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German 2320W

Lesson 4

Decline of the Weimar Republic and the Rise of the Nazi Party

General Ludendorff’s now famous “stab-in-the-back” theory set to blame the loss of the war on the republic. This had a major effect on the post war German people, this stacked with their feeling of dishonor from the Allied powers naming the sole agitator of the war. This along with the chaos to follow in the rise of the Weimar Republic directly led to the rise of the Nazi party and Adolf Hitler.

The Weimar Republic was founded in the chaos following the first world war. The post war election ended in fragmented support to many different parties, but the socialist party received the most votes and won the election. In January of 1919 Friedrich Ebert was declared the president of the Reich, but he had the unfortunate duty of representing Germany on the world scale. During and after this election the allied powers were discussing the Treaty of Versailles which was the ceremonial end to the war. This treaty to which Germany was not invited to discuss, but had to sign blamed them as the sole agitator of the war, reduced their foreign colonies, and had to pay a massive $33billion in war reparations. This, obviously, was very unpopular with the German people because not only did name them as the cause for the war and threatened their sovereignty, it was signed in the Hall of Mirrors where the second Reich was declared after the war with the French. The German people blamed the new Republic for this disrespect and failure making them extremely unpopular. This chaotic structure was a mangled solution to compromise between reactionary and revolutionary forces of Germany and there was insufficient time to form a stronger bond and middle ground between rival factions to form the new Republic. Thus, the democratic process ended with undemocratic traditions in administration, economy, and education inside Germany.

The strong distaste for the new Republic was spurred on by the now famous “*Stab-in-the-back*” theory claimed by General Ludendorff which basically stated that the German army had been defeated by internal revolutionary forces rather than foreign enemies. His reasoning was that German forces were still fighting in Belgium and France, not on German soil, which implies that they had not been driven back and were not losing. This myth propagated and was a powerful force in the minds of the German people. It was an easy out to deny that they had simply lost the war and then was easy to make the new republic the scapegoat for the loss.

Part of the terms of the Treaty was that the German Army would limited to 100,000 soldiers, this prevented many veterans of the first world war to return to service including one Adolf Hitler. Hitler instead began working as an informant for the army where he began his political career. Together with 6 other members he formed the German Workers’ Party in 1920. Being one of many small socialist parties it would have been easy to fall through the cracks and crumble, but thanks to Hitler’s skill as a public speaker they gained a considerable falling. During the inaugural meeting Hitler attracted several thousand people with his twenty-five-point program that lashed out again democracy, capitalism, and particularly the Jews. In an attempt to emphasize the national and socialist programs of the new party its name was changed to “National-Socialist German Workers’ Party”. In 1921 Hitler established himself the leader of the party and formed the SA (Sturmabteilung), which translates to Storm Troops. The SA was originally intended to be the sports group of the party, but quickly turned into a para-military arm of the party. The party’s message resonated with people who blamed the Jewish bankers for their own business woes and the economic problems of Germany.

Adolf Hitler became the head of the Kampfbund or Fight Group that sought support from military groups to overthrow the republic. In 1923 Hitler declared a state of emergency in a beer hall in Munich, which would become known as the Beer-Hall-Putsch, however the local Bavarian leaders decided against the coop which ended much hope for the coop. Hitler was then arrested and sentenced to five years in prison, during this time wrote the book Mein Kampf. This book drew on political propaganda and the extrapolated them on the reason why the Beer-Hall-Putsch failed. This book also spread the popular anti-Semitic, lebensraum, and Aryan race that many relate to Nazi Germany. After being released from Hitler rebuilt the NSDAP and formed a small group inside the SA, called the SS which sought to increase the popularity for the party, but led to more fighting between parties. Eventually the Nazi party became the largest political party in Germany with Adolf Hitler as the chancellor. He used the SA and SS as enforces to maintain powers of the Nazi party eventually forcing the government to vote itself out of power.

The propaganda machine began and through decrees Hitler began to limit rights and put a strangle hold on his power over the government. He rose through the ranks legally and lamented his control legally as well. Thanks to the chaos of the Weimar Republic, the unrest of the German people following the Treaty of Versailles fallout and forces such as Ludendorff and Nazi parties rhetoric led to the rise Adolf Hitler.