Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic (1918/1919-1933) is a term used to describe the German Reich (*Deutsches Reich*) after the end of WWI and after the dissolution of the Germany monarchy up to 1933 with the establishment of Nazi Germany. It refers first to the new federal state, constitutional government and parliamentary democracy that initially convened in Weimar. The term also refers to a cultural period of German history associated with the Golden Twenties, Expressionism and the rise of mass culture. It can be divided into three periods: 1919-1923, founding of the Republic and internal struggle; 1924-1929, the phase of relative stability; 1930-1933, the phase of economic and political crisis. Following the 1918 November-Revolution, from 16 to 20 Dec., 1918, the Reich Assembly of workers and soldier councils chose against a soviet political order after the model of the Russian Revolution and decided to form a democratic parliamentarian system with woman’s suffrage. On 11 Aug. 1919, the Reich Constitution, drafted in 1918, was set into power by the signature of President Friedrich Ebert. The Constitution called for a German parliament and a strong presidial office. In a crisis situation the president was expected to provide stability (Article 48). Against the wishes of the communists, the Constitution secured the right of private property. In mediation with socialists, it granted the labor movement access to the political system. As a consequence of failed war reparation payment, French and Belgian troops occupied the industrial Ruhr area of Germany in January, 1923. This resulted in a passive German resistance to the occupation and the culmination of the economic crisis with high inflation becoming hyperinflation in the summer and fall of 1923. After currency reform, the end of the passive resistance and new formulations of the reparation payments, a new period of economic stability emerged in 1924. After the death of President Ebert, the conservative politician Paul von Hindenburg was elected President in 1925. In 1929 the world financial crisis enveloped the Germany economy. The rate of unemployment eventually increased to 44.5% in 1932. In March of 1930, Chancellor Hermann Müller of the Social Democratic Party resigned with his broad coalition government cabinet. The government dissolved because of political conflicts regarding unemployment benefits and the balancing of the national budget. By presidial (Hindenburg) initiative (Art. 48), Heinrich Brüning, of the Catholic oriented Center Party, formed a government to replace Müller’s. This government failed like other consecutive presidial governments. The National Socialist German Workers’ Party, which was publically opposed to the Weimar system, gained in popularity in the early 1930s. Its leader, Adolf Hitler, was made Reich Chancellor on 30 Jan., 1933 and thereafter consolidated power by elections on 5 Mar., 1933 and by the passing of the Enabling Act of 23 Mar., 1933. The democratic system was challenged by the radical rightwing and leftwing. The legitimacy crisis of the Republic was compounded by the critical stance of both an elite cultural milieu and older institutions which benefited from the former monarchial order (administrative sectors and ecclesial and military institutions).

Bibliography: Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, transl. by P. S. Falla and R. J. Park (London: Routledge, 2007).

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