National Socialism Essay, Research Paper

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National Socialism, commonly called Nazism, was a German political movement initiated in 1920 with the organization of the National Socialist German Worker?s Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei ). The movement culminated in the establishment of the Third Reich, the totalitarian German State led by Adolf Hitler from 1933 to 1945.

The roots of National Socialism were peculiarly German, grounded for example, in the Prussian tradition of military authoritarianism and expansion, in the German romantic tradition of hostility to rationalism, liberalism and democracy. In various racist doctrines according to which the Nordic peoples, as so-called pure Aryans, were not only physically superior to other races, but were the carriers of a superior morality and culture. Also, in certain philosophical traditions, National Socialism idealized the state or exalted the superior individual and exempted such a person from conventional restraints.

?The theorists and planners of National Socialism included General Karl Ernst Haushofer, a German geographer who exercised much influence in German affairs. The German editor and party leader Alfred Rosenberg formulated Nazi racial theories based on the work of the Anglo-German writer Houston Stewart Chamberlain. To the German financier Hjalmar Schacht fell the task of formulating and carrying out much of the economic and banking policies, and the German architect and party leader Albert Speer was a major figure in overseeing the economy just before the end of World War Two (1939 ? 1945)?.

It appears that the immediate origins of National Socialism are found in the consequences of the German defeat in World War One (1914 ? 1918). The German defeat in World War One brought about the German people to react to the defeat of their nation with a growing sense of humiliation. Rather than being subdued, however, many Germans saw World War One as a kind of transformation, a rebirth of German culture. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was charged with sole responsibility for the war, stripped of its colonial empire and forced to pay heavy reparations. France seriously disrupted German political and economic life consequently of the treaty, for example the seizure of the Saar Mines. The United States offered assistance to Germany by granting large loans and this temporarily helped Germany to recover its economy and to compensate the Allies.

Severe inflation, which reached its climax in 1923, all but destroyed the German middle class, leaving many of its impoverished and despairing members vulnerable to the appeals of radical political groups that sprang up in the postwar years. Only a few years after some measure of economic stability and progress had been achieved, the worldwide economic crisis that began in 1929 plunged Germany into an apparently hopeless depression. During these years the democratic ?Weimar Republic was subjected to increasing attack from both right and left parties.? The republic proved unable to cope effectively with the desperate condition of the country. By 1933, the majority of German voters supported one or the other of two major totalitarian parties, the Communist and the National Socialist.

?The National Socialist party originated in the German Worker?s Party and was formed in Munich in 1919. At the time that Hitler joined in 1919, the German Worker?s party had a nominal membership of about 25, only six of whom were active in its discussions and lecture activities.? Shortly after joining, Hitler became a leader of the group. ?At the first mass meeting of the German Worker?s Party, held in Munich on February 24, 1920, Hitler read the party program, which he had partly written; this consisted of 25 points comprising a mixture of exaggerated nationalistic demands, corrupt socialist ideas and racist and anti-Semitic doctrines. As the essential conditions for the realization of its aims, the party declared in point 25 of the program: ? For modern society, a colossus with feet of clay, we shall create an unprecedented centralization which we will unite all powers in the hands of the government. We shall create a hierarchical constitution, which will mechanically govern all movements of individuals.?? It seems that the National Socialist Party directed their speeches on what they were going to do with such strong confidence and that no one dared question how the Party was going to go about fulfilling these promises.

For example, on ?November 8 1923, with 600 armed storm troopers, Hitler marched on a beer hall in Munich at which Gustav von Kahr, head of the provincial Bavarian government, was addressing a public meeting. Hitler took von Kahr and his associates prisoner and abetted by General Erich Ludendorff, declared in von Kahr?s name the formation of a new national government. Immediately thereafter, von Kahr was released, and he turned against Hitler and Ludendorff. Following a brief skirmish with the Munich police on November 9, Hitler and his associates fled and the so-called ?beer hall putsch? (revolt) failed. Hitler and Ludendorff were subsequently arrested. The latter went unpunished, but Hitler was tried and received a five-year prison sentence, and the party was outlawed. In prison, Hitler dictated Mein Kampf to Rudolf Hess.? As later expanded by Hitler, this was a frank statement of National Socialist doctrines, propaganda techniques, and plans for the conquest first of Germany, and then of Europe. In later years, Mein Kampf became the bible of National Socialism.

Hitler was released from prison in little less than a year. The National Socialist Party was then in a state of virtual dissolution, in large part because improvement in the country?s economic conditions had created an atmosphere more favorable to moderate political organizations. During the following years, with the aid of a small number of loyal associates, Hitler slowly rebuilt the party.

The principal auxiliary organization of the Nazi Party was the SA, officially designated as the ?guarantor of the National Socialist revolution? and the ?vanguard of National Socialism.? It extorted large sums of money from German workers and farmers through its annual ?winter help? collections from the poor and conducted the training in National Socialism of all German youth through the age of 17. The SA organized a thorough pogrom against the Jews in 1938 and during World War Two, supplied the indoctrination officers attached to the field forces of the German army and led the home defense forces of the Reich.

In 1926, Hitler established himself as the ?Fuhrer? (leader) of the party and organized the armed and black-shirted ?Schutzsaffein? (protective units), or SS, known as the Elite Guard, to supervise and control the party and its semi-military arm, the SA. The SS organized special combat divisions to bolster the regular army at critical moments during World War Two. Together with the ?Sicherheitsdienst? (Security Service), or SD, the espionage agency of the party and the Reich, the SS controlled the Nazi Party during the last years of war. The SD operated the concentration camps for victims of National Socialism terrorism and during the war played an important role in enabling Hitler to win control of the armed forces from the general staff. Another important party auxiliary was the ?Hitler Jugend? (Hitler Youth Organization), which prepared boys of 14 to 17 years of age for membership in the SA, the SS and the SD. The party?s ?Auslandsorganisation? (Foreign Organization) conducted National Socialist propaganda and created, financed, and directed National Socialist Organizations among the German and people of German extraction abroad.

Following the onset of the world economic depression in 1929, the flow of foreign capital into Germany ceased, the country?s foreign trade declined, the wheels of German industry slowed, unemployment increased greatly and agricultural prices fell. As the depression deepened, a situation ripe for revolution began to emerge. ?Fritz Thyssen, head of the Thyssen conglomerate of steelworks and related enterprises, and other capitalists contributed large sums of money to the National Socialist Party.? Numerous German capitalists were, however, unalterably opposed to National Socialism.

The movement began rapidly, recruiting thousands of discharged civil servants, ruined shopkeepers and small-business owners, impoverished farmers, workers disillusioned with the Socialist and Communist parties, and a host of frustrated and embittered young people of all classes, brought up in the postwar years and without hope of personal economic security. ?In the Reichstag elections of 1930 the National Socialists polled almost 6.5 million votes (more than 18 percent of the total votes cast) compared to little more than 800, 000 (about 2.5 percent) in 1928. The 107 seats they won in that election made them the second largest party in the Reichstag, after the Social Democrats, who won 143 seats. The communists, who polled 4.6 million votes and who made a considerable gain, had 77 seats.?

The Nazi Party took all possible advantage of the deepening depression from 1929 to 1932. Desperate efforts by Chancellor Heinrich Bruning to save the democratic republic by emergency decrees did not succeed in stemming the growing tide of unemployment. Rather, his ineffectual government undermined what remained of belief in parliamentary democracy in Germany. Consequently, Hitler drew a huge vote in the presidential elections of 1932, although he lost to Paul von Hindenburg.

Thereafter, the party was the principal instrument of the totalitarian control of the state of German society, exercised through the leadership corps of the party. Loyal Nazis soon held most high government offices ? national, provincial and local. ?Party members of ?pure? German blood 18 years or more of age swore allegiance to the ?Fuhrer? and according to Reich law were accountable for their actions only in special party courts.? Nominally, membership in the party was voluntary, and millions willingly joined, but a great many others were compelled to become members against their will. Many civil-service employees were required to join. At its peak, the party had an estimated membership of about 7 million.

Hitler began to create the national Socialist State by eliminating all working class and liberal democratic opposition. The Reichstag fire trial served as the pretext not only for suppressing the Communist and Social Democratic parties, but also for abrogating all constitutional and civil rights and for instituting concentration camps for victims of National Socialist terror.

The ?Geheime Staatspolizei? (Secret State Police), known as the Gestapo, was created in 1933 to suppress opposition to the Hitler regime. ?In 1936, when it was incorporated into the state, the Gestapo was declared not subject to legal restraints and responsible only to its chief, Heinrich Himmler, and to Hitler.?

From 1933 to 1935, the democratic structure of Germany was replaced with a completely centralized state. The autonomy previously exercised in many matters by the provincial governments was eliminated, and these subnational governments were transformed into strictly controlled instruments of the central government. The Reichstag retained only a ceremonial, not a legislative, function. A process of coordination subjected all private organizations of business, labor and agriculture, as well as education and culture, to party control and direction. Even the Protestant church was infiltrated by National Socialist doctrines. Special legislation also excluded Jewish people from the protection of German law.

The most crucial problem the party leadership confronted on coming to power was unemployment. German industry was then operating at about 58 percent of capacity. Estimates of the number of unemployed people at that time in Germany vary from 6 to 7 million. Among them were tens of thousands of party members who expected Hitler to carry out the anticapitalist promises of National Socialist propaganda, put an end to the monopolistic enterprises and cartels, and revive industry through the establishment of a large number of small businesses. Ordinary people demanded a second revolution. ?The SA, led by Ernst Rohm, included control of the Reichwehr (the army) in the program of the second revolution. Hitler had to choose between a ?plebian? National Socialist regime and an alliance with the industrialists of the country and the general staff of the Reichswehr.? He chose the latter course. On the evening of June 30 1934, later known as the ?night of the long knives,? Hitler ordered the SS to murder members of the unruly SA, a group Hitler feared would agitate the Reichwehr. ?A number of SA and party members, including Rohm, and between 400 and 1000 of their followers, many of them innocent of any opposition to Hitler, were killed. Also included in the purge were other enemies such as General Kurt von Schleicher and some monarchists who had advocated restoration of the Hohenzollem dynasty.?

Suppression of opposition parties and blood purges, however, did not solve the unemployment problem. To eliminate unemployment, Hitler had to revive German industry. ?His solution was to create the ?new order,? the basic premises of which were the following: that the full and profitable utilization of the capacity of German industry could be achieved only by restoring Germany to a position of leadership in world trade, industry and finance. That necessary sources of raw materials of which Germany had been deprived had to be reacquired; and control of other necessary sources had to be established. That an adequate merchant fleet and modern rail, air, and motor transport systems had to be constructed; and that industry had to be reorganized for the greatest possible efficiency.?

It seems that two necessary sets of conclusions were drawn from these premises. The first set recognized that carrying out the entire plan required eliminating the economic and political restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, and that ultimately this step would result in war. Therefore, the economy was to be reorganized essentially as a war economy. Germany had to become completely self sufficient in strategic raw materials by developing synthetic substitutes for those materials in which the country was deficient and that could not be secured abroad. An adequate supply of food was to be assured by the controlled development of agriculture. The second set of conclusions concerned eliminating obstacles to the realization of the plan, arising from the struggle of the workers to improve their condition and embodied organizationally in the trade unions and their auxiliary organizations.

Concretely, the ?new order? involved abolishing trade unions and cooperatives, confiscating their financial and other assets, eliminating collective bargaining between workers and their employers, prohibiting strikes and lockouts, and requiring membership by law of all German workers in the state controlled ?Deutsche Arbeitsfront? (German Labor Front), or DAF. The minister of national economy, who handled all questions relating to wages and hours and conditions of work, determined wages.

The trade associations of business owners and industrialists of the Weimar Republic were transformed into organs of state control. Membership by employers was compulsory. Supervision of these associations were vested in the ministry of national economy, which had the power to recognize trade organizations as the sole representatives of their respective branches of industry, organize new associations, dissolve or merge existing ones, and appoint and recall the leaders of all the associations. Through the exercise of these powers and as specifically empowered by law, the ministry of economy greatly expanded existing cartels and cartelized entire industries. The banks were similarly coordinated. Private property rights were preserved, and previously nationalized enterprises were ?reprivatized? – that is, ?returned to private ownership but all owners were subject to rigid state controls.? By all of these and related means the Hitler regime eliminated competition. Ultimately four banks and a relatively small number of huge conglomerates economically dominated the ?new order?. ?These included the vast munitions and steel manufacturing empire of the Krupp family and the notorious Interessengemeinschaft Farbenindustrie, known as the I. G. Farben, which produced dyes, synthetic rubber, oil and other products and participated in or dominated almost 400 enterprises.? Some of these enterprises made use of millions of prisoners of war and inhabitants of conquered countries as slave laborers in German industry. The cartels also supplied materials for the systematic and scientific extermination by the Hitler government of millions of Jews, Poles, Russians and others.

The creation of the new order enabled the National Socialists to eliminate unemployment; provide the German workers and farmers with a tolerable standard of living; enrich the elite ruling group of the state, industry and finance; and build a stupendous war machine. As they constructed their ?new order? in Germany, they pressed forward politically and diplomatically for the creation of Greater Germany. The record of Hitler?s foreign policy constitutes an ugly period in German History.

?The outstanding effects of the era of totalitarian aggression was the remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936) and the intervention in the Spanish Civil War (1936 ?1939) on behalf of the royalist forces of Francisco Franco, ?Anschluss? (?union,? that is, annexation) with Austria (1938). Also the destruction of the Czechoslovak state (1939), negotiation of a non-aggression pat with the Soviet Union containing a secret agreement to partition Poland, and, in consequence of that pact, the invasion of Poland on September 1 1939, which precipitated World War Two.?

Hitler boasted that National Socialism had solved the problems of German society and would endure for a thousand years. It seems that the party resolved problems with which the Weimar Republic was powerless to cope, and that it transformed the weak republic into an industrially and politically powerful state is a matter of record. Equally of record and undeniable is that the cost of that transformation included the horror of World War Two, the bloodiest and most destructive conflict in human history, from which Germany emerged beaten, divided, and impoverished. Also included in that cost is the price paid in suffering endured by the German people under Hitler and after his death. Although, the most tragic aspect of the National Socialist reign was the systematic murder of approximately 6 million European Jewish people.

After the war, a small neo-Nazi movement continued to exist in West Germany. Neo-Nazism gained some popularity after the reunification of Germany in 1990. The movement is largely composed of discontented young males who target Jews, blacks, homosexuals and members of other minority groups with acts of violence. Neo Nazi groups have also sprung up in other countries, including the United States and Canada.

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