1939 and 1941. At the outbreak of war responsibility for economic planning was shared by rival organisations: the Office of the Four Year Plan remained under the control of Göring, the Ministry of Economics led by Walther Funk as well as General Thomas who led the economics section of the armaments programme at the Ministry of War. Following the invasion of Poland in 1939, he was appointed Reich Minister for Munitions and oversaw the work of *Organisation Todt* in the occupied west. The *Todt Organisation* was a Third Reich civil and military engineering group named after its founder, Fritz Todt. The organisation was responsible for a huge range of engineering projects both in pre-World War Two Germany, in Germany itself and the occupied territories from France to the Soviet Union during the war. It became notorious for using forced labour. Most of the so-called “volunteer” Soviet POW workers were assigned to the *Organisation Todt*.

The projects of the *Todt Organisation* became almost exclusively military such as creating the Siegfried Line and the Atlantic Wall. The huge increase in the demand for labour created by the various military projects was met by a series of expansions of the laws on compulsory service, which ultimately obligated all Germans to unlimited compulsory labour for the state. From 1938–1940, over 1.75 million Germans were conscripted into labour service. From 1940–1942, *Organisation Todt* became reliant on foreign workers in the occupied territories and POW workers. Approximately 1.4 million labourers were in the service of the Organisation. Overall, 1% were Germans rejected from military service and 1.5% were concentration camp prisoners; the rest were prisoners of war and compulsory labourers from occupied countries. All were effectively treated as slaves and were forced to work for a ruthless totalitarian state. Survival rates were low.

In 1941 Todt was given responsibility for restoring the road and rail system in the Soviet Union. Todt’s growing importance in the party hierarchy brought him into conflict with Hermann Göring and Martin Bormann. Todt also helped to establish the *Nationalsozialistischer Bund Deutscher Technik* that helped to organise engineers and managers in the German construction industry. He also built the great defensive systems, the Atlantic Wall and a chain of concrete U - boat shelters along the French Atlantic coast. Entrusted within the Party organisation with the Head Office for Technology, all the major technical tasks of the Third Reich concerning Germany’s war effort were in his hands. In all these massive communications works, SS General Todt had at his disposal a vast army of slave labour as well as several divisions of troops.



Todt frequently clashed with Göring, but he enjoyed the high respect of Hitler who made him Inspector-General of roads, water and power in 1941. After an inspection tour of the Eastern Front, he complained to Hitler that without better equipment and supplies it would be better to end the war with the USSR. In reward for building the motorways and the Western Wall, he was the first German to receive the “German Order” created by Hitler for individuals who had rendered “special services to the German people.”

Todt set about rationalising armaments production in response to the Führer Order in December 1941. Following his death in February 1942 Albert Speer was appointed as his successor. This signified the shift to a campaign of total war. Speer developed Todt’s plans for greater efficiency in raw material distribution and further rationalisation of industry. The formal move towards total war was launched by Goebbels in a speech at the Berlin Sportsplatz in February 1943 where he called for the closure of non-essential business and universal labour service. Speer was promoted to the post of Reich Minister for Armaments and Production in September 1943, giving him control over all industrial output and raw materials.

The results were impressive as in Speer’s first six months in power the results can be seen in the increase in output:

- Ammunition production increased by 97%
- Tank production rose by 25%
- Total arms production increased by 59%

His main sweeping changes included:

- the introduction of modern methods of mass production
- non-essential businesses were closed
- working patterns changed by increasing the use of 3 shifts a day; extending the use of concentration camp labour and changing the Nazi position on women in the workforce
- a Central Planning Board was introduced which had a number of committees, each representing a vital sector of the economy with experts drawn from business and industry and the interference of the armed services personnel was ended
- the economy was dramatically expanded by 1944 and as a result:
  - weapons production trebled
  - ammunition increased sixfold
  - the time taken to produce Panzer tanks was halved
  - controls over Industry were relaxed



### Web Article

For an interesting perspective on the impact of Speer read Albert Speer was the man to see.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1971/01/10/archives/albert-speer-was-the-man-to-see-speer.html>

## **(b) The consequences of the war for the German people, including rationing, indoctrination, propaganda and morale**

An adequate food supply was the critical factor in maintaining morale on the Home Front. This was a valuable lesson the Nazis had learned from World War One. Ration cards had been printed in 1937 and were ready for use. In October 1939 clothing and shoes were rationed as was meat. Germany depended on the imports of meat and dairy products as well as fodder. Therefore, the Nazis stressed changes to people’s dietary habits. By 1941 the meat ration was reduced to 400g per week. People were encouraged to eat offal and to



try exotic foods from conquered territories, such as aubergines. An increasing number of people started to keep rabbits for consumption.

By 1940 there was a noticeable shortage of food. Complaints about lack of fuel and shoes were becoming a major political problem. The black market flourished despite harsh penalties. Anyone found guilty of stealing poultry was sentenced to death. As a result of rationing, food consumption fell by 25% between 1939 and 1941. Cigarettes and soap were also rationed by 1941. Tobacco was increasingly difficult to find and, by the end of the war, was used as a substitute for money to buy other items.

Newspapers emphasised the need for austerity in the home. By 1942 the parks and gardens in major German cities were turned into vegetable allotments. In 1943 Berlin Zoo was destroyed in a bombing raid; as a result, Berliners consumed some of the wildlife. By 1945 rationing was in chaos. Ration cards were no longer honoured. People relied on the black market increasingly for goods. However, widespread starvation and malnutrition did not occur until after the war was over.

### **(c) Indoctrination, Propaganda and Morale**

The onset of the war underlined the totalitarian nature of the regime. The Nazis remained very aware of public opinion. When World War Two began, the key aims of the Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment were to maintain public morale and to increase support for the war effort, thus continuing the effective indoctrination of the German population. They were encouraged to save fuel, work harder and do anything they could to support the war effort. Goebbels and his Ministry were initially very successful with their mission, focusing intensely negative propaganda against the Allies and promising victory to the German people. The early Nazi military victories were very easy to exploit as propaganda for the war. Nazi propaganda also played on the German fear of Communism. The German military defeated every major power it faced between 1939 and 1940, and even though Great Britain and the USSR maintained their resistance through 1941 and 1942, Germany was seen as still having the upper hand.

Goebbels became primarily responsible for keeping up morale during World War Two; Hitler was becoming increasingly remote and aloof. Goebbels organised the “Winter Aid” for German soldiers in 1941. This provided 1.5 million furs and 67 million garments donated by the public for the soldiers in the campaign in the East. Allied bombing intensified by 1942 by which time the Nazis were encountering challenges in the war against the USSR.

Goebbels organised additional rations for German civilians during Christmas 1942. He was widely respected both for his Total War speeches in 1943 and his visits to bombed areas in the same year. In his role as Propaganda Minister, he created more feel good movies in 1943. There were also plans to produce the film *Kolberg*, based on German resistance against the French in 1806. It was intended to galvanise the German people in the latter stages of the Second World War.

However, the Nazi’s could not completely control what the German people heard. Though discouraged from doing so under the threat of arrest and execution, the German people listened to the BBC and some noted that eyewitnesses of the Battle of Britain were often agreeing with the BBC information rather than the data issued by the Nazi Party. It was obvious that information being given to the German people by the Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment was not entirely accurate, and there were gaps in reports.



However, these issues were minor in comparison to the impact of the defeat at Stalingrad. Up to this point in the campaign against the USSR, Nazi propaganda had done its job fairly well; soldiers believed in its message and the public still trusted Hitler and the rest of the Nazi Party. By ignoring the dangerous turn of the battle at Stalingrad, Goebbels' Ministry undermined itself. The defeats on the Eastern Front, later in North Africa and then the opening of a second front in 1944, all damaged civilian and soldier morale. Glaring inconsistencies in media reporting continued throughout the war, though nothing damaged the reputation of the propaganda Ministry as much as the fall of Stalingrad and the terrible defeat for the *Wehrmacht* in February 1943. German propaganda had presented the campaign as though the Germans were winning, even as the German 6th Army was surrounded and slowly being destroyed. Not until a week before the actual surrender did Nazi propaganda change its tone, and when the fall of the city was reported by the Ministry of Propaganda, the German people were in a state of shock. The German surrender at Stalingrad was a strategic disaster and a damaging blow to the confidence of the German people. Stalingrad was as much a defeat for Goebbels's reputation and morale as it was a military defeat for the *Wehrmacht*. The Ministry had suffered a massive loss of credibility that it now had to try to recover from.

By 1944, the guarantees of victory gave way to messages that promoted the idea that should Germany surrender or be defeated, it would be destroyed. The reports of the horrors on the Eastern Front and the devastation caused by Western Allied bombers corroborated that message and were among the reasons why the Germans continued fighting. Before, propaganda had guaranteed victory and proclaimed German superiority whereas now the public learned that Germany was vulnerable, but could still achieve great victory if its people did not give up on the Home Front. The battle would be grim and difficult but determination was vital. Further defeats in 1943 and 1944 and the failure of the Ministry to keep the German people reliably informed had a serious impact on civilian morale.

There was widespread support for Bormann who resisted Speer's attempts to cut back on consumer industries. Bormann was concerned with the alarming drop in the popularity of the NSDAP; he was focused on the need to have more supplies for the homeless. On 25 September 1944 the *Volkssturm* was set up (Home Guard): it was accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign reinforcing the need for a people's army. The force was poorly equipped, badly trained and lacked willing recruits.

Goebbels and the Ministry did the best they could, and much of the propaganda being created was ingeniously crafted to stir the emotions of the German people. Nonetheless, Nazi war propaganda never truly regained the confidence of the German people that it had enjoyed prior to World War Two. As the Allies closed in around Germany, many people simply lost faith in some of the leading personnel, especially Goebbels. However, although many of the German people came to distrust some figures, few seemed to lose their faith in Hitler. The Ministry had deified Hitler during his rise to power through film, radio, and printed propaganda. He had been portrayed as superhuman, and many Germans believed that with Hitler they could get through any situation. In their eyes, he was a miracle worker.

#### **(d) The impact of allied bombing, the mobilisation of the labour force, the use of foreign labour and prisoners of war**

For most civilians the biggest worry was the bombing raids. In September 1940 the RAF bombed Berlin for the first time. A sustained bombing campaign began in 1942. On 30



May of that year the RAF dropped 1,000 lb bombs on Cologne with the result that 45,000 homes were destroyed and approximately 500 people killed. Industrial production was back to normal within a fortnight.

News of the Hamburg raid 24 July-2 August 1943 had a particularly devastating effect on morale. 40,000-50,000 people died and a further 40,000 were injured. 61% of homes were destroyed. But only 10% of the city's industrial capacity was affected. Use of incendiary bombs caused further destruction and injuries. By 1944 there were fears that gas could be used in the raids too. By early 1945 the most extreme bombing took place. The last major raid was on Dresden on 13-14 February 1945. The city had virtually no military or industrial significance and therefore was lightly defended. The total number of dead will never be known; however, the local Police chief reported 25,000 dead and 35,000 missing.

Much had been prepared for civil defence before 1939. The Reich Association for Air-raid precautions was formed in 1933 and organised a network of air-raid wardens. Shelters were built, a network of alarms installed and emergency services organised. Women with particularly strong nerves (known as bunker mothers) were in charge of keeping order and preventing panic in the bunkers during the raids. Some people, however, preferred to take their chances in the open air than possibly being suffocated or incinerated in a bombed bunker. Workers in strategically important factories were only allowed to take cover at the very last minute. This inevitably caused considerable stress. Life continued in the bombed cities. People lived amongst the rubble. Many did not want to evacuate to the countryside. By 1943 about 4.5 million people were homeless. Goebbels was the only one in the Nazi leadership to visit the devastated cities. According to the Decree on the Enemies of the People, thefts/looting in the aftermath of an air raid were punishable by death.

Labour shortages had become apparent in the early stages of the war. By May 1940 there were 3.5 million less workers in the workforce than in the previous year. The use of 800,000 French prisoners of war and other nationals ensured that by the end of 1940 approximately two million foreign workers were in Germany. The German economy increasingly relied on foreign workers who represented 21 per cent of Germany's workforce. Despite the Nazi racial contempt for foreign workers, with the turning point of 1942 and the push for mobilisation, they became key to the German war effort. There was a hierarchy of nationality and race, ranging from France and Belgium at the top to the slave labourers from the Slavic countries. Racially, the Jews were the most exploited and seen as generally expendable. However, this was still not sufficient to meet the increasing demands of war and therefore Fritz Sauckel, the General Plenipotentiary for Labour Deployment issued a compulsory labour decree for all occupied territories in August 1941. The following month the Vichy government issued compulsory labour for all men and women aged 18-65 years. By the end of 1942 there were 6.4 million foreign workers in Germany. For many Nazis this reliance upon foreign labour would have been unpalatable and was regarded as a last resort. Of the eight million foreign workers present in Germany in 1944, the majority were from the USSR, Poland and France. Prisoners of war comprised approximately two million.

Any ideological objections to the use of Slav prisoners of war particularly had to be set aside due to the chronic labour shortages faced by the Third Reich. At first prisoners of war were set to work in farms but increasingly they were employed in the munitions industry. Conditions endured by the prisoners of war were notorious; indeed it was known that soviet soldiers used any means necessary to evade capture. Death rates in this particular group were appalling: just over three million soviets died out of a total of



5.7 million taken prisoner. Moreover, in contrast to other races, the Soviet prisoners of war were kept isolated. As the Second World War progressed and the Nazis encountered difficulties in their campaign in the East, productivity amongst foreign labourers (civilian and prisoner of war) started to wane. There remained a fundamental tension within the Nazi hierarchy. Sauckel recognised that foreign workers would only be productive if they were looked after, whereas some Nazi Gauleiter insisted that eastern European foreign labourers especially were expendable. Incentives for the civilian foreign workers were introduced including higher wages and more rations. However, this was not applied to the prisoners of war. Instead the prisoners of war were subjected to yet more brutal discipline. The latter responded with further acts of non-compliance and sabotage. It was only in 1944 that Sauckel ensured that prisoners of war and Soviet workers were provided with the same rations as German workers. Yet, this was not always put into practice. Indeed, as the war drew to a close, both foreign workers and prisoners of war encountered even more desperate conditions in the aftermath of allied bombing raids. With their appalling treatment and poor diet, it was not very surprising that foreign workers were not very productive. As a result of poor treatment, the recruitment of millions of forced labourers failed to solve Germany's economic problems.

The shortfall in labourers necessitated a change in Nazi policies regarding women. In January 1943 women aged 17-45 years were ordered to sign up for work. By 1944 women made up 41.5% of the total labour force. The Nazi leadership still preferred the use of foreign labour; however, the changing fortunes of the German forces in the East, including the surrender at Stalingrad in early 1943, necessitated a change in approach.

**Question for discussion:**

What was the most significant effect of the war on the German people and why?



**Teaching and Learning Activity** - Short response question

Analyse the impact of war on the German people in the period 1939-1945.

**(e) The extent of German opposition and resistance to the Nazis in wartime, including youth and student protest, the Christian Churches, the conservatives and the military:**

**(i) Youth and Student protest**

The Edelweiss Pirates was the collective name given to the various working class groups of youngsters who formed gangs such as the Roving Dudes and Navajos. They had been alienated by the military emphasis and discipline of the Hitler Youth. Membership has been estimated at 2,000 by 1939. Some groups were highly politicised and these groups were linked to the KPD. The Gestapo had 3,000 names of suspected members on their files by 1942. Some Pirates were also involved in some active resistance during World War Two; in Cologne in 1944 twelve Pirates were hanged for the assassination of a Gestapo officer and attacks on military targets.

The Swing Youth was one craze in which mainly middle class youngsters took up the music and imagery associated with the dance bands of Britain and America. They played American black and Jewish jazz and swing music, not the officially sanctioned German folk music. They rejected Hitler Youth ideas but were generally apolitical. Martin Kitchen states that they were not a serious threat to the regime. He suggests that *“they did*



*nothing more than shock and annoy.*” However, many of them were sent to concentration camps for undermining Nazi values.

The White Rose Movement is probably the most famous of the university protest groups. It is believed that the group was formed in Munich after the event called “August von Galen” in July 1941 when Archbishop von Galen spoke out in a sermon against the Nazi practice of euthanasia. This was the first of three such sermons in July-August 1941. The White Rose was led by siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl as well as Christopher Probst. A series of leaflets was printed in 1942-1943 and distributed initially amongst the students of Munich University and then gradually many towns in central Germany. The content of the leaflets was highly political and openly condemned the spiritual and moral values of the Nazi regime. One topic was *“Is not every decent German today ashamed of his Government?”* It called upon Germans to *“disassociate yourself from the depravity of National Socialism.”* In February 1943 six White Rose leaders including the Scholls and Probst were arrested, tortured and executed.

### **(ii) The Christian Churches**

Historians have commented that the Christian Churches did little to protest against Nazi racial policies. They concentrated on protecting their own positions; church leaders may have been fearful of bringing more persecution on their own people if they protested on behalf of the Jews. Pope Pius XII was denounced after World War Two for not doing enough to challenge the Nazi Regime. Yet, recent research has shown that the Pope organised false passports for Jews and that he sheltered Jews in the Vatican. There was more criticism of and opposition to the Nazi regime from individual Christians than from the Churches as institutions. In 1941 the so-called ‘Lion of Münster’ Catholic Bishop August von Galen denounced euthanasia. This protest was so widely supported that Goebbels advised against his arrest. Hitler also ordered the euthanasia programme to be suspended. Von Galen was ultimately arrested after the 1944 Bomb Plot but was released in 1945. The Confessional Church led by Martin Niemöller followed the Catholic Church and also denounced euthanasia. Niemöller was arrested in 1937 and imprisoned until his release from Dachau in 1945. Dietrich Bonhöffer was another leading figure within the Confessional Church. He taught trainee pastors and encouraged them to resist Nazism. He worked with the resistance and was arrested in April 1943 after being identified by an Abwehr agent. Bonhöffer was executed in Flossenbürg concentration camp in April 1945. In all, hundreds of pastors and priests were arrested and killed by the Nazis for selfless acts of resistance.

### **(iii) The Conservatives**

The Kreisau Circle was made up primarily of conservatives from the traditional aristocracy and gentry, but it did include people from a wide variety of backgrounds. They met on Count Moltke’s estate in Kreisau. The group was united in its hatred of Nazi ideology and its desire to establish a new Germany following Hitler’s demise. In particular, the main focus was to plan a peacetime government for Germany; in August 1943 they drew up the Basic Principles for a New Order, a plan for a new Germany based upon an open society and justice for all. They do not ever appear to have made any plans as to how to overthrow the Nazi state. As Count Moltke wrote to his wife just before his execution *“we are to be hanged for thinking together.”* However, some of the Kreisau Circle did participate in the July 1944 Bomb Plot.



#### (iv) The Military

By mid-1943 the tide of World War Two was turning decisively against Germany. Opponents within the army and their civilian comrades became convinced that Hitler must be assassinated so that a government acceptable to the western allies could be formed and a separate peace negotiated in time to prevent a Soviet invasion of Germany. They were joined by Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg. Since the beginning of 1942 he shared the widespread conviction among Army officers that Germany was being led to disaster and that Hitler must be removed from power. For some time, his religious conviction had prevented him from coming to the conclusion that assassination was the correct way to achieve this. However, after the Battle of Stalingrad in December 1942, von Stauffenberg came to the conclusion that not assassinating Hitler would be a greater moral evil. In July 1944 he twice took bombs into Hitler's headquarters but did not use them as Himmler and Göring were not present. On 20 July 1944 he went ahead anyway but Hitler was only wounded. It is estimated that around 4,980 Germans were executed after the 1944 July Plot. The leaders' executions were filmed and later shown to senior members of both the NSDAP and the armed forces. There was also opposition activity in the military intelligence organisation, the *Abwehr*. Its leader, Admiral Canaris tolerated resistance and assisted Jews to escape during World War Two. In the aftermath of the 1944 Bomb Plot, the *Abwehr* was absorbed into the SS.

#### Questions for discussion:

1. What types of resistance are possible in a police state?
2. Which resistance group posed the greatest threat to the Nazis and why?



#### Web Video

For a highly insightful discussion of Sophie Scholl's bravery and sacrifice, watch Frank McDonough's Inaugural Lecture, LJM University – *Sophie Scholl: A woman for all seasons*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBeHdtqQHQA>



#### Web Audio

For a good insight into Sophie Scholl listen to Sophie Scholl, resistance fighter – Frank McDonough on Dan Snow's History Hit podcast at:

<https://podtail.com/en/podcast/dan-snow-s-history-hit/>



#### Teaching and Learning Activity - Short response question

Analyse the nature and extent of resistance to the Nazis in the period 1939-1945.

**Teaching and Learning Activity - Source evaluation and analysis**

Read the source and answer the question which follows:

**Source 1**

Extract from a sermon preached by Clemens von Galen, the Catholic Bishop of Münster 3 August 1941. He is condemning Hitler's euthanasia programme which began in October 1939. Thousands of copies of Galen's sermon were circulated in Germany.

Lately we have been hearing reports that, on the order of the Nazi authorities in Berlin, some patients from mental asylums in the diocese of Münster are being compulsorily removed. There is a general suspicion that the unexpected deaths of these mentally ill people do not occur naturally after their removal but are deliberately brought about. Such action is contrary to the moral laws of God. Fellow Christians, I request you to provide immediate protection for our national comrades threatened in this way by taking action against those agencies which are intending their removal and murder. Woe to our German nation, if God's Holy Commandment "Thou shall not kill", which God our Creator inscribed in the conscience of mankind, is not only broken, but permitted to go unpunished.

**Study Source 1.**

How useful is it as evidence for a historian studying opposition and resistance to the Nazis from the Christian Churches in Germany in the period 1939-1945? You must use contextual knowledge in your answer.

**(f) The policies towards the Jews during the war, including Polish Jews and the ghettos, the consequences of Operation Barbarossa for Jews in the Soviet Union, the Wannsee Conference and genocide**

By 1939 the SS was firmly in control of Nazi Jewish policy. In his notorious speech to the Reichstag in January 1939 Hitler warned that any future war would lead to 'the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe'. From the outbreak of war Jews were subjected to increasing restrictions. Radio sets were removed from German Jews in September 1939, a curfew was imposed and Jews were denied rations for clothing, footwear and certain foodstuffs. In September 1941 Jews in the Third Reich were ordered to wear the Star of David symbol. Failure to comply would result in deportation to a concentration camp. From October 1941 onwards the Jewish population of Germany began to be deported east. This decision satisfied Goebbels who had long campaigned for more severe policies to be directed against the Berlin Jews, in particular. By May 1945 there were only an estimated 15,000 Jews living in Greater Germany, in contrast to 318,000 Jews when the deportations east began in earnest.

The outbreak of war in 1939 and German expansion into Eastern Europe brought millions more Jews under Nazi control. Mass emigration was no longer regarded as a viable option. Shortly after the invasion of Poland, Himmler in his role as Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Race ordered the deportation of Jews from North West Poland to Nazi occupied Poland under the General Government controlled by Hans Frank. German Jews similarly began to be transported east by *SS Einsatzgruppen* under orders from Heydrich; these Jews were to be housed in ghettos prior to their movement



elsewhere. Jews were also dispatched eastward from Austria and Czechoslovakia. In the occupied territories Jews began to be concentrated in ghettos; by January 1940 Jews were sent to the ghettos of Warsaw, Lvov and Lodz and used as slave labour. Hitler's announcement that the German Reich was to be free of Jews by the end of 1941 put even greater pressure on the Polish ghettos. The Nazis established over three hundred ghettos in Poland, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Hungary during the Second World War. Ghettos were filthy, with poor sanitation and extreme overcrowding. Disease was rampant and food was in such short supply that many slowly starved to death. Warsaw, the largest ghetto, held 500,000 people and was 3.5 square miles in size.

As Nazi troops swept across Poland, *SS Einsatzgruppen* were authorised to exterminate Jews. Mobile gas chambers were constructed at a camp at Chelmno in 1941. Approximately 150,000 Jews were killed at this facility. In spring 1941 Hitler informed commanders of the Soviet invasion force that it was his intention to destroy political opponents and members of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia' in the campaign in the East. Subsequently in June 1941 Heydrich signalled to the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders that the mass killings of Soviet Jews was the prelude to the destruction of European Jewry as a whole. It is estimated that within eight months of Operation Barbarossa, 700,000 Jews had been murdered. One of the most notorious massacres committed by *Einsatzgruppen* occurred at Babi Yar in September 1941. Over the course of one week 34,000 Jews were murdered at this location outside Kiev in the Ukraine.

On 31 July 1941 Göring ordered Heydrich to prepare for 'the sought-for final solution of the Jewish question'. At the invitation of Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Security Police and SD, a conference between representatives of the SS, the Nazi Party and various Reich ministries took place at Wannsee, a Berlin suburb, in January 1942. In the meeting lasting approximately ninety minutes, fifteen leading Nazis agreed upon plans for the extermination of Europe's eleven million Jews. The subject of the conference was the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question'. Heydrich aimed to reinforce his leadership role in the deportation of European Jews and also to involve important departments and party offices in the plans for the murder of the Jews. Adolf Eichmann, Head of the Gestapo's 'Jewish Section' summed up the results of the Wannsee discussions in a protocol. According to this protocol, Heydrich had told the participants that on the basis of a 'prior authorisation' by Hitler the deportation of all European Jews to Eastern Europe was to commence immediately.

At the end of January 1942 Adolf Eichmann sent urgent correspondence to all the relevant authorities in the German Reich, instructing them to prepare for the deportation of the Jews. The death camps in occupied Poland were part of the Nazi system of camps. Millions of Jews from across Europe were murdered on an industrially-organised scale in these camps. In the spring of 1942 Polish Jews were moved to the death camps of Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec and German Jews soon followed them. The construction of the camp at Belzec had begun in November 1941 as part of Operation Reinhard (the code name for the genocide of the Polish Jews), named after Reinhard Heydrich. In all, approximately two million Jews were killed at Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek, Belzec and Chelmno.

From spring 1942, the Economic and Administrative Main Office of the SS was responsible for the concentration camps and their various satellite camps. The camps were under the control of the SS units specially trained for this purpose and the SS guards kept watch over the sites enclosed by barbed wire, watch towers and electric fences.



Inmates were also used to help in the internal supervision of the camps. The original camp at Auschwitz had been established following an order from Himmler in April 1940. Birkenau was later constructed in October 1941. Most inmates were Jews from across Europe; however, there were also Soviet prisoners of war and non-Jewish Poles. An additional sub-section comprised Buna-Monowitz and other labour facilities. In spring 1942 two farmhouses were converted into gas chambers. Four additional buildings were constructed for crematoria and gas chambers. These became operational in 1943. Around 1 million Jews from throughout Europe died at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Moreover, forced labour in the camps was inextricably linked to the Final Solution. The use of Jewish prisoners as labourers was intended to kill them. Labour shortages from spring 1942 onwards meant that more and more Jewish prisoners had to be employed in the war economy. Unbearable working conditions caused the deaths of large numbers of Jewish workers. In November 1944, in a bid to win a degree of clemency from the Allies, Himmler ordered an end to the genocide of the Jews and the destruction of the gas chambers and crematoria. With the war entering its final stage, the SS started to drive hundreds of thousands of inmates on death marches towards the West. Since the liberation of Majdanek in the summer of 1944, thousands of concentration camp prisoners had already been driven west via other camps. As the Allied forces liberated the camps they found innumerable dead bodies, malnourished and extremely weak survivors. Many of this latter group died in the following days and weeks. By the time Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated on 27 January 1945, it was estimated that six million Jews had been murdered.



### **Teaching and Learning Activity** - *Source evaluation and analysis*

Read the source and answer the question which follows:

#### **Source 1**

Extract from a letter by George F. Kennan, the American ambassador in Berlin, to his wife, 21 October 1941.

The major change to life in Berlin has been the wearing of Stars of David by the Jews. This is a fantastically barbaric thing. I shall never forget the faces of passengers in the underground train when they saw Jews with the large yellow star sewed onto their overcoats. The Jews were standing, not daring to sit down or brush against anybody, staring straight ahead of them with eyes like terrified beasts. As far as I could see, the mass of the German public was shocked and troubled by such measures, and public reaction was mostly one of consideration towards the victims. The remaining Jews are being deported in large batches and very few stars are now to be seen.

#### **Study Source 1.**

How useful is it as evidence for an historian studying the effects of Nazi policies towards the Jews in Germany in the period 1939–1941? You must use contextual knowledge in your answer.