

Essential Question: How was it possible for a modern society to carry out the systematic murder of a people for no reason other than that they were Jewish?

Focus Question: Why would someone vote for the Nazi Party?

For each of your assigned Germans, provide the following information:

Name

1. Profession
2. Social/Class Status
3. Vote: Communist Party (C) / Nazi Party (N) / Social Democratic Party (SD)
4. Why? What appealed to them?

Steps:

- 1) Read the introduction on page 2
- 2) Read the party platforms on pages 3, 4, & 5
- 3) Read about your assigned German voters
- 4) Answer the questions about your voter

GERMANY, 1932

In 1932, Hitler narrowly lost his race for the German presidency to the conservative incumbent and legendary World War I general, Paul von Hindenburg. Eighty-four percent of all eligible voters cast ballots.

Parliamentary elections that year were no less spirited, for German voters had to decide which party offered the best solution to the nation's seemingly endless problems—unemployment, political violence and upheaval, and national humiliation. The decision was not an easy one, and the German electorate was deeply divided.

To appreciate the choices faced by German voters at the time, compare the platforms of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Communist Party (KPD), and the Nazis (NSDAP).

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY PLATFORM

We are committed to maintaining the Republic and a policy that will allow Germany to take its rightful place among the free governments of Europe.

We will support the present German Republic so that freedom, democracy, and justice will live in the hearts of our German countrymen.

We will honor all of Germany's obligations, political and financial, in order that Germany's honor and respect will not be decreased in the eyes of the world.

We plan to create more jobs by undertaking an extensive program of public works.

We will cut government expenditures to lower taxes.

We believe in the right of those who disagree with the party to speak and write on those issues without interference.

COMMUNIST PARTY PLATFORM

We are committed to the overthrow of the presently existing, oppressive Republic and all of its economic and social institutions. We favor:

The abolition of private property.

The establishment of land reform programs, so that the government can take over the land and distribute it for the common good.

Government ownership of all industrial productive forces, so that they can be run for the benefit of the people rather than the capitalists.

To the German people: The cause of your misery is the fact that French, British, and American capitalists are exploiting German workers to get rich themselves. Germans, unite to get rid of this terrible burden.

NAZI PARTY PLATFORM

We demand the following:

1. A union of all Germans to form a great Germany on the basis of the right to self-determination of peoples.
2. Abolition of the Treaty of Versailles.
3. Return lands lost in World War I and colonies to give German adequate living space.
4. German blood as a requirement for German citizenship. No Jew can be a member of the nation.
5. Non-citizens can live in Germany only as foreigners, subject to the law of aliens.
6. Only citizens can vote or hold public office.
7. The state insures that every citizen live decently and earn his livelihood. If it is impossible to provide food for the whole population, then aliens must be expelled.
8. Guarantee for jobs and benefits for workers.
9. No further immigration of non-Germans. Any non-German who entered Germany after August 2, 1914, shall leave immediately.
10. A thorough reconstruction of our national system of education. The science of citizenship shall be taught from the beginning.
11. That German citizens and owners must publish all newspapers in the German language.
12. Eliminate the Marxist threat.

ERIC VON RONHEIM

Eric von Ronheim, the head of a Frankfurt textile factory, is very concerned about the depression. Sales are down and so are profits. If only Germany had not been treated so ruthlessly at Versailles, he argues, the nation would be far better off. Instead the government has had to impose heavy taxes to pay reparations to its former enemies. As a result, Germans are overtaxed with little money to spend on textiles and other consumer goods. The worldwide depression has made matters worse by eliminating possible foreign markets for German products. Even if the depression were over, Ronheim does not think taxes would come down because of reparation payments.

Ronheim considers the Communists a serious threat to Germany. He fears that if they set up a government like the one in the Soviet Union, capitalists like him would receive no mercy from the workers. He also thinks that Germany would become subservient to its old enemy, the Soviet Union.

HERMANN STRUTS

Hermann Struts, a major in the German army, fought bravely during the war. He comes from a long line of army officers and is himself a graduate of the German military academy. Struts has always taken pride in the army's able defense of the nation and its strong leadership.

Yet Struts is bitter about the fact that he has not had a promotion in over ten years. Few soldiers have, mainly because the German army was so drastically reduced by the Treaty of Versailles. In the old army, Struts would have been at least a captain by now and possibly a major. The treaty, he argues, has done irreparable harm not only to Germany's honor but also to his own honor as a soldier. He feels that if the civilian government had refused to sign the treaty and allowed the army to fight, both he and Germany would be better off.

WILHELM SCHULTZ

Wilhelm Schultz works with his father on the family farm in eastern Brandenburg near the Polish border. The Versailles treaty has had a profound effect on Schultz and his family. The treaty turned part of Pomerania, Poznan, and West Prussia over to Poland. Even though his uncle lives just a few miles away, his home is now in Poland rather than Germany. Schultz's grandfather lives in Danzig, now an independent city under the mandate of the League of Nations. Schultz can only visit his grandfather by traveling through Poland; he now needs a passport and other official documents. This does not seem right to Schultz. As a child, he was taught to admire Germany's heroes, some of whom fought the Poles. So, he is dismayed that his government signed the treaty of Versailles that has subjected many Germans, including his uncle, to Polish rule.

OTTO HAUPTMANN

Otto Hauptmann works in a factory in Berlin. Although his trade union has actively worked for better conditions and higher wages, it has recently been losing ground in the Depression. Hauptmann blames their lack of success on the 1923 inflation and the current depression. He believes that the union would be more successful if the economy were more stable. Still, it is the union that has kept him employed. At a time when many of his friends have been laid off, his union persuaded the owners of his factory to keep men with seniority. In factories with weaker unions, managers kept only the young, claiming they would be more productive. As long as the Depression deepens, however, the chances that he will keep his job diminish.

Hauptmann worries about some of the ideas his fellow workers have expressed recently. They argue that when the owners are forced to cut back production, they take it out on the workers. So, the only way to end the depression is to let the workers control the factories and the government. Hauptmann disagrees. He thinks that the workers do get fair treatment as long as they have a strong union. Moreover, he believes that managing the factories and government should be left to those who understand these complicated jobs.

GERDA MUNCHEN

Gerda Munchen is the owner of a small Munich grocery store started by her parents. For years, her parents had saved to send her to the university. But Munchen chose not to go and the money stayed in the bank. In 1923, she had planned to use the money to pay for her children's education. But that year hyper-inflation hit Germany because the government had printed so much money, as she was told, to pay reparations invoked by the Versailles treaty. Just before her older daughter was to leave for the university, the bank informed the family that its savings were worthless. This was a blow to Munchen, but even more of a blow to her daughter, whose future hung in the balance.

Munchen does not think she will ever regain her savings. With so many people out of work, sales are down sharply. In addition, Munchen's small grocery is having a tough time competing with the large chain stores, which can offer far lower prices. She and her children question a system that has made life so difficult for hardworking people.

ELISABETH VON KOHLER

Elisabeth von Kohler, a prominent attorney who attended the University of Bonn, has a strong sense of the German cultural, literary, and historical traditions. She believes that her people's contributions to Western civilization have been ignored. Kohler would like to see the republic lead a democratic Europe. She disapproves of the methods the Weimar Republic often uses to repress extremist parties.

Her sense of justice is even more outraged by the way the Allies, particularly France, view Germany. She, and others like her, who believe in Germany and its traditions, would like to prove to these countries that the Germans are a great race. She is proud to be an attorney and a German woman in the Weimar Republic.

KARL SCHMIDT

Karl Schmidt is an unemployed worker who lives in the rich steel-producing Ruhr Valley. Like so many men in the Ruhr, he lost his job because of the Depression. Many steel mills have been forced to shut down until there is a market for their goods. On the day that Karl's mill closed, the owners announced that shrinking profits made it impossible to keep the workers on their jobs.

Such might be the case, Karl states, yet he notes that the owners of the steel mills still live in big houses and drive expensive cars. Why are they protected from the Depression while their former employees suffer? Although the government did provide unemployment compensation, the money was barely enough to support Schmidt, his wife, and their two children. The government claims that it could not afford to continue even these payments any longer.

Schmidt feels that the government would be in a stronger position to help people if it cut off all reparation payments. But he also knows that if the government did so, the French might occupy the Ruhr Valley just as they did in 1923. What is needed is a government that is responsive to the workers—perhaps even one that is run by the workers, as some of his friends maintain. And he is convinced that Germany needs a government strong enough to stop reparation payments.