

Versailles, Weimar, and the Failure of Democracy in Germany

- World War I – The Human Toll
 - WWI – The single-largest loss of human life to date
 - Closely followed by Spanish flu epidemic that killed 20-30 million in Europe
 - Germany lost over 2 million men
- Versailles
 - Big Four: David Lloyd George (U.K.), Vittorio Orlando (Italy), Georges Clemenceau (France), and Woodrow Wilson (USA)
 - Effective – January 10, 1920
 - Clauses:
 - German War Guilt
 - Reparations
 - Germany forfeits 13% of territory (10% population) as well as colonies
 - Loss of 50% of iron ore and 20% iron/steel industries
 - German armed forces reduced to 100,000 men (from 13 million)
- Weimar Economics
 - WWI saw exponential inflation despite tough controls on rent, prices, and wages.
 - Inflation
 - July 1919 – 14 RM : 1 Dollar
 - November 1923: 4 trillion 420 billion (4,420,000,000,000) : 1 dollar
 - Quality of Life
 - For middle-class Germans, consumption statistics show a shift from meat, butter, and fruit to rye bread and potatoes
 - 2.4 million war-dead = an unknowable amount of widows and fatherless children living on tiny pensions
- Weimar Republic
 - Political Restructuring/Civil War
 - Calls for a liberalization of German parliamentarianism had been present for many years, but in October 1918, with total defeat imminent, the Kaiser relented and the Prusso-German political system shifted to a constitutional monarchy akin to the British system.
 - January 1919 saw violence between the Free Corps and left-wing groups
 - January 19, 1919 Election
 - 76.2% support for a Republican parliamentary system
 - Weimar Constitution finalized in August 1919
 - Structural:
 - Participatory rather than merely representative
 - Referenda (plebiscites) could be called
 - President elected by direct popular vote for a 7-year term
 - Electoral system of proportional representation
 - Meant many parties
 - Usually at least 3-5 major players and often over a dozen total
 - Became increasingly viewed by many as an Allied imposition on Germany

- Prominence of Social Democrats in founding of Republic and early leadership, led to development of right-wing opposition parties that not only opposed the Social Democrats but constitutional republicanism itself.
- Kapp Putsch (March 1920)
- June 1920 Elections
 - Weimar parties (SPD, Centre, DDP) lose nearly 50% of their support and right-wing parties gain 1/3rd of the vote
- Munich Beer Hall Putsch – November 1923
 - Right-wing putschists were given far lesser sentences than left-wing
 - Hitler 5 years (served less than a year)
 - Ludendorff was acquitted
 - Whereas communist coup leaders were executed or imprisoned for life
- However, Weimar survive the crisis period of 1923, and the period of civil war and putsches ended.....Germany would experience a period of stability until the onset of World Depression in 1929/30. This was largely due to the 1924 Dawes Plan.
- **Article 48**
 - Following the global economic downturn of 1929/30, Heinrich Brüning the Center-party German chancellor convinced President Paul von Hindenburg to invoke **Article 48** of the Weimar constitution to invoke emergency powers in order to force through Brüning's financial reform bill which had been voted down by the Reichstag.
 - When the Reichstag overrode this emergency power, Brüning convinced Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag and force new elections in September 1930
 - Article 48 would be used extensively from 1930-1933
- September 14, 1930 Election
 - 577 Seats
 - Left-wing – 220 (38.1%)
 - Center-ish – 130 (22.5%)
 - Right-wing – 227 (39.3%)
 - NSDAP jumped from 12 seats in May 1928 election to 107 seats
- *Weimar Takeaways*
 - The Period of the Weimar Republic was marked by:
 - Economic uncertainty
 - Unemployment rose from 1.3 million in 1929 to over 6 million by the beginning of 1933
 - National Shame and a reactionary nationalism
 - Liberalization of politics and culture with a resultant conservative backlash
 - Political instability with a strong conservative drift
 - 14 chancellors from 1919-1933
 - By contrast the U.S. had 4 presidents, and probably would have had only 3 if Harding hadn't died in office

The Nazi Seizure of Power

- NSDAP
 - *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*
 - “The “socialism” in view here was the supposed “socialism” of the WWI trenches, that is, the tearing down of class distinctions for the Vaterland.
 - Not really a workers’ party, although somewhere between 20-25% of party members were workers
 - The majority of Nazi party members were middle class, but the party drew from all classes
- *What was the appeal of National Socialism?*
 - Two main reasons for Nazi growth:
 - Distinctive organization and campaign strategy
 - Mass meetings
 - Promise of a utopia of the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*)
 - Masterful manipulation of fears and desires based on socioeconomic and national situations
 - Detlev Peukert states, “The fact that the NSDAP had no firm, consistent political programme enabled it all the more easily to entice a wide range of groups in the population with a variety of promises, so long as it could conjure up the prospect that, once armed with the dignity of power and the instruments of propaganda, it would effect a fundamental break with the old Weimar ‘system’ and a general national ‘awakening.’” (Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 27)
 - Nazi campaigners adapted their campaigning to local regions and demographics. The NSDAP program lacked many positive claims, but emphasized various politically-expedient negations including: anti-Republicanism, anti-socialism, anti-Communism, anti-Versailles, anti-Semitism, and anti-capitalism (albeit pro-private property).
- Beer-Hall Putsch
 - November 1923
 - Hitler dictated *Mein Kampf* while serving only 9 months of his 5 year sentence
- Nazi Electoral Success
 - Prior to the September 1930 election the Nazis never held more than 32 Reichstag seats
 - September 1930
 - Nazis grew to 107 seats (18.5%)
 - March/April 1932
 - Hitler runs against Hindenburg for president
 - Hindenburg beats Hitler but needs the run-off to get the needed majority
 - July 1932
 - Marked NSDAP high-point with 230 seats (37.8% of vote)
 - Hindenburg refused to offer Hitler the chancellorship, and Hitler refused to accept any other role

- November 1932
 - NSDAP loses two million votes and falls to 196 seats in Reichstag
 - First Papen and then Schleicher are unable to form a workable coalition
- January 30, 1933
 - Hitler made chancellor
 - Wilhelm Frick – Minister of the Interior
 - Hermann Göring – Minister without Portfolio (and Minister of the Interior for Prussia)
 - Papen was to serve as Vice-chancellor
- *Machtergreifung* – “Seizure of Power”
 - The hope was that if Hitler and 1-2 Nazis were allowed in cabinet that the other conservative members could tame and manipulate them in order to cash in on their mass success.
 - *Reichstag Fire*
 - February 27th
 - Reichstag Fire Decree – February 28th
 - Issued by Hindenburg.
 - Invoked Article 48 of Weimar Constitution
 - Gave emergency powers to Hitler to suspend civil liberties in order to save Germany from a supposed Communist putsch
 - Hitler and NSDAP used these emergency powers to suppress opponents
 - March 5, 1933 Elections
 - Nazis unleashed a campaign of terror against their opponents
 - Did not reach majority but did achieve 43.9%

Nazis, the Volk, and the Jew

- European Anti-Semitism
 - Path from theological anti-Judaism → racial anti-Semitism
 - History of pogroms
 - Especially in connection with Holy Week
 - Blood libel
 - Eastern European
 - Pale of Settlement
 - Jews confined to poor regions in eastern Europe
 - The Pale of Settlement included all of Belarus, Lithuania and Moldova, much of present-day Ukraine, parts of eastern Latvia, eastern Poland, and some parts of western Russia,
 - *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*
 - Ca. 1905 forgery
 - Claimed to prove a Jewish world-conspiracy
 - Plagiarized from a French political satire that never mentioned Jews from 1864 and a Prussian novel from 1868.
 - Political Anti-Semitism
 - Dreyfuss/*J'accuse*
 - 1894 Trial

- Zola's *J'accuse* published 1898
- Dual Accusations
 - Jews were too un-assimilated
 - Jews were so assimilated that they held a disproportionate role in various professions (banking, academics, law, etc.)
- Link of Jews and Communism
 - Trotsky (Russia)
 - Bela Kun (Hungary)
 - Rosa Luxemburg and Kurt Eisner (Germany)
- Adolf Stoecker
 - Lutheran court-preacher
 - Christian Social Party (1879)
 - Decried Jewry's "domination" of press and stock market
- Karl Lueger
 - Christian Social Party in Vienna
 - Mayor of Vienna
 - Utilized Anti-Semitic attacks
 - Influenced Hitler
 - Hitler called him the best Burgermeister ever
- National Socialism
 - World Jewry and the Jewish Other
 - Eugenics
 - *Volksgemeinschaft*