



First, they came for the socialists,  
and I did not speak out because I  
was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade  
unionists, and I did not speak out  
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I  
did not speak out because I was not a  
Jew.

Then they came for me and there  
was no one left to speak for me.

## Pastor Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984

Martin Niemöller was born in the Westphalian town of Lippstadt, Germany, on January 14, 1892. In 1910 he became a cadet in the Imperial German Navy. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Niemöller was assigned to a U-Boat, of which he was eventually appointed the commander. Under the stipulations of the armistice of November 11, 1918, that ended hostilities in World War I, Niemöller and other commanders were ordered to turn over their U-Boats to England. Along with many others, Niemöller refused to obey this order, and was, consequently, discharged from the Navy. In 1920, he decided to follow the path of his father and began seminary training at the University of Münster.

Niemöller enthusiastically welcomed the Third Reich. But a turning point in Niemöller's political sympathies came with a January 1934 meeting of Adolf Hitler, Niemöller, and two prominent Protestant bishops to discuss state pressures on churches. At the meeting it became clear that Niemöller's phone had been tapped by the Gestapo (German Secret State Police). It was also clear that the Pastors Emergency League (PEL), which Niemöller had helped found, was under close state surveillance. Following the meeting, Niemöller would come to see the Nazi state as a dictatorship, one which he would oppose.