

Hitler and the Third Reich

Adolf Hitler was not a German. He was born at Braunau am Inn, in Austria (across the border from Bavaria) on 20th April 1889.

He was the third son of the third marriage of a minor Austrian customs official, Alois Hitler.

Hitler, however, always regarded himself as being German.

As Hitler wrote in the 1920s, in his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle):

Today it seems to me providential that fate should have chosen Braunau am Inn as my birthplace. For this little town lies on the boundary between two German states which we of the younger generation at least have made it our life-work to reunite by every means at our disposal. . . This little city on the border seems to me the symbol of a great mission."

The Hitler family moved home frequently during Adolf's childhood.

By the time Hitler was 15, he had lived at seven different addresses and attended five different schools.

The constant changing of schools may have contributed to the fact that Hitler did not do very well academically. Hitler blamed his teachers. On four separate occasions in 1942, Hitler said as follows:

"When I think of the men who were my teachers, I realise that most of them were slightly mad. The men who could be regarded as good teachers were exceptional. It's tragic to think that such people have the power to bar a young man's way."

[3rd March 1942]

"I have the most unpleasant recollections of the teachers who taught me. Their external appearance exuded uncleanness; their collars were unkempt. . . They were the product of a proletariat denuded of all personal independence of thought, distinguished by unparalleled ignorance and most admirably fitted to become pillars of an effete system of government which, thank God, is now a thing of the past."

[12th April 1942]

"When I recall my teachers at school, I realise that half of them were abnormal. . . We pupils of old Austria were brought up to respect old people and women. But on our professors we had no mercy; they were our natural enemies. The majority of them were somewhat mentally deranged, and quite a few of them ended their days as honest-to-God lunatics! . . . I was in particular bad odour with the teachers. I should not have the slightest aptitude for foreign languages — though I might have, had not the teacher been a congenital idiot. I could not bear the sight of him."

[29th August 1942]

"Our teachers were absolute tyrants. They had no sympathy with youth; their one object was to stuff our brains and turn us into erudite apes like themselves. If any pupil showed the slightest trace of originality, they persecuted him relentlessly, and the only model pupils whom I ever got to know have all been failures in after-life."

[7th September
1942]

Hitler's dislike of educated people remained with him all his life.

However, there was one teacher who inspired him — Dr. Leopold Poetsch, his history teacher. Said Hitler, in *Mein Kampf* :

"An old gentleman, kind but at the same time firm, he was able not only to hold our attention by his dazzling eloquence but to carry us away with him. Even today I think back with genuine emotion on this grey-haired old man who, by the fire of his words, sometimes made us forget the present; who, as if by magic, transported us into times past and, out of the millennial mists of time, transformed dry historical facts into vivid reality. There we sat, often aflame with enthusiasm, sometimes even moved to tears. . . he

used our budding national fanaticism as a means of educating us, frequently appealing to our sense of national honour. This teacher made history my favourite subject. And indeed, though he had no such intention, it was then that I became a young revolutionary.”

Clearly, Dr. Poetsch asserted an early and deep influence on Hitler’s nationalist fervour.

At the age of eleven, Adolf fell out with his father over his father’s intention that the young Hitler should become a civil servant.

Hitler told his father that he wanted to become an artist.

Hitler later claimed that, as a consequence of his father’s demand for him to become a civil servant, he stopped studying at school.

“I thought, said Hitler, “that once my father saw how little progress I was making at high school he would let me devote myself to my dream, whether he liked it or not.”

Indeed, his dream to become an artist dominated Hitler’s teens and early manhood. But by this time other factors if

Hitler’s future ideology had already formed.

As William L. Shirer notes:

“Although Hitler was determined to become an artist, preferably a painter or at least an architect, he was already obsessed with politics at the age of sixteen. By then he had developed a violent hatred for the Habsburg monarchy and all the non-German races in the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire over which it ruled, and an equally violent love for everything German. At sixteen he had become what he was to remain until his dying breath: a fanatical German nationalist.”
[Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich*, p. 15]

In 1906, just after Hitler’s seventeenth birthday, his now widowed mother provided him with the funds to spend a two-month stay in Vienna.

Whilst there, he enquired about entering the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts.

The following year, aged 18, he took the Academy’s entrance examination and failed.

The following year, his preliminary drawings were considered to be so poor that he was not admitted to the examination.

A few days before Christmas 1908, the nineteen year old Hitler’s mother died.

Hitler, who had never done a day’s work in his life, was now faced with having to make a living for himself.

Accordingly, he set off for Vienna.

As Hitler told it:

“With a suitcase full of clothes and underwear in my hand and an indomitable will in my heart, I set out for Vienna. I too hoped to wrest from fate what my father had accomplished fifty years before; I too hoped to become ‘something’ — but in no case a civil servant.”

Hitler in Vienna

The years 1909–13 were years of utter misery and destitution for the young Adolf. He called it ‘the saddest period of his life’.

Said Hitler (in *Mein Kampf*):

“Hunger was then my faithful bodyguard; he never left me for a moment and partook of all I had. . . My life was a continual struggle with this pitiless friend.”

Hunger never forced Hitler to get a permanent job though! He preferred to take occasional jobs when necessity arose.

He sometimes shovelled snow, beat carpets, carried bags outside railway stations, and worked as a building labourer. Hitler also utilised his artistic talents by painting scenes of Vienna.

As William L. Shirer notes:

"Probably hundreds of these pitiful pieces were sold by Hitler to the petty traders to ornament a wall, to dealers who used them to fill empty picture frames on display and to furniture makers who sometimes tacked them to the backs of cheap sofas and chairs after a fashion in Vienna in those days. Hitler could also be more commercial. He often drew posters for shopkeepers advertising such products as Teddy's Perspiration Powder, and there was one, perhaps turned out to make a little money at Christmas time, depicting Santa Claus selling brightly-coloured candles, and another showing St. Stephen's Gothic spire . . . rising out of a mountain of soap cakes."
[Shirer, The Rise and Fall of The Third Reich, p. 19]

But Hitler did not reapply to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts; nor to the Vienna School of Architecture.

Nevertheless, all his life Hitler considered himself to be an artist.

According to Hitler, he spent all his free time reading.

Said Hitler (in Mein Kampf):

"Vienna was and remained for me the hardest, though most thorough, school of my life. . . In this period there took shape within me a world picture and a philosophy which became the granite foundation of all my acts. In addition to what I then created, I have had to learn little; and I have had to alter nothing."

What then did Hitler learn in Vienna?

The Political Influences on Hitler in Vienna

Although Hitler played no direct part in Austrian politics, he took an avid interest in the fortunes of Austria's three main political parties. They were:

1. The Social Democrats
2. The Christian Socialists
3. The Pan-German Nationalists

Let's examine them in closer detail:

1. The Social Democrats

Hitler hated the Social Democrats, but he learnt from them. He detested their hostility towards the unification of Austria and Germany. He hated the party's "disgraceful courting of the Slavic 'comrade'". Hitler hated the 'non-German' Austrians; particularly the Slavs and Czechs. However, he admired their techniques; especially their use of mass marches and propaganda. Both were to become essential elements of the future Nazi party.

2. The Christian Socialists

Hitler admired the leader of the Christian Socialists, Dr. Karl Lueger — the burgomaster (mayor) of Vienna. For Hitler, Lueger knew just how to build a mass party centred on the lower middle classes. Like Hitler, Lueger understood the power of oratory (public speaking) in winning mass support and the importance of propaganda. However, Hitler did not like Lueger's loyalty to the Habsburg monarchy, his disinterest in a unified Greater Germany (which would include Austria), his Roman Catholicism, and his failure to adopt 'hard-line' anti-Semitism (hatred of the Jews).

3. The Pan-German Nationalists

Most of all, Hitler admired the Pan-German Nationalist Party founded by Georg Ritter von Schoenerer. It was violently nationalist, anti-Habsburg, anti-Semitic, anti-socialist, anti-church, and wanted a Greater or Pan-Germany to be created. Indeed, the Pan-German Nationalist Party favoured most of the things which Hitler's National Socialist Party would in the future. However, its central weakness, according to Hitler, was that it failed to appreciate the 'importance of the social problem'.

The Making of an Anti-Semite

According to Hitler, it was during his stay in Vienna (1909–13) that he grew to hate the Jews.

In Linz, Hitler's home town, there was not a large Jewish population.

Said Hitler in *Mein Kampf* :

"At home I do not remember having heard the word ['Jew'] during my father's lifetime."

There was a Jewish boy at Linz High School, "but we didn't give the matter any thought...I even took them for Germans."

"Then", says Hitler, "I came to Vienna."

One day, recounts Hitler, whilst strolling through the inner city:

"I suddenly encountered an apparition in a black caftan and black sidelocks. 'Is this a Jew?' was my first thought. For, to be sure, they had not looked like that in Linz. I observed the man furtively and cautiously, but the longer I stared at this foreign face, scrutinising feature for feature, the more my first question assumed a new form: 'Is this a German?'"

Hitler then began to read the masses of anti-Semitic literature which abounded in Vienna at that time.

NOTE: Vienna was very much a cosmopolitan city (made up of many races). In addition to Czechs, Poles, Slavs, and so forth, Vienna contained a 9% Jewish population. In itself, this was not large. But popular hostility towards the Jews was not eased by the fact that they monopolised 27.5% of university places.

Hitler began to notice the Jews more and more.

"Wherever I went", said Hitler, "I began to see Jews, and the more I saw the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity...Later, I often grew sick to the stomach, from the smell of these caftan-wearers."

Apart from his physical dislike of the Jews, Hitler soon discovered a 'moral stain' on this 'chosen people'.

"Was there any form of filth", asked Hitler, "without at least one Jew involved in it? If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light — a kike!"

Hitler held that the Jews in Vienna were responsible for the city's prostitution and the white slave traffic.

"When for the first time", relates Hitler, "I recognised the Jew as the cold-hearted, shameless and calculating director of this revolting vice traffic in the scum of the big city, a cold shudder ran down my back."

Mein Kampf is sprinkled with lurid allusions to the sexual violation of young Christian girls by uncouth Jewish seducers.

Hitler talks of the "nightmare vision of the seduction of hundreds of thousands of girls by repulsive, crooked-legged Jew bastards".

Indeed, Hitler cited the Jewish problem as one of the factors which made him leave Vienna.

"My inner revulsion towards the Hapsburg State steadily grew...I was repelled by the conglomeration of races which the capital showed me, repelled by this whole mixture of Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Serbs, and Croats, and everywhere the eternal mushroom of humanity — Jews, and more Jews. To me the giant city seemed the embodiment of racial desecration...The longer I lived in this city the more my hatred grew for the foreign mixture of peoples which had begun to corrode this old site of German culture...For all these reasons a longing rose stronger and stronger in me to go at last whither since my childhood secret desires and secret love had drawn me."

[*Mein Kampf*]

At some time after May 1913 Hitler left Vienna for Munich in southern Germany (Bavaria).

NOTE: August Kubizek, a boyhood friend of Hitler's in Linz, casts doubt upon the truth of Hitler's statements regarding the role of Vienna in turning the future Nazi leader into an anti-Semite. Said Kubizek:

"His anti-Semitism was already pronounced... Hitler was already a confirmed anti-Semite when he went to Vienna. And although his experiences in Vienna might have deepened this feeling, they certainly did not give birth to it."

[Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew*, p. 50]

Hitler and the Great War

When Hitler arrived in Germany, from Austria, in 1913, he arrived in a country that was only 42 years old (Germany was not formed into a single political nation until 1871).

During these 42 years, Germany had been transformed from a 'jigsaw collection' of small independent states into a modern industrial nation. She had overtaken Britain in the production of iron and steel and had one of the finest armies in the world (over a million men).

Some fifteen months after Hitler arrived in Munich war broke out. When war was declared on 1st August 1914, Hitler was elated.

As he said in *Mein Kampf* :

"Even today I am not ashamed to say that, overpowered by stormy enthusiasm, I fell down on my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart."

On 3rd August 1914 Hitler joined the army.

He arrived at the front in October 1914, after scarcely 3 months' basic training.

Hitler was a brave soldier. He was twice decorated for bravery. He was awarded the Iron Cross (Second Class) in December 1914 and the Iron Cross (First Class) in August 1918.

In October 1916, Hitler was wounded in the leg at the Battle of the Somme. He was hospitalised in Germany and returned to action in March 1917.

He fought in the Battle of Arras and the third Battle of Ypres that summer.

His regiment was in the thick of the fighting in the last desperate German offensive of spring and summer of 1918. On the night of 13th October 1918, he was caught in a British gas attack during the last Battle of Ypres. Hitler was blinded.

It was whilst recovering from this attack at a military hospital in Pasewalk, a small Pomeranian town North-east of

Berlin, that Corporal Hitler heard the news that Germany was to sign the armistice. He was heartbroken.

Said Hitler:

Everything went black again before my eyes; I tottered and groped my way back to the ward, threw myself on my bunk, and dug my burning head into my blanket and pillow... So it had all been in vain. In vain all the sacrifices and privations;... in vain the hours in which, with mortal fear clutching our hearts, we nevertheless did our duty; in vain the death of two millions who died... had they died for this?... Did all this happen only so that a gang of wretched criminals could lay hands on the Fatherland?"

[*Mein Kampf*]

When Hitler later became a politician he did much to create the myth that Germany need not have surrendered; that Germany had been betrayed by these 'November criminals'. According to Hitler, Germany had been 'stabbed-in-the-back'. It was all part of a Jewish/Communist conspiracy, said Hitler.

And many people believed him.

The Formation of the Nazi Party

Hitler takes over the DAP

The 25 Points

1. The very first point demanded the creation of a greater or pan-Germany, It stated: "We demand the union of all Germans, on the basis of the right of the self-determination of peoples, to form a Great Germany."
2. "We demand equality of rights for the German People in its dealing with other nations, and abolition of the Peace Treaties of Versailles and St. Germain."
3. "We demand land and territory (colonies) for the nourishment of our people and for settling out surplus population". In other words, the Nazis wanted Lebensraum (or 'living-space').
4. "None but members of the nation may be citizens of the State. None but those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. No Jew, therefore, may be a member of the nation."
5. "Anyone who is not a citizen of the State may live in Germany only as a guest and must be regarded as being subject to the Alien laws."
6. Point six stated that the right of voting on the leadership and legislation of the nation was to be enjoyed only by members of the nation.
7. "We demand that the State shall make its first duty to promote the industry and livelihood of the citizens of the State. If it is not possible to nourish the entire population of the State, foreign nationals (non-citizens of the State) must be excluded from the Reich."
8. "All further non-German immigration must be prevented. We demand that all non-Germans who entered German subsequently to 2nd August 1914 shall be required forthwith to depart from the Reich."
9. "All citizens of the State shall possess equal rights and duties."
10. It must be the first duty of every citizen of the State to perform mental or physical work. The activities of the individual must not clash with the interests of the whole, but must proceed within the framework of the community and must be for the general good."
11. Point 11 demanded the abolition of incomes 'unearned by work' (through interest).
12. "... personal enrichment through war must be regarded as a crime against the nation. We demand therefore the ruthless confiscation of all war profits."
13. "We demand the nationalisation of all businesses which have (hitherto) been amalgamated (into Trusts)."
14. "We demand that there shall be profit sharing in the great industries."
15. "We demand a generous development of provision for old age."
16. "We demand the creation and maintenance of a healthy middle class, immediate communalisation of wholesale warehouses, and their lease at a low rate to small traders, and that the most careful consideration shall be shown to all small purveyors to the State, the provinces, or smaller communities."
17. "We demand a land-reform suitable to our national requirements, the passing of a law for the confiscation without compensation of land for communal purposes, the abolition of interest on mortgages, and the prohibition of all speculation in land."
18. "We demand ruthless war upon all those whose activities are injurious to the common interest. Common criminals against the nation, usurers, profiteers, &c., must be punished by death, whatever their creed or race."
19. "We demand that the Roman Law, which serves the materialistic world order, shall be replaced by a German common law."
20. Point 20 demanded educational reform. "Directly the mind begins to develop the schools must aim at teaching the pupil to understand the idea of the State" (State sociology).

21. "The State must apply itself to raising the standard of health in the nation. . . and increasing bodily efficiency by legally obligatory gymnastics and sports, and by extensive support of clubs engaged in the physical training of the young."
22. "We demand the abolition of mercenary troops and the formation of a national army."
23. "We demand legal warfare against conscious political lies and their dissemination in the press". In order to create a 'German' national press, the Nazis demanded:
 - (a) That all editors and contributors to newspapers who used the German language be 'members of the nation'.
 - (b) That special permission from the State be granted before non-German-language newspapers be allowed to appear.
 - (c) That non-Germans should be prohibited by law from participating financially (or influencing) German newspapers. The Nazis also demanded in Point 23 "the legal prosecution of all tendencies in art and literature of a kind likely to disintegrate out life as a nation".
 - (d) Point 24 called for the toleration of religion as long as it did not "militate against the morality and moral sense of the German race."
 - (e) Point 25 demanded the "creation of a strong central power of the Reich. Unconditional authority of the politically central Parliament over the entire Reich."

As we have seen, the 25 Points were a curious mixture of nationalist, 'socialist', and anti-Semitic aims. The Nazis promised to help the middle classes who felt in danger of becoming 'proletarianised' by a Marxist Communist takeover. Another necessary condition was the Nazi insistence of the subordination of the individual to the Nationalist Socialist State.

Fundamental Programme of the National Socialist German Workers Party — Grundsätzliches Programm der nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiter-Partei

Translation

Fundamental Programme of the national socialist German Workers Party.

The German Workers Party Programme is an unalterable programme. Having achieved the aims put forward in the Programme, the leaders refuse to draw up new ones merely to facilitate the continuation of the Party by artificially heightening the discontent of the masses.

1. We demand the unification of all Germans in a greater German Reich on the basis of the peoples' right to self-determination.
 2. We demand equal rights for the German people vis à vis other nations and the abolition of the Peace Treaties made in Versailles and St. Germain.
 3. We demand land and soil (colonies) for the feeding of our people and the settlement of our surplus population.
 4. Only racial comrades may be German citizens. Only those of German blood may be racial comrades, regardless of religious denomination. So no Jew can become a racial comrade....
 7. We demand that the state should commit itself first and foremost to protect the ability of the citizen to survive and earn an income. If it becomes impossible to feed the entire population, then foreign nationals (non-citizens) should be deported from the Reich.
 8. Any further immigration of non-Germans is to be avoided. We demand that all non-Germans who have resided in Germany since 2nd August 1914, and who are therefore immigrants, be compelled to leave the Reich immediately...
 10. The first duty of every citizen must be to work, either intellectually or physically. . .
- That is why we demand:**
11. The abolition of unearned income.

The Breaking of Interest-Slavery.

12. Because of the dreadful sacrifice of blood and wealth that every war demands of the people, self-aggrandisement from war must be regarded as a crime against the people. Therefore we demand the confiscation of all war-profits.
13. We demand that the state takes over all those businesses (Trusts) that are under workers' control.
14. We demand profit-sharing in large concerns.
15. We demand a generous increase in old age pensions.
16. We demand the creation and preservation of a healthy middle class (Mittelstand). Immediate municipalisation of the large department stores and the renting out of their premises to small traders, who must be given prime consideration in contracts for supplying central, regional and local government...
18. We demand a ruthless fight against all those who harm the interests of the general public through their activities. Common thieves, usurers, black-marketeers &c. are to be punished with the death sentence, regardless of religious denomination or race...
24. We demand the freedom of religious worship. . . The Party as such, represents the viewpoint of a positive Christianity. . . It fights against the spirit of Jewish materialism within and outside of us. .

The leaders of the Party promise that they will totally commit themselves to carry out the above points, if necessary, at the risk of their own lives.

Munich 24th February 1920