

History 12: The Rise of Hitler and Fascism

5 "Night of the Long Knives" - Notes



Name: _____

Date: _____

Recommended Readings: Howarth Chapter 25

The first obvious example of the violent methods Hitler capable of using to consolidate his power

When? night of June 30, 1934

Who involved?

a. Hitler

b. Rohm and the SA - founded in 1921, the SA or Sturmabteilung- Stormtroopers or Brown Shirts - Lead by Rohm in 1934. SA founded to intimidate the opposition and browbeat the public consciousness. Also many people impressed by its military discipline and action. Attracted ex-soldiers, and by 1930's, many unemployed young men. A large unprofessional body (ie. not full time job)

- by 1934, over 2 million men

c. Himmler and the SS - formed in 1925 for the prime purpose of protecting Hitler. In 1929 Heinrich Himmler took charge. Started as a small professional body made up of an elite of young Aryan men. SS grew to permeate every aspect of German life- police, security, the army, the concentration camps (administered by the Death's Head units of the SS) , the Gestapo or Secret State Police (set up in April, 1933, to deal with "political police tasks" by 1936, had become a nation-wide organization, when separate state police forces were combined and placed under the control of the SS) .

"the night of the long knives" marked the beginning of the SS acts of wide-scale terror

- loyalty only to Hitler, above the law

d. The Reichswehr (army) - by 1934, only 200,000 men. Headed by the traditional noble class who were very distrustful of upstarts like Rohm.

Why Purge?

- challenge for control -

- Ernst Rohm, wanted his Brown shirts (about 2 million in 1933) to become the nucleus of an expanded German army, with himself as commander-in-chief of the army. Army very much opposed, particularly the aristocratic officers. Hitler didn't want to alienate the army, army officers would give Hitler full support once the SA brought under control

- threat...if Rohm to control both the SA and the army, could be more powerful than Hitler

- Also, Rohm wanted a social revolution now that the Nazi's in power, wanted the nationalization of the major firms. Some the SA men were demanding that the "socialist" part of National Socialism be enacted. Hitler, however did not believe in this, just used these slogans to appeal to the working man. Also, now had the financial support of big business.

- read excerpt in De Marco, p. 95 Exercise 2

What Happened?

- executions - occurred at Bad Wiessee, Rohm's holiday resort... also murders took place throughout Germany. How many killed, estimates vary from low of 77 to about 500.. first act of legalized murder in the Third Reich

Who was killed?

- a. Rohm- leader of the SA, shot three times in his cell (read excerpt De Marco p. 94, end of page)
- b. General von Schleicher, former chancellor - gunned down at his office, his wife also killed... had tried to split the Nazi party when he was Chancellor, by offering Gregor Strasser, the leader of the Nazi socialists, a cabinet post
- c. Gregor Strasser- Had attempted to enter the cabinet under von Schleicher (though Hitler had him expelled from the party when he found out.) See cartoon Da Marco p. 96

Consequences?

- SA a tamed organization with no real power

- army stood aside and allowed Hitler to commit his purge because it was in Army's interest to destroy the SA
- the price- in August 1934, all army officers and men to swear an oath of personal loyalty to Hitler.... though freed from the threat of an SA take-over, army lost the non-political role of which it had been proud

- same month, August 1934 - Hindenburg dies, Hitler abolishes Presidency, makes himself Commander-in-Chief of armed forces

Hitler takes title of Fuehrer (Leader) and Reich Chancellor

- talk of a "social Revolution" at an end, Hitler indisputably in control

- SS under Himmler raised to the status of an independent organization,.... becomes the agent of control of German society.

In Summary:

1. Identify Hitler's motives for unleashing the Night of the Long Knives: both private and public motives.

2. What were the consequences of Hitler's action?

3. How does Hitler exploit effective propaganda? What are the results?