

Germany 1890-1945



Content

Germany under the Kaiser

A: Introduction

1888-1918 Germany was a monarchy under the rule of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The term 'Kaiser' came from Caesar meaning Emperor with absolute power. The Kaiser was an absolute monarch and retained power until death. He had the ability to choose the Chancellor (Prime Minister). He also had power over Foreign Policy and influence on Domestic Policy. He was supported by the landowning class called the Junker.

B: The Context - Unification of Germany

Prior to 1871 Germany was a group of 25 separate German-speaking states and city-states between France, Russia and the North Sea coast. Each state had its own traditions, culture and in some cases language. In 1871 these states were unified to form Germany and this was fueled by a rise in German nationalism pushed on by Prussia, the leading state before unification. Leading Germany to its success would be its army and navy which it needed to compete with other nations such as Britain, America, France and Russia.

C: Powers of the Kaiser:

The new German constitution (system of running a country) was a mix of strong monarchical power and individual rights. The emperor retained absolute power over ministers and government decisions: he could hire and fire the chancellor (prime minister), determine foreign policy and was commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He also had some influence over domestic policy but this was mainly the Chancellor's area of power.

D: Foreign Policy

Germany's foreign policy approach during this period was called *Weltpolitik*; it was more confident, assertive, some might say aggressive; with the aim of strengthening Germany. *Weltpolitik* began to generate tensions and fears of a European conflict. The Kaiser allowed its 1887 treaty with Russia to expire, and its aggressive diplomacy pushed the Russians into an alliance with France, losing them an ally. Germany also began to expand her army and navy and used this to gain new colonies or possessions in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific.

E: Domestic Policy

The government adopted policies to encourage industrial growth and Germany experienced an economic and technological boom for most of the late 1800s. The unification of Germany boosted industrial growth, railway construction, coal production, iron ore mining and foreign investment. Examples of companies that grew in the period are Siemens and Benz. With its large and rapidly growing population (40 million in 1880, 58.5 million by 1910) overcrowding became an issue in Germany's cities, for example the population of Berlin doubled and 60% of the population were now living in towns, during the Kaiser's reign. By 1900 Germany had overtaken Britain economically, and was second only to the United States.

F: Challenges to his reign

During his reign the Kaiser faced challenges due to the complexity of ruling a newly united Germany. Some extremist groups viewed him as too authoritarian or 'power-hungry' in comparison to the previous Kaiser and sought to challenge him. Extremist groups such as Anarchists grew in popularity in this period. Anarchists believed that the government limited people's freedom and without laws and coercion (violence) from the government, people would live freely with no need for a government. A handful of bombings around Europe caused great concern for many people. Any people involved in extremist activities were closely monitored and arrested if necessary.

G: Socialism and Trade Unions

In 1900 the membership of the trade unions was 680,000. Trade unions were groups who protected workers' rights and could go on strike (refuse to work) to try and force this. They were generally socialist (believed in fairness and equality), which many of the ruling classes (business and land owners) didn't like. By 1913 membership had risen to 2,575,000. They had influence over the Social Democratic Party (SDP) who became the largest party in the Reichstag in 1912, winning 35% of the vote. The Socialists pushed business owners to improve wages and working conditions

H: Naval Laws

In his attempt to build a world empire, increase Germany's trade, and challenge Britain's supremacy at sea, the Kaiser would need to have a large modern navy. In the years **1898, 1900, 1906, 1908** and **1912**, the Kaiser and the Reichstag passed laws to increase the number of warships to be built. These laws were supported by Grand Admiral **Alfred von Tirpitz**. This led to an arms race with Britain to build the greatest number and most advanced battleships in the world. Although many nationalists were pleased with the growth of Germany's prestige at sea, the Social Democrats and conservatives complained that too much money was being spent on the military. Germany's **debt** was increased to **490 million marks** and socialists believed that the money should be used to help improve living and working conditions of the poor.

I: The Great War and the Collapse of Germany

After early successes for Germany during the first stages of the First World War, it eventually ground to a stalemate. The Schlieffen Plan, designed by the Germans to win a war against both Russia and France failed. They managed to put Russia out of the war in 1917, but unfortunately they were replaced by the USA. With all their money, resources and manpower, Germany would find it extremely difficult to win. The Royal Navy also **blockaded** the German ports which meant that very little food, fuel and raw materials could be imported. Industry began to grind to a halt and many people began to starve. Food was so scarce that people were forced to eat animal feed in the **Turnip Winter** of 1916. In total **800,000 starved to death** during WWI. **150,000** people also died of **Spanish Influenza**.

With all the suffering in Germany, many people began to complain about the war and sided with Social Democrats. The Kaiser, fearing a violent revolution, stepped down from the throne and fled to Holland. He was replaced by Friedrich Ebert and the Social Democrats who then signed the armistice for peace.

Weimar Germany

A: The Treaty of Versailles

The Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919 by the new leaders of the Weimar Republic. It severely restricted Germany **militarily** (only allowed any army of 100,000, 6 battleships, no military aircraft, tanks or submarines).

Germany also lost **territories** like Alsace and Lorraine to France, West Prussia to Poland, overseas empire given to Britain and the Saar coalfields put under international control. The Rhineland was also demilitarised.

Germany was also **politically** humiliated by being forced to accept responsibility for starting the war and not being allowed to join the international peace keeping organisation called the League of Nations. Consequently, they were also forced to **financially** pay for all the damages called reparations. Germany would find it impossible to pay the £6.6 billion demanded of them. The treaty was hated by the German people and they called it “The Diktat” Later, in 1927, Germany would declare that Clause 231, “The Guilt Clause”, was a lie.

B: The Weimar Constitution

After the Kaiser abdicated and left Germany, he was replaced by a new democratic system of government. This new government was led by the **Social Democrats (SDP)** under the leadership of **Friedrich Ebert**. Because Berlin was a dangerous place, the government was moved to a city in southern Germany called Weimar.

This new system of government gave the German people many new political rights such as freedom of speech. Everyone over the age of 20 could vote. The members of the Reichstag were elected every 4 years and the President was elected every 7 years. The Reichstag had control over law making and the police and army.

There were various **problems** for the new government. The nationalists believed they were responsible for Germany’s defeat and did not support it. They did not respect Ebert and wanted the Kaiser back. The communists wished to overthrow it and set up a communist state like the one in Russia. Germany had a huge debt to pay in reparations.

C: Political problems 1919 to 1922

Many Germans were unhappy with the new constitution and the new government. Many political groups hated each other especially the communists and the nationalists.

Communists attempted to overthrow the government three times: with the **Spartakist** revolt (1919); **Bavaria declared independence** (1919); and the **Red Rising in the Ruhr** (1920). All three attempts were defeated when the government ‘unleashed’ the **Freikorps**.

Nationalists caused problems for the government: when the **Treaty of Versailles** announced in May 1919 the people called government ministers who signed the treaty “**November criminals**,”; **Kapp Putsch** (1920)- which was defeated by a strike and the **murder of Walter Rathenau** (1922)

D: The Year of Crisis 1923.

The invasion of the Ruhr: France invaded the industrial heartland of Germany, the Ruhr, because they failed to pay their second reparation payment. The German workers in the factories were told to slow down production or go on strike. This became known as the policy of “**passive resistance.**” The French reacted with violence and forced evictions of 150,000 workers and policemen.

Hyperinflation: To pay the striking workers, the government printed off more money. This caused the money to become hyperinflated making it worthless. **Bread** prices rose from 2 marks in 1919 to **200,000 million marks** by 1923. People like pensioners and students struggled to make buy the basics in life. People’s life savings became worthless in a matter of days. Some people did benefit however. Those who had mortgages and debts could pay them off with the worthless money. Farmers also benefitted from the rising prices for their products.

The Munich/Beer Hall Putsch: With a strong 55,000 strong membership and Germany in a financial mess, Hitler believed the Nazi’s were strong enough to take over. Hitler was arrested and charged with treason after he had burst into a Bavarian government meeting and threatened to shoot them if they didn’t follow him. He was put on trial and given 5 years in Landsberg Prison but was released after just **9 months.** It was while he was in prison he wrote his book “Mein Kampf “and decided to try to get into power by legitimate democratic means.

E: Stresemann years 1924- 1929 (The Golden Age)

Stresemann led Germany to recovery during this period:

- He called off Passive Resistance
- He burned the old money that was hyperinflated and replaced it with the **Rentenmark.**
- In 1924 he makes the **Dawes Plan** with the U.S.A. The U.S.A agreed to lend Germany money.
- He also signed the **Young Plan** that reduced the reparations that Germany had to pay.

By 1929 Germany was well on the way to recovery. People were attending the cinema to see films like **Metropolis**, theatre, cabaret and enjoying new forms of design like **Bauhaus.** In 1925, Germany agreed to the Locarno Treaty and was later allowed to join the League of Nations (1926). Exports increased by 40%. IG Farben became the biggest chemical company in Europe.

However, the improvement was limited as it all depended upon US loans and more was spent on imports than exports.

Hitler's Rise

A: The Great Depression and the rise of Extremist Parties 1929-32.

In October 1929 the American Stock Market collapsed. After the Wall Street Crash, American money dried up. Unemployment rose in Germany from **1,300,000** in 1929 to **6,000,000** by 1932. As unemployment grew, so did the support for extremist parties like the Communists and Nazis.

The Nazis attracted extra support by offering '**Work and Bread**' to the unemployed. They also offered a range of different policies and ideas.

The word Nazi is a shortened version of National Socialist. The Nazi took ideas from Nationalists and Socialists so that they could win over votes from both sides.

- **Socialist ideas:** profit sharing in industry; a generous pension for old age; the abolition of incomes not earned by work
- **Nationalist ideas:** Land for the benefit of those of German blood. Only they may be members of the German nation. No Jewish person can be part of the German nation. All German speakers in one country; the abolition of the Treaty of Versailles.

People also voted for Hitler because of his **personality** and abilities. He was a great public speaker and inspired people to vote for the Nazis. He promised he would get them out of the Depression. He was seen as the **saviour** of Germany.

By 1932, the Nazis were the largest party in the Reichstag with **230 seats**.

B: How did Hitler become Chancellor?

Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 due to a range of different reasons.

Economic :- Effects of the depression

Hitler's Popularity :- Speeches and policies

Weakness of Weimar Political System :- Proportional Representation meant there were too many political parties and so, **no clear majority**. This prevented frequently changing governments passing effective laws. President Hindenburg used **Article 48** to pass emergency laws without going through the Reichstag.

Hindenburg and Von Papen :- Both people believed that if they appointed Hitler as Chancellor, they could use him and his supporters to get things done the way they wanted.

C: From Chancellor to Dictator (1933-1934).

Hitler was appointed Chancellor in **Jan 1933**. Hitler used this position to give himself more and more power. Within 18 months Hitler made himself as Dictator.

- As soon as he became Chancellor Hitler called new **elections** to gain more Nazis in the Reichstag.
- **Reichstag Fire:** Parliament building was burnt down. A Communist called **Van Der Lubbe** was found guilty
- Hitler convinced President Hindenburg to issue **The Law for Protection of People and State**. This allowed the Nazis to start to round up his main opponents, the Communists and place them in **Dachau** concentration camp.

- **The Enabling Law:** After the election the new parliament voted to hand over all law-making power to Hitler.
- Hitler used this new power to close down **Local Governments** and **Trade Unions**, ban other **political parties** and place Nazis in charge of Germany's regions (Gauleiters and Blockleiters).
- Hitler made the **Concordat** to stop opposition from the Roman Catholic Church.
- Hitler then eliminated who he saw as his enemies within the Nazi Party: he launched **the Night of the Long Knives** (Ernst Rohm and the leaders of the SA were rounded up and approx 1000 people were shot by Himmlers's SS.)
- **Hindenburg died** (in August 1934). Hitler took on the title '**Fuhrer**' and the army now swore an oath of loyalty to him.

Life in Nazi Germany

A: Hitler's Ideology and Plans for Germany

When Hitler came to power he set about implementing his vision for Germany.

- **Restoring the Economy** by using rearmament, public work schemes, and national service. He hoped to eliminate unemployment by 1939
- **Introduce Social Policy** by promoting the superiority of the pure German **Aryan** race and the removal of 'Undesirables' called the '**Untermenschen**'. These included Jews, Slavs, Gypsy Roma, homosexuals, physically and mentally disabled.
- **Control the People** through fear using the secret police and concentration camps, and propaganda using radio, cinema, rallies and posters.
- **Make Germany great again** by restoring Germany's pride. Building up its army and taking over European and Russian territory

B: Nazi Economy

The Nazis created **80,000** jobs building motorways (**autobahns**), schools, hospitals and the 1936 Olympic stadium. They created jobs for young men in the **National Labour Front**, undertaking conservation work in the countryside. **Rearmament** created jobs in the army and factories producing armaments and equipment for the army.

Hitler also tried to make Germany self-sufficient (**Autarky**), so that Germany was not dependent upon foreign imports. Unfortunately, they were still importing **33%** of their raw materials by 1939

Winners: - Big rearmament business owners, farmers, loyal Nazis rewarded with holidays, through the **Strength Through Joy** organisation.

Losers:- Trade Unions made illegal, small business owners (20% closed down), non-rearmament workers (wages fell by 15%), Jews and women removed from the workplace.

C: Women in Nazi Germany.

Before the Nazis came to power, Women in Germany had equal rights and made up 10% of the Reichstag.

In Nazi Germany women were removed from the workplace and expected to follow the **KKK: Kinde, Kuche, Kirke** (children, cooking, and church). **360,000** women were removed from jobs in the first year of Nazi rule.

Women were expected to stay at home and look after the family (Kuche / Kitchen)

The Motherhood Cross was awarded to women who had the most children. **The Law for the Encouragement of Marriage** encouraged them to have at least four children by being offered 1000 marks for each child (Kinder)

Women were also expected to go to church (Kirche) as it taught obedience and the values of family life.

Women had to follow **traditional German fashion**. (hair in braids or buns; no make-up; no high heels or trousers; no slimming)

D: Children in Nazi Germany

Students were **indoctrinated** at school: teachers had to put across Nazi ideas in lessons. **The Hitler Youth** was also set up. Boys wore a uniform and were taught history, eugenics and trained in military skills. Girls (**in the League of German Maidens**) also wore a uniform and were taught eugenics, PE and how to look after their families and home. Both boys and girls were taught Nazi ideas and were encouraged to inform upon their parents. By 1939, approximately 90% of all boys were members of the Hitler Youth.

E: Religion

With 45 million Protestants and 22 million Catholics in Germany, Hitler and the Nazi's saw religion as a major source of opposition. Christianity taught peace, love and equality, whereas the Nazis believed in the superiority of the German race and the need for war to achieve their aims. The Nazi's set up the **Reich Church** which taught a Nazi form of religion. They tried to ban the 'Jewish' Old Testament and sent over **1,200** anti-Nazi priests to concentration camps. Catholic youth clubs and newspapers were shut down. Some Army generals tried to blow up Hitler because they believed he was anti-Christian. The Pope also criticised Hitler in one of his speeches. The Nazis failed to reduce the numbers of Christians in Germany.

F: Propaganda and Censorship

Dr Joseph Goebbels was in charge of **propaganda**. He wrote speeches for himself and for Hitler. He ran propaganda campaigns in the form of **Mass rallies** (in huge stadiums like **Nuremburg**) and made effective use of the Nazi control over radio, films, newsreels and newspapers. Films like "The Eternal Jew" were used to spread **antisemitism**. The Nazis also used **censorship** in several ways: they banned opposition leaders (like the Communists); all newspapers like "Der Sturmer" had to print pro-Nazi stories or be shut down; anti-Nazi books were burnt; Jazz music and Tarzan films were banned. Art and the 1936 Olympic Games were used to boost the image of the Aryan race.

G: The Police State and Fear

In Nazi Germany the **Gestapo** (Secret Police) spied on the general population and targeted people who were known as **enemies of the state**. It was set up by Heinrich Himmler who also controlled the SS. The SS ran the concentration camps and were fanatical Nazis. The Gestapo relied upon denunciations (reports) from the ordinary public. **80%** of arrests came as a result of **denunciations**. The courts were also controlled by the Nazi's. Judges and Lawyers had be members of the Nazi party. **46 crimes** carried the death penalty and over **40,000** German people were executed. Political opponents like the Communists and Social Democrats were sent to concentration camps. After 1938, these camps would be used against the Jewish population.

H: Persecution and the Final Solution

The Nazis believed the German **Aryan** race was superior to all other races. Some races of people like Jews, Slavs and Gypsies were regarded as "**Untermensch**" meaning subhuman. In 1933, the Nazi's tried to **Boycott** Jewish businesses. In 1935 they introduced the **Nuremburg Laws** which took away civil and political rights from Jewish people. They also banned marriages between non Jewish and Jewish people. In 1938 400 Synagogues were attacked and burnt as part of **Kristallnacht**. Between 100 and 300 Jewish people were killed.

People who had physical and mental disabilities were sterilised. Many were killed (Euthanasia). Homosexuals, pacifists and beggars were also targeted and sent to concentration camps.

The outbreak of war meant that more people were persecuted in the occupied territories. Initially the Jews were forced into confined areas of cities called Ghettos. Many died of disease and starvation. Later, special SS death squads called **Einsatzgruppen**, went around occupied territories executing whole communities of Jews.

In 1943, Reinhard Heydrich planned the mass murder of the Jewish people at the **Wannsee Conference**. Death camps like **Auschwitz** were created to do this. By the end of the war, **6 million** Jews had been murdered as well as millions of other people. This would become known as the **Holocaust**

I: Opposition

Despite the attempts made by the Nazi's to control the German population, there was some opposition coming mainly from **young** people and disillusioned members of the **army**.

Youth groups:-

Edelweiss Pirates went around writing anti-Nazi graffiti. Over **700** arrested. **12** members were hanged for killing a Gestapo officer.

Swing Youth met together to listen to banned jazz music and went to nightclubs.

White Rose were students led by **Hans and Sophie Scholl**. They wrote pamphlets which were mass produced and circulated in university buildings. They were seen by university caretaker and reported. They were arrested and executed

The Army:-

Admiral Canaris tried to plot Hitler's overthrow in the early stages of the war believing he would lead Germany to defeat. Canaris was later executed for High Treason.

In 1944, a group of **Generals** plotted to kill Hitler with a bomb. The bomb went off, but Hitler survived. The Generals, including **Colonel Von Stauffenberg**, were rounded up and executed.

J: The Second World War

In the early stages of the war, Germany did very well with its tactic of **Blitzkrieg**. By the end of June 1940, the Nazis controlled most of Europe. However, they failed to conquer Britain due their failure to win the **Battle of Britain**. Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 and their loss at **Stalingrad** in 1942 would see the tide of war turn against Germany.

During the war, the German **economy** would suffer. Food **rationing** was introduced and workforce shortages would emerge as more and more skilled workers were being called up to fight in the army. Women and slave labour from conquered areas were used to replace them. **Area bombing** by the Allies smashed German cities and factories causing **7.5 million** homeless **refugees** and approximately 400,000 civilian deaths.

After further defeats in North Africa, Italy and Russia, the Germans would experience increased pressure with the D Day landings in June 1944. Germany would not be able to compete with the combined economic and military might of the Allies and consequently the German army was pushed all the way back to Berlin. Hitler committed suicide in his bunker in May 1945 bringing the war and Nazi Germany to an end.

K: Germany during the war, 1939-45

Germany experience during the Second World War can be summed up to two sections:

1. For the first three years Germans did well because Germany was winning the war (victory in battle, Germany was strong again, Germans in work in munitions factories, workers brought into Germany from captured areas; very little affect on lives of Germans as fighting took place in other countries).
2. For the last three years life for ordinary Germans was much harder because Germany was losing the war (10 million Germans died, from 1943 onwards there are massive air-raids on German cities. Many of these cities were reduced to rubble, shortages of fuel and of food in the last year of the war, millions of German refugees in the East of Germany trying to get away from the invading Russian army).