

What were the Main Characteristics of the Nazi State 1933-1939?

The Nazi Party was typical of any fascist party. One key aspect of fascism is the presence and demonisation of another ethnic or political group. In this case the group was the Jews. Anti-Semitism was one big characteristic of the Nazi State. The Nazi State is so named for nationalist, socialist party. Nationalism and the desire to rebuild Germany greatly affected the economic policy, another characteristic of the Nazi state. Another essential aspect was a violent police force, a secret police force and the use of fear to manipulate the population. Another tool to manipulate the German people, a major characteristic was propaganda. Nationalism also affected the aggressive expansionist foreign policy. And finally, the most important characteristic was the fact that the Nazi State was a dictatorship.

For his first few years in power Hitler took steps towards turning Germany into a dictatorship. His first move was to take control of the police, as Herman Goering enlisted many Nazis into the police force. In 1933 on Feb 27th a Dutch Communist Marinus van der Lubbe set the Reichstag on fire and Hitler used this as an excuse to arrest over 4,000 Communists and Socialists, claiming that they were a threat and removing a major opponent from the upcoming elections. Hitler's police force terrorized the opposition parties and by doing so gained the party a further 92 seats. However they still failed to receive an overall majority, forcing them to rely on the small nationalist party to make up the slim majority of 52% in the elections on March 5th, 1933. Once in power Hitler instated the Enabling Act on 23rd of March, which allowed him to rule by decree for the next 4 years. This was a huge step towards totalitarianism, giving one man that much power. Hitler took further measures to cultivate his control, bringing in a policy of Gleichshaltung in 1933 which brought many aspects of life under the control of the Nazi Party. Germany began to be known as the Third Reich. Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS, became chief of police, bringing it totally under

control of the Nazis. This all culminated in the Night of the Long Knives, June 29th 1934. Particularly threatened by Ernst Rohm, Hitler had him and many others who contested him killed in the middle of the night, truly getting rid of any political opponents. About 400 members of the SA were also killed. President Hindenburg then died in 1934, leaving the top position open for Hitler and setting off a chain of events which would have catastrophic consequences. A dictatorship was a huge characteristic of the Nazi State as it allowed Hitler enormous control over every aspect of life in the Third Reich and the ability to rule by decree.

Another main characteristic of the Nazi state was the economic policy. Hitler had been allowed come to power as a result of the economic turmoil in Germany following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Unemployment levels had a dramatic decline under Hitler, falling from 6 million in 1932 to almost full employment by 1938. Many jobs were created in the construction industry as Hitler set about building autobahn. Women were also discouraged from working, as Hitler's attitude towards women was Kinder, Kirche, Kuche (Children, church, kitchen). Many Jews were forced out of their jobs. These two groups then were not counted on the unemployment register. Hitler's big economic policy was the make Germany a self-sufficient state, an autarky. However he didn't believe Germany was big enough for this and this had an effect on foreign policy. As well as autarkic policies in the period up to 1939 the economy of the Nazi State was focused on rearmament, placing the country in massive debt. In 1936 military spending reached 10% of GNP. These economic policies were hugely characteristic of the Nazi State. First of all these was a big emphasis on nationalism, pulling Germany out of the gutter and making it glorious and strong again with full employment and self sufficiency. This was the side which was shown to the German public (linking with propaganda another key trait). In the meantime the state was spending more and more money on the army, building up a huge national debt of 38 million marks by 1939. This links with rearmament and the foreign policy. This side of the economy was not seen so clearly by the German people.

Another big trait, a word almost synonymous with Nazism was propaganda. The Nazi State had control almost over all aspects of life. Josef Goebbels was the head of the Reich Ministry of Information and Propaganda and it was he who came up with the term 'Heil Hitler'. Goebbels had strong links with the film industry, preapproving all films screened in Germany.

Some films approved were 'Victory of Faith' 1933 and 'Triumph of the Will' 1934, both directed by Leni Riefenstahl. Another example of Nazi propaganda was the Nuremberg rallies. Twice yearly from 1923-1939 enormous rallies were held at Nuremberg in Germany at which Hitler gave speeches. The subject of Hitler's speeches ranged from the need for racial purity to the evils of communism. These rallies were examples of political theatre as lights and music were used to create an awesome effect, whipping audiences into frenzy. These were a powerful propaganda tool as they exploited Hitler's skills as an orator. Another big area where propaganda was used was the indoctrination of German youth. By 1935 the Hitler Youth boasted 3.5 million members. By 1936 32% of teachers were members of the Nazi party. Children were showered with stories of the glory of the Third Reich, while also creating the image of Jewish people as malicious and even sub-human. In this way the population was taught early on that it was honorable to fight for Germany, that Hitler was their great leader and that they should do whatever they could to aid him in his cause. Propaganda was a big characteristic of the Nazi State as it contributed to the control which it had all the more. It made the people think exactly what Hitler wanted. However it has to be said that many people didn't agree with Hitler's policies and were particularly uncomfortable with the manipulation of their children. They were simply too scared to do anything about it.

Anti-Semitism was another main characteristic of the Nazi State. Jews were blamed for problems in the economy as a large percentage of bankers were Jewish, and were just generally used as a scapegoat. This is a typical characteristic of any fascist state. Propaganda was used extensively to encourage the image of Jews as evil and threatening. Films such as 'The Eternal Jew' were very effective in this purpose. Children's stories were written with Jews in the place of villains. The 1935 Nuremberg rallies were largely focused on the dangers of Jews. Hitler's racial decrees, the Nuremberg laws forbidding marriage between Aryans and Jews were announced. This was in order to prevent mixed race children 'mischlinge'. Jewish people were discriminated against in many other ways over the next few years, removed from teaching and the judiciary, no longer allowed to go to public parks and nearing the beginning of the war forbidden from owning radios or bikes. On the 9th of Nov 1938 many Jewish owned shops were destroyed in Kristallnacht. Over 20,000 Jews were imprisoned, dozens were killed and many more fled, foreseeing what was to come. In 1933 500,000 Jews had lived in Germany. By 1939 this had reduced to 360,000 as those who could afford to leave did so. This

treatment of the Jews as an inferior race was highly characteristic of the Nazi State. This ethnic group was highly useful to the party as a source of blame for all problems in Germany. Kristallnacht not so coincidentally occurred with Germany's period of huge debt due to spending on the army. Here the Jews were blamed under the misconceptions encouraged by the Nazis that they were at fault,

A main characteristic of the Nazi State was also the use of a violent police force to instigate fear within the population. As previously mentioned Hitler insured that the police was under his control early on, making the leader of the SS chief of police. The SS was also maintained as well as the Gestapo, the secret police force. These organizations led to fear and paranoia in the population and used to silence enemies of the Nazi regime. After Hitler took control of the Gestapo in 1934 they infiltrated every aspect of life, tapping phones, encouraging people to inform on neighbors and overall keeping a close eye on the population to squash any opposition to Nazism. People were terrified to say anything vaguely negative about Hitler or the Nazi party. Germans also had to maintain a certain appearance, regardless of their actual beliefs. Many people disagreed with his policies but had heard stories of people suddenly disappearing, having made a stand or even a slightly anti-Nazi joke, and so were too frightened to do anything about it. These campaigns of generating fear within the population were an essential characteristic of the Nazi state. While appearing in solidarity to the rest of the world, the German people were many of them simply doing what they had to survive. This gave the Nazi state all the more control, as they were perfectly willing and able to silence those who stood up to them. That being said many people strongly agreed with Hitler's beliefs and willingly informed on acquaintances.

Finally the last main characteristic of the Nazi State from 1933-1939 is the foreign policy. Hitler's foreign policy was linked with the desire to make Germany an autarky. He realized that this would not be possible, as they didn't have certain essential resources, most notably oil. He wanted to extend the borders to include certain areas of Russia which were rich in oil, and the Ukraine which was good for growing grain. But he couldn't simply do this outright so he started small, claiming he wanted *Grossdeutschland*, or the unification of all Germany speaking peoples. To begin this Germany first had to rearm. In 1933 Germany left the League of

Nations, claiming that they were the only country serious about disarmament. By 1935 Germany had begun to rearm despite a term of the Treaty of Versailles forbidding this, increasing the army to 550,000. Another violation of the treaty came in the form of the reoccupation of the Rhineland on March 7th 1936. This was a territorial gain. However Britain and France took up a policy of appeasement, not reacting to Germany's actions as they were unprepared for war. In 1938 the Nazi State made a union with Austria, Anschluss when the Chancellor was forced into a corner, fearing the alternative, of a massacre. Another territorial gain. Hitler now wanted the Sudetenland, an area of Czechoslovakia taken from Germany after the war. In March 1938 Hitler met with the Sudeten-German leader Heinlein to discuss the 'Sudeten Question'. When Chamberlain intervened in Sept it was decided that the Nazi State would take parts of the Sudeten land where more than 50% of the population was German. At this point Britain and France began to prepare for war. At the Munich Agreement in 1938 it was agreed the Germany would receive the entire Sudetenland but that Czechoslovakia was off limits. Then in March 1939 Germany occupied Prague. There was no longer a pretense that Grossdeutschland was all Hitler desired. He had moves on to lebensraum. The Nazi State's foreign policy was highly characteristic as it was all about increasing the prestige of Germany. This was done both by regaining land and population but also trying to make Germany a self-sufficient country. As the Nazi's belief system was focused on restoring Germany to its former glory, and then some, these aims were typical of the state.

In conclusion, I believe that the most dominant characteristics of the Nazi State from 1933-1939 were an authoritarian leader and also the use of terror and propaganda. Both of these methods were used to manipulate the German population, consciously or subconsciously, making them act in the exact way which the Nazi State desired. This was key in the success of the Nazi State, allowing a ridiculous amount of control over the public in every aspect of their lives.