

Nationalism case essay

Government



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Nationalism had proven to be a potentially destructive force right from the time of the First World War. The increasing feeling of nationalistic pride and chauvinism had ensured that countries in Europe felt it necessary to register their supremacy over other countries and predictably this led to violence, bloodshed and war. Following their painful defeat in the First World War and the humiliating Treaty of Versailles, Germany was a bitter nation. The ignominy caused by the treaty was not only economic it was also political. It proved to be fertile ground for a demagogue leader like Hitler who could sway the masses with his rhetoric and persuade an entire country to fall in line with an ideology like Nazism.

Nazism, a much virulent version of fascism was based on the feelings of supremacy of one race over another (Aryans, the origin of many Germans, were considered supreme) and over the legitimate right of this race to rule the earth. This sort of dogmatism could only be sustained because the feeling of hurt national pride ran so high in popular sentiment. Nazism unleashed the worst ever reign of terror, with thousands of innocent Jews being tortured and killed in concentration camps and mass genocide.

Stalinist Russia, although marked by Communism - an ideology completely opposing Fascism/Nazism, ironically was no different in the kind of violence it saw perpetrated against thousands of innocent people. Under Stalin's regime, no criticism could be tolerated and dissenters would all be "purged". Stalin had ambitious (and not necessarily viable) plans for Russia. He wanted the country to modernize at such a fast rate that it could make up the 50-year gap in 10 years. Suddenly, an agricultural economy was being pushed into being an industrial economy.

Russia, just recovering from the Second World War, had very low levels of production from heavy industries as compared to other countries. Stalin wanted to change this as he anticipated attacks from the capitalist West attempting to destroy Communist Russia. Stalin launched a massive purge of anyone - including Communist Party members and top government officials - who were potential rivals or threats to him and those who criticized his policies. At times even innocent people were killed. By 1937 the purges had spread to the armed forces. The Great Purges affected Russians as they lived in constant dread of being arrested or tortured or killed.

Over 10 million people were sent to labour camps where they often died, while a million were executed. Stalin's skewed notion of National pride (as well as egotism) were what saw the tragic end of so many numerous lives. In the same way, Hitler's rise to power and subsequent atrocities, were also the cause of a skewed sense of National pride and jingoism. As these two examples elucidate, nationalism in the 20th century, was a terrifying and destroying force.