

History

Germany & West Germany 1918-89 (Edexcel)

Task 1

Please research the role of the following individuals in the creation and early years of The Weimar Republic (Germany's new democracy) 1918-23. You must answer the questions below for each individual:

- What was their job, role, or position in society?
- Were they responsible for forming the Weimar Republic or a threat?
- What were their political views?

- ❖ Kaiser Willhelm
- ❖ Hindenburg
- ❖ Philipp Scheidemann
- ❖ Karl Liebknecht
- ❖ General Groener
- ❖ General Ludendorff
- ❖ Rosa Luxemburg

German Chancellors

- ❖ Friedrich Ebert (November 1918 – February 1919)
- ❖ Prince Maximillion von Baden (October - November 1918)
- ❖ George Von Hertling (November 1917 – September 1918)
- ❖ George Michaelis (July to Novemeber 1917)
- ❖ Theobald Bethman Von Holweg (July 1909 – July 1917)

Task 2

Political Crises and The Impact of War.

Make notes, using pages 2-4 from the Pinfield textbook, on the following problems that faced Germany at the end of the First World War. You should ensure that your notes have plenty of SPEND evidence (Statistics, People, Events, Names, Dates) to be of the standard required for an A level student.

- The Crisis October to November 1918
- The Crisis in Military discipline (Kiel Mutiny)
- The Crisis in the Economy (The Blockade)
- The Crisis in Society (reasons for grievances)

Transition Task



Political crises and the impact of war

The crises of October to November 1918

In the spring of 1918, it looked for a short time as if Germany might have achieved the impossible and won the Great War. Russia had been defeated. The German army's major offensive on the Western Front that spring enjoyed a brief initial success of a kind unseen since August 1914. It soon became clear, however, that it had failed to achieve the intended breakthrough. This was to prove Germany's last major offensive, and the losses of troops and **matériel** left military heroes, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, after 1916.

Germany's forces severely weakened. In the summer of 1918 the army command began to realise that the war was lost. On 29 September 1918 Ludendorff informed Paul von Hintze, the German Foreign Minister, that the Western Front might collapse at any time and that any request for a ceasefire should come from a civilian government. Clearly the army wanted to shift the blame for defeat onto civilians.

The crisis in military discipline

Yet a month later the German Imperial Navy's High Seas fleet was ordered to confront the blockading Royal Navy fleet. This would have been its first action since the indecisive 1916 Battle of Jutland. Rumours that the war was ending were circulating. The sailors of the Imperial German Fleet had grievances about their conditions and had **mutinied** in 1917, demanding an end to the war. On that occasion firm intervention, arrests and executions had ended the trouble. This time, when the sailors refused to obey the October 1918 command to sail pointlessly into danger, the authorities adopted the same approach, arresting 300 mutineers in Wilhelmshaven. In November the Wilhelmshaven example was followed in Kiel, but there, ships and buildings were seized and the red flag of **revolution** was raised.

The mutineers formed revolutionary committees. Many of these committees were formed of workers, sailors, soldiers and political activists. They often lacked structure, order and direction, but they did represent a new form of political action. The delegates were elected by their fellow sailors.

The revolutionary committees spread from Kiel across Germany. The authorities could not stop this spread. Sometimes the committees concentrated on local issues, sometimes on national ones, but all reflected anger with a leadership that had led Germany into a long and difficult conflict, causing misery and suffering to millions.

The crisis in the economy

The impact of the First World War (1914–1918) on the civilian population of Germany had been considerable, and alongside the patriotic fervour of some, an increasingly embittered and rebellious attitude was developing towards existing authority. The sailors at Kiel were not alone, and the public mood was shifting towards them. The German military leadership had anticipated a fairly short war; taking their lead from the experts, the Imperial government too had expected the war to be over quickly. After all, the preceding conflict, the Franco-Prussian War



Key terms

Matériel: military supplies.

Mutiny: refusal by armed forces personnel to obey an order or orders.

Revolution: change that takes place suddenly and unexpectedly, often despite opposition, usually by violent means.

1 The establishment and early years of Weimar, 1918–1924

of 1870–1871, had lasted ten months. Initially, as German troops swept through Belgium and attacked France, these assumptions seemed correct. The advance halted, however, and was replaced by static trench warfare on the Western Front. The lack of German planning for a long conflict now became apparent. **Total war**, the dominant military idea, required the involvement of the entire population in the war effort.

In practice this meant that priority was given to supplying the military; the civilian population consequently suffered badly as the war dragged on.

The German government did achieve some success in controlling the wartime economy. The pre-war Imperial German government had already modestly extended the control it exercised in society and the economy; the wartime government accelerated this process. A War Raw Materials Department (*Kriegsrohstoffabteilung, KRA*) under the industrialist (and future government minister) Walther Rathenau had been established as early as August 1914. Even by the end of the war at the end of 1918, Germany had not come to the end of its reserves of raw materials. The wartime government had established maximum prices for foodstuffs, then introduced requisitioning and finally rationing. They started with bread, as Germany was not self-sufficient in grain and had to import 40% of its needs. There was not enough food to eat, and the situation got worse as the war dragged on. Complex bureaucratic machinery was needed to administer all these controls; the idea of a more interventionist government thus became established in German society and politics.

Germany's heavy reliance on imported food was exposed as a major weakness. The British **blockade** of the North Sea ports, through which most food imports had to pass, had been very effective.

In addition, the winter of 1916–1917 was especially harsh and the potato harvest was poor. This period became known as 'the turnip winter' because this vegetable, usually used as fodder for animals, had to be eaten by many as a substitute for bread and potatoes. The situation was made even worse by the switching of almost all factory production to the output of military items. Most garment factories now produced uniforms, resulting in shortages of clothing. Many miners had been conscripted into the army, so the mines were understaffed and coal was in short supply. Those food supplies that were available to the civilian population consisted mainly of bread and potatoes, and it became ever harder to buy any meat. The availability of dairy products such as butter, cheese and eggs was about a fifth of that in peacetime.

There were of course **profiteers**, **black-marketeers** and other unscrupulous people who took advantage of the situation, and the wealthy could always afford scarce items.

In rural areas it was usually possible to grow your own food and supplement the ration with eggs and chickens, but for the majority of Germans these were grim times. There was much standing in queues. As the war dragged on, these miseries became worse. Diseases of malnutrition appeared. Writer G.J. Meyer states that, according to one report at the time, 80 000 children had died of starvation in 1916.¹ But it was not just malnutrition and hunger that killed: bodies weakened by an



Key terms

Total war: a war in which every part of the economy prioritises the war and the needs of the military.

Blockade: a campaign to disrupt trade and communication in order to prevent the movement of imports in such a way as to deprive the targeted place of necessary supplies.

Profiteer: someone who takes advantage of a crisis such as a war or famine to make money.

Black-marketeer: someone who buys and sells goods on the 'black market', dealing in goods in a way that breaks the law, such as not paying an import tariff or without taking account of a rationing system.

A/AS Level History for AQA: Democracy and Nazism: Germany, 1918–1945

ACTIVITY 1.1

Consider the question: 'Could the German government have controlled the economic situation in 1918?' Using the information given here, plus whatever else you can find out for yourself, write one short paragraph to address each of the following:

1. the economic situation in Germany, 1918
2. the German government's actions in response – what they prioritised and what that tells you about where they thought the most pressing problems lay
3. the problems about which the German government could do little or nothing.



Key terms

Kaiser: German word for emperor.

Kaiserreich: Imperial Germany (1871–1918), a German state dominated by Prussia and ruled by Prussia's king as emperor.

Chancellor: a figure with authority over certain organisations such as head of government.

inadequate diet were much more vulnerable to disease. It has been calculated that nearly half a million more civilians died in Germany during the First World War than would have been the case in peacetime.

As the years went by, the stresses on society in Germany became more and more marked. A characteristic of pre-war Imperial Germany (the **Kaiserreich**) had been the elevation of the **Kaiser** to the pinnacle of German society. As the war went on the power of Kaiser Wilhelm II faded, to be replaced by that of the new military heroes, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, after 1916.

The crisis in society

Habits of good order and unquestioning obedience to authority were deeply ingrained in the society of Imperial Germany. This attitude was largely maintained in the disciplined army but less so in the civilian population as the war dragged on; as people at home became more and more weary of deprivation, rationing and standing in queues, they became increasingly resentful. In 1917 there was even a series of strikes, supported reluctantly by the trade unions, for better conditions at work. In October 1918 new drafts of conscripted German soldiers were still being sent to the front, even though it was clear to the German High Command that the war was lost. The surge of optimism that followed the German army's victory on the Eastern Front of 1917 and the initial successes of the 1918 spring offensive on the Western Front had faded into bitterness.

By late 1918 ordinary people in many cities, including Berlin and Munich, had become more open to the arguments and ideas of revolutionary political groups. Winter was approaching and the effective British blockade of the North Sea coast was still in place. Many people felt hungry, bitter and angry. In particular, they blamed the national leadership for their problems. This included even the Kaiser and his top generals. The revolutionary committees would not have spread as they did throughout Germany in the autumn of 1918 unless these grievances had become intolerable for many.

The political crisis: chancellors come and go

The scale of the political crisis at the end of the First World War is indicated by the frequency with which new **chancellors** took office (Figure 1.1).

Task 3

Listen to episode 295 of The Rest is History Podcast Titled: The Rise of The Nazis (Part 1). Click the link below to watch on Youtube or you can access this on Spotify.

[295. The Rise of the Nazis](#)

'Where do the origins of Nazism lie? The Second Reich? Hitler's time in Vienna? The First World War? Join Tom and Dominic in the first of their four-part series on the Rise of the Nazis as they discuss its origins'

This activity will give you important contextual knowledge of the time period that covers Germany from 1918-33 that will give you a deeper understanding so you are ready to begin your course in September.

As you listen, please answer the following questions:

1. Why did the rise of The Nazis shock people living in democracies in Europe?
2. Identify and describe the views of two competing Historians on the Rise of Hitler's rise to power
E.g. AJP Taylor.
3. Define The Second Reich that developed under The Kaiser & Bismarck in 1871.
4. What democratic elements existed in The Second Reich?
5. What is Darwinism? (In the context of Germany)
6. What is Pan Germanism?
7. What was the German experience of The First World War? Casualties? Deaths? Turnip Winter?
8. What was Hitler's experience of The First World War? What was his reaction to the end of the war?
9. Write down two facts about Hitler's early life.
10. Define what Hitler meant by the term The November Criminals.
11. Who are The Freikorps?
12. Who was Anton Drexler & What were the views of The German Workers Party?
13. Why was Hitler such an effective public speaker? Give two examples.
14. What does NSDAP stand for? (If not clear from podcast use the internet)