

The Divided Nation

A History of Germany 1918-1990

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The Collapse of Democracy and the Rise of Hitler

Two rather different processes coincided in the late 1920s and early 1930s. One was the collapse of the democratic political system of the Weimar Republic. The other was the rise of Hitler's Nazi Party, immeasurably aided by the economic depression after 1929. The collapse of democracy effectively preceded, and was an essential precondition for, the rise of Hitler; and the appointment of Adolf Hitler to the chancellorship of Germany was by no means the only possible, or inevitable, outcome of the collapse of Weimar democracy. Given the consequences of this appointment, it is scarcely surprising that the causes, the relative contribution and importance of different factors, have been so hotly debated.

The Flawed Compromise

We have seen that Weimar democracy was born under difficult circumstances. The 1918/19 revolution in effect represented a temporary abdication of responsibility on the part of old elites unwilling to take the opprobrium of defeat or shoulder the burdens of post-war reconstruction. Fearful of more radical revolution, they made crucial concessions to moderate socialist forces; but they did not view these concessions as permanent, and remained in the wings, waiting and watching for chances to revise both the domestic and international settlements of 1918/19. On the part of the urban masses, on the other hand, the participation for the first time in government of the SPD, and the newly recognized and established position of the trade unions, awakened expectations which an impoverished post-war country would find it hard to deliver. Defeated in war, burdened with the harsh provisions of the Versailles Treaty, essentially contested in its very essence and attacked from both left and right, the Weimar Republic certainly bore a considerable weight of problems from the very start. Yet it survived the difficulties of the early years. A general strike in 1920 served to defeat the Kapp putsch; the hyper-inflation of 1923 was successfully dealt with, reparations were renegotiated, and international affairs apparently brought onto a firmer footing by the mid-1920s. The question thus arises: was Weimar democracy, as some pessimistic accounts tend to suggest, really 'doomed from the start'; or, rather, was its collapse contingent on the immediate effects of the world economic depression after 1929? Were the causes of its collapse essentially structural and long-term or circumstantial and short-term in nature? And, insofar as they were short-term, what roles were played by different groups and individuals, and what, if any, alternative outcomes might have been possible? What options and courses of action might have been available to those key historical actors, who, if they had taken different decisions, might have been in a position to alter the fatal course of Weimar history? Could the economic distress which provided much of the rapidly increasing strength of the Nazi Party after 1928 have been in some way

ameliorated? Did Hitler actually 'seize power', or was it rather handed to him? And if so, by whom? Clearly answers to these questions cannot easily be found, and the concomitant debates are by no means resolved.

In February 1925, Friedrich Ebert died, prematurely, from appendicitis. In the ensuing election, the seventy-seven year-old right-wing monarchist Junker Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg was elected, on a second ballot, President of the Weimar Republic. Unlike the Social Democrat Ebert, Hindenburg was not in principle committed to upholding and strengthening the democratic system: on the contrary, he made little secret of his intention to replace it with a more authoritarian political system as soon as was practicable. The election of Hindenburg was of twofold significance: it illustrated the prevailing political orientations of a little over half of the German electorate in the mid-1920s; and it put into a position of considerable power an individual who would use this power to undermine the democracy which he was empowered to uphold.

Hindenburg's election was symptomatic of wider trends. As far as the actual functioning of parliamentary democracy was concerned, all was far from well even before the onset of the recession. Under an electoral system of proportional representation, in which the relatively numerous parties held radically different opinions on a range of domestic and foreign affairs, it was extremely difficult to form any sort of stable coalition government with majority support in parliament, even in the 'good years'. While some combinations of parties were able to agree on domestic issues, they could not agree on foreign affairs; and other combinations could agree on foreign affairs but not on domestic matters. With no party able to dominate a fragmented political landscape, any coalition was intrinsically unstable, and in the event short-lived. The instability of parliamentary government only helped to discredit a system which was in any event rather lacking in legitimacy among large sectors of the population.

In 1924 Germany saw two governments made up of a bourgeois coalition without a parliamentary majority come and go: the first, headed by Wilhelm Marx, failed to gain support in the May General Election, as did the second Marx cabinet in the General Election of December 1924. In the period up to the next General Election of May 1928, there were four different cabinets. The first, headed by Hans Luther, which lasted from 15 January 1925 to 5 December 1925, was a coalition of the right which collapsed as a result of the opposition of the right-wing German National People's Party (DNVP) to the Locarno Pact. The second, surviving from 20 January 1926 to 12 May 1926, and again headed by Luther, was a bourgeois coalition lacking a parliamentary majority; it was brought down by a combination of forces in the Reichstag. The third flourished only from 16 May to 17 December 1926, headed once more by Marx, and was a renewed bourgeois coalition lacking parliamentary support; it was ultimately brought down by a vote of no confidence in the Reichstag proposed by the SPD and supported by both Communists and Nationalists, as well as by other smaller parties. A new right-wing coalition, headed again by Marx, lasted from 29 January 1927 until after the General Election of 1928. After the short-lived grand coalition of the Stresemann government of 13 August, in November 1923, the SPD

had chosen to remain on the sidelines of parliamentary politics. In 1928, the SPD returned again to government in a grand coalition under Chancellor Hermann Müller: this was to be the last truly democratic regime of the Weimar Republic. From 1929 onwards, it was faced with mounting economic, social and political problems that finally tore apart the delicate fabric of Weimar democracy and ushered in the period of *de facto* presidential rule. But it is clear that even in the period from 1924 to 1928, the functioning of Weimar parliamentary politics was less than smooth; and the instability of governments only helped to bring the whole 'system' into disrepute. The problems of Weimar parliamentary democracy cannot be attributed simply to specific constitutional features, such as proportional representation or the ease by which Chancellors could be voted out of office. Party politics reflected the deeper socio-economic and cultural divisions in Weimar Germany, which in turn contributed to the fragmentation and increasing extremism of party politics in the later Weimar years, and the expansion of an effective political vacuum in the centre ground.

For one thing, because of the new and prominent role of the state in economic and social affairs, socio-economic conflicts were inevitably politicised. Particular issues became generalized; criticisms of specific policies widened to become critiques of the 'system' as a whole. Again, these tendencies predated the onset of economic recession, and weakened the internal structure of Weimar democracy even before it was subjected to the sustained battering of the depression years.

As early as 1923, employers had mounted an effective attack on the eight-hour-day agreed in the Stinnes Legien agreement of 1918; and the failure of the *Zentral-Arbeits-Gemeinschaft* (ZAG) to resolve industrial disputes led to the official resignation of the trade union organization, the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* (ADGB), in January 1924. After 1923, trade unions began losing members, funds, and credibility. They had increasingly to rely on the state as the effective guarantor of their position. Yet employers, despite their relatively strong position, remained on the defensive. Although it is difficult to generalize about employers' attitudes, the Ruhr lock-out of 1928 is a significant illustration of one important strand. Unwilling to concede even a modest wage increase (of 24 per cent), certain Ruhr industrialists locked out around a quarter of a million workers in protest against the very system of state arbitration. Gradually, significant sectors of industry came to feel that it was the democratic parliamentary system itself, which guaranteed the position of workers and unions, that needed to be revised. As they lost faith in a system for which they had never, in any event, had much love, so also they began to withdraw support and funds from the liberal parties of the bourgeois middle. More broadly, the Weimar Republic was identified with the institutionalized power of workers and their political and union organizations which employers, who had formed their attitudes in what were now seen as the golden days of Imperial Germany, tended to regard as essentially illegitimate, by definition little more than 'enemies of the Empire' (*Reichsfeinde*), in Bismarck's phrase.

Labour relations constituted but one element in undermining support for the Republic among certain economic elites. Far more widespread was the rejection of the Versailles Treaty and all it implied for Germany's geographical boundaries, and

for her political and military status. This resentment was extensive and was to play an important role in the eventual mass popularity of the Nazi Party but it took on a particular significance in connection with one particular elite: the army. While there are varying analyses of the role of the army in Weimar politics (ranging from older, liberal interpretations of the army as comprising a 'state within a state' to the more recent explorations of the interconnections between army, industry and government), it is clear that in a number of ways the army played a key role in undermining Weimar democracy. The *Reichswehr* was to a degree split within itself; there were differences of attitude towards the Republic and a growth of factions after 1918. 1 Many leading officers claimed that while they supported the German nation, they could not support the democratic state: thus, in the early years, in different ways, Generals Groener, Seeckt and others co-operated with right-wing groups and paramilitary organizations, such as the ex-servicemen's association, the *Stahlhelm*. German military schools were opened in Russia (under the Treaty of Rapallo) to train officers, and secret rearmament programmes were initiated in contravention of the Versailles Treaty. From 1926 onwards, General Kurt von Schleicher played a leading role in supporting and influencing President Hindenburg's plans for a more authoritarian form of government which would reinstate the pre-1918 elites in what they deemed to be their rightful positions of power. Schleicher's role was to become particularly important in the closing stages of the Republic's brief history. Meanwhile, in the civilian arena, towards the end of the 1920s, increasing disaffection with democracy was reflected in the rightwards shift of a number of 'bourgeois' parties. Most notable among these was the DNVP, which was taken over by the right-wing nationalist press baron Hugenberg in 1928. After the death of Stresemann in 1929, the DVP also moved towards the right. But even as they shifted, so were they being outstripped-and their support sapped away from them-by the emergence and dramatic growth of an infinitely more radical party: the NSDAP. And, unlike the traditional conservative and nationalist parties, the NSDAP was able, in the new era of plebiscitary democracy and economic crisis, to attract a wide popular following. Ultimately, elites disaffected with democracy were to feel they must ally with the Nazis to gain a mass base from which to bring the shaky edifice down.

The Rise of the NSDAP

The Nazi Party was, in the early 1920s, but one among many nationalist and *völkisch* radical political groups. It was catapulted to prominence with the onset of economic recession in the late 1920s: having secured only 2.6% of the national vote in the 1928 General Election, the NSDAP became the second largest party in the Reichstag with 18.3% of the vote in September 1930. The Nazis owed their spectacular success to a combination of two discrete sets of factors: first, their distinctive organization and strategy: and secondly, the wider socio-economic conditions which created climates of opinion and sets of grievances on which the Nazis could prey.

Following Hitler's release from imprisonment at the end of 1924, the NSDAP was formally refounded in February 1925. Over the course of the next few years,

Hitler rose from his pre-1923 role of 'drummer' to become the undisputed leader or 'Führer', standing to some extent above the organizational fray and exerting his powers of charismatic leadership through his gifts of oratory and control of mass audiences. The eventual semblance of a well-organized, united party symbolized by the brown shirt uniforms of the SA, the serried ranks of units marching past the Führer with arms raised in Hitler salute, the visual and emotional effects of the mass rallies with the leader as the focal point partially disguised more complex realities.

The paramilitary SA founded in 1920, one of the many paramilitary groups to spring up in the aftermath of the First World War was at first organized only at the local level. After the return of the war veteran Ernst Röhm from Bolivia to head the organization in 1930, the SA remained somewhat unruly, and, in conventional political terms, more radical than Hitler's conception of Nazi ideology was to be. Nor were all Nazi leaders united on a clearly definable 'ideology' in any case. An important figure with ideas somewhat different from those of Hitler was Gregor Strasser, whose role in Nazi party organization was strengthened in 1925 when Hitler was banned from making speeches in public. Strasser, who had considerable organizational skills, played a key role in spreading the Nazi party organization across broad areas of Germany, beyond the original Nazi heartland in Bavaria. In some areas, particularly in north-west Germany, the NSDAP had a more 'revolutionary' or radical flavour.

During 1925-6 the NSDAP suffered much infighting. Hitler, on returning to the public rostrum, was able to transcend this factionalism and unite the party under his unique form of leadership. The Berlin party chief Joseph Goebbels was persuaded of Hitler's merits, and made it his task to promote and strengthen the 'Führer myth' through propaganda. At the same time, the 'putschist' strategy of the early years was rejected in favour of following a legal, parliamentary road to the overthrow of parliamentary democracy. New party organizations were founded to begin to penetrate a range of social and professional groups. In 1926, the National Socialist League of German Students and the Hitler Youth were founded. The League of Nazi Lawyers, the League of Nazi Doctors, the League of Nazi Schoolteachers, and the Fighting League for German Culture were all established by 1929. In 1928, the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO) was created in an attempt to infiltrate the heartland of left-wing politics, the working class. From 1930 onwards, concerted efforts were made to infiltrate existing agrarian and white-collar worker pressure groups, such as the *Reichslandbund* and the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfenverband*. Attempts were also made to win over or at least neutralize and allay the suspicions of important industrialists.

The Nazis propagated, not a coherent doctrine or body of systematically interrelated ideas, but rather a vaguer world-view made up of a number of prejudices with varied appeals to different audiences which could scarcely be dignified with the term 'ideology'. As far as Hitler himself was concerned, two major elements were of decisive importance. One was his radical anti-Semitism; the other was his ambitious set of foreign policy aims his desire for mastery of Europe, the creation of 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) for the 'Aryan' Germans, and eventually for mastery of the

world. Linked to these was Hitler's anti-Communism: 'Jews and Bolsheviks' were often pejoratively associated, even indissolubly equated, as in their alleged responsibility for the debacle of 1918. The fight against the perceived evils of modern capitalism was to be a simultaneous fight against 'international Jewry' and against the threat of Communism. But while anti-Semitism was undoubtedly a major theme for Hitler and for Nazi activists, it was much less important as an element in the Nazi party's appeal to the wider population. ³ At this broader level, Nazi 'ideology' was a somewhat rag-bag collection of largely negative views combined with a utopian vision of a grandiose future coloured by nostalgic appeals to aspects of a mythical past. Thus Nazism opposed certain pernicious, potentially threatening tendencies of 'modern' capitalist society: the evils of big business (large department stores, often owned by Jews), international finance ('Jewish'), and revolutionary Communism. Nazis promoted a vision of a harmonious national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) which would be racially pure (cleansed of the 'pollution' of Jews, hereditary degenerates, and other supposedly racially or biologically inferior types), and which would overcome the class divisions which beset Imperial and Weimar Germany. Nazism claimed to be able to transcend the divisions and heal the wounds of capitalist society, and to present a new way forwards to a great future, presenting a genuine alternative to both the discredited authoritarianism of the Imperial past and the 'despicable' democracy of the Weimar present. How this transcendence would look in detail and in reality was never fully spelled out: Hitler was able to appeal to a wide range of groups harbouring different resentments and to allay suspicions on a number of fronts precisely because he was never very specific on the details of the proposed new order. In addition to particular social grievances and fears, there was very widespread nationalist resentment about the Treaty of Versailles from which Hitler was able to benefit. But most important for the expanding appeal of Nazism were the economic developments in the closing years of the Weimar Republic.

Economic Crises and the Collapse of Democracy

The Weimar Republic had suffered since its inception from major economic problems. The means of financing the First World War through loans and bonds rather than taxes had laid the foundations for post-war inflation, which had been fuelled and exacerbated by government policies in connection with reparations in 1923. Even after the stabilization of the currency in 1924, and the revision of reparations arrangements with the Dawes Plan, the Weimar economy was far from strong.

For one thing, it was heavily reliant on short-term loans from abroad. These could rapidly be withdrawn, with far-reaching consequences as indeed occurred after the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. For another, as Harold James has put it, 'Weimar's economy suffered from an inherent instability, and like any unstable structure required only a relatively small push to bring down the whole structure.'⁴ On both the industrial and agrarian fronts there were difficulties. Workers were heavily reliant on state arbitration to back wage claims that were disputed by employers, and, on some interpretations, relatively high labour costs contributed to the problems of the Weimar economy. Whatever one's view on the question of

whether wages were 'too high' in an era characterized by 'Taylorism' and 'Fordism' (the attempted rationalization of labour and enhanced productivity through the introduction of American time-and-motion studies, assembly line methods and the like), distributional struggles certainly contributed to Weimar's political problems. Nor was all well on the agricultural front, and the difficulties in the agrarian sphere were to play a major role in the rise of Hitler. From 1924, when the agricultural protectionism introduced at the beginning of the War came to an end, there was a need for rationalization in agriculture. From the mid-1920s onwards, agricultural indebtedness increased, and every year there were greater numbers of bankrupt estates: a heightened political radicalism among farmers resulted. Agrarian elites also came to bring considerable pressure to bear on President Hindenburg himself a Junker with experience of indebtedness in the final intrigues leading to the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor.

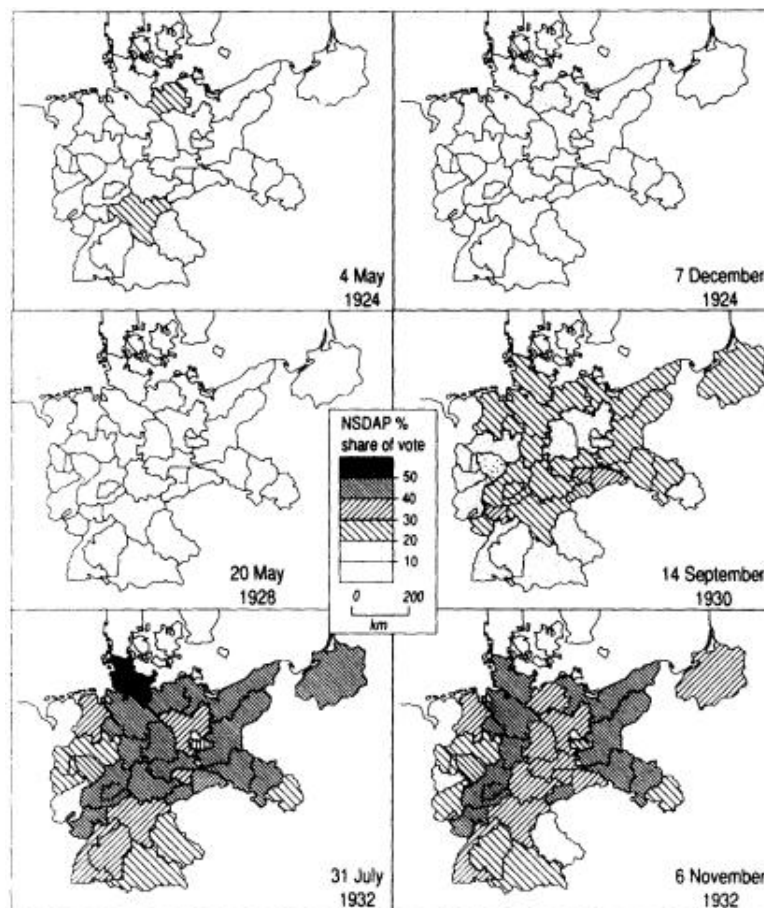
Given its inherent weaknesses, it is scarcely surprising that Germany's economy was affected so badly by the world recession in the years after 1929. Whatever the intrinsic political weaknesses of Weimar democracy even in the 'golden years', it was undoubtedly the depression which precipitated the actual collapse of Weimar democracy and paved the way for the rise of the Nazis to power.

The Grand Coalition of 1928-30, including the SPD, led by Chancellor Hermann Müller, was the last genuinely parliamentary government of Weimar Germany. Plans had already been made for its replacement by a more authoritarian alternative essentially presidential rule through a Chancellor and cabinet lacking majority support in parliament several weeks before its actual collapse. Having survived earlier crises, the Müller administration fell over the issue of unemployment insurance in the wider context of economic recession and rising unemployment. In October 1929 the Wall Street Crash prompted the withdrawal of American loans from Germany, and heralded a phenomenal rise in bankruptcies and unemployment in the following three years. With rising numbers out of work, unemployment insurance could no longer be paid at the level decreed in the unemployment insurance legislation of July 1927. Müller's coalition government was unable to reach agreement on the issue of whether to raise contributions or lower the level of benefits. Foundering on this issue, the last cabinet of the Weimar Republic to rely on parliamentary support was replaced by a presidential cabinet under Chancellor Brüning, which, lacking majority support in parliament, was to rule by presidential decree.

Brüning's policies have been the subject of considerable debate. He pursued austere, deflationary policies designed at the cost of sacrificing the well-being of millions of German families to achieve certain foreign policy aims. In particular, he consciously exacerbated a worsening unemployment situation with the intention of lifting the burden of reparations payments from the German economy. This was effected first, in the Hoover Moratorium of 1931 and then ultimately, when Brüning was no longer Chancellor, by the cancellation of all reparations at the Lausanne Conference of 1932. Brüning's deflationary policies have been defended by some historians, who suggest that there was no alternative set of economic policies either

politically or technically open to him at the time. Brüning, on this view, operated in a period when there was very little room for manoeuvre (in Knut Borchardt's phrase, *Handlungsspielraum*). Others, such as C.-L. Holtfrerich, have disputed such an interpretation, suggesting that a range of other policies were open both theoretically and politically and could thus have been pursued and indeed were being promoted increasingly by influential groups at this time. 6 Whatever the balance of argument in this debate, one thing is quite clear: the consequences of Brüning's policies were such as to produce the socio economic circumstances which provided fertile ground for Nazi agitation.

Brüning had been appointed Müller's successor, on the collapse of the latter's cabinet, without any dissolution of the Reichstag. However, when the latter demanded the withdrawal of a decree which Brüning had issued after the Reichstag's rejection of parts of the finance bill, Brüning chose to have the Reichstag dissolved in the summer of 1930. Under the constitution new elections would have to be called within sixty days. These took place in September 1930. Now, under conditions of rising economic crisis, the NSDAP achieved its electoral breakthrough. With 6.4 million votes, or 18.3% of the total vote, the NSDAP became the second largest party in the Reichstag, after the SPD (with 24.5% of the vote). At last, with 107 deputies out of a total of 608, the Nazis had a large, visible, disruptive presence in the Reichstag. The NSDAP made its greatest gains in the Protestant, agricultural regions and small towns of north and north-east Germany. In 1930, they achieved figures of 27% in Schleswig Holstein, 24.3% in Pomerania, and 24.3% in Hanover South-Brunswick. In the mixed agricultural and small-scale industrial areas of Lower Silesia Breslau (24.2%), Chemnitz Zwickau (23.8%) and Rhineland Palatinate (22.8%) the Nazis also achieved good results.⁷ Most impervious to Nazi penetration were Catholic areas, where Catholics tended to remain loyal to the Centre Party, and urban-industrial areas, where the organized working class on the whole stayed with the two major parties of labour, the SPD and KPD, although, as the depression worsened, the Social Democrats lost votes to the Communists. (In 1930, when the Nazis gained 107 seats, the Communists won 77 seats.) Presented, by skilful propaganda, as the party of dynamism and of youth, in contrast to the ageing, stolid image of the SPD, the NSDAP attracted many young voters and new voters with visions of a better future. The Nazis also benefited from the enhanced respectability and widespread publicity arising from co-operation with Hugenberg's DNVP in the campaign against the Young Plan in 1929. With a more 'respectable' image, the NSDAP was able to make inroads among 'pillars of the community' local notables such as mayors, schoolteachers, and Protestant pastors. The increasing radicalism of frightened former liberals and conservatives who had previously supported a range of parties led many more into the Nazi camp. In the closing years of the Weimar Republic the support for liberal and conservative parties shrank markedly. The share of the vote held by the DVP and DDP collapsed from 20% at the beginning of the Weimar Republic to a mere 2.2% in July 1932; the DNVP's share fell from 20% in late 1924 to 5.9% in July 1932; the *Wirtschaftspartei* and the agrarian parties also collapsed mainly to the benefit of the NSDAP.



The electoral performance of the NSDAP, 1924-32

Given the outcome of the September 1930 elections, the SPD chose to 'tolerate' the Brüning government rather than trying to topple it and risk new elections which might provide further support for the extreme right. In the meantime, Brüning's policies only served to heighten the misery of millions in the economic depression. Unemployment rose steadily, from 1.3 million in September 1929 to over 3 million by September 1930, to over 6 million by the beginning of 1933. This last figure represented one in three of the working population; with official underestimation of the true figures, and with widespread short-time working, perhaps one in two families in Germany were severely affected by the depression. Brüning's priority nevertheless remained that of showing that Germany was unable to pay reparations, whatever the cost in human misery, misery which could have been alleviated by public expenditure programmes and less deflationary policies. In the summer of 1931, the economic situation was further exacerbated by a financial crisis. A failed attempt at a German Austrian customs union led to a withdrawal of French credits from Austria, precipitating a collapse of the main Austrian bank, a rush of bankruptcies in Austria and Germany, and a banking crisis, which necessitated a 'bank holiday' of three weeks duration in July 1931.

In the midst of this mounting economic chaos, politics was increasingly played out not in parliament but on the streets. Skirmishes took place between rival political gangs: most frequently, the paramilitary organizations of the KPD joined violent battle with the unruly SA units. Hitler, in an attempt to retain the air of respectability cultivated over the preceding few years, now made concerted efforts to improve his relations with conservative elites: the army, agricultural landowners, leaders of industry. While some industrialists particularly Fritz Thyssen, and the banker Hjalmar Schacht had for some time been sympathetic to the Nazi cause, the prevailing attitude among business leaders was on the whole one of suspicion. Weimar democracy might have been rejected in principle; but it was quite another matter to consider Hitler's Nazism as embodying a preferable alternative. Before 1933, industrialists were not important supporters, at least financially, of the NSDAP; small donations by local notables were a more significant source of NSDAP funds than any contributions from leaders of industry (with the exception of Thyssen, whose book entitled *I Paid Hitler* provided a basis for much of this myth).⁸ In the early 1930s, it was clear to Hitler that he needed to woo industrialists, and convince them that he was worth backing. On 26 January 1932, Hitler addressed the prestigious Düsseldorf Industry Club, seeking to create a distinction between his condemnation of *Jewish* capital and capitalism in general. More important perhaps was a combination of increasing disaffection with Brüning's management of the economic crisis and increased willingness, in the apparent absence of viable alternatives, to view Nazism as at least acceptable or tolerable. This shift in attitude was particularly important in army circles, who began to insist that officers and civil servants should be allowed to become members of the NSDAP. An attempt at developing links between conservative parties and the NSDAP in a right-wing 'National Opposition' was less successful. In October 1931, the so-called 'Harzburg Front' named after a rally in Bad Harzburg consisting of Hugenberg's DNVP, the leadership of the veterans' *Stahlhelm* organization, and Hitler's Nazis, failed to develop a truly united front in opposition to the Brüning government.

In the spring of 1932, Hindenburg's seven-year term of office as President came to an end. Brüning mismanaged from 58 Hindenburg's point of view-attempts to obviate the need for re-election, and Hindenburg had to face the humiliation of going to a second ballot, having failed to win an absolute majority on the first round against a powerful vote for Hitler as President. Symptomatic of the politics of this period was the line-up of candidates: Germans of a Social Democratic or liberal persuasion were constrained to choose between the conservative nationalist Hindenburg, the Nazi Hitler, the right-wing Stahlhelm representative Theodor Duesterberg, or, at the other extreme, the declared enemy of the Social Democrats, the Communist Ernst Thälmann. The anti-democratic, elderly Field Marshal, who had been working systematically to replace parliamentary democracy by more authoritarian rule, was now the only possible choice for all those genuine and committed republicans who feared that a vote for any of the other candidates would only bring 'something worse'. In the event, the re-election of Hindenburg was to effect precisely that result. From the early summer of 1932, a series of alternatives were

pursued and played out, until finally the appointment of Hitler to the chancellorship seemed to the old elites and the ageing President the only viable solution to the perceived problems of the ill-fated Weimar Republic.

Hitler's Path to Power

From April 1932 to January 1933 the final debacle of the Weimar Republic unfolded through a series of intrigues and machinations, as alternative strategies were pursued, and found unworkable, in relation to the economic, political and governmental crisis. Distanced from Brüning by his management of the Presidential elections, Hindenburg was prepared to countenance the removal of this increasingly unpopular Chancellor. First the Army Minister Groener was forced to resign on 12 May, over the issue of his ban on the SA and SS in April; then, at the end of May, when Brüning gave Hindenburg an emergency decree to sign, proposing drastic measures to deal with indebted East Elbian estates, the President refused to sign and instead accepted Brüning's resignation. Brüning's proposal to dispossess East Elbian estates overburdened with debts was the occasion, rather than the cause, of his downfall; behind it lay wider plots for alternative political scenarios.

On 2 June, the Catholic Franz von Papen became Chancellor losing the support of his own Centre Party in the process. Papen failed in the period of his chancellorship to gain parliamentary support: his cabinet excluded Social Democrats and trade unionists, and never succeeded in securing a substantial conservative nationalist base. On 4 June the Reichstag was dissolved and new elections called for 31 July. The ban on the SA and SS was lifted on 18 June, and despite the fact that the paramilitary organizations of the KPD were still outlawed, there was near civil war on the streets as Nazis and Communists engaged in violent battles. The alleged failure of the Prussian state police to control political violence which had in effect been legalised by the Reich government, with its unleashing of the SA provided the justification for a coup against the Prussian state government on 20 July. The SPD leadership of Prussia (at that time heading a caretaker coalition) was ousted and replaced by a Reich Commissar a useful precedent for Hitler's takeover of *Land* governments the following year. The SPD's lack of resistance to this coup has often been criticized; but Social Democrats still believed in the rule of law, and were unwilling to meet force with force; they also, by this time, were suffering from a certain weariness and resignation, a lack of a broader vision in the face of changing events. In the General Election of 31 July 1932, held amidst this atmosphere of violence and crisis, the Nazis achieved their greatest electoral success in the period before Hitler became Germany's Chancellor. With 37.8% of the vote, and 230 of the 608 seats, the NSDAP for the first time became the largest party in the Reichstag. Claiming to be a 'people's party' or *Volkspartei*, transcending class boundaries and narrow interests, the NSDAP at the height of its electoral success did indeed succeed in gaining a relatively wide social spread of support, in contrast to the narrower socio-economic, regional or confessional bases of the parties of the Weimar period. 9 As before, the organized industrial working class tended to remain faithful to the SPD and KPD, with the latter gaining votes from the former, and

particularly winning support among the increasing numbers of unemployed. But the Nazis actively solicited votes among the working class, and were to a limited but nevertheless significant degree successful in winning support among workers in handicrafts and small-scale manufacturing, who were not so fully integrated into the organized working class. Similarly, most Catholics remained loyal to their Centre party, which had retained a remarkably stable vote throughout the Weimar Republic. The Nazis benefited most from the collapse of the liberal and conservative parties. The NSDAP's greatest electoral successes were in the Protestant, agricultural and small-town areas of Germany, and their most stable vote from 1924 onwards came from small farmers, shopkeepers, and the independent artisans of the 'old' middle class, who felt threatened by the tensions and tendencies of modernization and industrial society. This core was augmented in periods of economic crisis by a 'protest vote' from other sections of society, including a sizeable vote from the new middle classes, and among established professional and upper middle class circles. In Childers' summary of these groups: 'Motivations were mixed, including fear of the Marxist left, frustrated career ambitions, and resentment at the erosion of social prestige and professional security. Yet, while sizeable elements of these groups undoubtedly felt their positions or prospects to be challenged during the Weimar era, they cannot be described as uneducated, economically devastated, or socially marginal.' 10 Civil servants, pensioners, white-collar workers, added their votes to those of the small farmers and shopkeepers in a rising tide of protest against the chaos that Weimar democracy, to them, had ushered in. People of all ages were in the end attracted to the apparently young, energetic, demagogic movement, which appeared to offer a new way forward out of the deadlock and disasters of the Weimar 'system'.

Armed with his electoral success which still fell short of an overall majority Hitler was hoping to be offered the chancellorship by Hindenburg. But the President despised this upstart 'Bohemian corporal', and snubbed him by refusing to offer anything more than the vice-chancellorship. Enraged, Hitler refused to accept second-best and caused considerable anger and consternation among the ranks of the Nazi party, who felt he had missed the opportunity of putting the Nazis into government.

When the Reichstag reopened on 12 September, it passed a spectacular vote of no confidence in the Chancellor, Papen, by 512 votes to 42 (the remainder of deputies having abstained or stayed home). Papen was unable to command either a parliamentary base or popular support for his government; but nor was he able, in tandem with Hindenburg, to finalize plans for establishing a non-parliamentary, authoritarian regime in complete breach of the constitution. Parliament was dissolved, and fresh elections called for 6 November. By now, the worst trough of the depression was passing, and the Nazis lost some of their protest vote of the summer. With the loss of two million votes, parliamentary representation of the NSDAP after the November elections was reduced to 196 deputies. Nevertheless, the governmental crisis and parliamentary deadlock were not resolved. At the beginning of December, having been persuaded by General von Schleicher that unless matters

were taken in hand a civil war was likely to break out which the army would not be able to control, Hindenburg rather unwillingly replaced Papen and appointed Schleicher Chancellor. Schleicher's brief period in office until 28 January 1933 was characterized by an unsuccessful and somewhat far-fetched attempt to cobble together an unlikely set of alliances, including trade unionists and the 'left-wing' of the NSDAP under Gregor Strasser. This attempt failed, and managed along the way to antagonize both industrialists who were suspicious of Schleicher's rapprochement with the unions and agrarian elites, who viewed Schleicher's plans for agriculture as a form of 'agrarian bolshevism', and not nearly as favourable to their interests as Papen's policies had been.

During January 1933, intrigues and machinations in high places set in motion a campaign to convince the ageing President to appoint Hitler as Chancellor. Papen came round to the view, as did leading representatives of agrarian interests in the (by now Nazi-infiltrated) *Reichslandbund*, that the Nazis must be included in a coalition conservative-nationalist government, in order to provide it with a measure of popular support; and that, in order to include the Nazis, it would be necessary to offer Hitler the chancellorship. Those pressurizing Hindenburg to take this move were of the view that, if Hitler and one or two other Nazis were included in a mixed cabinet, they would be effectively hemmed in and could be 'tamed' and manipulated. The idea was that the army, industrial and agrarian elites would be able to benefit from and subvert Hitler's demagogic powers and mass support. Finally, after a series of meetings in Ribbentrop's house in Berlin in the last week of January 1933, and through the mediations of Hindenburg's son Oskar, an acceptable set of arrangements was constructed and the President persuaded. On 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler was, by fully constitutional means, offered the chancellorship of Germany by a reluctant President Hindenburg. With Hitler's acceptance, the process of dismantling Weimar democracy was accelerated and rapidly completed. For a while, the fateful coalition between the old elites and the Nazi mass movement survived; in the end, the last-ditch gamble by elites, who had failed to rule Germany on their own, to survive through alliance with Hitler, proved to have been a historical mistake of inestimable and tragic proportions.

Who, finally, should bear the brunt of responsibility for the failure of Weimar democracy? What factors are most important in explaining its collapse? The Left has often come in for criticism on a range of counts. The bitter hostility obtaining between the KPD and SPD has often been remarked on as a fateful split among those who should have been united in opposition to the greater evil of Nazism. In addition to the bitterness arising in the early years, when the SPD as the party of government had no qualms about using force to suppress radical Communist uprisings, the rift was deepened by the late 1920s and 1930s, when the KPD, under the influence of Moscow, adopted the theory that Social Democracy was equivalent to social fascism. Whatever one's views on these matters, in a wider sense the working class in the closing years of the Weimar Republic was scarcely in a position effectively to resist the course of events. In contrast to 1920, when a general strike had been sufficient to bring down the Kapp putsch, there was little that could be done on a mass scale in

the early 1930s: it is extremely difficult to use the weapon of striking when one is unemployed or desperate to retain a job. For most ordinary working-class people, sheer material survival was all that could be striven for in the years of the depression.

More attention needs to be paid to those who were in a position to affect events and indeed often did so, in a direction ultimately favouring Hitler. There are a number of separate strands which interrelated to produce the fateful, but by no means inevitable, outcome. The pursuit of deflationary economic policies by Brüning served to exacerbate the economic crisis and nourish the conditions in which the NSDAP was able to achieve mass support. While industrialists may not have played an important role in fostering or financially supporting the rise of the NSDAP, they certainly made little effort to sustain the democratic political system and indeed attacked its structure and fabric sufficiently to render it weak in the face of the final onslaught. The agrarian elites who had such a favourable reception with Hindenburg must also bear a burden of guilt, as must those army officers who worked to undermine democracy and install an authoritarian alternative. The Social Democrats had faced a difficult enough task in guiding the Republic through its early stages, at a time when moderate parties had greater parliamentary support and authoritarian elites had effectively abdicated their responsibility and retired to the wings of the political stage; now, when pro-Republican forces were in a minority and conservative-nationalist forces were joined by a new, popular and virulent right-wing radicalism in the shape of the Nazis, there was even less possibility for democrats of the moderate left or centre to control developments.

It was this socio-political configuration, in a country defeated in war, reduced in territory and status, subjected to a burden of reparations, rankling with revisionism, lurching from one political crisis to the next, and finally suffering major economic collapse, which ultimately spelled the death of democracy. No one factor alone is sufficient to explain the collapse of the Weimar Republic: not the provisions of the constitution, nor the implications of the Versailles Treaty, the impact of the Depression, the strategies and political abilities of Hitler and the Nazi Party, nor the decisions and actions of other prominent individuals; it was the peculiar combination, under specific historical circumstances, of a range of activities, orientations and pressures which produced the ultimate outcome. Perhaps the only comforting lesson from this complex period is that, while radical and extremist movements have arisen and may arise elsewhere and at other times (and indeed there were many in the inter-war period, of which Mussolini's Fascists were a notably successful example), such a unique combination of circumstances as occurred in Germany, opening the way for the rise of Hitler, is unlikely ever to recur in its entirety.

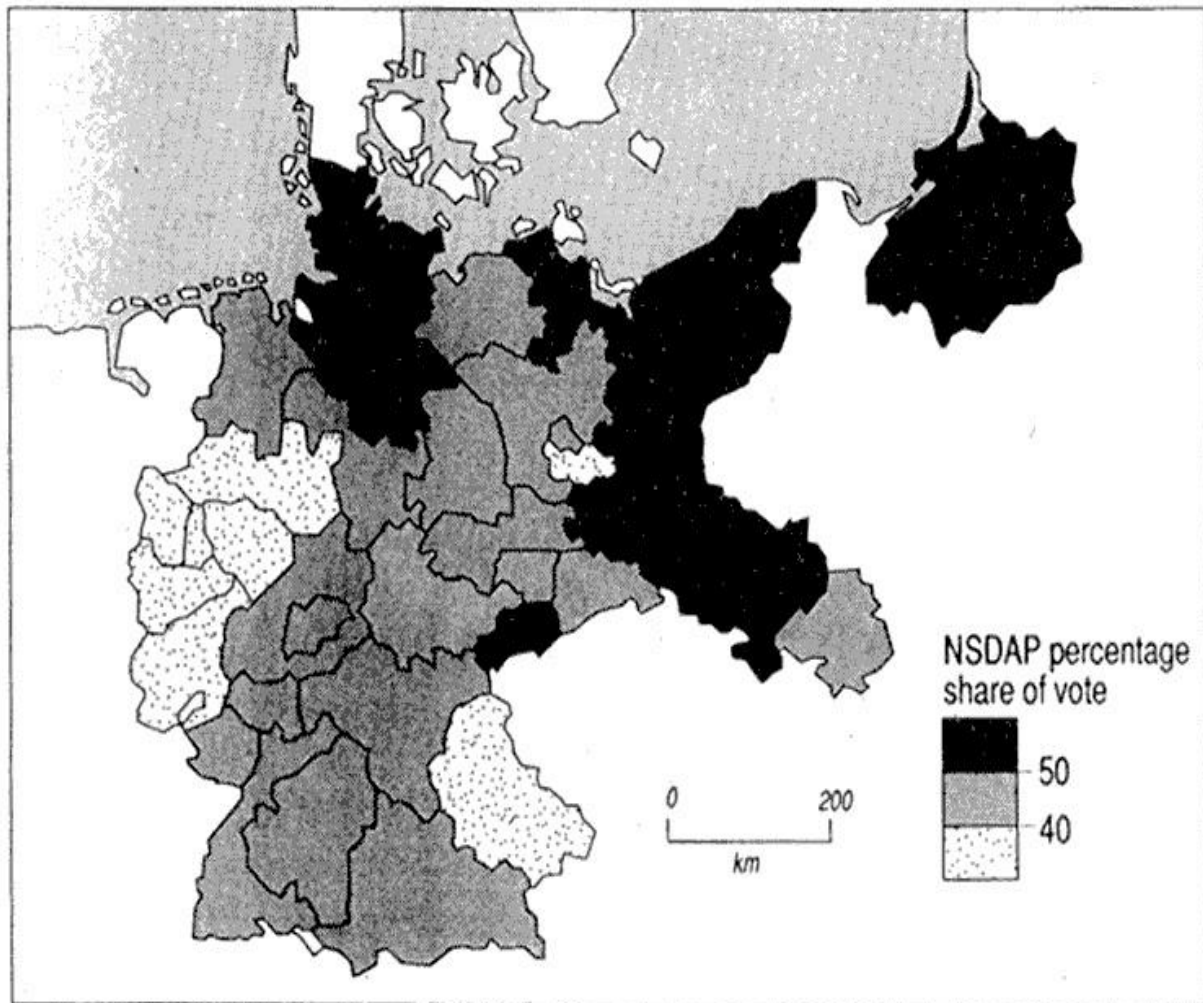
Four

A 'National Community'? State, Economy and Society, 1933

Gleichschaltung and Hitler's State

Hitler became Chancellor on 30 January 1933; but he had by no means actually 'seized power', as the myth of the *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power), supported by the celebrations and propaganda of the Nazis themselves at the time, would suggest. He still had much to do to consolidate his hold over German administration, government and people; indeed, at this time many still felt that he could be harnessed and restrained, and his popular support co-opted and redirected. However, in the course of 1933 Hitler systematically pursued a policy of so-called *Gleichschaltung* (literally, putting everyone 'into the same gear'; coordinating, or bringing into line), in order to consolidate his hold on German politics and society. Even then, however, Hitler's power was by no means absolute. His state was a complex system, riddled with rivalries among competing centres of power and influence, in which the notion of a charismatic Führer, above the fray, played a key role in maintaining a degree of cohesion. Equally important was the extent to which this system was, almost to the last, sustained by key elite groups (particularly in the army and industry) who, while not necessarily themselves 'Nazi', must bear a large degree of responsibility for the functioning and consequences of the regime.

Hitler had declared that the elections following his appointment as Chancellor would be the last free elections in a parliamentary state. In the event, the elections of 5 March 1933 were less than 'free'. On 27 February 1933 the Reichstag was set on fire. While uncertainty still surrounds the circumstances of the arson attack, there is no doubt that it was the Nazis who obtained the utmost benefit from the consequences of the fire. It was used as the pretext for an emergency decree on 28 February, which suspended most civil liberties and legitimized mass arrests of Communists and Social Democrats. In conditions of mounting tension, with rising violence on the streets, and left-wingers no longer able freely to express their opinions, the elections of 5 March were held under highly intimidating conditions. Nevertheless, Hitler and the NSDAP still failed to gain an overall majority: with 43.9% of the vote, the Nazis won 288 seats, while the left gained over 30% of the vote (128 votes for the SPD and 81 for the KPD), and the Centre (73 seats) and Liberals together won 18% of the vote. Even with the votes for the right-wing DNVP the Nazi-dominated 'government of national concentration' could only barely command an absolute majority, and could not achieve the two-thirds necessary to pass an Enabling Law (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*) to alter the constitution and 'legalize' the destruction of democracy. Yet by 23 March, this had become possible.



The Reichstag elections, 5 March 1933

On 21 March the Reichstag was formally opened in the Garrison Church at Potsdam. Much was made of this carefully stage-managed 'Day of Potsdam' by the Nazis, who attempted to emphasize continuities between Frederick the Great, Hindenburg and Hitler, with the great traditions of German and Prussian history culminating in the figure of Hitler. Somewhat relieved by these appearances, the Bavarian People's Party, the German State Party, and the Centre Party were more prepared to consider voting for the Enabling Law. The Catholics in particular were rather reassured by Hitler's insistence that the position of Christianity would be untouched in the future; and Centre Party politicians also felt that their willingness to ally with the Nazis might help to moderate the government as had their former cooperation with Social Democrats in 1919, although in a rather different direction. The Communist Deputies were prevented from attending the Reichstag vote, as were twenty-one of the Social Democrats. In the event, when the Reichstag convened in the Kroll Opera on the evening of 23 March, the only members courageous enough to vote against the Enabling Act were the Social Democrats. Otto Wels read out their reply to Hitler, in which he stated: 'At this historical hour, we German Social Democrats pledge

ourselves to the principles of humanity and justice, of freedom and Socialism. No Enabling Law can give you the power to destroy ideas which are eternal and indestructible . . .' 1 With the passage of this law, Hitler was able with all the appearance of legality to overthrow the remnants of any form of parliamentary democracy. He no longer needed to pay attention to the views of most of the nationalist members of the government, nor did he need President Hindenburg's signature for the passage of legislation. Henceforth, 'law' could be used to justify any arbitrary act of the regime. But this garb of legality, while reassuring to moderate, middle class Germans, did not preclude the use of violence and terror; it simply accompanied it.

From the spring of 1933, the Nazis engaged in a series of moves to extend and consolidate their power. Initial measures were taken to purge the civil service in the 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service' of 7 April 1933. Having survived the transition from Imperial Germany to the Weimar Republic relatively unscathed, the German professional civil service found itself under stronger attack in this new revolutionary upheaval. Jews were removed from the civil service, as were political opponents of the regime. The purge was, however, by no means as thorough as many NSDAP members would have liked, since considerations of administrative efficiency in some cases outweighed Nazi credentials. Furthermore, some civil servants who harboured misgivings about the Nazi regime justified their decision to stay as 'preventing something worse'. Yet the overall record of civil servants in the Third Reich remains one of compromise, rather than serious subversion of the regime. At the same time, the traditional decentralization of the relatively recently unified Germany was attacked a continuation of tendencies already evident towards the end of the Weimar Republic. The powers of the *Länder* were reduced by the Nazi seizure of power in the regional states in March 1933. (The take-over of Prussia the previous summer, with the installation of a Reich Commissioner in place of the elected government, had provided a useful precedent.) On 7 April 1933 ten so-called *Reichsstatthalter* (Reich Governors) were appointed, usually the senior *Gauleiter* of each state, except in the cases of Bavaria (Ritter von Epp) and Prussia (Hitler). The take-over was by no means smooth: as at national level, there were perpetual tensions between party and state. Frictions varied from place to place, depending on pre-existing political configurations and circumstances. Curiously, the heavy-handed actions of local party officials were often dissociated in people's minds from the regime as a whole, and the person of Hitler in particular: people frequently asserted that 'if only the Führer knew', things would not be allowed to go on in the way they were locally.

While the Nazis made strenuous efforts to woo economic elites many of whom had been belatedly persuaded to give financial support to the Nazi election campaign in the spring of 1933 they had no such tender consideration for the bulk of the German people, the workers. Giving the appearance of populism by proclaiming 1 May a national holiday on full pay, the Nazis rapidly proceeded to dismantle and destroy the autonomous workers' organizations. Trade unions were wound up and replaced by a body spuriously claiming to represent the interests of all German

workers in the new 'national community', the German Labour Front (DAF) under Robert Ley. Walther Darré took control of the Reich Food estate (*Reichsnährstand*), dealing with the peasantry and agriculture, while small traders were organized into the HAGO (*Handwerks-, Handels-und Gewerbe-Organisation*). While in appearance developing a form of corporatism, in practice this was a coercive system in which none of the Nazi organizations actually represented the real interests of their 'members'. At the same time, there was an assault on political parties. In the course of the spring and summer of 1933 these were either outlawed (starting with the KPD) or they dissolved themselves (the Centre Party formally dissolved itself on 5 July 1933). With the 'Law Against the Formation of New Parties' of 14 July 1933 a one-party state was formally established. No longer was there any legal parliamentary opposition: the sole function of the Reichstag was to acclaim the decisions of the Nazi government. Yet this government itself became progressively more chaotic in nature: cabinet meetings were less and less frequent, eventually being so rare that they ceased to fulfil any governmental function; and political decision making processes became more and more a matter of gaining direct access to the Führer an increasingly difficult task as he spent more time in his mountain retreat near Berchtesgaden and became less interested in the minutiae of most aspects of domestic policy.

On 30 January 1934, one year after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, the *Reichsrat*, or upper chamber of the Reichstag, was abolished and the federal system was effectively terminated by removing independent authority from the states. Perhaps the final major event in terms of initial constitutional change came with the death of President Hindenburg on 2 August 1934. Hitler made use of the occasion to merge the offices of President and Chancellor, and to take personal command of the armed forces. Abolishing Hindenburg's title of Reich President, Hitler now styled himself 'Führer and Reich Chancellor'. The Army and public officials now had to swear personal oaths of obedience to Hitler oaths which subsequently proved for many to be a moral obstacle to resistance against Hitler's regime.

The Army was able to ignore or surmount its potential misgivings about Hitler in August 1934 for a number of reasons. For one thing, Hitler had made no secret of his intention to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, revising the much-hated Treaty of Versailles. Hitler's whipping up of resentment against Versailles, and his sharp denunciations of the Jews and Bolsheviks whom he held to be the 'November Criminals' responsible for Germany's national humiliation, had been constant themes prior to his coming to power. After becoming Chancellor, Hitler lost little time in settling revisionist policies in motion: on 8 February 1933, Hitler informed ministers that unemployment was to be reduced by rearmament; in July 1933 Krupp's euphemistically named 'agricultural tractor programme' started the production of tanks; and by 1934 explosives, ships and aircraft were in production all contrary to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, but greeted with approval by the Army itself.

Furthermore, Hitler had just resolved a potential source of friction in relation to the traditional armed forces. The SA, under its leader Ernst Röhm, had become a large and rather unruly organization, propagating unwelcome notions of the need for

a 'second revolution', and developing into a rival not only for the elite SS but also for the Army proper. Hitler decided that the support of the latter two groups was more important to him than was the SA; so he instigated the so-called 'Night of the Long Knives' on 30 June 1934, during which the leaders of the SA were murdered along with other individuals with whom Hitler had fallen out, including Gregor Strasser, Gustav Kahr (who had been state commissioner for Bavaria at the time of the abortive putsch of 1923), and General von Schleicher. There were also a few cases of mistaken identity. Retroactively this mass murder which continued for three days, entailing seventy-seven officially admitted deaths, although the true figure was much higher was 'legalized' on 3 July 1934, when a law was passed simply stating that 'the measures taken on 30 June and 1 and 2 July to strike down the treasonous attacks are justifiable acts of self-defence by the state. 2 Although few can have been genuinely taken in by the Nazi version of the terror, which they represented as a nipping in the bud of a treacherous plot against the regime, the garb of legality helped to allay disquiet in many circles; and many were also to an extent relieved that the more radical, unruly elements in the Nazi party appeared to be being put in their place. In any event, the purge certainly helped in the co-option of the Army by Hitler.

Meanwhile, the Nazi regime was bolstered by an elaborate apparatus of terror. The first concentration camp for political opponents of the regime was opened at Dachau, near Munich, with considerable fanfare and publicity in March 1933. In subsequent years, well before the radicalization of the wartime period, a network of concentration camps was set up across Germany. These camps made use of prisoners as forced labour, sending labour gangs to *Aussenlager*, or subsidiary camps, in the vicinity. Gangs of concentration camp inmates were marched through surrounding towns and villages to work long hours under inhumane conditions with very little food. Within the camps, brutality and violence were the norm. While certain methods of torture and execution were employed, these camps were not intended primarily for the physical destruction of their inmates (as were the extermination camps in the east which functioned from 1942). The SS, under the command of Heinrich Himmler, was able to arrest, detain, imprison, torture and murder, with little respect for any rule of law or putative notion of justice. Himmler, who between 1934 and 1936 took over the police powers of the Reich and State Ministries of the Interior, became on 17 June 1936 'Reichsführer-SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei im Reichministerium des Innerns', thus effectively controlling the means of terror in the Third Reich. Fear of arrest, and fear of informers, led to public conformity and the leading of a double life for many Germans, who withheld their real views and feelings for expression only in complete privacy in the company of family and close friends.

The Nazis attempted to promote a great display of power and unity under the national Führer. The mass parades, the battalions marching past Hitler, the apparently adoring populace, hands raised in the *Heil* salute, fostered the image of a strong leader and a united people as encapsulated in the slogan of 'Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer!' ('one people, one empire, one leader') and indeed the myth of the Führer, above all the petty everyday conflicts and frictions, constituted a powerful element of cohesion in the Third Reich. But to a certain extent the Nazis' self-

promotion has been misleading. The myth of a strong leader in a one-party state, with a single official ideology and the back-up of force, fed into the concept of totalitarianism a concept which proved particularly useful in the Cold War period after the Second World War when dictatorships of the left and right, communist and fascist, were simplistically equated. But it has become increasingly clear to serious analysts of the Third Reich that the monolithic image does not correspond to a more complex reality.

While the Nazis clearly took over the government of Germany, they never entirely took over the state: the tendency was rather to create new parallel party agencies, with spheres of competence and jurisdiction overlapping or competing with those of the existing administration, and armed with plenipotentiary powers directly dependent on the Führer's will. In this 'dual state' there was no rational means of adjudicating between the rival claims of competing agencies to represent the undisputed fount of authority on a given issue and there were, in addition to conflicts between party and state, also disputes between different party agencies. In the final resort, recourse had to be had to the Führer, and the 'Führer's will' became the ultimate source of authority to resolve all disputes. The 'Hitler state', with the Führer the only final source of arbitration, was to some extent a structural result of this relative administrative chaos.

Since Hitler often stood aside from the fray, only to enter at the last moment to side with the emerging winner, some analysts have been inclined to see him as a 'weak dictator', with very real limits to his power. However, as others have rightly pointed out, when it mattered to Hitler he made sure his own views were predominant. ³ The degree to which Hitler was able to realise given aims, or intervene in detailed policy-making, varied with the sphere of activity, as is discussed below in greater detail with respect to economic, foreign and racial policy in both the peacetime and wartime years. Not only was the Nazi state never as streamlined as the concept of totalitarianism suggests, German society also proved somewhat resistant to its own reformation into a harmonious national community. It is time to consider in more detail the impact of Nazi policies on the everyday life of the German people.

Society, Culture, and Everyday Life (Parts of the following two sections have been previously published in slightly different form as the opening section of an article by the author in *Historical Research*, vol. 62, no. 148, 1989).

The Nazis did not only want to control the German people: they wanted to transform them into a cohesive, racially pure 'national community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*) of national comrades (*Volksgenossen*) which would of course exclude those 'community aliens' (*Gemeinschaftsfremden*) who were deemed inferior, 'pollutants' of the social body: Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, the hereditarily diseased, and 'a-social' people. The 1939 edition of the *People's Encyclopaedia* (*Volksbrockhaus*) defined the *Volksgemeinschaft* as 'the life-community of people, resting on bonds of blood, on a common destiny and a common political faith, to which class and status conflicts are

essentially foreign'.⁴ After the near civil war conditions of the Weimar Republic, the notion of an organic, harmonious, biologically based racial community, with common political beliefs and a common historical destiny, transcending and healing the wounds of the preceding years, could sound intrinsically appealing to many Germans. Every effort was made by the regime to realise this concept of society, both through overt indoctrination and through the transformation of social organization and everyday experience.

Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda and Enlightenment, created in March 1933, sought increasing control of all media of communication and culture. A symbolic early event was the burning of books written by Jews, socialists and other 'undesirable intellectuals' on 10 May 1933. Although instigated by radical students, the book-burning was given official blessing by Goebbels' presence at the bonfires on Berlin's central street, Unter den Linden. The event did not in practice succeed entirely in eradicating books by banned authors from libraries across Germany, but it certainly contributed to the 'inner emigration' self-censorship and public silence as well as the literal emigration of many authors, among them Thomas and Heinrich Mann and Bertolt Brecht. Subsequent cultural life in Nazi Germany was to a considerable extent reduced to the level of 'German art', typified by a mediocre realism in painting and grandiose schemes in architecture; in the fields of music and drama, some notable individuals compromised with the regime to continue to realise peaks of artistic perfection in the performance of German classics. Britain, and, on a larger scale, the USA, were the major beneficiaries of the mass exodus of cultural talent from Nazi Germany.

Goebbels also made use of the media of popular entertainment and less highbrow culture to attempt to influence the masses. Film was a highly effective medium for propaganda, and the Nazis became adept at producing short newsreel pieces glorifying the achievements of the Führer, illustrating popular adulation of Hitler, and celebrating the achievements of the Reich as a result of its 'national awakening'. Care was taken to stress positive aspects and downplay features which would tend to alienate people and lose popular support. The press, which under the Weimar Republic had been diverse and decentralized, was gradually subjected to Nazi control. This was done partly by the Nazi publishing house gaining an increasing share in the outright ownership of newspapers, partly by increasing control over publishers, editors and journalists, partly by censorship, and partly by feeding stories through a Nazi-run news service. By the later 1930s, the news in the different newspapers was sufficiently *gleichgeschaltet* (co-ordinated) and predictable for most people to adopt a cynical approach and put little store by what was said in German newspapers. The radio was similarly co-opted to Nazi ends, and mass ownership of the 'people's receiver' (*Volksempfänger*) was encouraged which trebled ownership in the six pre-war years, giving Germany the highest percentage of radio-owners in the world. The emphasis was placed on a combination of light entertainment and snippets of slanted 'news' coverage.

In education, there was a purge of teachers lacking the appropriate racial credentials or political views, at both school and university levels. While a large number of school and university teachers in the Weimar Republic had held conservative and nationalist views, by no means a majority were of Nazi leanings. Many leading academics were forced into emigration, including, for example, Albert Einstein. Attempts were made to influence the contents of what was taught, as well as the people who taught it. While topics such as biology, history, and German were fairly readily adapted for Nazi purposes, other scientific and technical subjects were less susceptible to Nazi distortion. Yet even at the level of school mathematics, examples could be used for exercises in arithmetic which sustained or propagated a certain world view. Pupils were asked to do sums relating to the distance covered in certain times by tanks, torpedo boats, infantry battalions; they were asked to work out, given different speeds, at what distances from a town an enemy aircraft would be met by German air defence forces, if the latter started when the former were a certain distance away; and so on. 5 The subject of *Rassenkunde* was introduced, putting across Nazi views on heredity and racial purity. Schoolchildren undertook such projects as bringing to school a photo of a relative and writing an essay describing the features characteristic of the racial group of the person illustrated. The overall balance of the curriculum was altered too. There was an increased emphasis on sport and physical fitness, with sport compulsory even at university. There was also an emphasis on community service through various work schemes a useful means not only of attempting to inculcate a sense of community but also of obtaining cheap labour, particularly important in the later years of the Third Reich.

Attempts were also made to create a sense of national community through organizational means. On the one hand, old, previously autonomous organizations had their independence removed and their capacity for harbouring subversive views neutralized; on the other hand, people were harnessed for activities which gave them experience of comradeship and community at the same time as promoting particular Nazi aims. The luxuriant profusion of clubs, associations and societies characteristic of Imperial and Weimar Germany was pruned, coerced, and remoulded into new, Nazi-dominated frameworks. The wide range of youth organizations, ranging from conservative and nationalist through Catholic to Social Democratic youth groups, were submerged into the Nazi youth organizations under the leadership of Baldur von Schirach. Children between the ages of ten and fourteen were encouraged and expected to join groups for boys (DJ) and girls (JM), while those between fourteen and eighteen were to join the Hitler Youth (HJ) and League of German Maidens (BDM) respectively. The Nazi youth organizations were at first similar to their non-Nazi predecessors in their open air activities: camping, hiking, singing songs as they marched through the pine forests or sat by camp-fires at a lake-side. Many young people undeniably enjoyed the expeditions and comradeship engendered by these activities. But from December 1936, the Hitler Youth was given an official status alongside school and home as an educational institution which was supposed to cover all those in the relevant age groups. Children were expected to enter on 20 April (Hitler's birthday) in the year in which they reached the age often. Membership

finally became compulsory in a decree of March 1939. Meanwhile, since 1934 there had been an increasing emphasis on paramilitary activities and attitudes.

Nevertheless, it does not seem that the Nazi youth organizations were an unmitigated success in inculcating a Nazi world-view in those who participated in them. Many young people simply conformed to the minimum extent necessary to avoid sanctions. Other young people developed their own youth sub-cultures, which the Nazis failed to suppress. Alternative youth groups included the 'Edelweiss Pirates' (spontaneous groups of youngsters who waged war on the Hitler Youth), as well as the Leipzig *Meuten*, the Dresden 'Mobs', the Halle *Proletengefolschaften*, the Hamburg 'Deathhead Gang' and 'Bismarck Gang' and the Munich *Blasen*. While these groups were in the main working class, the swing movement was largely supported by upper middle class enthusiasts for 'decadent' jazz music. It is quite clear, not only from isolated autobiographical accounts of individual alienation from the Hitler Youth (such as that by Heinrich Böll) but also from these more visible subcultural groups members of which ran considerable risks, and did not always escape Nazi retribution for their nonconformity that Nazi attempts to bend the minds of a whole generation were at best only partially successful. 6

While youth was an obvious focus for investment in the future of Nazi Germany, so too were the progenitors of future generations: women. In this area, Nazi ideology was clear in principle but less than consistent in practice. As is well known, the Nazis promoted the view of women's role being confined to 'children, kitchen, church' (*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*). The birth rate had been declining in early twentieth-century Germany, and the Nazis wanted to reverse this trend and replenish the 'racial stock'. A variety of means were attempted, many of which were not specifically Nazi but represented more widespread attitudes at the time. In the depression of the late Weimar years there had been much criticism of 'double earners', and the effective expulsion of women from sections of the labour force was underway before the Nazis came to power. After 1933, the pattern of female participation in the labour force was a partially contradictory one. While Nazi prejudices had deep impact in some areas the exclusion of women from practising law or becoming judges is an example in other areas, such as the caring professions and primary school teaching, female participation increased slightly. By the later 1930s, the pressures of rearmament and labour shortage encouraged a higher female employment rate. There is some dispute among historians as to whether, during the war years, ideology or economic necessity took precedence in policies on female employment.

At the same time, birth control techniques were discouraged, and the benefits and virtues of having a large family were promoted. Attempts were made to propagate a view of marriage as being for the purpose of producing healthy, racially pure stock, with the state having a clear interest in the reproduction of a 'superior' species. As in other areas, Nazi views were dressed up to appear scientifically respectable: the expert the doctor had a role to play in giving a medical blessing to what might otherwise have been seen as purely the intimate, private affair of an individual couple. The decision to reproduce was not a matter solely for individuals,

but an affair of the state, responsible for ensuring healthy future stock and for sterilizing those people deemed unfit to pass on their genes into the genetic pool of the next generation. Such views were insidiously put across in such seemingly non-propagandistic publications as popular dictionaries of health and medicine, such as *Knauer's Gesundheitslexikon*. 7 Financial incentives were given to those having numerous children, and symbolic rewards in the form of a 'mother's cross' (*Mutterkreuz*) were awarded to those having eight, six or four children (gold, silver and bronze crosses respectively). Courses in motherhood and domestic science were run by the Nazi women's organization, the *Deutsches Frauenwerk* (DFW), which had been established in September 1933 to co-ordinate the various women's organizations of pre-Nazi Germany. Along with the original NSDAP organization, the National Socialist Frauenwerk (NSF), the DFW attempted to organize and mobilize women. Like Nazi youth organizations, Nazi women's organizations had a limited impact: working class and rural women proved relatively impervious to their supposed attractions. Moreover, Nazi women's policy was in any case subject to intrinsic contradictions: while attempting to emphasize the woman's role as wife and mother, it simultaneously tended to take her away from the family through time-consuming organizational activities. As it turned out, the essentially private sphere of family life proved relatively resistant to Nazi infiltration and 'co-ordination'. 8

In the sphere of work, similar attempts were made to foster a sense of community. Programmes such as 'Strength through Joy' (*Kraft durch Freude*) and 'The Beauty of Work' (*Schönheit der Arbeit*) made a pretence at fostering the health and well-being of workers. Although a few benefited from well-publicized holidays, such as pleasure cruises, many were not taken in by the propaganda about the 'factory community' in which individual effort served the good of the whole community. On the other hand, with the demise of independent trade unions the experience of collective solidarity was lost; and with the introduction of individual wage negotiations for individual advancement, working class collective identities and bonds began to be eroded. Nazi policies may not always have had the effects intended; but they were not without impact altogether.

Not all organizations and ideologies were equally susceptible to Nazi co-ordination, penetration, or subversion. Catholics had initially proved more resistant to the attractions of pre-1933 Nazi electoral propaganda than had Protestants. The *Reichskonkordat* of 1933 appeared to establish a *modus vivendi* for Catholicism with the Nazi regime, but Catholics were concerned to preserve a strict separation between the spheres of religion which remained their preserve and politics, which could be left to the state. When the latter encroached on the former, Catholics were prepared to resist, as in the campaigns waged against the Nazi attacks on confessional education and attempts to remove crucifixes from schools.⁹ The Protestant churches, lacking the transcendent loyalty to a higher authority equivalent to the Catholic focus on Rome, initially appeared more vulnerable to Nazi incursions. But Nazi attempts to co-opt Protestantism, with the appointment of a 'Reich Bishop' and the formation of a movement of pro-Nazi 'German Christians', soon led to a serious rift among Protestants. Those who recognized the essential criminality of the

Nazi regime came to sympathize with the 'Confessing Church', associated with theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller. A majority of Protestants sided with neither the German Christians nor the Confessing Church, and the latter two groups were in the event subject to internal divisions and disputes. The Nazis eventually gave up their attempt to co-opt Christianity, and made little pretence at concealing their contempt for Christian beliefs, ethics and morality. Unable to comprehend that some Germans genuinely wanted to combine commitment to Christianity and Nazism, some members of the SS even came to view German Christians as almost more of a threat than the Confessing Church. 10

Clearly there was a wide range of opinions among Christians of different confessions, political perspectives and social backgrounds, and different issues took precedence for different individuals at various times. For many lay people, the 'pastors' squabbling' (*Pfarrergezänk*) must have seemed at best an irrelevance to the pressing concerns of everyday life. For some members of the laity, the singing of hymns with deeper meanings may have helped them to retain a sense of the transience of contemporary oppression, while not galvanizing them against the regime, and may hence have aided regime stability.¹¹ On the other hand, it was also possible to hold what would otherwise have been forbidden political gatherings under the guise of church meetings or Bible study groups. But insofar as it is possible to generalize on a complex issue, it must be said that, whatever the diversity of opinion and action, the record of most Christians (Protestant and Catholic) was at best a rather patchy and uneven one. With the notable exception of those religious individuals and groups who stood out for their principled resistance to the regime of whom more in the next chapter it seems that, for many Germans, adherence to the Christian faith proved compatible with at least passive acquiescence in, if not active support for, the Nazi dictatorship.

Economy and Society

Undoubtedly of major impact on most people's attitudes and perceptions was their economic experience. Weimar democracy had been associated, for millions of Germans, not only with national defeat and a humiliating peace treaty, but also with economic disaster. Many had survived the inflation of 1923 only to be buffeted by the slump which started in 1929. Despite the increasing political repression, for a large number of Germans the Third Reich appeared to give new hope of prosperity and stability. Small retailers looked forward to the suppression of their rivals, the big department stores; peasants looked forward to a rightful place in a country proclaiming the importance and glory of 'blood and soil'; industrialists welcomed the suppression of trade union rights in the hope of regaining power for the employers, eroded under the Weimar system. While socialists and communists, Jews, and other committed opponents of the regime viewed it with foreboding, for many apolitical Germans the 'national awakening' appeared to offer hopes of a brighter future.

What actually happened to German economy and society in the Third Reich, and what were the relationships between economics and politics under Nazi rule? Controversies over these questions are far from settled. The Nazis themselves

proclaimed that they were effecting a 'national revolution', although the hopes of more radical Nazis were rapidly dashed after they attained power, leading to pressure from the party ranks for more radical action and a 'second revolution'.

It is clear that Hitler's overriding interest lay in the preparation for the conquest of *Lebensraum* and not primarily in the transformation of the economy. In his view, everything must be directed towards the ultimate goal of rearmament. As Hitler put it in a speech to his cabinet only a week after becoming Chancellor, on 8 February 1933: 'The next five years in Germany had to be devoted to rendering the German people again capable of bearing arms. Every publicly sponsored measure to create employment had to be considered from the point of view of whether it was necessary with respect to rendering the German people again capable of bearing arms for military service. This had to be the dominant thought, always and everywhere.'¹² Insofar as there was a coherent, specifically Nazi economic programme, it had two main features: the notion of self-sufficiency, or 'autarky', and the notion of expanded living-space in central Europe, encompassing particularly lands to the south-east and east of Germany. These notions were, of course, integrally related to the development of a self-sufficient war economy sustained by territorial expansion and exploitation of the raw materials and labour of conquered territories. At the same time as giving priority to rearmament, however, the Nazis were concerned to retain popular support, which meant paying attention to consumer pressures and not imposing severe levels of austerity on the people. These different objectives were not entirely compatible, and periodic strains and crises resulted from attempts to pursue mutually contradictory strands of policy. Such crises also had effects on, for example, the timing of certain foreign policy moves, such as the remilitarization of the left bank of the Rhine in 1936.

Initially, the economic policies of Nazi Germany were controlled by the relatively orthodox former President of the *Reichsbank*, Hjalmar Schacht, as Minister of Economics. Deficit financing began in 1933 with the issue of so-called "Mefo Bills", which served to disguise spending on rearmament under the cover of the spurious 'Metallurgische Forschungsgesellschaft m.b.H.'. On 1 June 1933 the first 'Reinhardt Programme' was announced with the 'Law to Reduce Unemployment', followed by a second plan on 21 September 1933; and on 27 June 1933 there was a law initiating the construction of autobahns. While the economy had already begun to turn around in 1932, prior to the Nazis' participation in government, economic recovery up to 1936 was certainly aided perhaps speeded up by Nazi work-creation schemes, motorization and construction works, and their willingness to engage in deficit financing. Many of these early schemes were of an infrastructural nature, facilitating later mobilization for war without being directly war-related themselves. While autobahns would later be highly useful for the rapid movement of troops, they could also serve more immediate ideological ends, symbolizing the rebuilding of the community and the integration of its different parts into one future-oriented national whole.¹³ Schacht's New Plan of 1934 marked the first stage in the planned development of autarky, (although Schacht himself was an opponent of out-and-out

autarky) with bilateral trade agreements between pairs of countries not relying on certain international foreign currency exchanges.

By 1935, however, it was becoming clear that, despite the return towards full employment, Germany's economic problems were by no means resolved. With a shortage of foreign exchange reserves, a choice had to be made between the import of raw materials for the rearmament programme or of foodstuffs for consumers. Moreover, there were splits within industry: while some industries, most notably the great chemical combine I. G. Farben, supported the manufacture of synthetic materials and an economy of autarky, others, more export-oriented, were opposed to such policies. In August 1936 Hitler issued a key memorandum stating that Germany must be ready for war within four years, and that economic activity must be geared towards this primary end. On 18 October 1936 the Four Year Plan was announced, with Goering in charge. Yet despite the precarious economic condition of Germany, and the overriding priority given to rearmament, there was to be no drop in the standard of living of consumers. From then on, in attempting to pursue both these objectives, economic policy became less and less orthodox and increasingly unbalanced.

The Four Year Plan involved close collaboration between members of certain industries again, particularly I. G. Farben and Nazis in high positions. It represented to some extent a clear illustration of the proliferation of spheres of competence and institutional rivalries in the Nazi state, as the powers of Goering conflicted with those of the Ministers of Labour (Seldte), Agriculture (Darré) and Economics (Schacht). Schacht in fact resigned his post in November 1937, partly because of these conflicts. Not only were there party-state conflicts, but also conflicts between different sections of the party. There were, for example, conflicts between party agencies concerned with rearmament, and those more concerned with aspects of consumer satisfaction or popular opinion, such as the DAF.

These developments have been variously interpreted. While rearmament has often been held up as one of the prime factors in German economic recovery in the 1930s, R. J. Overy suggests that it was only increasingly important after 1936, and that in fact attempts to orientate the economy towards war actually slowed down the rate of recovery and growth, partly because of the resistance of some cartelized industries to Nazi policies. Yet Overy plays down Volker Berghahn's emphasis on what the latter calls a deliberate 'unhinging' of the economy from 1936, when traditional economic considerations were discarded and ultimate economic salvation was predicated on a successful war of conquest. ¹⁴ The relationships between industry, party and state are also more complex than sometimes assumed. Although the older orthodox Marxist interpretation of fascism as the last ditch stand of a capitalist state in crisis is untenable, it is by no means clear either that a pure 'primacy of politics' was achieved. Some industries benefited from close collaboration with the state; others attempted to resist interference; and while the Nazis attempted to control the direction of economic policy, they were by no means always successful; nor could they be, given their own partly mutually contradictory aims. Moreover, the successes of economic recovery and a return to full employment by 1936 had by

1939 generated a shortage of skilled labour, necessitating the conscription of workers into compulsory labour service on certain projects. There were also conflicts between aspects of Nazi ideology and the demands of reality: women, for example, despite Nazi views of their proper place being in the home, in fact participated in increasing numbers in paid employment outside the home, even before the more acute shortages of (literally) manpower in wartime years.

What is quite clear is that, far from achieving a social revolution, the effects of Nazi economic policies on society represented in large measure a continuation and perhaps exacerbation of previous socio-economic trends. Realities under Nazi rule by no means corresponded with pre-1933 election promises. While the return to full employment did mean jobs and a steady income for many, the associated withdrawal of trade union rights and collective bargaining, as well as the very variable rates of pay and conditions, rendered the experience at best an ambiguous one. Despite attempts by the All-German Federation of Trade Unions (ADGB) to reach a compromise with the new regime in April 1933, autonomous trade unions had been unequivocally smashed; and although many workers were prepared somewhat cynically to enjoy any holidays or outings offered to them by organizations such as Strength through Joy, few really swallowed much of the propaganda about the 'harmonious factory community' and the like. While concessions were made to small businesses, insofar as they did not conflict with major political aims, other demands of small retailers were not met; in particular, big department stores continued to flourish. While peasants were praised in Nazi ideology, the measures taken under Darré (who had replaced Hugenberg as Minister of Agriculture in June 1933) were by no means universally popular. The control of the production, distribution and pricing of foodstuffs by the Reich Food Estate and the control of the inheritance of farms under the Entailed Farm Law met with the hostility of considerable numbers of peasants in different areas, varying with local conditions. It is clear that, while there were certain fundamental changes particularly in the increased political direction of the economy, with the attempt to control and subordinate economic development to the goal of preparation for war Germany continued to be an industrializing society with certain endemic conflicts and strains. The 'national community' was created neither in reality nor in popular social perceptions.

The Radicalization of the Regime

Hitler had two main aims, expressed in *Mein Kampf* and the later *Second Book*: to create a 'pure' racial community in Germany; and to expand Germany's living-space, dominating central Europe and, eventually, seeking world mastery. Hitler's anti-Semitism, while finding resonance in the widespread prejudices against Jews, clearly went way beyond existing concepts of discrimination in its eventual practical implications. Hitler's grandiose visions of the future of his Thousand Year Reich, while having much in common with conservative-nationalist desires for revision of the Treaty of Versailles, also went some considerable way beyond them in terms of global aspirations. While Hitler lost little time in jettisoning the political framework of the Weimar Republic, it took rather longer to transform the relationship of the Nazis to

the old elites, whose miscalculated support had brought Hitler to power and who were essential for the effective use of that power. Moreover, Hitler had simultaneously to play to a number of galleries: to public opinion, dependent as his charisma was on repeated popular acclaim; to the Nazi Party activists, who were often frustrated at the apparent stalling of momentum and the incompleteness of the 'national revolution'; and to the established economic and military elites whose co-operation was vital to the realization of Hitler's ends. Added to these sometimes conflicting pressures was Hitler's distinctive style of leadership, which allowed the duplication, indeed proliferation, of state and Party offices and functions, and blurred the lines of leadership and responsibility. But on issues which mattered to Hitler, he pursued his aims with ruthlessness and appropriate brutality. While Hitler's intentions alone are not sufficient to explain the pattern of developments in the Third Reich after all, Hitler had to attempt to realize his intentions under given circumstances and not always welcome conditions the chronology of Nazi Germany reveals a progressive radicalization of the regime in line with Hitler's pursuit of his overriding aims. Anti-Semitic policies in peacetime were powered to a considerable degree by Nazi Party radicals, and Hitler sought to distance himself somewhat at least as far as his public image was concerned from the consequences of the more extreme or less successful of their actions. The attempted boycott of Jewish shops in April 1933 was rapidly called off. Systematic discrimination against Jews continued, however, in the removal of Jews from professional and cultural life. In 1935 the so-called Nuremberg Laws announced in a last-minute way at the Nuremberg Party rally sought to give legal validity to racial discrimination. Under the *Reichsbürgergesetz*, two categories of citizenship were introduced, with Jews given second-class citizenship, in that they could not become *Reichsbürger* with full political rights. Under the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, Jews were no longer permitted to marry those of German or related extraction, nor a deliberate affront in its moral implications to employ German women under the age of forty-five in their households. Consideration was given to the vexatious question of *Mischlinge* those of mixed extraction who, in Nazi eyes, might be deemed to 'pollute' German blood. The milder view of excluding 'half-' and 'quarter-Jews' from the Nuremberg Laws was finally adopted, while 'three-quarter Jews' were included. For many Germans, the Nuremberg Laws were welcomed as an apparent legalization of the rather *ad hoc* measures of discrimination against Jews. But, far from being the culmination of Nazi anti-Semitic measures, the Nuremberg Laws marked but a stage in the systematic exclusion of Jews from 'normal' life. With a brief, partial respite in deference to international opinion when Berlin hosted the Olympic Games in 1936, a series of *Verordnungen* consequent on the *Reichsbürgergesetz* in the following years systematically continued to exclude Jews from their professions, from education, and from public and cultural life. From 1938, discrimination became more severe, with the 'aryanization' or confiscation of Jewish property, and the effective removal of the means of material existence in a variety of ways. The effect, as a Nazi article of 24 November 1938 remarked with glee, would be to reduce the Jews to dependence on crime which would 'necessitate' the appropriate measures on the part of a state

committed to law and order, ending in the complete extermination (*restlose Vernichtung*) of German Jewry.

Commitment to law and order was scarcely evident in the actions against Jews on the *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) of 9 November 1938. Ostensibly precipitated by the murder of a member of the German Embassy in Paris by a young Jew, a supposedly 'spontaneous uprising' was incited by a speech by Goebbels on the occasion of the annual anniversary celebration of the Beer Hall Putsch. Party radicals burned synagogues, and attacked and looted Jewish property across Germany. Official party figures reported ninety-one deaths of Jews, and subsequently around thirty thousand Jews were arrested and detained in concentration camps for a period of time. Jews had to pay compensation for the destruction of property themselves, and hand over any payments from insurance policies to the state. Many Germans, far from having spontaneously perpetrated attacks as the Nazi propaganda would have it were actually appalled at the wanton destruction of property and evident lawlessness of the *Reichskristallnacht*. But they did little to protest against the continued series of measures discriminating against the Jews the removal of their driving licences, the withdrawal of their passports (which were returned stamped with the initial 'J'), the enforced adoption of the first names Israel or Sara, the ban on visiting museums, theatres, concerts, swimming-pools, the forced surrender of gold and silver objects and all precious jewellery with the exception of wedding rings, the systematic reductions in status and livelihood. Most Germans simply acquiesced in the piecemeal process by which Jews were identified, defined, stigmatized, segregated, and stripped of the status of fellow citizens and even human beings to become an oppressed community in their own homeland. These peacetime measures of discrimination were a precondition for the subsequent preference of many Germans to ignore the later, more tragic fate of these people who had already been effectively removed from a normal status in civil society.

On the foreign policy front, desires for the revision of the Treaty of Versailles were, as indicated above, widespread among Germans. Already in the closing years of the Weimar Republic, after the death of Stresemann, less cautious, more strident tones had been evident in German foreign policy. These revisionist tendencies were unleashed with vigour by Hitler. In 1933, he made clear his preference for bilateral rather than collective security arrangements, and soon withdrew from the League of Nations. With the approval of the Army, by 1934 rearmament was in full swing, with the production of aircraft, ships and explosives. In January 1935, after a plebiscite, the Saarland was returned to German jurisdiction. In March 1935 the rearmament programme, the existence of a German air force, and the introduction of one year's conscription (raised to two years in August 1936), were made public. These clear breaches of the Treaty of Versailles were censured by the so-called Stresa Front of Italy, France and Britain, and by the League of Nations, in April 1935, but to little effect. By June of that year, Britain and Germany had concluded a Naval Agreement under which Germany was permitted to increase her navy to one-third the strength of the British navy. The 'Stresa Front' was in any case less than solid. Hitler on the whole tended to admire Italy's fascist leader Mussolini, and, despite tensions between

Italy and Germany over Austria after the attempted coup by Austrian Nazis in 1934, Hitler was concerned to foster good relations with his fellow-dictator. Hitler was also a prime opportunist. Taking advantage of British and French preoccupation with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935, and under some pressure from domestic discontent over a deteriorating economic situation, Hitler took his first major foreign policy risk in March 1936. German troops marched over the Rhine to reoccupy the demilitarized left bank, in clear defiance of the Versailles Treaty. This served to boost Hitler's domestic popularity considerably, and occasioned only very limited criticism from abroad.

From then on, foreign policy moved into a new gear. Under the Four Year Plan, presided over by Goering, rather unorthodox economic policies were initiated, which marked a clear break with Hjalmar Schacht's notions of economic management. Schacht's resignation as Minister of Economics in November 1937 came partly as a result of conflicts between the Economics Ministry and Goering's office. There were similar conflicts between Nazis and more traditional conservative nationalists on the diplomatic front. For some time, Ribbentrop had been running a diplomatic service in rivalry with the Foreign Ministry. In 1936, Ribbentrop became Ambassador to Britain. The Spanish Civil War, which broke out in July 1936, fostered closer relations between Italy and Germany (with both supporting Franco), and helped to bring about a new alignment. The emergent 'Rome-Berlin Axis' was strengthened as, in the course of 1936, it had become clear to Hitler that he would have to abandon his ideas about an alliance with Britain; and, in 1938, under Ribbentrop's influence, Hitler opted for Japan as the third member of the 'Axis'. The Tripartite Pact was finally signed in September 1940. Meanwhile, it was becoming increasingly clear that the attempt to combine preparation for war with domestic consumer satisfaction was in the long run economically impracticable and that it was essential for Germany to go to war sooner rather than later. This realization occasioned a new rift between the increasingly radical Nazi regime and the old elites: Hitler's clash with army leaders in the winter of 1937 marked a further step in the gathering momentum of the Nazi regime.

In November 1937, at a meeting with leaders of the army, navy and air force, together with the Foreign Minister and War Minister, Hitler delivered a lengthy harangue on Germany's need for *Lebensraum*. Notes of this meeting were taken unofficially by Hitler's military adjutant Colonel Hossbach, in what has become known as the 'Hossbach memorandum'. Some of Hitler's audience were not convinced by his ideas, which were greeted with grave reservations. Notwithstanding criticisms, in the following weeks Nazi military planning became offensive. Rather than responding or listening to criticism, Hitler simply removed the critics from their strategic positions. By February 1938 a significant purge had been effected: Blomberg's post of War Minister was abolished; the old *Wehrmacht* office was replaced by the *Oberkommando* (High Command) of the *Wehrmacht* (OKW) under General Keitel; Fritsch was replaced as Commander-in-Chief of the Army by General von Brauchitsch; fourteen senior generals were retired, and forty-six others had to change their commands; and, in the Foreign Ministry, Ribbentrop officially replaced Neurath

as Foreign Minister. Hitler, who was already Supreme Commander of the Army by virtue of his position as head of state since the death of Hindenburg, now also became Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The regime was now more specifically Nazi, less conservative-nationalist, in complexion.

The overthrow of Hitler was first seriously contemplated by members of the elite during 1938. Army leaders including Beck and Halder, as well as the head of the Foreign Ministry Ernst von Weizsäcker, considered the possibility of a coup. Their ideas were conveyed to the British government, but ignored. Similarly, any prospect of success for Adam von Trott's visit to Britain in June 1938 was marred by suspicions of his real intentions: while Trott was seeking to buy time for a military coup to be successful, his official reports back to the German Foreign Ministry and his proposals for further concessions to Hitler, as well as his sincere German nationalism, sufficiently opened his aims to misinterpretation and misrepresentation for the Americans as well as the British to choose to take little notice of his mission.¹⁷ But these early attempts at resistance in high places were deflected, first by the apparent success of Hitler's foreign policy and the 'appeasement' with which he was met and then, after the final outbreak of war in September 1939, by the combination of rapid early military success and unwillingness to commit an act of treason against the head of state when the fatherland was at war.

In the course of 1938, Hitler achieved certain major foreign policy goals without igniting an international conflict. In March 1938, after considerable exertion of pressure on the Austrian chancellor Schuschnigg who attempted to organize a plebiscite which would avoid German takeover, but was out manoeuvred and replaced by the Nazi sympathizer Seyss-Inquart the peaceful invasion of Austria by German troops and its annexation into an enlarged German Reich was effected. Later myths of 'the rape of Austria' and being 'Hitler's first victim' notwithstanding, the entry of German soldiers was greeted by many Austrians with considerable enthusiasm. While those Austrians of left-wing and liberal opinions viewed *the Anschluss* with foreboding, others gave a rapturous welcome to the triumphant return of Adolf Hitler to his native land, in which, over a quarter of a century earlier, he had collected his ideas and fomented his rag-bag of prejudices while a drifting failed art-student in Vienna. Austrian Jews had good reason to be worried: a virulent anti-Semitism was unleashed, soon making their situation even more demoralizing and unpleasant than that of the Jews in Germany, against whom discriminatory measures had unfolded more gradually and legalistically. As far as international responses were concerned, the reaction was muted. For one thing, since Austria had been a dominant force in 'German' affairs for centuries, and had only recently been excluded from Bismarck's small Germany (and forbidden any union under the Versailles Treaty), it did not seem entirely unnatural that Germans in the two states should be united under the Austrian-born leader of Germany. For another, the major powers were at this time not prepared for military confrontation with Hitler. The USA was adopting an isolationist, neutralist stance with respect to European affairs; the Soviet Union under Stalin was preoccupied with domestic purges of perceived internal

opposition; neither France nor England was ready for a military challenge to Hitler, although rearmament had been underway since the mid-1930s.

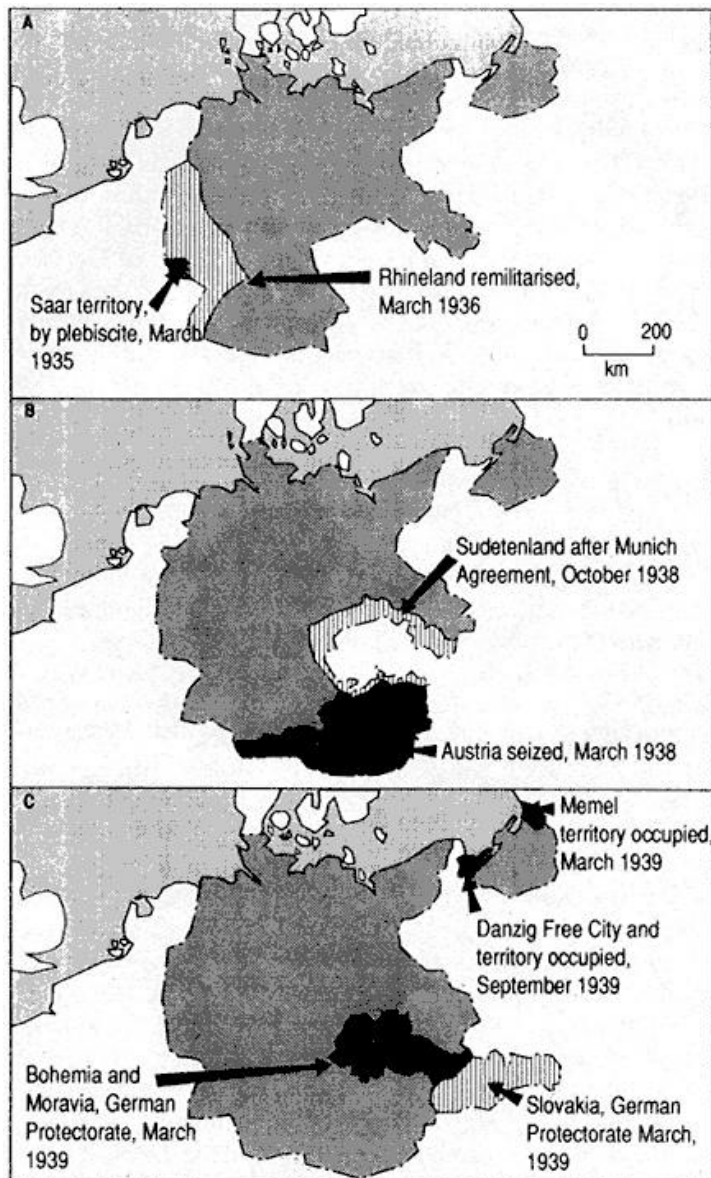
In the summer of 1938, Hitler turned his attention to Czechoslovakia. The Sudeten German Party under Henlein, with help from the German Nazis, had been cultivating unrest among ethnic Germans in the border areas, the Sudetenland. There was a heightened sense of crisis as misperceptions of German mobilization led to an actual Czech mobilization, and for a week in August 1938 it appeared that war was about to break out. By September, the threat of war had been averted, and attempts were made to resolve the Czech crisis by diplomatic means. The British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, braving the novelty of airborne diplomacy, returned from the Munich conference of September 1938 at which Czechoslovakia, whose fate was to be decided, was not represented waving the famous piece of paper with Hitler's signature and proclaiming 'peace in our time'. The western powers felt that, by ceding portions of the Czech border territories, they had fulfilled legitimate ethnic demands and averted the threat of a war for which they were not yet ready. Whether or not their policy of appeasement was justifiable, it certainly served to buy further time for rearmament. Hitler, for his part, felt cheated out of war by the Munich Agreement.

Czechoslovakia's loss of the western border territories also meant loss of key border defences and the will to defend herself, after the debacle of the summer. When, in March 1939, Hitler's armies invaded Prague, there was little the Czechs could do to resist German takeover. Bohemia and Moravia became a German protectorate, while Slovakia became a satellite state of the German Reich. As far as Britain was concerned, it was prudent to allow this 'far-away country' of which they knew little (as it was put in September 1938) fall without western military intervention.

Emboldened by the feeble western response to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Hitler now turned his attention to Poland and the Baltic states. Lithuania ceded Memel to Germany, but the Poles stood firm on Danzig. At this point, the British took a stronger stand, issuing a guarantee of Polish independence. Hitler chose not to take too much notice of this, given the British record of appeasement. In August 1939, in a surprise move and putting an end to parallel British negotiations with the Russians Hitler concluded a pact with his ideological arch-enemy, the Communist leader Joseph Stalin. In conjunction with a further agreement in September, Hitler and Stalin mutually carved up the Polish and Baltic states, and achieved certain strategic aims; while Stalin bought time for further rearmament, Hitler sought to avoid the possibility of war on two fronts.

On 1 September 1939, German troops used the pretext of incited border incidents for a well-organized invasion of Poland. By 3 September, Britain and France had concluded that this clear act of German aggression now meant that they were, at last, at war with Germany. The precarious attempt at stabilizing European affairs and achieving a new international order after the First World War had collapsed. Germany under Hitler was again unleashing war in Europe. But this time unlike the mood of August 1914, however exaggerated by nationalist mythology there was little enthusiasm for war among the German people. The peaceful gains of the preceding

years had been greeted with an acclaim tinged by relief at the avoidance of bloodshed; now, in the main, the Germans took up arms in sombre mood, with considerable foreboding, clinging to the hope that Hitler was right in his predictions of an assured and early German victory. But, as it was to turn out, Hitler's aims for the 'master race' were so ambitious as to pave the way for eventual total defeat.



Territorial annexation, 1935-9