

History, Weimar and Nazi Germany

Lesson 30

How far did the lives of German workers improve after 1933?

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The German Labour Front (DAF)

Normally **trade unions** helped to protect the workers. However, **Hitler** believed that trade unions supported the **Communist Party**. So, in 1933, the Nazi government banned trade unions and set up the **German Labour Front (DAF)** instead. This was run by **Dr Robert Ley** and had **20 million workers** join within the first two years. The DAF was in charge of setting out the **rights of workers** in the workplace, the maximum **length of the working week** and the **minimum pay**. This could be viewed as a positive as the DAF monitored employers and working conditions. However, the DAF would **typically agree with the employer** during a dispute rather than the workers. Weekly average **wages did increase between 1932 and 1939, from 86 marks a week to 109 marks a week**. The workers had also **lost their right to negotiate improvements in pay and conditions** with their employers. Under the DAF, the maximum length of the **working week actually increased by approximately 6 hours per week**. The DAF also had the **power to punish workers who disrupted the workplace** if their actions stopped or slowed down production. This meant they could not strike or leave their job without permission.



Strength through Joy (KdF)

In 1933, a **section of the DAF** was created which was called **Strength through Joy (KdF)** to **make German workers happier**. The theory was that happy workers would be harder workers as they would see work as a way to get benefits which would give them a better and happier life. One way of improving life of German workers was to **provide leisure activities. These included sports events, films, theatre shows and outings and trips abroad**. These activities were provided at a **low cost** to allow workers opportunities which were sometimes only available to the wealthy in Germany. Those who worked the hardest could be rewarded with a foreign holiday or a cruise on a KdF ship. **Few achieved this though**. By 1936 there were **35 million members of the KdF but only 700,000 people had been rewarded with a holiday or cruise**. Whereas activities such as going to the theatre, museums and sports events were attended by a larger number of people. For example, in Berlin between **1933 and 1939, 11 million people attended 21,000 theatre performances provided as part of the KdF scheme**.



Hitler was keen to expand **car ownership** and encouraged the **development of a new car**. Therefore, in 1938, the **Volkswagen** ('people's car') scheme was introduced by the KdF. As part of this scheme workers paid **5 marks each week** from their wages to **eventually own a new Volkswagen car**. The weekly money provided by the workers went towards setting up factories to make the cars. However, by the time war broke out, **not a single person had received a car** and **none of the money was refunded**. In 1939 factories which were producing the **Volkswagen** changed their production to military vehicles, weapons and ammunition needed for war.



Beauty of Labour (SdA)

This was another section of the DAF. The main role of the **SdA** was to improve working conditions. For example, it **organised the building of canteens, showers, better toilet facilities, swimming pools and sports facilities** as well as **better heating** and **improved lighting in workplaces**. However, workers were expected to make these improvements in their **own free time, after work hours** and with **no extra pay**. Some employers even **threatened to fire people** who did not volunteer. This made the scheme less popular with many workers.



Glossary

Autobahn - A German motorway.

Beauty of Labour (SdA) - Created to improve the facilities within the workplace such as building canteens, improving toilet and shower facilities.

German Labour Front (DAF) - Created in the place of trade unions after trade unions were banned. The DAF focused on working conditions, working hours and pay.

Strength through Joy (KdF) - This scheme focused on making workers happy by giving them benefits such as leisure activities and holidays in order to make them value work.

Volkswagen - Means 'people's car' in German.



Comprehension Questions

1. What was the role of the German Labour Front (DAF)?
2. What happened to the average weekly wage for workers between 1932 and 1939?
3. How did Strength through Joy (KdF) try to improve the lives of German workers?
4. Why were some workers unhappy with the Beauty of Labour (SdA) scheme?
5. **Challenge question:** How far do you agree that the lives of German workers did improve after 1933?

You could use the following sentences to help structure your answer

It could be argued that the lives of German workers did improve after 1933. This is because...

However, it could be argued that the lives of German workers did not improve after 1933. For example...

Overall, I mostly agree/disagree that...

