

## Chapter Two

# IT'S ALWAYS THE ECONOMY

**IMAGINE THIS SCENARIO:** Inflation is out of control; the price of bread, milk, and vegetables (when available) runs into the thousands of dollars. Candles and combustible household furnishings are replacing heat and electricity as public utilities are closed due to unattainable wage and labor demands. And these "demands" arise from an inflationary cycle fueled by fear and frustration; unemployment numbers continue to rise daily at frightening speed.

Disease runs rampant. Hospitals are not only closed but also abandoned; medicine (or whatever of it remains) is being hoarded by the privileged few or traded in bartered transactions. The rich hide behind their gated communities and vigilante groups are formed to protect the "haves" from the "have-nots" who are roaming the streets destroying property, killing randomly, and stealing. With a porous border, drug lords come from Mexico to wreak destruction and find what they can steal amid the chaos.

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Nearly all public services such as schools, police, fire, and emergency networks have likewise been discontinued as the infrastructure of a civilized society rapidly disintegrates. Even the remnant of a federal militia cannot enforce martial law. Thus, chaos and crime explode on the scene as families and family units implode. Relatives huddle together trying to survive and those who have friends or relatives outside of the big cities, flee hoping to save their lives and sanity.

People are indeed angry . . . very angry. And that anger is primarily directed at the government—a government that promised not only life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness but stability, and even prosperity. People are angry when they realize that their government is hopelessly indebted to foreign countries; multiple billions of dollars were borrowed as though they did not have to be repaid. The billions owed have become trillions and the day of reckoning has come.

Hostile crowds demand that banks allow them to withdraw their funds in cash, but of course, the banks have long since run out of hard currency, even though the dollar is devalued almost weekly if not daily. People are demanding action; the populace feels betrayed. Even when the president speaks, few hear him, for electronic communication is unreliable. Even so, those who do hear him disbelieve what he says. And why should they trust his words? . . . The promise has become a lie.

I'm sure that the populace at large—including all of us today in twenty-first-century America—would be willing to tolerate the suspension of such civil liberties as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of worship—and even the freedom of free elections—in exchange for stability

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and order. People would submit to rations, travel restrictions, and a ban on demonstrations. We'd trade our freedoms for one gift: the gift of survival. If a dictator arose who gave credible evidence that he could bring order out of the chaos, we'd be willing to let him have whatever power and freedom he needed.

Let us not be quick to condemn those who were willing to give Hitler a chance, given the economic chaos that spread through Germany after World War I. He could never have come to power if the German economy would have remained strong after World War I. He rode to victory simply because he promised to rebuild the collapsing German mark and put the nation back to work. He cleverly exploited the economic crisis that postwar Germany was experiencing. Yes, it was the economy that gave rise to National Socialism.

Germany's inflation was triggered by a huge increase in the nation's money supply because of the heavy reparations assigned to Germany after losing World War I. The German government chose to pay its debts with cheap marks, printing as many as needed to stem the crisis. When the initial injections of newly printed money failed to work, the government's response was more of the same. The result was to print still more.

Economists are agreed that "hyperinflation" is brought about by an unchecked increase in the money supply, usually accompanied by a widespread unwillingness on the part of the people to hold the money for more than the time needed to trade it for something tangible to avoid further loss. Hyperinflation is usually associated with wars, economic depressions, and political and social upheavals. It is associated with

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governments that artificially create wealth to extend the benefits of the state to a populace in crisis.

Stories of what life was like in postwar Germany abound. People who had fixed incomes were wiped out financially. Retirement funds were reduced to zero. Prices changed by the hour. It is said that a student at Freiburg University ordered a cup of coffee for 5,000 marks. He decided to order a second cup. When his bill was 14,000 marks he protested but was told, "If you want to save money and you want two cups of coffee, you should order both of them at the same time."

There is a story, perhaps fictitious, of a woman who filled her wheelbarrow with German marks and left them outside the store, confident that no one would bother stealing the money. Sure enough, when it was time to pay for her groceries, she walked outside only to discover that the bundles of money were left on the ground but the wheelbarrow was gone! We might smile at the story, but for the Germans there was nothing to smile about. Their savings were totally wiped out. They had lost faith in their government. The people suffered immeasurably, and the worst was yet to come.

However—and this is important—there were benefits to this runaway inflation. Businesses with significant debt were glad when the value of the mark fell so that they could repay their loans with essentially worthless pieces of paper. In fact, big industrialists and landlords goaded the government into deliberately letting the mark tumble in order to free the State of its public commitments and assist businesses that needed to erase their large debts. The masses suffered, of course, because their savings disappeared when the mark was devalued. When 1,000-billion notes were printed, few both-

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ered to collect the change when they spent it. By November 1923, with one dollar equal to a trillion marks, the breakdown was complete. Unused marks were used to light fires.

Predictably, anarchy erupted, particularly in the big cities. Gasoline was siphoned from cars; whatever was not nailed down was stolen and whatever could be bartered was used in exchange for food or clothes. In the midst of the chaos, the government was forced to leave Berlin and move to the National Theatre in Weimar to attempt to form a new government based on democratic principles and ideals.

## AT THE HEIGHT OF THE INFLATIONARY CYCLE, THE PEOPLE CRIED OUT FOR SOMEONE TO END THE MADNESS.

At the height of the continuing inflationary cycle, the people cried out for someone to end the madness. Even when the mark was in a free fall, the government would not stop printing money, because it saw no way out of the chaos. So the people longed for a strong leader—a dictator who would be able to put an end to the charade and have a new beginning with a new currency, and with it institute the controls that a stable economy would need. And there was just such a man waiting for this moment.

An economic crisis is always a gift to a leader who wants

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to capture a nation. And Hitler was delirious with joy over his country's economic ills. Inflation and unemployment was the disease for which he had the cure. He did not want to let this financial crisis go to waste.

## THE ARRIVAL OF HITLER

Hitler holds a fascination for us because his dictatorship enjoyed such wide support of the people. Perhaps never in history was a dictator so well liked. He had the rare gift of motivating a nation to want to follow him. Communist leaders such as Lenin or Mao Tse-tung rose to power through revolutions that cost millions of lives; consequently they were hated by the masses. Hitler not only attracted the support of the middle class, but also of university students and professors. For example, the psychologist Carl Jung grew intoxicated with "the mighty phenomenon of National Socialism at which the whole world gazes in astonishment."

In 1923, Hitler's dramatic attempt to overthrow the Bavarian government failed. He had tried to foment a political revolution in Munich that was aborted by the police, and sixteen of his men were killed. He was convicted of treason; and after his stay in the Landsberg Prison, he decided to gain power through the political process. He would use democracy as the path to power and then crush it once he gained control. Democracy was the stepping-stone to dictatorship.

The economic outlook improved in 1925-29 with unemployment down and retail sales up. Ten years after the war ended, the German Republic seemed to come into its own. The Nazi Party was all but dead. But Hitler, with the

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passion of world conquest burning in his breast, simply would not give up. He kept waiting, hoping that Germany would experience bad times.

The worldwide depression of 1929 gave Hitler the opportunity he sought. Revolutionary that he was, he could thrive only in bad times when unemployment was high, inflation was rampant, and anger and mistrust spread throughout Germany. This was his time to capture the nation, not by war but by constitutional means.

When Austria's biggest bank collapsed, it forced the banks in Berlin to close temporarily. Germany was unable to make its war payments; millions were unemployed as thousands of small businesses were wiped out. Deprived of jobs and a decent living, and ravaged by hunger, the Germans were willing to do anything to survive.

For Hitler these were fertile times to gain the ear and vote of the masses. Anticipating an election in March 1933 that he knew he could not win, he chose to create a crisis. On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building in Berlin was in flames. The evidence points to arson, most probably that Hitler's men forced a Dutchman named Marinus van der Lubbe to enter the building through a passage used for the heating system. At gunpoint, he set a fire in the basement of the building and soon the massive structure was in flames.

Hitler blamed the arson on a communist conspiracy and induced Paul von Hindenburg (the aged German president) to sign a decree "for the protection of the people and the state" that suspended individual liberties. The Nazis could search homes without a warrant, confiscate property, and outlaw the meetings of groups that might oppose them.

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Interestingly, von Hindenburg was acting in accordance with the Weimar Constitution, which stipulated that the president could bypass Parliament in the event of an emergency!

Though Hitler still failed to get a majority, by murder, threats, and promises, he did manage to get a two-thirds majority vote in the Reichstag to amend the constitution. By this amendment, all legislative functions were granted to the Reich Cabinet which transferred these powers to Hitler personally. From now on, he, not the Reichstag, would make the laws. On July 14, he decreed that the Nazis would be the sole political party in Germany.

His report card is filled with such astounding achievements that many Christians saw him as an answer to their prayers. Some Christians, I have been told—yes, I said *Christians*—took a picture of Christ from the wall in their homes and substituted a portrait of Hitler. Winston Churchill observed Hitler in 1937 and said that his accomplishments were “among the most remarkable in the whole history of the world.”

Hitler's brand of socialism had many advantages for the German people. By nationalizing the banks, instituting wage and price controls, and centralizing the economy, National Socialism could bypass the often slow democratic process and get things done quickly. Despite Hitler's gross crimes, he did have an economic policy that appeared to work, at least for the first few years. Here is his outstanding report card:

1. He revived a collapsed economy in four years.
2. He instituted nationalized health care.
3. He gave millions of Germans attractive vacations

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through his *Kraft durch Freude* (“Strength through Joy”) program.

4. He established training schools for those who were unskilled and brought the nation to full employment.
5. He brought crime under control.
6. He instituted a huge public works program and built freeways and promised the production of a car that ordinary Germans would soon be able to afford.
7. He gave Germans a reason to believe in themselves, to believe that they could become great again.

If only he had died before World War II, one historian mused, he would have gone down in history as “Adolf the Great, one of the outstanding figures in German history.”

But Hitler didn't die before World War II; he didn't die until the German people had surrendered their personal rights; he didn't die until laws were enacted that led to the extermination of more than eight million people, and until Germany and several other countries were destroyed in a war that killed fifty million people in the greatest bloodbath in history. He didn't die until thousands of pastors joined the SS troops in swearing personal allegiance to him. What began as an economic miracle ended with a moral and political nightmare.

## THE POWER OF THE ECONOMY

By and large the Germans offered little resistance to National Socialism because they saw its obvious benefits.

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Listen to what Gerald Suster writes: "Many welcomed the abolition of individual responsibility for one's actions; for some it is easier to obey than to accept the dangers of freedom. Workers now had job security, a health service, cheap holiday schemes; if freedom meant starvation, then slavery was preferable."<sup>1</sup> The man for whom they had waited had arrived.

As long as the economy was strong, people didn't care whether they had freedom of speech, freedom of travel, or freedom of elections. Under the Republic, people were starving in the big cities; they agreed that bread on the table was more important than a ballot at a voting booth. The people were willing to forgive Hitler's purges and his ruthless massacres in return for the right to live.

By far the majority of the Lutheran churches sided with Hitler and his spectacular reforms. But a minority, under the leadership of Bonhoeffer and Niemoller, chose to pull away from the established church to form the "Confessing Church." This breakaway church that opposed Hitler held its own synods and wrote its own protests to the continued intrusion of Nazism into the life of the church. In 1938, when the German pastors were mandated to swear personal allegiance to Hitler, the synod essentially "wimped out" and refused to take a stand against the political firestorm that now engulfed them.

The synod did that which could only gladden the heart of Hitler himself: they decided that individual pastors and church leaders should make up their own minds about signing the Aryan clause and taking the oath of loyalty. This made it easy for the Gestapo to identify any pastor who didn't

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comply, arrest him, and sentence him to whatever the "People's Court" would decide.

As a result, about eight hundred pastors were arrested and imprisoned.

## THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

What did the rest of Germany think of the news that eight hundred pastors were imprisoned for not accepting the Nazification of their churches? We are shocked at the indifference of the German populace in the face of such abuses. William Shirer in his monumental *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* gives one of the most chilling assessments of the values that the Germans held dear. Though this paragraph is long, I encourage you to read every word. Shirer writes:

It would be misleading to give the impression that the persecution of Protestants and Catholics by the Nazi State tore the German people asunder or even greatly aroused the vast majority of them. It did not. A people who had so lightly given up their political and cultural and economic freedoms were not, except for a relatively few, going to die or even risk imprisonment to preserve freedom of worship. *What really aroused the Germans in the Thirties were the glittering successes of Hitler in providing jobs, creating prosperity, restoring Germany's military might, and moving from one triumph to another in his foreign policy.* Not many Germans lost much sleep over the arrests of a few thousand pastors and priests or over the quarreling of the various Protestant sects. And even fewer paused to reflect that under the leadership of Rosenberg,

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Bormann and Himmler, who were backed by Hitler, the Nazi regime intended eventually to destroy Christianity in Germany, if it could, and substitute the old paganism of the early tribal Germanic gods and the new paganism of the Nazi extremists. As Bormann, one of the men closest to Hitler, said publicly in 1941, "National Socialism and Christianity are irreconcilable" (*italics added*).<sup>2</sup>

So there you have it—the majority of the people, including the Christians in the Third Reich, no longer believed that Christianity was worth suffering for, much less dying for. They were willing to substitute *Mein Kampf* for the Bible in exchange for jobs and the greater glory of Germany. Yet those who saved their lives lost them, and those who lost their lives saved them.

### **GIVEN A CHOICE, MOST PEOPLE PROBABLY WILL CHOOSE BREAD AND SAUSAGE ABOVE INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES.**

*Jobs! Economic security! Prosperity! Most people are willing to close their eyes to glaring warning signs in exchange for a strong economy and money in the bank. Like the late Francis Schaeffer used to tell us, people are willing to march down the wrong path if only they can be assured of personal*

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peace and affluence. They willingly march forward, not asking where that path will lead.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall a cartoon appeared in a Russian newspaper picturing a fork in the road. One path was labeled *freedom*; the other path was labeled *sausage*. As we might guess, the path to freedom had few takers; the path to sausage was crowded with footprints. When given a choice, most people probably will choose bread and sausage above the free market and individual liberties. It was Lenin's promise of bread in every kitchen that ignited the communist revolution. Bread with political slavery was better than freedom and starvation. Bread fills the stomach, freedom does not.

Thanks to the wars he began, Hitler soon had huge deficits and so the German government again printed money to pay for the national debt. Inflation surfaced again and the German people faced another economic crisis after World War II was over. As always, it was the economy that became the number one concern on the minds of the disillusioned German people.

### **A LESSON FOR THE UNITED STATES**

"It's the economy, stupid!"

This was a slogan effectively used here in the United States during the 1992 presidential campaign. People tend to vote their pocketbooks, and while that in itself is not wrong, it can lead to warped values and in some instances the curtailment of freedoms. Money, which is so essential for us to live, can also be the lure that makes us willing to sell our souls.