

Weimar and Nazi Germany: 1.1 – What impact did World War One have on Germany?

Story		
Create a title for each paragraph. <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> </div>	The article below examines the situation in Germany in 1918.	Summarise key details from each paragraph in 1-2 bullet points. <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> </div>
	<p>During the First World War, Germany was led by Kaiser (King) Wilhelm II. By late 1918, 11 millions Germans had fought in the war; over 2 million had died, and another 4 million had been wounded. Government debts trebled, rising from 50 billion marks to 150 billion marks by 1918. By the Autumn Germany was on the brink of defeat.</p> <p>However, ordinary Germans were suffering too. Throughout the war, the British Navy blockaded German ports such as Hamburg, preventing food from entering the country. As a result, 750,000 Germans died because of food shortages during the war. The British blockade continued after the war, until July 1919.</p> <p>Consequently, Germany started to crumble from within before it was ever defeated on the battlefield. In October 1918, soldiers in the German navy mutinied (they refused to follow orders) at the ports of Kiel and Hamburg. By November, many workers across the country went on strike and soldiers refused to control rioting in the streets. In Munich, workers led by a communist called Kurt Eisner declared a general strike and announced that the state of Bavaria was separate from the rest of Germany.</p> <p>It was clear that Kaiser Wilhelm had lost control of Germany. In many places, soldiers and workers had set up unofficial councils to replace him already. On 9 November, the Kaiser was forced to abdicate (resign) when told the army would no longer support him, and he fled to Holland.</p> <p>After the Kaiser’s abdication, the Social Democrats (SPD) acted quickly to take power, as they feared armed rioters were preparing to take control in Berlin. They were the biggest party in the Reichstag (parliament). Their leader, Friedrich Ebert became Chancellor, and he quickly made an agreement with the army to stop the communists taking power.</p> <p>The new government’s first major decision was to sign the armistice (the agreement to surrender to the Allies and end the war). It was signed on 11 November 1918. But for many soldiers and ordinary Germans, the surrender came as a shock. The Kaiser had introduced strict censorship laws in Germany, meaning that many Germans did not know how badly the war effort was going until late 1918. Many Germans were deeply angry, and felt betrayed by the new government who signed the armistice.</p>	

A

Armed sailors join with protesting workers during the uprising that overthrew the Kaiser in Hamburg, November 1918.



Source

B

From the papers of Jan Smuts, a South African politician who visited Germany in 1918.

... motherland of our civilisation [Germany] lies in ruins, exhausted by the most terrible struggle in history, with its people broke, starving, despairing, from sheer nervous exhaustion, mechanically struggling forward along the paths of anarchy and war.*

Anarchy* - disorder with no strong authority.

C

Taken from a report sent by the Foreign Office in September 1918.

“The German public is threatened this winter with an almost complete lack of lights of every description: electric light, gas, lamp oil and candles. The lack of soap and washing powder makes personal cleanliness impossible and helps the spread of disease. Medicines are difficult to obtain. In the industrial district of Westphalia many of the women have hardly any clothing and are going about in thin blouses, bare legged with wooden shoes”.

Scholarship



From *The Weimar Republic* by Historian John Hiden, published in 1996.
 ‘In the face of such pressure, existing order virtually collapsed. The rapid spread throughout Germany of workers’ and soldiers councils confirmed that people were attracted to the prospect of far-reaching political change.’

From *The Coming of the Third Reich* by Historian Richard J. Evans, published in 2003.
 ‘Many Germans refused to believe that their armed forces had actually been defeated. Very quickly a fateful myth gained currency among sections of the public... many people began to believe that the army had only been defeated because it had been stabbed in the back by its enemies at home. To them, the armistice was nothing more than a national humiliation’

TASK 1:

Read through the **story** of the events of 1918 in Germany. For each paragraph, you need to create a ‘title’ on one side, and a short summary (2 bullet points maximum) on the other.

TASK 2:

Look at **sources** A, B, and C. In your book, write a short description of the message of each source. Then answer the following question – “What do these sources tell us you about the problems Germany faced in 1918?”

TASK 3:

Read through Hiden and Evans’s **scholarship** of the situation in Germany at the end of WWI. Highlight the key information within each extract, then answer the question – What do historians believe is important about the end of WWI for Germany?