

## MINI BIOGRAPHIES IN PRE HITLER GERMANY

Read the following mini biographies of people from various “walks of life” who lived during the pre-Hitler Nazi period (1919-1933).

**Choose one person** and assume you are this person. Explain your frustrations and why you might find the Nazi Party and Hitler an attractive alternative! (You should find at least 2 or 3 reasons.)

### **Hermann Struts**

Hermann Struts, a lieutenant in the German army, has been a lieutenant since World War I, when he fought bravely on the western front. Coming from a long line of military officers and having graduated from the German military academy, Hermann is proud of Germany’s military tradition. His pride is personal, because Germany had always boasted a fine army that had secured the nation’s well-being and leadership.

Yet Hermann has not been promoted for more than ten years. Because the German army has been so drastically reduced by the Treaty of Versailles, there have been relatively few promotions. In the old army, Hermann would have been at least a captain by now, because he is a resourceful officer. In all probability, he would have been a major. Hermann resents the Versailles Treaty, which forced Germany to give up its military tradition. He believes this has done irreparable harm to Germany’s honor, and to his honor as a soldier. He feels that if the present government had vetoed the treaty and allowed the German army to resist it, neither Germany nor he would be in their present position.

### **Otto Hauptmann**

Otto Hauptmann works in an electric motor factory in Berlin. Although his trade union has actively worked for better conditions and higher wages, it has not made many gains, primarily because the 1923 inflation and the present depression have sapped the entire economy. Otto believes, however, that the union would succeed if the economy were stable. As it is, the union has kept him employed. When many of his friends had been laid off, Otto’s union had persuaded his company managers to keep the senior men. Factories where unions are weak had kept only the younger men, because the managers say they are more productive.

Otto has been worried by the ideas many of his fellow workers have expressed recently...When the owners are forced to cut back production, they take it out on the workers. So the only way to end the depression is to let the workers control the factories and the government. Otto still believes that the workers get fair treatment as long as there are strong unions. Moreover, he thinks that managing the factories and government should be left to men who understand these complicated jobs.

**Eric von Ronheim**

Eric von Ronheim, chief executive of a Frankfurt textile factory, is extremely concerned about the present economic depression. Reduced production means lower profits for his company. If only Germany had not been treated so ruthlessly at Versailles, the nation would have sufficient resources to produce goods for consumption, and conditions would be far better. But the government has had to impose burdensome taxes in order to pay the reparations the Allies had demanded. Indeed, much of his own profits are going into these taxes. Moreover, the overtaxed Germans have little money to spend on German goods, and so demand is dangerously low. Since other countries are also suffering from depressions, there is almost no foreign market for German goods. Even if Germany were to come out of the depression, Eric knows taxes would be increased to finish paying the reparations.

Eric is also worried about the menacing number of communists in Germany who wish to organize the same kind of government as the Soviet Union has. If the communists succeed, the capitalists would receive no mercy from the workers. And Germany would become subservient to its old enemy, the Soviet Union.

**Karl Schmidt**

Karl Schmidt is a steelworker in the rich steel-producing Ruhr Valley. Like so many men in the Ruhr, however, he is out of work. The depression has forced many steel mills to shut down until there is a market for their goods. On the day Karl's mill closed, the owners announced that shrinking profits made it impossible to keep the workers on their jobs. Such might be the case, Karl reasons, yet the owners still live in big houses and drive expensive automobiles. Why are the owners protected from the economic slump while the workers suffer? The government is helping the workers somewhat with unemployment compensation, but the payments are hardly enough to support Karl, his wife, and their two children. Moreover, the government has declared that it has little money left, and it cannot continue the payments much longer.

As far as Karl understands, if the government would stop paying the reparations, perhaps it could help Germany recover. But Karl also knows that if the government stops its payment, the French might again occupy the Ruhr Valley, as they had in 1923. What is needed, Karl believes, is a government that is responsive to the workers—perhaps even one that is run by the workers, as some of his friends argue. And he feels Germany needs a government that can deny France and the other nations the reparation payments.

**Wilhelm Schultz**

Wilhelm Schultz is a peasant who works with his father on their farm in East Prussia. His uncle lives just a few miles away, in the area of East Prussia that the Versailles Treaty had sectioned off as the Polish Corridor. Wilhelm's uncle sends reports describing how the Poles mistreat the Germans in their country. Wilhelm's grandfather lives nearby in Danzig, but his relatives never visit him. Going to Danzig means crossing

into Poland and contending with numerous travel restrictions. Wilhelm's schooling had taught him great love for the German heroes like Siegfried, and he was dismayed that his government had signed a treaty that subjected many Germans, like his uncle, to Polish rule. Then again, he watches people who violate basic Prussian values rise to respected positions in the government. He sees in them a distasteful lack of moral discipline, for they are often drunk and rowdy. This is not the way Prussians should behave, Wilhelm thinks.

Wilhelm and his father are finding times hard. The thriving port of Danzig had once been the market for his father's goods. Now it is difficult to ship goods there because they have to cross the Polish Corridor. Besides, the Poles have opened a rival port to take business away from Danzig. Moreover, the depression does not make things easier. Finally, the communists nearby in the Soviet Union are a constant threat to Wilhelm and his father, because they advocate the end of private property. Wilhelm and his father are proud to call their land their own, for this gives them added dignity. The communists want to take this land and this dignity from them—the last rewards the world seems to offer.

### **Wolfgang von Kohler**

Wolfgang von Kohler, a prominent attorney who attended the University of Bonn, has a strong sense of the German cultural, literary, and historical traditions. He believes that the great gifts his people have contributed to Western civilization have been ignored. Wolfgang dreams of the newly created Republic uniting all of the German democratic traditions and leading the way to a totally democratic Europe. He is upset by the unfortunate methods the Weimar Republic often uses to repress the parties of the extreme left more cruelly than those of the extreme right.

However, Wolfgang's sense of justice is more outraged by the demeaning attitude with which the Allies, particularly the French, view the German Republic. He, and others like him, who believe in Germany and human dignity, would like to prove to these countries that the Germans are a great race.

### **Heinrich Munchen**

Heinrich Munchen is the owner of a small Munich grocery store started by his father. For years his father had saved to send him to the university. But Heinrich chose not to go to the university, and the money stayed in the bank. In 1923 Heinrich had had a good use for it. His two sons were both brilliant; one wanted to be a doctor, and the other hoped to be an engineer. The money in the bank would have paid for their education. But that same year inflation had hit Germany because the government had printed so much money to pay the reparations. Since the money was not backed by anything economically solid, it had become nearly worthless. Two weeks before his older son was to leave for the university, the bank had called him to say that his savings were worth only enough to buy three postage stamps. This was certainly a blow to Heinrich, but it

was more of a blow to his sons, whose futures hung in the balance. They asked him what kind of faith they could put in a system that ruined hard-working men.

Now in 1930, there seems little to be done to regain the losses. People are not making any money and, therefore, cannot buy as many groceries as they had before. And the competition from the big department and chain stores makes it difficult for Heinrich to compete. Again Heinrich's economic plight is no fault of his own. His sons once more question the system that has brought these hardships to their father and to them.