

Life in Nazi Germany 1933-9

Women and the Family



Encouragement of Marriage

When Hitler came to power in 1933, he introduced a 'Law for the Encouragement of Marriage'. The law said that the government would give all newly married couples a loan of 1000 marks (about nine months wages). When the first child was born, the couple could keep a quarter of the money. On the birth of the second child, they could keep the second quarter. They could keep the third quarter on the birth of the third child, and the entire amount on the birth of a fourth.

In 1943, a further law was considered but never introduced. This proposed law stated that:

A "All single and married women up to the age of thirty-five who do not already have four children should be obliged to produce four children by racially pure ... German men. Whether these men are married is without significance. Every family that already has four children must set the husband free for this action"



The Nazis assumed there was a natural distinction between men and women. They stated that men were productive and creative in the world of politics and war whereas women were reproductive, and had their important role in the family home.

The phrase the Nazis used to put across what was expected for women was:

"Kinder, Kirche und Küche.",

This meant, 'children, church and cooking' - what the Nazis believed women should be limited to. Women in Nazi Germany found themselves being forced to stay at home. Within months of Hitler coming to power, many intelligent women doctors, civil servants were sacked. Soon women lawyers and teachers were dismissed. By 1939 few women had professional jobs.

The Nazi party attempted to stop women following fashions. Make-up and wearing trousers was frowned upon, and hair was 'expected' to be in certain styles. An arrangement in a bun or in plaits was permitted, but dyed or permed hair was not.

B Nazi propaganda poster illustrating every woman's duty for the Führer and Germany.

Slimming was discouraged because being slim was not thought to be good for childbearing. The only thing women were actively encouraged to do was to have children. Every 12th August, the birthday of Hitler's mother, the Motherhood Cross was awarded to the women who had the most children. In 1938, gold was awarded to those who had eight children, silver for those with six and bronze for those with four children! Some local authorities introduced rent, water or electricity rebates for large families.

The Nazi government even set up homes for unmarried mothers. These were called Lebensborn - Spring of Life - and recognised by a white flag with a red dot in the middle. These maternity homes were also brothels. An unmarried woman could go there with the aim of becoming pregnant and would be introduced to 'racially pure' SS men.

C A happy Nazi German family - a drawing from a propaganda poster



Hitler's Mein Kampf

“ In the education of girls in the German state the emphasis must be placed primarily on physical education; only after that should the spiritual and mental values be considered. The one goal always to be kept in mind when educating girls is that some day they aim to be mothers. ”

Women and the war

Once war preparations began in Germany in 1937, the Nazi policy changed. As the armed forces and weapons production grew, there was a shortage of workers.

Having encouraged women to be the 'perfect housewife' who reared 'pure' children for the greater good of Germany, the Nazis now had to persuade women to take jobs related to war production. Unsurprisingly, most women were not interested.

The Nazi government could not get enough women workers to cope with the demands of the wartime economy. The government's message promoting the 'natural' role of women during the peace of the 1930s resulted in the lack of workers during wartime.

Tasks

- ① How did Hitler try and encourage marriage as soon as he came to power?
- ② According to Nazi ideology, what roles did men and women have?
- ③ Using the information on this sheet, create a spider diagram clearly showing what women were expected to do, and what was not acceptable
- ④ Using your spider diagram, create a table illustrating differences between our society today and Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Start you table with: - [try to find at least four more comparisions]

Nazi Germany in the 1930s	Our society today
Women not expected to have 'professional' jobs	Women have freedom to choose a career

- ⑤ Why do you think Hitler placed such importance on the role of women?
- ⑥ What evidence is there to suggest that there were some contradictions in Nazi policies towards women? [Contradictions = things that don't make sense, that don't put across the same idea or don't agree]
- ⑦ "The Nazis were never really interested in the traditional family life". Using all the sources together with your previous answers, explain in no less than 100 words, your opinion of the statement. You will need to find evidence to both agree and disagree with the statement.