The Rise Of The Nazi Party Essay, Research Paper

There is no single answer as to why the Nazis were able to gain so much support during the 1920’s; there are several, and people still argue about them. Some people – especially during the Second World War – suggested that the Nazi movement grew out of something basically wrong in the German character. However, modern historians recognise that a combination of factors such as Hitler’s personality and mesmerising oratory skills, the problems with the Weimar Republic, the Nazi’s effective use of propaganda, Hitler’s exploitation of the Dolchstoss myth and the German people’s fear of communism and the Great Depression all aided the National Socialist Workers’ Party (NSDAP, or Nazi Party) in attracting growing support throughout the 1920’s.

According to Robert Gibson and Jon Nichol in their book Germany, the reasons for Hitler’s success were:

1. The Nazi Party was well organised;

2. People feared the Communists;

3. Hitler was a good speaker;

4. Few people like the governments of the Weimar Republic;

5. Hitler’s ideas were popular;

6. There was an agricultural depression;

7. There was mass unemployment;

8. The Communists thought that the Social Democrats were a greater danger than the Nazis;

9. Industrialists supported Hitler.

These and other factors all contributed to the increasing support of the Nazi Party in the 1920’s.

Hitler, the leader of the NSDAP, was suave, charismatic and always impressive. He would always arrive at functions and meetings in a Mercedes and had extensive visits to the most exclusive hotels in Germany. Hitler had a very memorable personality, and it has been stated that “There is no question that it was the personality of Hitler that held the NSDAP together … and was the party’s main weapon.” Hitler was above all of this a passionate and emotive speaker who, some would argue, captured his audiences’ attention with greater ease than any other figure in history. “He shone in print and positively dazzled on the lecture platform.”

Even an American journalist realised Hitler’s ability to grasp people’s attention with his speeches, and commented that “When, at the climax [of a speech] he sways from one side to the other his listeners sway with him; when he leans forward and when ends they are either awed or silent or on their feet in a frenzy.” Hitler’s remarkable ability to capture and entrance his audiences is demonstrated by the fact that Hitler, unlike any of his contemporaries, could actually charge admission for his speeches! Obviously, the fact that Hitler was such a popular speaker was a major reason why the Nazi Party was able to attract growing support in the 1920’s. Hitler’s impressive nature was a major contributing factor to the Nazi Party’s electoral landslides in the late twenties.

Although the war was over, the militarism and fondness for military tradition remained strong in Germany. With their processions, military bands, leaflets and sheer energy, the Nazis attracted massive interest and appealed to the soft spot that many Germans had for the Prussian military style, with discipline and pride. The marches, often by the SA (Nazi Storm troopers), had a huge presence and were very impressive. Albert Speer, a leading Nazi made the comment: “my mother saw a Storm Trooper parade … the sight of discipline in a time of chaos, the impression of energy in an atmosphere of universal hopelessness, seems to have won her over also.”

The sight of these parades was very emotive for some German people, and those who respected the militaristic values that Germany had previously stood for were very supportive of Hitler. The ideal of discipline appealed to many, and although the Nazi Party was quite small, it was a tightly controlled, highly disciplined organisation. This is one reason why the Nazis gained growing support during the 1920’s. The opportunity of serving in the SA gave unemployed men the opportunity to at least earn a few pfennigs. In this manner, the Nazis were gaining support from the unemployed who traditionally favoured the socialists and communists. This is also an example of why the Nazis continued to grow in popularity as they were able to attract Germans from the right who appreciated the militarism displayed, whilst also attracting those from the left – unemployed men exciting at the opportunity to do something worthwhile.

Kurt Ludecke, who personally knew Hitler stated that “Only one thing was managed marvellously from the beginning – the propaganda, Hitler’s personal hobby and perhaps his strongest point.”

Hitler revealed in his extremely cynical writings in Mein Kamph (My Sruggle – a book that was largely composed whilst in prison after the Beer Hall Putsch), that he had a brilliant grasp of the principles of propaganda, ahead of many of his contemporaries. Hitler was portrayed by his propagandists as a saviour, who could fight big business and the working class on behalf of the ?small man’ who was being neglected. One of Hitler’s key propaganda experts, Dr. Josef Goebbels portrayed Hitler as a ?modern monk’ who worked tirelessly for Germany. This is a perfect example of why the Nazis gained growing support during the 1920’s, they were using the media to convince the German people of Hitler’s supreme leadership credentials. Hitler cleverly manipulated the media so that he was portrayed in the most positive light possible, and the Germans were effectively brainwashed.

Hitler promised to “restore honour to the Germans, to renew political order and to bring back ?work and bread’”. Prior to the world Depression that started around 1928, Hitler devoted much of his political energy to the working class. However, the Nazis found it very difficult to attract considerable support for these groups who stubbornly stood by socialist parties such as the SPD and KPD. So when Germany came under an agricultural depression that pre-empted the global depression that followed, Hitler turned his focus to rural Germans, who would be looking for someone to offer them solutions.

Hitler promised impoverished small farmers, rural traders, skilled workers and peasants cheap credits, the abolition of numerous taxes and help in reconstruction of their farming enterprises. “The peasants, the Nazis said, were of true German blood and their life was the true German life. They had shamefully been neglected by the Weimar Republic.” Hitler told the people of the land that under a Nazi Government, rural people would be the most important people in Germany.

These rural Germans were on the brink of bankruptcy and starvation and welcomed these promises. This is another reason why the Nazi party attracted so much support during the 1920’s. They promised a plethora of wondrous concessions and aids to a large group of voting Germans, who would be anxious to accept the Nazi’s promises. Being in such a poor state, the agricultural sector of German society were eager to find someone to blame. As Geoff Spencely state: “The Nazis adopted the slogan ?Blood and Soil’ and offered the discontented rural community a scapegoat in the form of Jews. It was a potent mixture for success.”

Hitler also made many other flashy promises to the German people. One such promise came after the Young Plan was signed, tying Germany to thirty seven annual reparations payments rising from 1700 million gold marks to 2400 million gold marks, and then a further twenty one annual payments at a level of 1700 million gold marks. This meant that Germany would be paying reparations at an average annual level of just over 2000 gold marks until 1988! When this was announced, Hitler stated that he would not pay reparations and condemned the Weimar Government’s decision to agree to the Plan. On this matter, Hitler found an ally in Alfred Hugenburg, leader of the largest conservative party – the German National People’s Party. Hugenburg controlled a massive media empire, and used this to campaign against the Young Plan and ?The Enslavement of the German People’ as they called it. Although this attempt to stop the signing of the controversial document was unsuccessful, Hitler was given national publicity, and was given notoriety as a politician who strongly opposed the constraints set upon Germany after the embarrassing loss in World War One. As resentment over the loss of the war was still rife within Germany, Hitler’s stance on the reparations issue gained admiration, and added to his popularity. This is another reason why the Nazi Party attracted growing support during the 1920’s. The Nazis promised to stop reparations to the victors of the First World War, end unemployment, give a strong leadership and they attacked immigrants and particularly Jews.

Another, earlier, incident that gave Hitler national publicity was his attempt to overthrow the Weimar Government in the Munich, or Beer Hall, Putsch of 1923. Once again, Hitler’s attempt at assuming power was a miserable failure, with Hitler scuttling off in a car soon after the first shot was fired. However, this putsch was what first brought Hitler to national prominence. This was a stepping block in Hitler’s plan to take power. Yet another example is Hitler’s attempt to win the Presidency. Although this was also unsuccessful, with Hindenburg attaining a second term, Hitler was impressive in his ability to take Hindenburg to a second vote; capturing 13 million votes. Hitler was able to gain more publicity, and grew in stature in the public’s eye.

To say that the events of 1918 came as a great shock to Germans is probably an understatement. The war had been launched in a wave of patriotism, unity, and optimism in 1914. In the East, the war had gone particularly well for Germany, victory had seemed within her grasp. The defeat, armistice, and the crushing terms of the Versailles Treaty therefore left many Germans in a state of shock about the course of events. As a result, many believed and found solace in various conspiracy theories that appeared. It was a conspiracy that the Jewish had “stabbed Germany in the back”, holding protests and sabotaging the war effort, while Germany’s brave heroes remained undefeated at the front.

Hitler used this conspiracy theory to attract support. He gave the German people a scapegoat that they could blame for all their problems. Hitler took advantage of this, and promised to deal with the Jews if the Nazis were in power. This is yet another reason why the Nazi Party gained growing support during the 1920’s.

According to Kurt Ludecke, Hitler “had a matchless instinct for taking advantage of every breeze to rouse a political whirlwind. No official scandal was so petty that he could not magnify it into high treason.” Hitler was able to play on people’s fears and extend them so that they became extremely worried about matters that really were not as important or significant as Hitler suggested. Once he had built up this worry, he would alleviate it by ensuring the people that he, and the Nazi Party, would fight it on behalf of them. For example, Hitler played on the significant fears that people had of communism, and he exaggerated the threat that communism posed. People were extraordinarily scared of communism, and Hitler assured them that he would take care of the problem, as Albert Speer claims: “The perils of Communism could be checked, Hitler persuaded us, and instead of hopeless unemployment, Germany could move towards economic recovery.” the Nazi Party amassed a huge amount of support because of their anti-communist rhetoric. Hitler made the people believe that the Communists posed a very real threat, and “in the time of crisis the German people had swung to an extreme group … the Nazis were an easy way out, more appealing that the Communists.” This is an ideal example of how the Nazi Party attracted growing support during the 1920’s.

In 1923, Germany was hit by hyper-inflation when the value of the mark rapidly lost its value, and became virtually useless. In 1919 when inflation was already bad, one American dollar was worth 9 marks. By 1922, after the occupation of the Ruhr, one US dollar was worth 493 marks, and by November 1923, one American dollar was worth 4 300 000 000 (4.3 billion) marks. For the average German, this saw the cost of bread rise from 0.63 marks in 1918 to 201 000 000 000 marks in November 1923. This heavily affected the lower classes and the middle classes. A rather sour joke that Germans told each other was that “Years ago you took your money in your pocket to the delicatessen and brought home your supper in a carrier bag; now you have to take the money in a carrier bag and bring back the supper in your pocket!” This shows the extent to which the German people, most notably the lower classes, suffered. Many middle class retirees who were living off savings were ruined when the money they had in the bank was devalued and the money they had left was not nearly enough to survive on.

This is just one of the many prolonged economic crises of the 1920’s that gave the German people reason to doubt and feel angry towards the Weimar Government. Similar to the build up of anger between nations before the First World War, here began the build up of anger towards the Weimar Government. The Government’s perceived poor performance in running Germany after the lost war is one factor that added to the Nazi Party’s support in the 1920’s; the Government wasn’t working, so it was only natural that the Germans would look for a solution, and Hitler offered them that solution.

In 1927, Hitler established the Hitler Youth Group to draw younger people to the movement. This gave the Nazi Party a youthful, energetic source of members, and younger people were keen to join. Hitler was very intelligent in his plans to attract German youth. Hitler “successfully sought to project the image of youth, dynamism, strength, power and unity” and was able to harness the energies of younger people, who would later continue to increase Nazi membership when they were able to become full members. This burgeoning of membership helped the Nazi Party gain support in the 1920’s as it encouraged a wider range of people to become involved in the Nazi movement.

In a mere 14 years, the Weimar Republic had 19 Governments. The Republic was unloved by the German people and had achieved few successes in the eyes of the people since its inception. The fact that the Weimar Republic, in its entire existence, was not able to form a majority government, and thus was ruled by coalitions meant that precious few confident decisions could be made. Any proposals that were passed through the Reichstag were weak after being severely compromised. The Weimar governments were ineffectual, and unable to face problems without resorting to right wing force with the Friekorps or the Reichswehr. Obviously, when all protests were violently opposed by the government of Weimar, there is going to be a mounting of anger against the governments, and this is what occured. So, when Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came along and opposed the Weimar governments, they were able to attract more and more support. As the governments in power continued to blunder, the Nazis gained increased popularity. “The dysfunctional nature of Weimar democracy … aided in the rise of Nazism. The Weimar republic started in chaos, spent much of its short life in chaos, and dissolved without putting up much resistance.”

The Weimar Republic was also given considerable blame for Germany’s defeat in World War One as the Treaty Of Versailles was signed after the Weimar Republic was proclaimed. As W.R.D. Jones observed: “It was Germany’s defeat in this war [World War One] and her losses by the treaty of Versailles … that gave Hitler one of the two great weapons which he used to rouse his audiences to frenzy.” Indeed, the losses by the Treaty of Versailles were considerable. Germany lost thirteen percent of her territories, all her colonies, fifteen percent of her arable (fertile) land, seventy-five percent of iron resources, twenty-eight percent of coal resources as well as a great deal of industrial and transport capital. Unfortunately for the Weimar Republic, it was blamed for much of this and “tarnished by association with defeat, weakness, vacillation.”

For most of Weimar’s life, the Rhineland was still occupied, the hated war guilt clause remained and Germany’s army was reduced to a humiliating one hundred thousand, enough to ensure that Poland represented a considerable threat to Germany’s national security. Throughout the twenties, many specific groups were unhappy with the Government. Taxes remained high, businessmen yearned to restrict the influence of the unions and an agricultural depression hit many rural areas of Germany. Hitler appealed to national discontent and bitterness. People linked the Weimar Republic with the humiliation of World War One, and then came to link it with poverty and economic depression. “The German people were tired of political haggling in Berlin. They were tired of misery, tired of suffering, tired of weakness. These were desperate times and they were willing to listen to anyone, even Adolf Hitler.”

It cannot be denied that the Great Depression had a colossal impact on the Nazi’s gain in popularity. This is clearly shown in the election figures as it was not until the Depression started to hit that the Nazis began to claim large portions of the vote. When the Depression was first beginning to affect Germany n 1928, the Nazis had twelve seats. Two years later, deeply entrenched in the economic crisis, the Nazis had one hundred and seven; a meteoric rise.

The already unstable economic conditions of 1928 were severely intensified on October 29, 1929 when the American Stock Market crashed. When the Depression hit, the German economy was especially vulnerable since it was built out of foreign capital, mostly loans from America. Germany was also very dependent upon foreign trade as they had an extremely strong export market. When America suddenly asked for their money back, and when overseas countries could no longer afford German imports, the well oiled German industrial machine quickly ground to a halt. As production levels fell, German workers were laid off and inflation soon followed, making it hard for families to purchase some necessities with devalued money. Lower and middle class Germans were obviously worst hit. “The Great Depression began and they were cast out into poverty and deep misery and began looking for a solution, any solution. Adolf Hitler knew his opportunity had arrived.”

The Depression affected all parts of German society, and the ramifications were quite terrible. As Geoff Spencely remarks: “As world markets and investments collapsed, economic activity declined everywhere while unemployment increased dramatically. Few countries were affected as badly as Germany, however, and the Weimar Republic visibly wilted under the strain.” Whilst most people were wallowing amongst the economic turmoil, Hitler and the Nazis gained from it. The Government was unable to do anything, as they could rarely ever agree. “The crisis of the Great Depression brought disunity to the political parties in the Reichstag. Instead of forging an alliance to enact desperately needed legislation, they broke up into squabbling, uncompromising groups.” However, Hitler provided the people with hope. The Republic was once again showing its inadequacies in dealing with a major crisis, and to the people, Hitler was really the only option left. In extreme time, people go to the extremes of politics, and that it what the German people began to do.

Victor Schiff was quoted as saying “If there is indeed a point on which there is … no difference of opinion among us, it must surely be that Hitler owes his rise and his ultimate victory essentially to the World Economic Crisis: to the despair of the unemployed proletariat; to the academically trained youth for whom there is no future; to the middle class businessman and craftsman heading for bankruptcy and the farmers threatened with a fall in agricultural pricing.” These people looked to Hitler for a solution. The Great Depression was one of the most significant factors in the Nazis continued rise to power in the 1920’s. The people of Germany had not been able to rely on their government at any crisis situation, and again the Weimar Republic seemed unable to help, so they went to the extremes and looked to Hitler and the Nazi Party for an answer; and they gave one.

The killing of millions of Jews and other “non-Aryans” in the Holocaust is almost undoubtedly the greatest crime against humanity in recorded history, and it was made possible by a unique combination of factors.

Ever since the end of the war, the German people had suffered one problem after another. The numerous governments had done little to help, largely due to the fact that out of the nineteen Weimar governments, not one ruled with a majority, and this inspired little confidence in the people as the governments could take no decisive action. By the end of the 1920’s, a series of events had steadily eroded away the German people’s tolerance of the ineffectual democracy. They were tired of hopeless struggle, and when the Great Depression hit and the Government did very little to aid the people, it was the last straw. A landslide of support went to the Nazis who were promising to return Germany to its former glory.