How Did the Nazis Gain Control over the Minds of Average Germans?

1) The Personal Popularity of Hitler Himself

a) The Hitler Myth:

- Hitler provided the people with the leadership they wanted since 1918.
- To many people he represented the *successor to the Kaiser*.
- This attitude was exploited through the *leadership cult*.
- The image of Hitler was of a man above party and politics and dedicated himself to the service of his people.
- Hitler sustained the regime and brought most people together through strong emotional appeal.
- By the late 1930s an estimated 90% of Germans admired Hitler but only a small minority rejected this 'Hitler Myth'
- In order to satisfy the people's desire for decisive leadership he had to be seen to be managing the people's woes and solving their problems.
- To be above politics and party, he had to become the leader of people's minds, hearts and souls.

Traditionally, the Third Reich has been portrayed as a totalitarian state, almost totally reliant on terror for its support and backing. However, this view is being challenged and a growing body of evidence (much of it from local studies) supports the view that Hitler's regime was in fact based on popular support and co-operation as well as on intrusive and arbitrary terror.

2) Use of Propaganda:

- Media fit snugly within Hitler's overall policy of *Gleichschaltung*, of co-ordination. In as much, the aim was not simply to control the cultural activities of the nation, but to control the nations relationship with culture.
- They used the latest technology such as loudspeakers, slide shows, films and even planes to fly Hitler and other dignitaries across Germany to spread the message.
- The 1933 election campaign saw Hitler flying across Germany (this was a unique and innovative tactic for electioneering.
- Traditional music was played at ceremonies and meetings, with lights and disciplined enthusiasm from the crowds. The message was one of harmony as much as unity and the words of speeches.

a) Radio

- The Reich Radio Company was set up in 1925, eight years before Hitler came to power in 1933.
- Radio, though, was given top priority.
- The spoken word was preferred to the written as a means of strengthening support for the regime.
- Radio enhanced the effectiveness of the Führer cult by making "direct" contact between Hitler and the German people.
- By 1939 over 70% of households in Germany had a radio.
- This was considered to be a great success.
- There was only one radio outlet, the ***Reich Broadcasting Board***. These radio sets could only tune into Nazi approved channels.

b) Film

- All films had to undergo a thorough censorship process.
- The **Reich Film Chamber** regulated the content of both German and Foreign films.
- One of the main propaganda uses of film was the use of newsreels **to announce important political and social developments** and to convey key Nazi ideas, eg films of the most famous producer in Germany Leni Reifensthal.
- Reifensthal produced the '*Triumph of the Will*' (1935) about the 1934 Nuremberg Rally and also '*Olympia*' (1937) about the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.
- Not all films were outright propaganda, but even those of pure entertainment had to be acceptable within the bounds of Nazi morality and ideology.
- In the main, ideas of mater-race, lebensraum and anti-Semitism were followed.

c) Press

- Ownership of newspapers
- Many newspapers were simply closed down after Jan 1933 and the number of state take-overs increased dramatically.
- Even though most newspapers became state-controlled, they allowed to keep their original

names. Control was extended gradually rather than suddenly.

- It was a treasonable offence to spread rumors and false news in Germany at this time – punishment was imprisonment and hard labour.

d) Culture

- The Nazis distrusted traditional culture, but never quite supplied an alternative. Their aim was **to make culture a way of transmitting Nazi values**.
- **Literature**
- The emphasis on preventive censorship.
- There were book burning ceremonies (May 1933) in the streets of Berlin and the removal of certain authors from library shelves (Marx, Thomas Mann, Einstein)
- The Nazis never supplied an "official" literature, although pro-war and militaristic novels were published and considered to be acceptable reading.
- Much fiction in rural settings was promoted as it reinforced the fantasy of the perfect German living for 'blood and soil' – it was great propaganda.

e) Visual Arts

- These were purged of all Jewish art
- There was the emphasis on 'Aryan' art, which portrayed the basic blood and soil values and stereotyped figures.
- Most of this art was mediocre and the public was not that interested in it.
- Art was brought to the public through local and national exhibitions.
- In 1937 there was even a contrasting "German Art" versus "Degenerate Art"
- Sculpture reflected stereotyped Nazi values – ie heroic German figures.

f) Music

- The Nazis purged everything they disliked.
- Approved drama included historical, light entertainment and 'blood and soil' stories.

g) Photographs and Posters

- Photographs were used to portray images of Hitler and posters were used to strengthen support for the Nazis.
- Before 1933, the regime made considerable use of political posters during the Weimar Republic.
- After 1933, a monopoly of resources meant that any image could be produced.
- Posters

h) Meetings and Rallies

- One of the most effective ways of getting support was through these mediums.
- They were carefully organized and the use of uniforms, flags and symbols created a sense of belonging.
- The highlight was always a speech by Hitler.

i) Festivals

- Various days celebrated as key dates in the Nazi year.
- Rallies were held and streets were festooned with flags and swastikas – eg Hitler's birthday; the day of Nazi seizure of power.

j) Sport

- Activities of the masses were organized by the Hitler Youth (HJ) and the DAF.
- Great Propaganda was made out of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.
- Hitler used this occasion as an opportunity to display the physical superiority of the Germans as a master race.

k) Architecture

- This was probably the most important artistic form of propaganda.
- Huge buildings would represent the '1000 Year Reich'.
- Hitler spent hours pouring over plans for new buildings and even new cities.
- Public buildings tended to be neo-classical in style and were on a vast scale.
- They represented the strength and authority of Nazism of Nazism.

l) Social Policy as Propaganda

- Much of Nazi social policy was aimed at changing people's attitudes and can be seen as an aspect of propaganda.
- The aim was to promote the idea of working together (***Volksgemeinschaft***).

- The **DAF** through ***Strength Through Joy*** and ***Beauty of Work*** provided facilities for German workers.
- People's car scheme (*Volkswagen*) represented co-ordination to help everyone.
- The Winter Relief Campaign – to provide extra help to the unemployed during the winter.
- One-Pot Meal – one Sunday each month. The money saved was donated to the winter relief fund

3) The Nazi Police State:

HOW WAS THE POLICE ORGANIZED?

- There were a variety of agencies important to policing the Nazi State:
- In as much we gain another impression of confusion and overlapping sections of power over time.

- Essentially there were four main groups:
  a) SS
  b) Gestapo
  c) SD
  d) RHSA

a) The SS:

- This was the main instrument of terror after the elimination of the SA after the Night of the long Knives
- Created in 1925 as Hitler's personal bodyguard, it became a mass organization with a variety of roles in spheres such as security, race, military and economy.
- It was led by **ReichsFührer SS Heinrich Himmler**.
- Shared a role with the Gestapo of rooting out State enemies but wider role developed for developing new Nazi racial community (and identity).
- Distinct by their black shirts and uniform and red and white Swastika armband.

b) The Gestapo

- This was originally the Prussian secret police, but eventually covered all German States.
- It was under SS control.
- After 1936 it was the most important security agent of the State.

c) The SD (Security Police)

- Established in 1931, this was the internal security/intelligence service of the SS.
- It was headed by **Heydrich**.
- Their role was to report on public meetings, public feelings, conversation, social deviants and clandestine political activities.
- Their reports are extremely valuable to the historian.

d) RHSA (Reich Main Security Dept)

- ·Created in 1939 and designed to draw together functions within State and party under one group.

HOW POWERFUL WAS THE GESTAPO?

- Traditionally, it was thought to be all-powerful and to have held sway over millions of Germans.
- However, historians now argue that this traditional picture is not in fact accurate.
- From the study of Gestapo operations at a local level, it now seems that the ***power of the Gestapo rested on popular consent rather than terror.***

Several Weaknesses of the Gestapo have Come to Light:

(a) It lacked the personnel necessary to enact order effectively
(b) Major towns like Frankfort, Hanover, Bremen had under 50 officers each
(c) Dusseldorf (population of 4m) had 231 officers.
(d) There were only 30,000 officers for the whole country.
(e) Most Gestapo officers were recruited from local police and not, as assume, from the SS.
(f) Most SS recruits were office workers and not field agents.

- The Gestapo officials were increasingly bogged down in paperwork in a "....*thoroughly bureaucratic system....*"

However,

- The **image of power** served to intimidate potential opposition.
- **Its poor resources were enhanced by public co-operation**. Local studies have shown that over half, and in some cases 80% of investigations were due to voluntary denunciations inspired by personal rather than political motives i.e. love of Nazism, political motives, etc.
- **The Reich remained a brutal state**. There were no basic individual freedoms within the state. Thousands were in concentration camps, imprisoned, sterilized and eventually murdered. The courts offered individuals no protection from the secret police.
- "*.....Never before, in no other land and at no other time, had an organization attained such a comprehensive penetration (of society), possessed such power and reached such a degree of completeness in its ability to arouse terror and horror, as well as in its actual effectiveness.....*"