

Weimar and Nazi Germany

The early days of the Weimar Republic

Key Question: Why was the Weimar Republic so unstable in its early days?

Facts:

- Germany agreed to an armistice on November 11th 1918.
- The German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm, abdicated 28th November 1918.
- Peace terms were imposed upon the German people in 1919.
- Many German soldiers did not believe that they had been defeated.
- Germany was in a state of economic chaos. Food was in short supply and much of the workforce had been killed or injured during the conflict.

Your task today is to investigate the reasons for unrest in the early days of the Weimar republic. Read through the following extracts carefully before completing the activity that follows.

Consider these sources.

<p>A "Then came stirring news. Mutiny in the Kaiser's fleet! Young sons of the bourgeoisie who had been sporting sailors caps now left them at home. I saw women who laughed and wept because they had their men in the fleet. From windows and doors in the front of the food stores sounded the anxious voices: 'Will the fleet sail out!...No, the fleet must not sail! It's murder! Finish the war!' youngsters in the street yelled, 'Hurrah!'" http://www.marxist.com/germany/chapter2.html</p>	<p>B Weimar had great problems gaining acceptance throughout Germany, too. The terribly harsh conditions of the Treaty of Versailles angered Germans everywhere and many directed their resentment at the Weimar government who signed the Treaty. This was actually quite unfair, because they really had very little choice but to sign. http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/8288/gessay.html</p>
<p>C By early November 1918, many cities had been taken over by workers' and soldiers' councils. This was very similar to what had happened in Russia during the communist take over of 1917 and politicians were fearful of another communist takeover in Germany itself.</p>	<p>D From 1919 to 1923, there was a series of attempted revolutions in Germany, some by Communists - who hoped to take advantage of the situation and follow the example of Russia - others by right wing nationalists who blamed the government for accepting the treaty and tried to overthrow it.</p>

<p>E On December 23rd 1918, 1000 sailors broke into the government's headquarters and held Ebert captive. They demanded their owed pay and an increase in their wages. Government soldiers did not attack fellow military men and Ebert had to give in.</p>	<p>F In March 1919, what was left of the German Communists attempted another takeover. The Free Corps was called in to crush them and within a few days had killed over 1000 people. Ebert had ordered that anybody seen carrying a weapon was to be shot dead. The Free Corps had once again saved the government and restored order.</p>
<p>G The leader of the Social Democrats (SPD), Ebert, becomes President, signs an armistice with the Allies and promptly holds the country's first free elections in January 1919. Ebert wins and becomes the first elected leader of the Weimar Republic, so called because its first government meets in the small town of Weimar rather than the dangerously unstable Berlin.</p> <p><i>However, the new Republic faced overwhelming problems from the outset.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>On the Left</i>, the Communists press for revolution like in the USSR. · <i>On the Right</i>, nearly all the Kaiser's former advisors remain in place in the Civil Service, the Judiciary and the Army; the country itself is very authoritarian. 	<p>H In the autumn of 1918, the Allies launched a massive attack on the German lines. The German Army could not stand up to such an attack and in just a few weeks the German Army had collapsed. The euphoria of the success of the Ludendorff Offensive was quickly forgotten. Many Germans could not accept that they had lost the war. The blame was put on weak politicians rather than on military exhaustion. In the space of two months, Germany had gone from a fighting nation to a defeated one; from a nation with a leader - Kaiser William II - to one with politicians leading the country. William II had been forced to abdicate - give up the throne.</p> <p>http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/wei1.htm</p>
<p>I Many soldiers had returned from the war with their weapons. They had been greatly angered by the defeat and they blamed the government - which happened to be Ebert's. These men could not be disarmed nor were they loyal to the government. They were potentially a serious source of trouble. Ironically, it was not Ebert's fault that Germany had lost the war. The incompetence of the military leaders was forgotten and the government of the time of the Armistice was blamed.</p>	<p>J Some Germans, especially the military, still resented the government for signing the Treaty of Versailles, claiming that Germany could or would have won the war if negotiations had not been called. This became the 'stab in the back' legend. Ebert and other members of the SPD became known as the 'November Criminals.'</p> <p>http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/8288/gessay.html</p>