Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Germany, 1890–1945: Democracy and dictatorship

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Kaiser Wilhelm II's Germany, 1890–1918

- Germany was united in 1871. **Kaiser** Wilhelm II ruled from 1888 to 1918. He appointed the Chancellor and controlled the army, while the elected **Reichstag** had limited power.
- The army was hugely respected (Prussian militarism). Germany industrialised rapidly, but poor conditions for workers boosted the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which became the largest party in the **Reichstag** in 1912.
- The Navy Laws (from 1898), pushed by Admiral Tirpitz, built a large navy to rival Britain's.
- The First World War brought food shortages (Britain's naval blockade), war weariness and unrest. The **Kaiser** abdicated on 9 November 1918, and the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918.

Weimar Germany, 1919–1929

- The Weimar Constitution (1919) gave everyone over 20 the vote and used proportional representation, which led to many parties and weak coalition governments. **Article 48** let the President rule by decree in an emergency.
- The **Treaty of Versailles** (June 1919) was hated as a 'diktat' (dictated peace). Germany lost land, its army was cut to 100,000 men, it had to accept the blame for the war (the war guilt clause) and pay reparations (set at £6.6 billion in 1921). Many blamed the 'November Criminals' who had signed the armistice.

- Challenges: the communist Spartacist Uprising (January 1919); the right-wing Kapp Putsch (March 1920), defeated by a general strike; the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr (January 1923) after Germany missed reparations payments; and **hyperinflation** in 1923, when money became almost worthless. Hitler's Munich Putsch (November 1923) failed, and he wrote Mein Kampf in prison.
- Gustav Stresemann led a recovery, the 'Golden Age': a new currency, the Rentenmark (1923); the Dawes Plan (1924), which brought US loans and lower yearly payments; the Locarno Treaties (1925); joining the League of Nations (1926); and the Young Plan (1929), which cut the total reparations. Culture flourished, such as the Bauhaus art school.

The Nazi rise to power, 1929–1934

- The Wall Street Crash (1929) caused the Depression. US loans were recalled, and unemployment reached about 6 million by 1932. Coalition governments failed, and Chancellors ruled using **Article 48**.
- Nazi support grew through Goebbels' propaganda, Hitler's speeches, promises of 'work and bread', the SA's intimidation of opponents and fear of communism. In July 1932 the Nazis became the largest party in the **Reichstag**, with 37% of the vote.
- Hitler was appointed Chancellor on 30 January 1933, after a deal with von Papen and President Hindenburg, who thought they could control him.
- The **Reichstag** Fire (27 February 1933) was blamed on communists, and emergency decrees took away freedoms. The **Enabling Act** (March 1933) let Hitler make laws without the **Reichstag**. Trade unions were banned (May 1933), and Germany became a one-party state (July 1933).
- In the **Night of the Long Knives** (30 June 1934), the SS killed Ernst Röhm and other SA leaders. When Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler became **Führer**, and the army swore an oath of loyalty to him personally.

Life in Nazi Germany

- Economy: public works such as the autobahns, the Reich Labour Service, rearmament and conscription (1935) cut unemployment. The Four-Year Plan (1936), led by Göring, aimed to make Germany self-sufficient. Trade unions were replaced by the German Labour Front, with Strength Through Joy holidays and Beauty of Labour workplace improvements.
- Women were expected to focus on 'children, kitchen, church'. Marriage loans and the Mother's Cross encouraged large families. Young people joined the Hitler Youth or the League of German Maidens, and school subjects were rewritten to spread Nazi ideas.

Your notes

- Control: the SS (led by Himmler), the **Gestapo** (secret police) and concentration camps (Dachau opened in 1933). Goebbels controlled propaganda and censorship through radio, rallies, films and the 1936 Berlin Olympics. A Concordat (1933) with the Pope was meant to keep the Catholic Church quiet; Protestant pastors who resisted, such as Martin Niemöller, were arrested.
- Persecution: a boycott of Jewish shops (April 1933); the **Nuremberg Laws** (1935), which took away Jews' citizenship and banned marriage between Jews and non-Jews; and **Kristallnacht** (9–10 November 1938), when synagogues, shops and homes were attacked. Roma, disabled people, gay men and others were also persecuted.
- Opposition included the Edelweiss Pirates, the Swing Youth, and the White Rose student group, whose leaders Hans and Sophie Scholl were executed in 1943.

Germany at war, 1939–1945

- Rationing began in 1939. After the defeat at Stalingrad (1943), Goebbels declared 'total war', and more women and forced foreign workers were used in factories. Allied bombing destroyed cities such as Hamburg (1943) and Dresden (1945).
- After the Wannsee Conference (January 1942), the Nazis organised the 'Final Solution': the systematic murder of Europe's Jews in death camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. About 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust.
- The July Bomb Plot (1944) to kill Hitler failed. Hitler killed himself in April 1945, and Germany surrendered in May 1945.

Key terms

Kaiser	The German emperor.
Reichstag	The German parliament.
Weimar Republic	The democratic German government from 1919 to 1933.
Treaty of Versailles	The 1919 peace treaty that punished Germany after the First World War.
Hyperinflation	Prices rising so fast that money becomes almost worthless, as in Germany in 1923.
Article 48	The part of the Weimar Constitution that let the President rule by decree in an emergency.
Enabling Act	The 1933 law that let Hitler make laws without the Reichstag.
Night of the Long Knives	The killing of SA leaders by the SS in June 1934.
Gestapo	The Nazi secret police.
Nuremberg Laws	The 1935 laws that took away German Jews' citizenship.
Kristallnacht	The Nazi attacks on Jewish homes, shops and synagogues in November 1938.

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Führer	'Leader': Hitler's title from 1934.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. When did Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicate?
2. What did Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution allow?
3. How did the Treaty of Versailles limit Germany's army?
4. What happened in Germany in 1923?
5. Who led Germany's recovery in the 'Golden Age' of 1924–1929?
6. What was the Dawes Plan (1924)?
7. When was Hitler appointed Chancellor?
8. What did the Enabling Act (1933) do?

Answers

1. November 1918
2. The President to rule by decree in an emergency
3. It was cut to 100,000 men
4. Hyperinflation made money almost worthless
5. Gustav Stresemann
6. US loans, and lower yearly reparations payments
7. 30 January 1933
8. Let Hitler make laws without the Reichstag

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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