



LoN

The Question of Rising Political Extremism - 1934

Forum: League of Nations

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Introduction

During the Interbellum (Nov 11, 1918 – Sep 1, 1939), Europe was in a vulnerable state both economically and politically. The people hoped for a better future for themselves and their countries and therefore sought support from a greater power. This greater power came in the form of totalitarian leaders, also known as dictators, that strived for total control of the lives and ideas of the citizens. Dictators, such as Adolf Hitler, promised professions and civil order, which gave hope to the citizens that were suffering from unemployment and had lost optimism for their land. This resulted in the rise of political extremism in the early 1930's.

Definition of Key Terms

Extremism

- The holding of extreme political (or religious) beliefs. “Extremism can lead to the radicalisation of individuals, deny people their full rights and opportunities, suppress freedom of expression, incite hatred, erode our democratic institutions, social capital and cohesion, and can lead to acts of terrorism.” (*New Definition Of Extremism (2024)*, 2024)

Interbellum

- The interwar period between Nov 11, 1918: the end of the First World War and Sep 1, 1939: the beginning of the Second World War.

Totalitarian

- “Form of government that theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state.” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024)

Dictator

- A political leader who possesses absolute power and control over a country, usually obtained by force.

Reparations

- The compensation for war damage paid by a defeated state.

Nationalism

- “Nationalism, ideology based on the premise that the individual’s loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests.” (Kohn, 2024)

Disarmament

- The reduction or withdrawal of military forces and weapons.

General Overview

History & Geographical facts

After the signing of the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I, Germany faced harsh consequences for their actions during The War:

“According to French and British wishes, the Treaty of Versailles subjected Germany to strict punitive measures. The Treaty required the new German Government to surrender approximately 10 percent of its prewar territory in Europe and all of its overseas possessions.”

(Milestones in The History Of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office Of The Historian, n.d.)

Along with the aforementioned repercussions, Germany had to pay reparations up to 33 billion dollars, which took a toll on their economy as a whole (Blakemore & Blakemore, 2019). In addition, the people of Germany felt humiliated by the Treaty and resorted to nationalism, believing Germany can be great once again and longed for the return of the Reich (*Milestones in The History Of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office Of The Historian, n.d.*). Germany was no longer an empire (Reich) and was now a republic after King Wilhem II had abdicated the throne after WWI. Meanwhile Benito Mussolini's rise to fascist power was happening in Italy, which tied with the upsurge of Adolf Hitler in Germany. Hitler founded the National Socialist German Workers' Party which had promised the people to restore nationalism and retrieve the territories taken according to the Treaty (School History, 2020). This is what gained Hitler and his party immense popularity in Germany.

Furthermore, the Dawes plan was established in late 1923. It stated that in the span of the next four years, the U.S. would contribute by lending Germany money to help it pay its reparations. Later, in 1928, the Young Plan was implemented and it held the idea that Germany's debts would be lowered from \$33 billion to \$29 billion and will be paid over 58 years. The U.S., along with other foreign markets, supplied a loan of \$300 million (*Milestones in The History Of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office Of The Historian, n.d.-b*). However, both the Dawes and Young Plan came to a tragic end once the U.S. was hit by the Great Depression in 1929. This event put an end to the flourishing economy of the States and resulted in it not being able to supply any more loans. This meant that Germany was in a worse financial state than ever. The unemployment and poverty rates had risen from 1.3 million to over 2 million (Crew, 1998). Because of this, the German citizens had lost hope in the Weimar Republic.

Additionally the citizens began to have strong doubts in the democratic governance of the country and believed that the current government couldn't handle the crisis well. Hitler, with the NSDAP had promised the restoration of the German Reich and had further guaranteed jobs for those who were left unemployed due to the financial crisis (School History, 2020). Since the German

civilians were left unemployed and didn't trust the government functioning as a republic anymore, Hitler's ideas seemed appealing. Therefore Hitler took advantage of the vulnerability and desperation of the citizens and ran his campaign stronger than ever. All of this led to Hitler overthrowing the democratic government and turning Germany into a dictatorship in 1933 (*Germany 1933: From Democracy To Dictatorship*, n.d.).

However, political extremism such as nationalism and fascism wasn't common only in Germany. As previously stated, Benito Mussolini was rising in power during the time in which Hitler had founded the NSDAP. Mussolini is known for starting the fascist movement in Italy during the Interbellum and supporting the international spread of the belief (*Benito Mussolini | Biography, Definition, Facts, Rise, & Death*, 2024). Fascism, along with various other extremist ideologies, among which nationalism, became widely followed throughout Europe. The common thread with extremist ideologies was that the dictators who stood for said ideologies, preyed on the vulnerability and fragile states of their given civilians and countries and rose to power by giving simple, unreliable, solutions to complex situations and crises.

Similar to the National Socialist movement, communism rose to widespread popularity across Europe, due to the economical and social vulnerability of the world between 1929 and late 1930's (Markowitz, 2019). The Great Depression had left Europeans doubting capitalism, which is what made extremist ideas gain traction. In Western Europe, national socialism and fascism were the most popular ideologies, whereas communism was most common in Eastern Europe. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed in 1922 and its ideas were used even in countries that were directly a part of the Union. The Soviet Union had satellite states such as Bulgaria, Romania and Poland which were under the communist regime of the Union and had totalitarian leaders that strongly followed the ideologies (*Historical Documents - Office Of The Historian*, n.d.). What made communism appealing to some is that it appeared as an ideology that contradicted fascism and national socialism. Communism had risen in popularity in South America, along with Eastern Europe. It appealed to these countries, because they were financially and economically frail and the idea of communism had promised the abolition of class (*History Of Latin America | Meaning, Countries, Map, & Facts*, 2024).

Impacts

After its sudden rise between the 1920s and 1930s, political extremism had several impacts, many of which were negative. The extremist ideology national socialism that was prosperous in Germany in the 1930s targeted various religious and ethnic groups such as Jewish, Roma and homosexual people (*Holocaust Memorial Day Trust | Nazi Persecution Of Other Groups: 1933 - 1945*, n.d.). The Nazis, led by Adolf Hitler, believed in the "purity" of the Aryan race and committed ethnic cleansings

through the German Reich and in concentration camps outside of it. These particular cleansings came to be known as the Holocaust and are responsible for the death of six million Jewish people alone (*How Many People Did The Nazis Murder?*, n.d.). The actions of the Nazis during the rise of political extremism still have heavy consequences, as antisemitism and other forms of discrimination are a pressing issue till this day.

Major Parties Involved

Germany: played a central role in the rising of political extremism, as it was under the leadership of the NSDAP and found itself to be a totalitarian dictatorship between 1933 - 1945. (*Adolf Hitler | Biography, Rise To Power, History, & Facts*, 2024)

United States of America: played a vital role on how political extremism came to rise, as it lended money to Germany during the Interbellum. During the Great Depression, when the USA could no longer supply the loan, Germany's economy crumbled, resulting in the rise of socialist nationalism in Germany.

National Socialist German Workers' Party: founded in 1920, was responsible for the spread of the extremist ideology of national socialism throughout Germany. Its impacts resulted in antisemitism, anti-communism and racism and promoted the restoration of the German Reich.

National Fascist Party: emerged in Italy under the leadership of Benito Mussolini and stood for the belief of a totalitarian, authoritarian regime that honours one's land completely. This belief was therefore called fascism and had spread throughout Italy and Europe as a whole.

Timeline of Key Events

Timeline of events in reverse chronological order leading up to present day.

Date	Description of Event
28 June 1919	The signing of the Peace Treaty of Versailles that implemented strict post-war reparations for Germany, along with sanctions and reductions of their (overseas) territories.
1920s	Emerging Fascist movement in Italy under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Adolf Hitler distinguishes himself in Germany by establishing the National Socialist German Workers' Party.
10 June 1920	Founding of the League of Nations which stood for promoting international cooperation and achieving international peace and security. (<i>The League Of Nations</i> <i>The United Nations Office At Geneva</i> , n.d.)
October 1929	The Wall Street Stock Market Crash, which led to the Great Depression that prevented the U.S. from supplying Germany with loans to pay off their reparations. This caused Germany's economy to collapse completely, leaving the German citizens to question the democratic governing of the country.
19 August 1934	Hitler becomes Führer, making him a totalitarian "supreme" ruler of Germany.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The primary focus of the League of Nations when it came to political conflicts was disarmament (*Disarmament: League Of Nations: Commitment To Disarmament*, n.d.). The efforts of disarmament were discussed upon member states of the League in order to promote peace and with the hopes of reducing the military forces used by politically extreme groups. Furthermore the League of Nations imposed “Minority Treaties” which served to protect the basic rights of minorities based on religion, race or, but not limited to, ethnicity (Scheu, 2022). The first Minority Treaty was concluded on June 28th 1919 as a part of the Versailles Peace Treaty. The defence of minority rights was crucial, since extremist political groups such as national socialists and fascist mainly targeted specific religions and ethnicities.

In 1932, the United States of America took its own measures against the abolishment and prevention of political extremism by establishing "The New Deal". The New Deal was a plan that was implemented in order to restore the economic state of the country after the financial and economic despair it had faced during the Great Depression (*President Franklin Delano Roosevelt And The New Deal | Library Of Congress*, n.d.). While this plan was not intended to directly tackle political extremism, it certainly helped with the restoration of democratic values and the improvement of the economy, which ultimately led to prevention of political extremism.

Possible Solutions

- Enhance education programs in order to promote democratic values and critical thinking and make students have an understanding, recognition and immunity to propaganda.
- Ensure that judicial and governmental institutions are transparent and can withstand corruption in order to prevent the rise of extremist political ideologies.
- Member states work together to create government-funded employment opportunities in order to avoid unemployment.
- Encourage member states to implement Bilateral Agreements in which countries can cooperate in strengthening democratic values and control the rising extremist political groups.
- Enforce laws for the protection of minority groups in order to prevent them from being exploited and discriminated against, while simultaneously protecting their rights and expression.
- Member states impose censorship and regulation laws against hate speech and propaganda of extremist ideologies, but keeping in mind the freedom of speech values.
- Implement surveillance measures to monitor and restrict the activities of extremist groups.

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