

KS3 History

Lesson 3 of an enquiry of 4 lessons.

# Persecution in the Soviet Union and Germany

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# Persecution in Germany and the Soviet Union

In totalitarian states, such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, their leaders wanted to control every aspect of people's lives. One surprising method used to gain greater control was to pursue some people unfairly or cruelly because of their race, religion or beliefs. This is known as **persecution**. Hitler and Stalin persecuted multiple groups in Germany and the Soviet Union to achieve two main aims. Firstly, to create fear across the whole population, therefore causing most people to **conform** to the leader's laws. Secondly, to unite everybody that was not part of these groups.



# Nazi Germany

It was common for the leader to blame the persecuted groups for the state's troubles or to suggest they were linked to an external enemy. As the Nazis wanted to make the German nation strong, they began to **persecute** groups of people that they believed threatened its stability. The largest group to be persecuted by the Nazis were Jewish people. Hitler developed his policy towards Jewish people in the 1920s when he wrote the Nazi Party's programme. Once in power, Hitler began to introduce policies to persecute the Jews and unite the population against them.



# Nazi Germany

The Nazis passed laws to legalise the persecution of Jewish people. During the 1930s laws were introduced which excluded Jewish people from positions of power. In 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were passed stating that Jewish people were not German citizens, did not have basic civil rights and were forbidden from marrying Germans. In 1938, the police and ordinary citizens attacked **synagogues** and over 1000 Jewish properties in an event known as *Kristallnacht* or the November Pogrom. After this event, many Jewish people were arrested and sent to concentration camps. The persecution of Jewish people in Germany increased Nazi power. As a result of the repressive measures imposed on the Jewish population, many German people were united against them and increasingly conformed to Hitler's racial policy.



# The Soviet Union

Stalin also attempted to gain greater control by persecuting groups of individuals who opposed his policies in the Soviet Union. These people were referred to as 'class enemies'. During the late 1920s, Stalin began the process of **collectivisation**, and branded anybody who refused to follow this policy as a class enemy or **kulak**. They would be arrested, sent to the **gulag**, or even shot for refusing to follow orders. The kulaks were slightly wealthier peasants who did not want to give up their land or move onto large, state-owned farms. However, in practice, Party officials could label anyone they disliked as 'a kulak'. The purpose of identifying kulaks as class enemies was to create fear amongst the peasant population and force people to follow Stalin's policies. In December 1929, Stalin announced that he wanted to **liquidate** the kulaks as a class of people.



# The Soviet Union

Stalin recruited 25,000 party **activists** to force peasants to collectivise and to remove kulaks. They were supported by the police and the military who forced kulaks to give up their land and equipment. The activists waged class warfare in a process known as 'dekulakisation'. In each region, the activists were given a number of kulaks to arrest, whether that many existed or not. Stalin issued a law that gave the activists power to use 'necessary measures' against the kulaks, meaning whole families or villages could be sent to the gulag where they faced extremely harsh conditions. During this period, Stalin aimed to unite the other peasants against the kulaks, thus giving him greater control over the countryside. In some areas this was effective and many poorer peasants **denounced** their neighbours as kulaks. By the end of the collectivisation process, up to 10 million people had been deported to labour camps and Stalin claimed that collectivisation had been successful.



# Glossary

**Activists:** people who try to cause social or political change

**Collectivisation:** the process of forcing peasants to move onto large, state-owned farms

**Denounce:** to declare others are guilty or in the wrong

**Gulag:** the system of labour camps in the Soviet Union

**Kulak:** a wealthier peasant

**Liquidate:** to kill someone



# Glossary

**Persecution:** to treat someone unfairly or cruelly because of their race, religion or beliefs

**Synagogue:** a Jewish place of worship





# Comprehension questions

1. Name one group who were persecuted by the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s.
2. Why were the kulaks viewed as a class enemy by Stalin in the 1930s?
3. Describe one reason why totalitarian leaders used persecution.
4. Describe one method used by Stalin to persecute the kulaks in the Soviet Union.
5. Challenge question - Why did ordinary citizens denounce their neighbours in the Soviet Union?



**This source is an extract from a speech made by Stalin to students on December 27 1930. Read through the source and answer the questions on the next slide in full sentences.**

*'Now we are able to carry on a determined offensive against the kulaks, to break their resistance, to eliminate them as a class and substitute for their output the output of the collective farms... Now, the kulaks are being expropriated [removed] by the masses of poor and middle peasants themselves... who are putting solid collectivisation into practice.*

*Consequently it is now ridiculous and foolish to discourse on [discuss] the expropriation of the kulaks. You do not lament the loss of the hair of one who has been beheaded.*

*There is another question... whether the kulaks should be permitted to join the collective farms. Of course not, for they are sworn enemies of the collective-farm movement.*



# Source activity

**Read through the source and answer these questions in full sentences.**

1. Using the source, quote a short extract which tells us who Stalin wanted to remove as a class in the countryside.
2. Using your own knowledge, why did Stalin create a class enemy in the countryside?
3. Using your own knowledge and the source, describe how Stalin treated his class enemies.

**Class enemy** - a term used to describe people who opposed Stalin and his policies.

