THE REASONS FOR HITLER'S POPULARITY IN GERMANY 1933-39.

German newsreels of the 1930's conveyed images of mass enthusiasm for Hitler and Nazism. In determining if this really was the case the historian is faced with serious problems about the sources eg.

a) there were no public opinion polls taken in Germany in the 1930's

b) the media were controlled by the Nazis.

c) it was impossible for the opponents of Nazism to openly display their opinions.

d) after 1933 the results of elections and plebiscites were rigged.

Even so in spite of the SS and Gestapo and the terror they inspired, it is clear that Hitler's govt. was based on a large measure of consent from broad sections of the population. The reasons for this are:

1) Hitler launched a successful attack on the problem of unemployment which fell as follows:

   Jan. 1933 -- 6,040,000
   Jan. 1934 -- 3,700,000
   Jan. 1936 -- 2,500,000
   Jan. 1937 -- 1,800,000
   Jan. 1938 -- 300,000

By 1939 in fact an acute shortage of labour had developed with only 34,000 unemployed by the summer and industrialists were actually looking for 1 million workers. In short, by the late 1930s German industry was booming and the majority of the population was benefiting from it.

2) Nazi propaganda as directed by Goebbels depicted the Fuhrer as a Messiah, a master politician, and a great statesman.

3) Hitler had tremendous foreign policy successes 1933 and 1939. He destroyed the Treaty of Versailles, built up a great German army, air force and navy, reoccupied the Rhineland, united Germany and Austria and destroyed Czechoslovakia. He made Germany again the dominant power in Europe, respected and feared by the other nations and this was a tremendous source of pride to the German people after the humiliation of defeat in 1918 and the hated treaty of Versailles in 1919.

4) Many Germans between 1919 and 1933 had hungered for strong, determined leadership but the Weimar Republic had not given that to them. The Weimar Republic therefore had never won widespread acceptance, let alone emotional loyalty. This vacuum of leadership was especially disturbing to a people used to a forceful style of behaviour from their politicians. This vacuum was intensified by the fact that by 1933 President Hindenburg was too old and senile.

5) Hitler had ended the threat of a communist takeover in Germany which had terrified many middle and upper class Germans in the 1920s and early 1930s. He had also crushed the trade union movement and ended strikes and industrial disruption.
6) Hitler provided excitement and action to the young people of Germany who were also won over by jobs, indoctrination in the schools, and membership of the Hitler Youth.

7) Many Germans believed that there had been a serious decline in moral standards under the Weimar Republic. To such people Berlin was a kind of Sodom and Gomorrah and they welcomed Hitler's restoration of traditional strict standards of behaviour. Such people also welcomed the Nazis' treatment of unpopular minorities such as Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, habitual criminals and the workshy. They also welcomed the fact that the young were being taught discipline in the Hitler Youth and the army.

8) Most Germans learnt to limit their political horizons so that they did not make an overall assessment of the Nazi regime and decide whether it was good or evil. If they complained therefore it was usually about specific grievances and those were usually non-political. The criticism was not meant to be hostile to the Nazi govt. Again there were people who were able to approve of some Nazi policies and not of others. Therefore there were very few people who were willing to see the Nazi regime as a whole. Thus the German people failed to see that the economic revival was largely due to re- armament and that the foreign policy successes were a part of a programme which was bound, ultimately, to lead to war.

9) Finally, there were many people who saw the coming to power of the Nazis as an opportunity to advance themselves; they would have done so under any regime. This was reflected in the number of applications for membership of the Nazi party after Jan. 1933. In Jan. 1933 there were 850,000 members but in Feb. and March 1.5 million applied to join, most of them men. By 1935 there were 2.5 million members and by 1943 6.5 million.