

What problems did
the weimar republic
face between 1919
and 1923 essay
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The Weimar Republic was formed in six weeks, after Kaiser Wilhelm abdicated and Germany replaced a monarchy with a Republic at the end of the First World War. Any government facing the task of rebuilding a nation after a war undertakes a very difficult task, and this is even more so in a defeated nation. I am going to examine the problems that faced the Weimar Constitution. Many historians regard the change from an autocracy to a democracy within Germany as the German Revolution.

However, although founding a democracy in Germany was indeed a great change, it is a common view that very little concerning political structure actually did change. The Civil Service grew after 1919, but it also remained unreformed. Therefore, many of the newly appointed ministers could not implement their new ideas to induce more reform within Germany, and had to rely on the Old Guard and Conservative civil servants, who were unlikely to want reform. " German history reached a turning point and failed to turn" AJP Taylor.

This quote supports that the local Governments remained unchanged also, so the fact that the monarchy was removed did not mean the implementation of reforming actions in the districts of Germany. This meant that the Weimar Republic faced a problem because it was limiting the materialisation of revolutionary ideas and could not make decisions for the betterment of Germany as a Republic, because many of the old ideas were still potent. This slowed down government aims and meant the Weimar Republic could not be effective and lacked support.

The armistice that was signed when the Government Ministers wanted to end the war was mightily unpopular with the German Citizens. Their general consensus was that the Germans were still winning on the front with Operation Michael, and that the “ November criminals” who declared the admittance to loss of the war had stabbed their nation in the back. This constituted a problem for the Weimar Republic because any new treaties that they signed would be regarded by the citizens as also stabbing their nation in the back, submitting to nations that they should have defeated in the war.

This was more of a problem than the fact that Germany had lacked a complete reform, because an unpopular Government is an unwanted one, and an unwanted one is one subjected to the danger of being overthrown for aggravations that would be dismissed if a popular government was in power. Signing the Treaty of Versailles meant that a War Guilt Clause was signed. This proclaimed that Germany accepted all responsibilities for starting the First World War.

The War Guilt clause damaged National Pride among the citizens of Germany, and they felt betrayed by their Government admitting responsibility of the War when they did not feel it was their responsibility. The Government was perhaps founded because the Kaiser abdicated rather than face the blame for the loss of the war, and so the government was founded to take the blame for the war. The pride-damaged citizens' disrespect meant the Weimar Republic lost support among Germans, and made them more open to political ebellions and threats from radical extremists.

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The allied governments affirm, and Germany accepts, the responsibility if Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied governments and their peoples have been subjected as a result of the war" Article 231, Treaty of Versailles. The War Guilt Clause caused Germany to be held responsible for all the damage the war had caused, and therefore, meant that she had to pay for it. The Reparations that the victorious nations demanded were set at six thousand six hundred million pounds, and they were set on April 27th 1921.

The then leader of the Weimar Constitution, Joseph Wirth, was forced to agree to these terms. However, Germany could not actually afford the Reparations. Agreeing to pay the Reparations was a huge problem faced by the Weimar Republic because she could not meet the demands, and yet the trust of the victorious nations, and the chance to regain some economic and European growth relied upon her meeting the demands. The reason that Germany could not pay her Reparations was due to several factors, one of them being Europe's general bankruptcy after the expenses of the war and one of them being the land that she lost to the Treaty of Versailles.

Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine to France in the agreement, this was an industrial area and vital to Germany's economy because it was an iron and steel producer. By losing the district, Germany lost the profits from the land and also she lost National Pride because Alsace-Lorraine had previously been French territory until Germany had claimed it off them, and thus the Weimar Constitution agreed to part with a district that was a symbol of National strength and pride. This was a problem for the Republic as it made them

unpopular with the citizens and also reduced Germany's income out of which she had to find the money to pay the Reparations.

Losing Alsace-Lorraine was not as major a problem to face as signing the War Guilt clause though because losing some income was less important than admitting to have caused a war. However, the loss of the district meant that there could be problems which sprang from a poor economy at a later date which meant that it would become a major cumulative problem. The Saarland was taken from Germany and this contained coal fields that were very important to Germany's industry. It reduced the income and production levels within Germany and hindered her economic stability.

This meant that there was less money available to pay the reparations set by victorious nations. The loss of the Saarland was less of a problem for the Weimar Republic than the loss of Alsace-Lorraine because the Saarland was smaller and had less money to be made from it. The League of Nations also removed the overseas colonies of Germany and gave them out to other nations. The Germans had started late in the race for an empire, and had believed it was "Their time for a place in the sun" so the loss of their colonies meant that national pride was damaged and the citizens blamed the Weimar Republic for the loss of their colonies.

This meant that the Republic had less chance of pleasing the Germans and had national hatred to contend with. The loss of the overseas colonies was not as an important problem then the loss of the economically beneficial parts of Germany because it did not mean that Germany would have trouble paying her reparations so much, and so the problems could not branch out to

create more problems at a later date concerning a poor economy. The Treaty of Versailles took away Germany's industrial port Danzig, where a lot of shipbuilding took place.

This reduced the economic profit and meant that reparations would be harder to pay. Furthermore, Upper Silesia was another industrial area lost. The losses were equally as important as losing the Saarland because it meant that Germany lost out on economic gain and put her in an awkward position concerning her ability to pay the demands of the victorious nations. The loss of the individual industrial lands meant that the losses could gather collectively into a prospectively large problem with the finance situation.

The Treaty of Versailles put restrictions on the German Army, allowing her only one hundred thousand men, no conscription, light infantry and cavalry only and no tanks or armoured vehicles, heavy artillery or chemical weapons. This raised the unemployment levels in Germany because a great deal of the soldiers returning from the war found themselves unemployed. This caused great dissatisfaction among the citizens. Unemployed German soldiers opposed the Treaty of Versailles and proposed a serious threat to the government as they were skilled and highly trained in overthrowing people.

The loss of a powerful army was also damaging to pride and inspired more hatred for the Weimar Republic because the army was the symbol of power and strength. This was a serious threat to the Republic, perhaps more so than the loss of the individual districts such as Danzig because unemployed soldiers are likely to join radical rebellious groups who have room for military

action in their hopes for revolution, thus putting the whole constitution at immediate risk. The Navy was also restricted.

Germany was not allowed to unite with Austria (Anschluss) under the Treaty of Versailles and nor was she allowed to join the League of Nations. This made Germany have no say in what was to happen to her regarding the terms on the treaty, and also meant that she was not allowed to gain support to prevent being abused from her close ally Austria. This put Germany in a very unsafe position, especially seen as the Rhineland was demilitarised, and she was open to attack from the French at any time, and could not defend herself because she had both a small army and no help from other countries.

This was a less important problem than the loss of economically supportive parts of Germany, but it reduced national pride and reduced the strength of the nation and so reduced support for the Weimar Republic. Uprisings from the left wing proposed problems to the rule of the Weimar Republic. A group of Spartikists led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht demanded the country e led by the workers and united under Communist Russia's slogan "All power to the soviets! ". In January 1919 the Spartakists (the then German Communist Party KPD) organised a general strike and an attempted revolution in Berlin.

However the Weimar Republic managed to supress the uprising easily with the Freikops and the army. The people of Europe were historically scared of communists and so the communists lacked sufficient support to succeed in overthrowing the government. Although the communists posed a small threat to the Republic, they were not a major problem, just a mere

annoyance because they were an opposition party and so were critical of the way the government ran, therefore, damaging public opinion and planting alternative ideology in desperate people's minds.

The communists were not as much of a threat as the right wing Nationalists because nationalists were more publically acceptable. They were also not as much of a problem as the Treaty of Versailles. The communists could be crushed easily, and would have been less prominent if the Treaty of Versailles' demands had not caused so much damage to Germany that the government lacked support.

However, it could also be argued that the communists could pose a huge threat in the future if the Weimar Republic continued to lose support due to not improving the situation, but in between 1919 and early 1923, the communists were not high profile. The uprisings from the right posed a far greater problem to the Weimar Constitution than the communists.

Nationalists believe in military greatness and therefore, they had the support of the army, because at this point the army were unemployed and were very angry at the Treaty of Versailles restrictions.

One uprising was led by Dr Wolfgang Kapp. Some of the police were in favour of Kapp's plans to destroy the Republic and replace it with a military dictatorship, therefore, they were able to help the members of the attempted revolution to avoid arrest early on, and thus create a very real threat to the constitution because they had military support. Dr Kapp planned to take over using a putsch. On the nights of 12th-13th of March Dr Wolfgang Kapp managed to take over Berlin. They proclaimed the National

Assembly dissolved, the Weimar constitution void, and the government deposed in favour of one headed by Kapp and General Von Luttwitz" D Thompson This was highly embarrassing to the Weimar Republic and was a serious problem as it exposed them as a weak government lacking the support of the army. It also revealed the fact that internal powers of Germany were not supportive of each other. " This night has shown the bankruptcy of all my policy. My faith in the officer corps is shattered, you have all deserted me. " Minister of Defence.

Therefore, it meant that the people of Germany did not have faith that the Weimar Republic could make Germany great again and so Weimar lost support. Despite the fact that the government managed to put down the Kapp Putsch, by ordering a general strike by the Berlin workers, The putsch was defeated by the Berlin Workers, who declared a general strike and paralysed the city" D Thomson The memory that an opposition party had nearly gained power made the people of Germany feel afraid of political unrest and left them wanting a stronger government. It also made the other opposition groups aware that they had a real chance at a revolution.

Kapp was a very bad leader, but that did not mean that other groups would have bad leaders and could not take over. It put the Weimar Republic in a cautious and threatened position. The opposition from the right was a very real threat, even more so than the communists, because they had the support of the army and so had power to take over using violence. Opposition was more of a threat also than the loss of individual lands. However, any radical opposition thrives in desperate times, so the existence of strong opposition

was most likely a branch from the fact the Treaty of Versailles made Germany insecure.

Thus, the opposition was not a major problem, but the general state of Germany induced by the victorious nations wanting to “bleed her dry”, was the real problem faced by the Republic. The government did not like to start to build their economy again because they felt if they looked strong, the League of Nations would start to impose more demands on them. Weimar Republic faced a problem of either economic collapse by not helping the economy, or economic collapse by trying to help the economy, and having more restrictions placed on them by the League of Nations.

In December 1922 the Government failed to pay reparations to France and in early 1923 the French invaded the Ruhr to reclaim the reparations to which they felt entitled. The government, because of reasons discussed before, simply could not afford to pay the demands. The French planned to wait in the Ruhr and cause havoc and take what they needed as well as agitating the Germans in other ways, such as killing them if they refused to comply. The Weimar Constitution's reaction to this action was to order a general strike and halt industry until the French ceased their occupation.

The government however, was still paying the workers their wages. “This paralysing blow to Germany's economy united the people... the workers of the Ruhr declared a general strike and received financial support from the government in Berlin, which called for a campaign of passive resistance. WL Shirer. Thus the economy collapsed. The demand for products greatly exceeded supply and the demand for money to pay reparations also greatly

exceeded supply. The government printed more money to meet the demands. Hyperinflation set in as the value of the mark plummeted. This was very damaging to the Weimar Republic.

Although much hatred was given to the French by the citizens, the German people blamed their government for the inflation that meant that one dollar was equal to four thousand million marks within a period of eleven months after the occupation. The citizens savings were lost and the government could not help the economic situation which led to widespread starvation and in turn more people looking to radical extremists such as the newly founded Nazi Party, for help. The people blamed the Weimar Republic for Hyperinflation for accepting the War Guilt clause and agreeing to such high reparations.

This was a very serious problem for the government because all of the other problems, although major, did not inflict serious change to the average German's life. Hyperinflation affected everyone all over Germany and posed a threat to being a catalyst to revolution. This situation could be arguably the single most dangerous threat to the Weimar, although it could also be argued that it is just another inevitable bad situation, which sprang from the high demands set by victorious nations and Government inadequacy to propose major reform.

The Weimar Republic faced many problems when coming to power after the war. Not only was their country bankrupt from the monetary demands of the war, but they faced situations that meant they could not successfully rebuild their economy. The problems all seemed to stem from the fact that the

Treaty of Versailles did not give Germany a fair hance to improve herself, and did not give a fair chance to the Weimar Republic to gain support.

The country seemed to be on an exponential course for doom. Decreasing support for the Republic due to damaged national pride meant an increase in support for extremist parties. Also being forced to sign treaties that professed Germany was guilty and demanding reparations that were too high did not help the Weimar in her popularity. In conclusion the Treaty of Versailles meant that the Weimar Republic could not establish a strong government and thus she encountered many branched problems.