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Historical Sciences

THE FALL OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC IN GERMANY: CAUSES AND LESSONS FOR MODERNITY

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Abstract

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Almost 90 years have passed since those events, and many historians still wonder: how did it happen that a nation with rich cultural traditions, a developed legal consciousness, and experience of civil self-government succumbed to the calls and promises of the person who brought the country and the German people to national disaster?

According to the author, in all societies there will always be a place for a talented demagogue who will lead his people to the abyss. It was on these painful complexes of the German people that Adolf Hitler played after coming to power in 1933. In addition, a well-developed civil society and a democratic political culture are needed to defend democracy. Unfortunately, none of this happened in the Weimar Republic. Weimar democracy was stillborn from the very beginning of its existence and its fall sooner or later was inevitable.

Keywords: Weimar Republic, Third Reich, national humiliation, German people, national disaster.

I. INTRODUCTION

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Almost 90 years have passed since those events, and many historians still wonder: how did it happen that a nation with rich cultural traditions, a developed legal consciousness, experience of civil self-government, not to mention universal literacy, succumbed to the appeals and promises of a person who led the country straight to the abyss?

Over the years, hundreds of books and articles have been written about the events of 1933 in Germany. However, let us try once again to turn to this tragic episode in the history of Germany.

II. METHODOLOGY

As for general scientific methods, we used the systematic approach requiring the holistic view of the research subject. This approach has contributed to a comprehensive review of the causes of the fall of the Weimar Republic. The historical approach allows researchers to study the formation and development of the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1933. The objective approach requires unbiased, clear-eyed consideration of the problem in hand. An objective analysis of the development features of the Weimar Republic is very important for assessing the causes of its decline.

III. DISCUSSION

By the end of the 1920s, the Weimar Republic began to slowly get out of the post-war devastation, but the world economic crisis that began in 1929, the growth of unemployment and the burden of reparations that they paid under the Treaty of Versailles, still put Germans in serious trouble. In March 1930, having failed to agree with the Reichstag on a unified financial policy, the elderly president Paul von Hindenburg appointed a new Reich Chancellor, who no longer relied on the support of the parliamentary majority and depended only on the president himself. The Reichstag no longer influenced the appointment of the chancellor and the formation of the government, but could remove them. A leapfrog of successive cabinets has become commonplace.

In the end, the new Chancellor Heinrich Brüning introduced austerity regime. There were more and more dissatisfied with government policies. In the September 1930 elections to the Reichstag, the National Socialist Workers Party of Germany (NSDAP) led by Hitler managed to increase the number of their mandates from 12 to 107, and the Communists from 54 to 77. Thus, right and left extremists together won nearly a third seats in parliament. Under these conditions, any constructive policy was almost impossible.

The communists might still be able to stop the Nazis coming to power if they acted together with the Social Democrats, but from Moscow they categorically forbade them to deal with them: Stalin considered the Social Democrats to be almost their main enemies. But the Nazis even became allies: in 1932, the Communists held a joint strike with them transporters, which paralyzed Berlin.

In the new elections of 1932, the National Socialists received 37 percent of the vote and became the strongest faction in the Reichstag, although they did not have an absolute majority. Hitler could get power only from the hands of the ruling elite and began to seek its support. He received it from influential businessmen. Relying on big capital, on his own election successes and on the atrocities of the storm troopers, which the Nazis took to the streets, in August 1932, Hitler turned to Hindenburg with a request to appoint him Reich Chancellor. Hindenburg refused: he despised the "strange corporal" who, according to the president, "could become the Minister of Posts, but certainly not the Chancellor."

However, on January 30, 1933, Hindenburg succumbed to pressure and appointed Hitler the Reich Chancellor. In the Weimar Republic, the president had great powers and the chancellor very modest. That is why Hitler took his appointment as chancellor on January 30, 1933 only as an intermediate stage. In the government of his party, only 3 seats belonged to him - he (chancellor), minister of internal affairs (Frick), minister without a portfolio (Goering). The remaining 10 posts were held by conservatives. Hence the demand - new elections to the Reichstag, which took place on March 5, 1933.

The elections were actually held in the midst of open Nazi terror. The situation was aggravated by arson in the Reichstag on February 27, 1933, which was immediately used by Nazi propaganda to discredit the Communists. The very next day, the president signs a decree on the protection of the people and the state, which allows the police to arrest suspects without judicial control.

In this situation, the NSDAP received on March 5 43.9% of the vote. Moreover, the voter turnout was very high - 88.7%, and there is no reason to suspect massive falsification. 17.3 million Germans voted for Hitler's party. The level of support for the Social Democrats remained virtually unchanged, and the Communists lost more than 1.1 million votes. Having entered into a coalition with the right-wing parties, Hitler hardly achieved for his government an absolute parliamentary majority of 51.9 percent.

Already on March 23, 1933, Hitler raised the question of granting him extraordinary powers. But for the adoption of this law, two-thirds of the votes of deputies are needed. After difficult maneuvers, it was decided to support Hitler, and only the Social Democrats (94 votes) were against it. Little time passed, and the conservative parties declared their self-dissolution - the German People's National Party (June 27, 1933); German People's Party (June 28); Bavarian People's Party (July 4); Party of the Center (July 5). The SPD was banned on June 22, and on July 14, Hitler passed a law against the formation of new parties.

The March 23, 1933 Act on Extraordinary Powers allowed the Chancellor to legislate and rule the country without the consent of the Reichstag. From now on, the Weimar Constitution has become its own shadow. The national revolution, about which the Nazis spoke of the need back in 1923, finally happened in March 1933.

In the days of the March revolution, Hitler makes several important decisions that had a huge impact on the further development of events.

On March 13, he signed a decree establishing the ministry of "public education and propaganda." His associate Joseph Goebbels is appointed Minister. Two months later, at the initiative of the new minister, German students begin to burn harmful "non-German books" from private and public libraries in bonfires on university squares. Under the joyful cries of students and a considerable part of the professors, Germany begins to fall into the abyss.

On March 22, near Munich, in the town of Dachau, a concentration camp began to operate in the buildings of the former factory. So in Germany the foundation was laid for the mass persecution and extermination of objectionable people in the concentration camp system.

On the last day of March, Hitler signed the "Provisional Law on the Unification of Land and Reich." With land autonomy begin to systematically crack down. And on the first day of April a boycott of Jewish stores is announced.

How did the thinking part of German society react to all these events? Unfortunately, most German intellectuals who previously accepted the Weimar Republic and liberal democracy enthusiastically accepted Hitler's rise to power. Karl Schmitt, one of the most famous jurists in the country, in his article published in 1934 in the newspaper of specialists in law, writes: "The true Fuhrer is always a judge. Judging arises from the Fuhrer. In truth, the Fuhrer's actions were the exercise of full jurisdiction. They do not obey justice, they themselves are justice" [1, pp.945-950]. Meanwhile, Adolf Hitler continued to strengthen his personal power. On August 1, 1934, he issued a law on the head of the German Reich, joining the posts of chancellor and president. Moreover, it happened the day before the death of President Hindenburg, who died on August 2. But Hitler did not want to become the new president. He is both Chancellor and Fuhrer. And the Fuhrer is above all posts.

German society, for the most part, then took this event for granted. Like the "Nuremberg Laws" on September 15, 1935, because of which all Germans had to dig into genealogies and prove their belonging to the Aryan race in three generations and as a result become the owner of "full political rights" that only "German Reich citizens can have» [2, p.30].

Since mid-1933, the only German party - the NSDAP, based on the idea of leaderism - has permeated the whole of society with its activities. The hierarchy of the Fuhrer is being built. It concerns, by the way, the rectors of universities, which are now not elected by the scientific community, but are appointed from above, while receiving the post of university Fuhrer.

IV. RESULTS

Hitler steeply turns the German economy towards arms production. In 1934, German military spending amounted to 18%, in 1936 - already 39%, and in 1938 -58% of all expenses of the national economy. The people of Germany warmly approve of this policy, as rising military spending increases the number of jobs [3, p.89].

In German society, there is an increasing belief in the special qualities of Hitler, capable of raising the German nation from its knees. Hitler's keynote address in the Reichstag on March 23, 1933, was called "The Speech of the World" in print. "The Munich Agreement (September 29-30, 1938)," explains the modern German historian Hans Mommsen, "gave Hitler an image «almost legendary". The Führer was praised primarily for the fact that he managed to achieve decisive foreign policy successes, whether it was the accession of the Saarland, Austria or the Sudetenland, without resorting to bloodshed. There is no doubt that Hitler's foreign policy successes in the last pre-war years contributed to his popularity among the general population" [4, p.9].

The sobering-up of German society will come later, with the outbreak of hostilities against the USSR. The first bell rang in 1941 from outside Moscow. The second, at the very beginning of 1943 from the banks of the Volga, where in the Battle of Stalingrad, German troops suffered a crushing defeat. Well, the third and final bell is the signing of a document on unconditional surrender. The Great National Revolution, proclaimed by Hitler in March 1933, ended in disaster 12 years later, in May 1945.

V. CONCLUSION

Despite the huge number of works devoted to the Third Reich, the question remains relevant: how could German society succumb to the promises of a clear political adventurer, although, undoubtedly, endowed with charismatic abilities? In all societies that continue to cherish in their historical memory the need for national greatness or want revenge for what they consider national humiliation, there will always be a place for a talented demagogue who will lead his people to the abyss.

It was on these painful complexes of the German people that Adolf Hitler and his accomplices, who came to power in 1933, played. In addition, a developed civil society and a consensual political culture are needed to defend democracy. Unfortunately, none of this wasn't in the Weimar Republic. Weimar democracy from the very beginning of its existence was stillborn and its fall sooner or later was inevitable [5, p.233].

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ПАДЕНИЕ ВЕЙМАРСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ В ГЕРМАНИИ: ПРИЧИНЫ И УРОКИ ДЛЯ СОВРЕМЕННОСТИ

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Аннотация

В январе 1933 г. к власти в Германии пришел Адольф Гитлер. Со времени тех событий прошло уже почти 90 лет, а многие историки до сих пор задаются вопросом: как получилось, что нация с богатыми культурными традициями, развитым правовым сознанием, опытом гражданского самоуправления поддалась на призывы и обещания человека, который привел страну и немецкий народ к национальной катастрофе. По мнению автора, во всех обществах всегда найдется место для талантливого демагога, который поведет свой народ к пропасти.

Именно на этих болезненных комплексах немецкого народа сыграл Адольф Гитлер после прихода к власти в 1933 году. Кроме того, для защиты демократии необходимо развитое гражданское общество и демократическая политическая культура. К сожалению, в Веймарской республике ничего из этого не было. Веймарская демократия с самого начала своего существования была мертворожденной и её падение рано или поздно было неизбежно.

Ключевые слова: Веймарская республика, Третий Рейх, национальное унижение, немецкий народ, национальная катастрофа.

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