

The development of Germany, 1919-1991

Part 2: Life in Germany



1. Economic downturn

The occupation of the Ruhr 1923

Germany was left with a huge debt at the end of the First World War. The government had preferred to borrow money rather than raise taxes to pay for the war. This meant printing more banknotes in the hope that winning the war would mean that Germany could make its enemies pay for the cost of war. Instead, Germany now had a currency that was declining in value as well as inflation. Wages were increasing and prices were rising so the value of money fell.

To make matters worse, the Allies had insisted in the Treaty of Versailles that Germany should pay reparations – a total bill of 132 billion marks or £6.6 million, payable in annual instalments. Confidence in the German currency declined as other countries expected Germany would be unable to pay its debts. When the German government failed to make a reparations payment in 1922, few were surprised.

However, the new French president, Raymond Poincaré, took a hard line, insisting that, unless Germany paid reparations, French and Belgian troops would occupy the main German industrial area, the Ruhr, which produced 80 per cent of Germany's coal, iron and steel. In 1923 the threat was carried out and French and Belgian troops moved in to supervise reparation payments and take resources from the Ruhr. The occupation of the Ruhr was a final devastating blow to an already weak German economy. The German government responded by ordering the German people to carry out a campaign of passive resistance and by encouraging sabotage. As the workers were on strike, they had to be paid by the government which meant printing more and more money. The result was hyperinflation: prices went completely out of control as you can see in this chart of the price of a basic food, bread:

Year	Price of a loaf of bread
1918	0.6 mark
Jan 1923	250 marks
Sept 1923	1.5 million marks
Nov 1923	201 million marks

Effects of hyperinflation

At one stage conditions in Germany became so bad that people turned to bartering for goods. The effect of hyperinflation was terrifying and dramatic for most Germans, although not everyone was so badly affected:

- Landowners benefited as the value of land kept pace with prices and many were able to pay off mortgages.
- Large industrialists were able to repay loans and farmers benefited from the rise in food prices.

BUT:

- The savings of Germans, particularly the middle classes, were destroyed.
- Germans on fixed incomes, such as pensioners, were badly affected.
- There were serious shortages of food with widespread hunger and outbreaks of stealing.

Recovery and depression

The crises of 1923 were ended by the actions of a new government led by Gustav Stresemann who became Chancellor of Germany for a few months in 1923 and Foreign Minister until 1929. His term of office as Chancellor is often known as Stresemann's 'hundred days' when he took decisive action:

- He called off the passive resistance in the Ruhr.
- He ended hyperinflation by abolishing the old currency and replacing it with a new one, called the Rentenmark,

backed not by gold (which Germany did not have) but by a mortgage on all industrial and agricultural land. When more money was needed, Stresemann refused to print more and instead cut government spending, increased taxes and reduced salaries. He was also helped as Germany was not paying reparations at this time. Confidence at home and, importantly, abroad was brought back: hyperinflation was cured.

When a new government was formed in November 1923 Stresemann remained Foreign Minister. He was determined not only to restore Germany as a major power but also to ease the burden of reparations. He did this by repairing relations with France after the occupation of the Ruhr. Britain was keen to bring stability to Europe after these events and it encouraged the USA to investigate Germany's ability to pay reparations. The result in 1924 was the Dawes Plan which stabilised German currency and balanced Germany's budget. Stresemann negotiated the new agreement with the USA. It was agreed that in future Germany would not repay in reparations more than it could afford. In addition, loans, mostly from the USA, would generate economic growth in Germany and back up its currency, so that reparations could be made regularly. The French also agreed to leave the Ruhr.

Germany's entry into the League of Nations in 1926 was another sign that Stresemann's policy of restoring Germany as a major power was working.

In 1929 Stresemann achieved his final success. The Dawes Plan had always been regarded as a temporary measure. It was now replaced by the Young Plan which reduced reparations by two-thirds and also allowed Germany to make repayments over a longer period of time – 59 years (until 1988). In return the French and British agreed to move their troops out of the Rhineland. Stresemann died suddenly before these negotiations were finished. Although his policies had helped Germany to recover its international standing and solved the problem of hyperinflation, Stresemann was still bitterly criticised by right-wing Germans who objected to the payment of

reparations and believed that Stresemann should not have made agreements with the Allies.

The onset of the Depression and its impact

In October 1929 the Wall Street Stock Exchange in America crashed and plunged the world into a serious economic crisis. Share values in the USA had increased well beyond the actual value of the products they were invested in and, when the bubble burst, American investors lost \$400 million in a month.

Countries like Germany, whose industries relied heavily on loans from America, suffered greatly as the loans which had helped to boost the economy in the 1920s in Germany now dried up. In addition, as the world's economy went into depression, Germany's exports also began to decline, resulting in serious unemployment. The failure of several Austrian and German banks in 1931 made an already bad situation worse. Prices of farm products tumbled and German agriculture suffered, causing distress to farmers who had heavily mortgaged their farms in the 1920s.

The impact of the Depression on Germany was very severe, causing serious social discontent:

- Unemployment rose dramatically from 900,000 in 1929, to over 3.5 million in 1930, 5 million in 1931 and nearly 6 million in 1932. This caused widespread misery and poverty.
- The failure of the banks caused the middle classes to lose their savings once again.
- Many people found they could not keep up with mortgage or rent payments and became homeless.
- The Brüning government reduced government expenditure from 1930 onwards to deal with the crisis and this affected benefit payments to the poorest sections of the community.
- As shown on (**Part 1, Page 16**), the Depression encouraged the growth of more extreme political parties like the Nazis and the Communists. It also brought about the end of democracy as Brüning's government increasingly relied

in 1931 and 1932 on presidential emergency decrees to govern (**Part 1, Page 17**).

Key learning points: Economic downturn

- The problem of reparations.
- The reasons for the occupation of the Ruhr 1923.
- The causes and impact of hyperinflation.
- Stresemann's policies for recovery.
- The revival of the German economy in the 1920s.
- The Wall Street Crash 1929.
- The impact of the Great Depression on German society, economy and politics.

2. Social change under the Nazis up to 1939

Policies regarding employment

Hitler's aims for the German economy have already been outlined (**Part 1, Page 27**):

- reduction of unemployment;
- rearmament;
- economic self-sufficiency.

There were large reductions in unemployment under Nazi rule:

1932	5.6 million
1933	3.7 million
1934	2.3 million
1935	2.1 million
1936	1.6 million
1937	0.9 million
1938	0.2 million

This reduction was achieved by:

The development of Germany, 1919–1991

Part 2: Life in Germany

- spending money on public works such as building houses, schools, hospitals and motorways (*Autobahnen*). The National Labour Service provided jobs on public works for men aged between 18 and 25 on very low pay. From 1935 it was compulsory for all men aged 18–25 to serve in the National Labour Service for six months.
- conscripting hundreds of thousands of young Germans into the armed services.
- manipulating the figures so that unemployed Jewish people were not counted, neither were women who were forced to leave their jobs. Part-time workers were counted as fully employed.
- drafting hundreds of thousands of workers into factories to produce weapons of war, aircraft, guns and tanks. Preparations for war drove the Nazi's economic policy.

War preparation was the big priority. Reichsmarshal Goering remarked in 1936: 'In the decisive hour it would not be a question of how much butter Germany has but how many guns.'

The reduction in unemployment and increase in productivity was not accompanied by a rise in the standard of living of the workers. In fact prices went up, as did the hours of work. Wages struggled to keep up with prices and as a percentage of national income they actually declined. This meant that workers had less money to spend.

Index of wages

Index means the wages in one year (1936) are taken to be 100 and the other years are measured against this.

1928	125
1933	88
1934	94
1936	100
1938	106

Wholesale prices (1913 = 100)

1928	140
1933	93.3

1936	104.1
1938	105.8
<i>Wages as a percentage of national income</i>	
1928	62
1932	64
1933	63
1934	62
1936	59
1938	57

The German Labour Front

There was an almost total absence of strikes in Nazi Germany. Trade unions had been banned in 1933 and were replaced by the German Labour Front (DAF) headed by Dr Ley. This had total control over industrial workers, not only setting levels of pay but also regulating working hours. All workers had to join the German Labour Front and there were penalties for workers who disobeyed its orders.

The German Labour Front also set up two other organisations to benefit workers. One was called Beauty of Labour (SDA) which tried to improve working conditions, such as ventilation, provision of hot meals, cleanliness, lighting and health and safety standards. It should be remembered, however, that many firms expected to make these improvements at the expense of its workers who had to do the painting, cleaning and building after normal working hours and for no additional reward. Threats of dismissal or the concentration camp faced those who did not help. Strength through Joy (KDF) organised leisure activities for the workforce, such as cheap holidays (including cruises on ocean liners for the most productive workers), entertainment, theatre and opera trips and subsidised, cheap sport. The idea was to make longer working hours more acceptable through improved working conditions. Propaganda also played its part by suggesting that workers in other countries were not so well off.

‘Your Strength Through Joy car’ poster
<http://transpressnz.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/your-strength-through-joy-car.html>

Women in Nazi Germany

Despite German women gaining the vote after the First World War, most political parties in the Weimar Republic agreed that the main role of a woman was at home, looking after the family. Hitler and the Nazis strongly agreed with this. In a speech to Nazi women in 1934, Hitler said that the woman's world was 'her husband, her family, her children and her home'.

These beliefs were put into practice. A law against the overcrowding of German universities and schools restricted the number of girls that could go to university. By 1936 the number of female university students had been halved. As part of the Law on the Reduction of Unemployment of 1933, newly married couples would receive an interest-free loan of up to 1,000 marks provided the woman gave up her job and promised not to re-enter the labour market. The loan could be reduced by a quarter for each child born – by the birth of the fourth child the loan was completely cleared. Medals were awarded for mothers of large families. Taking women out of employment certainly reduced the unemployment figures and was an important part of Hitler's economic policies (**Part 1, Page 28**).

This may have had a temporary effect in reducing unemployment but the number of working women had actually increased by 1938. The onset of war in 1939 created a renewed demand for women workers, so much so that their wage rates started to increase. There has been debate about whether the Nazi marriage laws actually increased the birth rate. There was a large rise in live births in 1934 and this level was maintained. From 1933 to 1939 the number of births per 1,000 women of child-bearing age rose from 58.9 to 84.8. The numbers might have risen as a result of the end of the Depression as much as the effect of Nazi policies.

The Nazis took great care to publicise their image of women as mothers of the new Reich. Make-up, lipstick and smoking were frowned upon. Hairstyles were meant to be traditional, in plaits. Whether this had much effect is

doubted – the cosmetics industry boomed in the 1930s. Goebbels' wife often appeared in public smoking, and Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun, smoked when Hitler was absent and used Elizabeth Arden cosmetics.

Religion

Neither the Protestant nor the Roman Catholic Churches in Germany had been strong supporters of the Weimar Republic as they thought it was anti-religious. Some parts of both churches were prepared to work with Hitler and the Nazi Party, particularly as they were opposed to communism. Hitler had expected to create a new national church loyal to his government from the existing Protestant Church. He hoped that eventually this would win over Catholics to the Nazi cause as well.

A significant number of Protestants had Nazi sympathies. They called themselves 'German Christians' and they managed to combine beliefs in Christianity with some racist and anti-Semitic beliefs which were similar to the beliefs of the Nazis. As part of the coordination process ([Part 1, Page 24](#)), Hitler created a National Reich Church under Nazi control, with one of the leading 'German Christians', Ludwig Müller, as its bishop. It was not unusual by the summer of 1937 to see German Christian pastors in Bavaria taking services wearing SA or SS uniforms. It was not unusual either for the swastika and a copy of *Mein Kampf* to be placed at the front of the church.

Not all Protestants, however, were happy with these developments and a rival church, called the Confessional Church, opposed the National Reich Church and its beliefs. The leader of this rival church was Martin Niemöller, who had once been a strong opponent of the Weimar Republic but now had serious concerns about the Nazification of the Protestant Church. A 27-year-old Berlin theologian called Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke out against the treatment of Jews who had converted to Christianity and he also opposed the Nazification of the Protestant Church. Niemöller was put on trial by the Nazis and, although found

not guilty by the courts, he ended up in a concentration camp. Bonhoeffer, too, was later arrested and eventually executed in 1945.

At first the Catholic Church was willing to work with Hitler not least because of its opposition to communism. The Centre Party (Germany's only really important political party based on religion) had cooperated with Hitler in passing the Enabling Bill in 1933 in return for guarantees about the position of Catholics in Nazi Germany. In any case, Hitler had a reluctant admiration for the power and organisation of the Roman Catholic Church (20 million Germans were Catholics). However, he also had fears about the loyalty of Catholics – would they be loyal to him or to the Pope in Rome? Like other dictators before him, Hitler saw the advantages of an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, so in 1933 he signed a concordat or agreement with the Catholic Church. The Church was guaranteed:

- religious freedom;
- free communication between bishops and Rome;
- the right of bishops to publish pastoral letters;
- church schools would be left alone.

In return, the Catholic Church agreed to withdraw completely from politics. The Centre Party, as was seen earlier ([Part 1, Page 22](#)), voluntarily withdrew from politics in 1933.

It was not long before the Nazis broke the terms of the concordat. Bishops found that they did not have free communication with Rome, church schools were threatened and there was conflict between Catholic youth organisations and the Hitler Youth. The anti-Christian propaganda of the Nazi Party became more common. By 1937 the situation was so serious that Pope Pius XI issued a papal letter entitled 'With Deep Anxiety', which directly criticised Nazi policies. Meanwhile Himmler and his anti-Catholic deputy, Heydrich, launched a campaign against the Roman Catholic Church in Germany. By 1938 most Catholic youth groups had been closed down.

By 1939 hundreds of anti-Nazi Catholic priests were in concentration camps. The outbreak of war in 1939 persuaded Hitler that it might be wise to ease off anti-Catholic policies until after the war was won, as the Nazis recognised the continuing power of the Catholic Church.

Some members of the Nazi Party went further in putting their anti-Christian beliefs into practice. Himmler, in particular, dabbled in pagan beliefs. On one occasion he ordered SS families not to celebrate Christmas but to celebrate Midsummer instead. The German Faith Movement introduced pagan ceremonies which were used by sections of the SS, but for all this interest, the movement never really became popular, perhaps having no more than 40,000 members. In the end Nazi policies succeeded in damaging the established churches but not sufficiently to destroy the importance of the Christian religion for many Germans.

Policies towards children

‘The whole purpose of education is to create Nazis.’ So ran a statement from the Nazi Minister of Education (Bernhard Rust) in 1934.

As government employees, teachers were encouraged to be members of the Nazi Party. By 1936 as many as 36 per cent of teachers were already members of the Nazi Party, and nearly all were members of the National Socialist Teachers’ League. This was carefully controlled: Jews and left-wing teachers were sacked.

The content of lessons also changed. Teachers would have to be greeted at the start of lessons with a Nazi salute. The content of lessons and textbooks was carefully controlled to emphasise Nazi beliefs and values. In particular history and biology lessons gave the Nazi interpretation of the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles, the evils of communism, Jews and betrayal, and Nazi views on racial superiority. To start with, Jewish children were singled out for humiliating treatment in class. The amount of time given to physical education was dramatically increased.

The development of Germany, 1919–1991

Part 2: Life in Germany

School noticeboards were filled with Nazi propaganda posters. Schools celebrated Nazi festivals, including Hitler's birthday, and Nazi heroes like Horst Wessel. Boys' education emphasised different topics from girls' education; for example, more science and history for boys while girls did more domestic science.

The Nazis also started schools intended to train future Nazi leaders. There were several:

Napolas	For boys aged 10–18 who were entering the armed forces, especially the <i>Waffen-SS</i> , the military wing of the SS.
Adolf Hitler Schools	Intended to train the future members of the Nazi government.
The Ordensburgen or Order Castles	Named after fortresses built by the Teutonic Knights. The entry qualification was six years' attendance at an Adolf Hitler School, plus state labour service and Nazi Party work. A finishing school for young Nazis in their twenties.

Waffen-SS
The military wing of the SS

Standards of education in all three categories proved inadequate compared with the established state grammar schools. The numbers involved were very small and confidential Ministry of Education reports revealed that achievements were disappointing.

The Hitler Youth

The Hitler Youth movement was set up in 1925 well before the Nazis came into power. As other youth organisations were closed and harassed, the Hitler Youth movement had over 4 million members by 1936. In that year membership was made compulsory and by 1939 there were 7 million members.

Under the energetic leadership of Baldur von Schirach, the main objective of Hitler Youth was to indoctrinate the young with Nazi ideas and make them loyal Nazis. In 1933 the Hitler Youth was divided into two: the *Deutsches Jungvolk*

(the German Young People) for those aged 10–14 and from age 14 the Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth) proper. There were similar organisations for girls, such as the League of German Maidens. Whilst there was great emphasis on unquestioning obedience to Nazi beliefs, there is no doubt that only a minority were opposed to the movement. The conduct of the *Waffen-SS* army divisions in the Second World War suggests that their loyalty, determination and ferocity were no doubt inspired by Nazi propaganda and the indoctrination that took place in the 1930s and 1940s. It was also the case that the special status of the Hitler Youth caused discipline problems in state schools with the authority of teachers being called frequently into question by members of the Hitler Youth.

The treatment of the Jews up to 1939

Hitler's hatred of the Jews (anti-Semitism) was extreme. He and his fellow Nazis saw the Jews as not merely an inferior race but a major threat to Germany and part of a world conspiracy to destroy Germany. In Hitler's mind the Jews were responsible for Germany's defeat in 1918, for communism, for the failure of the Weimar Republic and all the political ideas Hitler detested, like democracy, pacifism and international cooperation.

The SA had always targeted Jews and after Hitler came to power in 1933 it organised, on Hitler's orders, a boycott of Jewish shops and businesses. A law of 7 April 1933 also banned Jews from having jobs in the civil service, the universities, the teaching profession and the judiciary. However, after this initial outburst of Nazi anti-Semitic behaviour, Hitler became more cautious because:

- The violence of the SA created bad publicity for the Nazis abroad.
- The main priority to start with was to help the economy recover and the boycott of Jewish businesses threatened the rather fragile recovery in 1933.
- President Hindenburg was opposed to anti-Semitic policies.

boycott
A systematic refusal
to buy goods

As a result Hitler bided his time and ended the boycott temporarily. By 1935, however, his position was considerably stronger:

- Hindenburg had died and Hitler was now undisputed Führer (**Part 1, Page 23**).
- The SA had been destroyed.
- Anti-Semitic propaganda, particularly Julius Streicher's publication *The Stormer*, which appeared in most German workplaces, had made a great impression in 1934–5 on German society.

As a result the Nuremberg Laws were passed in September 1935. These laws were a concerted attempt to isolate Germany's Jews:

- Jews were deprived of German citizenship.
- Marriages between Jews and non-Jews were banned and made a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment.

Boycotts of Jewish shops, now organised by the SS, became more common, as did anti-Semitic road signs on the outskirts of towns and villages, usually displaying the message, 'Jews are not wanted here'. There was a further attack on Jewish communities when Hermann Goering implemented the Four Year Plan for the German economy (**Part 1, Page 29**). All properties worth more than 5,000 marks owned by Jews had to be registered and could not be sold without permission. All Jews were ordered to add a name 'Israel' or 'Sarah' to their current name by 1 January 1939.

This increasingly severe persecution came to a violent climax in November 1938. A Jewish student, Herschel Grynszpan, bitter about the deportation of his parents from Germany marched into the German embassy in Paris and shot dead the first diplomat he saw. The Nazi government seized on this incident as a reason to attack Germany's Jewish community. The SS and Gestapo organised a wholesale attack on Jewish shops, premises, synagogues and schools. At least 7,500 Jewish-owned shops were destroyed and 191 synagogues were burned

on 9 November 1938 in an event known as Crystal Night (*Kristallnacht*). The death toll probably ran into hundreds and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested in the following week and sent to concentration camps.

The Jewish community was fined 1 billion marks as punishment for the murder of the German diplomat. Further laws banned Jews from going to cinemas, theatres and swimming pools; Jewish children were excluded from schools and universities. The removal of Jews from Germany's economic life followed: their property was taken over by the state, they were not allowed to work and had to be dismissed from jobs without compensation or pensions. In the next 12 months more than 115,000 Jews left Germany, probably bringing the total of those who had left Germany since 1933 to 400,000.

There was a fierce reaction to *Kristallnacht* abroad, with many foreign countries and newspapers reacting with horror to the events of that night. The true nature of the Nazis had now been clearly revealed and, ominously, Hitler declared in a speech to the Reichstag in January 1939 that if war broke out it would lead to the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

Key learning points: Social change under the Nazis up to 1939

- Nazi employment policies and the debate on their success.
- The German Labour Front and its effect.
- The place of women in Nazi Germany.
- Nazi attempts to control the Protestant Church.
- Attempted conciliation with the Roman Catholic Church and increase of tensions to 1939.
- Indoctrination in German schools.
- Main aims of the Hitler Youth movement.
- Reasons for anti-Semitic policies.
- Reasons for the stages of anti-Semitic policies.
- The Nuremberg Laws.
- *Kristallnacht*, 9 November 1938, and its results.

3. Life during the Second World War

Changing conditions on the home front

Although for many Germans the start of the Second World War was not welcomed with great enthusiasm, the early successes of the German *Wehrmacht* in Poland, Scandinavia and France generated more patriotic feelings; France had been relatively easily defeated and the effects of the Treaty of Versailles reversed. The failure, however, to knock Britain out of the war in 1940 and the growing threat of British bombing raids meant that a longer war was likely, especially after the decision to attack the Soviet Union in June 1941.

Wehrmacht
German armed
forces before 1945

Hitler was greatly concerned not to have a repeat of the suffering on the home front that Germany had experienced in the First World War. He had to accept reluctantly that some form of rationing would be necessary. Rations of food, soap and textiles began in August 1939. The rations were certainly not generous. To begin with, 500 grams of meat a week for an average worker (halved by 1945), 125 grams of butter and one egg a week were introduced. Certainly, this had more effect than rationing in Britain, and the German staple diet throughout the war was bland and boring, mainly rye bread, potatoes and vegetables. Fresh food and fish were rarely obtained. Shoes were also severely rationed: work shoes were only be worn at work and there were regular checks on homes by Nazi officials to confiscate extra shoes.

War production became a priority as a long war seemed likely. By the summer of 1940, 50 per cent of German workers were involved in war production and the proportion of women workers increased dramatically, reversing key Nazi policies of the 1930s. The number of women working in heavy industry increased by a third between 1939 and 1941. The production of armaments was at first made the responsibility of Dr Todt (the man who had built the *Autobahnen* in the 1930s). He was killed in a flying

The development of Germany, 1919–1991

Part 2: Life in Germany

accident in 1942 and was replaced by Hitler's favourite architect, Albert Speer. Speer not only streamlined war production but also ruthlessly employed slave labour from prisoners of war and the occupied territories. By the end of the war, 7 million non-German men and women were working in Germany. By 1944 German war production had improved tremendously, but by then it was too late as Germany could not compete against the massive combined war productions of Britain, the USA and the USSR.



Source 1: Bombing of Hamburg, July 1943

The Allied bombing campaign against the German economy and cities greatly increased civilian hardship. In the spring of 1942 the British RAF was able to mount heavier bombing raids. The 'thousand bomber' attacks on Cologne, Essen and Bremen in May and June created widespread destruction. In 1943 the RAF and the US air force started severe bombing of the Ruhr industrial area, which had a disastrous effect on German war production. The *Luftwaffe* had to deploy 70 per cent of its fighter strength at a crucial stage in the war to meet this threat. In July 1943 the RAF switched its attention to the port of Hamburg, creating a firestorm that killed 45,000 civilians and destroyed 10 square miles of the city. As many as 900,000 civilians fled the city in panic. The shock of the Allied bombing raids was recognised by the Nazis.

Luftwaffe
The German air force between 1935 and 1945

Dr Goebbels, the Minister for Propaganda, toured the damaged cities (Hitler refused to) to try and boost flagging German morale. The Allies switched their raids to Berlin, which may have been a mistake as German armament production recovered in 1944 as the Ruhr was not so heavily hit. Nevertheless, in the last stage of the war British and American bombers reduced most German cities to rubble in ‘round the clock’ carpet bombing. The Ruhr was devastated again but the most spectacular raid was in February 1945 on the city of Dresden, where the death toll in one night of bombing exceeded 25,000. By the end of the war at least 500,000 German civilians had been killed by bombing and most German cities had been ruined, with millions made homeless.

The ‘Final Solution’

The Nazi policy of anti-Semitism has been described earlier ([Part 2, Page 13](#)). The start of the Second World War, however, started an even more horrifying attack on Jewish communities not only in Germany but also in the countries that were conquered in the *Wehrmacht’s* early successes. When Poland was invaded in 1939, Hitler had agreed to the formation of special action squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) made up of SS and police units who would follow the advancing German armies and take responsibility for security in the newly captured areas. In practice, this meant the murder of senior Polish officers, Polish clergy as well as Polish Jews. Thousands were executed in a matter of weeks and, although some German army officers protested, the majority either assisted or looked the other way. Three million Polish Jews were now resettled into ghetto areas. Conditions in the overcrowded ghettos in Poland were horrifying: inadequate food supplies, famine, exposure to the weather and widespread disease made for a miserable existence for hundreds of thousands of Jews.

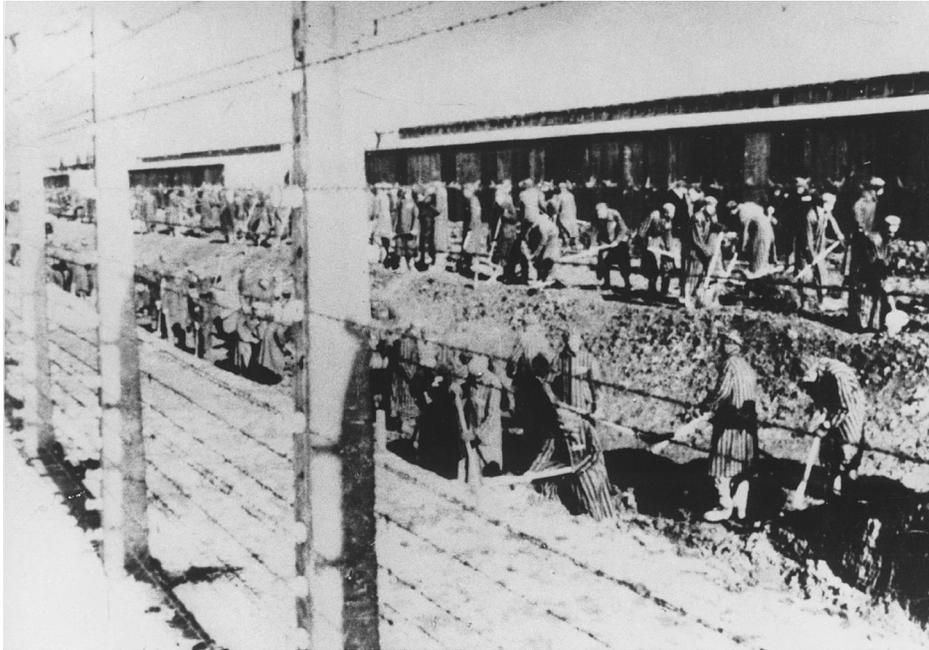
ghetto
Jewish reservations in towns, at this time usually walled in

Nazi policies towards the Jews underwent a dramatic change in 1941–2. The invasion of the USSR had a decisive effect on the direction of policy. On 31 July a directive signed by Goering was sent to Himmler’s

deputy, Reinhard Heydrich, to find a ‘final solution’ to the problem of the Jewish populations of Europe. The invasion of the USSR, begun in June 1941, saw a repeat, on a much larger scale than Poland, of the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* that followed the German armies. Mass killings of Jews, irrespective of age and sex, took place in the wake of the advancing German armies. In September 1941 in the Babi Yar ravine, just outside the city of Kiev, 33,771 Jewish men, women and children were shot dead and covered in quicklime by the local *Einsatzgruppen*. Similar massacres took place all over western Russia. By January 1942 500,000 Jews had been killed in this way. This was the start of the genocide of the European Jews. Himmler himself visited a mass execution of Jews in Minsk in August 1941 and was so revolted by the spectacle of the mass shootings that he gave orders for a quicker and less bloody solution. Experiments began to gas Jews instead.

In January 1942 a high-level conference of Nazi leaders, led by Heydrich, was held in a villa on the shores of Lake Wannsee on the outskirts of Berlin. There it was decided that forced deportation of all European Jews would not be sufficient to deal with the huge numbers of Jews in the newly occupied territories and, after the expected victory against the USSR, within Soviet territory also. The details of the ‘Final Solution’ were worked out: extermination of the Jews.

Purpose-built extermination camps were built in eastern Europe to kill Jews from all over Europe. The mass murder of Jews in Poland was under way by the spring of 1942, as was the deportation and murder of Jews from Germany and western Europe. The camps where most Jews were killed were at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Chelmno and Majdanek. One extermination camp at Birkenau may have been responsible for 1.1 million Jewish deaths. In all it has been estimated that 6 million European Jews were murdered. This horrific genocide is known as ‘the Holocaust’.



Source 2: Auschwitz prisoners dig drainage ditches in 1944

Other groups such as gypsies, prisoners of war, political opponents and homosexuals were also persecuted and frequently deported to concentration camps and extermination camps.

Opposition to the Nazis

Despite the power and influence of the Nazi propaganda machine and the apparatus of the police state, there was limited and unsuccessful resistance to the Nazi regime. It should not be forgotten that over 14,000 Germans were sentenced to death in the courts for political offences and thousands more political opponents ended up in concentration camps.

Opposition from within the churches tended to be from individuals rather than large groups. Martin Niemöller spent nearly eight years in concentration camps and was lucky to survive. His leadership of the Confessional Church as a rival to the 'German Christians' had led to his arrest. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was another well-known opponent within the Confessional Church to the ideas of Nazism. He was arrested and executed in 1945. Although there were brave exceptions, in the main there was little effective

opposition from the churches to the Nazi regime.

There was some opposition from German youth. The White Rose organisation at Munich University was very critical of the loss of freedom by ordinary Germans. In 1943 the White Rose bravely organised a demonstration against the Nazis in Munich. Members of the organisation, including brother and sister Hans and Sophie Scholl, were arrested, brutally tortured and executed. During the late 1930s more organised resistance came from youth cult groups known as the Edelweiss Pirates. This took the form of attacks on Hitler Youth members, distribution of anti-Nazi pamphlets and the sheltering of deserters from the army. Many of the leaders of this group were arrested and hanged publicly in 1944.

Potentially, however, the most serious opposition could have come from within Germany's armed forces. The relationship between the senior officers and Adolf Hitler was complicated. Although many regarded him as an upstart, they were grateful to him for the elimination of the SA in 1934 and most were enthusiastic supporters of Hitler's policy of rearmament and reversal of the Treaty of Versailles. Army officers were also bound by an oath of obedience to the Führer, an oath required from 1934. To break the oath was a matter of honour and most senior officers had scruples about doing so, although later few had moral scruples about involvement in Nazi war crimes. When Hitler's foreign policy almost led to a war over Czechoslovakia (**Part 3, Page 10**) in the autumn of 1938, the Chief of Staff of the German army, Franz Halder, planned to remove Hitler from power. The Munich settlement, however, gave Hitler most of what he wanted and a tremendous popularity boost. The moment passed.

A more serious attempt was made by officers of Army Group Centre in Russia in 1943 but the bombs they placed on Hitler's aircraft failed to detonate. In 1944 a group of army officers plotted to kill Hitler as Germany's defeat looked inevitable. A bomb was placed in Hitler's headquarters by Colonel von Stauffenberg. The conspirators planned to start a coup in Berlin as soon as

The development of Germany, 1919–1991

Part 2: Life in Germany

Hitler's death was announced. However, the assassination attempt on 20 July 1944 was bungled: the bomb injured Hitler, but failed to kill him, and the attempted coup in Berlin was a fiasco. Within 24 hours the SS and *Gestapo* had regained control. Hitler's revenge was swift: 200 members of the plot were executed. Many were hanged slowly from meat hooks with piano wire, the executions filmed for Hitler and his cronies to watch over and over again. Famous soldiers like Field Marshal Rommel, who knew of the plot, were persuaded to commit suicide. Even if the plot had succeeded, it is highly unlikely it would have made any difference to the end of the war: the Allies were insisting on unconditional surrender whoever was in charge in Germany.



Source 3: Hitler shows Mussolini the wreckage caused by the July Plot in 1944

Hitler's regime remained in power until the end, and the war only ended after bitter fighting over German territory and even in the streets of Berlin. Most of Germany's armed forces and population, despite military defeats, heavily bombed cities, hardship and starvation fought to the end until Germany had been invaded and occupied by the Allied armed forces. Internal opposition to the Nazis failed spectacularly.

Key learning points: Life during the Second World War in Germany

- Rationing on the home front in Germany.
- War production policies and the use of slave labour.
- Impact of the Allied bombing campaign.
- The origin of the Final Solution.
- The destruction of Jewish communities in Poland and occupied areas of USSR.
- The extermination camps.
- The main sources of opposition to the Nazis.
- The 20 July 1944 Bomb Plot.

4. Life in post-war Germany

Life at the end of the war

In May 1945 Germany surrendered to the Allies. One of the most serious consequences for Germans was their forced expulsion from where they had settled in occupied Europe. Some 11 million Germans were expelled from countries all over the continent, arriving in the western and eastern zones of occupation as homeless refugees. Not surprisingly, life was harsh, not only for the refugees but also the remaining home population. The condition of the bombed German cities was appalling, with millions living in temporary and sub-standard housing. Their diet was poor, starvation was common and food supplies almost entirely dependent on the Allied armies. It has been estimated that the average daily calories for all Germans went down from 2,000 in 1944 to 1,412 in 1945–6. To the misery of this life was added the huge problems of inflation and shortage of most products. Out-of-control inflation had once again ruined Germans and eventually the Allies had to introduce a new currency in 1948.

The major Nazi war criminals were put on trial at Nuremberg in 1946: twelve (including Hermann Goering) were sentenced to death, seven (including Albert Speer)

were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Trials of other Nazis prison camp guards and army officers continued for many years – in the British zone alone between 1945 and 1949 24,000 trials were held. In all of the Allied zones a process of denazification began, designed to remove Nazis from positions of power and to re-educate the German population. The Nazi Party was made illegal and German schools were reorganised to remove all trace of Nazi propaganda. It has been estimated that over 6 million Germans were investigated in the denazification process but the western Allies soon realised that so many Germans were compromised by their links to the Nazi government that there was no hope of rebuilding the economy, government, police, judiciary and legal system or schools unless ex-Nazis were re-employed. By 1947 the process of denazification had definitely slowed down and by 1951 it was abandoned.

denazification

The process of removing the influence of the Nazi Party

To start with, the Allies began a programme of de-industrialisation: destroying all trace of heavy industry in Germany so that any future armaments industry would be impossible. Large-scale unemployment resulted when other industries, for example the chemical and electrical industries, were also destroyed. The supply of food dried up and any realistic prospect of Germany paying reparations faded. The British government found itself in the crazy situation of paying more for importing food into the British zone than it was receiving in reparations. The western Allies came to the conclusion that unless Germany was allowed to revive its economy there was no hope of payment of reparations, recovery or an end to starvation.

In June 1947 a massive boost, not only to the West German economy but also to western Europe generally, came with the Marshall Plan. The US Secretary of State, George Marshall, announced that the wealthy USA would make funds available to all the European states to rebuild their economies. Between 1948 and 1952 \$1,300 million was spent on this aid in western Europe and the western zones of Germany benefited enormously. At the same time, in June 1948, the western Allies suspended the German

currency and replaced it with the Deutschmark to bring an end to inflation. The revival of the German economy in the western zones began.

Stalin, the leader of the USSR, viewed these developments in the western zones with growing suspicion and fear that the agreements made at Yalta and Potsdam were being violated by the western powers.

Life during the Berlin Airlift

Stalin's fears about Marshall Aid and the Allied decision to introduce a new currency in the western zones prompted his decision to blockade Berlin. He thought that this would be easily organised and result in the western powers leaving the city of Berlin. Road and rail links between Berlin and the west were cut in June 1948. Stalin, however, had underestimated the determination of President Truman and his allies to keep an Allied presence in Berlin. He also underestimated the air power that the USA and its allies could use.

The Allies organised an airlift to supply west Berliners with food, fuel and other essential supplies for the 2.4 million population. Although the Russians 'buzzed' Allied aircraft, using the three air corridors into Berlin, they did not shoot down any planes. Stalin hesitated to do so as it would start a war between the USSR and the western Allies: he also doubted whether the airlift would work. In this belief he was wrong. The airlift lasted eleven months: a flight to Berlin left bases in West Germany every 30 seconds. The worst moment for the west Berliners came in January 1949 when supplies of coal were down to one week and food to three weeks. But the supplies kept coming: 278,000 flights in all, carrying 2.3 million tons of supplies at a cost of more than \$200 million. Tens of thousands of Berliners helped to build a new airport at Tegel to reduce congestion at the other two Berlin airports.

West Berliners had to suffer near famine conditions but most were not tempted to the eastern zone with

promises of food and fuel. In the end only 2 per cent of the population of west Berlin was tempted to leave. West Berliners came under great pressure to become part of a single-city communist government. A clear majority supported the airlift and the city council moved to west Berlin. Many students and teachers from Berlin University in the eastern zone set up the new Free University in west Berlin.

Stalin, realising that the blockade was not working and not wanting to risk a full-scale war, called it off on 12 May 1949. The results were significant not only for the German people but also for the rest of the world:

- Two separate German countries were now created (**Part 3, Page 24**).
- Berlin had become a symbol of opposition to the spread of communism.
- The USA was now committed to maintaining substantial forces in Europe.
- A '**cold war**' now existed between the east and west.

Adenauer's economic miracle and its effects

Konrad Adenauer was Chancellor of West Germany from 1949 to 1963 and his aims have already been described (**Part 1, Page 34**). A very important part of his policy was to restore the West German economy and repair the damage caused by the Second World War. There were two very important factors affecting these plans:

- One was the introduction of a new currency, the Deutschmark, in 1948 which brought to an end the post-war inflation.
- The other was the Marshall Aid programme which gave West Germany, along with many other European countries, generous investment to rebuild the economy. West Germany received \$1,300 million.

cold war

A period of hostility between the USSR and eastern Europe on the one hand and the USA and its western Allies on the other, with an arms race, threats, propaganda, but no open warfare



Source 4: Konrad Adenauer, German Chancellor

Adenauer's Economic Minister was Dr Ludwig Erhard and much of the credit for the success of West Germany's economic recovery is due to him. So successful was the growth of the German economy that it is often described as an 'economic miracle'. The West German economy was a mixed economy, in that private capital and state capital were used to create wealth and recovery. Relatively high rates of taxation were used to ensure there was enough government income to afford social reforms and welfare provision of a high standard (benefits for the unemployed, sick, and young people and pensions for the old). The mixed economy depended on economic recovery and the creation of wealth to pay for the welfare state. Excellent relations with trade unions ensured a cooperative workforce and there were remarkably few strikes.

The key points of Erhard's policies in the 1950s were:

- Sensible use of \$1,300 million of Marshall Aid to rebuild old industries and introduce hi-tech machinery.
- Investment and research: firms which invested in research and development could reclaim tax.
- A strong central bank and new currency.
- Massive demand for goods because of the Korean War (1950–3).
- High taxation of business and the more wealthy to fund further investment and social reform. For example, from 1952 wealthier Germans were taxed at 50 per cent and the money was used to build 2 million badly needed new homes.

As a result of these policies, West Germany experienced:

- the highest annual growth rate in western Europe;
- full employment (by 1960 a low rate of 0.4 per cent unemployment);
- high productivity (between 1948 and 1964 industrial production increased by 600 per cent);
- very low inflation.

West Germany became one of the leading economies of the world by the 1960s. The production of cars, for example, was second only to the USA. By the mid-1950s the Volkswagen company was producing the VW Beetle car at a price that was affordable to Germans and buyers in other countries and it had a sound reputation for reliability. Luxury goods such as Leica cameras and Mercedes-Benz cars were in high demand. Although growth slackened in the 1960s, it had largely recovered by the 1970s and West Germany continued to out-perform most other western economies. West Germans enjoyed an unprecedented rate of economic growth and a very high standard of living and welfare provision. Not surprisingly, East Germans looked on enviously: between 1949 and 1961 3.5 million East Germans moved to the West, mostly through Berlin, to seek a better lifestyle. This was a serious political problem for the East German government and its Soviet allies.

Key learning points: Life in post-war Germany

- Living conditions in post-war Germany.
- Trials of war criminals and denazification.
- Marshall Aid and the Deutschmark.
- Reasons for the blockade of Berlin by the USSR.
- The success of the Berlin Airlift, 1948–9.
- The consequences of the Berlin Airlift.
- Reasons for Adenauer's 'economic miracle'.
- Results of the 'economic miracle'.

5. Life in Germany during the cold war

East and West Germany

Whilst living conditions in West Germany and west Berlin remained high in the 1950s, East Germany (GDR) faced enormous problems. It had a population of only one-third that of West Germany and its industrial output was barely 20 per cent of output in West Germany. Poor living and working conditions encouraged thousands of Germans living in the GDR to move to the west. This movement made the shortage of skilled workers even worse and the economy did not prosper, especially as the USSR was still demanding reparations. Although the border was closed by the East German government in 1952, thousands still escaped through the free city of Berlin. In 1952, 182,000 left for the west through that route.

The pressure on the East German government was shown in June 1953 when hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike, attacking Communist Party buildings and demanding free and secret elections. The Soviet army was called in to restore order: many thousands were arrested and it has been estimated that 125 people were killed. Although wages were increased after this uprising, the government took steps to double the size of its secret police force to ensure that a similar protest did not occur. Many voted with their feet and in 1953 408,000 people

emigrated from East to West Germany. The East German one-party, police state could only continue with the support of the Soviet army.

Tensions remained over the situation in Berlin for many years after the Berlin airlift. The migration of people from east to west continued: in 1958 the leader of the USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, threatened western access routes to Berlin but then backed down. Life in west and east Berlin was very different. West Berlin was a centre of consumerism – with modern, well-stocked shops, thriving cafés and restaurants, packed theatres and nightclubs. The West German ‘economic miracle’ was plain for all to see. Conditions in east Berlin were very different. Whilst everyone was fed and housed and health care and free education was provided, it was nevertheless a much lower standard of living. Consumer goods such as washing machines and cars were not readily available: there were waiting lists. The migration of people from east to west was not only politically embarrassing, it was also economically disastrous as there was a serious labour shortage. Many of those who left tended to be young and highly skilled. The overall impression in east Berlin was one of drabness; buildings were still derelict and much war damage remained unrepaired. The tensions over the divided Berlin and the migration of people to the west boiled over into a major crisis in 1961.

The Berlin Wall

In August 1961 the East German government, under instructions from the USSR, started to construct a wall to divide East and West Berlin. This 103-mile perimeter around west Berlin was quickly built. It was a massive stone wall, topped with barbed wire and gun positions. A second barrier created a gap between the walls that was soon nicknamed the Death Strip. There were specially constructed crossing points into east Berlin: special permits were required. The most famous was called Checkpoint Charlie, the only point at which non-Germans could cross into the east.

The development of Germany, 1919–1991

Part 2: Life in Germany



Source 5: Workmen begin to build the Berlin Wall in 1961

Escape across the wall was highly dangerous. It has been estimated that nearly a hundred people were shot trying to cross into the west between 1961 and 1989, 41 in the first year. Families and friends were forced to live apart for decades.

The border between the two Germanies was heavily fortified, not only in Berlin but along the whole frontier. One famous example of an attempted escape was that of Pete Lechter on 17 August 1962. He attempted to cross the wall to see his sister. As he climbed the barbed wire he was shot and fell back into the Death Strip where he slowly bled to death only 300 metres from a border post. Crowds gathered, begging the US guards to rescue him, but this would have meant violating the border and risking an international crisis. A tense stand-off existed between the west and the east over Berlin. President Kennedy of the USA made a famous visit to west Berlin in 1963 which may have boosted morale in west Berlin but, at the same time, the USA was powerless to remove the wall without risking a nuclear war. The wall survived for 28 years, a symbol of the cold war and the divided Germany.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall

In 1982 Helmut Kohl became Chancellor of West Germany and under his leadership the economy began to recover from the recession of the late 1970s. His period in office from 1985 coincided with the end of the cold war. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost in the USSR not only ended tensions between east and west but also relaxed the ban on other political parties in eastern Europe. The Polish and Hungarian governments changed into coalition governments where communists were either in a minority position or non-existent. The new Hungarian government dismantled the Iron Curtain, opening up its borders to Austria in March 1989.

This had a dramatic impact in East Germany where thousands of people now had a new route to move west. By June 1989 12 per cent of the entire population of East Germany had put in applications to emigrate. In September 1989 alone, 33,000 people moved west from East Germany. The East German economy was heading for bankruptcy. Gorbachev had already announced that he would not order the Soviet army to crush opposition in eastern Europe as had happened on so many previous occasions in the past.

On 9 November 1989 the East German government had no option left, without Russian support, but to open its borders and allow free travel. Thousands marched to the Berlin Wall and pulled it down in one of the most momentous events in post-war history. In the next few days hundreds of thousands of east Germans crossed the remains of the wall and visited the west.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany now seized the opportunity to lead the reunification of Germany:

- Huge loans were made by the West German government to bail out the bankrupt state of East Germany.
- By March 1990, 300,000 East Germans had left for the west. At this rate of emigration, coupled with its poor economy, East Germany had no long-term future as a country.

- Gorbachev assured Kohl he would not oppose reunification in return for West German loans to the USSR: by 1997 133 billion marks had been paid to the USSR and the countries that replaced it.
- There was overwhelming support for reunification in East Germany as was shown in free elections in March 1990.

Germany now became a complete federal democracy. The two currencies were merged in May 1990 and East Germans found that their mark could be exchanged at a value of one for one with the West German Deutschmark even though the market value was only a fraction of the West German mark. This was an important factor ensuring that unification was popular in the east.

The treaty of unification followed in August 1990, Berlin became the capital of the new Germany and Helmut Kohl easily won in the election for a new German government, becoming Chancellor of a united Germany, 41 years after the country's division.

Although unification and destruction of the Berlin Wall had happened quickly, significant problems remained:

- The economy of the old East Germany needed massive subsidies from the west to survive. For example, wages in the former East Germany rose from 35 per cent to 74 per cent of western levels by 1995, pensions rose from 40 per cent to 79 per cent of western levels too. The cost was massive and highly unpopular in the west.
- Huge migration from east to west took place after reunification, resulting in a rise of unemployment (to 7.9 per cent) in the former West Germany, which was not used to such social problems and reunification was blamed.

However Berlin, overall, has undergone massive redevelopment since 1991 and has been redesigned as a new capital with an iconic Reichstag building. It is a centre of creativity, with a thriving music scene, active nightlife and important tourist industry. The German economy, in spite of all the problems of reunification, is still a major success

story and has been justly described as the economic powerhouse of Europe, ranked in 2008 as the third largest economy in the world. Most Germans have not only done well out of reunification, the majority are also firmly in favour of it. Unemployment by 2013 in the east was at its lowest since 1991, but gross domestic product in the east was still only 67 per cent of that in the former West Germany and unemployment in the east is 9.5 per cent whilst in the west it is 5.8 per cent.

Key learning points: Life in Germany during the cold war

- Different life styles in East and West Germany.
- Tensions over Berlin and migration from East to West.
- Reasons for the construction of the Berlin Wall.
- Impact of the Berlin Wall, 1961–89.
- Reasons why the Berlin Wall collapsed.
- Reunification and its effects on German society and economy.

Acknowledgements

Source 1: Bombing of Hamburg , July 1943 – Corbis Images

Source 2: Auschwitz prisoners dig drainage ditches in 1944 - AKG Images

Source 3: Hitler shows Mussolini the wreckage caused by the July Plot in 1944
- Mary Evans Picture Library / Alamy Stock Photo

Source 4: Konrad Adenauer, German Chancellor - AKG Images

Source 5: Workmen begin to build the Berlin Wall in 1961 - dpa picture alliance / Alamy Stock Photo