

The Weimar Republic 1919-1933

A new democracy – the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic is the term used to describe the German democratic republic that lasted from 1919 until 1933. The republic was established after workers and troops revolted in early 1918 against the government's refusal to end the First World War. On November 9, Kaiser Wilhelm II fled the country and a provisional (temporary) government was formed by Friedrich Ebert. The new parliament met in Weimar, in February 1919 and drew up a constitution that established Germany as a democracy. There were two houses of parliament, the *Reichstag* and the *Reichsrat*. Ebert was elected first president of the new republic.

Although the Weimar Republic was democratic it was weak and unpopular with many Germans. The Weimar Republic had too many political parties and weak coalitions did not seem to last long. It was blamed for surrendering to the Allies in 1918 and was associated with defeat by many who believed that Germany should have continued to fight after November 1918. Political extremists such as the Communists (left wing e.g. Spartacists, in 1919) and the Nationalists (right wing e.g. the Kapp Putsch, 1920) tried to seize power from the Weimar Republic. The Weimar Republic had to deal with severe economic problems in 1923 during the Ruhr Crisis and after the Wall St. Crash of 1929.

The Ruhr Crisis 1923

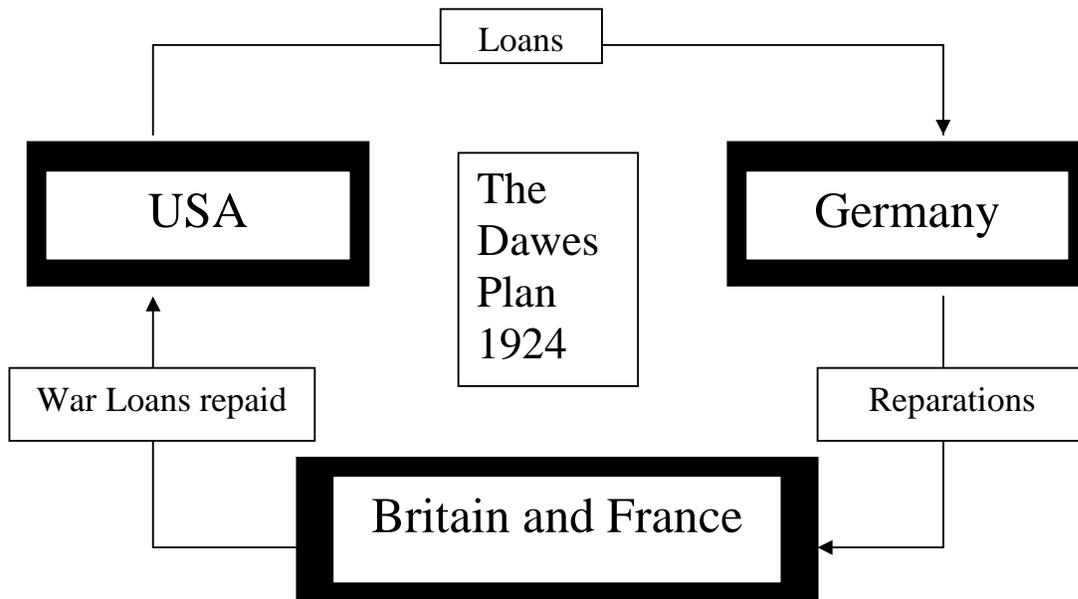
World War I had left Germany with many economic, social, and political problems. In addition to enduring high inflation and a large national debt, Germans were deeply embittered by the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919, which formally ended the war. The treaty called for German disarmament and huge reparation payments to the Allies. Unable to meet the payments, Germany's currency collapsed and the German people suffered large financial losses. In January 1923 French and Belgian forces occupied Germany's main industrial region, the Ruhr, claiming that Germany had stopped making reparation deliveries. German workers were encouraged to strike in protest at the French and Belgian occupation. The result was a period of hyperinflation when the German mark became worthless. Many Germans were desperate by 1923 and were ready to support extremists such as the Nazis or the Communists.

The Munich Putsch or Beer Hall Putsch 1923

This was a short-lived rebellion started by Nazi party leader Adolf Hitler, which began in Munich on November 8, 1923. Hitler planned to make the veteran general Erich Ludendorff a dictator. He kidnapped the leader of the Bavarian government, declared a revolution, and the next day marched on Munich. Police crushed the rebellion, shot 16 of the 3,000 Nazi party demonstrators dead, and arrested Hitler, who served nine months in prison. Hitler used his time in Landsberg prison to write 'Mein Kampf' (My Struggle). This set out Hitler's beliefs for the future of Germany and many people read it and were fooled by its false promises.

Gustav Stresemann

Gustav Stresemann became Chancellor in 1923, and was Foreign Secretary from 1923 to 1929. He dominated German politics in the 1920s and helped to stabilise the country. In 1924 the Allies made it easier for Germany to pay reparations through the Dawes Plan. The USA agreed to lend money to Germany. Germany used this money to pay reparations to France, Britain and Belgium. These three countries used reparations money to pay back the USA what they had borrowed to fight the First World War.



In October 1925, Stresemann signed the Locarno Pact with France and Belgium. Germany agreed never again to challenge its borders with France and Belgium. The Allies withdrew their occupation forces from the Ruhr and in 1926 Germany was elected to the League of Nations, an international alliance for the preservation of peace. War hero General Paul von Hindenburg was elected as the second president of the republic. A new currency, the *Reichsmark*, was established and an impressive economic recovery began. In 1929 the Young Plan extended the German reparation payments over another 59 years. Germany seemed to be on the road to recovery, Berlin became the pleasure capital of Europe and extreme political groups such as the Communists and the Nazis lost support. The Weimar Republic appeared to be working.

The Wall Street Crash 1929

Stresemann died in 1929 and a world wide economic depression began with the Wall Street Crash in 1929, throwing the Weimar Republic into crisis. The value of shares dropped dramatically forcing businesses all over the world to go bust. Six million Germans were made unemployed by 1932. Extreme groups became popular again. Reichstag elections held in September 1930 made the Nazis the second-largest party, their support growing as the Depression deepened. In the elections of July 1932, the Nazis became the largest party in the Reichstag. Hindenburg was persuaded to bring Hitler into the government, with conservative politicians believing they could control Hitler in a coalition government. Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor on January 30, 1933. Hitler soon abolished the office of president and declared himself *Führer* (leader) of the Third Reich, bringing to an end the Weimar Republic.