

Crisis of the weimar republic history essay



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The crisis and eventual collapse of the Weimar republic was contributed to by World War One and the Versailles Treaty and cultural, political and economic factors.

WWI and the Versailles Treaty had political, cultural, social and economic impacts on Weimar Germany which contributed to a republic in crisis and eventual disintegration. The culture of the Weimar Republic also contributed to its collapse. The Weimar culture was drastically different to Imperial Germany and many believed that tradition had succumbed to the pressure of the new culture. Art and education were modernized along with the Weimar culture and bringing these to the people was condemned as it threatened the German cultural tradition. Politics also assisted in the demise of the Republic. The political sphere was revolutionized as it broke from tradition and emphasised popular politics and the links between local and national levels. The Weimar economy was also a contributing factor. The nation's links to the international economy were distorted, the welfare system came under greater pressure, the effects of local management, the inflation and the inequality of economic power all contributed to the Republic's collapse. In all the crisis of the Weimar Republic was a result of the combination of World War One, the Versailles Treaty, cultural change, political factors and economic issues which resulted in eventual collapse.

A vital factor that contributed to undermining the Weimar Republic was the end of World War One (WWI) and the Versailles Treaty. The end of the War and the Versailles Treaty had political, cultural, social and economic impacts on the Weimar Republic. The Versailles Treaty outlined penalties which were to be imposed on Germany. These penalties included losing around ' 13% of

its' territory, six millions in populations, valuable resources... all its colonies,' disarmament, reparations to be payed and the ' war guilt clause.' [1]The ' war guilt clause' meant that Germany had to acknowledge that it and its allies were the ' originators' and ' aggressors' of the war. [2]The Versailles Treaty had a significant impact on the Weimar Republic as many believed that the republic had been betrayed by the ' political forces which should have been expected to defend it.' [3]The Versailles Treaty, Peter Gay argues, resulted in demands for abolishment of the ' dictated peace' and ' punishment of the November Criminals' who had accepted it. [4]Richard Bessel concurs with Gay and argues that the rhetoric of the political right centred on the belief that ' Germany's noble fighting men had not been defeated on the battlefield, but were stabbed in the back at home.' [5]Bessel also argues that the war and the Versailles Treaty ' brought old structures of authority crashing down.' [6]WWI and the Versailles Treaty also had significant cultural and social impacts on the Weimar Republic. Gay argues that the war destroyed the ties of German culture to the German past and to foreign locales. [7]The social impacts are equally significant. Jason Crouthamel argues that both victims and civilians suffered from an ' inferiority complex' and felt hostile towards the state, which resulted in feelings of isolation and helplessness in ' their struggle to adjust to post-war conditions.' [8]Also significant was the disparity between the varied classes and social groups. Crouthamel argues that the labelling of post-war victims from the working classes as ' hysterics' contributed significant to this social inequality. [9]Crouthamel also states that the interests of different groups became more difficult to overcome after the war. [10]Economic factors were also vital to the Republic post WWI and the Versailles Treaty. Of significance

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is the modernization of the welfare services which was accelerated by the war. Eve Rosenhaft argues that this created new 'client groups' for welfare services which consisted of war victims and survivors.[11] Rosenhaft argues that these new clients were a constant source of conflict and competition for benefits in the Republic.[12] In sum, World War One and the Versailles Treaty had significant political, cultural, social and economic impacts on the Weimar Republic. These factors significantly undermined confidence in the Republic, resulting in crisis and its ultimate demise.

Culture of the Weimar Republic and how it differentiated from the traditional German culture also contributed significantly to the crisis of the Republic. Bessel argues that the traditional values of Germany had been weakened by the War and this extends to its culture.[13] Imperial Germany was unreceptive of the modern movement and extremely resistant to developments in the arts and social sciences.[14] Larry Eugene Jones argues that during the Wilhelmine Empire Germany was dominated in the cultural sphere by a 'relatively thin, but immensely influential social stratum.' [15] With the development of the Weimar Republic, came modernity. Sheri Berman argues that the masses were 'ripped from their traditional moorings' by modernity and as a result associational activity grew.[16] Associational activity grew as people tried to come to terms with revolutionary changes in art, literature, architecture, music, science, medicine, sexuality, urban planning, social policy and industrial relations. [17] Jones argues that for those who identified with the 'bourgeois humanist tradition' it seemed as if their culture was folding to the new culture.[18] The popularity of new music such as jazz, the obsession with figures such as the

singer, actor and dancer Josephine Baker, new sexuality and the rebellion of the youth all contributed to the idea of a culture in crisis.[19]In the sphere of art, modernist works were condemned as a means for ' exploring new perspectives on reality and bringing society's blemishes into sharper focus.'[20]Critics of art were also concerned of threats to German traditional culture from ' niggerized Americanism' and Mongolian waves of Bolshevism' which would convert Germany into a ' swamp culture.'[21]Education also underwent a transformation during the Weimar Era. Count Hermann Keyserling stated that the ' mighty consider popular higher education' as the ideal and this lead to ' lower standards.'[22]Hermann Hesse agreed with Keyserling and argued that the new intellectualism was ' more turbulent, wilder and poorer in tradition.'[23]Franz Von Papen also concurred and stated that ' bringing academic education to the people' was not effective as they were receiving the discarded ' garb of the academic elite.'[24]The culture of the Weimar Republic differed significantly from the culture of Imperial Germany. The modernization of the German culture left many feeling as if their traditional values were ' no longer honoured and protected' and this lead to a rise in associational activity.[25]Art and education exemplify the modernization of the German culture and the threat posed to tradition. In sum, the inability of the German people to come to terms with the modernized German culture contributed to the crisis of the republic and its collapse.

Politics also had a fundamental impact on the Weimar Republic and contributed to its state of crisis. A major issue involved traditional German politics. Gay argues that tradition was a key issue as conservatives preferred

old methods and despised new innovations.[26]Gay also argues that the radicals despised the remnants of Imperial politics that were evident in the new republic.[27]Berman concurs with this and states that voters abandoned ' traditional bourgeois parties' and turned towards ' people's parties.'^[28]A further consequence of the modernization of politics involved replacing traditional political parties with mass parties and parliamentary democracy. ^[29]Anthony McElligott argues that the ' advent of popular democracy' allowed the working classes the opportunity to participate in politics.^[30]This participation allowed the working classed to influence the political process, most significantly at the local levels.^[31]Bessel agrees with McElligott and argues that politicians and interest groups could not avoid building their bases upon popular politics.^[32]Bessel also argues that as a result of popular politics, policy was ' directly affected by popular reactions via the ballot box.'^[33]The emphasis on popular politics resulted in many political parties reinventing themselves and insisting on committing to becoming true ' people's parties.'^[34]Berman argues that despite reinvention and the commitment to the people, the parties found it essentially challenging to secure the support of the voting public throughout the 1920s.^[35]Bessel argues that despite the emphasis on popular politics the ' political interests in whose hands power really la[id]' stayed considerably unaltered.^[36]Bessel also argues that the instability of popular politics and the political system resulted in growing approval of parties who opposed the republic and were anti-democracy.^[37]Another vital political factor that contributed to the collapse of the Weimar Republic was the relationship between the local and national levels of politics. McElligott argues that during the period of Imperial Germany subordination was the ideal that governed ' the relationship

between local and central authorities.’[38]McElligott also outlines that Article 127 of the constitution of the Weimar Republic gave new local administrators increased independence and freedom in the running of ‘ day to day affairs’ without national interference.[39]The increased power for local governments resulted in criticism and opposition. Conservatives hoped to weaken the validity of local governments and press for a ‘ constitutional reform which would create a unitary state’ under the control of the centre.[40]In sum, the break from traditional politics, the development of popular politics and the relationship between local and national politics all contributed to the crisis of the Weimar Republic and its collapse. Politics undermined the republic and in a similar way so did economics.

Economic factors were an essential component in undermining the Weimar Republic. One significant factor was the international impact on the German economy after WWI and the Versailles Treaty. Bessel argues that after the war the German exporting industrial economy collapsed.[41]The war also significantly impacted on the German economy in relation to welfare services. Rosenhaft argues that during the Weimar era the amount of the population that was welfare-dependant increased exponentially.[42]The growth in the welfare-dependant population resulted in competition between various groups who wished to be ‘ acknowledged as deserving.’[43]Such growth in welfare groups which included war victims and survivors, ‘ ordinary recipients of poor relief’, pensioners and victims of the inflation, resulted in increasing pressure on the welfare system.[44]Also of significance to the economic impact on the Weimar Republic were the local economies. McElligott argues that local authorities attempted to achieve their goals

through unimpeded borrowing and taxation.[45]Such unimpeded borrowing and taxation was later curbed in an attempt to restore the economy to prudence and good management.[46]Local economic management was objected to by the middle classes as they felt that they were over-taxed and that their resources were being wasted.[47]The inflation also contributed economically to the crisis of the Weimar Republic. The inflation, Jones argues, destroyed the economic stability of a large amount of the population's ' educated elite.'[48]Measures taken to stabilize the mark after the inflation are also significant. Jones argues that the ' authoritarian manner' in which the mark was stabilized ' inflicted severe economic hardship and aggravated the social strata' that had already suffered the most from the inflation.[49]Jones also argues that the ' uneven economic recovery' of 1924 to 1929 overlooked the German middle class, resulting in disaffection with the Republic's system of government.[50]Modernization also impacted on the Republic's economy. Economically, modernization resulted in the increasing of power of large ' capitalist enterprises' and the minimisation of the power of small enterprises.[51]In sum, economic factors including Germany's relationship with the international economy, pressure on the welfare system, local economies, the inflation and disparity in economic power all contribute to the crisis of the Weimar Republic. The combination of political, cultural and economic pressure was too significant for the Weimar Republic to withstand.

The combined effect of political, cultural and economic factors resulted in the crisis and collapse of the Weimar Republic. Berman discusses the links between politics and culture and argues that frustration with the failures of

the government and political parties resulted in increased participation in cultural clubs and voluntary and professional organizations.[52]Berman also argues that such increased participation helped to undermine the Republic and enabled ' Hitler's rise to power.'[53]Jones agrees with Berman and argues that the Weimar culture was ' intensely political', mirrored ' political struggles' and was ' enlisted in the struggle' over Germany's future.

[54]Culture also impacted on the ways in which the economy was managed, especially in relation to expenditure. McElligott argues that the socialist government, increased expenditure to ' meet the needs of the less well-off' and improve the health of the population and the youth in particular.

[55]Such targeted spending alienated the middle class and resulted in their discontent with the government.[56]Jones argues that the combination of cultural, political and economic factors could not be withstood by the republic.[57]Gay concurs with Jones and states that the civil war, the inability to discredit the ' aristocratic-industrial alliance', the Versailles Treaty and the inflation made the republic appear to be an absurdity.[58]In all, the impacts of culture on politics and the economy and vice versa and the combination of all three fundamentally weakened the Weimar Republic sending it into crisis and resulting in its eventual collapse.

The crisis and eventual collapse of the Weimar republic was contributed to by World War One and the Versailles Treaty and cultural, political and economic factors. WWI and the Versailles Treaty had political, cultural, social and economic impacts on Weimar Germany. Politically many believed the republic and its fighting men had been betrayed and were disgruntled with the government. Culturally WWI and the Versailles Treaty destroyed ties with

the German past and socially many felt inferior and hostile towards the government. Economically WWI and the Versailles treaty modernized welfare services and created competition between the more welfare-dependant populations. The culture of the Weimar Republic also contributed to its collapse. The Weimar culture was significantly different to the Imperial German culture and many felt that their values were no longer protected and this resulted in a growth in associational activity. The modernization of the German culture during the Weimar period is exemplified by art and education as both were brought to the masses and threatened the German tradition. Politics was also a vital factor assisting in the demise of the Republic. The break from traditional politics, the advance in popular politics and the connection between local and national politics all contributed to the demise of the Republic. Economic factors were also vital. Germany's affiliation with the international economy, the growing pressure on the welfare system, the development and criticism of local economic management, the inflation and the inequality in economic power all contributed to the crisis of the Weimar Republic. The effect of cultural, political and economic factors combined with post WWI and the Versailles Treaty fundamentally eroded the Weimar republic, resulting in crisis and its eventual collapse.