

The Weimar Republic under Stresemann 1924-1929

Achievements

Chancellor for only a few months
Leading member of every government from 1923-1929
More skilful than Ebert
Right wing so had wider support

The economy

Called off passive resistance in Ruhr
Called in worthless marks and burnt them
Replaced marks with a new currency called the Rentenmark
Negotiated to receive American loans under the Dawes Plan, 800 million marks
Renegotiated reparations payments
Some money went into business replacing old equipment with latest technology
Some went into providing new facilities for Germany
By 1927 German industry seemed to have recovered well
1928 achieved the same levels of production as before the war and became the worlds second greatest industrial power
Wages rose
For many Germans there was a higher standard of living
Reparations were being paid
Exports were on the increase
Government was even able to increase welfare benefits and wages for state employees

Culture

Cultural revival
Free expression of ideas
Writers and poets flourished
Artists tried to represent reality for German people
Some criticised politicians
Golden age for cinemas
Berlin famous for its daring and liberated night life

Politics

Became more stable
No attempted revolutions after 1923
Parties that supported the Republic did well at elections

Foreign Policy

Stresemann's greatest achievements were in foreign policy

1925 he signed the Locarno Treaties, guaranteeing not to change Germany's western borders with France and Belgium

1926 Germany was accepted into the LON

Stresemann began to work quietly on reversing the term of the Treaty

Problems

Economy

The boom was precarious, if US loans were recalled it would cause ruin

Unemployment began to rise

Peasant farmers were over producing

Many small businesses became disillusioned

Small shopkeepers saw their businesses threatened by large department stores

Culture

Some viewed changed as a moral decline

Organisations wanted a return to simply country values.

Politics

Both the Nazis and Communists were building up their party organisations

During these stable years there were still four Chancellors and it was only the influence of party leaders which held party coalitions together

Worryingly 30% of the vote went to parties opposed to the Republic

Right wing parties were quiet rather than destroyed

Parties like the Nazis made themselves more respectable

Hindenburg was elected as President in 1926, he opposed democracy and even wrote to the Kaiser in exile for approval before taking up the post!

Foreign Policy

Nationalists attacked Stresemann for signing Locarno, seeing it as an acceptance of the Treaty

Communists also attacked Locarno seeing it as a plot against the Communist government in the USSR.

Weimar Germany 1919-1923

Impact of the First World War

- 1914 the Germans had been a proud people
- The Kaiser was celebrated for his achievements
- The army probably the strongest in the world
- Businesses flourished
- The people were well educated and well fed
- By 1918 it was a completely different story
- The war left 600,000 widows and 2 million children without fathers
- National income was about 1/3 what it had been in 1913
- Industrial production was about 2/3 of what it had been in 1913
- War had deepened divisions in society
- There were huge gaps between the rich and poor
- Many factory workers were bitter at restrictions placed on their earnings during the war while factory owners made huge profits
- Women had been called up and many people saw this as damaging to traditional family values and society as a whole
- Germany had a revolution and became an unstable democratic republic
- Many ex soldiers despised this new government though

The birth of the Weimar Republic

Autumn 1918 allies offered the Germans peace on the condition that it became a democratic country.

When the Kaiser refused, sailors in Kiel mutinied

This triggered other revolts, the Socialists led uprisings in towns and ports across Germany

In Bavaria an independent Socialist Republic was declared

9 November 1918 the Kaiser abdicated his throne and left Germany for the Netherlands

10 November the Socialist leader Friedrich Ebert became the new leader of the Republic of Germany

11 November he signed an armistice with the allies

A new constitution was drawn up, the Weimar Republic would be democratic

- All Germans over 20 could vote
- Proportional Representations
- Chancellor needed support of half the Reichstag
- The head of state was the President. He stayed out of day to day running of the country but in a crisis he could rule the country through Article 48, he would have emergency powers and would not have to consult the Reichstag

The reaction of German politicians was unenthusiastic
There was opposition from the left and right
The right developed a myth that Ebert had stabbed Germany in the back and caused the defeat in the war
On the left Communists believed that at this stage what Germany actually needed was a Communist Revolution like there was in Russia in 1917
In January 1919 free elections took place in Germany's history
Ebert's party won a majority and a new government was formed in Weimar due to Berlin being too violent

The Treaty of Versailles

In June 1919 Ebert had to sign the Treaty of Versailles
Germany lost:

- 10 per cent of its land
- All of its overseas colonies
- 12.5 per cent of its population
- 16 per cent of its coal and 48 per cent of its iron industry
- Its arm was reduced to 100,000, no air force and navy reduced
- Germany had to accept blame and pay reparations

Most Germans were appalled

Supporters of the Weimar Government felt betrayed by the allies

Opposition blamed Ebert

The injustice of the Treaty became a rallying point for all Ebert's opposition

The Republic in danger, 1919-1924

The threat from the Left

One Communist group was the party known as the Spartacists

Led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg

They wanted Germany ruled by workers councils or soviets

January 1919 they launched their bid for power

Set up soviets in many towns

Ebert turned against them by making an agreement with the Freikorps (ex soldiers)

Street fighting took place

Freikorps won and Rosa and Karl were executed

However in February 1919 another attempt was made when Communists in Bavaria declared a soviet republic

The Freikorps moved in to crush the revolt, 600 Communists were killed

1920 there was Communist agitation in the Ruhr, there were 2000 casualties

Ebert's ruthless measures created lasting bitterness between the Communists and his Socialist Party.

The threat from the Right

Right wing opponents were largely those who were successful under the Kaiser
They wanted a strong leader, an army, an empire.

March 1920 Dr Wolfgang Kapp led 5,000 Freikorps into a rebellion known as the Kapp Putsch

The army refused to fire on the rebellion and it looked as if Ebert's government were doomed

However the workers saved Ebert by going on strike, there was no transport, water or electricity and the capital came to a halt

Kapp was hunted down and died whilst awaiting trial

It seemed the Weimar had support but the other rebels went unpunished by the courts and judges

Political assassinations were also frequent

November 1923 Hitler attempted the Munich Putsch, he also got off lightly, Ebert's right-wing enemies had friends in high places

Economic disaster

Germans blamed the Treaty for economically destabilising Germany

Germany was forced to pay reparations of £6,600million in annual instalments

2% of Germany's annual output

Germans said this was too much after WWI

The Ruhr

£50 million was paid in 1921 but in 1922 nothing was paid

France who had war debts to pay ran out of patience

In January 1923 French and Belgium troops entered the Ruhr legally under the terms of the Treaty to take what was owed them in the form of raw materials and goods

Result of occupation was disastrous for Germany

Government ordered workers to carry out passive resistance

French reacted harshly killing over 100 workers and expelling 100,000 from the region

The halt in the production in Germany's most important industrial region caused the collapse of the Germany currency

Hyperinflation

The government simply printed money

It paid off debts in worthless notes

Prices and wages rocketed but soon it became worthless

Poor people suffered

Those with savings were the greatest casualties though

Pensioners found their pension worth nothing

It was solved by *Gustav Stresemann*

The hyperinflation had done political damage though

Right-wing opponents had another problem to blame them for

Middle class no longer supported the Weimar

The Munich Putsch, 1923

Hitler believed the time was right to topple the Weimar Government

8 November 1923 Hitler hijacked a local government building and announced he was taking over the government of Bavaria

Joined by Ludendorff

Storm troopers began taking over government buildings

The next day however the Weimar Republic hit back

Sixteen Nazis were shot; Hitler escaped in a car whilst others stayed to face the police

Short term Munich Putsch was a disaster. People did not support him. He was put in jail.

However he gained lots of publicity and got off lightly.