

HISTORY NOTES

© The Institute of Education 2016



SUBJECT: History
LEVEL: Higher
TEACHER: Sean Delap

Topics Covered:

Case Study: The Nuremberg Rallies

About Sean:

Sean has been teaching History at the Institute since 1990. He gives regular talks on behalf of the History Teachers Association of Ireland to students and teachers. He has lectured on the methodology of teaching as well as on teaching History through Irish. Sean has participated in a number of radio and television history documentaries, most recently on the television series *Éalú* produced for TG4. He is the author of several Leaving Cert History textbooks.



The Institute of Education
79-85 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2

Case Study: The Nuremberg Rallies

Key Concept: Propaganda

Hitler and the Nazi's used an effective propaganda machine to achieve their aims and spread their beliefs. Propaganda is information, often exaggerated or false, which is given out in order to press home a particular political message. The Nuremberg Rallies were one of a number of methods that the Nazi's used to spread their propaganda.

“All effective propaganda must be confined to a few bare necessities and then expressed in a few simple phrases. Only by constantly repeating will you succeed in imprinting an idea onto the memory of a crowd.” Hitler – Mein Kampf.

Key Personality: Joseph Goebbels.

Joseph Goebbels headed the **Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment**. All books, films, radio broadcasts and newspapers had to meet with his approval.

He aided the Nazi rise to power by spreading their propaganda in his own newspaper, **Der Angriff** (the Attack). He introduced the term “**Heil Hitler**” as the regular form of greeting for party members.

On coming to power in 1933 he divided his propaganda ministry into seven departments:

1. Fine arts
2. Music
3. Theatre
4. Literature
5. Press
6. Radio
7. Film.

Newspapers:

- The **Reich Press Law of October 1934** insisted that all newspaper editors “must possess German citizenship, be of Aryan descent and not married to a Jew”.
- Well-known daily papers such as the *Berliner Tageblatt* were shut down and were replaced by pro-Nazi newspapers like **Das Reich** or the anti-Jewish Nazi Party weekly, **Der Sturmer**, edited by **Julius Streicher**. Der Sturmer was considered to be the most violently and crude anti-Semitic journal of its time. Streicher was a regular “rabble rouser” at the Nuremberg Rallies.

Film:

- Films that did not suit Nazi views were banned. MGM's *Prizefighter and the Lady* was banned because it starred Jewish boxer **Max Baer**, while *Tarzan and his Mate* was banned for displaying “incorrect attitudes”. He ruined a thriving German film industry –

many actors such as **Marlene Dietrich** and film directors like **Fritz Lang** left Germany and moved to America – **Hollywood Exiles**. Simple propaganda films such as “**The Eternal Jew**” and “**Motherhood**” took their place.

Leni Riefenstahl (Key Personality)

Leni Riefenstahl is considered to be one of the best ever film directors. Her work for the Nazi Party include the following propaganda films:

- **Sieg des Glaubens (Victory of Faith) 1933**
- **Triumph of the Will 1934**
- **Olympia 1936**

In 1933 Riefenstahl produced her first film for the Nazi's - **Victory of Faith**. It documented the coming to power of the Nazi's as well as the 1933 Nuremberg Rally which celebrated Hitler's rise to power. She found it difficult to work with Gobbles and only agreed to film another film for the Nazi's in 1934 following a request from Hitler and a promise that Gobbles would not be involved. Hitler ordered all copies of Victory of Faith to be destroyed following the Night of the long Knives in June 1934 as the film showed numerous scenes of Hitler in the company of Ernst Röhm.

Riefenstahl's film of the 1934 rally, **Triumph of the Will**, is considered to be amongst the best documentaries ever made. It celebrates the Nazi coming to power and portrays Hitler as a type of “high priest” adored by the masses. It chronicles the week's events from start to finish. Despite the films opening titles declaring it to be a documentary of the Nazi Party congress, Riefenstahl used her skill as a filmmaker to praise Hitler and the Nazi regime. It starts with Hitler arriving to Nuremberg by plane and shows shots of 300,000 loyal supporters unfurling 21,000 flags, “goose stepping” soldiers and torchlight processions. **36 cameramen, a Zeppelin airship and a plane** were used to film the rally. The high point of the film shows Hitler laying a wreath in honour of Germany's war dead.

On its release in 1936, the film received a National State Prize and a gold medal at the Venice Film Festival and a Grand Prix prize at the Paris Film Festival.

Her second great documentary **Olympia** is a record of the **1936 Berlin Olympic Games**. It was released in two parts: **Festival of the Nations** and **Festival of Beauty**. Following the war Riefenstahl tried to claim that she had no interest in politics and that her films were purely artistic. Despite this she was officially declared to be a “Nazi sympathiser” in 1949 and found it difficult to find work afterwards.

Radio:

- In 1933 Goebbels introduced a “**People's Receiver**” (cheap radio set) to enable the Nazi to spread their propaganda.
- During the Second World War Goebbels developed a broadcasting service directed at spreading “**black propaganda**” against Germany's enemies. His most famous broadcaster was “**Lord Haw-Haw**” or William Joyce.

The Nuremberg Rallies:

“Mass assemblies are necessary because they have a strengthening and encouraging effect on most people. A man, who enters such a meeting in doubt and hesitation, leaves it inwardly fortified. He has become a member of a community”. Hitler-Mein Kampf.

Annual Party rallies were held every September at the **Zeppelin Field** in **Nuremberg**. These rallies were used to great effect by the Nazi Party to spread propaganda.

Nuremberg was used as an **important meeting place for the Nazi’s since 1923**. At first the rallies were held with other right wing groups such as the **Battle League**. Nuremberg was chosen as it was a **traditional German Medieval city steeped in history**. Prior to the Nazi’s coming to power in 1933 the yearly rallies known as **Parteitage** or party Days attracted about 20,000 followers. However from 1933 to 1938 these rallies became the highlight of the Nazi year and attracted an audience of over 500,000.

All Nazi organisations including the **SS, SA, Hitler Youth, Nazi Women’s Organisation, the Labour Front** etc were represented at the yearly rallies which were held in early September. From 1934 onwards the rallies lasted for an entire week. Hitler would give up to 20 speeches during the festival. New SS recruits were sworn in under the **Blood Flag** – this flag was carried by Hitler during the Munich Putsch and was spattered with the blood of **Andreas Bauriedl**, one of 16 killed during the ill-fated rising.

The Nuremberg Rallies were used by the Nazi’s as an instrument of propaganda. Their achievements were celebrated and forthcoming policies were announced.

Themes of the Rallies:

Each rally had a particular theme:

- The **1933 Rally of Victory** was used to celebrate his rise to power and to praise the army. Hitler realised that he needed the support of the army to consolidate his power.
- The **1934 Rally of Unity and Strength** celebrated the first year of Nazi power in Germany. It was also at this rally that **Dr Gerhard Wagner** delivered a speech on **“Race and National Health”** which sought to justify the policy of **euthanasia**. (killing of the old and those that are unable to look after themselves)
- Hitler’s racial laws (**Nuremberg Laws**) were introduced following a strong attack on the Jews at the **1935 rally – the Reich Rally of Freedom. The Nuremberg Laws** forbade marriages between Aryans and Jews or **Mischlings** (Mixed race). Breaking this law was punishable by death. Jews had also to wear the “Star of David” so that they could be recognisable in public. A major military took place during this rally and it acted by way of an announcement that Germany was rearming.
- The **1936** rally was called the **Rally of Honour** and sought to demonstrate and praise the strength of the Nazi regime and celebrated the Nazi reoccupation of the demilitarised Rhineland in March 1936. Hitler also used this rally to denounce Communism and once more a major military display took place.

- The **1937 Rally of Labour** celebrated the reduction of unemployment in Germany and 4 years of political and economic success. There was a strong presence of foreign leaders and diplomats at this rally including Neville Henderson (British Ambassador) as well as diplomats from the USA and France, the Emperor of Japan and the brother of Franco.
- The **1938 Rally of Greater Germany** largely concentrated on justifying a more aggressive Nazi foreign policy as well as celebrating the **Anschluss** (Union) between Austria and Germany, which had taken place in March 1938. Both Hitler and **Goering** used the occasion to denounce and threaten Czechoslovakia for its treatment of **Sudeten Germans**.

On 15 August 1939 Hitler secretly cancelled the Nuremberg rally which had been scheduled to begin in the first week of September. Instead of marching at Nuremberg, the German army was invading Poland. It's ironic that the proposed theme for the 1939 rally was to be the **"Party Rally for Peace"**.

The Rally Grounds:

The Zeppelin field was the main venue for the staging of the parades. A large grandstand was built and space was provided for up to 200,000 people. It was lit up at night with over 150 floodlights- "Cathedral of Light".

In 1934 Hitler's architect **Albert Speer** began work on the design of a great stadium and conference centre at Nuremberg. An 11 square kilometres site was set aside for the project. The stadium was to be larger than the Berlin Olympic Stadium. A **congress hall seating 60,000 and a stadium for 405,000** (bigger than the Berlin Olympic Stadium) was to be built. As far as possible the buildings were to be built of marble or granite, so that they would be preserved for generations to come, just like the ruins of **ancient Rome in Italy and ancient Greece in Athens**. Work on the stadium had to be cancelled following the outbreak of war in 1939.

Hitler welcomed foreign visitors, journalists and diplomats to attend the Nuremberg Rallies, as he believed that the rallies demonstrated the strength and determination of the Nazi Regime. Following the ending of the Third Reich in 1945, the Allies set a **war crimes tribunal in Nuremberg from Nov 1945 to Sep 1946**. The venue was chosen because the Allies believed that Nazi leaders should be held accountable for their crimes in the same place that they announced and boasted about their policies. They hoped that this would bring closure to one of the most brutal regimes in world history.

Importance of the Rallies:

- They promoted a sense of "togetherness" and pride amongst the German people, something that was missing during the days of the Weimar Republic 1918-1933.
- They demonstrated the strength of the Nazi regime- endless army displays.
- The cult of Adolf Hitler was reinforced – **Führerprinzip**.
- They created the impression that the Nazi Regime was popular.
- Firebrand speeches by Hitler scared other countries and forced them to compromise with Germany – Munich Agreement September 1938.

- Used to spread policies – anti-Semitism (1935 Rally)

Other forms of Propaganda:

Youth Movements:

According to Hitler the Third Reich would last for a thousand years. It was therefore essential that the next generation be introduced to Nazi beliefs and propaganda at the earliest possible stage. The **Hitler Youth** was established for boys in 1926. Two years later the **League of German Maidens (BDM)** was established for girls. Younger boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 14 joined the **Jungvolk** and **Jungmadel**. By 1934 the membership of the Hitler Youth stood at 3.5 million. In 1936 all other youth movements were banned.

Education:

The education system became another important way of spreading Nazi propaganda. Emphasis was placed on three core subjects: **History, Biology** and **Sport**.

- History was rewritten according to Nazi beliefs.
- Biology lessons stressed the importance of **racial purity**.
- Sport was considered to be an important step in turning the Germans into the **Herrenvolk (master race)** of Europe.

By 1936 32% of teachers were Nazi Party members. Religious instruction was gradually phased out. Special schools known as **NAPOLOA** were established to produce well-educated future party members.

Importance of Propaganda:

- Helped the rise of the Nazi Party.
- Increased anti-Semitism in Germany.
- Turned Hitler into a **cult figure - Führerprinzip** (Leadership system).
- Convinced many Germans that they could win the war.