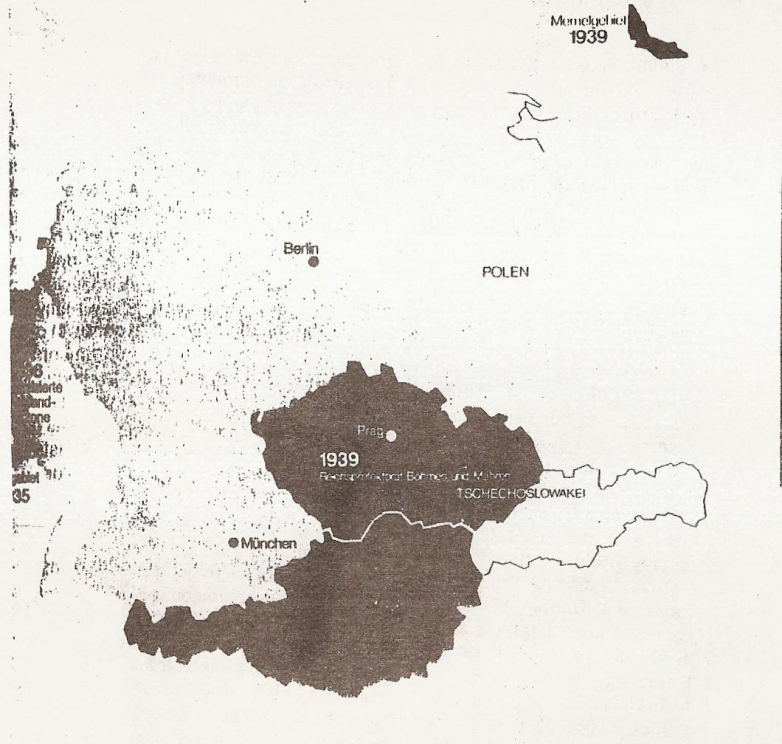


German Empire 1939

Memelgebiet
1939



dm VI

The Third Reich

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The 30th January 1933 was to a certain extent the result of a series of attempts to overcome the economic, political and social crises which had confronted the Weimar Republic after 1929 by authoritarian means. In addition, however, it also marked the starting point of a development which immediately pushed aside such attempts to find a solution and which within a short space of time abolished the parliamentary democratic system in radical fashion. Initially the National Socialists were able to take advantage of the idea, supported by many right-wingers and members of the middle class, of a renewal of state and society by means of a strong national government with a wide support-base. Support for the idea also led to Hindenburg's opposition to the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor being ignored. Who was using whom in pursuit of his own aims quickly became all too clear. Although the National Socialists were initially in the minority, with Adolf Hitler as Chancellor, in the government of "national unity" the illusion that Hitler could be influenced, as the charismatic "drummer" and eventually pushed aside, was dispelled within a few weeks.

The National Socialists still did not win a majority of the votes cast on 5th March 1933 in the last elections which could to a certain extent be said to be free. However, together with the German Nationals the National Socialists had a majority in Parliament. Through his Enabling Law Hitler freed himself of all constitutional obligations and of parliamentary control. After the elimination of the KPD only the SPD opposed the Law in the Reichstag. The Centre Party and middle class parties voted in favour of it. The next step was the banning or voluntary dissolution of political parties. The NSDAP became the state party of the Third Reich. The Reichstag became merely an institution which acclaimed Hitler and his decisions. The idea of a parliamentary democracy was conclusively destroyed. Henceforth the NSDAP and its organisations supervised and determined all aspects of political, economic and cultural life in the state. The police were placed under national socialist control. The police force, the S.A. (Sturmabteilung) and S.S. (Schutzstaffel) were the instruments with which the Party extended the totalitarian system and secured its dominant position. In February 1933 the first concentration camps for political internees were opened. When the S.A. demanded widespread powers of control in line with those of the Party, it was stripped of power by Hitler at the end of June 1934. The S.S. became the most powerful state

organisation. They saw themselves as the élite. In the war the S.S. was the organisation which carried out the extermination of European Jews.

Federal representatives (Reichsstatthalter) were appointed in the German Länder and the state parliaments were dissolved. The independence of the Länder and the local authorities' right of self administration were abolished. The federal state structure, which had existed since the founding of Bismarck's Empire, was transformed into a unitary state.

After the death of Hindenburg Hitler took control of the now combined functions of President and Chancellor. As the "Führer of the German Reich and people" all officials and soldiers had to swear an oath of allegiance to him. In this way he bound the officers and officials, who were mainly sworn in on a traditional oath of allegiance, even closer to him.

With the help of its various organisations the NSDAP controlled political life and society itself. All political, economic and cultural organisations were "brought into line". This began with the state organisation of the economy. Trade unions were abolished. The workers were deprived of their right to form trade unions, which had been fought for in the nineteenth century to enable them to have their interests represented. Workers and management were joined together in a unitary state organisation, the "German labour front". The fixing of wages by the state replaced the notion of social partnership. Restrictions were imposed on the right to choose one's place of work and the position of the employer was strengthened by the adoption of the Führer - subservient followers' attitude in factories. The principle of a capitalist private economy was not affected by the Party but production was largely controlled by the state. During the World War concentration camps and eventually the whole of occupied Europe became recruitment areas for the German armaments industry.

National socialism aimed to harness together the contradictory ideas of "nationalism" and "socialism" in the "national community" ("Volksgemeinschaft"). In reality, it broke away from German nationalist ideas and preached a racist ideology. An example of the principle of the personal and ideological grip on the whole nation was to be found in the youth organisation. All previous youth associations were disbanded and replaced by the state association, the Hitler Youth movement (H.J.). This was an instrument of national socialist education and pre-military training.

The upturn in the world economy after 1933 contributed to the recovery of the German economy. A job creation programme launched by the National Socialists included primarily public work schemes. This did little to assist industrial production but did take the unemployed off the streets and offered them low wages. The rearmament programme, which was initially disguised, and the building up of the Wehrmacht with two year's compulsory service also contributed to the reduction in unemployment. This success was one of the reasons why the national socialist regime had hardly any opponents in the whole German nation.

The job creation programme and build-up of arms were financed by foreign exchange, Reich loans and finally by the printing of banknotes. The Reich had debts on a scale which was hitherto unknown. The national socialist economic policy after 1933 primarily served Hitler's plan, which was kept a secret from the public: the war of conquest in the East which was to provide "a final solution for the future . . . by extending the 'Lebensraum' and the supplies of raw materials and food for our nation". Hitler gave the Wehrmacht and the economy the following tasks: "I. The German army must be ready for active duty within four years; II. The German economy must be equipped for war within four years".

Foreign policy, which at first seemed to continue the revisionist policies of the Weimar Republic, actually served this prime national socialist aim. For fear of a war the Western powers reacted cautiously and in so doing allowed Hitler to continue his aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. Not until German troops had occupied Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1939 did France and England adopt a firmer stance and jointly offer Poland a guarantee of military assistance. It now became clear that Hitler's next step risked causing a world war.

Anti-semitism, whose roots went back as far as the nineteenth century, had already been widespread in the Weimar Republic. For Hitler the racist ideology was the central idea of his philosophy. The NSDAP succeeded in transforming the feeling of being at the mercy of anonymous social forces - which had been experienced by the masses in the uncertain life of the world economic depression - into aggression against the "world conspiracy of Jews and Bolsheviks". Following the acquisition of power by the National Socialists Hitler's ideas about the "Volkfeinde" were consistently turned into reality. This began with

acts of violence against Jewish citizens and their property. Step by step life was made impossible for German Jews. Finally, the extermination of the "Jewish-Bolshevik ruling class" and of the Jews in Eastern Europe became, along with the winning of "Lebensraum" for the "German master race", a fundamental war aim.

The chances of the opposing forces offering any effective opposition to the N.S. regime were small from the outset. The political left, sections of the middle class conservative camp, churchmen and some military officers were united in their opposition to Hitler but were unable to form a common front against him because of their diverging political views and above all because of the perfect surveillance system operated by the state apparatus. Not until the 20th July 1944, with the threatening consequences of a military defeat staring them in the face, was there any attempt to overthrow Hitler. However, this did not succeed in ousting Hitler and in ending the war, at least in the West but rather led to the physical extermination of all German opposition. The war, which was continued and accompanied by increased internal terror campaigns, claimed more victims between the 20th July 1944 and the end of the war than in the previous four years.

The Path to the 30th January 1933

The Seizure of Power

The start of the world economic depression in autumn 1929 which hit Germany particularly hard, increased social and political tension in the Weimar Republic. Influenced by mass unemployment and economic depression large sections of the population turned to extremism. The economically threatened middle classes in particular, the traditional supporters of the liberal parties, turned their backs on the Republic and moved toward the right. The right wing opposition, which was grouped around the NSDAP, grew into a mass movement and helped Adolf Hitler to power, with the support of sections of heavy industry and the financial world (*cat. illustr. 228*).

Hitler's government was initially no different from its predecessors: it depended as a "presidential cabinet" not on a parliamentary majority but alone on the support of the President of Reich. The majority of the conservatives and the national middle class, large sections of the unemployed, especially the time voters amongst them approved Hitler's seizure of power. They saw in it the promise of an end to the "confusion of the Republic". The rejection of the Weimar Republic, however, did not lead to the hoped-for "conservative renewal". The result was rather the totalitarian "Führer state".

The NSDAP before 1930

In the form of Adolf Hitler the leader of a party came to power which had, after the First World War, come onto the political scene as just one of many nationalist splinter groups. The driving forces behind the party's programme were confusion, anticapitalism, antiparlamentarianism, antimarxism, antisemitism and, in a time of growing political and social conflict, the obviously attractive ideology of a national community (*cat. illustr. 229*). National socialist propaganda condensed all these elements into a philosophy ("Weltanschauung") which, against the background of the social crisis, offered a solution for the antedemocratic mass.

Hitler began attempts to make political reality of his programme at an early stage. In similar fashion to Kapp in 1920 he believed

**MILLIONEN
stehen hinter mir**



1 "The meaning of the Hitler salute": poster by John Hearfield: "Millions stand behind me"

that it would be possible to stage a successful putsch against the "November Republic" during the crisis year of 1923 (*cat. illustr. 230*). With the failure of the Putsch the danger of a national socialist take-over was avoided for the time being. Hitler was tried on a charge of high treason. During his period of imprisonment he set down his political aims in his book "Mein Kampf": his foreign policy plans, which were in many respects based on extreme war aims of the First World War, revolved around the central aim of exterminating the Jewish "mortal enemy" of the "aryan race". During the first stage, following the "seizure of power", the "cancerous democracy" was to be abolished and Jews, Bolsheviks and Marxists were to be banished from the national community. Following the internal consolidation of the Reich the German position in central Europe was to be secured stage by stage and then strengthened and finally Germany, as the "Great Germanic Reich of the German Nation", would achieve a position of world dominance. Following his early release Hitler adopted a new tactic: power was to be won slowly and legally. In the ensuing peaceful years of the Republic he systematically built up the Party (*cat. illustr. 231*).

The Consolidation of N. S. – Dominance

The Elimination of Political Opponents (Gleichschaltung)

The "seizure of power" on 30th January 1933 marked not just the end of the Weimar Republic but also the abolition of the federal structure which had existed since 1871 in the German Reich. The same was also true of the existing institutions of political and social life. The "Gleichschaltung" of the German Länder, the administration and the judiciary (*cat. illustr. 242*), the press, the arts and sciences, meant the path was cleared for a centralist unitary state. The banning of political parties and the aggressive elimination of political opponents, including those amongst their own ranks, were further steps along the road to the establishment of a dictatorship. With the death of Hindenburg in August 1934 the concentration of internal political power was secured: Hitler was the leader of the state party, head of government and head of state. As the "Führer of the German Reich and nation" he forced officials and soldiers to swear an oath of allegiance to him.

The N. S. government used the Reichstag fire on 27th February 1933 (*cat. illustr. 233*) as an opportunity for replacing the constitutional laws of the Weimar Republic on the following day by passing an emergency decree "to protect the people and the state" (*cat. illustr. 234*). This marked the beginning of the hounding and arresting of political opponents, especially those of the left (*cat. illustr. 235*).

Fresh elections of 5th March followed the dissolution of the Reichstag. However, although the NSDAP declared it "the day of the awakening nation" and although left wing party newspapers had been banned since the Reichstag fire and communists and social democrats had been pursued or suppressed, the NSDAP only won 43.9% of the votes cast and thus had no parliamentary majority.

At the opening of the newly elected Reichstag on 21st March Hitler testified to the "spirit of Potsdam" (*cat. illustr. 236*). In so doing he adopted Prussian traditions for himself and his party, which, in place of the "spirit of Weimar", were to support the "awakening of the nation".

By means of the "Enabling Act" of 23rd March Hitler freed himself from all constitutional and parliamentary control (*cat. illustr. 237*). The Centre and middle class parties voted in favour of the Law. After the banning of the KPD the social democrats were the only party to vote against it after a courageous speech by their chairman Otto Wels. The Law made the Reichstag a superfluous institution. The legislature and the executive were coordinated. Only the government could now pass laws.

On 31st March the independence of the Länder and the local authorities' powers of self administration were abolished. The Länder parliaments were reformed in accordance with the result of the March Reichstag elections. Federal representatives (Reichsstatthalter) ensured that the "policy guidelines set out by the Chancellor of the Reich" were adhered to (*cat. illustr. 238*). Officials who did not support the national socialists could be dismissed in accordance with the "law on the recreation of the professional and service" of 7th April and Jewish officials could be dismissed on the grounds of a special "Aryan paragraph". Opponents of the regime in the Länder and their civil services were also eliminated.

The 1st May, the traditional celebration day of the labour movement was declared a "day of national labour" by the government of the Reich. Hundreds of thousands supported the

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regime's appeal. The trade union leaders accepted the decision in the hope of at least saving their organisation. However, on the following day, the 2nd May, the leading union officials were arrested and sent to concentration camps (*cat. illustr. 238*). The union organisation was "aligned" and the "working Germans of brow and fist" were united in the "German Labour Front". By voting in favour of the Enabling Act most political parties had renounced in March any hope of a decisive role in political affairs, for which they had been struggling and had eventually won in 1918 after several vain attempts. Under increasing pressure from the NSDAP they either disbanded during 1933 or were banned. A law passed on 14th July "against the establishment of new parties" completed the process and cemented the NSDAP's role as the sole party in the unitary state.

After Hindenburg's death the concentration of internal political power was complete. A symbol of this concentration of power was the oath of allegiance which Hitler made the Reichswehr swear on 2nd August 1934: "I swear to God this holy oath that I shall offer total obedience to the Führer of the German Reich and Nation, Adolf Hitler, the supreme commander of the Wehrmacht, and that I shall be prepared, as a brave soldier, to lay down my life at any time" (*cat. illustr. 241*).

The Liquidation of Political Opponents

Parallel to the political alignment process a policy of elimination of political opponents, of "enemies of the state" was pursued (*cat. illustr. 243*). According to the statutes of the security police the following categories were sought out: "communists, marxists, Jews, politically-active churches, freemasons, politically dissatisfied people (grumblers), members of the national opposition, reactionaries, members of the Black Front, economic saboteurs, common criminals, abortionists and homosexuals, traitors and those guilty of high treason".

The June murders of 1934 claimed both men from the opposition within the Party and conservative and religious opponents of the regime as victims (*cat. illustr. 244*). As a measure to ensure law and order, aimed at rebel forces in the S. A., the actions of the party leadership and the S. S. were accepted by the President of the Reich and by the Reichswehr. Moreover, the "Röhm Affair" ended the aspirations of the social revolutionary forces in the

national socialist leadership, who had previously blocked an agreement between Hitler and the Reichswehr and industry.

The N. S. State

By the middle of 1934 the N. S. position of dominance had been largely secured. The NSDAP, which before 1933 had been primarily a party struggling against the Weimar Republic, had achieved its task of taking power. However, the Party did not then become superfluous. "The NSDAP remains, in order that the people remain national socialists", announced propaganda minister Dr. Joseph Goebbels. The institutions of the state should, by means of education and propaganda and with the support of the judiciary and the police, create a situation in which "national socialism is the only air which we breathe" (Goebbels). The real aim remained a secret: the preparation of state, economy and society for an expansionist war.

National socialism aimed to bring together the contradictory forces of "nationalism" and "socialism" in a "people's community" (*cat. illustr. 249*). An example of the personal and ideological grip held on the entire nation was the youth organisation. All previous youth associations were disbanded and replaced by the state association of the "Hitler Youth" (H. J.). This was an instrument of national socialist education and pre-military training from which Hitler wanted to create a youth which was "as tough as leather, as hard as Krupp steel, as quick as greyhounds". The state education institutions held a grip on citizens from childhood and taught them "to think nothing but German, to feel German and to behave German".

The "publicity work" of the regime also served this aim. Various pieces of information in the press, on the radio and on film could be traced back to the same source and were all vetted by the same organisation: the Ministry for Propaganda under Joseph Goebbels. His precise instructions about the way to deal with political, economic or even artistic themes ensured, together with the pressure placed on journalists, a uniform and moreover, perfect control of public opinion (*cat. illustr. 245*). The Propaganda Ministry controlled the public image of the party regime. Even the "spontaneous" character of mass actions were regulated: from "plebiscites" to the "Reichskristallnacht" of 1939.

The public, whose attitude varied from those who agreed with the regime to those who feared reprisals, was subjected to a perfect system of surveillance: the police, secret agents, the S.A. and the S.S. were the instruments used by the Party to extend their totalitarian system and to secure their dominant position. In February 1933 the first concentration camps were set up for political internees. From the "Black Shirts" ("Schutzstaffel"), Hitler's bodyguard, the S.S., under Heinrich Himmler, became a "state within a state" (*cat. illustr. 246*). S.S. members considered themselves to be the new ruling elite of the nation. They swore total obedience to Hitler and pledged themselves to the fight, as an end in itself "and also to remain at their post when all is lost: there can be no such word as 'impossible' and there never will be amongst our ranks. It is not what we are fighting for which is all important but how we fight".

By 1939 the S.S., together with the "Geheime Staatspolizei" (Gestapo), was occupied with the task of surveying and persecuting opponents of the regime. During the war, having by then been expanded to form the "Waffen-S.S.", they were assigned to various "special duties" in occupied territories. The extermination of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 was one of these "special missions" (*cat. illustr. 256*).

Despite its position of unrestricted and unchecked power the totalitarian state set up a judiciary, which sanctioned what was happening and by its total subservience to the "will of the Führer" renounced its classical function as an independent third force in the state. Now the "basis for the interpretation of all laws is the national socialist philosophy, as expressed in the party programme and in the speeches of our Führer. The judge had no right to question the decisions of the Führer, which were disguised as laws or decrees" (legal expert of the Reich, Hans Frank). There was "no legal means of appeal" against decisions of the "people's court" (Volksgerichtshof), which had been set up in 1934 to deal with cases of high treason and treachery (*cat. illustr. 247*). In this way the constitutional state was delivered into the hands of the "healthy feelings of the nation".

The control exerted over all areas of life and the establishment of a state and society based on the principle of the "Führer and his followers" also included economic affairs. Laws were passed to replace the independent bargaining process between the social partners and "determined" the working conditions in a new and authoritarian manner. The right to choose one's place of work

was restricted. The dismantling of workers' rights showed just how far the NSDAP was removed from its "socialist" beginnings. The position of the employers was even strengthened. The principle of a private capitalist economy was unaffected by the Party. The National Socialist Job Creation Programme provided new jobs for many people (*cat. illustr. 248*). On the other hand, the workers lost the right to have their views represented by an organised body, the coalition right. In its place a mock sense of harmony was created amongst workers. This succeeded in winning over a high proportion of the labour force to the Third Reich and thus in extending the social base of national socialist dominance and in creating the necessary conditions for gearing the economy towards the production of armaments.

The Job Creation Programme and the build up of armaments was financed by foreign exchange, loans and finally by printing money. The Reich fell into debt on a previously unknown scale. By employing intensive agricultural techniques and by acquiring industrial raw materials the dependence of the Reich on the world market was to be lessened. The economic policy of the national socialists served one major purpose after 1933: the pursuit of Hitler's plan, which was concealed from the public, to prepare for the "conquest of new Lebensraum in the East and for the germanification of these areas" (*cat. illustr. 251*). Hitler set the Wehrmacht and the economy the following task in 1936 in his Four Year Plan:

"1. The German army must be ready for active duty in four years.

2. The German economy must be equipped for war in four years" (*cat. illustr. 250*).

Göring promised in December 1936: "Victory or ruin. If we are victorious the economy will be amply rewarded. The cost must not be calculated. We are playing here for the highest stakes. What would be more profitable than orders for armaments? Industrial circles were concerned simply about the speed of the arms build-up and not interested in the Programme. "We Krupp people only wanted a system which worked. Politics is not our game" said Alfred Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach in 1945.

The Persecution and Elimination of the Jews

Antisemitism, the origins of which can be traced back to the nineteenth century, was also widespread in the Weimar Republic. For Hitler the racist ideology was the central point in his philosophy. It was included in the Party Programme of 1920 which laid down the aggressive policy of the NSDAP towards the Jews. "A fellow citizen can only be someone who is a fellow German. A fellow German can only be someone who is of German blood, regardless of his religion. Thus no Jew can be a fellow German". The NSDAP succeeded in transforming the feeling of being at the mercy of anonymous social forces – which had been experienced by the masses in the uncertain life of the world economic depression – into aggression against the "world conspiracy of Jews and Bolsheviks". Once Hitler had seized power reality was made of his ideas on the "national enemies". Acts of violence against Jews and their property on 1st April 1933 marked the beginning of the persecution of the Jews (*cat. illustr. 252*). The dismissal of Jewish judges and civil servants heralded the systematic elimination of Jews from all aspects of life. Increasing use was made of the legal basis for this action, the "Aryan paragraph": against doctors, dentists, chemists, lawyers, solicitors, artists and journalists. Universities and state run schools were now open to an increasingly smaller number of Jews. They were also barred from holding honorary positions, from tax benefits and many social benefits, from military service and from all clubs and associations. Jewish works were removed from galleries, libraries, concert halls, theatres and cinemas, streets named after Jews were renamed and Jewish names were erased from the rolls of honour on war memorials. It was also possible to forbid Jews to enter bars and to ban them from using public baths and park benches (*cat. illustr. 254*). The main driving force behind this campaign was the "law to protect German blood and German honour" of September 1935: "passed in the knowledge that the purity of German blood is necessary for the continuation of the German nation . . . the Reichstag has unanimously accepted the following law, which is hereby announced:

§ 1 1. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or some related blood are forbidden. Such marriages which take place despite the law are invalid, even if the ceremony has taken place abroad to avoid the law.

§ 5 1. Anyone who disregards § 1 is liable to a term of imprisonment."

In November 1938 the regime used the assassination attempt by a seventeen year old Jew on a German diplomat in Paris as an excuse for a massive persecution campaign throughout the Reich. On the "Reichskristallnacht" Jewish shops were destroyed by the police and SA forces, almost all synagogues burned down, Jewish property looted and wealthy Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Three months later Hitler announced to the people, on the radio and in the press: "If the international Jewish financiers within Europe and beyond should succeed in leading the nations into another World War, the result will be not the conversion of the world to Bolshevism and the Jewish victory that would accompany this, but the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe!". The complete social outlawing of the Jews as a preliminary to Hitler's concealed aim became perfectly clear in 1941 with the "police decree concerning the marking of Jews" (*cat. illustr. 255*).

"§ 1 1. It is forbidden for Jews, who have reached the age of seven, to appear in public without the mark of a Jewish star.

2. The Jewish star consists of a hexagonal star the size of the palm of the hand, drawn in black on a yellow background with the inscription "Jew" in black. It must be worn on the left hand side of the chest in a clearly visible position."

The extermination of the "Jewish-Bolshevik ruling élite in the Reich" and of the Jews in Eastern Europe became, along with the need to acquire "Lebensraum" for the "German master race", an expressed war aim. The decision on this matter was taken at the "Wannsee Conference" in January 1942 on the "final solution of the European Jewish question". The minutes of the conference leave no doubt in one's mind as to the nature of the procedure: "Under appropriate leadership, in pursuit of the final solution, the Jews should be suitably employed in the East as forced labour. The Jews, who are capable of working, will be transported to these areas in large work-teams, with men and women to be kept separate, to be employed in road building operations. Doubtless, a large percentage will die and cause a natural reduction in numbers. The eventual survivors, since they will doubtless represent the most resistant section, will have to be treated accordingly because, representing a selection of the strongest, they would act as the germ-cell for the building up of a new Jewish race (look at historical experience). During the

course of the implementation of the final solution, the whole of Europe, from East to West, will be scoured". Thus, the title "final solution" was given to the systematic extermination of the Jewish population in Europe. The concentration camps, which were set up in Poland, such as Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka, became extermination camps in which Jews were murdered, frequently directly upon their arrival from transportation from the Reich and the occupied territories. These murders were partly carried out by means of poisonous gas in special gas chambers. If one adds to these victims the number of those who died in concentration camps in Germany and abroad as a result of forced labour and malnutrition or as a result of mass shootings by special firing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) in the occupied territories, the total number of murdered Jews reaches between five and six million.

Power Politics and Resistance in the Reich

The National Socialist Foreign Policy

From the outset, the aim of NS foreign policy went beyond the revision of the Treaty of Versailles demanded by all the other parties and entailed the acquisition of new "Lebensraum" and the establishment of a "Great German Reich of the German Nation". In the first years, however, this policy followed the same lines as the previously pursued revisionist policy. Initial successes encouraged Hitler to step up the tempo (*cat. illustr. 257*). Hitler finally embarked upon an imperialist expansionist policy when he occupied "the remnants of Czechoslovakia" in spring 1939.

The foreign office, which remained unaffected by the seizure of power by Hitler, seemed to be continuing with its revisionist policy that it had adopted during the Weimar Republic. The "Reich Concordat", agreed with the Vatican in July 1933, aimed to settle all previous differences between the Catholic Church and National Socialism. The nonaggression pact with Poland of January 1934 eased the tension existing in German-Polish relations. The increase in Hitler's international standing aroused hopes and also weakened internal opposition to him in Ger-

many. The reoccupation of the Saar in January 1935 was seen as a further success in NS foreign policy. This policy had still not contravened the Treaty of Versailles. By contrast, however, the reintroduction of conscription in March 1935 and the reconstruction of the Luftwaffe, which was no longer kept a secret, were open violations of the Treaty. However, the League of Nations, which Germany had left in 1933, and which was entrusted with the task of supervising international treaties, only managed a "condemnation" of the actions. The European powers could not succeed in forming a united front against this policy.

Instead of imposing sanctions the foreign powers effectively sanctioned such violations of the Treaty. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 1935 averted the threat of German isolation and encouraged Hitler to violate the Treaty yet again by ordering his troops to march into the demilitarised Rhineland in March 1936 (*cat. illustr. 258*). A few months later the regime presented to the world, during the Olympic Games in Berlin, the picture of a peace-loving Germany, both at home and abroad. However, this was pure deception: in the Spanish civil war, which broke out in July 1936, the German "Condor Legion" supported the antirepublican Falangists of General Franco. The weapons, which had been developed as a result of the German policy on rearmament, were put to the test for the first time in Spain. Nevertheless, Hitler saw Mussolini rather than Franco as a potential ally of his own military plans and the two reached an agreement on the demarcation of their respective policies of expansionism in October 1936 (*cat. illustr. 259*). This Rome-Berlin axis was a prelude to the future war-time alliance.

The German-Italian agreement also paved the way for the realisation of a plan, which had failed in 1934, not least because of Mussolini's opposition to it; the Austrian national socialists' plan to unite their own country with the German Reich. In March 1938 German troops marched into Austria to be met by jubilant crowds and the country was annexed to the Reich as "Ostmark" (*cat. illustr. 260*). Thus the Greater German Reich was established by a policy of surprises and blackmail. The Gestapo accompanied the German troops in Austria and by December 1938 had taken over 20,000 people into "custody". After the "Anschluß" with Austria, which like the reoccupation of the demilitarised Rhineland, was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler further incited the "Come Home to the Reich" movement. Nevertheless, England and France continued to follow

their policy of appeasement: in September 1938 they agreed to the ceding of the German Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia because they did not yet feel ready for a military conflict with the Reich (*cat. illustr. 261, 262*). Hitler was not yet satisfied, however: his next aim was the "wiping out of the remaining areas of Czechoslovakia". The alleged persecution of the German minority by the Czechs served as a pretext. The press were given orders to dramatise their reports of "horror, murder and mistreatment in order to demonstrate what a barbaric nation the Czechs are". Finally Hitler used the conflict between the Czechs and the Slovaks as an excuse for ordering his German troops to march into Prague in March 1939 (*cat. illustr. 263*). The Czech area of the country became the "protectorate of Böhmen and Mähren", Slovakia became an autonomous state under the "protection of the German Reich". As a reaction to this open aggression Great Britain and France issued a joint declaration guaranteeing protection for Poland.

The Anglo-German Naval Agreement was revoked by Hitler in April 1939. The "Steel pact" of May firmly committed Italy to Germany's aggressive policy. The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 (*cat. illustr. 264*) finally won over the "doves" in Germany to the idea of war; an additional secret clause dealt with the distribution of the spoils following the imminent German attack on Poland.

The Opposition

The seizure of power by Hitler in 1933 sparked off immediate opposition. In addition to the many thousands who saw emigration as the only solution, many people shunned the alignment policy at home and formed secret groups. In the first years of the regime it was above all the socialdemocratic and communist cells and churchmen who opposed the totalitarian system and the recognisable war aims of Hitler. Even during the period of foreign policy successes and before the outbreak of war opposition to Hitler was raising its head in middle class, conservative circles and in the form of individuals and certain groups in the state apparatus itself and amongst military officers. The few who became convinced that making a stand against Hitler's criminal policy in no way represented a betrayal of Germany. During the war these circles attempted to join forces with the labour move-

ment. Hitler and the NSDAP were to be overthrown by a coup d'état even if this would still not prevent a German military defeat. However, diverging motives and different political aspirations along with uncoordinated action prevented the setting up of an effective front against Hitler. Moreover, the regime succeeded, with the help of a well-structured and efficient secret police system, in continually eliminating the opposition forces. Thus, the opposition was restricted to a "rebellion of conscience", which was witnessed with mistrust from abroad. The assassination attempt of 20th July 1944 represented an effort, by overthrowing Hitler, to create more favourable conditions for the end of the war and to prevent the further destruction of Germany (*cat. illustr. 268*). Even in the event of failure the conspirators expected to have an effect abroad: "the assassination attempt must take place... Even if it does not succeed negotiations must be held in Berlin because it is no longer a matter of being practical but that the German opposition movement, in the full view of the world and of history has dared to take a decisive step. Next to this everything else is immaterial" (General v. Tresckow).

The Second World War

Hitler had formulated his plan to expand German "Lebensraum" at all costs in his book "Mein Kampf" and had repeatedly reiterated it in his propaganda speeches. Just four days after his seizure of power he developed his political and military plans during secret discussions with the top officers of the Reichswehr (*cat. illustr. 251*). In November 1937 he saw "the way of force" as the only "solution to the German question", which can "never be without its risks" and he related his ideas on the appropriate time for an attack to the military leaders. On 1st September 1939 he announced the beginning of the war to the Reichstag and the nation (*cat. illustr. 265*). The attacks on Poland, Denmark, Norway, France and Yugoslavia represented Hitler's concept of lightning warfare (Blitzkrieg) (*cat. illustr. 266*). They led initially to quickly-won victories. The war took on new dimensions following the attack on the Soviet Union and the entry of the USA into the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941: it finally became a World War. National Socialist propaganda

attempted to meet the increasing difficulties, which Germany was facing from fighting a war on several fronts, with appeals to stick to the task and with promises for the "time after the victory". The "march on the East" signalled the beginning, not just of attempts to impose a military defeat on the Red Army but also of a systematic extermination of East European Jews. In January 1943 the Allies demanded the unconditional surrender of Germany. Shortly after this the German defeat at Stalingrad marked the turning point of the war (*cat. illustr. 267*). The Western powers responded to Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels' call for "total war" in 1943 by stepping up their air attacks, including those against the civilian population. The war entered its final phase in June 1944 with the invasion by the Western Allies (*cat. illustr. 270, 271*). Simultaneously, the Soviet forces pushed the German troops in the East back as far as the German border. The end came in May 1945 with the total collapse and the unconditional surrender of Germany (*cat. illustr. 272, 273*).