

SUMMARY OF CONCEPT OF GLEICHSCHALTUNG

DEFINITION: The shifting of an entire society according to a predetermined clearly defined world-view, philosophy or belief system, it also meant (theoretically) to build a classless society, a Volksgemeinschaft = people with same ideals; anti-individualism, individual exists only for the good of the Nazi state (e.g. Goebbels once said: “You are nothing; the Volk (people) is everything”)

Führer principle: Following, without questioning of authority, the worldview of one strong leader, personal sacrifice for the sake of the ruler and the ruling government established principles of conduct. Best expressed in the Enabling Act of 1933 which granted Hitler dictatorial powers and disbanded parliament.

Another good example: A German soldier takes an oath not to uphold the constitution as in a democracy, but pledges loyalty to an individual leader = Hitler.

Political parties: Only a one party system; no free elections; power rests in the hands of one party, The National Socialists (Nazi Party) and one leader, Adolph Hitler.

The Military

The SA, Hitler’s so-called storm troopers, were a type of private army which Hitler used to his advantage during the 1920’s and early 30’s to whip up support for the Nazi Party. The SA would often use violence to break-up political meetings of opposing parties, such as the Communist Party. When elections were held, the SA would be out in force “encouraging,” i.e. frequently threatening citizens to vote for the Nazis. After 1933, the SA became too powerful a force of its own; Hitler recognized that, if Germany were to go to war, it would need the support of the traditional Germany military machine, i.e. support of the elite General Staff officers, many of whom were soldiers in the first World War, many who were from wealthy, land owning families, many who were sympathetic to the concept of having and needing a strong leader and a strong military, many who were, at heart, suspicious of a democracy, such as the German Weimar Republic, established as part of the Versailles Peace Treaty ending World War 1. The SA was forced to dissolve about 1934 and most of its members were integrated into the German armed forces.

The SS, Hitler’s elite military force was established to raise a generation of specially trained men who would follow orders without question. They participated, for example, as the Einsatzgruppen (Special Forces) and were responsible for conducting the mass executions in front of open pit grave sites (usually dug by the victims themselves) of thousands of innocent, Jewish citizens and political dissidents. Especially in the Soviet Union. Many were

concentration camp guards or, as Rudolf Hoess at Auschwitz, rose to the ranks of a commandant of a concentration camp.

The Main Office of the Order Police participated in roundups of Jews, guarding and shooting of Jews in ghettos, concentration camps and in towns occupied by the Germans.

Sicherheitsdienst SD = the Nazi CIA became the watchdog of the state, carefully monitoring the allegiance of all members of society, including the SS Heydrich was the leader of the SD and had tremendous power; he was present at the Wannsee Conference (see ahead).

The Foreign Office

Civil servants and career diplomats working in the foreign office carried out Nazi policy on an international level: negotiated with governments under Nazi control for deportation of Jews to concentration camps (e.g., from France, Holland, Greece, Italy, Hungary, etc.).

Religion

Although there was an attempt to undermine all religion and church related activities, many Germans still went to church on Sundays. However, there was a strong pull towards substituting organized religion for the Nazi belief system in which Hitler was viewed by many as a Christ-like savior of Germany. There was an attempt—which eventually failed—to substitute in Catholic schools, the picture of Christ and the crucifix on classroom walls with the picture of Hitler and the Nazi Swastika.

Racism/Belief in the inferiority of the physically and mentally handicapped

Anti-Semitism becomes official Nazi policy—belief in Jews as belonging to a race, which, like a bacterium or disease, wanted to destroy the pure, noble Aryan race;

People with physical or mental infirmities become outsiders in German society and through the Euthanasia policy, begun in 1939, were murdered in state-run “Mercy-Killing” centers.

Grotesque example of racism becoming public policy is seen in the establishment, within government bureaucracy, of Jewish Affairs Offices and Jewish Affairs Civil Servants who would study a family’s background to determine the “degree of its Jewishness” and later would determine who would be sent to concentration camps. The Nuremberg Laws (see below) defined a Jew as anyone descended from at least three grandparents who were racially full Jews. As the years past, policy was revised to include almost anyone with some degree of “Jewish blood.”

The legal system

Judges and lawyers all conform to Nazi doctrine. Laws are passed which take away the rights of Jews legally (e.g. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 which outlaws marriage or sexual relations between Jews and Germans; eventually leads to removal of German citizenship from Jews and from professionals such as practicing physicians in state hospitals.

Establishment of the so-called peoples' court where judgments handed down by judges was determined by Nazi policy. German lawyers and judges who were directly working for the government were civil servants before Hitler took control of Germany and most remained faithful civil servants after Hitler came to power.

Media

Censorship of literature, (e.g. book burning on university campuses) film, visual and performing arts; Creation of a Reich Chamber of Culture which defined what was “good, acceptable” art; Jewish artists—musicians, writers, painters were no longer allowed to practice their craft.

Newspapers could only print pro-government opinions. Anti-Semitism becomes recurring theme of articles and cartoons in Nazi daily newspaper *Der Völkischer Beobachter* and in the weekly, very salacious, vulgar weekly paper, *Der Stürmer* whose editor Steicher was one of Hitler’s strongest supporters and one of the most virulent anti-Semites in the Nazi party. Steicher later was the publisher of the infamous racist children’s book “The Poisonous Mushroom.”

Radio was used as propaganda tool as well as films (e.g., *The Eternal Jew*). Goebbels becomes Minister of Propaganda, an extremely important position in a dictatorship.

Education

All curriculum followed Nazi ideology; a new subject was introduced into the schools: **Rassenkunde** (racial social studies); most subjects like biology, history, literature, even math (e.g. word problems with a racial theme) had a racial component. Teachers were eventually required to join the Nazi Party Teacher’s Union (1936), if they wished to keep their positions. Principals and teachers who did not follow Nazi dogma were dismissed. The Education Ministry determined curriculum which emphasized the superiority of the German nation, the Aryan race and the inferiority of any group or individual who did not conform to pre-determined, Nazi standards. (e.g., physical fitness was emphasized—a healthy body became a prerequisite for a healthy i.e., Nazi mind; one who excelled in sports was considered more worthy than the “book worm”.)

Jewish professors lose their university positions; Jewish students barred from the German university.

Establishment of the Hitler Youth where both boys and girls were indoctrinated into Nazi philosophy; the Hitler youth organization took the place of religious youth organizations which were no longer permitted; Hitler youth ceremonies often took on the look of a religious service; young people professed their faith not in God or Christ but in Hitler and National Socialism. Children could begin to participate as young as 6 years of age. Uniforms were often worn in school and many teachers became active as Hitler Youth leaders. Camp-outs were encouraged where young people would be trained in map reading, and learning how to hike like future soldiers; they learned how to use weapons; lectures were given about German's heroic past and its glorious future, traditional German folk songs and new Nazi patriotic songs were sung around camp fires and were spiritually effective indoctrination tools.

Business and Industry

Hitler knew that he needed big business on his side if he wanted to wage a war against other countries and against the Jews. The Krupp industry became a main supplier of military weaponry and the chemical company, E. G. Farben produced the gas, Cyclon B which eventually was used in the concentration camp gas chambers.

Construction companies were hired to build gas chambers and crematoria.

Many of the sources available document that the Nazi "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was often viewed as a dispassionate, "get the job done" objective. In some of the memos written, for example, before and after the Wannsee Conference on January 30, 1943 when the "Final Solution" was officially discussed, albeit with euphemistic language, we observe that the language employed by Nazi officials is often the same type of language found in most business communications:

1. a goal to be achieved is set forth,
2. the experts in various areas are called on to use their expertise in achieving the outlined objectives,
3. deadlines are set forth,
4. efficiency—time on task management—is a major concern,
5. financial resources must be taken into account, etc.

Trade Unions were outlawed and no worker or organization was permitted to strike; unions were considered to be Communist controlled.

The German Railroad's participation in genocide is an outrageous example of the "business as usual" mentality of Nazi perpetrators; the SS had contracts with the German Railroad to transport Jews and other undesirables to concentration camps in the East. The Jews had to pay for their own transportation, euphemistically referred to as resettlement. One of the saddest of ironies: children under 5 years of age went for half-fare.

Participation was wide-spread—from the conductors who ran the trains, laborers who repaired broken railroad tracks, small-town railroad civil servants whose stations were stopping points for trains on their way to concentration camps, from high, level managers who coordinated the timetables so that the trains would efficiently run to “pick-up and deliver” their “loads,” only to immediately turn around and begin the process all over again, from railroad management personnel who worked directly with the SS in preparing transportation lists of those who were to be sent away and whose signatures appeared on many railroad documents.

Banking “industry,” working very closely with the Finance Ministry was also involved in genocide: they accepted money confiscated from Jewish owned businesses which the Nazis took over or closed down. Banks became the intermediaries between Jews who owned businesses in Germany and the Nazi government. Firms, once Jewish-owned, were aryanized.

The gold-teeth taken from prisoners before they were gassed and burned was melted down and deposited in German banks.

Professionals from all walks of life

Most notably the many doctors who were active in the Nazi Euthanasia policy; the doctors whom like Joseph Mengele, conducted so-called scientific experiments on prisoners in concentration camps; doctors who could determine, by the movement of a finger, those who would die immediately in the gas chambers or those who might temporarily live. Also involved: **chemists** who perfected the gas for the gas chambers; **engineers** and **architects** who designed the gas chambers and crematoria; **physicists** who worked on experimental weapons.

The Family

Large families were encouraged. The more children one had, the better Nazi one became. Mothers with five or more children were given Mother’s Day medals and had front row seats during May Day parade.