

Nazism in theory and practice

The theory of the Master race

The basic ideas of Nazism were as follows:

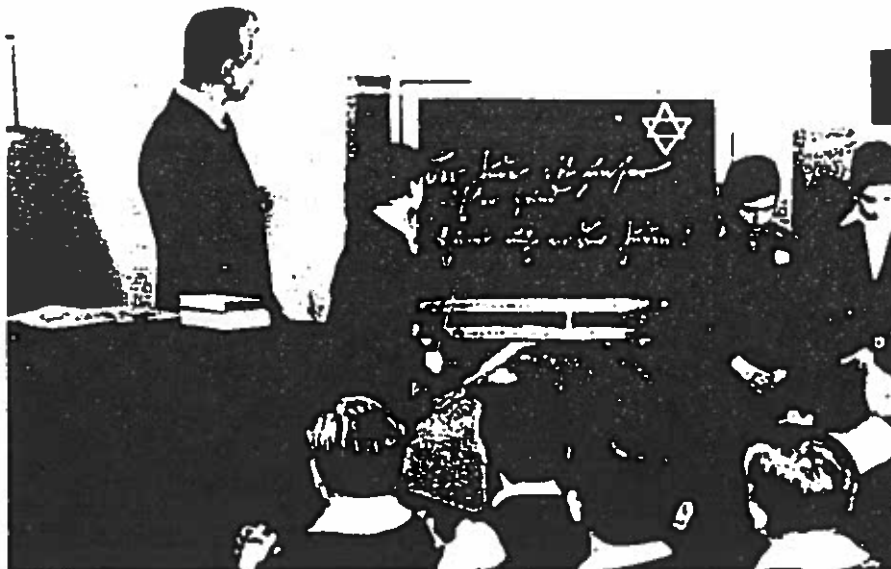
- 1 Mankind is divided into different races, and some races are 'better' than others. The 'best' races are those that are 'pure' and have not inter-bred with others. In the past the best race was the 'Aryan' race and the present-day Germans are descended from the Aryans.
- 2 For the sake of human progress the Germans must keep themselves pure in order to become the 'Master Race'. The greatest danger to the purity of the Germans was inter-breeding with Jews.
- 3 The Slavs (that is, people like the Poles and Russians) are an inferior race. The Germans were too crowded in their own country. They needed extra 'living space' ('lebensraum'). This could be had by occupying countries like Russia and making the people there serve the Master Race. Compare this list with the short extract from *Mein Kampf* on p. 47.

Anti-semitism

There was no scientific evidence for these theories. Yet a most thorough and horrible campaign was organised against the Jews. Dislike or hatred of Jews is called anti-Semitism. Here are some of the main events in the steady build-up of the persecution of the Jews:

The two Nuremberg Laws, 1935

- 1 Reich Citizen Act: 'No Jew can be a Reich citizen. The right to vote on political questions is not extended to him and he may not be appointed to any office of State.'



Two Jewish boys being taught that they belong to an inferior race

A Jewish boy being taken to a concentration camp



- 2 Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour: 'Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are hereby forbidden.'

Many restrictions, 1933-39

For example, Jews were forbidden to practise many professions such as

medicine and teaching. Their jewels and radios were confiscated.

'Kristallnacht' ('Crystal Night'), 1938

The windows of Jewish shops, homes and synagogues were smashed. There was much looting and destruction.

Nazism in theory and practice

Concentration camps

Many Jews were sent to these camps, especially after the start of the Second World War. There most of them died from the work they were forced to do, or were murdered directly. Then, Jews were collected from all parts of German-occupied Europe and transported to the concentration camps for what was planned to be the 'Final Solution' of the Jewish problem—their total extermination. (see below for a description of these camps.)

The Nazi system of control

Censorship

As early as 1933 bonfires were made of books whose authors or contents the Nazis disliked. Soon school textbooks were rewritten and newspapers were controlled.

The S.S. and Gestapo

Apart from Hitler the most feared man in Germany from 1936 to 1945 (and during the Second World War, in German-occupied Europe) was Heinrich Himmler. There were many police organisations in Germany. In 1936 Himmler was put in charge of them all with the grand title of Reichsführer S.S. and Chief of the German Police. The two most famous police organisations were the Gestapo and the S.S. The Gestapo were particularly feared as they hunted down anyone who opposed the Nazis. The S.S. had a number of duties including running the concentration camps.

The concentration camps

The most horrifying part of the history of Nazi Germany was the system of concentration camps. Any people the Nazis did not like were



A pile of bodies at the Belsen concentration camp



Heinrich Himmler (left), with one of his senior officers in the SS, Reinhard Heydrich

rounded up—beggars, gypsies, homosexuals, for example, as well as Jews. Without any trial they were imprisoned in concentration camps. By 1939 there were about 25,000 people in four camps. At first they were just harsh prisons. But by 1941 there were very many more. The

most notorious concentration camps were Belsen and Dachau. Some camps were turned into extermination camps: people were sent there deliberately to be slaughtered. The camps became very efficient at this. Gas chambers and gas ovens were built for killing people and then for

Nazism in theory and practice

burning the bodies. The most notorious extermination camp was at Auschwitz in Poland, where 3 million people died. Here are descriptions of the gassing and cremation at Auschwitz:

With blows from different kinds of sticks they were forced to go in [to the gas chambers] and stay there, because when they realised they were going to their deaths they tried to come out again. Finally, they succeeded in locking the doors. One heard cries and shouts and they started to fight against each other, knocking on the walls. This went on for two minutes and then there was complete silence. . . .

When the doors were opened a crowd of bodies fell out because they were compressed so much. They were quite contracted and it was almost impossible to separate one from the other.

Firwood was stacked between the bodies and when approximately 100 bodies were in the pit the wood was lighted with rags soaked in paraffin.

When the flames had taken hold more bodies were piled on. The fat which collected in the bottom of the pits was put into the fire with buckets when it was raining to keep it alight.

But for many, death was a happy release after starvation to the point of cannibalism or torture to the point of insanity. The S.S. carefully collected the clothes, hair, gold rings and gold tooth-fillings of their victims.

Enthusiasm and support for Nazism

Hitler could not terrorise or kill everyone. He needed the support of the majority of the people. How did he achieve this?

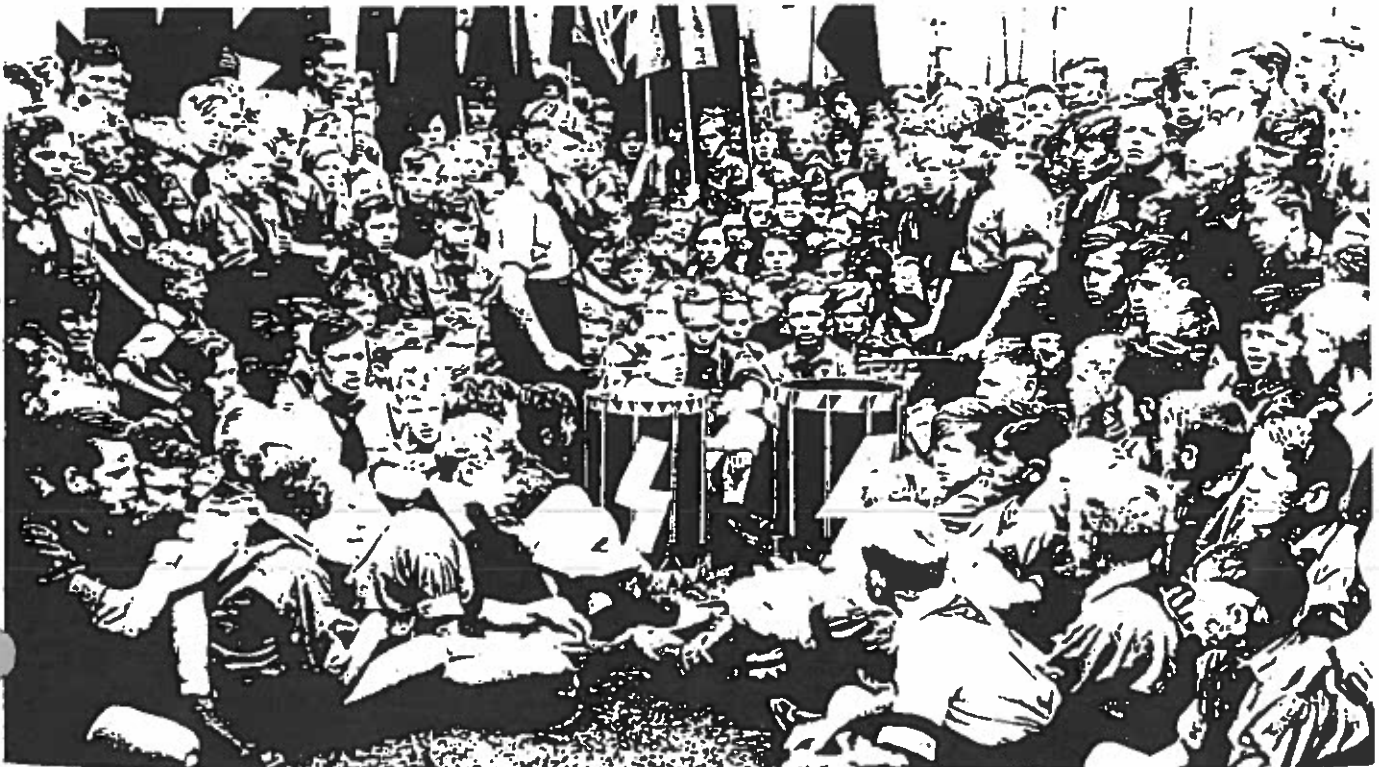
Rallies

We have already seen (p. 45) that Hitler was a very gifted speaker. He used this ability very skilfully to whip

up mass enthusiasm for himself and his policies. Sometimes great rallies were held in huge open-air arenas; sometimes in large halls. The most famous arena of all was at Nuremberg. Always the events were very carefully arranged to produce an intense emotional effect. Look at the photograph on p. 41 and read the following passage from the diary of an American radio correspondent and try to imagine the atmosphere.

The hall was a sea of brightly coloured flags. Even Hitler's arrival was made dramatic. The band stopped playing. There was a hush over the thirty thousand people packed in the hall. Then the band struck up the *Badenweiler March*, a very catchy tune, and used only, I'm told, when Hitler makes his entries. Hitler appeared in the back of the auditorium, and followed by his aides, Göring, Goebbels, Hess, Himmler, and the others, he strode slowly down the long centre aisle while thirty

A gathering of a group of German schoolchildren belonging to the junior branch of the Hitler Youth



Nazism in theory and practice

thousand hands were raised in salute. Then an immense symphony orchestra played Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture. Great Klieg lights played on the stage, where Hitler sat surrounded by a hundred party officials and officers of the army and navy. Behind them the 'blood flag', the one carried down the streets of Munich in the ill-fated putsch. Behind this, four or five hundred S.A. standards. . . .

In such an atmosphere no wonder, then, that every word dropped by Hitler seemed like an inspired Word from on high.

Youth movements

Many people have suggested that if the beliefs and loyalties of children and adolescents can be shaped in a particular way, they will keep these beliefs and loyalties when they grow up. Hitler certainly believed this.

In the 1930s a Hitler Youth movement was organised and eventually membership was made compulsory. They wore uniforms and were taught above all to love and obey Hitler. They also learnt practical outdoor skills.

Propaganda

Adults could not be controlled in quite the same way. They picked up information and ideas from newspapers, radio and the cinema. Hitler realised that it was vitally important to control these media. Hitler therefore appointed a Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. (Propaganda is telling people what you want them to believe.) This man was Dr Joseph Goebbels—a short man with a limp. He was brilliant at his job. Soon newspapers, radio broadcasts and films were all telling the German people (and the rest of the world) how splendid the Nazis were! For example, the Olympic Games of 1936 were held in Berlin and were used quite deliberately as

Adolf Hitler in seiner historischen Rede im Reichstag:

„Auf allen Gebieten unseres nationalen, politischen und wirtschaftlichen Lebens ist unsere Stellung gebessert worden.

Ich konnte dies alles nur tun, weil ich mich nie als Diktator meines Volkes, sondern stets nur als sein Führer und damit als sein Beauftragter gefühlt habe.“

Darum
am 29. März



Deine Stimme dem Führer!

A typical Nazi propaganda leaflet. This propaganda leaflet was produced to persuade people to vote for Hitler in 1936 to support his take-over of the Rhineland (see p. 61). Zeppelins were used as a publicity stunt in this campaign. The official result showed that nearly 100% of the people voted in support of Hitler!

The translation reads:

Adolf Hitler in his historic speech in the Reichstag:

In all areas of our national, political and economic life there have been improvements.

I was only able to do all this because I have never felt myself to be the dictator of my people, but only its leader and therefore its representative. Therefore on 29th March: Vote for the Führer!

a massive propaganda exercise to show the world how prosperous and efficient Nazi Germany was.

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister

