

# BBC Bitesize GCSE History - 20th century Germany

## Episode 5 – Life in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

**Announcer:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**Katie:** I'm Katie Charlwood.

**Datshiane:** And I'm Datshiane Navanayagam.

**Katie:** And this is Bitesize GCSE History.

**Datshiane:** This is the fifth episode in a nine-part series on 20th-century Germany.

**Katie:** In this episode we'll be revising how German people's lives were affected by the Nazi dictatorship and control.

**Datshiane:** And by the significant changes in the German economy.

**Katie:** We'll be hearing from our time-travelling Bitesize reporter who'll give their eyewitness report from this period.

**Datshiane:** Katie, let's get going. Katie, take us back to Germany in 1933. Who, where, when and what do we need to know?

**Katie:** Okay. So, in 1933, Hitler is the Chancellor and by August 1934 he is the Fuhrer. And the Nazis have total control. It's a dictatorship. If you need to know how they got there, have a listen back to the previous episode.

**Datshiane:** And this era reshaped the lives of the German people in profound and often devastating ways. The Nazi regime's grip on the country influenced every aspect of daily life, as the state employed both fear and propaganda to maintain its power.

**Katie:** At the same time, Germany's economy underwent significant changes as the Nazis implemented policies that appeared to reduce unemployment and stimulate growth. And they did this by funding expansions in the military.

**Datshiane:** Exactly, Katie. Key sectors were mobilised to support the production of tanks, aircraft, ships and ammunition. Factories were repurposed to produce armaments on a large scale.

**Datshiane:** Let's look at the economic changes.

**Katie:** When the Nazis came to power in 1933, German unemployment had reached catastrophic levels. Around six million people, which was about 30% of the workforce, were unemployed. Industries were collapsing and this had added to the wide social unrest.

**Datshiane:** The Nazis had also promised to rebuild the economy, create jobs and restore national pride. And remember, these promises to the German people helped the party's rise to power. So, what did they do? And how successful were they?

**Katie:** Well, in order to reduce unemployment, the Nazis brought in several strategies. They launched large-scale public works programmes such as the construction of the highways or autobahns, bridges and buildings such as hospitals, schools and public buildings. And this helped create around a hundred thousand jobs. And these infrastructure projects were also highly visible symbols of the regime's promise to restore Germany to greatness.

**Datshiane:** Next, they pursued a policy of military rearmament. Effectively, that means the rebuilding of the German Army which significantly increased employment in the arms, steel and other related industries.

**Katie:** A National Labour Service (in German, the Reichsarbeitsdienst or RAD), was introduced, which was compulsory for all German men aged 18-25 to join. Let's cross over in time and space to Jordan with their report from the scene for more on this.

**Jordan:** Hi, this is Jordan, reporting from the outskirts of a National Labour RAD camp, 1936. It's early morning and the crisp air echoes with the sounds of men marching in uniform. I talked to one of them who fought in World War I. He told me that he gets up at dawn, eats a quick breakfast, and then heads out to work on a construction project to build a new road. It's hard, physical work but he said that he's helping to rebuild Germany and that makes him proud, even though it's compulsory. This is Jordan, reporting for Bitesize History. Back to the studio.

**Katie:** Thanks Jordan. So, for six months German men in the RAD - R A D - would plant forests, mend hedges or work on farms. And once out of the RAD, they were enrolled or conscripted into the military for another two years.

**Datshiane:** Conscription into the military had been introduced in 1935. This also reduced the number of unemployed men. And the 1.4 million men already in the army at this time weren't counted in unemployment figures.

**Katie:** Yeah, but what about unemployed women? Well, many women who did paid work were forced to give up their jobs to men. And women who gave up work to have a family didn't count as unemployed. They were a part of what's called 'invisible unemployment.'

**Datshiane:** And there were others too. Jewish workers, and other groups which the Nazis deemed were racially and socially inferior, were also excluded from employment statistics. They called these groups 'undesirables.'

**Katie:** This Nazi terminology also referred to people with mental or physical disabilities, homosexuals, Poles and other Slavic people, Roma and Sinti people, Jehovah's Witnesses and communists.

**Datshiane:** Under the Nazis many of these people had been sacked and their jobs taken up by Germans who fit in with the Nazi racial policies.

**Katie:** So, lots of different schemes there which the Nazis used to reduce the employment figures. An exam question might ask you to describe some of these. A useful mnemonic to remember them is A RAD RUN.

**Datshiane:** I love your mnemonics, Katie. A rad run! Take us through those letters.

**Katie:** A is for autobahns which relates to the public works schemes. RAD is that National Labour Service which translates into the German abbreviation R A D. And R U N , RUN is the rearmament. U is the undesirables they left out of the unemployment figures and N is no women in the figures.

**Datshiane:** If that helps, write it down. Or if not, think of your own way of remembering these schemes in your revision notes. So, it appeared that Nazi policies were reducing unemployment. But in reality, large sections of the workforce are missing from the statistics. So, what about those who did have work, Katie?

**Katie:** Well, you see the Nazi policies affected them in different ways. The Nazis had this carrot and stick policy towards workers: rewarding high production but a loss of many rights because trade unions - they had been banned.

**Datshiane:** But it nearly always followed the wishes of employers rather than employees. But DAF also promised a scheme for workers to save up for an affordable people's car. Or, in German, Volkswagen, which had some of Hitler's design suggestions. Workers were told that 'Five marks a week you must set aside if in your own car you wish to ride.'

**Katie:** That's a catchy wee rhyme there! A nice wee quote you can use if you're asked about Nazi policies towards workers in an exam. And one that sounded just a wee bit too good to be true.

**Datshiane:** It was because no one ever received a car. And the money was used to build military weapons.

**Katie:** So, German workers did have more work. But this was at the cost of their rights and working longer hours. And, ultimately, unless you were working in the armament industry, your living standard hadn't really improved by 1939. An exam question might ask you about the various policies and whether German workers were better or worse off. So, make sure you know about each of these schemes and their effect on workers. Check out the Bitesize website for more info.

**Datshiane:** But, what about others in different levels of society? Well, the rural workers had in general been supporters of the Nazis' and Hitler's rise to power. His policies tried to reward this but with mixed results.

**Katie:** The biggest beneficiaries of Nazi economic policy were the big business owners; especially those involved in the armament industry. They saw their profits increase by half between 1933 and 1939. Okay. So, a quick summary test on employment and the economy. Three questions. Five seconds to write those answers down. Here we go.

**Datshiane:** First question. What was the state of the German economy when the Nazis came to power?

**Katie:** It was pretty bad. Very high unemployment and industries were collapsing.

\*[correct bell sound]\*

**Datshiane:** In what two ways did the Nazis create jobs in this period, Katie?

**Katie:** Well, they had public work schemes such as the autobahns. And then rearmament.

\*[correct bell sound]\*

**Datshiane:** And unemployment seemed to reduce dramatically under the Nazis but were these statistics reliable?

**Katie:** Absolutely not. \*[correct bell sound]\* Lots of people were excluded. Women who were mothers or women whose jobs were taken by men, men in the army and Jewish workers. And of course, others whom the Nazis labelled in their terms as 'undesirable.'

**Datshiane:** So, it seems as if these Nazi policies were supported by some German people in this period. But it is difficult for us to tell how many people didn't agree with them. Because Germany had become a police state. That's one where the police and organisations close to it were given huge amounts of power. Individual freedoms were severely restricted and dissent - well that was ruthlessly crushed. Let's look at how the Nazis used fear and terror to eliminate dissent and opposition.

**Katie:** The SS, headed by Heinrich Himmler, was the most important of the organisations creating this climate of fear and terror. They were originally Hitler's personal bodyguards and were extremely loyal to him. They were responsible for setting up the first concentration camps, initially for political prisoners, which were prison camps where inmates were forced to undertake hard labour.

**Datshiane:** In later episodes, we'll look at the expansion of the concentration camp system, extermination camps and the Holocaust. And there'll be more specifically on the persecution of Jewish people and minorities in other episodes.

**Katie:** The Gestapo were the Nazi secret police whose role was to protect the Nazi regime and perpetrate Nazi crimes. And they were helped by ordinary German people. And children were encouraged to inform on their neighbours, friends and even teachers.

**Datshiane:** The SD looked after the security of Hitler and other high-ranking Nazis. And they could arrest anyone for any reason.

**Katie:** So, Datshiane, do you want another way to help remember those organisations?

**Datshiane:** Absolutely, how can I refuse?

**Katie:** Himmler's Sight Gradually Spreads. Himmler was the head of the police state. Site is for the SS. Gradually is the Gestapo. And spreads is the SD.

**Datshiane:** Himmler's sight gradually spreads. Thanks, Katie. Alternatively, I also find it useful to draw a diagram showing how the various organisations in the police state were connected together. If that works for you, this is a great time to hit pause and start mapping the connections.

**Katie:** The legal system was also taken over by the Nazis so that crimes committed by Nazis were ignored. And judges had to swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler. They could even send people to concentration camps for anti-Nazi political comments or jokes.

**Datshiane:** Most Germans were Christian and Nazi policies towards the church involved a mixture of cooperation, control and suppressions. The Nazis didn't want to alienate this large group in society and some Christians did support the Nazis due to their family-focussed ideology and Hitler's promise to defeat communism.

**Katie:** So, Nazi policies towards the Christian church involved a mixture of cooperation, control and suppression. Don't forget to write that down in your revision notes. Check out the Bitesize website for more info. Okay, so it's time for a summary on German control and suppression.

**Datshiane:** Remember, totalitarian control was overseen by the SS, the Gestapo and the introduction of concentration camps.

**Katie:** And policies of cooperation, control and suppression eventually brought the Christian church under Nazi control. In the next episode, we'll continue our look at the experiences of German people during the Nazi dictatorship; specifically at women and children.

**Datshiane:** In that and the remaining episodes of this series, there will be topics with distressing themes including the suffering of millions of innocent people. And some of the content may be upsetting or difficult to hear.

**Katie:** And, if at any point if you feel overwhelmed, please take a break or speak to someone you trust. Remember, it's okay to feel emotional about these events and it's important to approach this subject with great care and respect. Thanks for listening.