
The Impact of Adolf Hitler on the Economy of Germany

Hitler did many good things for Germany, the most prominent being the way in which he brought the country out of economic depression after the Wall Street crash of 1929. For example, after the crash, government and private institutions lost faith and money and had to withdraw most of their investments from companies. Under the Nazi regime, within six years, investment rose from 2 billion Reichmarks to 20 billion Reichmarks.

Part of the Nazi's plan was to make Germany much more self sufficient, in order that, in the event of war, they would be unaffected by economic sanctions. Hjalmer Schacht, the first economics minister of Germany, devised a "new plan", which would limit imports, expand exports, increase government spending in key industries (eg. synthetics) and introduce conscription. This meant that Germany began to grow industrially, and new industries were introduced, creating jobs for the 6 million unemployed. It was under Schacht that unemployment was reduced from 6 million to 1.75 million.

After Schacht came another economics minister, Hermann Göring. He introduced the "4 year plan". This maintained the basis of Schacht's plan, but with a few subtle differences: increased production (coal, iron, steel, synthetic oil, armaments and war related machinery - all helping provide Germany's footing for war); reduced imports; control of prices and wages; forced labour if necessary and the rationing of non-essential luxury goods. He further reduced the employment, though not on the same scale as his predecessor, from 1.75 to 0.5 million. In the struggle to reduce unemployment, it was impossible to just redistribute everyone. Jobs had to be created. The DAF (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, German Labour Front) was formed in order to employ people in creating and building useful public services. During the period between 1932 to 1939, the unemployed were used to build Autobahns (motorways), hospitals, prisons, schools and public projects. It was a very successful scheme, as it increased the standards of services afterwards in Germany considerably. Another scheme used was conscription. Building up the armed forces took 1 million people out of unemployment. The new soldiers needed uniforms, weapons, equipment, and other supplies and this helped implement Göring's 4 year plan - the equipment production helped bring the steel mills, coal mines and factories back.

One of the most important things that Hitler did for Germany involved improving the standard of life. In creating the DAF, three other sub-organisations were introduced devoted to the worker. The first, "Beauty of Labour", was like a trade union. They encouraged employers to improve working conditions, and organised various campaigns, for example, "Good ventilation in the work-place" and "Hot meals in the factory". Another was "Strength through Joy", a popular organisation that arranged worker's leisure time. They set up concerts, operas, films and hikes,

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and other activities for the workers. Even though the wages were not huge, the service provided meant that anything they would have done with surplus money was already being done! The RAD was an intensive six month long work service for young men and women aged 18-25. It was poorly paid, and involved hard manual labour, but provided education and skills in labour. Although the DAF removed worker's rights to strike, they were, on the whole, satisfied with their lot - they had bread and work, and some benefits.

Along with the increased standard of life came the restoration of national pride. The Germans felt undermined and humiliated after the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, and Hitler knew that if he could bring Germany back to being an important world power, he would have a lot more support from the German people. Part of this plan was the 1936 Berlin Olympics. This was a Nazi showcase, devised by Hitler's propaganda genius, Dr. Josef Göebbels. The plan was to show Germany off as a new modernised, civilised and revised people. A brand new stadium, to hold 10,000 people, was built. It was the first televised Olympics, and Germans came top of the medal table. The overall impression was very good, and it restored most countries' respect for the Germans.

But then, although this paints a very positive picture of Nazi Germany, there were definitely bad points as well. There was a reign of terror through much of Hitler's rule. People were terrified out of expressing their opinions. Any insubordinates were sent to concentration camps. The original camps were created to house Communists and socialists after the Nazis success in the Reichstag. They were eventually run by the SS Death's Head units. Prisoners were forced to do hard labour, with limited food and terrible conditions. Anyone brave enough to criticise the Nazis ended up here - Jews, socialists, Communists, trade unionists, churchmen etc. Justice was not really possible against the Nazis. All the top jobs in the police were given to Nazis who would inform to Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS. Also, Nazis were infiltrated into all judicial jobs. Many Germans did not see or hear what was happening in their own country because of the propaganda and censorship that took place. Göebbels organised rallies, marches, torchlit processions and meetings in honour of Hitler. He was solely in charge of censoring the media - he controlled newspapers, cinema and newsreels. Books that had anti-Nazi messages were banned and burned. In May 1933, he and some Berlin students organised a burning of books that had been stolen from libraries. Books by Germany's most famous authors went up in smoke. He banned jazz because it was "Black" music, and against the Aryan way of things. He set up the "Chamber of Culture". In order to have any job in the media, you had to be a member. In this way, anything hostile to Nazism was rooted out. Göebbels had a lot of faith in the effect of the spoken word, so the Nazis made sure that everyone had access to very cheap radios, on which the Nazi message was broadcast. Loudspeakers were set up in the street, so that people, wherever they were going, could hear the Nazi message. Along with the propaganda produced by the Nazis came indoctrination. Hitler realised the importance of raising a generation of devoted Nazis who had never known otherwise. Children were taught to never

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question Nazi policy, that war was acceptable, and something they should prepare and train for, and had large chunks of their and other country's history erased. For example, "The Jews are aliens in Germany. In 1933 there were 66,060,000 inhabitants of the German Reich of whom 499,862 were Jews. What is the percentage of Jews in Germany?" - This is a question from a Nazi maths textbook, 1933. A child's only source of the truth was their parents, and the older generation, but so many of them were blinkered by the Nazis and influenced by propaganda, that they themselves were not aware of the truth. The abolition of all trade unions on 2nd May 1933 meant that, although they were replaced by the German Labour Front, workers were "voiceless". The German Labour Front was a strictly Nazi organisation, and quashed any leanings towards Communism or Socialism that some previous trade unions had. As there was really nothing the workers could do if their demands were not met, and their right to strike had been withdrawn, workers had no choice but to agree with the Nazi wage and demands.

The Nazis persecution of the Jews was a carefully planned and well carried out operation. It began with the subtle encouragement of people to pick on the Jews, and eventually broke out into hostile confrontations. For example in November 1938, the Nazis went on the rampage, destroying Jewish shops, homes and synagogues. 91 Jews were murdered, and 20,000 taken to concentration camps. This ritual humiliation and violence (but not to the same extent) took place against gypsies, alcoholics, prostitutes and other "undesirables".

The Nazis, realising they could not take control of the churches, a very influential group, signed the concordat with the Pope promising that the Nazis would not interfere with Church proceedings. This was not to be. All Protestant churches were merged into a Reich church that controlled the teachings, and the Nazis created the pagan "German Faith Movement" in 1934. In 1935, the Gestapo arrested 700 Protestant ministers, and then in 1936 the persecution of Catholic nuns and priests began. The Pope did nothing.

Different people in Nazi Germany would have strongly differing views of how good a leader Hitler was. To try to fathom the overall opinions of the people, you have to study different classes, groups, sexes and races. For example, owners of small businesses were great supporters of Nazi policy, and the Nazis promised them much. Eventually, between 1933 and 1957, the value of small businesses trade doubled, so they would be very positive of Hitler's influences.

But then, in stark contrast to this, there were the Jews. They were persecuted and treated harshly throughout Hitler's rule, most losing a lifetime's worth of savings or business. A typical German Jew would not agree that Hitler was a godsend - they would say he was a curse on their formerly peaceful homeland.

A farmer would have mixed feelings. The Nazis were very positive about how important farming

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was, and wrote off some farm debts, but then were very demanding of the Nazis, ordering, for example, that each hen should lay 65 eggs a year. They also lost a good deal of their farm labourers, most leaving for well-paid city jobs. A female journalist would probably be resentful of the Nazis for two reasons. Firstly, the Nazis were very down upon females working - they wanted them to remain at home, having children, raising them to be good Nazis. Because of this, many women would lose their jobs, or not be employed, because a great deal of pressure would be put on the employers. Secondly, a great deal of censorship went on, so this would be very frustrating for a professional journalist to not be able to report the truth.

A Catholic priest, originally, would have been very satisfied with the Nazis, because it seemed that the Church's interests were safe, but when the persecution of the Church and church leaders began, he would have probably begun to see the transparency of the Nazi promises, and felt powerless against them.

In conclusion, I think it is nearly impossible to say whether Hitler would have gone down in history as Germany's greatest leader. There are many good things that Hitler did for Germany, but there are also other things that the German people were not necessarily aware of. I think that, towards the end of 1937, people were becoming slowly aware of the things that Hitler was doing to the country, but before that, the public were blind to Hitler's misdeeds. Hitler did re-establish the infra-structure of Germany, putting the 6 million unemployed back into work - he did well in that he constructed a country that would work well in theory, but the way he treated humans was hideous - the concentration camps and the persecution of the Jews. He was very ruthless, and would execute his closest members of his own party if he thought they were being in any way unfaithful to him - for example, after the leaders of the SA became difficult to control in 1934, Hitler decided to crush all the difficult leaders. 400 leaders of the SA were executed. So, in the end, I can say I am unable to come to an opinion on whether Hitler would have gone down in History as the greatest German leader had he died in 1938.

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