

National Socialism

(Nazism; NS), German political movement led by Adolf Hitler. The notion of combining the concepts of "national" and "social" became popular in Germany before World War I. In 1919 an antisemitic right-wing political party called the German Workers' Party (*Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*) was founded in Munich; this party adopted the combined "national-social" ideology. In 1920 the party added "National Socialist" to its name and thus became the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP or Nazi Party). A year later Adolf Hitler, a man who started out as a public speaker for the party, became its undisputed leader, or *Fuehrer*.

The National Socialist ideology was an outgrowth of earlier political theories that also gave birth to fascism--- a political movement that became popular in Italy some years before the Nazis took over Germany. Nazism brought together the ideas of racial anti-semitism (that Jews were inferior by virtue of their race, or genetic makeup), Social Darwinism (that certain individuals or ethnic groups are dominant because of their inherent genetic superiority), and *lebensraum* (the belief that Germans needed more "living space," i.e. more territory, particularly in Eastern Europe). Nazism also embraced the attitude of total anti-Bolshevism, and demanded revenge against those people--- especially Jews---who, they claimed, had "betrayed" Germany during World War I and caused it to be vanquished by the enemy (see also stab in the back myth).

During its first three years of existence, the Nazi Party was mainly active in Bavaria. However, its members used emotional appeals and violence to attract many new members. On November 8--9, 1923 Hitler attempted to take over the Bavarian government, but failed. The Nazi Party was outlawed and Hitler was thrown into jail. During his nine months in prison, Hitler penned much of *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), a book that would soon become the National Socialist bible. It included what Hitler alleged to be his life story and his public declarations regarding Nazi ideology. Soon after Hitler was released he revitalized the Nazi Party, and it quickly spread to western and northern Germany.

As the humiliated social and economic state of German society in the wake of World War I was compounded by the Great Depression, more and more people were attracted to Nazism. Germans from all walks of life were drawn to the Nazis, for all sorts of reasons. Some saw it as a young, dynamic, proactive force that could fix the country's social and economic problems. Others liked its antisemitic and anti-Communist ideology. Still others could relate to the party's call for violent, revolutionary change, while even others were drawn to the Nazis' vision of a superior society in which every pure-blooded "Aryan" German would have his own place. Party adherents included a range of Germans---from unemployed, ex-soldiers, to lower middle class Germans, to moderates from the Young Conservative and Christian Socialist movements. Hitler became a cult figure to the followers of Nazism: as the *Fuehrer*---simply meaning leader---he was seen as the ultimate German who could do no wrong.

By 1932 the Nazi Party boasted a total of 800,000 members and 14 million voters. During the 1932 and 1933 elections it was the largest party in Germany, although it never won a majority of votes in a democratic election. After months of refusing to put Hitler into the government, German President Paul von Hindenburg named him chancellor of a coalition government in January 1933.

Over the first year of their power, Hitler and the Nazis worked on obtaining absolute, authoritarian rule for their party. By the summer of 1934 Hitler had disposed of his enemies from within the party, such as Ernst Rohm (see also SA). That same year, President von Hindenburg died, and Hitler took on the additional title of president. A few months later, Hitler passed a law giving him absolute power over Germany.

The Nazis destroyed the line between their particular party and the general institutions of state. They smashed any inkling of opposition by sending their opponents to concentration camps set up for that purpose. Those Germans not completely enamored with Nazism usually pretended to be in public, so as to avoid problems with the government.

After the Nazis attained their initial power in 1933 and 1934, there were four years of relative quiet. The Nazis concentrated their power, took credit for a

somewhat improved economy and lowered unemployment rates substantially, and began revitalizing the German military. Much of what many Germans had hoped for had come to be: Germany was no longer an isolated pariah country and the economy was on the rise.

However, Hitler had much bigger achievements in mind: he wanted to conquer much of Europe for the German Empire, which he called the THIRD REICH. In March 1938 the Germany army entered Austria and annexed it to Germany in a move known as the *anschluss*. In October 1938 Hitler took over the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. By now, Hitler could legitimately call himself *Fuehrer* of the "Greater German Reich." But he had more in mind. National Socialism took on an ever more radical tune, which was manifested in the awful violence directed towards the Jews of Germany and Austria in the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 8--9, 1938, 15 years to the day that Hitler tried to overthrow the Bavarian government. This new extremism could also be seen in the violent activities of the Nazi Party's sub-organizations, such as the SS.

Hitler launched World II in September 1939 as a means to achieve the National Socialist dream of a Europe dominated by Germany, in which a new racial order would prevail. However, by 1943 these dreams began to crumble, when the war turned in favor of the Allies. The Nazi regime came to an undignified close when Hitler took his own life in April 1945, but Hitler remains a cult figure even today for extremist groups world over. In his name and in the name of National Socialism, they continue to spout hatred.