

Rise of nazism and consolidation of power



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Although the Nazi Party ruled Germany for more than a decade, due to a unique combination of political gift and right circumstances, their path to success wasn't an easy one. In Germany, the 1920's began with a feeling of unfulfillment, rage and dismay amongst the people due to the 'exceedingly harsh' treaty of Versailles imposed upon them. In those same early post-war years, the Nazi Party was extremely futile in the Reichstag, even eclipsed by the Communist Party (KPD) and the Socialist Party (SPD). Stresemann's enormous successes, during his reign as Chancellor, in the form of the Weimar 'Golden Years' as well as Hitler's imprisonment post the unsuccessful and humiliating Munich Putsch, both contributed towards the diminutive influence of the Nazis with less than 2% of the votes in the Reichstag initially.

The initial cause for the unpopularity of the Nazi party in the early 1920's was the outcome of the Munich Putsch; the imprisonment of Adolf Hitler, the Party leader. Senior Party member's imprisonment and the widespread exposure of their proceedings in court by the media did bring the Nazi Party along with its ideas into the limelight, but unfortunately for the unfavorable reasons. The SA, or more commonly known as the 'brown shirts', were formed by Hitler as a Nazi military force consisting of army officers who were unemployed due to the Treaty of Versailles, with the sole motive to protect Nazi meetings, disrupt opposition meetings and be of use during rallies. However subsequent to the Munich Putsch, the SA men were considered to be undignified hooligans and were disliked due to their violent methods of functioning.

The 1920's were right after the ' Great War' and an extremely mortifying and severe Treaty of Versailles. During this time of chaos and mayhem, the last thing the people wanted was an unstable and a fragile governing body. They sought after a leadership that ensured stability, consolidation and progressive recovery in the tenuous post-war years. The extremist and radical ideology of the Nazis was regarded as too rebellious and seditious by the general people. The Nazi idea for the German nation, in regard to their ideology, was of a nation with pure German people working mutually to achieve a flourishing and successful future. Hitler perceived the Aryans to be the most superior race in the world and the one which was at the top of the hierarchy of races. This policy of racial purity was obtained from the theory of Social Darwinism; the survival of the fittest in any struggle between the races. An important part on Hitler's beliefs was the idea to build a lebensraum, a living quarter for the purest race; the Aryans, in the Eastern European USSR region as part of his eastward expansion.

These principles, although majority of them were adopted from the manifestos of other parties, symbolized a revolutionary perspective that further ensured instability, violence and hostility, which the people firmly disapproved of. The Nazi Party was analogous to the other extremist parties, and possessed no original or convalescing ideas. Even the hard-line anti-communist approach gravely affected the acceptance of the Nazi Party by eliminating the crucial support of the workers. Furthermore, Hitler's ideas of Anti-Semitism wherein he blamed a religion and its followers as the causes of the negativity in the world were of great concern. Historians believe that Anti-Semitism acted as a self-inflicted obstacle in Hitler's political career

from the beginning till the end. People did not exactly share the same enthusiasm as Hitler as far as his policies of discrimination or his extremist ideology were concerned.

One more imperative cause for the lack of Nazi success in the 1920's was the extremely lucrative appointment of Gustav Stresemann as the Chancellor of the Weimar Republic. Amidst the ongoing panic and hysteria due to the Ruhr Crisis and the Hyperinflation, Stresemann still managed to recover from the situation and succeed in numerous ways to begin what were known as the 'Golden Years'. He gained immense admiration and respect from the people due to his recovery, as well as progress in the fields of Culture, Economy, Politics and Foreign Relations.

The extremely crucial and constructive economic assistance, in the form of the Dawes and the Young Plans from US, gave financial aid to Germany, put a momentary freeze on reparations and also reduced the total amount of the same. Through this support, Stresemann managed to revive German industries and work towards a more stable and prosperous economy. The boosting investment in Germany subsequent to these plans facilitated in creating more factories, jobs and hence prosperity, in terms of higher wages and increased production figures in the entire nation. In the course of this recovery, the professional life as well as the standard of living of the people in Germany drastically improved. This retrieval of an affluent German economy gave the indication that democracy was effectively functioning in Germany, which in turn, minimized the support for extremist parties such as the Nazis.

The flourishing culture under the policy of 'Neue Sachlichkeit' or the letting go of traditionalism and focusing more on the functionality of art, and the 'Bauhaus Movement', which paved way for modern and contemporary architecture was a great success for the republic. A new era of writers, musicians, actors and artists embarked, which was recognized all over the world and was also immensely acknowledged by the people of Germany. The minimal censorship paved way for greater innovations and encouraged new forms of expression. These advancements made Germany the center of the cultural world which in turn bought a lot of pride and honor for the German people. Furthermore, it had an effect of escalating the popularity of the 'amenable' republic and diverted the attention of the people from revolutionary parties such as the Nazis.

The Weimar Years also witnessed remarkable triumphs in the area of Foreign Relations. The pacifying approach with the allies in order to gain concessions over the commitments of Germany in the Treaty of Versailles was a major accomplishment in regard to the Locarno Treaties, wherein Germany acknowledged its western borders as part of the Treaty of Versailles, but made no agreements about its eastern borders. Post these treaties, Germany was made a Permanent Security Council Member in the League of Nations. This had the outcome of altering the viewpoint of the German people in terms of making it buoyant and optimistic. Through these proceedings, Stresemann accomplished a willful attempt to contravene the clauses of the 'slave treaty', which was received with high enthusiasm and admiration by the German people. These signs of not abiding by the Treaty of Versailles ensured that the Nazi Party, with its extremist ideology, could

not distract the support of the republic, which consecutively ascended the support of the same.

The Nazi Party saw grave failures in the 1920's due to no clear path or direction, lack of popularity and most importantly the success of the Weimar Republic. However, the 'Golden Years' of the Weimar Republic did end due to its reputation (burden of lost war and humiliating Treaty of Versailles) and most importantly the Great Depression of 1929. The Depression and the need of radical solutions didn't themselves bring the Nazis to power but created an audience for the Nazi Propaganda and ensured it wasn't falling on deaf ears.

Assignment 1

(Depth Study A – Germany 1918-45)

Topic – Rise of Nazism and consolidation of power

Q2. What factors enabled the growth of Hitler's power in post war Germany?
(10 marks)

Although the Weimar Republic was exceedingly successful by escalating the popularity for the republic during the Stresemann era, the support never grew to an extent that the general sentiments of mistrust and abhorrence could be ignored. The use of emergency powers during the end of the republics supremacy, to run the government, depicted the failure of the Weimar Republic and the democratic system itself. The proportional representation in the Reichstag resulted in no one party taking control with an overall majority, which in turn saw the failures of various coalition governments in the office. The desire of the people for a leader who ensured

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stability and progress remained as an aspiration during the rise of unpopular leaders and the turmoil of the republic. On one hand was the chaos and disorder of the republic, but on the other hand, extremist parties such as the Nazis seemed as worthy alternatives to the republic due to their order and discipline.

There is a saying that every big economical crisis is most likely to give rise to dictatorship. This holds true in Germany also as the Nazis gained enormously through the Great Depression of 1929. This global crisis sank all major support for the republic due to the dreadfully affected working population of Germany, especially the middle class. The Nazis were amongst the few parties who opposed the US aid in the form of the Dawes and Young Plan, fearing dollar imperialism. The crisis had an immediate effect of popularizing those very parties (such as the Nazis) who expressed fear of dependency on dollar. Depression didn't itself bring the Nazis to power but created an opportunity, possibility and an audience for Nazi propaganda. It led to destruction of the republic and popularized those with radical solutions to the economic crisis.

The economic crisis left two strong parties, with radical solutions, in the Reichstag; the Nazis and the Communists. Ironically, after the Great Depression, the growing strength of communism rather helped than hindered the Nazi Party. The Nazis increased their vote bank by receiving crucial votes from businessmen and other elite people simply because of the threat of communism on their businesses. Along with the support of the middle class through the re-organization of the party, the Nazis were now popular amongst the higher class too.

Along with the threat of communism, the Nazis expressed their views dramatically and gave the skeptical public someone to blame. The minority groups such as the Jews, Communists, physically and mentally disabled as well as the detested republic were blamed for the crisis. This blame later transformed into policies of segregation, which later solved the problem of unemployment caused by Depression. In this time of predicament, Hitler, through propaganda campaigns, portrayed himself and his party leaders as firm, strong and proposed several new campaigns in order to solve the crisis, which was sincerely appreciated by the people.

In addition, the Nazi Party benefited immensely due to their leader; Adolf Hitler. Despite his minimal knowledge about administration and economy, he still managed to appeal to mass audiences due to his brilliant oratory skills. He was a magnificent, influential speaker and made German people feel patriotic about their nation. Furthermore, Hitler benefitted immensely through his Propaganda Leader, Joseph Goebbels, who was the true creator and organizer of the Fuhrer myth, of feeding the theatrical element in the Nazi leader while at the same time stimulating the self-surrender of the German masses through skilful stage management and manipulation. Goebbels was exceedingly successful in his mission of selling Hitler to the German public and orchestrating the party under the Fuhrer as the savior of Germany from the republic, Jews, profiteers and Communists.

The strong opposition the republic had to face; in terms of the Nazis in the right wing and the KPD and the SPD in the left wing, made the decision making of the republic through a consensus and majority extremely complex. The Weimar years also saw a shift from parliamentary to

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presidential rule through the ' Article 48' which gave President Hindenburg the constitutional framework to undermine democracy. This meant that the Reichstag could be dissolved whenever the President desired it to. This process of undermining democracy through the frequent use of Article 48 and a ' behind the scenes deal' between Hitler, Hindenburg and Von Papen gave Hitler the legal route to success in terms of bringing the Nazis to power without them gaining 51% majority in the Reichstag.

Furthermore, the Weimar Republic had a reputation based on lost war and an unfair humiliating Treaty of Versailles. Hitler, during his rallies and marches, stated frequently that he wished to undo the Treaty of Versailles and was deeply disgusted with the republic for signing it in the first place. Although Hitler's accusations on the republic weren't very substantial, the humiliation faced by the people was enough for Hitler to gain their support against the republic.

Despite not getting a 51% majority in the Reichstag, Hitler still managed to get his Nazi Party to power. ' Even though Hitler wasn't destined to be the Chancellor, he got lucky with political gift (Role of Hindenburg) and right circumstances (depression)'. Using the absence of the Communist Party and the Socialists due to Reichstag fire as an opportunity, Hitler passed the ' Enabling Law' in 1933. This law gave Hitler, as the Chancellor of Germany, the power to rule by decree. This law meant the end of democracy in Germany and established the legal dictatorship of Adolf Hitler.

Assignment 1

(Depth Study A – Germany 1918-45)

Topic – Rise of Nazism and consolidation of power

Q3. How did Hitler consolidate his power in 1933-34? (10)

Although the Weimar Republic did collapse leading to Hitler eventually becoming the chancellor of Germany in 1933, he still needed to consolidate and strengthen his position in order to fulfill his aims of a totalitarian and pure German nation. However, after being appointed Chancellor, Hitler found himself to be in a precarious situation wherein only 2 out of 9 cabinet members were Nazis. Hitler's insecurity in the form of President Hindenburg's authority over the appointment as well as the dismissal of a Chancellor, and the discontent of the army made the situation further uncertain. Viewing this, very few could've anticipated that this man would go on to be the Fuhrer of the nation.

The first extremely vital incident which took place in Feb 1933 was the Reichstag fire. The Nazis held the communists responsible for starting the fire and over exaggerated the dangers of the communist threat. The Decree for the Protection of the People and State was passed the following day, wherein President Hindenburg, using Article 48, suspended all civil rights in Germany. It gave the government the authority to arrest individuals without trial as well as the secret police to hold people indefinitely in 'protective custody'. 4000 communists were taken into custody that very day. Hitler got supplementary powers through this decree and used it to get rid of opposition.

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In regard to the authoritarianism granted by President Hindenburg, Hitler took the most significant Nazi step of controlling Germany; the Enabling Law of 24th March 1933. This law meant that the cabinet, chancellor could pass any decrees without the Presidents involvement. This law needed 213 majority as constitutional amendment. Although it was an exceedingly demanding law to pass, under watchdog eyes of the SS and SA, the law passed by 441 vs. 94 in the Reichstag, with only opposition from the SPD. It was a great triumph for Hitler as he not only got dictatorship powers but was now exceptionally close to being the ultimate ruler of Germany.

The Enabling Law gave Hitler immense supremacy in the form of passing laws without consulting the President or the Reichstag. What ensue subsequent to this Enabling Act were a series of laws. There was the Law of Restoration of Professional Civil Services wherein administration, courts, education purged of all 'alien elements'; the Jews, communists. This law also extended into all public service, resulting in the elimination of thousands of Jews. This was the first instance when Hitler took a step in regard to his policy of Anti-Semitism against the Jews. Through this law, Hitler was creating the Aryan race as the superior one in Germany, which in turn was part of his aims for creating the lebensraum (living quarters in the east) for the purest race; the Aryans.

Although the KPD and the socialists were forbidden from entering the Reichstag, Hitler yet again did not manage to get 51% majority in the Reichstag elections in March 1933. Following this defeat, Hitler began what was termed as the influence over the media. The government took control of the radio and press, and Goebbels was appointed as the head of the new

Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. This meant that the Nazis were now controlling what the people of Germany were viewing and hearing.

On May 2nd 1933, one day after the ' Day of National Labour', Hitler seized all trade union offices and incorporated all unions into the newly created German Labour Front (DAF). This way Hitler cleared off all potential threats or strikes to the German industries, amalgamated all the labour unions under one Nazi led union, and also established power over the working class of Germany.

In regard to politics, Hitler passed the Law against Formation of New Parties in July. The KPD and the SPD had already been banned earlier, and other small parties had dissolved themselves. Through this law no new parties were permitted to form in the Reich. This leads to the conclusion that there was only one party remaining in Germany; the Nazi Party, and hence Germany was now a single party state. This denoted that Hitler had now cleared off all resistance as well as all probable future opposition to the Nazi Party. The Nazis were now ruling Germany and although not affirmed, Germany was now under dictatorship.

The opposition from the workers as well as the parties was now terminated; thus it left only one viable rebellion to the Nazi ' dictatorship'; the church. There was a Concordat signed in July, in which there was a mutual conformity between the state and the church in regard to which the church banned all political activity and in turn the government protected religious autonomy. This was the concluding step to pave a clear path for the Nazi

dictatorship of Germany. Now the parliament, workers, as well as the church were under Nazi influence.

The final, but a tremendously essential, significant and successful incident for the Nazis was the 'Night of The Long Knives'. After procuring Chancellorship of Germany, the SA had been a form of humiliation and embarrassment for Hitler due to their awfully violent approach. The SA as well as its leader Ernst Rohm also posed as a threat to Hitler due to their aspiration of a second revolution in Germany and of being the main military unit in the Nazi regime. Hitler persuaded Hindenburg by accusing the SA of plotting a revolt in opposition to the government and prepared a plan which is better known as the 'Night of the Long Knives' in History. Hitler got rid of most of the SA leaders including Ernst Rohm, the chief of the SA. Also using the authoritarianism presented by Hindenburg, Hitler skillfully used the situation to his advantage by getting rid of major hostility, including Strasser and Schleicher, Hitler's predecessors. Although the killings took place over the weekend, this event is termed as the 'Night of The Long Knives' due to 2000 people being exterminated in one night.

This incident proved enormously successful for the Nazis as the killing of the SA officials as well as the public vote of thanks by President Hindenburg brought Hitler immense popularity. Through this happening, Hitler portrayed himself as the 'just leader of Germany' and gave the people the impression that he will not tolerate indiscipline and offenses, may it be in his own party, by his own party members. Also Hitler pleased the army by removing their constant alarming threat of the SA through this event.

All these events consolidated Nazi power over Germany and eventually established hard lined Nazi dictatorship. After the death of Hindenburg, the last political figure who could possibly oppose Hitler, in July 1934, it was time for Hitler to take the last and final step. Hitler amalgamated the position of Chancellor and President to become the Fuhrer. The army tolerated Hitler's actions and the armed forces swore an oath of loyalty to Hitler in August 1934. What followed was autocracy, under Adolf Hitler, for more than a decade in Germany.