

How strong was  
weimar germany by  
the beginning of 1924



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After the humiliating defeat to the allies in World War One, change was desperately sought in Germany. As Kaiser Wilhelm 2nd abdicated to Holland, a new Government was set up, one that was hoped to bring about change. It was called the Weimar Republic, and it was Germany's first ever democracy. It was set up for a number of reasons. It was hoped that a new civilian Government would be able to obtain better peace terms from the allies. Furthermore, many were sceptical of the tactics of the previous Government.

The 'troops were exhausted' (Prince Rupprecht), and a new Government would end the war, preventing more misery to the people of Germany. The first four years of the new Government were seen as a crisis, however it also had its strengths. I am going to examine the true strength of this new Government, up until the year of 1924. From a social point of view, the Weimar Republic suffered in many ways, firstly from the Treaty of Versailles. The nationalist newspaper Deutsche Zeitung thundered 'Death rather than Slavery' as it's headline. However it was not just the Right that was infuriated, the whole nation despised it.

When the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919, it was a huge blow to the people of Germany. It rapidly decreased morale, and the German public struggled to see a way through the harsh times ahead. The outrage of the Treaty is explained because most Germans had expected a victory and to make major gains. Hugo Preuss, the lawyer chiefly responsible for writing the Weimar constitution in 1919, called it 'a shameless blow in the face'. The sudden collapse induced anger, which was further heightened when

Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points denied millions of German's their national rights.

Further social problems were highlighted after huge sums of the German public's savings went missing; and the reason why was because it was spent by the German Government to pay off war loans, and to pay for the vast ammunitions and weaponry used during The Great War. As a result, many Germans were left penniless, and this escalated to further problems. Real earnings fell 30%, and the winter of 1917 was called the 'turnip winter', as it was the only food to eat. Not only did the public loose support in the Government, they could now not afford health care. After a deadly disease swept the nation, thousands began to die each day as a result.

In addition, in 1918, 293, 000 people died from starvation and hypothermia. All was not well for the innocent members of the public in Germany. In 1923, opposition from the right was exposed when the events of the Munich Putsch took place. In Munich, at the heart of Right-wing activity, a young man named Adolf Hitler thought he could gain power by force. He tried to force the Bavarian Government to take action against Communist politicians, thus helping him to seize control. Despite it failing, Hitler learnt a valuable lesson, which he would use in the future.

Power in Germany could be obtained by lawful means, in the way of demonstration and protest. So, the Weimar Republic experienced a lot of social problems, thus making it look weak and unstable. When Germany began to borrow money from their own people, the future was always not to be crystal clear. Due to World War One lasting much longer than first

anticipated, Germany began to slowly run out of money and fall to its knees. The way in which the Government tried to finance the costs of ammunition and weaponry was to borrow money from their own people. This is linked to the savings fiasco highlighted above.

Despite stating that the money would be paid back, the issue of reparations that arose as a product of the Treaty of Versailles meant that Germany had dug itself into a deep hole and it was always going to be tough to escape. After George "the tiger" Clemenceau got a harsh Treaty, Germany was effectively dead and buried. The vast sum of 6.6 billion, which greeted the new Weimar Republic, left the new men in charge with troubled times ahead which would not help the new Government succeed. The issue of German territories brought to light at the Treaty of Versailles, led to Germany being cut like a cake.

In all, it lost 13% of its previously owned land, and 12% of its population. This was a blow to Germany, as it prided itself in its vast empire. All occupied territories in Africa were given to the allies, hitting morale even more. Of the lost territories, some of the prized and precious land Germany owned was taken ruthlessly. The port of Danzig, a major port involved in the process of import and export was given to the League of Nations. Also, Alsace-Lorraine, an area rich in iron ore deposits, returned to its previous owner, France. This particularly annoyed the Germans, however Weimar did not push for its return.

However the loss of the industry rich Ruhrland to the French, would have dented the German economy drastically. The French took over the Ruhr,

after claiming that the Germans had unfairly stopped paying the reparation fee. The money gained from owning the coal and steel factories would have been seen as a fair trade for this loss of money. However, the German factory workers went on strike, and therefore produced nothing. This is known as passive resistance. To combat the vast reparation fee, the German Government thought they were on to a winner when they had a new plan.

The idea was to print more money, which could help to pay off war-loans, the reparation fee, the loss of money from the Ruhrland factories, and to pay compensation to the war victims. 'Germany was burdened with intractable problems arising out of the war' (Carr). As a result, in 1923, there was no confidence in the German economy at all. In January 1923, \$1 = 18, 000M. The huge, exponential increase can be seen by the fact that just 11 months later \$1 = 4 billionM. The whole nation struggled with the tough prospect of buying the smaller things in life, like a loaf of bread.

At the start of one day when people went to work, their salary could afford a loaf of bread. However on the same day, when they finished work, prices had risen so much that the salary could now not afford the bread. This led to starvation and poverty, and it gripped the whole nation tightly. Despite many negative economic factors, there was one huge positive one. The inflatory crisis, a long time in the making, was solved remarkably quickly. In November 1923, the new Chancellor, Stressemann, took decisive action to restore confidence in the currency.

The old, now nearly worthless currency was replaced with a new one, the Rentenmark. One Rentenmark replaced 1, 000 billion paper marks. To

prevent another hyperinflation with the new currency, the supply was strictly limited to 3, 200 million Rentenmarks. It was quickly accepted. In November, the weekly Berliner Illustrierter Zeitung cost 1 billion marks. In December, it cost just 20 pfennigs. Despite the major economic problems in Weimar's early years, it had recovered due to Gustav Stresseman. There were many political issues that put Weimar in a bad way.

When the Government took control, a myth was rapidly gathering its followers. It was the issue over Germany being 'stabbed in the back' by the November Criminals. In a bitter atmosphere after the defeat to the allies, a simple explanation for it quickly spread. It was claimed that the German army had been 'stabbed in the back' by unpatriotic and weak politicians. According to this view, the German army was a formidable fighting force that could have won the war. Germany had not been defeated on the battlefields but by pacifists and Socialists who undermined the war effort.

This myth was quickly used to criticise the Democratic Weimar Government. It had been associated with weakness, which in turn weakened the prospects for Weimar Germany. Opposition from the Right wing was further heightened when the Kapp Putsch came about. In 1920, a former civil servant named Wolfgang Kapp, tried to set up a rival Government to Weimar in Berlin. He was supported by the Freikorps, who were ex-army soldiers, with a Right wing outlook. This caused huge and major problems to the Government. When the Putsch began, the army refused to take action against Kapp or the Freikorps.

The only way this potential threat to the Government was ended was due to a Right wing opposed General Strike. This again highlighted the frailties in the new Government, with SNYDER seeing Weimar being 'a stop-gap measure'. Another negative problem for the Government was its set up. When proportional representation was introduced, the vote in January 1919 was always going to stumble over problems. No one could get enough votes to win the elections because of PR. This meant that a Coalition Government was brought about. It consisted of Socialists, Democrats and the Catholic Centre Party.

There are many problems with the formation of a Coalition Government. Decisions to be made will be tough to come upon, as the Government has a wide political base. Each party in the Coalition will differ on their views over most problems. This makes passing laws a difficulty because of the intense bickering amongst them, so not a lot gets done. A political positive was the fact that both men and women had the right to vote, something which was extremely rare in Europe at the time, and was not even present in Great Britain.

The Government was also Democratic, a far cry from previous, autocratic Governments. The problem with an autocracy is that one person holds complete and undisputed power, seen nowadays in Iraq, who are under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. However the main political plus was the fact that the Weimar Republic had pulled itself through the previous 4 years, which included major problems, for example hyperinflation. To conclude, despite the German economy recovering from a hyperinflation crisis, the foundations for a future collapse had been laid.

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It had inflicted wounds which in the long term would contribute to Weimar's death. However, the Government could have been over in the first four years if the opposition had gathered support, and been stronger and better organised. Answering the question on how strong the Weimar Republic was by 1924, it looked stable from the outside, but it was weak on the inside. When a future crisis arises however, the Weimar Republic has a strong possibility of collapse, and this can be seen when a certain Wall Street Crash comes into the picture.