Rise Of Hitler

Original Mark: 19/20

To what extent was the weakness of the Weimar Republic the major reason for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party from 1919 to 1933?

The weakness of the Weimar Republic was important to the rise of the Nazi Party from 1919 to 1933. However, other factors played a significant role too. When the Great War ended in 1918, Germany was thrown into chaos. Germany was forced to comply to impossible terms and harsh restrictions as well as having to deal with other problems, such as hyperinflation and revolts, all while having weak governments throughout. One factor that played a role in the rise of the Nazis was the Treaty Of Versailles as this was the starting point for many of Germany’s problems including demilitarisation and economic collapse. The popularity of Nazi policies was also responsible as their policies suited everyone and included the promise to restore Germany to its former pride as well as controlling economic difficulties. Not only this, but the effective use of propaganda and Hitler’s charisma helped to spread the Nazi message far and wide, giving the impression that Hitler was the strong leader the people craved. Lastly, the element of luck was also responsible as if it was for certain events, like Hitler being invited into government, the Nazi Party may have not have gotten into power.

The Weimar Republic and its weakness did contribute to the rise of Hitler. Previously, the German people had been ruled by a Kaiser and were unused to democracy. The Republic was, at the time, described as the most democratic it could be as there was universal suffrage for those over 21 and proportional representation was used. This fact is important as it led to that, due to the voting system, every government was a coalition and also gave extremist parties, like the Nazis, a say in government. Furthermore, F. McKichan described the Weimar Republic as ‘a Republic with too few friends’ and this shows that there was a lack of support for the new system and this was evident as many civil servants, judges, and teachers remained loyal to old ways. Not only this, but the constitution included Article 48 which said that in a state of emergency, it would allow for the president to rule and pass legislation during this period of time. This fact is important as it could act as a loophole and if abused could lead to the formation of a dictatorship – as was the way with the case with the Nazis. This factor was important as Hitler was able to use the Republic’s weakness to gain absolute control. However, if Germany was more stable at the time, it would have made it more difficult for the Nazis to seize power.

The Treaty Of Versailles was also important in the rise of the Nazi Party. The treaty was the root cause for many of Germany’s problems and this is because its harsh terms were developed by President Clemencenau of France who wanted revenge for his country’s damage during the war. This bitterness and hatred resulted in impossible demands such as reparations to be paid, totalling a massive £6.6 billion. However, when the Germans fell behind with their payments, the French occupied the Ruhr coal mine which provided 85% of Germany’s coal and claimed it as payment. This fact is important as it shows the ridiculous nature of the terms and that Germany was suffering greatly to meet them with British Prime Minister recognising this in a document for the 1919 Peace Conference where he wrote "we cannot both cripple her and expect her to pay". Not only this, but Germany was no longer permitted to own tanks, an airforce, or an army larger than 100,000 men and this meant that Germany’s army was roughly the same size as neutral Belgium’s and in no way suitable to defend against a foreign invasion from countries, such as Russia and France. The treaty also rearranged Germany’s borders and this now meant that Germany was now split in half due to the new Polish Corridor, resulting in many Germans being displaced. This fact is important as the public was angry and upset that they had been separated from the rest of Germany and Hitler was