

## Germany:

### 2.2.1 Definitions:

#### *Weimar Republic:*

- The ruling government in Germany directly after WWI refers to a state in which power rests with the people or their representatives; formed in city of Weimar; forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles.

#### *Munich Beer Hall Putsch:*

- Occurred in 1923 as Hitler attempted to overthrow the Weimar government and establish a right wing nationalistic one in its place.

#### *Enabling Act:*

- This act was passed in March, 1935 and gave Hitler the power to pass laws without the consent of the Reichstag (parliament) or president for 4 years.
- Hitler used his powers to eradicate all political opposition, guaranteeing that the Enabling Act would continue indefinitely, thus making Hitler dictator for life.

**Gestapo:** The secret police of Nazi Germany that was notorious for brutality and terrorist methods.

**Anti-Semitism:** Form of prejudice against the Jewish people that ranged from apathy to violent hatred and murder.

**Nuremburg Laws:** Nazi legislation in 1935 that reduced all Jewish people in Germany to second-class citizens.

#### *Kristallnacht:*

- The November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938 attack by German Nazis on Jewish communities across Germany; also known as, “the night of broken glass”, the violence marked an escalation in the Nazi plan of Jewish persecution.

#### *Mein Kampf:*

- A book dedicated by Hitler to his deputy, Rudolf Hess, during their imprisonment in a Bavarian fortress for attempting the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch, part autobiography, part political philosophy, the book presents Hitler’s ideas of German expansion, anti-communism, anti-Semitism, and formed the blueprint for the racist ideology of National Socialism.

### 2.2.4 Problems for the Weimar Republic

- Two days prior to the end of WWI, Germany became a republic and the new government held its first assembly in the town of Weimar.
- From the start this new government faced problems, most importantly the problems resulting from the Treaty of Versailles, economic difficulties, and threats from opposition communist parties.
- Upon signing the **Treaty of Versailles**, the government was immediately discredited and many Germans felt they had been, “stabbed in the back”, by those in the Weimar Government.

- People were upset over the “**war guilt**” clause feeling their national pride was wounded.
- Also, the **reparations** and **restrictions on the military** (severely weakened), in their eyes, reduced their country to nothing and left them open and vulnerable.
- The republic faced severe economic difficulties resulting from the treaty, which resulted in severe hardships for the people.
- The country had to pay massive reparations, forcing them to print more money.
- This in turn led to the devaluation of the Mark (\$) and hyperinflation.
- For the German people money became worthless, food prices soared and people lost their savings.
- The arrival of the Great Depression increased this level of hardship.
- Everyone in Germany blamed the Weimar Government as discontent among them swelled.
- As a result of these problems another arose, the government was faced with the growing popularity of the communist.
- People wanted to get rid of the Weimar government, rebellion was in the air.
- As in Italy the business class feared this and wanted to crush the communist.
- By the late 20’s the communists had become a strong political force which caused difficulties for the Weimar on 2 fronts (pressure from business to deal with them and growing power of communist coming from the lower classes)

### 2.2.7 Domestic Policies of Mussolini and Hitler

- Mussolini and Hitler both wished to establish totalitarian regimes within their respective countries.
- To accomplish this both men introduced domestic policies which restricted freedoms of people/groups and concentrated power in themselves.
- **Mussolini** adopted several policies, two of which were the abolition of all political parties except the Fascist Party and the censorship of the press.
- When Mussolini took control of Italy he quickly removed all opposition political parties by outlawing them and stripping them of any power or influence.
- He made it illegal for any other political party to exist.
- Also, Mussolini took control of all press venues within Italy.
- He ensured that no negative or damaging news items made it into the newspapers or radio broadcasts.
- Only stories which showed the government and Mussolini in a positive light made it to the public.
- Those who disobeyed or broke from the rules were severely punished.
- **Hitler** also introduced similar totalitarian policies to gain control of his country.
- Hitler also banned all political parties except the Nazi party.
- Once he had earned the most seats in parliament and became Chancellor, other political parties were outlawed and disbanded.
- Those who were opposed to the normal extinction of their parties were dealt with by another of Hitler’s domestic policies, the Gestapo.
- The Gestapo were Hitler’s secret police force.
- Their original purpose was to purge Germany of any political opposition to the government.
- This police force took whatever actions were necessary to remove anyone who spoke out, wrote or took action against Hitler.

## 2.2.8 Nazi Persecution Policies

- Once Hitler came into power, he almost immediately began to show his true colours.
  - It was his belief that anyone who was not a true German was a menace to society and did not fit into or have a role in German society.
  - **He persecuted many groups including:**
- A) **Homosexuals:**
- Nazi's believed homosexuality was promoted by the Jews to undermine the "master race".
  - They did not seek to kill the homosexuals; they attempted to terrorize them into sexual and social conformity.
  - Homosexuals were arrested and deported to concentration camps, where they were harshly treated and were used as guinea pigs for experiments.
  - Hitler's first action against them was to close down gay bars.
  - Homosexuals were called a threat to the "disciplined masculinity" of Germany and "enemies of the state".
  - More than 100 000 were arrested, 50 000 served prison terms as convicted homosexuals, while others were institutionalized in mental hospitals and some were castrated.
  - Between 5 and 15 thousand were imprisoned in concentration camps where they died from starvation, disease, beatings and murder.
- B) **Gypsies:**
- The gypsies were seen as social "subhuman beings", and members of a "lower race".
  - In 1937, they were forced into concentration camps, here they were worked to death as slave labourers in the camp quarry or in arms factories.
  - They were tortured, shot and hanged. Nazi's believed they were diseased.
  - As early as 1933 they were being forcibly sterilized by the Nazis to stop the spread of disease by reproduction.
  - In the 1940's, there were large scale round ups and Gypsy camps were purged through a program of liquidation (forced to dig own grave, then placed in gas chambers).
  - From 1935 to the end of the war, 1.5 million were murdered.
- C) **Religion:**
- Hitler and the Nazis felt that religious minority groups were a threat to them.
  - Groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted and banned from practicing.
  - They were arrested, sent to concentration camps, lost their jobs in both private and public areas and were denied unemployment, social welfare and pension.
  - Children were taken from their parents and sent to orphanages, reform school and Nazi homes to be raised as Nazis.
  - In camps they wore purple triangles, many died of disease, hunger, exhaustion and at least 25% of them died.
- D) **Communists:**
- Hitler's initial tactic against the communist was to make people fear them.
  - Communists were portrayed as "evil" by Hitler in order to convince the people that Hitler was the only true safe option.
  - Leaflets were created accusing communists of killing its citizens and burning their homes.

- Once in power, Hitler outlawed communism, making it illegal to practice in Germany.
- Communists were eliminated from Germany's political landscape.

E) **Jews:**

- Nazi persecution of the Jewish people was forcibly promoted by Hitler.
- In 1933 they were expelled from all government jobs, teaching and the practice of law and medicine.
- In 1935 the **Nuremberg Laws** legally defined the Jews as “non-citizens/stateless people.”
- Marriages of Jews were banned and Jewish shops were forced to close.
- Synagogues were shut down and Jewish property was confiscated.
- Harsher treatment started after November 1938 when a Jewish youth murdered a German diplomat in Paris.
- On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1938 Jewish communities were attacked, everything was burned, and people were beaten and murdered.
- The Jews were forced to pay for all damages (caused by the Nazis).
- It was called the “night of broken glass” or **Kristallnacht**.
- When the war started millions of Jews were rounded up, stripped of all possessions (even silver/gold fillings in teeth), sent to concentration camps, and forced into ghettos, then ultimately to death camps, where 6 million eventually were killed.