

## The Rise of the Neo-Nazis in Germany

In 1933, Adolf Hitler established a Nazi dictatorship in Germany. His regime would go on to perpetrate one of the greatest crimes in world history: the Jewish holocaust during the Second World War. This tragedy had its roots in the rise of the neo-Nazis in Germany in the post-WWI era. The neo-Nazi phenomenon was a product of many forces, but two causes of the movement remain crystal clear: German humiliation in World War One and German anti-Semitism. Both realities blended together to cause the rise of the Neo-Nazis. Germans had grown resentful at the terms of the Versailles Treaty in 1919 and a fierce nationalism spread among them. In this climate of humiliation, nationalism and a thirst for revenge grew. Such sentiment translated into a fierce anti-Semitism, which played a central role in facilitating the neo-Nazi movement's ascension to power.

Germany's humiliation after the First World War was precisely the reason why the Versailles settlement and the League of Nations failed to establish a lasting peace. Ending World War I, the Treaty of Versailles was imposed on Germany by the Allies on June 28, 1919. Under the treaty, Germany was stripped of her colonies, received heavy economic "reparations," and saw its armed forces drastically reduced. Much of this, especially the economic reparations, was connected to French desires to tie Germany down so that any future German war would be inconceivable. This was, in other words, a punitive settlement, and it explicitly stated that the Germans were responsible for the outbreak of war (Willmott 1-

5). In this particular case, punishing Germany turned out to be the cure that became worse than the disease. The punishment angered Germans and made their acceptance of defeat even harder. Insult and humiliation, in other words, was added to injury. Germans grew resentful and a fierce nationalism spread among them. In this climate of humiliation, nationalism, and thirst for revenge, Adolf Hitler and the neo-Nazis were able to manipulate their way into power (Ready 100).

While the climate of humiliation and anger fed neo-Nazi success, German anti-Semitism defined and facilitated it. Hitler played a central role in defining German anti-Semitism. Because of his hatred of the Jews, he pursued the "Final Solution," which he believed had to be the extermination of the Jewish race. More than anything else, Hitler and his nation both needed someone to blame for their failures. The Jews, therefore, became Hitler's, and Germany's, depersonalized scapegoats (Geary 6-9).

Hitler convinced himself that Jews were conspiratorially making Germans hate their own country and, ultimately, themselves. He also saw them as the originators of the Marxist doctrine which, in Hitler's view, rejected aristocratic principles of nature and necessitated the death of mankind. Hitler also detested the Jews because they never had their own territory or culture. This led them, in Hitler's view, to manipulate and subjugate other people. To this list of reasons to justify his anti-Semitism, Hitler believed that Germany had to preserve the purity of the German race, and he feared that the Jews were intentionally trying to mix

their blood into German blood in order to destroy Germany's potential for greatness (Fischer 89-92).

Hitler's writings in Mein Kampf epitomize best the framework within which the German dictator developed his anti-Semitism. He despised the system of social democracy, seeing it as a "doctrine of destruction". He believed that it had a direct connection to the nature of Jewish people. "Only a knowledge of the Jews," he wrote, "provides the key with which to comprehend the inner, and consequently real, aims of Social Democracy" (Hitler 51). For Hitler, however, these issues were surpassed by more serious problems. The Jews, he recalled, were physically unclean and smelled. "By their very exterior," he noted,

you could tell that these were no lovers of water, and, to your distress, you often knew it with your eyes closed. Later I often grew sick to my stomach from the smell of these caftan-wearers. Added to this, there was their unclean dress and their generally unheroic appearance. (Hitler 57)

The physical uncleanliness of Jews, he discovered, was exacerbated by their "moral stains" (Hitler 57). He soon found that there was no type of activity in which Jews would engage in that was honest.

"Was there any form of filth or profligacy," he wondered,

particularly in cultural life, without at least one Jew involved in it? If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found, like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light -- a kike (Hitler 57)

Everything the Jews did, in Hitler's eyes, was contrary to the laws of ethics and morality. He found a direct connection between prostitution and Jews, as well as between the white-slave traffic and Jews (Hitler 59). Thus, the influence of the Jews,

Hitler found, was like a "spiritual pestilence" that was worse than the Black Death. He was very concerned that the German people were being "infected" by it (58) He found it particularly worrisome that the Jews were procreating and that there was "no limit to their number" (Hitler 58)

From a study of the Social democratic pamphlets, Hitler found that all of their authors were Jews. The key here was that all of these pamphlets did not encourage German nationalism. Thus, Hitler came to a conclusion: "the Jew was no German." Instead, he was the "seducer of our people" (Hitler 61). For this reason, Hitler believed that he was acting according with the will of God. "By defending myself against the Jew," he wrote, "I am fighting for the work of the Lord." (Hitler 65) Hitler added his racism and Aryanism to the issue. For the "mightiest counterpart to the Aryan," he wrote, "was represented by the Jew" (Hitler 300). The Jews, he feared, sought to pollute the Aryan race. And yet, the lost purity of blood destroyed inner happiness (Hitler 328). Thus, Hitler believed that Germany had to preserve the purity of the German race, and the Jews were intentionally trying to mix their blood with Germans in order to bring the nation down.

More importantly, Hitler held against the Jews that they imitated and then ruined other peoples' cultures, since they did not have one of their own, because they had no definite territory of their own. Whatever the culture a Jew possessed was really the property of other people, and then ruined in the hands of the Jew. (302-303). The Jews were really parasites, living in the states of

other peoples (Hitler 304-305). And they were always in the process of deceiving other peoples, pretending that they were assimilating, when in fact they were not. The whole existence of these people, he believed, was built on a "continuous lie."

For Hitler, the Jew was out to subjugate the peoples of the nation in which he/she was living. Through usury, Jews gained economic control. Through politics (i.e. their Marxism) they sought to rule with dictatorship. It was especially in the doctrine of Marxism, Hitler believed, that Jews found their weapon to dispense with democracy and rule over the peoples of the country they inhabited.

More than anything else, Hitler hated Jews, or thought he hated Jews, because he believed that they profited from the upheavals of Germany (Ayer 36). In the end, he believed that the Jews only strove for money and power and the destruction of the society they inhabited. This is why, the final aim had to be the removal of Jews (Payne 133).

Notwithstanding Hitler's articulation of his hatred of Jews in Mein Kampf, the real reasons of his anti-Semitism were more deep rooted. Historian Robert Payne has argued that Hitler's hatred of the Jews stemmed not so much from all of the reasons Hitler gave, but from a need to have scapegoats. "Deeper than Hitler's hatred of the Jews," Payne argued, "was the knowledge that they could be used for his own ambitions, his own cold-blooded purposes" (133). Hitler, and many Germans, Payne affirmed, needed someone to blame for Germany's defeat in the First World

War and for their own hopeless misery (Payne 133). Thus, Jews provided the scapegoat, and Hitler provided the leadership for a leaderless peoples. The cause of the neo-Nazi success in Germany was directly connected to the phenomenon.

The tragedy here was that the Jews were feared because they were so little known and so little understood in Germany, largely because of their religious practises. Author Pat Shipman finds that this made them easily blameable for all of Germany's problems. "Jews were not Aryan and they became, almost by definition, the universal scapegoat. As economic and social conditions worsened between the world wars, Jews came increasingly into focus as the acceptable target of mass dissatisfaction, chauvinism, and resentment" (Shipman 134).

This is where the plan for the Final Solution came from. The plan called for genocide: the elimination of the entire Jewish population (Ayer 83). With all of his rationalizations, ranging from the issues of Marxism to race, and from culture to egoism, Hitler decided that Germany's greatness was mutually exclusive with the existence of Jews. Thus, as Jewish historian Raul Hilberg has argued, Hitler convinced himself that the extermination of the Jews had long been meant to happen (Ayer 83). In other words, Hitler was only doing what was meant to happen. Because of the atmosphere in Germany at the time, the neo-Nazis profited from this disposition, since the German people desperately needed a scapegoat. Hitler needed one too, and his anti-Semitism became his own depersonalization of his personal failures during his youth.

In Vienna, he had faced poverty, humiliation, and rejection in his goals. He politicized this failure, and explained it by blaming it on the Jews (Ayer 29).

Thus, Hitler's and Germany's hatred of Jews was, in the long run, the problem of scapegoating. In the longer run, it could even go deeper, perhaps to the level of being explained by self-hatred, for Jews had also helped to build Germany, and that is why German anti-Semitism could be seen as parricide. Perhaps more frighteningly, it may even have been an urge toward self-hatred, for there is evidence to suggest, that Hitler, despite all of his hatred of Jews, may have been part Jew himself. There is evidence that Hitler's grandfather was a wealthy Jew named Frankenberger or Frankenreither (Ayer 15). This fact, perhaps, serves as the most illuminating, and tragic, post-mortem on German anti-Semitism.

In conclusion, the rise of the neo-Nazi phenomenon in Germany can be attributed to German anti-Semitism, combined as it was with German virulent nationalism and a desire for revenge. One can point out the weaknesses of the Versailles treaty, but it would be disingenuous to blame it for the rise of the Nazis. The ultimate blame has to lie with Adolf Hitler and his quest for power. It remains very questionable what could have sufficiently prevented Nazism. Hitler had a clear intention to launch wars of aggression, based as they were on his ideas of racial struggle and world empire. Thus, the punishment of Germany after WWI may have helped feed German anger and anti-Semitism, but it did not excuse the Germans from adopting such sentiments. The overall factor that

caused Nazism was hatred. And it was Nazism that caused WWII and the Holocaust. To blame anything or anyone else is to exonerate Hitler and Nazis from who they were and from what they did.

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