**Unit Essential Question:** To what extent can poor economic conditions lead to radical politics?

**Aim:** How did fascists leaders maintain control over their populations?

**ADOLF HITLER AND HIS RISE TO POWER**

Adolf Hitler tended to gain his support from the lower middle class - the little men – the clerks, the shopkeepers, the minor civil servants. These were the people whose ambitions had been frustrated by the wartime economy. These were the people who were self-taught but could not get ahead. Finally, these were the people who came out of the Great War demoralized by German defeat in 1918.

Hitler was fanatically nationalistic. Nazism thrived on the defeat of WWI as well as the national sense of humiliation shared by all Germans due to the Versailles Treaty’s war guilt clause. There is little doubt that Nazism made its appeal to the emotions of a society devastated by war. Capitalism, communism, the Jews, the weak, and the insane were all denounced. Hitler demanded a strong government capable of voicing the national will and leading Germany back to its place in the sun.

Hitler’s storm troopers specialized in brutal violence, His party borrowed heavily from the Russian Bolsheviks for its organization. And this was important for in such a party as the Nazis, organization was everything. And then there was Hitler’s social Darwinism – that life was a struggle and that the weak will perish. For Hitler, the Jews were the scapegoat, blamed for everything. Everything that had anything to do with capitalism, democracy, communism, modern art and modern literature and a hundred of other things was all part of a Jewish conspiracy. Stalin shared a similar disposition. The Jews were identified with intellectualism, while the German or Aryan was identified with the cultural and national soil – the “*Volk*” – the people – the pure breed.

Hitler learned his anti-Semitism in Austria were he developed his ideas of *Lebensraum (living space)* and the master race. Anti-Semitism was common in Russia and Eastern Europe where pogroms against the Jews already had a lengthy history by the 1920s and 30s. In fact, anti-Semitism in various forms had an extremely long history. In Germany, as compared with other areas of eastern and central Europe, there was no Jewish problem, the Jewish problem only became real after Hitler and the Nazis invented it.

The Nazi and Fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s were profoundly anti-intellectual. Fascism came to be led by the brutal, the ignorant and the criminal – men who were clever at exploiting the irrationality of the masses. As keen students of modern propaganda, the Fascist and Nazis borrowed heavily from the great mass movements of the age (radio, film, print). The Fascists employed the language of religious conversion, freely using would like faith, salvation, miracle, rebirth, and sacrifice.

In general, the Fascist and Nazis elevated all that was horrific in pre-war and inter-war European culture. They were the evil spirits of western civilization, They did not create the evil – they merely exploited it. They heighten it. Fascism was not restricted to Italy or to Germany alone. Fascism was a European phenomenon which developed as a reaction to the perceived failure of western-style democracies and industrial capitalism. From France, Belgium and Romania to Austria, England and the United States, Fascism did manage to receive some support. Fascism was profoundly conservative. Its ideology glorified the county over the city, stressed blind patriotism, the family, traditional value and old customs. Watching Hitler’s chanting crowds, and mass meetings, one could only get the idea that some king of madness had come over Germany. In actual fact, most Germans cared less for Fascist or Nazi propaganda, they liked Hitler because he got things gone, solved unemployment and restored the pride of all Germans.

By 1928, the Nazi Party had 100,000 members and Hitler had absolute control, The Nazis were still a marginal political group but world events in 1929 and 1930 produced a new mania for the Hitler program. Unemployment stood at 1.3 million in 1929. The following year, it had risen to 5 million while industrial production in 1932 fell by more that 50%. In that same year, 43% of all Germans were unemployed. Hitler now began to promise Germany economic salvation as well as military and political restitution for the “war-guilt clause” specified at Versailles. He focused on the middle and lower middle classes- the office workers, civil servant and teachers. These were the people who had barely survived through the Depression.

The Nazis also made their appeal to the German Youth. Hitler and his aides were, in general, much younger than other leading politicians. In 1931, for instance, 40% of all Nazis were under thirty years of age, 70% were under 40. National recovery, rapid change and personal advancement formed the main appeal of the Nazi party. By 1932, Hitler had gained the support of key people in the army and in big business. These individuals though they could use Hitler for their own financial interests. So they accepted Hitler’s demand to join the government only if he became Chancellor. Since the government was a coalition consisting of two Nazis and nine conservatives, they reasoned that Hitler could be used and controlled. And so, on January 30th, 1933, Hitler legally became the Chancellor of Germany.

Hitler moved quickly to establish a dictatorship. He used terror to gain power while maintaining an air of legality throughout. He called for new elections to Parliament and then had the Parliament building burned to the ground. He blamed the Communists for this act thus helping to get them out of the way and out of any possible public following. He convinced President Hindenburg to sign an emergency act that abolished the freedom of speech and abolished the freedom of assembly. On March 23, 1933, the Nazis pushed the Enabling Act through Parliament, thus making Hitler dictator for a period of four years. Communist Party members were arrested, the Catholic Center Party withdrew all opposition and the Social Democratic Party was dissolved. So it was that Germany, like Soviet Russia under Stalin, became a one party state.

In the economic sphere, all strikes were made illegal and unions were abolished. In the cultural sphere, the press now fell under total control. Blacklisting became the rule, books were burned, modern art was prohibited and anti-intellectual became the rule of the day.

Hitler promised the German people work and bread and he delivered both. Hitler gave the people what they wanted the most. He launched a massive public works program to pull Germany out of the Depression. Superhighways, office buildings, huge stadiums and public buildings were constructed at a rapid pace. In January 1937, unemployment stood at 7 million. 12 months later it had fallen to 1 million and by 1938, Germany witnessed a shortage of labor. The standard of living increased by 20% and business profits were finally increasing.

Hitler had accomplished something for Germany and the German people. For those Germans who were not Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, communists, liberals, non-Germans, or insane or weak, Hitler’s government meant greater opportunity and great equality.

Although economic recovery and increased opportunity won Hitler support, Nazism was totally guided by two main ideas: Lebensraum and race. As Germany regained economic strength and built up its military, Hitler formed alliances with other dictators and began to expand. Meanwhile, western Europe simply sat back and tried to appease Hitler in order to avoid another World War.

"Lecture 9 - The Age of Anxiety in the 1920s ." History Guide: Lectures of the 20th Century . Accessed January 20, 2012. Last modified August 2009. http://www.historyguide.org/europe/lecture9.html.

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**Questions Based on the Reading**

**Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences and in your own words!!!**

1. Who did Hitler gain his support from? Why did he gain his support from these people?

2. Why did Hitler use the defeat of WWI as a unifying factor to gain support?

3. What were the main beliefs of Hitler’s Nazism? Discuss three of them.

1. How did Hitler use propaganda to gain support?
2. What did highly important individuals believe would happen if they appointed Hitler as Chancellor?

Where they correct? Explain your answer.

1. Why did Germans support Hitler? Use specific examples.
2. Compare the similarities and differences between the rise of Hitler and the rise of Lenin.