

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The weakness and the eventual destruction of the Weimar Republic were the result, to some degree, of the Treaty of Versailles and the Weimar Constitution. To a far greater degree the failure of the German Republic was the result of the incongruity of the democratic republic superimposed on the inherent authoritarianism of the German people.

The Revolution of 1918, a revolution decreed from above and imposed upon the people, was nothing unique in the history of Germany. The German people as a nation have not taken advantage of their revolutionary situations, partly because they have been so thoroughly indoctrinated in the principles of state service and duty to the state, and partly because the liberal tradition in Germany has always been an under-current. The two examples of tradition liberalism that modern Germany rests most heavily upon are the War of Liberation and the Revolution of 1848.

These examples demonstrate the weakness of the liberal elements in Germany. The War of Liberation was a nationalist war fostered and supported by the Prussian government to free Germany from foreign oppression; the relatively liberal reforms were given by the government, not demanded by the people. It did much for Prussian nationalism, but little to inculcate a liberal tradition. The revolution of 1848 was suppressed because the aims of liberalism were not enthusiastically accepted by the people. Thus the weakness of the German liberalism invariably lies in the inability of the liberal elements to capture the imagination of the German people.

The liberal elements in the Weimar Republic (primarily the Socialists) suffered the same fate; the conservative, even the reactionary, elements held the mass of the population.

The isolation of the liberal forces in the Republican Germany meant that the Socialists had to ally themselves with the reactionary and the conservative forces. It is one of the greatest misfortunes of the period that the new Republic was forced to depend upon the Reichswehr for support.

The Reichswehr was one of the strongholds of reactionary nationalism in Germany. The officers and the men were anti-democratic and anti-republican; they were, on the whole, monarchists and they were strongly imbued with Junker attitudes and traditions. The nationalistic annexationist desires of the Reichswehr made the government suspect abroad, and their suspicious alignment made the Leftist elements within Germany wary.

This does not mean, however, that the German Socialists were not nationalist also. They proved their patriotism and their nationalism in policies that lay strangely with their socialist theory. The Socialists had associated themselves directly with the war in 1914 by voting the war credits; their instructions to the German delegates at the Paris Peace Conference resounded with nationalism; their refusal to accept the eastern frontiers and their entreaties concerning German minorities within the eastern states were also prompted by nationalist fervor. It was one of the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic that the Socialists' nationalism so often triumphed over their liberalism.

The position of the Socialist parties was another weakness of the Republic. The Majority Socialists and the Right Independent Socialists comprised part of the Centre Republican Bloc.¹ The alliance of the Social Democrats with the centre parties indicated the real desires of the German Socialists as a whole. They preferred alliance with the parties immediately to the right of them rather than with those to their left because the Socialists were imbued with a characteristic German trait--they respected and admired the traditional authority represented by the Centre. The Centre Republican Bloc was opposed on the left by the Communists and the Left Independents and on the right by the Nationalists and later by the Bavarian People's Party and the National Socialists. This centre position, coupled with the dependence on the Reichswehr, lessened the Social Democrats' chances of obtaining the support of the whole of the working classes.

Although the centre position was a disadvantage to the Social Democratic Party, in a sense it was an advantage to the Republic because it did allow the coalition of the moderate Socialists with the other centre parties. This coalition provided a workable majority in the Reichstag in the early republican period.

The opposition of the Nationalists to the republican centre had its foundation in the centre's acceptance of the Treaty of

¹ See Appendix.

Versailles. It is significant that the Nationalists did nothing to prevent the republican elements from accepting the treaty, but they used this capitulation of the Republic to the Allies' ultimatum as a means to attack the centre.

Versailles was regarded as an unacceptable treaty by the German nation as a whole. The Social Democrats were just as vehement in attacking the treaty as the Nationalists, were just as opposed to the territorial terms and to the war guilt clause; but they (with the other centre parties) accepted it because they realized that refusal would have meant the complete annihilation of the Reich. The Nationalists realized the peril implicit in refusing the treaty, but they, with complete unscrupulousness, assailed the centre for putting Germany in such a humiliating position.

The Treaty of Versailles imposed a handicap of some magnitude on the young Republic. It exposed the republican elements to the combined attack of the Nationalists and the Army; and with acceptance, it put the Republic in the position of a second-rate nation forced to accept unremitting ultimatums. The treaty also imposed a burden upon the Republic because by the terms Germany was deprived of territory and peoples who had been nationals of the Reich since 1871. The eastern frontiers remained a source of contention throughout the republican period.

The Left opposed the Republic because they felt that the Social Democrats had betrayed their Socialist principles. The Weimar Constitution had created a republic with only limited

socialist measures, and the Left wanted a Socialist government.

The Majority Socialists were able to accept the Republic without compromising their ideals because they believed that several stages must be entered into before the realization of a socialist state.

If the Treaty of Versailles was a handicap to the Republic in furnishing strong material for opposition, the Weimar Constitution was a handicap because it gave the Right the methods by which it could realize the destruction of its opponents. The Constitution's authors failed to take cognizance of the basically undemocratic heritage of the German people and with it their inability, even their unwillingness, to select democratic representatives. Proportional representation, popular referendum, and plebiscitary election of the president are all democratic achievements, and are all to be commended as a basis for a republican government; they do not, however, assure a democratic government. In the Weimar Republic they proved to be lethal instruments against the Republic because the people were so basically undemocratic.

A people reared on the heritage of a powerful Germany internationally ruled by a powerful autocratic regime are not likely to support in any great measure a government that had accepted a **treaty** which deprived its nation of her international prestige; that had proved incapable of defending itself from its internal opponents; that, indeed, had to depend on its internal opponents to defend it from external dangers.

It is altogether admirable in the construction of a constitution to aim at the highest aspirations of a people, to attempt the greatest possible measure of representative government for a people; but it is foolhardy to fail to take into consideration the inherent character of the people. If the highest aspirations of a people are the strength and power of its country abroad and a conservative, powerful government at home; if the greatest popular representation results in a nationalistic, annexationist government, the democratic electoral laws will reflect these aspirations and that representation. Such an accurate reflection of the internal picture may be democratically desirable, but in the Weimar Republic it meant the eventual downfall of the republican elements and the collapse of amicable international relations.

Public Ownership, The World of Dan Burton, J. S. Mitchell, New York, 1931, p. 135.

William Salpeter, Germany Under Weimar (New York, N.Y.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

To those accustomed to thinking in terms of the established traditions of the American, the French, and Puritan, and more recently, the Russian revolutions, the German Revolution appears as no revolution at all. In a very real sense it was at best a "negative revolution", that is, one precipitated not by a violent insurgent new group, but rather by the voluntary, albeit reluctant, abdication of the old group. It was, in effect, a revolution decreed from above; and never before had there been one so mild.

The revolution was primarily precipitated by the unhappy turn of the war. The adverse situation in the field led to the demoralization of the civilians at home. Philip Scheidemann, one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, said:

"Without the collapse the Revolution would probably not have occurred."¹ The revolution enjoyed the support of the majority of the nation largely because the military reverses of the army and the deplorable condition of the civilian population had convinced the German nation as a whole that the war was lost. Germany in the Fall of 1918 was no longer the united force it had been in 1914. The people were weary of war, and starvation had left its mark on the country.

It is significant to the history of the ill-fated republic that the revolution was brought forth by "starvation, despair, defeat, and foreign dictation."² It is further significant

¹ Philip Scheidemann, The Making of New Germany, J. E. Michell, trans. (New York, 1929), II, 131.

² S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy (New York), 93.

that the forces which carried out the revolution were not true revolutionary forces. It is of course true that the Social Democratic Party was a Marxist party and as such theorized on revolutionary action; however, it is also true, and even more to the point, that the Social Democrats had followed a revisionist policy in Germany to the extent that the left wing Socialists had split with the party as early as March 1916 to form the Independent Social Party.

The Social Democratic Party was revolutionary politically because it aimed at a radical alteration of the established government and because it recognized the possibility that force might be necessary, even in the event of holding a majority in the Reichstag, to gain control of the government. This view, however, was not universally held since there was already, to a large degree, a belief in the inevitability of gradual revision. The revisionists held that the working class had first to accomplish certain tasks within the frame of the existing government.

The Socialist Party in Germany had not developed in the direction anticipated by its founders. Because of the alliance with the trade unions (who concentrated on bettering the conditions of the workers) the working class was steadily turning into a respectable middle class; and the stronger the trade union elements, the stronger the conservative tendencies of the working class and of the Socialist Party. The majority of the Socialist leaders had abandoned pure Socialist theory to become Labor leaders with political ambitions.

The German Socialists had abandoned also their revolutionary opposition to the State in favor of constitutional opposition. In pure Socialist theory relations between the State and the party were negative; in practice, they were excellent. The Socialists had achieved a great deal of improvement for the working classes within constitutional limits. Within the great mass of German workers there was a strong class feeling; it was not, however, revolutionary class feeling. The German workers had become prosperous because of the benefits the party had gained and as their prosperity grew, their patriotism grew. The working class as a whole did not consider itself Vaterland los.

The left wing Socialists who split with the Majority Socialists did so because they disapproved of the Socialist support of the war. They had been dissatisfied since the Social Democrats voted the first war credits in 1914. In the days of crisis in 1914 the Socialists sought to organize international action, they threatened a strike, but in the end did vote the war credits. The Socialist Party did not dare vote against the credits for the army, actually they did not even want to vote against them. The Socialists, like every other segment of the German population, were patriotic; they were Germans first, then Socialists. By voting for the war credits the Socialists associated themselves with the war. The only protest came from Karl Liebknecht, a left wing Socialist, who left the House before the vote was taken. The left wing Socialists preferred to follow a pacifist policy which was more consistent with Socialist theory. While they were genuine

pacifists they did not, as a whole, advocate revolutionary action against the Imperial Government as a means to defeat the government and the war. The real defeatist elements among the Socialists, and thereby the real revolutionary elements, formed the Spartacus League.³

The leaders of the Social Democratic Party did not even desire a revolution. They "had steadfastly pointed to socialism as a product of evolution."⁴ For that reason they were repelled by the idea of a socialist state enforced upon the people by revolution alone. They joined the revolution in 1918 to prevent the threat of Communism from becoming a reality. Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the Social Democrats, had favored a monarchy limited by parliamentary government, and only fear of Muscovite-controlled Communism induced him to join the revolution.

An extremely unstable coalition between the Social Democrats and the Army changed the course of the 1918 Revolution--guiding it from radical hands to those of more moderate Social Democrats. The Army had a twofold purpose in fostering the revolution. First, they believed that a republican government would be able to obtain better peace terms from the Allies than the government of the Kaiser. Second, they thought, and planned, that when the necessity for a republican facade had passed they

³ R. T. Clark, The Fall of the German Republic, (London, 1935) p. 30

⁴ Albert C. Grzesinski, Inside Germany, trans., Alexander S. Lipschitz, (New York, 1939), p. 75.

would be able to discredit and discard the Republic in favor of a government which would support their annexation policies.⁵

Under these combined auspices Philip Scheidemann proclaimed the establishment of the Republic at 2:00 P. M., 9 November 1918 from the balcony of the Reichstag Building.

The main supports of the Republic were the Social Democrats and the trade unions because they alone could swing the great masses of the people to democracy, and because they alone, among the democratic forces, had the necessary administrative and organizational experience. Non-working class groups also moved to the support of the Republic, at least temporarily, because they felt that it would have had the best chance of getting an acceptable peace from the Allies.

To forestall any counter-revolutionary threat to the Republic, the Republic would have to restore stability to the nation. It would have to rebuild an impoverished and exhausted country, and above all else, it would have to obtain a just and honorable peace for Germany.

The gravest domestic problem of the Republic, aside from bread and demobilization, was the choice between Communism on the Russian model (dictatorship of the proletariat or its "vanguard") and democracy on the western model (based on free elections).⁶ About this choice Ebert showed no hesitation, no indecision. He was a Social Democrat, and his democratic convictions could be realized only by the establishment of a

⁵ Peter Viereck, Metapolitics (New York, 1941), p. 210

⁶ Arnold Brecht, Federalism and Regionalism in Germany (London, 1945), p. 5.

representative government. His task was to secure a return to normalcy and to eliminate possibility of further revolution. To accomplish these ends he pressed for immediate elections for a constituent assembly.

The decisions for the calling of elections for a national assembly, in fact, the decision for the existence of a national assembly, rested with the National Congress of All Workers' and Soldiers' Councils which had been convoked by the provisional government (the Council of People's Commissars) for 16 December 1918.

In 1917 the soldiers' and workers' desire for peace and their resentment against the government found expression in the creation of Soldiers' and Workers' Councils. These were, in effect, democratic (although revolutionary) governing bodies opposed to the government of the Kaiser. In most instances the Soldiers' Councils were formed first and were later joined by the Workers' Councils. After the military collapse the Councils assumed executive responsibility in cooperation with the Social Democrats to whom the Soldiers' Councils promised support of the armed forces. The Councils, as the representatives of the revolutionary elements, were called to authorize the new government.

The Congress, at this time composed mainly of Social Democrats and Independent Socialists, engaged in heated debates over the direction in which Germany was now to proceed. The left wing Socialist leaders, Dr. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, obviously inspired by the idea of a Socialist state, advocated

continuing the revolution. They were supported by the Independent Socialist Party and by some of the Soldiers' delegates. Friedrich Ebert was a leader in the Social Democratic Party's fight for the National Assembly and a democratic regime. The decision was finally made in favor of the democratic course, and general elections were scheduled for 19 January 1919. After stating their opposition to the decision in the Congress the Independents left the provisional government.

In connection with Ebert's evident desire for a speedy convocation of a duly elected constituent assembly it is interesting to pursue the question of his own authority in 1918. Actually his authority came from two distinct sources: one, revolutionary; one, traditional. He had been the leader of the largest party in the last Imperial Reichstag. Upon the abdication of Kaiser William II, the Imperial Chancellor, Prince Max von Baden, had conferred upon Ebert (the majority leader of the Reichstag), the chancellorship for the interregnum period (that is, until a constituent assembly could be elected), entrusting to his charge the executive functions and the preparations for the general elections to the constitutional convention. This action by Prince Max made Ebert the quasi-legitimate successor to the last Imperial Chancellor, and it was in this capacity that the civil servants, the army, and the bourgeoisie supported him. Almost simultaneously the mass assembly of the representatives of the workers and soldiers appointed him as the first of six Commissars of the People (that is, the Council of People's

Commissars, the provisional government). Thus he was assured also of the support of the masses who looked to him as a representative of the revolutionary assembly and as their own delegate.⁷

Ebert's sources of authority are interesting because they illustrate the dual character of the Republican period. In one sense the Republic was the culmination of nineteenth century German liberalism, of the liberal current from the War of Liberation and from 1848; in another sense it was the continuation of the militaristic, bureaucratic Reich. This relationship was incongruous because the traditional elements (the army and the bureaucracy) were never liberal in tendency and their presence in the Republic, in the face of the fundamentally non-liberal nature of the German people as a whole, would almost inevitably lead to the destruction of the liberal elements.

The Social Democrats were disappointed by the results of the general elections in January because they failed to get a majority in the National Assembly. The first parliamentary government was composed of the Social Democrats, the Centre (Catholic) and the Democratic (middle-class liberal) Parties. From this time forth throughout the Republican period the governments were coalitions between the democratic liberal and the middle-class parties. At times the coalition was far more rightist, including the German People's Party--a party which represented the financial and great industrial interests. The Social Democratic Party was not represented in the coalition cabinets at all times; their most responsible action in the

⁷ Brecht, op. cit., p. 145.

government was during the first five and half years of the Republic.

The necessity of forming a coalition government meant that the Social Democratic Party would have to forego fulfilling their socialist program, the socialization of heavy industry, the expropriation of the feudal estates, and a thorough reconstruction of the judicial system.⁸ The resulting coalition government would not make the tremendous task of the Assembly any easier to accomplish. The new Republic was faced with the problem of demobilizing the army and providing relief for the people; of creating stability by protecting the government from the threat of Communist revolution on the left, and from the danger of reactionaries on the right; of carrying out the activities necessary if a government is to function. In addition to these domestic problems, the National Assembly had to make peace with the Allied powers and to draft a constitution for the Republic. This staggering agenda would pose difficulties even for an assembly with a stable, workable majority; for an assembly of such vastly divergent parties the successful achievement of such an agenda was almost impossible.

It was unfortunate that the immediate problem confronting the new Republic was the termination of the war and the conclusion of a peace agreement. It was even more unfortunate that the terms of the Paris Peace Conference were so unacceptable to the German people. The new Democratic regime and the peace treaty

⁸ Grzesinski, op. cit., pp. 75-76.

were so tied together that the future of the Republic was dependent to a large degree on the verdict of the German nation concerning the term of the treaty. Had a more satisfactory peace been obtained the subsequent history of the Weimar Republic might have been vastly different.

... (The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, New York, 1941), p. 42.
... p. 42.

THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

The National Assembly in April 1919 passed a resolution regarding the conclusion of a peace treaty with the Allies.

In essence it stated:

...The German Nation, which accepted the burden of severe Armistice conditions expecting that peace would soon follow, is entitled to a peace treaty which corresponds to the program of the President of the United States of America which was accepted irrevocably by all nations as a basis for the treaty....The Will of the whole German nation refuses to accept a 'peace of might'....The National Assembly expects of the government that it will give assent only to a peace of understanding and conciliation and that it will reject a treaty which sets at naught the present and future of the German people and of mankind.¹

Immediately following the passage of this resolution the National Assembly created a special committee--the Committee for Peace Negotiations in the Constituent National Assembly--to handle all questions explicitly dealing with anticipated peace negotiations while the Assembly as a whole proceeded with the drafting of a constitution. The committee was to act as intermediary between the National Assembly, the cabinet, and the various parties. On 14 April 1919 Konstantin Fehrenbach was designated as chairman of the committee and twenty-eight members represented the parties. The Social Democrats, as the largest party in the Assembly, were represented by eleven delegates.²

The actual task of preparing the German material for drafting with the Allies goes back as far as 23 December 1917

¹ Alma Luckau, The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference (New York, 1941), p. 42.

² Ibid., p. 42.

when Dr. Karl Helfferich was asked to make economic preparations for future treaties with the Allies. In November 1918 Count Bernstorff, director of the Paxkonferenz, was consigned the responsibility for the preparations for peace negotiations. The Foreign Office also had a great wealth of material to be used in preparation for the treaty negotiations. It was generally assumed at the time all these memoranda were being readied that Germany would negotiate the terms of the final draft with the Allies. No one seriously entertained the thought that the Allies would "dictate" the peace.

In April 1919 the Scheidemann government presented its representatives to the Paris Peace Conference with a number of instructions. These instructions emphasized the point that Wilson's program should be used as a basis for the negotiations. The territorial instructions of the government included the demand for a plebiscite in Alsace-Lorraine, the rejection of the separation of Saar and left Bank of the Rhine from the Reich, the insistence that West Prussia and Upper Silesia not be ceded.

The economic terms were even more forceful. The government instructed the representatives to insist that the Saar Basin coal mines be left under the German control, that reparations be based solely on damages to civilians and their property; that the blockade be immediately lifted and Germany be allowed to regain control of her merchant fleet and be unrestricted, or at least be unimpeded, in her economic relations with other

nations. Furthermore, the representatives were to reject unilateral disarmament by the Reich.³

The German government was to be officially represented at the Paris Peace Conference by six delegates led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ulrich Brockdorff-Rantzau. The Social Democrats selected two delegates, Otto Landsberg and Robert Leinert. These six delegates and a staff of experts arrived in Versailles on 29 April 1919 to receive the treaty.

The chief difficulty which confronted the German delegation was that there was to be no oral discussion. They were obliged to make their objections to the treaty in the form of written notes and they were given only two weeks in which to prepare these notes.

On 7 May the German delegates met and received the conditions of peace from the Allies. It was at this meeting that Count Brockdorff-Rantzau antagonized the Allies, both by his attitude and by his speech which began:

Gentlemen, we are deeply impressed with the great mission that brought us here to give to the world forthwith a lasting peace. We are under no illusions as to the extent of our defeat and the degree of our powerlessness. We know that the strength of the German army is broken. We know the intensity of the hatred which meets us, and we have heard the victor's passionate demand that as the vanquished we shall be made to pay, and as the guilty we shall be punished.⁴

The terms presented to the German delegates were severe: Alsace-Lorraine was to revert to France; the German territory

³ Halperin, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

⁴ Luckau, op. cit., p. 220.

west of the Rhine was to be occupied for fifteen years; the Left Bank of the Rhine and a strip to the east fifty kilometres wide was to be permanently demilitarized; the Saar Basin was to be governed for fifteen years by a League of Nations Commission, with a plebiscite at the end of the period; Upper Silesia was to be ceded to Poland along with West Prussia and most of Posen; all German colonies were to be surrendered; and a German-Austrian Anschluss was forbidden.

To prevent the continuance of German military might the Allies decreed that the Great German General Staff be dissolved; that compulsory military service be abolished and the army be radically reduced; that the manufacturing of munitions be drastically curtailed; and that military aircraft, tanks, and all offensive weapons be forbidden. These disarmament terms were only what was to be expected from a Europe which had been threatened with annihilation by an aggressive Germany. In their efforts to secure the permanent impotence of Germany the Allies were, in effect, destroying Germany's chances of internal stability by creating an issue on which the army and the Nationalists could unite against the government. In regard to the disarmament terms Scheele says: "The Allied Statesmen fondly imagined they were destroying German military power, whereas in reality they were pruning the tree that it might be the stronger."⁵

⁵ Scheele, Godfrey, The Weimar Republic (London, 1946), p. 83.

The Allied terms that the army be limited to one hundred thousand enlisted men for twelve years and an officers corps of four thousand, serving for twenty-five years, enabled the Reichswehr to create a military élite. In the pruning process (that is, the process of cutting the army from a war time size of four hundred thousand to the stipulated one hundred thousand) the army rid itself of the conscripts and reserves, the liberal elements of the old army. This made it possible for the high command to carry out its dual policy--harshness toward the left, leniency toward the right. The application of the Allied terms by the German High Command had left the Reichswehr more united, more militaristic, and more nationalistic than it had been during the war years.

Similarly the ban on heavy military equipment was utilized to the advantage of the Reichswehr. While the Allies retained the heavy immobile character of their armies, the German army devised methods and equipment suitable to a small mobile army--methods which were realized in the Blitzkreig warfare of the second World War.

The economic terms of the treaty were the most strongly contested sanctions of the treaty. Not only the magnitude of the reparations, and the economic sanctions taken against Germany, but the justification of these actions created immediate animosity in German public opinion. Germany was deprived of almost all of her financial holdings; her merchant fleet was reduced to less than one-fourth of the pre-war size, and her shipyards for five years were to build ships for the Allies; she was

almost completely barred from Allied markets; and the Allies reserved the right to most-favored-nations in Germany for five years. The renunciation of her colonies was also demanded of the Reich.

The German delegates to the Paris Peace Conference and the German nation as a whole felt that the severity of these terms was due to the fact that the Allies had inadequate knowledge of the conditions in Germany and did not realize the inevitable consequences which would take place in Germany as a result of the conditions of peace.

The question of reparations and the responsibilities aroused great hostility to the treaty from the government, from the representatives of the government at Versailles, and from the German nation as a whole. Article 321 of the Treaty read as follows:

The Allied and Associated governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her Allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them in the aggression of Germany and her Allies.⁶

The German losses became intolerable to the German people when they were represented as punishment for moral transgressions. The nebulous attitude of the Allies in their unwillingness or inability to determine a definite amount of reparations caused further German hostility. The German government maintained it would be impossible for them to sign in good faith

⁶ Luckau, op. cit., p. 241.

an indefinite commitment for reparations the fulfillment of which might be quite impossible. 23

Following the presentation of the terms to German delegates, the first feeling was that acceptance of the treaty was impossible. Scheidemann resigned as head of the cabinet rather than accept the treaty, and Ebert considered resigning but was persuaded by his friends to remain in office.

Schiedemann explained his opposition:

We are one flesh and one blood, and he who tries to separate us cuts with a murderous knife into the live flesh of the German people. To preserve the life of our people is our highest duty...I ask you, who can as an honest man, I will not say as a German...accept such terms? What hand would not wither that binds itself and us in their fetters?⁷

A section of the Centre Party, under Matthias Erzberger, gradually appeared willing to accept a modified treaty--a treaty omitting the war guilt clause and the clause demanding the war criminals be turned over to the Allies for trial.

At the same time that the National Assembly was beginning to engage in discussions concerning acceptance of the treaty, the German delegation at Versailles was trying to wring concessions from the Allies. The Allies, cognizant of the discussions in the National Assembly, made a few minor concessions, the only significant one being a provision for a plebiscite in Upper Silesia. This was their final stand. The German government was given five days to answer.

⁷ Scheidemann, op. cit., pp. 310-311.

The National Assembly was having difficulty forming a government because the Democrats remained adamant in their refusal to join any government which would consider signing the treaty. Eventually a compromise was reached; the Majority Socialist Party and the Centre Party formed a government, under Gustav Bauer, and proposed a modified acceptance of the treaty. This qualification included repudiation of the war guilt clause.

The Allies refused to budge from their position and issued an ultimatum, the treaty must be signed as it was. The Allies were demanding the unconditional surrender of the German nation; and the National Assembly for the good of their people, mustered a majority vote for such a surrender. The opposition was made up of the Nationalists, the People's Party, almost all of the Democrats, and some of the Centre.

Albert Grzesinski reflects the Socialist view in this statement:

The war had to be terminated at all costs if Germany was to endure. The people and the army were no more able to continue the struggle....Nevertheless, certain elements demanded renewed resistance in view of the disastrous peace terms imposed upon Germany and the failure to bring about a modification....These demands, however, found only a thin echo among the war-weary masses.⁸

There was no real desire for resistance in 1919. The atmosphere was one of disillusion and positive defeatism. The Germans had become resigned to territorial loss, to a heavy

⁸ Grzesinski, op. cit., p. 56.

indemnity, and to military occupation by the enemy for an extended period of time.⁹ Erzberger said the rejection of the treaty would mean the political chaos and economic ruin of Germany, and the nation had rather accept a humiliating peace than an annihilating war.

One of the worst aspects of the signing of the treaty was the complete unscrupulousness of the anti-republican elements in utilizing the capitulation of the republican government as propaganda against the Republic. It was only by sending a public appeal to the army that the government seems to have prevented the complete demobilization of the army at this time.

The final decision was wired to Versailles on 23 June 1919, only two hours before the ultimatum deadline. In it the National Assembly explicitly stated its objections to the treaty.

...Yielding to overpowering might, the government of the German Republic declares itself ready to accept and to sign the peace treaty imposed by the Allied and Associated governments. But in so doing, the government of the German Republic in no wise abandons its convictions that these conditions of peace represent injustice without example.¹⁰

The prevalent opinion in Germany about the Treaty of Versailles may be gleaned from a paragraph in a letter by Dr. Walter Simons--the director of the legal division of the German Foreign Office and a civil service representative of the Foreign Office at Versailles--written to his wife, 10 May 1919.

⁹ Clark, op. cit., p. 58

¹⁰ Luckau, op. cit., p. 482.

The treaty which our enemies have laid before us is, in so far as the French dictated it, a monument of pathological fear and pathological hatred; and in so far as the the Anglo-Saxons dictated it, it is the work of a capitalistic policy of the cleverest and most brutal kind. Its shamelessness does not lie in treading down a brave opponent, but in the fact that from the beginning to end all these humiliating conditions are made to look like a just punishment, while in truth there is in them neither shame, nor any respect for the conception of justice.¹¹

In the opinion of Lord D'Abernon, Ambassador to Germany during the early years of the Republic, the treaty had several serious defects. It had been imposed upon the Germans, and the German public opinion did not consider settlements made under duress binding. The insistence on war-guilt as a basis for German responsibility for reparations was emphatically denied by the Germans. Furthermore, the treaty, which was supposed to unite the world, broke Central Europe into a considerable number of small states.¹²

The German government issued an appeal to the people on June 24, 1919. In it the government asked the people to abide by the treaty and to strive for its fulfillment. "There is only one way out of the darkness of this treaty: the preservation of Reich and the people through unity and work."¹³

¹¹Ibid., p. 120.

¹² Viscount D'Abernon, The Diary of an Ambassador, (New York, 1929), I, pp. 26-27.

¹³ Luckau, op. cit., p. 497.

THE WEIMAR CONSTITUTION

The German People, united in all their branches, and inspired by the determination to renew and strengthen their Reich in Liberty and justice, to preserve peace both at home and abroad, and to foster social progress, have adopted the following Constitution.¹

This is the Preamble to the Weimar Constitution adopted on 31 July 1919 and promulgated 11 August 1919 by the German Republic. The phraseology of the preamble illustrates the transitory nature of the Constitution. It is a transition between the past, traditional Prussian absolutism, and the future, western parliamentarianism. To the end it remained a transitional phenomenon for the Social Democrats who viewed it as the first phase toward a better, a greater future for the German people. The Social Democrats realized that Germany was not prepared for a Socialist state; therefore they considered the Republic as the first stage in the evolution to a Socialist state.²

The Constitution, which was being drafted simultaneously with the convention of the Paris Peace Conference, was a deliberate compromise of the many conflicting interests in the National Assembly. The authors of the Constitution--foremost of whom was Professor Hugo Preuss, the Minister of the Interior--were influenced by the precepts of western democracy, primarily that of Switzerland, France, and the United States; but they were also careful to retain as many of their German precedents

¹ Scheele, op. cit., p. 42.

² Grzesinski, op. cit., p. 75.

as could be successfully woven into a democratic parliamentary structure. The retention of the term "Reich" was a consciously held link with the past; it served as a symbol of German unity, a unity which transcended the structural form of government, monarchical or republican.

The ideal of unity was the primary motivating force behind Professor Preuss's draft of the Constitution. "The essential factor (in the Constitution to him) was the integration of all the natural energies in an organic state."³ He sought especially to unify the Reich and to create confidence in and loyalty to democracy and parliamentary government.

The Constitution established a government of carefully devised checks and balances based on plebiscitary foundation. This elaborately conceived structure was created to ensure the prevalence of the nation's will--the sovereign will of the German people.

As a concession to the South German states the federative principle was retained, but this was abridged by the stipulation that the national government was more powerful than that of the "Lander". The Reich was empowered with extensive exclusive powers of legislation, including such matters as foreign affairs, national defence, tariff and monetary policies, and immigration and emigration. The power accorded to the Reich was also

³ Scheele, op. cit., p. 12.

enhanced by legislative authority concerning many matters which it shared concurrently with the Länder. These concurrent powers embraced legislation on civil and criminal law, judicial procedures, public health, labor, commerce, banking and industry. In addition the Reich could legislate to protect public order and safety. The unequal distribution of legislative authority between the Reich and the Länder was complicated still further by Article 13 of the Constitution.

As long as, and in so far as, the Reich does not make use of the powers of legislation, the Länder shall retain the power of legislation. This does not apply to the power of legislation which belongs exclusively to the Reich.⁴

The State authorities were to enforce the laws passed by the Reich unless The Reich specified otherwise. However, the national government had the right to supervise the enforcement of all their laws. This right of supervision is indicative of the pronounced trend toward centralization of the administrative powers under the Republic. The dependence of the Reich on the individual state governments, with their essentially varying views, for the enforcement of national laws was a serious shortcoming in the composition of the Weimar Constitution. This danger to the Reich was rendered ineffectual by the subordination of the state authorities to the Reich authorities through the more extensive legislative powers of the latter and by the first provision of Article 48 of the Constitution (the Emergency Powers of the Reich President).

⁴ Halperin, op. cit., p. 156.

If one of the States fails to perform the duties that fall upon it under the National Constitution or under National Statutes, the Reich President with the aid of the armed forces can hold such State to the performance of its duties.⁵

The division of authority created by the Constitution's authors did not stop with the division of power between the Reich and the individual Länder. It also encompassed division of power within the fundamental structure of the Reich machinery. The Reich President, the Reichsrat, and the Reichstag were consciously endowed with elaborately interrelated functions.

The Reich President was envisaged by the National Assembly as the symbol of the unity of the Reich. He would receive his power directly from the people, and in the system of checks and balanced he would serve as a counterbalance to a powerful Reichstag. The Reich President was to be elected for a term of seven years, and was eligible for indefinite re-election.

The presidential election by popular vote was unsatisfactory, even a dangerous, provision in the Constitution. It gave the president a position of some independence from the various parties, and it enabled him to entertain policies irrespective of Reichstag confidence or support. The Social Democrats, realizing the implicit danger in a strong Reich President, wanted the presidential term limited to five years and wanted further to make it impossible for any Reich President to serve more than two terms. This stand was defeated on the

⁵ Brecht, Arnold, Prelude to Silence, (New York, 1944), p. 140.

that a powerful president would serve as a stabilizing force in the government.

"The National Assembly wished to create a strong president; in fact it had given him almost absolute power."⁶ The Constitution had in truth granted to the Reich President extremely broad powers in his right to appoint and dismiss the Chancellor, and in his right to dismiss the Reichstag. The sole limitation on his right to appoint the Chancellor was the constitutional clause which stipulated that the Chancellor must have the confidence of the Reichstag; and the only limitations placed on his right to dismiss the Reichstag were the stipulations that the Reichstag could be dismissed not more than once for the same cause, and that new elections must be held immediately after dismissal of the Reichstag.

The most extensive powers of the Reich President were outlined in Article 48 of the Constitution. It was the powers included in this article which gave the Reich President the dominant position in the Reich. By the powers granted inherently in this article the Reich President was empowered to compel the Länder to enforce the national statutes, and he was further empowered in the event of an emergency to "take any measure necessary" to restore public order and safety, even to the extent of suspending the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

⁶ Scheele, op. cit., p. 49.

The authors of Article 48--perhaps lulled by the comfortable respect for constitutionalism and parliamentarianism exhibited by Friedrich Ebert, the first Commissar of the People--maintained that any abuse of the article would be prevented by four checks. First, the Reich President was elected by popular vote. Second, any measure taken by the president required the countersignature of the Chancellor or a minister concerned with the measure. Third, the measure taken by the president could be cancelled by a simple majority vote of the Reichstag. Fourth, the Reichstag could regulate further details of any measure by a majority vote. These broad emergency powers, despite the restrictive clauses to safeguard their abuse, turned out to be a fatal measure in the Constitution. A strong Reich President would be able to utilize the loopholes in the restrictive clauses and carry forth any measure he desired with little or no legal opposition.⁷

The Reichsrat was the representative body of the Länder in the Reich. It was also the weakest organ of national government. As the expression of the Länder the Reichsrat was empowered to originate and review bills equally with the Reichstag, but the Reichstag was dominant in the matter of enactment of laws. Furthermore, the veto of the Reichsrat over the legislation of the Reichstag could be overridden by a two-third majority vote of the Reichstag, or by a popular referendum initiated by the Reich President.

⁷ Brecht, Prelude to Silence, p. 141.

The Reichstag represented the country as a whole. The members were elected for a period of four years by universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage by all men and women over twenty years of age. The Reichstag elections were conducted in accordance with the principle of pure proportional representation. The Social Democrats were the principal exponents of proportional representation which they believed to be the system most expressive of popular opinion.

It is apparent that the principle of proportional representation makes possible the most democratic representation of the views of the people, but it presents a grave peril to any government--the peril of instability. Proportional representation promotes the establishment of a great number of parties and the splitting up of existing ones. In republican Germany this meant that, when every group could find a party to reflect its particular view, it was impossible for any one Party to carry a workable majority to the Reichstag. This meant, in turn, that the Reichstag business must be carried on by either unstable majorities or by a minority cabinet. The lack of integration of parties ultimately resulted in an unstable legislative body dominated by a strong executive who was not forced to represent any of the various views supported by the Reichstag parties.

The weakness of the Reichstag, then, lay in proportional representation, in the strength of the Reich President, and furthermore, in the provision for popular referendum to which

the Reichstag legislation could be submitted on the initiative of the Reich President.⁸

The provisions for popular referendum embodied two weaknesses for the Reichstag. First, a referendum meant that the people, not the Reichstag, had the final decision in legislation; and second, the people (partly because of their authoritarian background) were not necessarily concerned with the welfare of the Republic as a whole. It is futile to expect people who are basically undemocratic and who have never had any great voice in their government to be immediately able to understand the problems of the nation and to act disinterestedly for the benefit of the nation.

Popular referendum on the Reichstag legislation was included in the constitution because of the prevalent distrust in Germany of parliamentary government. The principle of parliamentary government had been accepted by the National Assembly but they restrained it in the same system of checks and balances which impeded the whole machinery of the Reich.

The Reichstag could check the Reich President's right to appoint Chancellors through the necessity of Reichstag confidence for the Chancellor. If the confidence of the Reichstag was formally withdrawn the Chancellor must resign. The National Assembly did not provide ministerial responsibility however, therefore the Reichstag could not compel the Reich President to

⁸ Scheele, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

retain a Chancellor as long as he enjoyed the confidence of the Reichstag. This curious omission worked to the advantage of the Reich President and, coupled with the power to dismiss the Reichstag and employ the emergency powers, it could enable him to exist virtually as sole ruler or dictator in the Reich.

The makers of the Constitution announced their adherence to the democratic liberal tradition and, at the same time, restrained the power of government in the second part of the Constitution (articles 109 through 181), entitled the "Fundamental Rights and Duties of the German People." These articles granted to the German people the basic civil liberties guaranteed in the Constitution of all the Western democracies. In each case there was a restriction by authority of a national law or even by authority of a presidential decree. By the utilization of these restrictions to the guarantees of civil liberties dictatorial powers could be acquired by legalistic methods.

The doctrine of the duty of the individual to the state was also explicitly stated by the framers of the Constitution. This doctrine is essentially in line with Prussian tradition in which the services of the individual must be placed at the disposal of the community, for the good of the country.

Prussia, throughout her history, has had to subordinate the individual to the state. This process began under the Great Elector in the seventeenth century and was best exemplified by Frederick the Great's self-imposed title, "the first servant of the state." The poverty of natural resources in

Prussia and the desire to establish a strong centralized state gave impetus to the process. State service was the highest duty of every individual and in exchange for duty privileges were conferred upon state servants. In the Weimar Constitution, although the privileges and duties are parallel, it remains.

The essence of the doctrine of duty is also in line with the idea of the German Will, a heritage taken from Rousseau's General Will. The General Will is a mysterious thing, all but inexplicable to non-Germans. The General Will is the expression of Volk; and Volk implies unity at the expense of the conscious, free decision of equal citizens. The idea of Volk is based on the supposition that the community (the whole) is more than the individuals (the parts) which comprise it. This supposition, in turn, implies that the welfare of the community as expressed by the General Will is more important than the welfare of each individual; therefore each individual is obliged to devote his activities to the welfare of the community.

Parallel with the duty of the individual to the state was the obligation of the state to the individual. Every German was to be accorded the opportunity to earn a livelihood. Furthermore, because of the Centrists and the Democrats the economic liberty of the individual was explicitly assured.

The Weimar Republic was proclaimed to be the most libertarian and the most equalitarian of all constitutions. Theoretically it was the most democratic; and it was because of

the democratic frame that Otto Wels, a Social Democrat, could say in defiance of the Enabling Act of 1933: "The Weimar Constitution is no Socialist Constitution. However, we stand by the principles of a government based on law and justice, of equality of rights, and of social laws, as therein established.⁹ The Weimar Constitution, on paper, was all that.

⁹ Brecht, Prelude to Silence, p. 101.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

The German Republic and the counter-revolution against the Republic began simultaneously. From the day of the proclamation of the Republic by Philip Scheidemann, the republican elements in Germany had to defend the Republic and democracy from both the Left and the Right. The Communists on the Left and the German Nationalists on the Right, both wished to discard the basic principles of a democracy.¹ The Communists desired to carry the revolution further, they wanted a dictatorship of the proletariat. In the eyes of the Left the Ebert-Scheidemann government was a betrayal of Socialist principles to bourgeois bureaucratic interests. The Nationalists wanted to destroy democracy with its principles of parliamentary government by freeing the executive from the control of the parliament. It is doubtful that the Nationalists in the early years of the Republic desired to go beyond the restoration of the constitutional situation as it existed before the war.

The strength of the Rightists was drawn from the Freikorps and from reactionary old army command. The Freikorps were voluntary fighting units formed at the same time the regular army was being demobilized. They were soon to be found in every part of the country, In the internal confusion accompanying the demobilization of the regular army the Freikorps were used as police units and as reserve units of the deminished regular

¹ Brecht, Prelude to Silence, p. 15.

army. The members of the Freikorps were primarily professional soldiers and officers; they were anti-Bolshevist, anti-Socialist, and anti-Democratic. In their glorification of militarism and the old regime they stood in the forefront of the counter-revolutionary movement against the Republic.

The Freikorps, in turn, counted on the support of the Junkers and the most reactionary of the landowners. It is significant that the stronghold of the Freikorps was in South Germany which was intensely "nationalistic" and which opposed to a unitary state.

The Communists were strongest in highly industrialized areas of Germany. Their ranks were filled by the working classes, and they were undoubtedly encouraged, if not supported, by the Soviet Union. Albert Grzesinski, a Social Democrat, said that "throughout the whole period of the German democratic republic, the masters of Russia spared no agitation, no money or efforts to conquer Germany for Bolshevism."² The Communists organized the "red guards" during the confused period of the early twenties.

The Nationalists, the party of the old régime, made themselves immediately the centre of opposition to the Republican regime. Its representatives felt themselves the representatives of the national cause, and in so being they hindered the government in every way possible. The Nationalists were the

² Grzesinski, op. cit., p. 69.

most vehement attackers of the Communists. They decried the Communists as harbingers of Bolshevism and they clamored for the complete eradication of the Bolshevist threat.

The fear of Bolshevism was a genuine fear in the years immediately following the war.³ The people were tired of war and they were definitely opposed to the idea of continued revolution. The fears of Bolshevism seemed justified when the first overt opposition actually did come from the Left.

Early in January 1919 a Leftist putsch was originated against the Ebert-Scheidemann government. On the night of 5 January 1919 Spartacus elements occupied several districts of Berlin, and the next day, amid mass demonstrations, they demanded the surrender of the government. The only way the government in Berlin could handle the situation was to call for help from the troops garrisoned at Potsdam. The garrison at Potsdam was commanded by reactionary officers who were more than willing to quell the Leftist insurgents. The putsch was thoroughly defeated by 11 January 1919, a week before the elections were to be held. In March the Spartacus resumed their rebellious activity and were ruthlessly crushed after bloody street fighting.⁴

The first of the Rightist opposition movements, the Kapp Putsch in 1920, was precipitated by the Allied demands that all extralegal military formations be abolished. The Allies insisted that Germany fulfil the disarmament terms and disband

³ Clark, op. cit., p. 50

⁴ Grzesinski, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

all of her military organizations; the Nationalists insisted, equally emphatically, that the military formations were necessary to protect the nation and maintain internal security. Ebert and Gustav Noske, the Minister of War, did not consider the situation too alarming. They believed that the danger lay in the radicalism of the left.

The Ebert-Bauer government tried to appease the Allies by demanding the dissolution of the Marine Brigade which was led by Captain Ehrhart. The counter-revolutionary activity was being commanded by General Luettwitz, an old guard militarist reactionary. The Nationalist Party and the People's Party were sympathetic to the reactionary counter-revolution but they remained aloof until they were assured of the success of the coup.

On the night of 12 March 1920 the Marine Brigade marched to Berlin; on the morning of 13 March 1920 they entered the city unopposed--the government had fled. This was Kapp's answer to the demand for the dissolution of the brigade. The government had been forced to flee because they were unable to assure themselves of the support of the Reichswehr. General von Seeckt had refused to fire on the Rightist rebels, an action which made it impossible to defend Berlin. The Reichswehr, as a unit, never took an active interest in opposing the Republic. In the Kapp Putsch some scattered formations sided with the rebels, others remained neutral.⁵ The rebels occupied the government buildings, and Kapp proclaimed himself Chancellor. He tried

⁵ Grzesinski, op. cit., p. 88.

to enlist Seeckt in the putsch but the general refused. The rebels, among them Ludendorff, then issued an ultimatum demanding the resignation of Bauer and all the Social Democratic ministers.

The Social Democrats, supported by the Independents, the Democrats, and the Centre, called for a general strike. The labor unions responded overwhelmingly to the appeal, and the strike was fully effective. The economic life of the country came to virtually a halt. The result of the general strike was the collapse of the Kapp Putsch.⁶

The Kapp Putsch had several diverse results. It revealed the weakness of the counter-revolution because the expected support, the upper middle class and the high bureaucracy, did not materialize. The middle class and the high bureaucracy did not support the Kapp Putsch because they were not confident of his success. Had he succeeded they would have been willing to acknowledge him, but they were too cautious to reveal their sentiments openly. As long as the government yielded to the desires of the conservatives, as it was doing at the time, the upper middle class and the bureaucracy would remain loyal to it.

The putsch revealed also the weakness of the government which could not maintain sufficient military support to be able to defend itself. The government could not defend itself against the Right because the Reichswehr, the only force the government had for defense, was so conservative, so Rightist, in character

⁶ Ibid., p. 101; cf. Halperin, op. cit., p. 182.

that it could not be called upon in the event of an attack by the Right. If the government had insisted upon Socialist workers being taken into the army instead of the old guard Nationalists it would probably have been capable of much stronger action during the Kapp Putsch. A more tangible result was the ensuing period of intense civil war. In the Ruhr the anti-Kapp strike fell into control of the radical left. The disturbance there was finally quelled by the Reichswehr in April 1920.

Following the Kapp Putsch a more conservative frame of mind prevailed through out the country. The Reichswehr's action against the workers led to renewed activity by the Freikorps and other nationalist military organizations against the left. There were constant clashes in Pomerania and Westphalia, and in Bavaria the Social Democrats put an end to their participation in the Bavarian cabinets.⁷ In this period also were the first prominent terrorizing attacks by the Right. In 1921 Matthias Erzberger was killed; and in the same year the Storm Troopers of the National Socialists German Workers Party were formed. On 24 June 1922 Rathenau was assassinated. The greater part of the nation was shocked by these criminal acts. The immediate reaction of the working classes to the assassination of Rathenau was the adoption of a more militant attitude toward the right.

Meanwhile, Communist activity and agitation was also apparent in the Reich. In the Spring of 1921 there was a

⁷ Halperin, op. cit., p. 183.

Communist uprising in Central Germany, openly supported by the Communist Party. This uprising lasted until the end of April. In October 1923 the Communists planned another uprising, but called it off before it actually began. The reactionary activity awakened all the groups left of the center to their imperiled position. In July 1922 the Independent Socialists and the Majority Socialists agreed formally to cooperate.

The occupation of the Rhur in 1923 proved to be a godsend to the Nationalists. In the strange manner of politicians they vented their violence on the Republic. Gustav Stresemann, who formed his cabinet in August 1923, was especially suspect to the Right because of the foreign policy of fulfilment and his desires to compromise with the Allies. The Nationalists violently objected to withdrawing the policy of passive resistance in the Rhur.

The occupation of the Rhur gave occasion for the Hitler-Lundendorff Putsch, November 1923. The Putsch was originally intended as a putsch of the State of Bavaria, against the Reich. The elements comprising the putsch were quite divergent, including recalcitrant Bavarian officials, the Reichswehr sectioned in Bavaria, and the National Socialists united only by their hatred of the Republic.

The government group was afraid that Hitler's National Socialist forces would act prematurely in staging the putsch. When the Reich proclaimed martial law, outlawing the Communist Party and all Nationalist military organizations, the government group wavered and then disassociated itself from the Hitler movement.

Hitler was still confident of the support of Munich. He and Lundendorff led the march through Munich on 9 November 1923 (the anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic). The Nazi march met with the armed resistance by the Reichswehr and detachments of police. At this time Lord D'Abernon reported:

Things looked very much like the beginning of civil war; for some time past there have been authentic rumors both of sympathy with Hitler in Pomerania and East Prussia, and of the concentration of considerable selbstschutz bodies in the forests north and east of Berlin. Unless the Hitler-Ludendorff putsch is suppressed at once it looks like the certainty of severe fighting in many parts of Germany.

Immediately after the Hitler Putsch the Social Democrats took more aggressive stand against the Right. They demanded that action be taken against the reactionary elements who were trying to destroy the unity of the Reich.

In Saxony in 1923 a semi-Communist government had been created. This government was deposed by a Reich Commissar equipped with extraordinary powers. In the Rhineland separatist movements were being formented and supported by the French and Belgian troops stationed there.

The action taken by the Reichswehe and by the Reich itself were much more severe to the lements on the left than to those on the right. There was in truth a "dual standard of justice" meted out after the outbursts in 1923, and it was because of this that the Social Democrats left the "Great Coalition," causing a necessity for the formation of a new government.

⁸ D'Abernon, op. cit., II, p. 287.

Action within the Reichstag itself reflected the increasing conservative trend of the country. As early as February 1922 Ebert had mentioned the necessity of fixing the date of the first popular election of the Reich President. The Nationalists insisted upon an immediate election, but the Democrats and the People's Party agreed that a presidential election held at this time would plunge the nation into greater confusion. The Social Democrats, burdened by their constitutional scruples, supported Ebert's plea for an election. The Centre solved the dilemma by recommending that Ebert's term of office be extended to June 1925.⁹

In the May 1924 elections impoverished middle class elements flocked to the Rightist parties. The most spectacular gains were made by the Nationalists, whose parliamentary representation rose to ninety-six members in the Reichstag. Coupled with alliances with several small Rightist parties, this gain made the Nationalists the largest party in the Reichstag. The working classes moved progressively to the radical Left; therefore the Social Democrats lost to the advantage of the Communists. This boded ill for the democratic-republican elements because the Communists had reached the stage of political maturity where they could vote consistently with the Right to defeat the republican centre. The Democrats, the People's Party, and the Centre Party also lost parliamentary seats.

⁹ Halperin, op. cit., p. 240.

The elections in December 1924 had a vastly different outcome, evidence of the improved economic picture since the last elections. The Dawes Plan had been accepted by the Reichstag in August 1924. After signing the London protocol Germany was permitted to float a loan. The success of the loan and the creation of the Reichsmark as a substitute for the discredited Rentenmark strengthened the economic situation in Germany. This stability could not recover the lost savings of the bourgeoisie, but it did halt the inflation which had been detrimental to the working classes. The situation was beginning to approach normalcy and the people were beginning to be optimistic.

Since the working classes and the lower middle class were much better off than they had been in May, the Communists and the National Socialists--the extreme parties--lost appreciable representation in the Reichstag. The Social Democrats were the principal beneficiaries of the change in the internal economic situation; they increased both their proportional representation and their Reichstag membership. The Nationalists also drew an increase in Reichstag seats so they remained a force to be reckoned with.

Ebert died 27 February 1925; a heavy blow to the Republic. Gustav Stresemann, in an article in the Zeit, said:

The death of the first President of the Reich creates a void in regard to which no one can today tell how it is to be filled. In this I am not thinking primarily of the office of President. The late President never concealed the fact that he did not propose again to offer himself for election, so that his activity as President of the Reich would have come to a constitutional end June 30th.

But even though Friedrich Ebert had resigned from his office, he remained one of the very few strong and big personalities in Germany who were in a position and were qualified to take part in great decisions of the future.¹⁰

The various political parties occupied themselves in trying to line up presidential candidates. Otto Braun, the Premier of Prussia, was the Social Democratic candidate; Karl Jarres, the mayor of Duisburg, was the candidate of the Nationalists and the People's Party; Wilhelm Marx was the Centre candidate. The Communists, the Bavarian People's Party, and the National Socialists also selected candidates for the German elections.

The elections on 25 May 1925 resulted in Jarres polling the largest vote, but since he failed to obtain a majority of the votes there had to be a second election.

For the second election the Social Democrats, the Centre, and the Democrats formed the People's Bloc and supported Marx as their candidate. Field Marshall van Hindenburg was presented as the candidate of the People's Party, the Nationalist Party, the National Socialist Party, and the Bavarian People's Party. The People's Party entered this coalition over the violent objection of Stresemann who was dubious of the reaction of the Allies to the candidacy of Hindenburg.¹¹ The Communists again presented Thaelman as their candidate.

¹⁰ Gustav Stresemann, His Diaries, Letters, and Papers, ed. and trans, Eric Sutton, (New York, 1937), II, p. 36.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 46-48.

The second election was 26 April 1925, and its result was an overwhelming victory for Hindenburg. The Nationalists were so overjoyed by the results of the election that they became practically reconciled to the Republic. The conservatism of the nation and the Reich was amply demonstrated by the election of Hindenburg; and the victory of the Right foreshadowed the decreasing influence of the Social Democrats in the Republic.

REPARATIONS AND THE DAWES PLAN

The Reparation Clause of the Treaty of Versailles included:

1. German liability to consist of payment for all damage done Allied civilian population and their property (Art, 232).
2. By 1 May 1921 the Reparation Committee:
 - a. to notify Germany of the total amount of this liability;
 - b. to present Germany with a schedule of payments for discharging this liability within thirty years (Art, 233).
3. The Reparation Committee to have power to modify this schedule, but not to cancel any of the liability (Art. 234).
4. Germany to pay (in gold and commoditized) before 1 May 1921, the equivalent of twenty milliards of gold marks (art. 235).¹

A joint meeting of Allied and German Reparations experts assembled in Brussels in December 1920 to consider objectively the capacity of the Reich to make reparations payments. The German experts supplied the Allied experts with facts and figures of the financial and economic position of Germany at the time. From this study of the German economic conditions the Allied experts prepared a list of recommendations to be placed before the Supreme Council in Paris for use by a new Reparations Commission. The German government insisted that without balancing their budget and stabilising their exchange any promise made by them would be worthless. Reparations could not be guaranteed by an insolvent government.

The Paris Conference (January 24-30, 1921) was approached immediately by the French delegation which proposed an extraordinary schedule of payment to be made by Germany. This

¹ D'Abernon, op. cit., I, p. 42.

schedule was rejected by the Conference as was the list of recommendations of the experts. England counseled a policy of moderation, and finally after a great deal of discussion the Paris Conference presented the following terms:

1. Forty-two annuities, running from 1 May 1921 of:
 - a. 2 milliard gold marks for 2 years
 - b. 3 " " " " 3 "
 - c. 4 " " " " 3 "
 - d. 5 " " " " 3 "
 - e. 6 " " " " 31 "
 Equals 226 milliard gold marks, plus 12 per cent on German exports.
2. Annuities to be discounted:
 - 8 per cent until 1 May 1923,
 - 6 per cent from 1 May 1923 to 1 May 1925,
 - 5 per cent from 1 May 1925.
3. No State credit operation outside German territory without consent of Reparation Commission.
4. Reparation Commission to hold watching brief over German customs, with power to administer² if Germany defaults in her reparations obligations.²

The Paris decision was considered quite unacceptable in Germany; German public opinion was strongly against it. At the first London Conference (21 February-14 March 1921) the Germans submitted their counterproposals to the Paris Conference. The Germans had agreed to most of the terms individually; the chief difficulty remaining was to reach agreement fixing the total indebtedness of Germany. The nature of the counterproposals aroused bitterness and resentment on the part of the Allies because German acceptance of the Paris terms was made contingent upon the removal of restrictions upon Germany's commercial relations, relief from further payments or deliveries under the terms of the Versailles Treaty,

² Ibid., p. 144.

renunciation of the Allies right of jurisdiction over German property abroad, and the solution of the question of Upper Silesia. The London Conference rejected the German counter-proposals.

A second London Conference met from 30 March to 5 May 1921. During this Conference the total indebtedness of Germany was fixed at 132 milliard gold marks. Germany was informed that her refusal to comply would entail the occupation of the Ruhr as the **primary** sanction. The terms of the schedule of payments and an ultimatum (giving Germany six days in which to reply) were sent to Berlin, 6 May 1921.

The German government considered this amount more than the Reich would be able to pay. A new government was formed, with Josef Wirth as Chancellor, composed of the Social Democrats, the Centre, and the Democrats. With the vote of the Independents the government obtained a majority in the Reichstag and accepted the conditions of the ultimatum.

Wirth and Rathenau inaugurated their policy of fulfilment, supported by the Reichstag. There was a twofold purpose underlying this policy. First, they thought that by attempting to carry out their obligations they would prove their inability to attain complete fulfilment. Second, they wanted to defeat the pessimism of the German people by restoring confidence, in themselves and in the Reich.

A crippling blow to the German economy occurred in the plebiscite in Upper Silesia. A majority of the popular vote

was cast in favor of Germany; counting the vote by communes, the results favored Poland. The Allied decree regarding the plebiscite was to divide the province. Poland received less than half of the province, but the half she received contained almost all of the mines, mills, and furnaces in the province. This meant that the German fulfilment policy was even more difficult to achieve. The cabinet resigned as a result, and Wirth was again faced with the problem of creating a government. In the new cabinet, Rathenau was appointed the Foreign Minister. This appointment brought forth vehement protests from the Nationalists.³

Late in 1921 the German government had declared its inability to meet the next payment on reparations because of financial difficulties and had asked for a moratorium for the next year. The Reich stressed that in order to meet its obligations it must be allowed to make foreign loans. In March 1922 a partial moratorium was granted to Germany.

The inflation in Germany made her task of fulfilment almost impossible. The Germans consistently used the inflation as the excuse for their inability to make reparations payments. Actually, however, there is all too little evidence that the German government did anything to stop the, inflationary spiral. Certainly it never made the obvious connection

³ Halperin, op. cit., pp. 203-204.

between the constantly decreasing value of the mark and the ever-increasing amount of currency in circulation, currency which the government printed. The government's failure to halt the inflation may have been due in part to the close alignment between the government and the industrialists (who were profiting from the inflation); or its failure may have been due to its unwillingness to pay any reparations.

In December 1921 the Reich was forced to ask the Reparations Committee for an extension of time on the reparations in kind (timber) that was due. The Reparations Committee, over the strenuous objection of the British member, declared that Germany had defaulted on the terms of the treaty. In January 1923, the Reparations Committee, again over the objection of the British member declared Germany in default on her coal deliveries; then France and Belgium moved troops into the Ruhr. Both the United States and England disapproved of this action.

The German government declared the invasion of the Ruhr illegal. The government adopted a policy of "passive resistance" in the Ruhr since active resistance was out of the question. The Social Democrats pressed for understanding with the West as a preliminary to obtaining the evacuation of the Ruhr by the Franco-Belgian troops, but since France refused to negotiate as long as the passive resistance as a prerequisite to the reexamination of Germany's capacity to pay, the Cuno cabinet had to resign.⁴

⁴ Ibid., p. 251

Stresemann then formed a cabinet, the cabinet of the Great Coalition, composed of the Social Democrats, the Centre, the Democrats, and the People's Party. In order to negotiate with the Allies the government abandoned passive resistance in the Ruhr on 24 September 1923. Stresemann justified the abandonment to the Reich by saying that "a prolongation of the passive resistance would not have been possible without the complete collapse of German currency and industry; and that no external advantages were to be expected from its continuance."⁵

Following this action by the Reich an international committee of experts was appointed to investigate Germany's capacity to pay the reparations and to make recommendations to the Allies.

The American Secretary of State Hughes, as early as December 1922, made the suggestion that German reparations be clearly and definitely separated from politics and settled on the basis of Germany's capacity to pay. In 1923 the British Prime Minister supported this proposal.⁶ Stresemann was steadily gaining sympathy for Germany in England, Italy, and the United States, and the adoption of the Dawes Plan by Germany was Stresemann's greatest success as Foreign Minister--his greatest success because all his further policies hinged on it.

France was adamant in her insistence upon the exact fulfillment of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. She

⁵ Stresemann, op. cit., I, p. 131.

⁶ Scheele, op. cit., p. 239.

maintained it was the only way to insure the protection of France from future aggression by Germany, Stresemann, however, based his reparations proposals on the thesis that in an ordered Germany lay the strongest security for France. That England and the United States were not wholly in accord with the French position on reparations can be illustrated by a paragraph from a letter by Ramsey MacDonald, the British Prime Minister. MacDonald wrote Poincaire in an effort to reach a reparations settlement.

...Thus it is that our people look with anxiety on what seems to them France's determination to destroy Germany and obtain predominance on the Continent without consideration for our reasonable interests, and for the future consequences of such action on the settlement of European affairs.⁷

The committee of independent economic experts, under the leadership of the American General Dawes, was to recommend a plan for reparations. The report recommended "the restoration of full economic and fiscal sovereignty to Germany."⁸ The restoration of German unity was recognized as a prerequisite for reparations. The plan adopted accomplished Stresemann's desires--the evacuation of the Ruhr and the restoration of the economic and administrative unity of the Reich.

The Dawes Plan based on the principle of foreign backing in Germany to enable her to restore economic stability, and thus to enhance her capacity to pay. Under the agreement

⁷ Stresemann, op. cit., I, p. 310

⁸ Halperin, op. cit., p. 287.

German currency was to be stabilized under the control of a central bank which was also to receive the reparations payments. The bank was to be controlled by a board composed of German and foreign members. The stability of the new currency and the reparations in kind for the first twelve months were to be financed by an international loan. This loan was secured by a mortgage on German industry and railroads, and also by customs and excise duties. Parker Gilbert, an American banker, was to preside over the whole structure as the Agent General for Reparations in Berlin.⁹

Preparations for the reparations settlement took place at an Inter-Allied Conference in London (16 August to 21 August). The conference met to discuss the measures necessary to put the Dawes Plan into effect. Prime Minister MacDonald was conciliatory toward Germany, and the United States insisted that no agreement would be acceptable which did not command the wholehearted approval of Germany. On 1 August 1924 the Allies extended an invitation to the German government to participate in the conference.

The Germans had previously accepted the Dawes Plan as a basis for a reparations settlement. It remained only for the Reichstag to confirm the Pact of London and vote the necessary legislation to put the Dawes Plan into effect. The Chancellor put the report before the Reichstag on 27 August 1924.

⁹ Scheele, op. cit., p. 240.

The confirmation of the Pact of London required only a simple majority vote, but the legislation necessary for the enactment of the Plan required a two-thirds majority. It was this necessary two-third majority which posed a difficulty for the government. The government was assured of the support of the Social Democrats, (who proved they were better patriots than partisans), the Centre, the Democrats and the People's Party. The Nationalists, backed by the extremists of Right and Left, were emphatic in their renunciation of the agreement. They considered it a "Second Versailles."

The Reichstag reached an impasse, and Ebert threatened to dissolve it if no progress could be made. The Nationalists finally broke the impasse by yielding to the virtual bribes of the People's Party and the government. The People's Party said that once the bills were enacted the Nationalists would have the right to be represented in the cabinet in proportion to their strength in the Reichstag.

The government implied its willingness to declare formally that acceptance did not alter the Reich's opinion of the war guilt clause. This indicated the urgency the government felt toward the acceptance of the agreement since it appears that the Nationalists' position did not command much public support. Lord D'Abernon was even of the opinion that the public would prefer the government not to carry out the promise to the Nationalists. The public left, in his opinion, that it would

be "better (to) break an internal promise than (to) create an external crisis and imperil the smooth execution of the Pact of London."¹⁰

Legislation was passed by the necessary two-thirds majority and the Pact of London was confirmed 29 August 1924, after the Nationalist Party freed its members to vote independently. After the action of the Reichstag concerning the London Agreement, Chancellor Marx issued a statement which began:

The Reichstag, by the decision taken today, has set its seal to the agreements reached in London. These measures that will be of supreme importance for the destiny of the German people for years ahead. The Government of the Reich desires to express their thanks to all members of the Reichstag who have contributed to this result. All who participated had to overcome serious misgivings, and even to set aside their personal conviction, in order that the London Agreements might be accepted. Difficult as the decision may have been in each individual case, it had to be taken if our Fatherland was to find the way to a better future.¹¹

The Dawes Plan was accepted by the German government, not as an acknowledgment of guilt, but as submission to force. It was essential to Germany and to Europe because without stability, economically and financially, in Germany it would be impossible to fulfill her reparations commitments, and the reparations were essential to European economy. If the Dawes Plan was to France "morality sacrificed to expediency," it was to Germany the first time she reappeared as an equal in the post-war world.¹² On 30 August 1924 the London Agreements were signed in London by the Allies and the German Ambassador.

¹⁰D'Abernon, op. cit., III, p. 95.

¹¹Stressemann, op. cit., I, p. 408.

¹²Scheele, op. cit., p. 239.

LOCARNO

If the Pact of London signified Germany's economic re-emergence as an equal, Locarno signified her political re-emergence. The Treaty of Locarno marked the termination of a definite era in international relations, it also marked the beginning of a new era in German politics.¹ The achievement of German equality in international relations had been the primary interest of Germany since the cessation of the war. The Dawes-Locarno settlements were victories over the Treaty of Versailles, virtual nullifications of the "peace of shame."

The German government had long recognized that in order for Germany to enjoy amicable relations with France the nagging issue of security had to be settled to the satisfaction of the French. In 1922 Dr. Cuno, the Chancellor of the "Experts Cabinet," had attempted to establish an agreement with France. The basis of these negotiations had been a non-aggression agreement undertaken by France and Germany; England, Italy, and Belgium entering into the engagement in a secondary degree, and the United States entering as a trustee. This proposal was accorded a favorable reception in Washington but was refused by the French government, under Poincare.²

Again in 1923 Germany attempted to reach an agreement, and in February 1924 Stresemann said "...To meet a nightmare

¹ Clark *op. cit.*, p. 120.

² D'Abernon, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 127-129.

of a German attack on France, we are ready to offer her an international guarantee of security."³

The adoption of the Dawes Plan in August 1924 heightened the German hopes of obtaining an international agreement concerning the Rhine because it set a precedent for mutual negotiations between Germany and the Allies. This desire to dispel the fears of France was motivated by the realization that the evacuation of the Rhineland, which Germany desired above all else, would be accomplished only after successful negotiations with the French.

In January 1925 Germany initiated a policy which she hoped would lead to a Franco-German settlement. In a note to Great Britain Germany prepared a Pact of Mutual Security which could be combined with an arbitration treaty. Furthermore, Germany was willing to sign a treaty explicitly guaranteeing both the present territorial status on the Rhine and the fulfilment of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles concerning demilitarization of the Rhineland.⁴

The reply of the British Foreign Office to the note was extremely noncommittal. Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Minister, answered that any pact which had as its prerequisite the evacuation of the Rhineland would be unacceptable to Great Britain, and that the Geneva protocol would have to be disposed

³Stresemann, *op. cit.*, I, p. 40.

⁴D'Abernon, *op. cit.*, III, p. 125.

of first. Undeterred by the British attitude Stresemann, in the next month, began negotiations with the French. The note sent the French was, in essence, the same one which had received such scant attention in London. The attitude of the French was contradictory. The proposal maintaining the status quo in the West, they viewed with favor, but the omission of any provisions guaranteeing the eastern frontiers dimmed their approval since they wanted to protect their eastern allies. Meanwhile, in March, London changed its policy after rejecting the German protocol and gave its provisional support to Stresemann's proposal. The English government acknowledged its duty to establish France's security, and stated England's particular interest in Germany's western frontiers.⁵

The French reply to Stresemann's note came in June: "France and her allies were prepared for an exchange of views with Germany regarding the firm establishment of peace. But Germany must first become a member of the League of Nations without making special conditions."⁶

This reply to Germany was not entirely satisfactory since Germany was opposed to Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. This Article stated:

Should any member of the League of Nations resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Articles 12, 13, or 15, it shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which

⁵ Stresemann, op. cit., II, pp. 76-77.

⁶ Ibid., II, p. 88.

thereby undertakes immediately to subject it to the severance of all trade or financial relations, the prohibition of all intercourse between their nationals and the nationals of the covenant-breaking State, and the prevention of all financial, commercial or personal intercourse between nations of the nations of the covenant-breaking State and the nationals of any other State, whether a member of the League or not....⁷

In the German answer to the French memorandum the German government explained its reservations to Article 16. Germany's geographic position and her military and economic situation would necessitate some special arrangement until Germany's position equaled that of the other League members.

The French government was not pleased with this answer, but in September 1925 the Allies invited Germany to a conference. This invitation seemed to be the answer to Stresemann's query: "The decisive question, the centre-point of our relations with the Allies, is whether the Security question is to be solved among the Allied Western Powers Alone, or with the participation of Germany?"⁸

On October 1925 Statesmen from England, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Poland, Czechoslovakia, met in Locarno and, in open, equal discussions negotiated the Treaty of Locarno. England, France, Germany, Belgium, and Italy concluded a treaty which provided the maintenance of the frontiers fixed by the Treaty of Versailles between France and Germany and between

⁷ D'Abernon, op. cit., III, p. 292.

⁸ Stresemann, op. cit., II, p. 83.

Belgium and Germany, and the observance of the Treaty terms relating to the demilitarized zone; non-aggression pacts between France and Germany and between Belgium and Germany; settlement by peaceful means of all disputes between France and Germany, and Belgium and Germany; guarantee of these terms by England and Italy.

In addition to this general treaty, Germany signed arbitration conventions with Belgium and France and arbitrations treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁹

The final protocol of the Locarno agreements was signed 16 October 1925. In that protocol is a paragraph which reveals the hopeful attitude of the participating governments.

The representatives of the governments represented have declared their firm conviction that the entry into force of these treaties and conventions will contribute greatly to bring about a moral relaxation of the tension between nations, that it will help powerfully towards the solution of any political and economic problems in accordance with the interests and sentiments of the peoples, and that in strengthening peace and security in Europe, it will hasten on effectively the disarmament provided for in Article 8 in the Covenant of the League of Nations.¹⁰

The Locarno agreements were not the loss to Germany, nor the betrayal of German interests, that many Germans seemed to think. It is only natural that a people as highly "honor" conscious as the Germans should consider the treaty concessions degrading to the Reich, but, as a matter of fact, Stresemann

⁹ D'Abernon, op. cit., III, pp. 280-285.

¹⁰ Ibid., III, p. 281.

had obtained by diplomatic means, a victory of some importance for the German nation. The concessions made by Germany were actually confirmation of the previous deprivations. Alsace-Lorraine was lost to the Reich at Versailles, not Locarno; the non-aggression pacts were essential to the nation which had been disarmed by the "dictated Peace" in 1919.

By the terms of Locarno Germany had insured herself of security from the one nation who could possibly injure her, France; and she had made certain that her territory would be indivisible, that there would not be another invasion of the Ruhr. Germany was now in a position to concentrate on her domestic problems, and in view of her initiative in securing peace for Europe (by means of the negotiations resulting in the Locarno agreements) she could anticipate the foreign financial aid which was necessary for her domestic recovery. In addition, and very important to the Germans, Stresemann had achieved a distant gain in prestige for Germany and a corresponding loss in prestige for France.

Reichstag discussions on the Locarno treaty and the entry of Germany into the League lasted from 23 November until 28 November. The Social Democrats accepted the Locarno Treaty as the fulfilment of their own foreign policy demands. The Nationalists rejected it because:

In the result of the Locarno negotiations the German National Group in the Reichstag cannot see the fulfilment of the demands that will satisfy the vital needs of the German people. Moreover, the Group fails to observe the

conditions for the conclusion of a treaty, nor any contributions from the other Powers concerned equivalent to the sacrifices claimed from Germany. In the face of this result the Group hereby declares that it will agree to no treaty that does not satisfy Germany's vital needs, and more, especially does not exclude a reunciation of German soil and population.¹¹

The Reichstag ratified the Treaty of Locarno on 27 November; on 28 November the law regarding the entry of Germany into the League of Nations was passed. The Nationalists' last hopes were defeated when President von Hindenburg signed the law. The formal signing of the treaty took place in London 1 December 1925.

The Treaty of Locarno was a milestone in the German Republic. Before Locarno, Germany was a vanquished enemy and a potential threat which must be held in subjection to insure the peace and security of Europe; she was a "Carthage after the second Punic War"¹² in the eyes of the Allies. After Locarno agreements Germany was again a member in good standing in the community of nations; on her initiative the peace and security of Western Europe had been pledged and guaranteed. Germany had exchanged the "dictated" peace of Versailles for the voluntary, negotiated peace of Locarno.

¹¹ Stresemann, op. cit., II, p. 193.

¹² Ibid., II, p. 231.

CONCLUSION

The Weimar Republic was an experiment in democracy. Endowed with a theoretically perfect democratic constitution (the result of a combination of German genius for technical perfection and the liberal ideology of the Socialist parties), it established a government more democratically conceived than any in Europe. Unfortunately, however, the Republic could not build on a fresh foundation; it had to build its democratic structure on a traditionally authoritarian base.

The base on which the Republic was to stand was the chief handicap of the new government. It was too strong a foundation to become fused with the republican supports, which reached down to it; and the democratic structure was too fragile to bury it.

The German people had become docile through centuries of government from above. They were thoroughly imbued with the necessity of discipline and duty to the state. Initiative had been replaced by obedience, and individualism had been replaced by the General Will. Liberalism had never been accepted by the major forces; it had been accepted only by ineffectual intellectuals isolated from the masses of the population.

As a result the theoretical strength of the Constitution became the primary weakness of the Republic. The German people were not ready for democratic government. They had had no experience in self-government and the change was too swift, too complete.

The Social Democrats were quite correct in their assumption that the German people would not accept a socialist government, that they could not be capable of maintaining it. Their assumption was false only in the limitations, the German people were also not ready for a democratic government, and the Social Democrats were no more ready for, or capable of, complete self-government than the rest of the German people.

In 1918 the German people as a whole had not desired a republic; they had certainly not desired a revolution, mild though it was; all they actively wanted was peace and stability. In view of these desires the Socialists drew large support from the people at the establishment of the Republic.

Support of the Social Democrats--and the other Centre Parties--decreased when the people realized that the government could not maintain order or even defend itself. Their lack of democratic experience was revealed when they moved their support to the extreme parties--increasingly to the extreme of the Right. They did this because of the strength of the Right and because the tradition of the Right was something they understood.

The German people had a great deal of respect for strength; they liked and wanted a strong government and a strong state. They desired equally the restoration to Germany of German minorities in the newly created eastern states, and with that the restoration of the German prestige.

The Social Democrats were inept politically. The revitalization of the Reichswehr in its pre-war image was a preilous mistake for them to have made. It gave their opponents a powerful weapon and it destroyed the internal prestige of the Socialists. The acceptance of the treaty was unavoidable, but the government did not have adequate relations with the people and so they failed to convince the people of the necessity of the acceptance. The people did know that the republican elements had accepted the treaty and that the Nationalists had opposed acceptance.

As the republican elements gradually lost control of the Republic, the Republic gradually changed its character. It became, not an experiment in democracy, but a prelude to a strong, authoritarian government. The experiment failed because the only elements capable of carrying it through, the Socialists, had surrendered their liberalism to their nationalist; and because the German people, whose cooperation and support were necessary to make the experiment live, had responded to traditional authoritarian nationalist rather than to the liberal nationalism of the Socialists.

APPENDIX

In the pre-war years and during the years of the Republic the Liberals in Germany were the Socialist elements. The Social Democratic Party was the largest party in Germany just before and during the war and during the early years of the Republic. The party encompassed a large segment of the working classes and some of the middle class elements. The party was Marxist in theory but since the repeal of the anti-socialist laws it had been following a policy of constitutional opposition to the government of the Reich. The Social Democratic Party had become closely aligned with the trade unions and in practice they were enhancing the position of the workers through constitutional methods. The Social Democrats still professed to believe in revolutionary action but they followed a policy of gradual revision through the established government.

In 1916 the left wing Social Democrats broke away from the party and formed the Independent Socialist Party. The Independents were more radical than the Social Democrats (that is, the Majority Democrats) but they were still German patriots until the end of the war. The Independents were led by Dr. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, among the most liberal thinkers in Germany. The party drew its strength from dissatisfied workers and from intellectuals.

Both the Socialist parties were compelled to hold the working classes from Communism. The German Communist Party grew out of the Spartacus League and was directly connected

with Russian Communism. In the 1918 revolution the Spartacus League tried to gain control of the masses but the Socialists (the Majority Socialists) and the army defeated their attempts. From that time on the Communists attempted to further the revolution. Their most noticeable success was in 1923 when they gained a number of Reichstag seats in the Spring elections and when a Leftist government sponsored by the Communist Party was established in Saxony. The same year in the Fall and Winter most of their advances were lost, both in the elections and in Saxony.

The Socialist parties would have been able to maintain a clear majority cabinet in the Reichstag--a Leftist cabinet--if they had been able to work amicably together and if they had been able to work with the Communists. Unfortunately they could not and so the coalition cabinets were composed of the Social Democrats, the right wing of the Independents, and the parties of the centre.

The centre parties in the Reich represented the middle class, the Catholic population, the lesser industrial and financial interests. Because of the system of proportional representation there were several centre parties reflecting essentially the same point of view.

The Centre Party was the Catholic party. In Germany the Catholic party has always been moderate but not reactionary because it represents not only the South German peasant and

middle class but also the Catholic trade unions and the Catholic working class. Since the Kulturkampf the Centre has been the party of opposition to the Imperial Reich.

The Democratic Party was also a centre party. It represented the middle class liberal elements in Germany, and in many ways its policies coincided with the Social Democrats although the Democrats never advocated a socialist program. Of course the Social Democrats never exerted a great deal of pressure on the government to pass their socialist program.

The parties of the centre were parties of tradition and respect in Germany. There was no onus attached to them as there had been attached to the Socialist parties, and it was largely for this reason that the Majority Socialists wanted a coalition with them. The alignment with the centre gave the Socialists a respectability they had not previously enjoyed; socialist theory was not so garrish to German public opinion when it was combined with the more moderate policies of the established centre.

Immediately to the right of the centre parties was the German People's Party. The People's Party represented the views of the industrial and the financial elements. The policies of the People's Party were conservative and were inclined to be nationalistic. Under Gustav Stresemann the People's Party aligned itself with the Weimar Coalition (the centre parties and the right wing Socialists) to form

the Great Coalition. Such a coalition reveals the strength of nationalist sentiment within the Socialist ranks.

In practice the People's Party acted as an intermediary between the moderate centre and the reactionary Right. Until the advent of the National Socialists and the Bavarian People's Party the German Nationalist Party was the most reactionary party in the Reichstag. The term "nationalist" has a peculiar connotation in German politics. It denotes an in-group feeling, a feeling of being the exclusive German party. The Nationalists considered themselves the bearers of the true German sentiment, the real German party. They were extremely nationalistic, and during the republican period they were extremely annexationist. The party represented the old conservatives, that is, the Junkers and the army and the remaining monarchists in Germany.

The difficulties posed by the parties represented in the Reichstag of the Weimar Republic were created chiefly by the fact that all of the parties had a traditional policy which they continued to follow, a policy which they carried over from the Imperial Reichstag. Had the parties been inaugurated at the time of the establishment of the Republic, the Socialists might not have had to face the suspicions of the basically conservative German people, and the parties of the Right (the Nationalists and the various separatist parties) might not have enjoyed the respect they did.

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