

Political, Social and Economic problems, 1918-1923

The failure of the 1918-1919 revolution

- Spartacist revolt – extreme left uprising crushed by an army that “did not support the democratic system or the republic but opposed communism even more.”
- Eradicated by mid-1919, revolution/uprising attempted in Berlin, December and January 1918/1919.
- Army and Freikorps stopped revolution, murdered Spartacist leaders.

Lack of democratic tradition

- New German constitution from 1918 – possibly most democratic of that period globally.
- Existed against backdrop of Imperialistic monarchical system of autocratic leadership.
- Strongly opposed by both extreme left and right-wing groups – the former desiring revolution, the latter the restoration of the old order.

Military handover of power

- Ludendorff advised Kaiser to seek armistice with Allies – coalition government formed to negotiate armistice, Kaiser abdicated.
- This diverted blame from Ludendorff (and military) and Kaiser (and the Monarchy)
- Blame on new government created *Dolchtosslegende* – the myth of the stab in the back

The Armistice

- Germany agreed to armistice based on acceptance of Wilson’s 14 points.
- Signed on 11 November by new German government and Allies at Compiègne in France

Failure of the Revolution

- Revolution from Left crushed by right-wing supporting army – i.e. Spartacist revolt crushed by army and Freikorps.
- Army swiftly acted against left-wing threats.

Ebert-Groener Pact

- Ensured army (*Reichswehr*) would support the republic – loyalty doubted.
- General von Seeckt viewed army as a “state within a state” – i.e. separate interests from those of Government and German state as a whole.

Survival of the Elites

- Junkers lost power, yet capitalism created a new elite class from Industrialists.
- Elite also preserved in those with military ties.

Treaty of Versailles

Recap of details

- 15% land
- 15% agriculture/arable land
- 12% population
- 10% coal reserves
- 48% iron
- 10% industry
- \$32BN USD final reparations

No self-determination – Germany not permitted active role in negotiations process; received a *dictat*.

German reaction

- Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau – “simply refuse to sign”
- Cabinet resigns.
- On threat of resumption of hostilities, new foreign minister Hermann Müller signs Treaty of Versailles

Creation of Weimar Constitution

Main terms

- Republic, authority derived from the people
- Bicameral parliament system
 - Reichsrat
 - very limited power
 - representing German states
 - Reichstag
 - lower house
 - holds effective power
 - represents German people
 - elected by universal suffrage

Democratic features

- Universal suffrage
- Equality before the law
- Personal liberty: freedom of speech/assembly/association/religion
- **Reich president can suspend liberties and rights in an emergency**

Instability

Left-wing revolts

- Spartacist uprising
 - January 5, 1919
 - Suppressed by Freikorps
- Ebert-Groener Pact
 - November 1918
 - Agreement between *Reichwehr* and government to support republic
 - Only effective against left-wing threats (proven ineffective against right-wing in Kapp Putsch)
- Bremen proclaimed “Worker’s Republic”
 - Uprising put down by Freikorps
- Bavaria declared socialist republic
 - November 1918
 - by Kurt Eisner
 - Freikorps used to suppress communist threat

Kapp Putsch

- Conspiracy led (primarily) by Dr. Wolfgang Kapp, and General Luttwitz, with support of General Ludendorff.
- Marched on Berlin, 13 March 1920
- German army instructed by Government to stop this putsch, but did not
 - von Seeckt: “Reichwehr does not fire on Reichwehr”
- SPD called for general strike against Kapp – this was supported by trade union leaders, and the strike forced Kapp to abandon his plan after 5 days, escaping to Sweden.

- Demonstrated weakness of government which lacked support from army, Freikorps and Berlin police – was forced to flee in face of uprising.
- Army follows own interests – will not act against right-wing uprising, but readily dealt with left-wing threats.
- Lead to collapse of Socialist Government in Bavaria – was replaced by anti-republican right-wing leadership, further entrenching anti-republican and anti-democratic values in the Bavarian people. They have good cake, though, so that’s okay.

Economic Problems

Wartime Inflation

- High cost of goods leading to hardship (e.g. Turnip Winter)
- Shortages were accentuated by the policies of total war, in which resources and production were diverted towards the war effort.

Versailles

- Heavy reparations burdened Germany economically, as they faced a final reparations bill of \$US32BN, as well as other losses outlined above (see “recap details” under “Treaty of Versailles”)

1923

Ruhr Occupation

- January – French and Belgian troops sent to coalmining area (Ruhr), in response to German failure to meet reparations payments.
- 60,000 troops. It was a sizeable picnic.
- Campaign of *Passive Resistance* in response by German government.
 - Workers effectively went on strike
 - German government subsidised them
- Immediate halt of all reparations payments by Germany by Chancellor Cuno
- Mines and railways taken over, owners arrested.
- Occupied for next two years.
- Resulted in hyper-inflation as government lacked income from economically important Ruhr area (specifically mining/industrial operations), whilst supporting campaign of “passive resistance” financially.

Hyper-inflation

- Government costs +700%
- Met costs by printing more money, devaluing currency more rapidly.
- Added burden of supporting passive resistance and lack of income from occupied Ruhr area

Effects

Working and middle class suffered

- Agricultural and landowners survived through bartering crops/non-financial dependence
- Industrialists and those with access to foreign currency benefited greatly
- Radical parties gained support from desperate populace
- Government lost support, but benefited financially, as debts lost value. That’s what you get when your currency is used to start fires, see.

Munich Putsch

- November 8 and 9, 1923
 - Hitler and Ludendorff attempted putsch from Munich Beer Hall, marching to Berlin in an attempt to seize power. Local police shot at rebels, Hitler and others arrested and jailed.
 - Became German heroes for standing up to Weimar Republic and the Treaty of Versailles
 - Judges sympathised with cause, greatly lenient in sentencing.

Concepts

Democracy

- Democracy in Germany failed as a result of lack of democratic tradition, as well as the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Weimar Republic (e.g. Treaty of Versailles, etc.)
- People not ready or supportive of democracy
- Right-wing military and conservatism, coupled with prevailing support of militarism.

Militarism

- Reichwehr as separate entity with individual interests from those of the state.
- Populace supportive of military (generally), as government portrayed by military as betraying the honour of the German people at Versailles, whilst preserving their own image (i.e. the army is preserving their own image)
- Ebert-Groener pact inherently demonstrated rift between armed forces and state, and the failure of this in engaging the Army to assist in defending against the Kapp Putsch further conveyed this.

Nationalism

- Nationalism is the belief in the superiority of one country or state such that they consider their values to be true above those of other states. This can be linked to expansionist and militaristic policies, as was the case (to an extent) in the unification of Germanic states under Bismark.
- Bavaria defied this notion of nationalism, following a communist revolt and the installation of a right-wing, anti-republican government.
- German national interest bound against the Treaty of Versailles and those viewed as its oppressors – e.g. France and Belgium in the Ruhr occupation.

Characteristics of Relative Stability in the period 1924–29

Stresemann and the economics of the period

Positive features:

- The Dawes Plan (1924) –
 - Recognised German economy as incapable of meeting reparations payments unless it was stabilised.
 - Lowered reparations payments
 - Moved France from occupation of Ruhr
 - Adjusted payments based on Germany's ability to pay after 1930
- The Young Plan (1929) –
 - Reduced final reparations figure from 132,000 million marks to 37,000 million marks
 - Payable in annual instalments until 1988
 - Reparations ultimately cancelled when Great Depression began a few years later.
- US investment
 - Foreign capital and investment created prosperity
 - Raw material exceeded pre-war production, even after loss of key industrial areas and mineral resources.

Negative features:

- Dependence upon short-term loans –
 - German people lived off foreign loans and investments
 - Foreign debt of 25BN Marks
 - Stresemann: "If... the Americans withdraw their short-term credits then we would be bankrupt..."
 - Continuance of reparations:
 - Continued economic burden despite depression
 - Contributed to economic/political instability

Stresemann and the foreign policy of the period

Positive features:

- Locarno Treaties, October – December 1925
 - Confirmed inviolability of Franco-German and Belgian frontiers
 - Confirmed inviolability of DMZ Rhineland
 - Signed by France, Germany, Belgium
 - Guaranteed by Britain, Italy
 - Brought Germany back into European diplomacy
 - Conciliatory – recognised needs of both France AND Germany, with Germany now an equal participant in negotiations process (unlike Versailles)
 - Resolved question of Western boundaries, even though Eastern (Soviet) was not.

- League of Nations
 - Germany admitted to League of Nations in 1926
 - More equal standing in international community
- Improving Franco-German relations
 - Evacuation of Ruhr, 1924
 - Locarno – Germany + France equal negotiating power, Germany accepts boundaries outlined in Treaty of Versailles.
 - French to leave Rhineland by June 1930
- Treaty of Berlin, 1926
 - Re-affirmed Treaty of Rapallo (1922), agreed to neutrality if either were attacked.
 - Provision for training of German troops and development of weapons on Soviet soil, as Treaty of Versailles prohibited this in German – Circumvention of requirements of Treaty of Versailles.

Negative features

- Continuance of Treaty of Versailles
 - Reparations continued, contributing to economic instability » political instability
 - Against notion of “German pride” – right wing still felt betrayed/angered by continuance of this, *Dolchosslegende* continued to be felt.
- Army independence
 - Continued political divide
 - Right-wing influence
- Nationalist anger
 - Nationalist anger at negotiation of Stresemann – apparently too gradual, not achieving goals rapidly enough to be perceived
 - Withdrawal of Allied forces from Germany too gradual
 - Reduction in reparations, etc. not noticeable to common people
 - Foreign policy success did not mean internal political support—
 - Gradual change and reduction of reparations did NOT mean support for the Republic.

Stresemann and the politics of the period

Positive features

- *Relative* stability and lessening violence
 - Assassinations and putsches ended after 1923
 - September 1923, President Ebert used emergency powers (Article 48) to restore order
- Falling support for extremists/extreme parties – people mostly voting for moderate political groups
- Appointment of von Hindenburg as President in 1925 gave prestige to the Republic
- “Grand Coalition” of political parties from 1928 onwards.

Negative features

- Proliferation of parties contributed to a lack of political stability and popular support for the Republic, as people’s votes did not directly affect politics after preferential voting, etc. occurred

- Felt politics of the republic consisted of political dealings in which the populace had no say/opinion
- Paramilitary violence/growth –
 - Battles between SA (Nazi party) and Red Fighting League (KPD) resulted in 50+ deaths
- Survival of conservative elites which did not support Republic –
 - Industrialists opposed “Welfare State”
 - Junkers resented loss of power/control
 - Army desired more authoritarian leadership/government
 - Judges, civil servants, teachers, church leaders, journalists and other public figures all tended to lean away from democracy, therefore encouragement of democracy/democratic values did not occur.

Culture of the period

Positive features

- New expression of creativity and the arts in Germany
 - Innovative and experimental in nature
 - A short-lived Renaissance
- Literature, architecture, theatre and cinema all underwent revival as Germany came to be viewed as a powerful influence in contemporary art, culture and science

Negative features

- Much of this art and literature was anti-Republican in nature, or disillusioned with society (e.g. Brecht’s views on capitalism, etc.)