



Nazi Control of Germany

This is a transcript of the [Nazi Control of Germany podcast](https://www.mrallsophistory.com) from www.mrallsophistory.com

The Nazis face very little opposition in Germany during the 1930s due to three main methods: the stick, the carrot, and propaganda. The stick was terror. After the Reichstag Fire the Nazis rounded up many opponents and killed or tortured them in concentration camps. To ensure the effectiveness of the terror in Germany, the Nazis needed certain systems in place. The first was control of the police and courts, which the Nazis took in early 1933. Later they even controlled judges and lawyers. This meant that opponents of the regime could not expect a fair trial as the outcome would always come out in favour of the Nazis.

The SS was another vital part in the system of terror. The SS began life as Hitler's personal bodyguard and was created from the very best members of the SA. After the SA was effectively destroyed in 1934 during the Night of the Long Knives, the SS grew into a huge organization under Heinrich Himmler. The SS had many subdivisions – for example the Death's Head units which ran the concentration camps – but as its power increased the SS began to increasingly use its own courts. This made them even more effective at finding dissenters. These courts sentenced 200,000 Germans to be sent to concentration camps.

Working alongside this was the Gestapo led by Reinhard Heydrich, whose role was to root out possible enemies of Nazism. Such enemies might be, for example, a teacher who taught their pupils to see through Nazi propaganda; maybe a grocer who told anti-Nazi jokes to his customers; or even a worker who refused to give the Heil Hitler salute. Germans feared that Gestapo agents were everywhere. They informed on each other because of this fear. Indeed, the terror organizations gave the Nazis power but they didn't always have to use them. Fear of these organizations made people conform.

Terror tactics were used against other groups in society that the Nazis did not like: Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, tramps, and alcoholics were also taken to concentration camps.

Another method of Nazi control was the carrot (in other words Nazi achievements that could keep people on side). For a great many Germans the terror was not really necessary. Some Germans admired Hitler and liked what the Nazis were doing. Many Germans did very well out of Nazi rule and they needed no persuading to support the Nazis. Even those who did not admire the Nazis were often prepared to put up with them because of what they were achieving in the country.

The Nazis helped farming communities with measures like the Reich Entailed Farm Law and the Reich Food Estate in which the government promised to buy farmers' produce. They also



stopped banks from taking land from farmers who were in debt. However, not all farmers gained from Nazi policies. Even so, many country people left the land to work in the factories where they earned higher wages. Industrial workers also gained. They got work, they got better working conditions from the Beauty of Labour movement, and they got leisure activities organized by the Strength Through Joy labour movement. Life for industrial workers had its downsides though. In 1933 the working week was 43 hours but it had risen to 47 hours a week by 1939, and the value of wages did not get back to 1928 levels until 1938. Overall, most workers accepted the benefits and kept their heads down. They may not have like Nazi rule but they were prepared to put up with it.

The middle class were also fond of the Nazis. After all, the Nazis had removed worries about communism which had threatened to take over their businesses, and many of these people had pride in Germany after Hitler overturned the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. For big business too there were huge successes. Big contracts working for the government by producing armaments were available, and there were no trade unions to make trouble because the Nazis had banned trade unions in May 1933. There were also massive economic improvements which benefited everyone in Germany. Rearming Germany had created an economic boom and increased national pride, and because of huge government spending on roads and housing etc. there were millions of jobs and unemployment was brought down.

The third method of control was through propaganda, and a vast propaganda effort supported both the stick (the terror) and the carrot (these massive achievements). Both Hitler and Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister and the Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment, were experts in propaganda. They believed that all the mass media had to be carefully controlled for the Nazis' benefit. They thought that people had to be told what to think.

The ministry controlled radio stations and transmitters. Cheap radio sets were made, and Germany had more radios per head than the USA. Radios could only pick up programs from Germany. The ministry closed down about two-thirds of Germany's newspapers and also controlled information supplied to the remaining newspapers to make sure that only things that benefit of the Nazis were reported. The Reich Chamber of Culture was set up in September 1933 and was headed by Goebbels. Anyone who worked in journalism, radio, film, literature, theatre, music, or the arts had to belong to this chamber otherwise they could not get a role in a play, publish a book, sell a painting, etc. Members had to be approved by Goebbels, so there was virtually no need for censorship. There were some major propaganda films made by Nazi approved filmmakers such as *The Triumph of the Will* about the 1934 Nuremberg Rally, and *The Eternal Jew* produced in 1940 which was a vicious anti-Semitic film.

The Nazis built huge new buildings, especially in Berlin, where Nazi approved artists made massive sculptures showing idealised bodies. Posters and photographs were everywhere, especially ones glorifying Hitler, and Goebbels staged massive impressive rallies, meetings,



and processions. Probably the most spectacular success were the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. Germany won the most medals, and Goebbels even commissioned a special film called *Olympia* about the event. Unsurprisingly this was a massive box office smash.

If you're asked a question about the methods of control in Nazi Germany it is important to remember how the three systems worked in combination together. Propaganda made terror more effective. The Nazis made sure that people knew what happened to their opponents, which meant people thought the Gestapo had agents on every street. In fact they did not – for example Wurtzburg there were only 28 Gestapo agents for 1 million Germans. But terror also made propaganda more effective. The SS and Gestapo rounded up anyone who tried to show a banned film or sell a banned book, so opponents of the Nazis found it hard to spread their anti-Nazi ideas. Propaganda reminded German people how successful Nazi Germany was, so they were constantly being told about Germany's booming economy or Hitler's successes in getting land for the country. Propaganda also reminded people of Hitler's vision for Germany. Germans were regularly told to beware of Jews; they were reminded of how much they hated the Treaty of Versailles.

To consolidate your revision on this topic, how about thinking about the following three statements and working out which one you most agree with and why you think that:

- Goebbels work was more important to Nazi success than that of Himmler, the Head of the SS.
- Do you think that Himmler's work was more important to Nazi success than Goebbels' propaganda?
- Do you think the techniques of repression and propaganda go hand-in-hand and that neither would work without the other?

Make sure that you use the evidence provided in your exercise books and through revision guides to back statements on both sides with clear evidence to reach a balanced conclusion.