

The Russian revolution of 1917 resulted in communist rule of Russia, now the USSR, initially under Lenin and Trotsky, following the theories of Marx and Engels. Thus as World War I ended, Russia, the largest nation on earth, was a communist nation, a “dictatorship of the proletariat (working class).” In the following post-war period, right wing nationalist parties sprang up in Europe to oppose communism and protect their upper and middle class democracies, and in some cases, kingdoms.

The German economy suffered severe setbacks after the end of World War I, partly because of reparations payments required under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Adolf Hitler’s rise to power began in September 1919 when he joined the political party later known as NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers’ Party, commonly known as the Nazi Party). This party was anti-Marxist and opposed to the democratic post-war government of the Weimar Republic in Germany, and the Versailles Treaty which ended World War I (which Germany had begun). The Nazi Party advocated extreme nationalism and Pan-Germanism as well as virulent anti-Semitism.

Hitler became one of the best speakers of the party. Moreover, he was willing to use violence to advance his political objectives, and to recruit party members who were willing to do the same. The Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923 and the later release of his book *Mein Kampf* (usually translated as “My Struggle”) introduced Hitler to a wider audience in his quest to provoke the anger of the mob against non-German people like the Jews and immigrants, and make Germany great again.

In the mid-1920s the Nazi Party engaged in electoral battles in which Hitler participated as a speaker and organizer, as well as in street battles and violence between the Communist Party and the Nazi’s *Sturmabteilung* (SA). Through the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Nazis gathered enough electoral support to become the largest political party in the Reichstag (the German parliament).

During this period Paul von Hindenburg was President of the Weimar Republic of Germany. When he was reelected on January 30, 1933 he appointed Adolf Hitler as his chancellor (or prime minister).

Hitler immediately began laying the foundations of a fascist state. Guided by racist and authoritarian principles, the Nazis eliminated individual freedoms and pronounced the creation of a Volk Community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), a society which would, in theory, transcend class and religious differences.

With the passage of the Reichstag Fire Decree and the Enabling Law (March 23, 1933), the German parliament (Reichstag) transferred legislative power to Hitler’s cabinet and thus lost its reason for being. Using the Civil Service Law of April 1933, German authorities began eliminating Jews from governmental agencies and state positions in the economy, law, and cultural life. The Nazi government abolished trade unions. By mid-July, the Nazi Party was the only political party left in Germany. The other parties had been either outlawed by the government or had dissolved themselves under pressure.

Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934, and Hitler became dictator of Germany by merging the powers and offices of the Chancellery and Presidency. The Nazi party held a national referendum on 19 August 1934 (a democratic vote of the people) to confirm Hitler as sole Führer (leader) of Germany. All power was centralised in Hitler’s person, and his word was taken above all laws.

Opposition to Hitler’s rule was ruthlessly suppressed. Members of the liberal, socialist, and communist opposition were killed, imprisoned, or exiled. Open criticism of the regime was suppressed by the Gestapo (secret state police who used torture) and the Security Service (SD) of the Nazi party. But Hitler’s government was popular with most Germans. In the midst of the Great Depression, the Nazis restored economic stability and ended mass unemployment using heavy military spending and a mixed economy. Extensive public works were undertaken, including the construction of *Autobahnen* (high speed highways). The return to economic stability boosted the regime’s popularity, and Hitler began preparations for the expansion of German territory and World War II.