

MODERN HISTORY

Account for the success of Hitler and the Nazi Party in gaining and establishing power up to the end of 1934.

Hitler is unarguably the greatest dictator of our time, and the Nazi Party was the political group through which he gained power and popularity within Germany, up to the end of 1934. There were many factors which can be seen as reasons for the success of the Nazi Regime. These include aspects which Hitler had control over, such as the Party's appealing ideologies to a wide range of Germans, as well as its effective propaganda methods. There were also features of the Weimar Republic which the party exploited for their benefit and success, like the weaknesses of the left-wing parties and the fundamental flaws in the constitution. Lastly, Hitler obtained power by feeding off the wealth and prestige of the conservative elites and army, who were also against democracy.

It can be seen that the most significant reason for the success of the National Socialist Regime was its appeal to a wide range of groups. Its vague and broad policies applied to many groups and classes, playing on the emotions of the German public. The middle class were traditionally right-wing, and their fear of the working class led them to be attracted to the Nazi Party's rejection of the Republic and their promise of a return to traditional German values. For youth groups the party provided a medium through which they could express their hopes and ideals, above the interests of class and status. Although there were not many working class Nazi supporters, some were attracted to Hitler's promises of lower interest rates and subsidies to farmers. Because by 1919 the right to vote was also extended to women, the Nazi Party promoted itself to them as well, by emphasising their value and role in society as mothers and wives. These appealing features of the National Socialist Party, combined with Hitler's opportunist attitude, and the apparent legality of the Regime all contributed to the increasing popularity of the party. However, an effective means was needed to convey the ideologies of the party: propaganda.

It is clear that the propaganda methods implemented by Hitler and the Nazi Party were essential in bringing success and power to them. As was seen in the 1932 Presidential elections, Hitler was the first 'politician of the air' i.e. he travelled by air as part of his election campaign. He also used radio as a medium through which he could reach a larger proportion of the German public. There are also certain individuals who played imperative roles in his promotion eg. Architect Albert Speer incorporated many of the neo-classical Nazi Party ideals into his buildings and designs and Leni Riefenstahl the film maker could be seen to be publicizing Hitler's campaigns through her movies. Therefore, it can be said that Adolf Hitler was a manipulator of the latest technology and media as a form of propaganda to make his world view known, and to increase the popularity of his party.

During the 1920s and 1930s, The Nazi Party's opponents' weaknesses became a strength for Hitler, and a contributing factor to this was the divisions between the left-wing parties. The Nazi Party was able to successfully blame the current chaos in Germany on the left-wing parties, therefore undermining democracy and fits own interests. One of the main accusations that was put on the Weimar Republic was that of the Treaty of Versailles – Hitler claimed the political, social and economic instability that the nation was experiencing was due to this agreement. Like this, he made the Nazis seem like the more able and beneficial party to govern the nation. Another political factor which contributed to the weakness of Hitler's opponents was the division of the left wing parties. The main opposition was between the communists (KPD) and the socialists (SPD). This had been a long-term rivalry because the KPD could not forgive the SPD for their use of the Freikorps against them during the time of the Spartacist uprising. As is evident, the weaknesses of the left-wing parties were exploited by Hitler to bring success and power to the Nazi Party. The other major part of the Weimar Republic which the Nazis manipulated was the flawed constitution.

There were inherent flaws in the constitution which the Nazi Party took advantage of to ensure their electoral success. The major one was that the Weimar Republic used proportional representational

voting. This meant that it was possible for smaller parties to emerge and obtain some power, and also that the Nazis did not need a majority in the Reichstag to come to power. So in the 1932 elections, when the National Socialist Party was consistently the largest, President Hindenburg had no choice but to appoint Hitler as Chancellor. The second aspect of the constitution which allowed Hitler to attain totalitarian powers was Article 48. This ultimately allowed Hitler to, by March of 1933, pass the Enabling Act, which gave him complete control over the State, without having to answer to the Reichstag or the President. With this free reign, in 1934 the Nazi Party was able to implement several new laws which further created a totalitarian state. So the liberal nature of the Weimar constitution made it easy to be attacked by extremist parties, such as the Nazis, who came to power by exploiting it. However, certain groups were also contributors to the rise of the Nazis.

The conservative German elites and the respected German army played a pivotal role in Hitler's rise to power. The old ruling class of Germany wanted to retain their position as the independent decision makers, and ultimately it had the same goal as Hitler did: to lay the blame of the defeat at WW1 on the Socialist democrats, and in doing so, assume power over the nation once again. Because of this, Hitler was able to feed of their power and establish a dictatorial rule over Germany. One example of this is the Munich Beerhall Putsch in 1923: Hitler was able to gain the support of President Hindenburg and other key industrialists in causing unrest and gaining publicity for his ideas. The powerful media owner and industrialist Hugenburg also aided Hitler in bringing the Nazi Party into the centre stage of German politics. Hitler's party formed an alliance with Hugenburg's Nationalist Party in 1929, and like this, the Nazis used his finances as well as media outlets to promote themselves and project themselves into the national political arena.

In conclusion, it can be seen that there were a number of factors contributing to the success of Hitler and the Nazi Party in gaining power up to the end of 1934. These include political reasons directly influenced by Hitler himself, features of the democracy which were exploited by the Nazis, and also the assistance and support of powerful groups in Germany like the aristocracy and the army.