

# Example of the effect of the world war i on social divisions within german and it...

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



The end of the First World War led to the collapse of four empires, shaped the political map of the world, created a new system of international relations, and claimed about 10 million lives. But the true consequences of the war were noted by Marshal Foch: " This is not peace. It is an armistice for twenty years". This essay will consider the social division of societies in European countries, which took place after the First World War on the examples of Germany and Italy.

At the beginning of XX century, the German economy continued to grow rapidly. By 1910, the level of development of the empire's industry came in second in the world after the United States. However, becoming a leading industrial power, Germany has remained politically authoritarian state. At the top of the social pyramid, as before, was the nobility. In German society social movement was mainly " horizontal" and much less often - " vertical". At the beginning of the XX century a completely unknown phenomenon emerged in the German Empire - the youth movement that openly contrasted the ideas of Wilhelm's traditions in the society. As a consequence the chance of overall socio-political crisis increased sharply.

However, German society perceived the World War I as an event of national importance. The patriotic euphoria at the beginning of the war was replaced by weariness and exasperation. Mobilization of all the nation's resources required for conducting two-front war against the world's major powers, caused profound economic, social, psychological crisis. During the war, the country lost 2 million people dead and 4 million wounded. More than 1 million of Germans were taken prisoners. During the entire period of the war the total volume of industrial production significantly decreased, the fiscal

system exhausted, the country suffered from hunger.

The deepening government crisis began in early November 1918 when revolutionary events started in Germany. The revolution in Germany began on November 3, 1918 and on November 9 reached Berlin. Kaiser fled the country. The revolutionary government - the Council of People's Representatives, led by a social-democrat F. Ebert - declared Germany a republic. On November 11th the armistice was signed. On November 12th the Government published its program that finished war, proclaimed the freedom of speech, assembly, and associations, declared an amnesty for political prisoners, and universal, equal suffrage by direct and secret ballot. The government started to address the problems of unemployment, welfare of demobilized soldiers, and regulation of economic and social problems. On December 30, 1918 the Communist Party of Germany was established. Its program document called for a socialist revolution. On January 5, 1919 spontaneous demonstrations in Berlin were supported by the Communist Party of Germany. On the streets of Berlin began strikes and clashes with the police, which were suppressed by January 12. With the escalation of violence in recent months of revolution the democratic forces in Germany lost their positions.

On July 31, 1919 Weimar Constitution was adopted. Its fundamental principle proclaimed sovereignty of the people, freedom and social justice. The lower house of parliament - the Reichstag - had the greatest influence in the power system, including monitoring the legislative process. The President was seen as non-partisan arbiter and guarantor of stability and unity of the republican system of the empire. An attempt was made to introduce a system of checks

and balances and to avoid the dictatorship.

In addition to the state system, the Weimar constitution regulated in details the issues related to the rights and personal freedoms, including community life and the socio-economic sphere. It proclaimed the equality of all before the law, equality of men and women, equality of multilanguage categories of the population of the empire, the privacy of correspondence, freedom of speech and movement, freedom to form unions and associations, freedom of conscience. The authors of the Weimar Constitution tried to create a democratic state with the socialist orientation. The Weimar constitution implied the presence of a developed civil society, sustainable political culture and knowledge of democratic values in general. The most democratic constitution and perfect of its time proved to be unsustainable.

The lack of professional defenders among the ruling burghers and intellectuals weakened the position of Weimar Republic. The vast majority of professors, scientists, legal scholars, historians had a negative attitude towards Weimar Republic as well as students who were adherents of the old order. It is no accident that there were so many supporters of Hitler among students.

Democratic facade of Weimar Republic did not rely on a strong foundation of democratic state institutions, not only because of conservation of the old state apparatus, but also because of the shortcomings of the constitutional order, invented in Weimar without a thorough account of the situation in the country. Thus, the broad democratic rights and freedoms, in particular freedom of the press, in the absence of censorship contributed to the unprecedented growth of chauvinist, militaristic propaganda. Literature of

this wing actually swept across the country. The absence of a constitutional ban on the activities of the parties, sowing discord among the German people, inciting ethnic hatred, anti-Semitism, not only created the conditions for the growth of the Nazi organizations, but also created conditions for the legal entry of National Socialist German Working Party in Weimar social, political and governmental system.

The fatal mistake of the republic was that it neither deprived the authorities' reactionary warlords from influence, nor reorganized bureaucracy. It did not take surviving cadre of the Reichswehr, for the soldiers Kaiser remained a symbol of strength and power of Germany. The army, subordinate, under the Constitution, only to the Reich Chancellor, was in fact uncontrolled. It has evolved into an independent active political force. Expression of the complete rejection of the Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic was raised by his command, along with right-wing officers' organizations in May 1920, when the military coup Kappa took place. The Nazi paramilitary organization grew with the former soldiers of Reichswehr.

The outcome of the First World War was the elimination of the German monarchy, the beginning of the democratic changes in the political and social spheres, the acceleration of Germany's quitting the war. The main paradox of the German revolution consisted in the fact that its main idea was a struggle between the left and ultra-left parties in the passivity of the other political forces. In addition to this the general crisis of society could be seen throughout the postwar period. The final blow to democratic values was caused by the Great Depression, when output fell significantly and the average wage was less than the cost of living, 8. 5 million of Germans were

unemployed and had to live under hyperinflation. All this let Hitler's party highlight the old socio-economic relations and masses to the path of revolution.

Italy faced not less significant problems. The political system in Italy at the beginning of XX century was represented by a monarchy under the House of Savoy. At the beginning of the century the Italian bourgeoisie did not have any major, well-organized political party that could achieve a parliamentary majority. The Italian Socialist Party, created in 1892 remained the only mass party in the country.

The scope of the strike movement at the beginning of the century pushed the ruling circles of Italy to conducting social policy. Giovanni Giolitti, the Prime Minister of Italy, used liberal methods on practice. In 1902, he initiated the laws which made the basis of social legislation, such as limitation of working hours for women and children, the Sunday day of rest, the compulsory insurance, the right of workers and employees to strike and form trade unions. To strengthen control over the workers movement Giolitti even suggested the leaders of the Socialist Party to join the government.

The war stimulated economic development, causing a significant increase in heavy industry. The process of concentration of the industry accelerated the growth of monopolies merging them with the state. However, Italy did not receive the expected territories after the war although was on the victor's side. The war brought Italy more than 600 thousand killed, more than a million wounded and maimed, a huge foreign debt, devastated provinces, frustration and desire for change. Tax increases and inflation, decreasing wages and unemployment led to a sharp decline in the life standards of

Italians.

The consequences of the First World War to Italy played a crucial role in the maturation of fascism as a political movement. The hardships of the post-war period acutely experienced all categories of population, such as workers, peasants and tenants, businessmen, officials and employees, demobilized soldiers and officers. The soldiers who returned from the battlefield could not find a job to feed themselves and their families; industrial enterprises serving military orders, shut down. Italy was swept by the revolutionary upsurge, which is called the "The Red Two Years". It is characterized in the movement of the proletariat, in a mass peasant movement and in the crisis of Italian liberal state in general.

The scope of the labor movement disoriented the government. It promised the workers that their demands will be met. The leaders of Italian Socialist Party took a conciliatory position. But the promises were implemented only partially. Misfortune befell the labor movement had important consequences, namely the loss of confidence in both the government and the leaders of the Socialist Party and the trade unions. A few months later, in January 1921, Italian Communist Party was created. The bourgeois-liberal state was hardly able to cope with post-war difficulties and stabilize the internal political situation. In March 1919, on the initiative of the Catholic community and the Catholic-based mass movement People's Party was established. In fact it was a bourgeois party which relied on the broad masses of the peasantry, the urban bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and partly used the traditional deep religious feelings of Italians.

In the November 1919 parliamentary elections were held, fully reflecting the

changes in the political landscape of post-war Italy. In the first place by the number of votes cast was the Italian Socialist Party, the second - the People's Party. Thus, after the First World War a set of specific historical conditions in which fascism arose in Italy. The main components of this complex are: weakness of the Italian state in the conduct of its domestic and foreign policy, consequences of the "mutilated victory", the active mass movement of workers in 1919-1920, the growth of left parties, the collapse of ideals and stereotypes of pre-war period in the mass psychology of the Italians.

Ordinary Italians were misled by attractive political slogans of the fascist party: universal suffrage, guarantees of civil liberties, universal disarmament, the abolition of privileges and titles. The same purpose served economic promises of a progressive tax on capital, an 8-hour workday and a minimum wage, workers' participation in the technical management of enterprises, nationalization of the entire military industry, the transfer of land to the peasants, the prohibition of child labor under 16 years old, and a general education.

## **Conclusions**

The end of the World War I was hailed with delight by all participants. But the jubilation was short-lived, since the Versailles Treaty not only allowed, but also exacerbated the socio-political tensions in both winners and losers countries. The participants of the war could not adapt to the changing trends of the world, and most of the problems were not resolved. The Socialists gained popularity among all groups of populations, but failing to ensure the reforms led to increasing weight of the revolutionary movement. Assessing the growing labor movement and the increasingly strong position of social



democracy, the ruling circles of the countries had to choose between shift to the left which opened the way to social democracy into the government sector, and the shift to the right which meant fascism in its forms. England and France appeared to be more resistant to these processes, but Germany and Italy, being strongly affected by the war, opened the way to the extreme right-wing organizations. In these countries the sense of national infringement is especially evident. This factor let fascist leaders use nationalist rhetoric in their policy. On the other hand fascists had an anti-revolutionary orientation, which gives support to the army and the bourgeoisie. The populist slogans and successful management created an excellent base for fascist's prosperity.

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