

NAZI GERMANY

When the Kaiser was chased out of Germany in November 1918, a provisional government led by the Social Democrats took over. This party was divided into many factions. The Spartacists were the most radical group, similar to the Russian Bolsheviks (Communists). The Spartacists' 1919 effort to overthrow the provisional government was crushed by the army.

At Weimar in February 1919, Germans drew up a democratic constitution. The president and *Reichstag* (lower house) were elected with parties represented in proportion to party strength in the election (a party with 30 percent of the votes got 30 percent of the seats). The chancellor (prime minister) was responsible to the president and Reichstag. Each German state sent delegates to the upper house, the *Reichsrat*.

The new republic was threatened by Communists on the left and Nationalists on the right. The political right wanted to reestablish the old undemocratic system. A Nationalist plot, the Kapp Putsch (uprising), took over Berlin for a time in 1920, but the Socialist workers cut off public utilities and the ringleaders fled. Then in 1923 came another putsch led by a young fanatic, Adolf Hitler.

Born in Austria in 1889, Hitler was the product of an unhappy childhood and a frustrated effort to become an artist. Reduced to painting postcards before World War I, he eagerly joined the German army when the opportunity came. He was rewarded with a corporal's rank, an Iron Cross medal, and a wound at the Battle of the Somme. After recovering, he drifted to Munich where he often attended meetings of revolutionaries in the dark beer halls. In June 1919 he joined the National Socialist (Nazi) Party as member No. 7. This group hated Jews, the Treaty of Versailles, the Communists, and the democratic Weimar Republic.

Hitler was an expert organizer, and under his leadership, the Nazi Party grew quickly, picking up dreamers, hoodlums, and misfits as members. He developed the party flag with its swastika and the party slogan: "Germany awake!" From Italy's Fascists he borrowed the Roman salute, the pageantry, images of the heroic past, and the idea of special uniforms. Hitler said: "People need a good scare. They want someone to be afraid of." The Nazi's SA, the Brown Shirts, provided that fear. They battled socialists, marched in noisy parades, intimidated any critics, and lived by the slogan: "We're brawling our way to greatness."

In 1923, in defiance of an ordinance against demonstrations, Hitler led a march to capture control of Munich (the Beer Garden Putsch). Trapped by the police in a narrow street, the Nazis surrendered. Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison. His friend Hermann Göring was wounded.

While he was in prison, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*. According to his book, Germany and the great Nordic or Aryan race lost World War I because of the treason of liberals, Jews, and Bolsheviks. The great German Empire had been replaced by the pathetic Weimar Republic,



Adolf Hitler