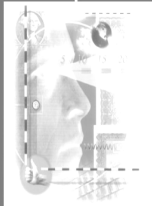


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Nazism was a system and a structure of ideas about the world and politics. Under the shadow of the Second World War, Germany had started a genocidal war. It resulted in the mass murder of selected groups of innocent Europeans. The number of people killed included 6 million Jews, 200000 Gypsies, 1 million Polish civilians and 70000 Germans. Nazis killed people by gassing them in various killing centres like Auschwitz. Hitler, his Propaganda Minister Goebbels and his entire family committed suicide collectively in April 1945 in his Berlin bunker. In May 1945, Germany surrendered to the Allies. An International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg prosecuted Nazi war criminals for crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Nuremberg Tribunal sentenced only eleven leading Nazis to death. Many others were imprisoned for life. The Allies did not want to be as harsh on defeated Germany as they had been after the First World War.

Birth of the Weimar Republic: Germany was a powerful empire in the early years of the 20th century. It fought the First World War (1914–1918) alongside the Austrian empire and against the Allies (England, France and Russia).

Defeat of Germany: All the people joined the war with great interest, hoping to gain from a victory. After sometime, they felt that the war would stretch on, eventually draining all the resources of Europe. Germany made initial gains by occupying France and Belgium. However, the Allies, won as they were strengthened by the US entry in 1917. They defeated Germany and the Central Powers in November 1918.

Framing of Democratic Constitution: The defeat of Imperial Germany and the resigning of the emperor gave an opportunity to parliamentary parties to recast German polity. A National Assembly met at Weimar and established a democratic Constitution with a federal structure. Deputies were elected to the German Parliament or Reichstag, on the basis of equal and universal votes cast by all adults including women.

Peace Treaty of Versailles: This republic was not received well by its own people because they were forced to accept terms after Germany's defeat at the end of the First World War. The Peace Treaty at Versailles with the Allies was a harsh and humiliating peace. By signing the Peace Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost

1. its overseas colonies
2. one-tenth of its population.
3. 13 per cent of its territories.
4. 75 per cent of its iron and 26 per cent of its coal to France, Poland, Denmark and Lithuania.
5. £6 billion as compensation for war. The War Guilt Clause held Germany responsible for the war and damages the Allied countries suffered.
6. resource-rich Rhineland to Allied control.

Further, the Allied Powers demilitarised Germany to weaken its power. Many Germans held the new Weimar Republic responsible for not only the defeat in the war, but the disgrace at Versailles.

The Effects of the War: The First World War had a devastating impact on the entire continent both psychologically and financially. Earlier, Europe was the continent of creditors, but now became a continent of debtors.

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The Weimar Republic was being made to pay for the sins of the old empire. It carried the burden of war guilt and national humiliation. It was forced to pay a huge compensation.

Socialists, Catholics and Democrats supported the Weimar Republic. They became easy targets of criticism and became known as 'November criminals' by the conservative nationalists. This mindset had a major impact on the political developments of the early 1930s.

After the First World War, soldiers were placed above civilians and the media glorified them. However, the truth was just the opposite. Politicians and publicists believed that man should be aggressive, strong and masculine.

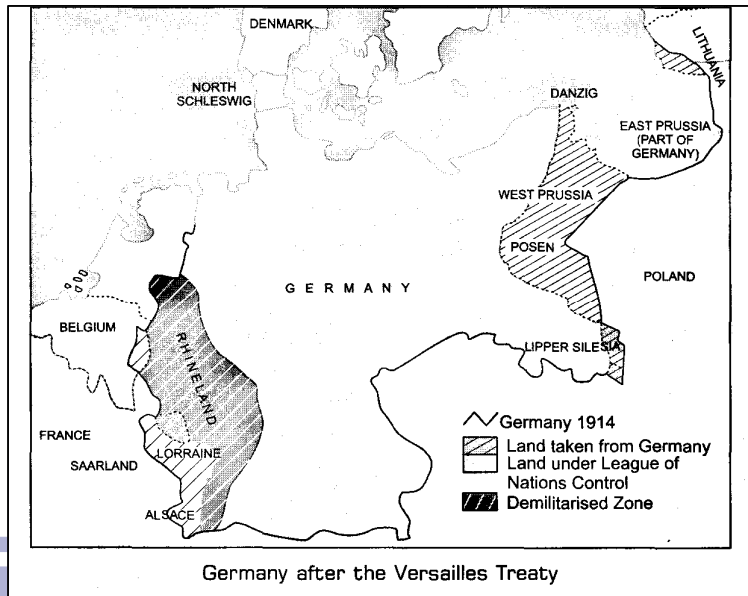
Aggressive war propaganda, national honour and support grew for conservative dictatorship, were very common at that time. At that time in Europe, democracy was a young and fragile idea which could not survive.

Political Radicalism and Economic Crisis: The birth of the Weimar Republic coincided with the revolutionary uprising of the Spartacist League. This league was based on the pattern of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Soviets of workers and sailors were established in many cities.

Political Radicalism in Germany: The political atmosphere in Berlin was charged with demands for Soviet-style governance. The Weimar Republic crushed the uprising of the Spartacist League with the help of the war veterans organisation called the Free Corps. The Spartacists later founded the Communist Party of Germany. The two parties of Communists and Socialists never worked together after this; thus they could not control the rise of Hitler.

Economic Crisis in Germany: Political radicalisation was only increased by the economic crisis of 1923. Germany had fought the war on loans and had to pay war reparations in gold. This depleted gold reserves at a time when resources were scarce. So, France occupied Germany's industrial area, the Ruhr, which was rich in coal.

Hyperinflation in Germany: Germany printed paper currency abundantly. It resulted in a fall of the value of the German mark. In April 1923, the US dollar was equal to 24000 marks, but it rose to 98860000 marks by December. As the mark value declined sharply, prices of goods increased. The image of Germans carrying cartloads of currency notes to buy just a loaf of bread evoked sympathy worldwide. This crisis came to be known as 'Hyperinflation in Germany'. At last,



Germany after the Versailles Treaty

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the Americans introduced the Dawes Plan. It helped Germany to overcome the crisis. The plan reworked the terms of reparation to ease the financial burden on Germans.

The Years of Depression: After the First World War, several countries of Europe were hit by economic depression. Demand for goods fell sharply after the war. Thus farmers, traders and industrialists were hit due to a steep fall in demand. Factories shut down, exports fell, investors withdrew their money from markets and farmers were badly hit. Even, America could not escape from this crisis. The Wall Street Exchange crashed in 1929. In Germany, investment and industrial recovery were totally dependent on the USA. Fearing a fall in prices, people made immediate efforts to sell their shares. On one single day, 24th October, 13 million shares were sold. This was the start of the Great Economic Depression.

Effects of the Recession on Germany: Over the next three years, i.e. between 1929 and 1932, the national income of the USA fell by half. The effects of this recession in the US economy were felt all over the world. The German economy was severely hit by the economic crisis. By 1932, industrial production was reduced to 40 per cent of the 1929 level.

The main effects of recession on Germany were:

- Workers lost their jobs or were paid reduced wages.
- The number of unemployed increased to 6 million.
- On the streets of Germany, men started moving with placards around their necks saying, 'Willing to do any work'
- Unemployed youths played cards or simply sat at street corners, or desperately queued up at the local employment exchange.
- As jobs disappeared, the youth took to criminal activities and total despair became common.
- The economic crisis created deep anxieties and fears in people.
- The middle classes, especially salaried employees and pensioners, saw their savings diminish when the currency lost its value.
- Every member of the society, middle classes, small businessmen, the self-employed retailers, big business, organised workers and the large mass of peasantry were affected by this economic crisis. Sometimes, they were filled with the fear of proletarianisation, an anxiety of being reduced to the ranks of the working class or worse still, the unemployed.

Un-stability of Weimar Republic: The Weimar Constitution had some internal defects which made it unstable and vulnerable to dictatorship. People lost confidence in the Weimar Republic. Due to proportional representation, it was impossible to get a majority for one single party. Moreover, Article 48 gave the President the powers to impose emergency, suspend civil rights and rule by decree. The Weimar Republic faced twenty different cabinets in 14 years, each lasting on average 239 days and people lost confidence in the democratic parliamentary system, which hardly offered any solutions.

HITLER'S RISE TO POWER: Hitler was born in 1889 in Austria. Hitler's rise was due to the crisis of economy, polity and society in Germany. In the First World War, Hitler joined the army and earned a medal for bravery. Germany's defeat and the humiliating Versailles Treaty made him join the German Worker's Party in

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1919. He took over the organisation and renamed it as the National Socialist German Workers Party. It was later known as the Nazi Party.

Reasons Behind Hitler's Rise: In 1923, Hitler planned to seize control of Bavaria, march to Berlin and capture power. He was arrested, tried for treason and later released. Nazism became a Mass Movement. However, the Nazis could not effectively organise popular support till the early 1930s. After 1929, banks collapsed, business shut down and people lost their jobs.

In this situation of despair, Nazi propaganda gave hopes of a better future to the German people. In 1928, the Nazi Party got no more than 2.6 per cent votes in the elections to the Reichstag the German Parliament. By 1932, it had become the largest party with 37 per cent votes. Hitler was a powerful speaker. His passionate speeches about the Fatherland and promises inspired people.

Promises made by Hitler were as follows:

1. He promised to build a strong nation, undo the injustice of the Versailles Treaty, restore the dignity of the German people and create opportunities for unemployed people. He promised employment for those looking for work and a secure future for the youth.
2. He promised to weed out all foreign influences and to resist all foreign conspiracies against Germany.

Developments at the Time of Hitler: The Red banners with the Swastika, the Nazi salute and the ritualised rounds of applause after every speech were new developments at the time of Hitler. Nazi propaganda skilfully projected Hitler as a messiah, a saviour, as someone who had arrived to deliver people from their distress. It was an image that captured the imagination of a people whose sense of dignity and pride had been shattered and who were living in a time of acute economic and political crises.

