The "Party of Non-Voters" (July 31, 1932)

Abstract

The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (*DAZ*), which had been published in Berlin since 1861, served as an unofficial government newspaper during the Bismarck era and maintained a conservative orientation in the years that followed. In 1920, the newspaper was acquired by Hugo Stinnes, one of Germany's richest industrialists, who had become the de facto spokesman for German business after the war and entered parliament in 1920 for the national-liberal German People's Party (DVP). As a result, the tenor of the *DAZ* became increasingly conservative, right-wing nationalist and anti-republican.

In early June 1932, Reich President Hindenburg appointed Franz von Papen from the Center Party to succeed the dismissed Heinrich Brüning as Reich Chancellor at the suggestion of Kurt von Schleicher. Papen formed a "cabinet of national concentration" made up of conservative, mostly aristocratic civil servants without any political mandate. Just three days after Papen's appointment, Hindenburg dissolved the Reichstag at Papen's request so that Papen could rule by presidential emergency decrees and practically disempower parliament. New Reichstag elections were held on July 31, 1932. In response to these new elections, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* published this opinion piece on election day. In the short article, whose author is not named, the frequency of elections in the Weimar Republic is cited as an argument against parliamentary democracy in general. (The four elections within six months to which the author refers were the two presidential elections, the state parliament elections in Prussia and the Reichstag election). The article then criticizes the millions of non-voters who allegedly prevented the parties of the political right from gaining the seats needed for a majority in parliament. While the article suggests a general political disenchantment or apathy among the electorate, voter turnout in the Weimar Republic was actually quite high overall. In the Reichstag elections of September 1930 mentioned here, it was 82% and rose to 84% in the July 1932 elections.

Source

Our opinion

Berlin, 31. 7.

The German people are being called to the ballot box for the fourth time this year. Four elections within six months, four election campaigns with all their unpleasant side effects – it is understandable if some people express their aversion to everything that is directly or indirectly connected with the word parliamentarianism in the words: "Leave me alone with all this humbug, I won't vote at all!" The number of people who think the same thing without saying it is in the hundreds of thousands. And if we add to this those lovely fellows who simply do not fulfill their duty to vote out of thoughtlessness, as if the whole thing did not concern them at all, then we have roughly described the group of people who make an inglorious appearance in the election statistics as the "party of non-voters." An entity without organizational cohesion, fought and courted by all other parties at the same time. A "party" which, counting 7.75 million heads, was more prominent in the last Reichstag election on September 14, 1930 than the Hitler Party with its 6.38 million votes and 107 seats. 7.75 million votes, that is around 130 seats. Half that number would have been enough to give the political right a majority in the Reichstag two years ago. This does not apply to the left, because sadly it is a fact that cannot be denied that this "party of non-voters" is made up predominantly of bourgeois elements. But regardless of whether the non-voters sleep in the bourgeois camp or in the proletarian camp, they all have one thing in common: they are the ones who shout the loudest when decisions are then made in parliament which the non-voters feel no

less than the outvoted minority. Those who do not fulfill their electoral duty have forfeited the right to complain afterwards when their wishes and protests go unheard. To repeat what was said yesterday, a few mandates can be the deciding factor in whether or not a right-wing majority is achieved. It will come about if each individual ensures that the “party of non-voters” emerges from the election battle as the smallest and most insignificant. This party must be defeated until it is annihilated!

Source of original German text: “Unsere Meinung,“ *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 31, 1932.

Translation: GHI staff

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