

## THE NAZI TREATMENT OF MINORITIES

The following workpack was produced by students at Wolverhampton Grammar School, England. Each student researched a different area and came up with suitable tasks and discussion points based on their findings.

Each set of notes can be used as a stand-alone worksheet, or the whole pack can be used to complete a table like the one on the following page.

Following completion of the table, it is a good idea to discuss the issues it raises, for example:

- What would your criteria be for determining
  - (a) Guilt at a war crimes trial
  - (b) Whether someone should be granted asylum in the UK?
  
- How would you summarise the role played by German people with regard to Nazi treatment of minorities (TIP: did their role change over time? Does it depend on the particular group of 'undesirables' being persecuted? Did the Nazis merely amplify existing prejudices, or generate new ones?)
  
- Compare and contrast the role played by the following groups with regard to the persecution of minorities in Nazi Germany:
  - (a) Hitler himself
  - (b) The Nazi State
  - (c) The German people
  
- Were Nazi policies towards minorities motivated most by (a) ideological or (b) pragmatic considerations?
  
- In what ways did Nazi policies towards various groups follow a similar pattern?
  
- What impact did the war have on Nazi policies?
  
- What is the best way of preventing these sorts of policies from ever happening again? Explain your answer carefully with some constructive suggestions.

## NAZIS AND MINORITIES

	1. Why persecuted?	2. How persecuted?	3. Conclusion
Tramps			
Gypsies			
Homosexuals			
Mentally and Physically handicapped			
Jews			

**TIPS:**

1. Why persecuted? – compare Role of Nazis (consider ideological versus economic / political reasons, was it intentionalist or structuralist?) to the role played by ordinary people.
2. How? – consider if the nature of the policy changed over time, waxed and waned, what the impact of war was.
3. Conclusion – consider effects and significance (does it support the intentionalist or structuralist argument?)

# Nazi policy towards Homosexuals

## By Jon Basudev

### Why?

- Homosexuals were perceived to be part of the asocial group that was previously part of society and existed outside the Nazi idea of a 'volkgemeinschaft'.
- The Reich Criminal code of 1871 enacted against 'acts of indecency'. This clause was exploited by the Nazis to discriminate against homosexuals. Indeed sexual intercourse between men was prohibited and in fact not repealed till after the fall of the Nazi regime in 1969.
- The Nazis tightened this legislative loop-hole in light of events after the First World War which created a male shortage. To this extent especially after Hitler's attempt to hugely swell the population all men were important even if they were only seen as a living sperm bank. Each man was valuable in expanding the population especially within the strict guide lines of the 'volkgemeinschaft'<sup>1</sup>.

### How?

- **Reich Office for Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion** was established under **Joseph Meisinger**. Hitler ordered a register of homosexuals to be drawn up by the Gestapo. Portfolios of current and suspected homosexuals were available within the Gestapo.
- Homosexuals were imprisoned in concentration camps and forced to wear **pink triangles** rather than the black triangles worn by Jews. During the period a total of between 10 and 15 thousand homosexuals were imprisoned however many were not recorded because of the anti-homosexuality that existed in Germany even after the war. To this extent the Nazis only took advantage of a prejudice that already existed in Germany and was not regarded as a particular Nazi ideal.
- Whilst in the camps some were castrated even before they entered the camps but others were made the objects of medical experiments to correct their sexuality. These were particularly foul and unpleasant experiments...

### Within The Regime

- After the assassination of Ernst Rohm in 1934 Hitler hoped to end the association between the party and homosexuality. However an average of ten cases a year were reported of homosexuality within the SS and Himmler in particular found this very embarrassing. So to counter this in 1937 all gay SS officers were sent to camps and on Himmler's orders 'shot whilst trying to escape'.

### ***From a speech by Himmler to the SS, February 1937***

...There are those homosexuals who take the view: what I do is my business. However, all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual but signify the life and death of the nation...The people which has many children has the candidature for world power and world domination. A people of good race which has too few children has a one-way ticket to the grave, for insignificance in fifty or a hundred years, for burial in two hundred and fifty years...

In olden times homosexuals were thrown out...That wasn't a punishment, but simply the extinguishing of abnormal life. It has to be got rid of; just as we pull out the weeds, throw them on a heap, and burn them. It was not a feeling of revenge - simply that those affected had to go'.

### Discussion Point

To what extent are gay people now fully accepted in British society?

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<sup>1</sup> This is the primary reason why lesbians were not persecuted. The vast male shortage meant the existence of a few lesbians did not matter and the regime was too busy purging the elements that bore a more ideological threat.

# Persecution of Gypsies and Tramps

## By Ed Bradley

### Introduction

- The Nazis believed in people who were 'Aryan' - supposed to have come from Northern India originally. These are superior to other 'white' people, who in turn are superior to 'black', 'red' and 'yellow' people. There were many theories about how to tell whether someone was 'Aryan' or not. Within the 'Aryans' there are more and less pure varieties. The purest are the Nordic or Teutonic peoples (roughly, the people who lived in central Europe about 2000 years ago). Of these, the Germans are the best and purest; all the rest have mixed with other races to some extent, which has reduced their 'value'. However, unfortunately, even the Germans are not pure, since many of them have intermarried with other 'races'. Possibly, the Nazis thought, up to 30% of the German population was impure in this way.

### Nazi Policy on Gypsies

- The Gypsies (Zigeuner in German, but they are properly called Sinti and Roma) came to Germany in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, originally from northern India (the Punjab). They were Christians, and because they came from the Punjab they counted as Aryan. They had their own distinctive language and customs.
- Sinti and Roma were travellers: their culture prevented them from settling and they moved from place to place in wagons, making a living by trading with settled people. There were probably about 30,000 of them in Germany in 1933, with more in Poland and Russia.
- The Nazis were confused, in that Sinti and Roma were Aryan and therefore could be seen as superior. They got round this in two ways: (a) they were not 'pure' Gypsies (a later Nazi investigation claimed that 90% of Germany's Sinti and Roma had mixed ancestry) and (b) they were habitual criminals - asocials.
- The aims of measures taken by the State to defend the homogeneity of the German nation must be the physical separation of Gypsedom from the German nation, the prevention of *miscegenation* [= sexual mixing of different races], and finally the regulation of the way of life of pure and part-Gypsies.
- Thus the Gypsies were condemned twice: once as a racial pollution and again as people whose way of life qualified them as asocials.

### The Law for Protection of German Blood and Honour

This was extended in November 1935 to include Gypsies, which made it a serious criminal offence for them to have sex with an Aryan.

A national register of Gypsies was begun by a research unit in the Ministry of Health, and a Reich Central Office for Fight against the Gypsy Nuisance was set up in 1936. Attempts to clarify the racial status of Gypsies were made but there was still confusion: Himmler wanted to keep a few 'pure' Sinti and Roma in reservations as a kind of museum exhibit of primitive Aryans, but Hitler overruled him and the 'pure' suffered along with the rest.

Gypsies were harassed as they always had been, and many Gypsies were arrested, sterilised or sent to concentration camps.

### The Berlin Conference

The Nazis wanted a more radical policy, however, and at a conference in Berlin in September 1939 under Reinhard Heydrich it was decided to put them in special camps, and eventually to deport them to Poland. Eventually most Gypsies (German and Polish) ended up in concentration camps, where most of them died: probably about 250,000 in all. The general hostility to Gypsies in Germany was so strong that after the war, when the Jews were compensated, the new German government refused to acknowledge that Sinti and Roma too were victims of Nazi genocide.

### **HIMMLER'S CIRCULAR OF DECEMBER 8, 1938:**

#### **"COMBATting THE GYPSY NUISANCE"**

- Experience gained in combating the Gypsy nuisance, and knowledge derived from race-biological research, have shown that the proper method of attacking the Gypsy problem seems to be to treat it as a matter of race. Experience shows that part-Gypsies play the greatest role in Gypsy criminality. On the

other hand, it has been shown that efforts to make the Gypsies settle have been unsuccessful, especially in the case of pure Gypsies, on account of their strong compulsion to wander.

- I therefore decree that all settled and non-settled Gypsies, and also all vagrants living a Gypsy-like existence, are to be registered with the Reich Criminal Police Office-Reich Central Office for Combating the Gypsy Nuisance...
- Treatment of the Gypsy question is part of the National Socialist task of national regeneration. A solution can only be ... through a Gypsy Law which prevents further intermingling of blood, and which regulates all the most pressing questions which go together with the existence of Gypsies in the living space of the German nation.

### **Nazi Policy on Tramps**

Other early measures against asocials included the persecution of tramps, vagrants and the 'work-shy'. From July 1933 onwards, Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, called for a nationwide swoop on beggars drastically to cleanse urban environments and to focus public charity upon the Party's own charitable agencies. Raids during 'Beggars Week', from September 18th-25th, 1933, resulted in the detention of some 100,000 beggars and vagrants in police 'protective custody'. However, the majority of them were released within a few days, as the existing prison system had no room for them. Despite this fiasco, the regime's determination to take a stand against asocials meant that from 1934 onwards, measures against them became increasingly harsh. The provisions of the Criminal Code dealing with beggars and vagrants were made much tougher. For example, homeless people had to carry Vagrants' Registration Books, which recorded their stays in approved overnight shelters. If they did not have such a book, they were categorised as 'disorderly wanderers' and could be arrested and imprisoned. Beginning in the autumn of 1933, persons other than "political" prisoners were also placed in concentration camps. They included tramps and beggars, who, in the Nazi jargon, were dubbed "asocial elements", as well as the *Berufsverbrecher* (habitual criminals), persons with several previous criminal convictions. At a certain stage, a discussion was held in the Nazi hierarchy on whether the camp system should be continued, in light of the consolidation of the regime. Hitler decided the argument by supporting those who favoured the continuation of the camps.

The reaction of the Germans to tramps being put into camps was not strong. On the contrary many Germans felt that the Nazis were cleaning up the streets and that the camps were probably for the tramps' benefit.

### **TASKS**

1. In what ways were Nazi policies towards Tramps and Gypsies similar, and in what ways were they different (consider causes, course and consequence).

# How did the Nazis treat the mentally and physically ill?

By Stephen Brookes

## Introduction

Hitler believed that the modern state, instead of devoting itself to protecting the weak, should reject its inferior population in favour of the strong and healthy. This idea became the theme of most of his speeches: "Victory goes to the strong, and the weak must be eliminated". His ideas were an expansion of Charles Darwin's theory of Social Darwinism – a social and political philosophy derived from his views of natural selection through the survival of the fittest.

## Sterilisation

- Initially Hitler rejected the idea of euthanasia in 1935, opting for a programme of compulsory sterilisation programme of the mentally and physically handicapped in July 1935. Two years early in July 1933 the Law for "Prevention of Hereditary diseased Offspring" was passed with the following rules:

*"1. (ii): Anyone is hereditary ill within the meaning of this law who suffers from one of the following illnesses:*

- *Congenital (hereditary) feeble-mindedness*
- *Schizophrenia*
- *Manic depression*
- *Hereditary epilepsy*
- *Huntington's chorea*
- *Hereditary blindness*
- *Hereditary deafness*
- *Serious physical deformities*
- *In addition, anyone who suffers from chronic alcoholism can be sterilised"*

- By 1945 the sterilisation programme had affected 350,000 people and about 100 people dying as a result of the "Hitler cut".

## Euthanasia

- The policy of euthanasia was initially rejected by Hitler in 1933, but in 1939 Hitler used a father's letter requesting that his deformed son be "put to sleep" to initiate the policy of killing the incurably ill. The mentally ill were seen as "burdens on the community" and "unworthy life".

### **• 1939-41: The T4 programme (hospitals)**

Hitler's favourite doctor Karl Brandt and the chief of Hitler's private chancellery, Philipp Bouhler, headed the top-secret euthanasia programme. The head office was located in a villa in Berlin in *Tiergartenstrasse 4*. Hence *T4* became the term used by the inner circle for their murderous programme. The programme included an expanded pool of medical and psychiatric expertise which was created mainly for the future project of destroying the adult asylum population. Initially the programme was established to kill disabled children, children's files were examined by doctors then marked with either a "+" to die or a "-" to survive.

- August 1939: the Nazis enacted the obligatory registration of all births of physically and mentally handicapped children.
- October 1939: the registration programme was expanded to include adults. Doctors and medical assistants applied to assist with this programme the volunteers were attracted by a salary which was comparable with the salary of a mayor governing a town of 20,000 residents!

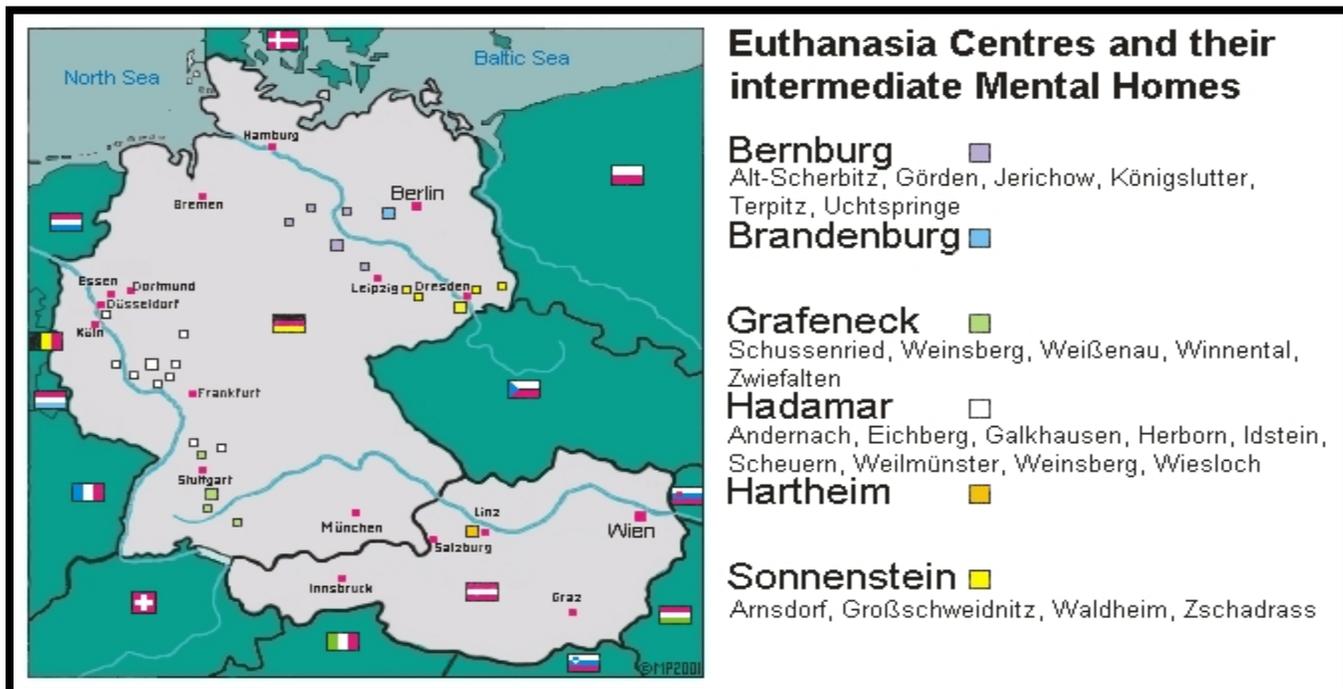
### **• 1941-45: The Aktion programme (concentration camps)**

- Hitler officially halted the *T4* programme on August 24th 1941. The intended rate of 70,000 persons to be killed as achieved. Nevertheless the killing continued until 1945 during a second phase. This phase decentralised and expanded to concentration camp (*Aktion 14f 13*), and mental home inmates in the occupied countries in the East. Since "free beds" in sanatoriums were needed in the cause of finding accommodations for Germans injured in the war the number of victims increased. Between the end of October 1941 and the summer of 1942, 100 *T4* members were sent to Lublin to install and operate the

three extermination camps of *Aktion Reinhardt*. The T4 operation members Wirth, Stangl and Eberl became the first commanders of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka Concentration camps. Wirth was appointed inspector of the *Einsatz Reinhardt* extermination camps.

## Conclusion

• By 1945: The "mercy killing" of people "not worth living" had become a murderous programme in Nazi Germany resulting in the killing of nearly 280,000 innocent people. They were killed by starvation, lethal injection or by gas in mobile vans called "killer boxes" or gas chambers disguised as shower baths. Relatives were sent letters informing them of death by measles or "general weakness" and an urn of ashes. However, a lot of the time the wrong urns were sent so relatives of boys would get hair clips in the urn. Administrative errors were common and so mistakes like saying someone died from appendicitis when they'd already had their appendix removed aroused suspicion. The euthanasia programme contributed in several ways to the Holocaust - not only were similar techniques used in the Holocaust but the moral degeneration that allowed such actions to occur eventually led to people permitting genocide.



## TASKS

1. Was a policy of euthanasia a natural progression from sterilisation?
2. Can the origin of the Holocaust be placed on the development of the T4 programme?
3. To what extent can the evidence here be used to justify why euthanasia should remain illegal in the UK?

# Nazi Treatment of Minorities: Euthanasia

## By Alana Walton

Nazi 'euthanasia' children buried



More than 800 children died at the Spiegelgrund  
(BBC News website)

### Introduction

- Above is a secondary source which shows the urns of 800 children who perished under the Nazi regime they were Mentally and Physically ill and died at **Spiegelgrund Children's Hospital in Vienna** during World War II.
- It was one of 30 so-called "euthanasia" centres in the Third Reich where 75,000 people across Europe, including 5,000 children deemed racially, mentally or physically unfit, were systematically murdered by doctors who daily betrayed their Hippocratic Oath. The deaths of hundreds of Spiegelgrund children were accelerated through lack of food and neglect. The drugs they received sometimes helped to bring on fatal pneumonia - which could then be registered as "death from natural causes".
- Instead of being buried, many of the body parts were kept and stored for decades in formaldehyde in dusty glass jars in the cellar of the hospital in the private archive of one of the doctors accused of carrying out the killings, the Nazi doctor **Heinrich Gross**.
- He was convicted of being an accessory to manslaughter, but the verdict which was overturned on appeal.

### "Racial Purity"

- Germany had been the site of an increasing number of measures taken in the name of "racial purity" since the Nazis assumed power in 1933, including forced sterilization of those with physical and/or mental handicaps, and the murder of infants with similar handicaps (in both cases, the primary targets were not Jews, but so-called "Aryans," or non-Jewish Germans). Now in 1939, under the cover of war, the program was to be expanded to include murdering handicapped adults. Since Hitler would issue no law legalizing such forced "euthanasia," and since physicians would hesitate or refuse to take part in the killing unless they had written protection from later prosecution, Hitler was persuaded to sign this document on his personal stationery instructing his assistants Philipp Bouhler and Dr. Karl Brandt to initiate the program. The document was signed in October 1939, but backdated to 1 September, the date of the beginning of World War II.

**ADOLF HITLER** writing in Berlin, 1 September 1939

Reichsleiter Bouhler and

Dr. Med. Brandt

are instructed to broaden the powers of physicians designated by name, who will decide whether those who have - as far as can be humanly determined - incurable illnesses can, after the most careful evaluation, be granted a mercy death.

## Why did Hitler do this?

- In the name of “Racial purity” he felt that the mentally ill were burdens on the community
- He said “ life without life is an unworthy life”

## What happened?

- Hitler began reducing the numbers of people who were mentally or physically ill by sterilisation, this then developed into euthanasia or “mercy killing” in 1939.
- In 1939 Hitler used a father’s letter requesting that his son be put to sleep to initiate the policy of killing the incurably ill.
- A special T4 unit was set up to initiate the killing of disabled children. Their records were marked “+” to die and “-“ to survive.
- In 1944 the policy had been gradually extended to adults.
- By 1944 200 000 people had been deemed mentally and physically ill and had been murdered.
- The policy was kept a secret from the public so relatives were informed through letter stating that they had died from “general weakness” or diseases such as mumps.
- Although the euthanasia program was kept secret the propaganda films and posters were shown to the public promoting the pro–euthanasia argument and stating the cost of keeping the mentally and physically ill alive and the adverse effect that this had on the Nation.

## Task

Read the following extract and fill in the spaces using the words and phrases below:

<b>Master Race</b>	<b>Undesirables</b>	<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Mass murder</b>	<b>Defective</b>
<b>Injections</b>				<b>Extermination</b>
	<b>Life unworthy of life</b>		<b>Mentally and physically</b>	

Under Nazi doctrine, one major obsession of the party was to assure that the blood of the German \_\_\_\_\_ remained "pure" of any contamination by people with undesirable features. The Nazi phrase, \_\_\_\_\_ was used to describe such people, as well as criminals, the insane, and the physically handicapped. This characterization was soon extended to include Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals. \_\_\_\_\_ Nazi policies were initiated as early as 1933 to take steps to assure that persons who were \_\_\_\_\_ were unable to dilute the Aryan race by reproduction. The first step was the forced sterilization of persons considered "mentally deficient." A July 14, 1933 law legalized sterilization for persons with certain hereditary diseases, and empowered the Hereditary Health Courts to enforce this policy. \_\_\_\_\_ Once sterilization became accepted, it was only a matter of time until the Nazis went one step further in approving a program of euthanasia. Intentionally masked by the onset of war, \_\_\_\_\_ handicapped persons were rounded up and sent to special facilities for \_\_\_\_\_. Most were never heard from again. The Nazis hoped to eliminate defective genes from the population, which would have the effect of strengthening future generations of the "master race." Early victims of this program were given fatal \_\_\_\_\_. These facilities were soon equipped with gas chambers.

In effect, the Nazis' euthanasia program was another rationalization for \_\_\_\_\_. The term "special treatment" (in German, Sonderbehandlung), which was a euphemism for the murder of \_\_\_\_\_ persons, was eventually applied to the treatment of Jews in the death camps. \_\_\_\_\_ Scores of medical doctors who committed these murders had taken the Hippocratic Oath, pledging to heal the sick, protect life, and refrain from harmful actions to their patients. And each had violated that Oath to the fullest degree possible. \_\_\_\_\_ Finally, the availability of thousands of human beings without any legal protection, and a government which encouraged their \_\_\_\_\_, made it possible for many of these doctors to carry out outrageous human experimentation. Much more of this experimentation was carried out in the concentration camps on prisoners who were savaged both physically and emotionally. The Nazis kept careful records of these experiments, which a horrified world later discovered.

# Anti-Semitism & the Holocaust

## By Sally Brown

**Background:** The Nazis did not invent Anti-Semitism nor did they conceive or concoct many of the images and caricatures that Jews were subjected to in the 12 Nazi years of terror and tyranny. For centuries Christian countries persecuted Jews, as 'Christ Killers'. Hitler *developed* those anti-Jewish ideas, incorporating Social Darwinism to encourage his notion of a superior Aryan race.

### **STAGE 1: 1934 Terror & Boycott**

• Hitler's first concern was consolidating his position, and although committed to his anti-Semitic stance, he recognised the need to hold back on direct persecution considering the state of the economy. However, the '**revolution from below**' following the 1933 elections saw a wave of attacks against the Jews, mostly by SA men, damaging synagogues and organising boycotts outside Jewish businesses. Homes and shops were daubed with the *Star of David*. Although Hitler sympathised with the sentiments of his men, such attacks of Jewish businesses and on foreign Jews threatened to get out of hand, thereby jeopardizing his alliance with the conservative elites. He decided, therefore, to give the Party radicals a controlled outlet for their energies. He decided on a nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses and professions. It lasted only one day, and the effects were varied throughout the country. The public was generally apathetic, but in some cities SA attacks went into excess regardless of public opinion. Attacks on lawyers, judges, doctors, university professors left many disgusted with the regime.

• **RESULT:** The Reich authorities detected a problem in the current approach- although the objectives were correct; the means of terror and arbitration were not. A more orderly and systematic approach was needed and this could only come through legislation. They were not too concerned about opposition to anti-semitic measures, as many figureheads of the army, the churches and the civil service expressed their support of the changes:

*In all the corrosive manifestations of modern mankind, Jews play a leading role. Pastor Otto Dibelius*

*A rapid dying out of the Jews is for us a matter of indifference, if not to say desirable. A civil servant*

Even if not in direct support of discrimination, most civil servants welcomed what they saw as a transition from the excesses of the SA to 'law and order' and eagerly cooperated with the drafting. The Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service banned Jews from employment in the Civil Service in April 1933. This was followed by the *Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools*, which restricted Jewish pupils and students to a maximum of 5% in any one school or university and 1.5% in total.

**Conclusion:** Clearly a disparity between the rationale of the Party, and the fanaticism of party militants. Reich officials had increasing concerns over the economic repercussions of anti-Semitism, particularly the negative effect on international opinion. The pace of change was dictated by the unplanned violent outbursts and harassment at **local level**.

### **STAGE 2: 1935, Terror and the Nuremberg Laws**

Continued unofficial attacks on Jews leads the government to issue formal plea:

*'...I must warn them [National Socialists] most urgently not to vent their feelings by acts of terror against individual Jews, as this can only result in bringing Party members into conflict with the political police, who consist largely of Party members, and this will be welcomed by Jewry. The political police can in such cases only follow the strict instructions of the Fuhrer in carrying out all measures for maintaining peace and order, so making it possible for the Fuhrer to rebuke at any time allegations of atrocities and boycotts made by Jews abroad.*

*Rudolf Hess*

However, the violence continued, initiated by local groups of frustrated Party members. Attacks on Jewish businesses and further drift toward lawlessness again caused concern for the disruption to the economy. Pressure was now on the Government to produce controllable anti-Jewish measures.

**Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour-** forbids mixed marriages, sex between Aryans and Jews)

**Reich Citizenship Law-** deprives Jews of German citizenship

**Law for the Protection of the Genetic health of the German People-** introduced 'certificates of fitness to marry'.

### **STAGE 3: 1936-37, the 'Quiet Years'**

• The Nuremberg changes had sufficiently appeased the Party militants to ease suburban violence. In Parliament, fear of a foreign boycott of the Olympic Games and concern to avoid disruption of the economy before rearmament had made sufficient progress ensured a relatively quiet period for the Jews.

### **STAGE 4: 1937-38, Radicalizing the Regime**

• The autumn of 1937 brought a new phase to the Nazi regime. Hitler became restless with the slowing dynamic of the Party, with no major foreign policy success since the Rhineland and growing resistance from the Churches and the Conservatives.

In 1938, a series of anti-Jewish decrees were established:

- ⇒ Measures against Jewish professionals
- ⇒ Degrading measures aimed at facilitating the identification of Jews.

9-10 October: **KRISTALLNACHT**

Thousands of Jewish businesses attacked, synagogues burnt, 91 Jews murdered, 20,000 sent to camps. Nazi propaganda dressed the affair as a spontaneous uprising of the German people against the Jews. In fact, the reaction of the public was apparently one of shock. The British ambassador in Berlin claimed that he had not met 'a single German from any walk of life who does not disapprove to some degree of what has happened.'

This was followed by a decree that excluded Jews more fully from German ECONOMIC life- bans on business contracts, shops, traders, and education for Jewish people.

### **STAGE 5: Moving them out**

Hitler and Goering, through the Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration, concentrate their efforts on getting Jews to leave Germany. Together with the promotion of emigration, Himmler is placed in control of 'Strengthening Germanism' to make conditions even more uncomfortable for Jews in Germany. Major emigration wave follows. Madagascar Plan drawn up to transport 4 million Jews to Madagascar.

### **WARTIME: The 'Final Solution'**

As war on the Eastern border (Russia) continued, transport problems halted Himmler's plans for the mass deportation of Jews. The following months of winter 1941 saw the mass gassing of Jews at Chelmno and Belzec concentration camps.

By 1942, all anti-Semitic initiatives had been developed into a programme for the systematic extermination of all European Jews. All German Jews were now forced to wear the Star of David, as a round-up of all Jews began.

This article was published in Goebbels' journal *Das Reich*:

#### **The Jews are to Blame**

*'The historical guilt of world Jewry for the outbreak and extension of the war is so clearly proven that there is no point in wasting any words on it. The Jews wanted their war and now they have got it. But now they are feeling the effects of the prophecy which the Fuhrer made on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1939 in the German Reichstag that, if international finance Jewry should succeed in plunging the nations once again into a world war, the result would be the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.'*

An estimated 6 million Jews were killed in the camps of Germany, in mass shootings, gas chambers and starvation programmes.

### **TASKS**

1. From the account above, which is the most significant turning point in the anti-Semitic policy of the Nazis?
2. Why do you think it is more important than any of the other events listed here?

# Who was responsible for the Holocaust?

## By Jon Tuck

### How responsible was Hitler for the Holocaust?

"..the final objective must be the complete removal of the Jews" - Hitlers letter to Gemlich 1919.

"The Fuhrer has ordered.....every Jew we can lay our hands on is to be destroyed..without exception"- Hoess recalling a conversation with Himmler.

"..the same procedure will be followed in other cities until Germany is cleansed of the last Jew"- remarks made by Hitler in 1922.

#### Analysis.

- It is clear Hitler was anti-semitic and how this drove many of his policies, but did he intend to kill the Jews?
- Mein Kampf and other sources talk about "removal" of Jews, which could mean relocating of Jews to other areas outside of Germany.
- No document can be found which Hitler has signed ordering the killing of Jews

#### However

- Hitler did not act in bureaucratic way, many instructions were oral.
- Numerous high ranking Nazis say Hitler knew about the murder, and several claimed he authorized them.
- Before the war, Hitler may have started the ball rolling, going along with the intentionalist view of Nazi society, but as the war progressed and Hitler had less total control it was the state that carried forward the policies to the extreme.

### How responsible was the Nazi State for the Holocaust?

- Many historians see Holocaust developing as a result of the way the regime operated.
- Lack of formal restraints and institutions competing (social Darwinism), and as they compete get more and more radical and extreme.
- Given the lack of formal restraints in the state, euthanasia could easily lead to mass murder.
- Incessant anti-Semitic propoganda contributed to Holocaust, the state used propoganda to justify and get support for its actions, without it may not have been so easily accepted
- In order to try to make ordinary Germans more actively antisemitic the government engaged in long-term propoganda. This was pursued in many ways – by films such as 'The Eternal Jew', the public notice-boards on which copies of Julius Streicher's pornographic anti-Jewish magazine *Der Stürmer* were pinned up, lessons in schools and so on.

### Hitler or the State more responsible?

- A meeting of the top Nazis just after Kristallnacht November 1938 was chaired by Goering, and included Goebbels and Heydrich. Hitler gave orders to sort the Jewish question out, but the specifics and methods were left up to the top Nazis. Perhaps it was not Hitler ordering the murdering, but with his key men taking the key specific decisions of policy along with the competition between different ministries, it was the state that took Hitler's ideas to the extreme.

### How far were the People responsible for the Holocaust?

- mass opposition from the people to the Holocaust would have meant it could not have happened so easily.
- However, how much did the people know about what was happening?
- one view is most Germans were unaware of what was happening, the regime tried to keep the Holocaust secret by burning all documents related, the extermination camps were far in the east and

rejected wild unbelievable rumours. Only a small number of Germans were involved, meaning it was not the fault of the German people.

- However, Daniel Goldhagen thinks differently, and his book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* claims thousands of ordinary Germans willingly participated in mass murder, at least 100,000 ordinary Germans were involved in the Holocaust. Goldhagen's view is summarized by Richard Evans:

“Goldhagen argues that Germans killed Jews in their millions because they enjoyed doing it, and they enjoyed doing it because their minds and emotions were eaten up by a murderous, all-consuming hatred of Jews that had been pervasive in the German political culture for decades...”

### **How did the war contribute to the Holocaust?**

- Some historians argue without the war the Holocaust would not have happened, the war disrupted plans for mass Jewish emigration, and the war meant Germany gained control of many more Jews when they wanted to have less.
- The war brutalized people and accustomed them to killing.
- Since Germans were dying in the war many thought killing her enemies was justified.

### **Task**

Get into four groups,

- Hitler
- the state
- the people
- the war

and debate which factor was most responsible for the Holocaust.

When the debate is over, produce an overall conclusion which is satisfactory to all four groups.

# The Nuremberg Trials

## By Brian Turton

In September 1945 the first series of war crimes trials began. Several camp guards were hanged. However the big trial took place in Nuremberg from November 1945 to October 1946.

### **Source 1: Interview with Nuremberg Trial Prosecutor Drexel Sprecher in 1999.**

**QUESTION:** What were your expectations of the Nuremberg Tribunal?

**SPRECHER:** My expectations of the Nuremberg Tribunal was not only that it would punish some of the worst criminals of all time, but also that it would expose in a way that people could understand how a dictatorship came to power, and how it slowly built itself to be the oppressive regime it was.

- The four prosecuting nations - the United States, Great Britain, France and Russia - issued an indictment against 24 men and six organizations. The individual defendants were charged not only with the systematic murder of millions of people, but also with planning and carrying out the war in Europe.
- On November 20, 1945, 21 Nazi defendants filed into the dock at the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg to stand trial for war crimes. The 22nd defendant, Martin Bormann, was believed to be dead. Among these were Goring and Hess, however Himmer and Ley killed themselves before the trial.
- During the trial, Goring was the most outspoken. He denied all charges, appeared arrogant, claimed the films of the death camps were faked and tried to score points at the expense of the American prosecutor. Some did show remorse, but only Speer appeared to appreciate the enormity of the Nazi excesses and made no attempt to evade his share of the guilt. In his final speech **Drexel Sprecher** said, 'If you were to say of these men that they are not guilty, it would be as true to say that there had been no war, there are no slain, there had been no crime.'

### **Verdicts**

- When the verdicts of the court were announced, 12 of the accused were sentenced to death, three to life imprisonment, four to terms of imprisonment and three were acquitted.
- Full sentences and people; <http://www.courttv.com/casefiles/nuremberg/defendants.html>
- Goring cheated the hangman and committed suicide. The remainder of those sentenced to death were hanged on 16 October 1946. All are now dead.
- By 1949 the Allies had convicted 5,025 people.

### **Questions**

1. What would be your criteria for determining guilt had you been a judge at the trials?
2. Read Source 1. Using the information here, do you think Sprecher achieved his aims?
3. Do you think the Nuremberg trials achieved any useful purpose?
4. Are "war crimes" a contradiction in terms? Explain your answer.