

The Munich Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism: History Is Not the Past

Munich is more closely associated with the origins and rise of National Socialism than any other city. After World War I, nationalistic and anti-Semitic circles in Munich society fostered the right-wing extremist political movement out of which the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) was born with Adolf Hitler as its leading figure.

The Munich Documentation Center is located on the site of the former “Brown House” where the NSDAP or Nazi Party had its first headquarters. Between 1933 and 1945, an extensive Party quarter housing many administrative bodies grew up in the area around Königsplatz. The newly built Documentation Center, which opened in 2015, takes a critical approach to the history of the site and addresses Munich’s historical significance as the former “capital of the movement.” Taking historical events prior to and during the Nazi dictatorship as its starting point, it documents how the impact of the Nazi era reaches right up to the present day. In temporary exhibitions and a varied program of events, topics such as ideology and dictatorship, racism and anti-Semitism, exclusion and displacement, war and genocide are considered in a current context and from international perspectives. The Documentation Center offers a broad spectrum of exhibitions, art interventions, events, and participatory projects. Visitors can also take advantage of its online offerings, a Learning Center with a specialist library and media tables, and an educational program designed for a variety of target groups. All of these permit an intensive confrontation with the history of National Socialism and other related topics. In 2025 a memorial site devoted to the history of Nazi forced labor will open as an annex of the Documentation Center in the grounds of the former German Railways Maintenance Workshops in the Munich district of Neuaubing. Entrance to all exhibitions and events is free.

The work of the Documentation Center is designed to sensitize people to the continuing repercussions of the Nazi era and at the same time to strengthen their awareness of the positive things that have been achieved since the defeat of the Nazi dictatorship: a liberal democracy, universal human rights, a united Europe, and a lively remembrance discourse. In considering the past, a central concern is to take a critical look at the present and to ask questions that have a bearing on the future—questions such as: What characterizes a strong democracy? What can weaken it? Where are minorities experiencing exclusion and persecution, hatred and violence today? What values and what modes of behavior can sustain an open society based on a sense of solidarity? How do we want to remember the past?

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