

Your Smartass List of Germany 1890-1945 Specialist Terms

<i>Deutsches Reich</i>	German Empire, formed in 1871 after winning a war against France
<i>Immediatsystem</i>	The system of immediate access to the Kaiser by lobbyists, who did not have to go through ministers first
<i>Kommandogewalt</i>	The Kaiser's command of the Army
Schlieffen Plan	The Army's (ultimately catastrophic) military plan
<i>Bundesrat</i>	The highest legislative body in the German Empire; its members were appointed by the governments of Germany's federal states to represent their interests in the German parliament
Junkers	A member of the Prussian landed nobility – literally jung here (=young sir). Not all were wealthy – some went into the army (Fahnenjunker), others into the civil service (Hofunker)
'New course'	the policy initially followed by Wilhelm and Caprivi, seeking to gain the support of the Reichstag by socially progressive legislation (allowing Anti-socialist legislation to lapse, reducing tariffs, improved working conditions)
Reinsurance Treaty	the Treaty with Russia which Wilhelm (disastrously) let lapse in 1890
<i>Weltpolitik</i>	Literally, 'world politics' – Wilhelm's policy of seeking 'a place in the sun' for Germany internationally
Kiaochow	The port Germany occupied in China in 1898 as a naval base in the Far East
Algeciras	The Conference (1906) where France and Britain forced Wilhelm to abandon his attempt to become 'protector' of Morocco
<i>Drang nach Osten</i>	Literally 'drive to the East' – Wilhelm's policy to expand Germany's territory into eastern Europe and the Balkans; it included friendly relations with the Ottoman Empire
<i>Sonderweg</i>	The historian's theory (not no longer believed) that German history had followed a 'special path', different to other countries, of militarism and expansionism, which started in the 19th century, led Wilhelm to start WWI, and led inevitably to Hitler and WWII.
<i>Burgfrieden</i>	The 'ceasefire' agreed by all the parties in the Reichstag at the outbreak of war in 1914, to set aside their differences and support the war effort; by 1918 it had fallen apart.
K-brot	Kriegsbrot – war bread, made from potatoes, oats, barley and even straw
Kaiser	The title of the monarch of Germany (derived from the Roman word 'Caesar'). The last Kaiser of Germany was Wilhelm II (1859 - 1941), who in 1918 fled to the village of Doorn in the Netherlands after Germany's defeat and his abdication.
Republic	A country NOT ruled by a monarch. The 'Weimar Republic' in Germany (1919-1933) took its name from the town where in February 1919 a constituent assembly met to draw up a democratic constitution.
Reichstag	The German Parliament – also the name for the building. Under the Weimar republic the Reichstag was elected by all men and women over the age of 20 – a far more democratic government than Britain, where only women over the age for 30 were allowed to vote.
<i>Novemberverbrecher</i>	November Criminals: the name given by the right-wing and nationalist parties in Germany to the government ministers who made the Armistice and then signed the Treaty of Versailles. Also called Volksverräter ('People-traitors').
<i>Dolchstoßlegende</i>	Literally, 'Dagger-blow legend' – the belief (invented by general Hindenburg in 1919) of the right-wing politicians that the Germany Army had only lost the First World War because it had been 'stabbed in the back' by the 'November criminals' – the politicians who had signed the Armistice.
Constitution	The Hutchinson Encyclopaedia defines a constitution as: 'Body of fundamental laws of a state, laying down the system of government and defining the relations of the legislature, executive, and judiciary to each other and to the citizens.' The constitution of the Weimar Republic was a representative democracy with an elected president, and the rights of the citizens defined by a Bill of Rights guaranteeing equality before the law and political and religious freedom.
Article 48	The first great flaw in the Weimar Constitution – it gave the President the right to make laws by decree in an emergency. Since the voting system of proportional voting never gave any Weimar government a sufficient majority to pass the laws it wanted, the President ruled increasingly by decree to pass ANY law – thus abusing the system as it was intended. It was this flaw in the Constitution that gave Hitler the opportunity to seize power after 1933.

Proportional representation	<p>A system of voting that does not – as we have in Britain today – elect representatives for individual ‘constituencies’ by a ‘first past the post’ system, but where people in a large region vote for the PARTY they want, and then a number of representatives are returned to the parliament in proportion to the number of votes cast for each party.</p> <p>Although it sounds much fairer, in fact, the system of PR in the Weimar republic led to a succession of weak, coalition governments, where no one party was ever big enough to have a majority. Thus, after 14 years of political impotence, many moderate politicians were HAPPY to support Hitler, who offered at least a decisive government.</p>
Spartacists	Group of Communists who – led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Leibknecht, rebelled in Berlin in Jan 1919. They were brutally put down by the army and the Freikorps.
Freikorps	Bands of soldiers who, returning from the war, did not disband, but formed small paramilitary units (= private armies). Two Freikorps units were called ‘the steel helmet’ and ‘the emergency police’. Usually very right-wing, and implacably hostile to the Weimar government (whom they called the ‘November Criminals’), they were a source of terrorism and intimidation. On the other hand, they were useful to the government because they were very keen to put down Communist rebellions.
SPD	The German Social Democratic Party, which was formed in 1875, but which soon became the biggest party in Germany. It advocated a mixture of Marxist and other more moderate left-wing beliefs. After 1919, the more moderate members of the party agreed to join the Weimar Government, although they lost the support of the more left-wing party members when the government used the army to put down Communist rebellions. Nevertheless, the Social Democratic Party continued to be the largest party in the Reichstag until July 1932 when the Nazis won 230 seats to the SPD’s 133.
KPD	The German Communist party. They wanted to bring in a Soviet-style Communist state in Germany. After the failure of the Spartacist revolt, in 1919, only 22 Communists were elected to the Reichstag, but the number of deputies increased during periods of economic problem. This is important because it is sometimes asserted that working class people voted Nazi because of the Depression; this is not true – working class people voted Communist (thus 101 Communist deputies were elected in November 1932, and 88 even in March 1933). It was the votes of MIDDLE CLASS people during the Depression which brought the Nazis to power.
<i>Zentrumspartei</i>	Denoted Z or ZP. The German Catholic Centre Party. Its ambivalence towards the Nazis was one of the main factors in Hitler’s rise to power.
Ruhr	The main industrial area of Germany, alongside the River Rhine in the west of the country. This was the area France invaded in 1923 when it wanted to collect reparations payments from Germany.
Hyperinflation	When prices rise out of control by many hundred per cent.
Putsch	A German word meaning a violent take-over of power/ a rebellion.
Black Reichswehr	<p>In its broadest sense, the ‘Black Reichswehr’ was any paramilitary group in Germany which opposed the government and the Treaty of Versailles – thus it included such as the Nazi SA, and Freikorps units such as ‘the steel helmet’ and ‘the emergency police’. ‘Black’ soldiers were any ex-soldiers involved in Freikorps.</p> <p>In a stricter sense, ‘Black Reichswehr’ refers to a specific Freikorps unit – amounting to 18,000 men – led by Major Bruno Buchrucker in the Kuestrin district of eastern Germany. At first the Weimar Army Minister denied that a ‘Black Reich’ existed, but on 1 October 1923 Buchrucker’s Black Reichswehr mounted the Kuestriner Putsch. Although the putsch itself was quickly put down by Major Fedor von Bock, it caused a scandal when an investigation in 1826 revealed that funds and arms had gone to these anti-Republican groups from army sources – and that even some of the generals were involved.</p>
Thuringia	An area in central Germany where the Communists took power and set up a ‘republican proletarian’ government during the economic disaster of hyperinflation in 1923. The government was short-lived, and collapsed when Stresemann ordered it to disband.
Kapp	Dr Wolfgang Kapp was a right-wing journalist who on 13th March 1920, led a rebellion against the Treaty of Versailles with the help of General Luttwitz and his Freikorps unit. It took over Berlin and tried to bring back the Kaiser, but collapsed on 17th March when the workers of Berlin went on a general strike.
Locarno	Locarno Pact: a number of diplomatic agreements made in Locarno, Switzerland, in October 1925 (and formally signed in London in December 1925). The agreements – signed by Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, and Germany – guaranteed Germany’s existing frontiers with France and Belgium (accepting that Alsace Lorraine was part of France). The Locarno Pact was the agreement that secured Germany’s acceptance into the League of Nations in 1926.

Great Coalition	One of the ways Stresemann saved the Weimar republic in 1923 was by organising the 'Great Coalition' of the pro-democracy parties – the SPD, the Centre Party, the German Democratic Party (DDP) and his own 'German People's Party' (DVP). This created a government strong enough to pass the laws which re-established stability. Actually, the Great Coalition only lasted 2 months before it fell apart, and the government returned to the instability of the past. Also, in 1924, Stresemann brought in the right-wing German National People's Party (DNVP), which 'let in' right-wing politicians into the government.
Bauhaus	A German School of Art and Design, formed by the German architect Walter Gropius in 1919, which tried to fuse the hitherto separate media of 'art' and 'craft'. Its most famous teacher was Paul Klee. Students at the Bauhaus School of Art studied a stressing the links between architecture and such crafts as stained glass, mural decoration, metalwork, carpentry, weaving, pottery, typography, and graphics, and fostering an understanding of materials. The Bauhaus school led to significant developments in architecture. The Nazis disapproved of the movement, and closed it down in 1933.
<i>Entartung</i>	Literally: 'deformed' – right wing groups regarded Weimar culture, art and music as 'degenerate' / from a lower stage of human evolution. The Nazis held exhibitions of degenerate art ... which, ironically, only served to popularise it
Wall Street	The American Stock Exchange. The collapse of share prices in October 1929 ('the Wall Street Crash') and the economic crisis this caused in America, led to the recalling of Dawes loans to Germany, which caused the Great Depression and led to the growth in Nazi fortunes after 1930.
NSDAP	The proper name for the Nazi Party was the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party) or NSDAP. The word Nationalsozialistische sums up its attempted appeal both to the right-wing nationalists, but also to the more left-wing socialists.
<i>Lebensraum</i>	Literally, 'living space'. In 1924, Hitler expounded in Mein Kampf his theory that the growing, superior German race had the right to seek extra land and resources in eastern Europe, at the expense of the inferior Slavic races, who would be the Germans' slave workforce.
Nationalisation	The ownership/running of industry (especially utilities such as electricity, telephone, railways etc) by the state. In its early days, the Nazi Party incorporated a number of left-wing quasi-socialist ideas into its philosophy, including the right to a job and a decent standard of living, improvements in pension, sharing the profits of public companies and war profiteers, and nationalisation of public industries such as electricity and water.
Sturmabteilung	Literally, 'Storm section'. Also known as the 'brownshirts'. Starting as stewards at Nazi meetings, the SA grew up into the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party. Their leader was Ernst Röhm. The SA failed in the Munich Putsch of 1923, but Hitler kept them on after 1923 to defend Nazi meetings against Communist attacks, and to break up meetings of rival parties. When he had come to power, however, they were an embarrassment, and Hitler had all the SA's leaders murdered 30 June 1933 (the 'Night of the Long Knives') and the organization was disbanded.
<i>Machtergreifung</i>	Literally, 'power grab' – the Nazis' consolidation of power, 1933-34
Fire Decree	Properly called the Decree of the Reich President for the protection of people and state, this was issued by President Hindenburg (though it was really Hitler who wrote the decree) under Article 48 of the constitution, on 28 February 1933, the day after the Reichstag fire. It abolished the Bill of Rights and gave the Chancellor the right to restrict people's personal freedom, freedom of speech, including the freedom of the press, the freedom to organize and assemble, the privacy of letters, mail, telegraphs and telephones, and order searches and confiscations. It was this decree that gave Hitler the right to arrest many Communists before the March elections, and before the Enabling Act was discussed by the Reichstag.
Enabling Act	The Act which we call the Enabling act was actually called the Law to remedy the need of the people and the country. Passed on 23 March 1933 (after all the Communist deputies had been put into prison), it gave the Reich government the right to make laws without going to the Reichstag – even if they were against the Constitution – and to make treaties without asking the Reichstag to ratify them.
Gestapo	A contraction of Geheime Staatspolizei: literally, 'secret state police'. The Gestapo was Germany's secret police, formed in 1933, and controlled by the SS leader Heinrich Himmler after 1934. There was no appeal against Gestapo authority and it had absolute power to deal with acts or individuals it considered against the national interest. It became one of the most feared and brutal elements of the Nazi regime.

DAF	On 2 May 1933, Hitler banned all trade unions, and ordered the SA to arrest all the trade unions leaders who had not fled the country. Instead, he set up the Deutschen Arbeitsfront (German Labour Front), run by Dr Robert Ley. This was supposed to look after the workers' interest – it did set up things like the KdF programme – but really it was used to keep the workers under control for Hitler's rich industrialist backers. Wages fell overall in Hitler's Germany, and workers were not allowed to strike.
Hummingbird	'Hummingbird' was the codeword for the Night of the Long Knives, 30 June 1934, when Hitler ordered the SS to kill more than 400 SA men.
Führer	Literally, 'leader'. The title adopted by Hitler as leader of the Nazi Party, and later – when Hindenburg died – as leader of Germany. As Führer, Hitler united the roles of President, Chancellor and head of the Army.
<i>Schutzstaffel</i>	Literally, 'protective squadron': the SS – a Nazi elite corps, Hitler's private bodyguard, established in 1925 under Himmler. They were conditioned to see themselves as 'agents of light'. At its height it had half a million members. Some of them – the Waffen SS – were army units. The special SS Death's Head Units ran the concentration camps.
Death's Head Units	The SS units detailed to run the concentration camps. They were infamous for their cruelty and atrocities.
Indoctrination	To brainwash by any method. The young are the easiest to brainwash, which is why the Nazis were so concerned to control the school curriculum, and why they placed such emphasis on the HJ. Usually, indoctrination is done covertly. In the Hitler Youth, however, 'indoctrination' was used to mean the factual learning that HJ members did about subjects such as 'the life of the Führer', 'the lost territories' and 'the five flag oaths'.
Poisonous Mushroom	A collection of 17 short stories by the Nazi writer Ernst Hiemer, with pictures by the Nazi artist Fips. The purpose of the stories was to indoctrinate (brainwash) young German children to despise and hate the Jews. In the stories, it is young German children who are the heroes. Sometimes they are able to help and support their parents by criticising the Jews. In the stories, Jewish people are always presented as evil, dirty and treacherous; by contrast, the children in the stories please their parents and teachers by hating the Jews. The book took its title from the opening story, which compared the Jews to poisonous mushrooms in a forest; they may not look very different from the others, but they have the power to destroy and must be destroyed.
<i>Kristallnacht</i>	On the night of 9-10 November 1938, after Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Jew living in Paris, had shot and killed von Rath, a member of the German Embassy staff. The Gestapo were ordered to destroy Jewish property and businesses, and to arrest 20-30,000 Jews. On November 9, the Gestapo whipped up the mob to help SA, SS and Hitler Youth beat and murder Jews, and wreck their homes. SS leader Reinhard Heydrich reported 7500 businesses destroyed, 267 synagogues burned (with 177 totally destroyed) and 91 Jews killed. The night got its name for the sparkling 'crystals' of broken glass in the street the morning from the broken windows of Jewish shops.
Wansee	1942: the meeting which agreed the 'final solution' to the 'Jewish question' – all Jews would be gassed in death camps.
Shoah	Shoah is the Hebrew word for the Holocaust – the attempt by the Nazis at the genocide of the Jewish race. The word 'shoah' means a calamity or catastrophe where God is not present. It was the word used by Jews in the 1940s to describe what was happening, and it is the word that Jewish people today prefer to use. The word Holocaust is a bible word meaning a 'sacrifice-by-fire'. Jewish people hate it; it is inappropriate, because a holocaust was an offering to God, and it is inappropriate to apply it to the Nazi genocide, which was godless.
Autobahns	The motorways built – invented – by Hitler under the public works programme. Not only did it help unemployment by providing work immediately, but it stimulated the economy in general by improving road transport and communications.
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst: The Reich Labour Service, set up by the Nazis to reduce unemployment. It organized public works like the autobahns and public building schemes (Government spending rose, 1932–38 from about 5 billion to 30 billion marks.). In 1935, Hitler made it compulsory for 18-25 year-old German men to do six months in the RAD, although the pay was poor and some young men resented it, generally it was regarded as a rewarding experience. Unemployment fell from nearly 6 million to virtually nothing.
Reich Food Estate	By the 1933 Farm Law, farmers were assured of sales and given subsidies. The government kept food prices at the 1928 level. But farmers were organised into the Reich Food Estate – led by Walther Darré, the Reich Peasant Leader – and strictly controlled (e.g., one rule stated that hens must lay 65 eggs a year).

KdF	<p>The Nazis believed in Schönheit der Arbeit ('the beauty of labour'). Through the DAF they made people work hard, but then they encouraged them to feel proud of their achievement. The Kraft durch Freude ('Strength through joy') movement was how they rewarded people for the hard work they had done. The government put 5 billion RM into the scheme: worker were given day trips, trips to the cinema or theatre, or (rarely) cheap holidays.</p> <p>In Berlin, 1933–38, the KdF sponsored 134,000 events for 32 million people (2 million went on cruises & weekend trips, and 11 million on theatre trips). It was under the KdF initiative that Hitler made his promise that every German family would ultimately own a Volkswagen car. The Nazis also made sure that every German had a radio, but this was more for propaganda than a reward for working hard.</p>
HJ	<p>Hitler Jugend: the Hitler Youth. A law of 1936 merged all German Youth Movements into the 'Hitler Youth Movement'. Boys aged 10-14 went to the Deutsches Jungvolk (Young Germans), and then – aged 14-18 – into the Hitler Jugend. HJ members did sports, military training and were indoctrinated about Hitler and Nazism.</p>
BDM	<p>Bund Deutscher Mädel: the League of German Maidens. By the law of 1936, girls aged 10-14 went to the Jung Mädel, passing aged 14-18 into the BDM. Girls did cleaning, craftwork, and learned about Hitler and how to be good Nazi partners of Aryan warrior-me.</p>
<i>Gleichschaltung</i>	<p>Literally, 'bringing together'. In a general sense, it means the Nazi process of taking every area of life in Germany and forcing it into line with Nazi ideology. This included taking control of the political system, the trade unions and the Church, uniting all youth movements into the HJ, but also affecting the way everyone thought by means of propaganda.</p> <p>More specifically, Gleichschaltung refers to the corpus of laws which the Nazis passed to give them control of the political system – chief among which were the Reichstag Fire decree, the Enabling Act, the acts banning trade unions and opposition parties, the law ratifying Hitler's actions on the Night of the Long Knives, and the law making Hitler Führer.</p> <p>Precisely, there were two specific Gleichschaltungsgesetz (Gleichschaltung laws): the first (31 March 1933) gave the local state governments the same powers as the Enabling Act gave Hitler, and the second (7 April 1933) put a Nazi Reichsstatthalter (proconsul) in charge of every state.</p>
Aryan	<p>A (supposed) parent race believed to have come from central Asia in the 2nd century BC, and which – according to Nazi philosophy – was the pure blood line of the German people (which had been contaminated by inter breeding with other races). The term Aryan derives from Sanskrit, originally a name for the highest (Brahmans) caste, and later meaning 'of noble family'.</p> <p>The Nazis held that the Aryan race represented the highest attainment of evolution. Full citizens rights were granted only to people could trace their 'pure Aryan' descent back for at least 100 years – back to 1750, if you wanted to be in the SS. The dream of Himmler –leader of the SS – was of white-skinned, blue-eyed, fair-haired, or pure 'Nordic' race. Ideal 'Aryan' boys and girls were sent to camps to breed, like animals, and – in the countries Hitler conquered – selective breeding programmes were set up to purify the blood of the people (the so-called lebensborn). Nazi theories about the Aryan race also gave them the theoretical justification to persecuted the Jews.</p>
Eidelweiss Pirates	<p>The generic name for the unofficial youth groups – with names such as the Navajos and the Roving Dudes – who rebelled against the HJ movement. They hung round, drinking alcohol, dancing and listening to jazz (which was banned music). In Cologne in 1944 a group of Eidelweiss Pirates - which had been helping army deserters - killed the local Gestapo chief. The Nazis rounded up the group's leaders and publicly hanged 12 of them.</p>
<i>Untermensch</i>	<p>Literally, 'sub-humans'. The word applied by the Nazis to a whole range of races (eg Jews, Gypsies, Blacks and the Slavs) as well as people with physical 'defects' (eg physically disabled, deaf, blind) or of whom they disapproved (eg beggars, homosexuals). These people they persecuted, sterilised, put to death or used for medical experiments.</p>