

# Weimar republic – political, social and economic issues

[Countries](#), [Germany](#)



Political, economic and social issues in the Weimar Republic to 1929 Year 12  
Modern History 2013 \* Mrs Lynch Jenni Hamilton Due Date; 26th of March  
2013 Word Count; 1, 665 The collapse of the Weimar Republic was due to many social, political and economic issues within. From its birth it faced numerous political problems, for which the causes were many and varied. These problems included political instability, deep divisions within society and economic crisis; problems were constantly appearing for the new government.

The Weimar Republic never really had a stable political party, having a whole six different parties between 1924-1928 does not create stability. Many of these parties were also narrowly sectioned, with messed up priorities such as to look after the interests of class area of religion that they represented within the Weimar Republic, loyalty to democracy was of least importance. In 1929 the misery that had aided the efforts of Weimar's enemies in the early 20s had been relieved by five years of economic growth and rising incomes.

Germany had been admitted to the League of Nations and is once more an accepted member of the international community. The bitterness at Germany's defeat in the Great War and the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles had not been forgotten but most Germans appear to have come to terms with the new Republic and its leaders. Gustav Stresemann had decided to take on the job of leading a battle for a policy he felt was in his nation's vital interest even though he was tired and ill and knew that the opposition would be stubborn. Stresemann was the major force in negotiating and guiding the Young Plan through a 'plebiscite'.

This plan although opposed by those on the right-wing won majority approval and further reduced Germany's reparations payments. The Weimar Republic was a bold experiment. It was Germany's first democracy, a state in which elected representatives had real power. The new Weimar constitution attempted to blend the European parliamentary system with the American presidential system. In the pre- World War I period, only men twenty-five years of age and older had the right to vote, and their elected representatives had very little power. The Weimar constitution gave all men and women twenty years of age the right to vote.

Women made up more than 52% of the potential electorate, and their support was vital to the new Republic. From a ballot, which often had thirty or more parties on it, Germans chose legislators who would make the policies that shaped their lives. Parties pning a broad political spectrum from Communists on the far left to National Socialists (Nazis) on the far right competed in the Weimar elections. The Chancellor and the Cabinet needed to be approved by the Reichstag (legislature) and needed the Reichstag's continued support to stay in power.

Although the constitutionmakers expected the Chancellor to be the head of government, they included emergency provisions that would ultimately undermine the Republic. Gustav Stresemann was briefly Chancellor in 1923 and for six years foreign minister and close advisor to Chancellors. The constitution gave emergency powers to the directly elected President and made him the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. In times of crisis, these presidential powers would prove decisive.

During the stable periods, Weimar Chancellors formed legislative majorities based on coalitions primarily of the Social Democrats, the Democratic Party, and the Catholic Center Party, all moderate parties that supported the Republic. As the economic situation deteriorated in 1930, and many disillusioned voters turned to extremist parties, the Republic's supporters could no longer command a majority. German democracy could no longer function as its creators had hoped. Ironically by 1932, Adolf Hitler, a dedicated enemy of the Weimar Republic, was the only political leader capable of commanding a legislative majority.

On January 30, 1933, an aged President von Hindenburg reluctantly named Hitler Chancellor of the Republic. Using his legislative majority and the support of Hindenburg's emergency presidential powers, Hitler proceeded to destroy the Weimar Republic. Germany emerged from World War I with huge debts incurred to finance a costly war for almost five years. The treasury was empty, the currency was losing value, and Germany needed to pay its war debts and the huge reparations bill imposed on it by the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended the war.

The treaty also deprived Germany of territory, natural resources, and even ships, trains, and factory equipment. Germany's population was undernourished and contained many widows, orphans, and disabled veterans living in poverty. The new German government struggled to deal with these crises, which had produced a serious hyperinflation. By 1924, after years of crisis management and attempts at tax and finance reform, the economy was stabilised with the help of foreign, particularly American, loans. This

relative "golden age" was reflected in the strong support for moderate pro-Weimar political parties in the 1928 elections.

However, economic disaster struck with the onset of the world depression in 1929. The American stock market crash and bank failures led to a recall of American loans to Germany. This development added to Germany's economic hardship. Mass unemployment and suffering followed. Many Germans became increasingly disillusioned with the Weimar Republic and began to turn toward radical anti-democratic parties whose representatives promised to relieve their economic hardships. The government no longer had sufficient resources to support the German economy, but continued to print paper money.

This caused rapid inflation, which Germany used as an excuse for not being able to pay its second instalment towards the reparations. The French government, however, decided to force Germany to pay. It did this by sending French and Belgian troops to the industrial heartland of Germany, the Ruhr to collect reparations still owing to them, but the German Chancellor called for "passive resistance" by the workers of the Ruhr; a refusal to co-operate with the troops. This, however, led to the collapse of the German economy, as the government was forced to print more paper money in order to pay the striking workers in the Ruhr.

This caused hyperinflation as Germany was not producing anything; its industrial heartland had been destroyed and yet the number of notes in its economy was increasing. The German currency soon became worthless and prices were constantly rising (For example, an American dollar in July 1914

was worth about 4 marks, whilst in November 1923, its equivalent in marks was 4, 000, 000, 000, 000 marks). This struggle is then proved by Gustav Stresemann in the following source; “ We in Germany in recent years have lived on borrowed money, if a crisis ever hits us and the American withdraw their short-term credits then we would be bankrupt ... e are not only militarily disarmed, we are also financially disarmed” The social effects of this hyperinflation were disastrous, particularly for the German middle classes who had lost all their savings and pensions as a result. Then, in September 1923, Gustav Stresemann called for the end of passive resistance in order to begin the restoration of the German economy. This led to great political humiliation however, as it showed that Germany had been forced to do what the French wanted.

This led to the Munich Putsch, which was an attempt by the Nazi Party leader, Adolf Hitler to overthrow the government; Hitler was determined to show the German people that not all Germans were going to accept what the French had forced the German government to do. Bavarian police broke up the revolt however and Hitler was arrested. In Saxony, there was another revolt against the republic, but this was a communist revolt and a communist government was set up, but Stresemann ordered this government to resign or else it would face military action.

Therefore, the Ruhr Crisis led to economic collapse, political humiliation, dissatisfaction within society, further opposition to the Weimar Republic and finally, it's devastating effects caused people to start looking towards extreme solutions. The Weimar Republic, in spite of all its problems, did

survive the crisis that had befallen it between 1919 and 1923; even though it had inspired violent political opposition from right and left wing groups, it had faced a devastating economic situation creating a high level of discontent within society, and had brought about serious political humiliation upon itself, it had still managed to survive.

All these problems contributed to the political difficulties which Weimar faced during its first few years; a general hatred amongst Germans of the new system and constant opposition towards it. The political issue of the Treaty of Versailles was probably the most important individual cause of Weimar's crisis however. It had been the Treaty of Versailles that caused nationalist opposition to Weimar and the

German nation to step down to a second class power, losing much of its territory, having extreme military restrictions imposed on it, and it had been the treaty of Versailles that had brought about reparations, leading Germany into an extremely difficult economic situation causing further social tensions, and it had been this treaty that had inspired communist opposition by bringing about the need to get Germany back to work, causing the majority socialists (SPD) to cooperate with the old order.

It can be argued that this treaty was responsible for most of the hatred of the German people towards Weimar between 1919 and 1923, but on the other hand, Germany would not have been able to negotiate peace had they not signed the treaty. Germany managed to survive this crisis of economic collapse, political humiliation and dissatisfaction within society.

## **Bibliography**

1. Secondary Sources – Republic to Reich, A history of Germany 1918-1939
2. Third Edition: K J Mason; Published 2007
3. Primary Source – Republic to Reich, A history of Germany 1918-1939
4. Third Edition: K J Mason; Published 2007 Gustav Stresemann – page 43
5. “ We in Germany in recent years have lived on borrowed money, if a crisis ever hits us and the American withdraw their short-term credits then we would be bankrupt ... we are not only militarily disarmed, we are also financially disarmed”