

## MODERN HISTORY

### Assess the importance of propaganda in the maintenance of Nazi power between 1933 and 1939.

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Although propaganda was not the sole factor in maintaining Nazi power between 1933 and 1939, it was still highly important in upholding such power. Propaganda coalesced with terror, repression and economic policies is what ultimately factored the maintenance of Nazi power during the six year period.

A few weeks after Hitler had come into power (March 1933) he appointed Dr Josef Goebbels as minister for propaganda. Evident in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had always appreciated the value and importance of effective propaganda and due to Goebbels the Nazis had control over all aspects of the media. Goebbels was minister of the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda (RMVP) which was set up in March 1933. This body extended Nazi control over legislation, broadcasting, film, theatre, foreign and German press, music, etc. allowing propaganda to indoctrinate virtually every aspect of the German life. This media monopoly aimed at promoting the ideological goals of the regime, emphasising that propaganda was still highly important in maintaining Nazi power.

Along with the RMVP, Goebbels was also president of the Reich Chamber of Culture, which allowed him control over German cinema. The Nazis controlled film content through censorship and propaganda films were also created, an ideal example being Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* which promoted Hitler. However, Goebbels and Hitler differed over how film should be used as David Welch argues. 'Unlike Hitler, Goebbels believed propaganda was most effective when it was insidious'. Regardless, film was still an effective method of propaganda. Goebbels also had control over Radio an instrument which Goebbels believed was 'the most modern and most crucial instrument that (existed) for influencing the masses'. By 1939 seventy percent of households had a radio and loudspeakers were introduced into factories, this broadcasting also promoting Hitler.

The Propaganda Ministry also promoted a constant flow of anti-Semitic material and the Jews became targets for venting national frustrations. Goebbels himself was violently anti-Semitic and took personal interest into producing propaganda presenting Jews as traitors to Germany and in partnership with Bolshevik Russia, the other great enemy of the Germans. As Hitler expressed in *Mein Kampf*, all enemies should be categorised in one group. With propaganda merging all enemies into one, it is evident that propaganda was still highly important in maintaining Nazi power for it allowed them to create an enemy that the Germans could vent all anger and frustration on.

Another important propaganda tool was the Hitler myth. Developed by Goebbels, this 'Fuhrer Myth' cultivated an image of Hitler as someone who understood the German people, personified the nation and stood aloof from selfish interests. It portrayed Hitler as someone who defended Germany against its enemies, e.g. the Jews, and was responsible for all the major successes of government. This was a highly successful propaganda tool for, as historian Ian Kershaw discusses, the German people had greater desire for a heroic leadership. This was due to the reaction to the divisions and weaknesses of the old Weimar system, it satisfied people's emotional need for a strong government and disenchantment with the monarchy led to a new interest in a leader who could bring a new beginning for Germany. Thus, propaganda was still highly important in maintaining Nazi power for it ultimately created a heroic image of Hitler and depicted him as a strong leader.

Although propaganda was highly important in maintaining Nazi power, a greater importance was the economic policies. The new government increased public expenditure and investment, and it tried to stimulate consumer demand. Hitler extended the public works scheme initiated in 1932, especially the building of homes and motorways (for example the autobahns). Such work which was paid by

the state and it called for more workers, helping to reduce the unemployment rate. In 1933 unemployment was 3.7 million but by 1936 unemployment had reduced to 1.6 million, effectively restoring the confidence of the German people. There was also an increase in wages for businesses (116 percent), farmers (41 percent) and industrial workers (25 percent), adding to the confidence of German people. Agricultural prices also improved and the Four-Year Plan was leading Germany to be rearmed. Such economic policies were associated with the recovery of Germany, creating a great importance in maintaining the Nazi power. Hitler and the Nazis were now associated with the recovery of Germany which supplemented to the image of Hitler as heroic and a saviour for Germany.

The most important factor in maintaining Nazi power was terror and repression. Although the bodies of repression were minor, its fear was still wide spread. Concentration camps were set up and in 1934 a People's Court was also set up to deal with political crimes. Their trial was run by Nazi judges with no jury present and the prisoners were deliberately mistreated, if released taken into 'protective custody' by the Gestapo (secret police). The Gestapo lacked manpower, as researcher Gellately has indicated in a town like Essen 43 out of a population of 650 000 were Gestapo personnel. Regardless, they had created an element of fear and effectively established repression through their 'spot checks' and being largely a reactive organisation. Denunciation was an accepted German tradition and as historian Shirer notes intelligence gathering were also used to gather a large quantity of information to use against civilians. The SA also created terror through its abrupt interruptions in political meetings, creating a sense of havoc. Such repression and terror was a significantly important factor in maintaining power for the civilians feared to oppose the Nazis.

Although propaganda was a highly important factor in maintaining Nazi power between 1933 and 1939, it was not the most significant. It was a combination of propaganda, economic policies and most importantly terror and repression that ultimately helped the Nazis maintain their power.