

4 HOW DID THE NAZIS TREAT GERMAN JEWS BEFORE THE WAR?

CHECK OUT THE LINK

Why did Hitler hate the Jews? (Chapter 3)

Historians are not sure exactly what Hitler's *long-term* plans for the Jews were. It seems likely that Hitler didn't know either. But he didn't wait long before making a start on his anti-Semitic policies once he became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. These policies were mild compared to what the Nazis were to do later. Perhaps Hitler was uncertain how the policies would affect the German economy, and he may have been worried about the opinion of foreign governments if his measures were too violent. To begin with, then, Hitler moved cautiously.

BOYCOTT

On April 1, 1933, the Nazis called on Germans to **boycott** Jewish businesses and professionals, such as dentists and doctors. However, the boycott only lasted one day. Jews were also banned from working for the government or as doctors, dentists and lawyers.

Some Jews – with the Nazi government's approval – decided to leave Germany. During 1933 and 1934 60,000 out of Germany's 500,000 Jews left Germany for good – the Franks were among them. It wasn't easy, however, to find countries willing to let them in. Nonetheless, by the time Hitler stopped Jews from leaving Germany in 1941, 75 per cent had left the country.

THE NUREMBERG LAWS

Many fanatical Nazis were unhappy with the slow progress of the measures against the Jews. They wanted harsher policies. In 1935 Hitler decided to give them what they wanted. The Nuremberg Laws:

- Banned marriages and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews.
- Stopped Jews from being German citizens.
- Stopped Jews from using public facilities such as swimming pools and restaurants.

NEW WORDS

BOYCOTT: to refuse to buy from, or use the services of, a particular group – in this case Germany's Jews.

CONCENTRATION CAMP: a prison where there was ill-treatment and beatings but not murder on the scale of the later death camps.

REPRISAL: an act of revenge.

Most Germans didn't appear to be very concerned about what was happening to the Jews. In fact, many Germans seemed to welcome these laws. Most Jews simply hoped that things wouldn't get any worse and 'kept their heads down'. But they did get worse.

NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS

On November 7, 1938, a 17-year-old Polish Jew shot dead a German diplomat in Paris in protest against the German government's anti-Semitism. The Nazi leaders quickly organised a wave of anti-Jewish **reprisals** in which over 8,000 Jewish businesses and 200 synagogues were destroyed. Over 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to **concentration camps**. Most of these were released within a couple of months but not before about 1,000 had been murdered.

EUTHANASIA

One Nazi policy which did lead to protests inside Germany was euthanasia – the mass killing of physically and mentally handicapped Germans. The Nazis had already begun a policy of sterilising these people so that they couldn't have children, but euthanasia went a step further. Between the autumn of 1939 and August 1941 70,000

men, women and children had been killed for these reasons. Hitler was determined to make the German people a 'master race' (*Herrenvolk*). This master race would have blue eyes and blonde hair, and no physical or mental weaknesses. There would, therefore, be no place for the handicapped. Many of the victims were gassed with carbon monoxide. The government tried to keep the programme secret but details soon leaked out. A protest by a leading German Catholic bishop in August 1941 forced Hitler temporarily to stop the policy. It was soon restarted but in greater secrecy.

SOURCE B



A Illustration of the Nazi campaign against the Jews, 1933–39.

SOURCE A

The doctor in charge said 'We do not carry out the action [euthanasia] with poison, injections, or other measures which can be recognised ... for then the foreign press ... would have new opportunities for propaganda against us ... No, our method is much simpler.' With these words he pulled a child out of its cot ... He displayed the whimpering skeleton-like little person like a hare which had just been caught. 'Naturally, we don't stop their food straight away. That would cause too much fuss. We gradually reduce their portions. Nature then takes care of the rest ... This one won't last more than two or three days.'

A A description of a visit in 1940 by some leading Nazis to a children's asylum where euthanasia was carried out.

Q

1. Using Source B as a guide, explain how the Nazi campaign against the Jews developed between 1933 and 1938.
2. Some Jews actually began to return to Germany in 1936 and 1937. Look at Source B. Can you suggest why?
3. Imagine you are a Jewish child in Germany in 1938. Write a letter to a friend explaining how Hitler has affected your life and that of your family:
 - Mention Nazi ideas about the Jews.
 - Show how these ideas have affected Jews.
 - Explain why Hitler's policies have sometimes changed.
 - Sum up by saying what life is like in 1938 and what your fears (or hopes) are for the future.