

# Chapter 5: The Nazi State, 1933-1939

## Introduction

Between 1933 and 1939, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party transformed Germany into a totalitarian state. The Nazis eliminated opposition, controlled every aspect of life through terror and propaganda, and imposed strict racial policies. They aimed to create a unified German society based on the principles of Volksgemeinschaft (People's Community) and Herrenvolk (Master Race). Nazi policies targeted political enemies, Jews, and other minorities while strengthening the economy and military in preparation for war.

## 1. Establishing Nazi Control (1933-1934)

### The Enabling Act (March 1933)

- Passed by the Reichstag, giving Hitler dictatorial powers for four years.
- Allowed Hitler to rule by decree without Reichstag approval.
- Marked the end of democracy in Germany.

### Eliminating Opposition

- **March 1933:** First concentration camp opened at Dachau, used for political prisoners (communists, socialists, trade unionists).
- **May 1933:** Trade unions banned; replaced by German Labour Front (DAF).
- **July 1933:** All political parties except the Nazis banned.
- **June 1934:** Night of the Long Knives
  - Hitler ordered the murder of SA leader Ernst Röhm and other rivals.
  - Strengthened the SS (Schutzstaffel) under Heinrich Himmler.
- **August 1934:** President Hindenburg died; Hitler combined the roles of Chancellor and President, declaring himself Führer.

## 2. Nazi Propaganda and Control

### Joseph Goebbels and the Ministry of Propaganda

- Controlled newspapers, films, and radio.
- “Heil Hitler” became the mandatory greeting.
- Cheap radios (Volksempfänger) distributed so all Germans could hear Nazi broadcasts.
- **Book burnings (1933):** Works by Jewish and anti-Nazi authors destroyed.
- **Nazi films:** Directed by Leni Riefenstahl, including *Triumph of the Will* (1934) and *Olympia* (1936).

## *The Nuremberg Rallies*

- Annual propaganda events held in Nuremberg.
- Displayed Nazi military power, unity, and devotion to Hitler.
- Albert Speer's "Cathedral of Light" used 150 searchlights to create dramatic visuals.

## *Education and Indoctrination*

- Schools rewrote history and racial science to promote Nazi ideology.
- Hitler Youth (HJ) and League of German Maidens (BDM) became compulsory (1936).
- Jewish teachers and students expelled from schools.

## *3. The Role of Terror and the SS*

### *The Gestapo (Secret Police)*

- Founded in 1933, led by Hermann Göring, later Heinrich Himmler.
- Used spies and informers to uncover resistance.
- Could arrest and send suspects to concentration camps without trial.

### *The SS (Schutzstaffel)*

- Led by Heinrich Himmler.
- SS Death's Head Units (Totenkopfverbände) ran concentration camps.
- By 1939, SS controlled all security forces in Nazi Germany.

### *Opposition to Nazi Rule*

- Confessional Church (Protestant opposition) led by Martin Niemöller.
- Catholic opposition: Pope Pius XI's 1937 encyclical "Mit brennender Sorge" condemned Nazi persecution of the Church.
- Political resistance crushed by Gestapo and SS.

## *4. Nazi Economic Policies*

### *Reducing Unemployment*

- **Public works projects:** Autobahnen (motorways), housing, and industrial plants.
- **Rearmament (1935 onwards):** Increased military spending created jobs.
- **National Labour Service (RAD):** Compulsory labour for young men.
- By 1939, unemployment had fallen from 6 million (1933) to 100,000.

### *Autarky (Self-Sufficiency) and the Four-Year Plan (1936)*

- Led by Hermann Göring.
- Aimed to reduce reliance on imports.
- Synthetic fuel and rubber industries developed.
- Failed to make Germany fully self-sufficient.

## *Women and the Nazi Economy*

- Encouraged to focus on Kinder, Küche, Kirche (Children, Kitchen, Church).
- Marriage loans rewarded women for leaving jobs.
- Female employment fell initially, but rose again during WWII.

## *5. Nazi Racial Policies*

### *Anti-Semitism and the Nuremberg Laws (1935)*

- Jews lost German citizenship.
- Marriage between Jews and non-Jews banned.
- Jews banned from many professions and public places.

### *Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass) – 9-10 November 1938*

- Over 7,500 Jewish businesses destroyed.
- More than 200 synagogues burned.
- 30,000 Jews arrested and sent to concentration camps.

### *Persecution of Minorities*

- Roma, disabled people, and homosexuals targeted.
- Compulsory sterilisation laws (1933) for disabled individuals.
- Euthanasia program (Aktion T4) led to the deaths of 70,000 disabled people by 1941.

## *6. Nazi Foreign Policy and Preparing for War*

### *Militarisation and Expansion*

- **1935:** Rearmament began, breaking the Treaty of Versailles.
- **1936:** Germany remilitarised the Rhineland.
- **1938:** Anschluss (union) with Austria.
- **1939:** Invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland led to WWII.

### *Conclusion*

Between 1933 and 1939, the Nazis transformed Germany into a totalitarian state through terror, propaganda, and economic reform. The suppression of political opposition, strict racial policies, and aggressive foreign expansion set the stage for **World War II and the Holocaust**.

### *Key Terms*

- **Volksgemeinschaft:** Nazi vision of a unified “People’s Community.”
- **Führerprinzip:** Leadership principle, making Hitler absolute ruler.
- **Herrenvolk:** The Nazi concept of a master race.
- **Gestapo:** Secret police force used to eliminate opposition.

- **SS (Schutzstaffel):** Elite Nazi security force.
- **Kristallnacht:** Pogrom against Jews (9-10 Nov 1938).
- **Four-Year Plan:** Nazi economic strategy to prepare for war.