

Did life improve for  
the german people  
under nazi rule up to  
1939



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When Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 there were only three National Socialist members in the first cabinet. Yet Hitler aimed to completely "destroy" the Weimer constitution and to do this he wanted to transfer all legislative power of the Reichstag to himself. However, any change in the Constitution required a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag before they could become effective. He arrested or excluded Communist deputies, and bribed the Nationalist Party and the Centre Party. As a result, in March, the Nazis outvoted the Social Democrats and due to the Enabling Bill this gave Hitler unlimited power.

From now on Hitler could draft and pass any laws without the Reichstag. In just eighteen months the German Constitution had been destroyed and Hitler had successfully managed to concentrate all power into his own hands. Hitler lost no time in consolidating his position and on July 14, 1933 all political parties except the Nazi Party were declared illegal. When President Von Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler announced that he would take on himself the offices of President and Chancellor. He named himself the Furer (meaning Leader and Reich Chancellor), and his dictatorship was now complete.

Hitler did not just want to create the laws he wanted to control the people including their thoughts and ideas. This would make it easier to maintain his control later on when introducing new ideas based on his right-wing opinions. Through control of all mass media under the Ministry of Propaganda, (in the hands of Dr. Goebbels), Hitler was able to put forward his strong ideas and laws to the German people. Germany effectively became a totalitarian state. This affected different groups of people in different ways.

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For some people life in Germany under Nazi rule, compared to the economic depression and unemployment of previous years improved greatly. For those groups of people who did not fit the criteria of the "ideal German" life slowly got worse. Hitler had strong anti-Semitic opinions. In [1]Mein Kampf, Hitler argued that the German race was superior to all others. He went on to say that Aryan superiority was being threatened particularly by the Jewish race. He believed the Jews were responsible for everything he did not like, including modern art, pornography and prostitution.

Hitler also alleged that the Jews had been responsible for losing the [2]First World War. He also claimed that Jews, who were only about 1% of the population, were slowly taking over the country. As people around the world had regarded the Jewish people with suspicion since the Middle Ages it was relatively easy for people in Germany to believe Hitler. The fact that Jews had achieved prominent positions in a democratic society was, according to Hitler, an argument against democracy: "a hundred blockheads do not equal one man in wisdom."

Based on his readings of how blacks were denied [3]civil rights in the southern states in America, Hitler attempted to make life so unpleasant for Jews in Germany that they would emigrate. The campaign started on 1st April 1933, when a one-day boycott of Jewish-owned shops took place. Members of the SA picketed the shops to ensure the boycott was successful. It did not stop there. In September 1935; the famous Nuremberg Laws were issued. The Laws deprived Jews of German citizenship and forbade them to marry 'Aryans' (or "pure" Germans). Jews were excluded from participation in German political and cultural life.

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Severe hardships were also inflicted on Jews in their daily life (e. g. the need to sit in a separate part of the bus). As time went on, the conditions of the Jews became worse and worse. They had their property confiscated, personal liberty deprived and personal safety endangered. Compared with the Weimar Republic this was a dramatic change. The minister of education purged the universities of Jews. Over a thousand people lost their jobs. Rust justified his actions by claiming that: " We must have a new Aryan generation at the universities, or else we will lose the future.

Previously they had held jobs as lawyers and doctors; they were musicians and scientists (many who would later play a part against the Nazis in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War), now only Jewish people were allowed to appreciate their talents. Life for the Jewish people in Germany definitely worsened. There was a huge amount of pressure placed on them to leave everything behind and emigrate, as well as large numbers losing their jobs. Many were placed in concentration camps, destined to die. As Hitler was an atheist he disliked other religions. In fact he wanted the German people to worship him and many of them did.

They hailed him as the " new Messiah" who had pulled Germany out of her economic turmoil. For those who did not believe that Hitler was the " returned Messiah" such as the Jehovah Witnesses, concentration camps awaited them. In terms of other religions mainly, Protestants and Catholics, Hitler was willing to tolerate them, at least at first. He still wanted to bring both the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church under his control. Hitler signed a Concordat with the Vatican in which the Catholic Church recognized

the new regime and renounced all activity except that of a purely religious kind in Germany.

In return, Hitler guaranteed the Catholic Church many of its historic rights, including the right to conduct local schools. Very soon, Hitler broke his promise. In 1937, resenting the Nazi interference with the Catholic control of education and the youth movement, the Pope issued the encyclical known as "With Burning Sorrow" condemning the Nazi policy of state and racial superiority. From 1937 onwards, the Catholics offered serious resistance to the Nazi persecution of the Catholic Church. In dealing with the Protestant Church, the Nazis found one willing supporter in Pastor Ludwig Müller.

He was appointed by the Nazis to be the Evangelical Bishop of the German Reich in 1933. Soon after his appointment, Müller amended Christian teachings in line with Nazi ideas. Many thousands of Protestants who did not follow the new Christian teaching were sent to the concentration camps. Based on this evidence it is clear that whilst unlike the Jews, their living conditions did not worsen, but their freedom to practice their religion was harshly restricted and many of them died trying to worship the way they wanted to. Another group of people that Hitler wanted to change was women.

Hitler claimed that the emancipation of women was a slogan invented by Jewish intellectuals. He argued that for the German woman her "world is her husband, her family, her children, and her home." In his election campaign in 1932, Hitler promised that if he gained power he would take 800,000 women out of employment within four years. In August 1933 a law

was passed that enabled married couples to obtain loans to set up homes and start families. To pay for this single men and childless couples were taxed more heavily.

The decline in [5]unemployment after the Nazis gained power meant that it was not necessary to force women out of manual work. However, action was taken to reduce the number of women working in the professions. Married women doctors and civil servants were dismissed in 1934 and from June 1936 women could no longer act as judges or public prosecutors. Hitler's hostility to women was shown by his decision to make them ineligible to jury service because he believed them to be unable to "think logically or reason objectively, since they are ruled only by emotion".

When Hitler came to power in 1933 he appointed [6]Gertrud Scholtz-Klink as Reich Women's Leader and head of the Nazi Women's League. A good orator, her main task was to promote male superiority and the importance of childbearing. In one speech she pointed out that "the mission of woman is to minister in the home and in her profession to the needs of life from the first to last moment of man's existence." Life for many women definitely worsened. Before Hitler they held many esteemed professions just like men as lawyers and doctors, even politicians.

In the year before the Nazis came to power there were 18,315 women students in Germany's universities. By 1939 this number had fallen to 5,447. They had been allowed to vote and could think for themselves. Now their husbands and Hitler controlled them. Many tried to fight back and suffered because of it. In October 1933, the Nazis opened the first [7]concentration

camp for women at Moringen. By 1938 the camp was unable to accommodate the growing number of women prisoners and a second one was built at Lichtenburg in Saxony. The following year another one was opened in Ravensbrück.

Though life certainly did not improve for many groups of people perhaps it improved for others. Unemployment certainly did fall, and by 1939 there were less than one million unemployed. For the middle class life was no longer insecure or worrying. It is evident that Hitler crushed the threat of communism in his own rise to power. Their finances and property were once again secure. Previously unemployed men had jobs and could bring money home to their families; they could afford clothes and food. Germany was once again thriving and full of industrial growth. It is clear that for the societal norm living conditions improved.

Many were convinced that Hitler was their one true leader "who only cared about the German people". He created jobs and public works schemes; Germany was no longer suffering from depression after the Wall Street Crash and was pulled out of its economic slump. However Hitler was a dictator and was therefore only likely to come to power in times of great hardship. He had strong opinions and views. Though he certainly did put "some things right", it came at a price and in the end it wasn't enough. People did not know how much death and destruction he would eventually cause and the bad certainly outweighed the good.