

Hitler

Weimar Republic

With the loss of the war, the German monarchy came to an end and a republic was proclaimed. A constitution was written providing for a President with broad political and military power and a parliamentary democracy. A national election was held to elect 423 deputies to the National Assembly. The centrist parties swept to victory. The result was what is known as the Weimar Republic. On June 28, 1919, the German government ratified the Treaty of Versailles. Under the terms of the treaty which ended hostilities in the War, Germany had to pay reparations for all civilian damages caused by the war. Germany also lost her colonies and large portions of German territory. A 30-mile strip on the right bank of the Rhine was demilitarized. Limits were placed on German armaments and military strength. The terms of the treaty were humiliating to most Germans, and condemnation of its terms undermined the government and served as a rallying cry for those who like Hitler believed Germany was ultimately destined for greatness.

German Worker's Party

Soon after the war in Munich, Hitler was recruited to join a military intelligence unit (the Press and Propaganda Department of Group Command IV of the *Reichswehr*), and was assigned to keep tabs on the German Worker's Party. At the time, it was comprised of only a handful of members. It was disorganized and had no program, but its members expressed a right-wing doctrine consonant with Hitler's.

He saw this party as a vehicle to reach his political ends. His blossoming hatred of the Jews became part of the organization's political platform. Hitler built up the party, converting it from a de facto discussion group to an actual political party. Advertising for the party's meetings appeared in anti-Semitic newspapers. The turning point of Hitler's mesmerizing oratorical career occurred at one such meeting held on October 16, 1919. Hitler's emotional delivery of an impromptu speech captivated his audience. Through word of mouth, donations poured into the party's coffers, and subsequent mass meetings attracted hundreds of Germans eager to hear the young, forceful and hypnotic leader.

As chairman of the NSDAP, he came into contact with Ludendorff, Gottfried Feder (1883-1941), Ernst Röhm (1887-1934), and Dietrich Eckart (1868-1923), whose influence was reflected in Hitler's thought: Gottfried Feder ("Break the bond of interest"), Ernst Röhm (the concept of the "state in arms") and Dietrich Eckart (anti-communism). With the assistance of party staff, Hitler drafted a party program consisting of twenty-five points. This platform was presented at a public meeting on February 24, 1920, with over 2,000 eager participants. After hecklers were forcibly removed by Hitler supporters armed with rubber truncheons and whips, Hitler electrified the audience with his masterful demagoguery. Jews were the principal target of his diatribe. Among the 25 points more negative points were the abrogation of the



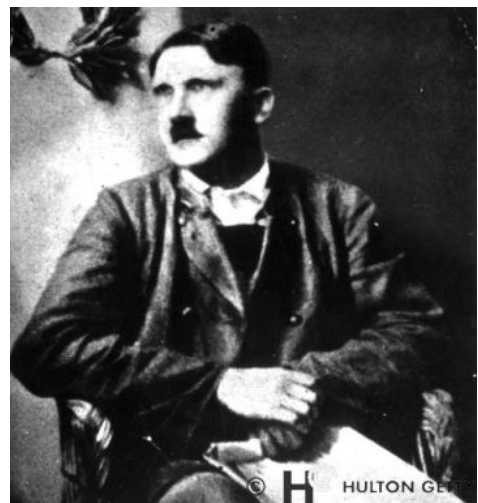
Versailles Treaty, confiscating war profits, expropriating land without compensation for use by the state, revoking civil rights for Jews, and expelling those Jews who had emigrated into Germany after the war began. More appealing to the masses were no doubt his promotion of the popular welfare ("the common weal comes before individual welfare"), the right of the establishment of self-determination for all Germans and equal rights for their state, and the destruction of the "bondage of interest." The DAP was renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The following day, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were published in the local anti-Semitic newspaper. The false, but alarming accusations reinforced Hitler's anti-Semitism. Soon after, treatment of the Jews was a major theme of Hitler's orations, and the increasing scape-goating of the Jews for inflation, political instability, unemployment, and the humiliation in the war, found a willing audience. Jews were tied to "internationalism" by Hitler. The name of the party was changed to the National Socialist German Worker's party, and the red flag with the swastika was adopted as the party symbol. A local newspaper which appealed to anti-Semites was on the verge of bankruptcy, and Hitler raised funds to purchase it for the party.

In July 1921 Hitler became chairman of the party (No. 7 on the Executive Committee). In January 1923, French and Belgian troops marched into Germany to settle a reparations dispute. Germans resented this occupation, which also had an adverse effect on the economy. Hitler's party benefitted by the reaction to this development, and exploited it by holding mass protest rallies despite a ban on such rallies by the local police. The Nazi party began drawing thousands of new members, many of whom were victims of hyper-inflation and found comfort in blaming the Jews for this trouble. The price of an egg, for example, had inflated to 30 million times its original price in just 10 years. Economic upheaval generally breeds political upheaval, and Germany in the 1920s was no exception.

The Munich Putsch

The Bavarian government defied the Weimar Republic, accusing it of being too far left. Hitler endorsed the fall of the Weimar Republic, and declared at a public rally on October 30, 1923 that he was prepared to march on Berlin to rid the government of the Communists and the Jews.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler held a rally at a Munich beer hall and proclaimed a revolution. The following day, he led 2,000 armed "brown-shirts" in an attempt to take over the Bavarian government. The small Nazi Party first won national attention in the Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923, when the Ruhr crisis and the great inflation were at their height. Hitler and his Nazis joined with General Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937) and his conservative nationalist followers in an attempt to seize power in Munich. (The plot got its name because it was planned in one of Munich's beer halls.) Once they had taken Munich, Hitler and Ludendorff planned to use the Bavarian capital as a base of operations against the republican government in Berlin. The support



that Hitler and Ludendorff expected to receive from some conservative Bavarian politicians failed to materialize, however, and the police easily suppressed the revolt.

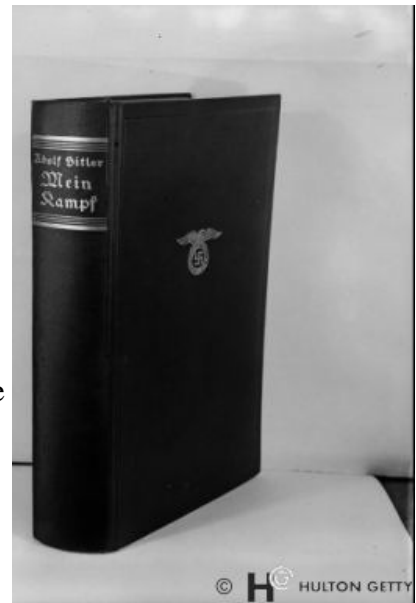
Following the collapse of the Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler and Ludendorff were tried for treason. In recognition of his services to Germany during the war, Ludendorff was acquitted. The conservative judges allowed Hitler to use his trial as a propaganda forum for his ideas. Hitler was convicted but sentenced to a term of only five years imprisonment at Landsberg where he would remain only 8 months. During his stay, Hitler put together the first part of his book *Mein Kampf*.

Hitler's *Mein Kampf*

Hitler served only eight months of his five-year term. While in prison, he wrote the first volume of *Mein Kampf* (2ed part was written in 1927-1927). It was partly an autobiographical book (although filled with glorified inaccuracies, self-serving half-truths and outright revisionism) which also detailed his views on the future of the German people. There were several targets of the vicious diatribes in the book, such as democrats, Communists, and internationalists. But he reserved the brunt of his vituperation for the Jews, whom he portrayed as responsible for all of the problems and evils of the world, particularly democracy, Communism, and internationalism, as well as Germany's defeat in the War. Jews were the German nation's true enemy, he wrote. They had no culture of their own, he asserted, but perverted existing cultures such as Germany's with their parasitism. As such, they were not a race, but an anti-race:

"[The Jews'] ultimate goal is the denaturalization, the promiscuous bastardization of other peoples, the lowering of the racial level of the highest peoples as well as the domination of his racial mishmash through the extirpation of the volkish intelligentsia and its replacement by the members of his own people," he wrote. On the contrary, the German people were of the highest racial purity and those destined to be the master race according to Hitler. To maintain that purity, it was necessary to avoid intermarriage with subhuman races such as Jews and Slavs.... Germany could stop the Jews from conquering the world only by eliminating them. By doing so, Germany could also find Lebensraum, living space, without which the superior German culture would decay. This living space, Hitler continued, would come from conquering Russia (which was under the control of Jewish Marxists, he believed) and the Slavic countries. This empire would be launched after democracy was eliminated and a "Führer" called upon to rebuild the German Reich."

A second volume of *Mein Kampf* was published in 1927. It included a history of the Nazi party to that time and its program, as well as a primer on how to obtain and retain political power, how to use propaganda and terrorism, and how to build a political organization. While *Mein Kampf* was crudely written and filled with embarrassing tangents and ramblings, it struck a responsive chord among its target and those Germans who believed it was their destiny to dominate Europe. The book sold over five million copies by the start of World War II.



Hitler's Rise to Power

Once released from prison, Hitler decided to seize power constitutionally rather than by force of arms. Using demagogic oratory, Hitler spoke to scores of mass audiences, calling for the German people to resist the yoke of Jews and Communists, and to create a new empire which would rule the world for 1,000 years.

Seeking Electoral Success: 1924-1929

In 1924, Hitler promptly reestablished the NSDAP in Munich. The party was organized according to the *Führer* principle: it was headed by the Führer, his deputy, and the national leadership with the *Reichsleiter* heading nation wide departments of the party. The regional political organization descended from the provincial level (*Gau*), to the county (*Kreis*), local district (*Ortsgruppe*), and cell (*Zell*) to the local bloc (*Block*). Party organizations, in part paramilitary, such as the SA (Brownshirt storm troopers), SS (Blackshirt storm troopers), HJ (Hitler Youth), and the BdM (League of German Girls), which were also organized according to the *Führer* principle, were closely linked to the party, as were the affiliated associations (DAF (German Workers' Front), NSV (National Socialist People's Welfare), and the professional organizations of physicians, teachers, lawyers, civil servants, etc.).

Rise to Power: 1930-1933

The Nazis gradually devised an electoral strategy to win northern farmers and white collar voters in small towns, which produced a landslide electoral victory in September 1930 (jump from roughly 3% to 18% of the votes cast) due to the depression. Refused a chance to form a cabinet, and unwilling to share in a coalition regime, the Nazis joined the Communists in violence and disorder between 1931 and 1933. In 1932, Hitler ran for President and won 30% of the vote, forcing the eventual victor, Paul von Hindenburg, into a runoff election. After a bigger landslide in July 1932 (44%), their vote declined and their movement weakened (Hitler lost the



presidential election to WWI veteran Paul von Hindenburg in April; elections of November 1932 roughly 42%), so Hitler decided to enter a coalition government as chancellor in January 1933.

Upon the death of Hindenburg in August 1934, Hitler was the consensus successor. With an improving economy, Hitler claimed credit and consolidated his position as a dictator, having succeeded in eliminating challenges from other political parties and government institutions. The German industrial machine was built up in preparation for war. In November 1937, he was comfortable enough to call his top military aides together at the "Führer Conference," when he outlined his plans for a war of aggression in Europe. Those who objected to the plan were dismissed.

Nazi Supporters

The Nazis won their support primarily from the lower middle class and the peasantry. These voters were strongly nationalistic in their political views and feared that the depression would deprive them of their standard of living. In religion, most of the Nazis' supporters were Protestants. German Catholics remained firm in their support of the Catholic Center Party.

Attitude of Workers

Most of Germany's industrial workers continued to vote for the Social Democrats, which remained the largest party, with 143 seats in the Reichstag. However, many disgruntled industrial workers voted for the Communists, who elected 77 Reichstag deputies in place of the 54 elected in 1928.

Attitude of Big Business

There is little evidence to support the view that Hitler received substantial financial support from big business. The conservative upper classes generally regarded Hitler as an uneducated demagogue and gutter politician.

Hitler's Political Views

Hitler lived in Vienna for several years, working at odd jobs and absorbing the ideas of Austrian right-wing extremists. In 1913, he left Vienna and moved to Munich in southern Germany. He took with him the basic political ideas to which he would remain committed for the balance of his life. Central to Hitler's thought were his notions of race. He believed in the racial superiority of the Germanic peoples (the Aryan race) and in the inferiority of other races, especially Jews but also Slavs and blacks. Hitler also advocated the Pan-German ideology that was popular among many Austrian extremists. Pan-Germanism held the view that all Germans should be united in a single state. In addition, Hitler was hostile to the ideology of Marxism, which emphasized the unity of the international working class rather than racial solidarity.

The following extracts illustrate some of the political ideas of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945):

In that we deny the principle of parliamentary democracy we strike the strongest blow for the right of the nation to the self-determination of its own life. For in the parliamentary system we see no genuine expression of the nation's will--a will which cannot logically be anything else than a will to the maintenance of the nation--but we do see a distortion, if not a perversion, of that will. The will of a nation to the self-determination of its being manifests itself most clearly and is of most use when its most capable minds are brought forth. They form the representative leaders of a nation, they alone can be the pride of a nation--certainly never the parliamentary politician who is the product of the ballot box and thinks only in terms of votes. The constructive development of the future leadership of the nation through its most able men will take years; the intelligent education of the German people will take decades. ⁽¹⁾

Internationalism is weakness in the life of nations. What is there that is born of internationalism? Nothing. The real values of human culture were not born of internationalism, but they were created by the whole heritage and tradition of the people [das Volkstum]. When peoples no longer possess creative power they become international. Wherever there is weakness in regard to spiritual matters in the life of nations, internationalism makes its appearance. It is no coincidence that a people, namely the Jews, which does not have any real creative ability, is the carrier of this internationalism. It is the people with the least creative power and talent. It dominates only in the field of crooked and speculative economy. ... The Jew, as a race, has a remarkable instinct of self-preservation, but as an individual he has no cultural abilities at all. He is the demon of the disintegration of nations--the symbol of continual destruction of peoples. If the first of May, therefore, is to have any meaning in the life of peoples, it can be only a glorification of the national, creative idea as against the international idea of decay. ⁽²⁾

I do not want even to speak of the Jews. They are simply our old enemies, their plans have suffered shipwreck through us, and they rightly hate us, just as we hate them. We realize that this war can end only either in the Wiping out of the Germanic nations, or by the disappearance of Jewry from Europe. On September 3rd I spoke in the Reichstag--and I dislike premature prophecies--and I said that this war would not end the way the Jews imagine, that is, in the extinction of the European Aryan nations, but that the result of this war would be the destruction of Jewry. For the first time, it will not be the others who will bleed to death, but for the first time the genuine ancient Jewish law, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," is being applied. The more this struggle spreads, the more anti Semitism will spread--and world Jewry may rely on this. It will find nourishment in every prison camp, it will find nourishment in every family which is being enlightened as to why it is being called upon to make such sacrifices, and the hour will come when the worst enemy of the world, of all time, will have finished his part for at least one thousand years to come. ⁽³⁾

For fourteen or fifteen years I have continually proclaimed to the German nation that I regard it as my task before posterity to destroy Marxism, and that is no empty phrase but a solemn oath which I shall follow as long as I live. I have made this confession of faith, the confession of faith of a single man, that of a mighty organization. I know now that even if fate were to remove me, the fight would be fought to the end; this movement is the guarantee for that. This for us is not a fight which can be finished by compromise. We see in Marxism the enemy of our people which we will root out and destroy without mercy.... We must then fight to the very end those tendencies which have eaten into the soul of the German nation in the last seventeen years,

which have done us such incalculable damage and which, if they had not been vanquished, would have destroyed Germany. Bismarck told us that liberalism was the pace-maker of Social Democracy. I need not say here that Social Democracy is the pace-maker of Communism. And Communism is the forerunner of death, of national destruction, and extinction. We have joined battle with it and will fight it to the death.⁽⁴⁾

We are enemies of cowardly pacifism because we recognize that according to the laws of nature, struggle is the father of all things. We are enemies of democracy because we recognize that an individual genius represents at all times the best in his people and that he should be the leader. Numbers can never direct the destiny of a people. Only genius can do this. We are the deadly enemies of internationalism because nature teaches us that the purity of race and the authority of the leader alone are able to lead a nation to victory.⁽⁵⁾

. . . Thus I am standing for exactly the same principles that I stood for already a year ago. We are convinced that a final showdown will come in this fight against Marxism. We are convinced that it must come, for two *Weltanschauungen* are fighting each other and there can be only one outcome! One will be destroyed and the other will win.... It is the great mission of the National Socialist Movement, to give this epoch a new faith and to see to it that millions will swear by this faith, so that, when some day the hour for the showdown comes, the German people will not meet the Jewish international murderers completely unarmed.⁽⁶⁾

Adolf Hitler's Rise to Power - <http://www2.dsu.nodak.edu/users/dmeier/Holocaust/hitler.html>