

How Did the Holocaust Occur?

How was Hitler able to win over millions of Germans to the Nazi cause? His success began with the desperate situation of the German people after 1929. As you know, in that year the worldwide economic depression began. The depression also financially ruined millions of Germans. They had already suffered financially during World War I and in the early 1920s. Once again their businesses went bankrupt, or they were let go from their jobs. They stopped believing in democracy. Many Germans were ready to listen to the messages on the Nazi posters that said, "Hitler, Our Last Hope."

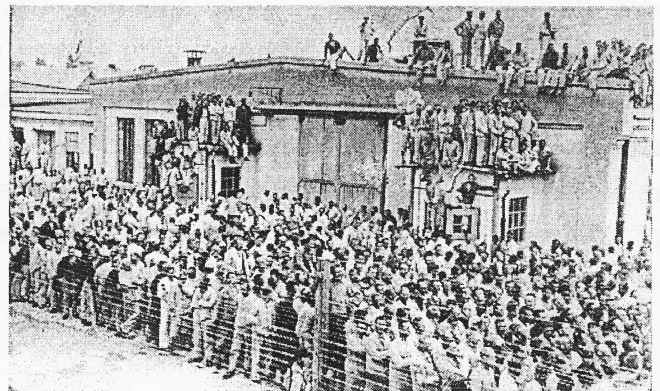


Hitler's great skill as a speaker helped influence the German people. At huge rallies, he stirred the emotions of tens of thousands of people. He was one of the first politicians who took advantage of the radio and reached an audience of millions. Hitler knew how to appeal to the German national feeling (nationalism) and to mix that appeal with attacks on Jews.

Hitler used anti-Semitism to tell different groups of Germans what they wanted to hear. He did not tell them the truth. He told the nation that the Jews were responsible for Germany's defeat in World War I. He told the business people that Jews favored communism. He told German workers that the Jews were the business people who were taking advantage of them. Through his emotional speeches, Hitler persuaded the German people to blame their problems on the Jews. Hitler, as the Nazi leader, identified Jews as a race. This is incorrect. He defined this Jewish race as "inferior" and told Germans that Germans were "racially superior" to the "inferior" Jews.

Hitler became Chancellor of Germany by legal means. He rose to power according to the rules of Germany's democratic system. The people elected him. However, his first goal when he became chancellor was to destroy democracy in Germany.

In March 1933, the Nazi government passed a new law that gave Hitler total power for four years. At the same time, the government set up its first concentration camp. It was called Dachau. Hitler used his power to completely end Germany's democracy. Germany's people had failed to defend their democracy against the Nazis. As a result, the German people soon lived under a dictatorship.



In April, the Nazi government announced that Germans should boycott Jewish businesses for one day. To boycott is to refuse to do business or associate with a certain individual or group. Storm troopers stood in front of Jewish-owned stores with signs stating "German people, defend yourselves."