

Hitler: the people's choice essay



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The topic of how Hitler came to power in 1933 has been the subject of much speculation and debate. Some believe it was that Hitler and the Nazis provided the best range of policies.

Others such as Edgar Feuchtwanger argue that it was because of the economic situation, whilst Craig would argue that it was the fault of those in government. There is also the viewpoint from those such as Geary that it was the way in which the government (i. e. the constitution) worked that allowed the Nazis to seize power. In order to come to a conclusion about which factor/factors played the largest role it is necessary to look at each one individually. The most rational factor to begin with is the Nazi party themselves.

The party's policies appealed to a huge range of people, and can be described as what is known as a 'catch all' party. They appealed to both businessmen and workers by promising to ban trade unions and end high interest rates, but at the same time claiming to fix wages and working hours. They enticed both young and old by giving the elderly adequate insurance and pledging to give higher education to students. Hitler himself along with the S. A and S. S appeared very glamorous, and used very affective propaganda in order to dazzle as many voters as possible.

In particular they placed great emphasis on the weaknesses of the Weimar and used slogans such as 'bread not reparations'. In this way it can be argued that Hitler would be the people's natural choice. However it can be shown that Nazi party policies were only popular during times of despair, and in particular times of economic instability. For example in 1928, before the

Wall Street crash the NSDAP had a mere 12 seats in the Reichstag. But by September of 1930 this had risen dramatically to 107 - nearly 20% of the over all vote. Nichols points out that without volatility " their movement was waning, a further period of frustration might have finished them off".

This is not only a Historians point of view as Goebbels himself stated in April 1932, after the effects of the Wall St crash were wearing off, " we must shortly come to power". This showed that Nazis needed unrest to become popular. From this it can be suggested that the Nazis were in-fact not what people would choose but what people felt forced towards. This is supported by the fact that the Nazis were not the only ' extreme' party to gain support during the times of instability. The communists too had a dramatic rise in support, which shows that people were looking desperately for any party to solve their problems. This suggests an element of irrational behaviour.

There are indeed a large amount of Historians who believe that " it is inconceivable that Hitler could ever have come to power had not the Weimar Republic been subjected to the unprecedented strain of a world economic depression" (William Carr). It is important to note that not only did Germany face problems from the Wall Street crash but also from the crushing terms of the Treaty of Versailles and also massive hyperinflation problems. Firstly the Wall Street Crash showed to the public that Germany had in-fact been living on " borrowed time as well as on borrowed money" (Stephen Lee). This heightened distrust in the politicians who were leading the Weimar, and gave good ammunition for opposition parties who wished to criticise the new Democracy. The treaty of Versailles is debated by some Historians as being key in the downfall of the Weimar.

Nicholls believes " the treaty disillusioned moderate men who might otherwise have supported their new Republic". On signing the so-called ' stab-in-the-back' treaty many immediately assumed that this new democracy was not to be trusted and therefore the population were made anxious to return to their old imperialistic ways. It can be claimed that " timely revision of the peace treaties would have saved the Weimar Republic and saved the peace". However everyone does not support this view, as figures such as Hillgruber believe that " the time when the Republic was most vulnerable to the Treaty of Versailles (1919-1923) was precisely the time it survived".

In answer to this statement it can be suggested that this was not a time when it survived, merely a time where its deeply engraved flaws were effectively covered up. The hyperinflation is also claimed to have " confirmed a deep seated dislike of democracy which was thereafter economic distress" (Fulbrook). From looking at the economic situation in Germany it is plausible to say that Hitler really had no role in his coming to power, he was merely there at the right time as people had already been disillusioned by the chaotic economic situation. His appointment was not one by choice; the public were forced into a more extreme answer by their frenzied surroundings. It is also important to note that Hitler could not have been appointed Chancellor without Hindenburg allowing it. Because of this it can be said that Hitler was not the peoples choice as it was Hindenburg who had appointed him.

However this is a slightly blinded statement to make as Hindenburg was known to dislike Hitler, considering him to be off a lower rank than he, and

was only forced to appoint him because public opinion was in Hitler's favour. This would mean that Hitler was in-fact the peoples choice. With the Nazis obtaining a third of all votes it would be particularly difficult not to appoint Hitler. That said it could also be argued that it was only Von Papens' claim that Hitler could be manipulated that provoked Hindenburg into appointing him. Nichols believes that Hitler's appointment was in fact " quite unnecessary". A government report in 1927 shows clearly that it was generally felt that Hitler could be easily controlled: " Their successes remain .

. . very modest. This is a party that isn't going anywhere". However Hitler clearly did not feel this way stating in January 1932, " now I have them in my pocket". It can be said from this that rather than a peoples choice it was the miscalculation of those in government that lead to Hitler coming into power.

It is also " no exaggeration to say that it [the Republic] failed in the end partly because German officers were allowed to put their epaulets back on again" (Craig). The continuity in areas such as the civil service mean that whether public opinion was in favour of Hitler or not, the government would not make any movements to avoid take over from something so familiar and comfortable to them. Another reason for Hitler being appointed chancellor is that with so many parties in opposition, Hindenburg needed someone who could gain overall (or at least a majority) support. This was one of the many problems suffered by the Weimar. With so many parties in opposition to each other the system of Proportional Representation made it virtually impossible to govern. With so many weak coalitions and different and extreme viewpoints it is hardly surprising the Weimar failed.

Some may believe that as Germany is functioning well today with the same system of government, that it is therefore not PR that proved to be the problem. However this appears a very naive viewpoint. With no experience of Democracy and with such powerful and influential people intent on it failing, such a modern and complicated system was hardly practical. It can be disputed that Hitler was not really the people's choice but that PR exaggerated his support and allowed him a foothold in the Reichstag. Added to this were the ruinous effects of article 48. A key example of its use was during Brunings government where by he used it to force through his rejected budget proposals.

Historians such as Arthur Rosenberg have described this event as " the beginning of the end of German democracy". Not only did this cause people to lose faith in democracy, but it also showed the Nazi's how easily a democratic system could be turned into an authoritarian one. This case has also shown how the way was made open for Hitler to come into power, and that it was again not the peoples choice more that Hitler was a lesser of two evils. Whilst it cannot be denied that Hitler did receive a large percentage of the vote, it is still not necessarily true that this means he was the people's choice. The public were forced into more extreme solutions by terrible economic situations, and a mix of weak politicians along with a weak system. People were not necessarily looking for Hitler himself, merely an alternative to what they had.

The mistrust of the public and the way in which the political system worked was what allowed Hitler to seize power.