

**The Weimar Republic in German Terms:
An English Translation of Two Pre-Unification Essays**

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Abstract

This thesis is a translation project to mark the centennial of the Weimar Republic's founding in 1918 – 1919. The period of turmoil which began during the November Revolution set the tone both for Germany's national and political development (even into the 21st century) and for the way that people talk about the Weimar Republic and its ultimate demise.

Through the translation of two essays on the Weimar Republic first published in former West Germany, an English-speaking audience may be introduced to certain elements which inform discussions of the Weimar Republic; some of these issues are explored in “An Introduction to Linguistic and Historical Factors Which Influence the Translation of Weimar Research.” In “The Political Culture of the Weimar Republic,” Kurt Sontheimer delineates the problems that scholars encounter when trying to argue the existence of a predominant political culture in Germany at that time. Finally, Klaus Schwabe abridges the ten most functional years of Weimar's legislative and executive branches in “The Path of the Republic from the Kapp Putsch of 1920 Until the Collapse of Müller's Cabinet in 1930” in order to demonstrate the extent of the strained relations between Weimar's many political parties and leaders.

Framed from the viewpoint of translation, Sontheimer and Schwabe's essays help to define a discursive space wherein multiple perspectives can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the Weimar Republic. These perspectives require an analysis of language as it has functioned at different points in time, of relationships with the past, and of the fact that Germans' modern framing of the Weimar Republic is based on how the Republic was handled discursively and rhetorically both during its own time and during the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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List of Abbreviations

BVP	Bavarian People's Party (<i>Bayerische Volkspartei</i>)
DDP	German Democratic Party (<i>Deutsche Demokratische Partei</i>)
DNVP	German National People's Party (<i>Deutschnationale Volkspartei</i>)
DVFP	German <i>Völkisch</i> Freedom Party (<i>Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei</i>)
DVP	German People's Party (<i>Deutsche Volkspartei</i>)
HAPAG	Hamburg-American Line (<i>Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Actien-Gesellschaft</i>)
KPD	Communist Party of Germany (<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i>)
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers Party (<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i>)
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany (<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>)
USPD	Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (<i>Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i>)

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Linguistic and Historical Factors Which Influence the Translation of Weimar Research

This chapter serves as an overview to the most prevalent linguistic issues which arose in the course of translating the essays presented here. It also situates the essays I have translated within their historical context of a pre-unification Federal Republic of Germany seeking to distance itself from the failure of the Weimar Republic.

My primary contributions to this paper include (i) articulation of my purpose in selecting this topic, (ii) development of my approach to translation, (iii) review of the anthology where the translated essays were originally published, and (iv) analysis of the purpose, relevance, strengths, and weakness of the translated essays.

Abstract

Knowledge of culture and history is just as important to translation practice as linguistic competence. However, in the act of translation, some aspects of a source text's culture will be lost to readers. In this introduction, analyzing certain terms from the German language provides English-speaking readers access to certain cultural understandings which do not exist in the United States, but which are crucial to a fuller comprehension of research on the Weimar Republic.

Additionally, being aware of the historical context of a text's publication allows for greater insight into the text's significance for readers at the time. That the essays translated here were first written at time when Germany was split into two nations with "Republic" in their names, but that they were written for a *West* rather than East German audience, points to a concern in the foreground of the minds of West Germany's founding fathers: ensuring that the second German democratic society would not meet the same fate as its predecessor.

I. Introduction

Translation is a culturally-bound process both for the translator and the person who reads a translation. As a result, although “there can never be any ideal translation” (Lambert 18), there are a multitude of translations which are situationally apt and timely. This occurs when a very specific process of understanding (*Verstehen*) is accomplished by the translator:

So on the one hand, the translator presents the ST [source text], including existing linguistic and non-linguistic bodies of knowledge, from his historical standpoint and his culture-specific conventions and traditions in an event of transmission. On the other hand, he reads it with particular intentions, attitudes, dispositions, normative conceptions (i.e. affective factors). Likewise, adopted into his interest-guided readings are an accepted preconception and the expectations of the TT [target text] recipient.¹ (Kupsch-Losereit 45 – 46)

As with any translator, my *intention* is to transmit literature and bodies of knowledge to new audiences while remaining true to the purpose and spirit of the original text. Doing such requires an *attitude* of openness to new possibilities, of flexibility in the face of difficulties. In my opinion, for this reason, only people with a *disposition* that hungers for knowledge and development, embracing different cultural ideals while maintaining some sense of objectivity, who have the capacity to be successful and effective translators. The *normative conceptions* at play in translation involve an understanding of culture as a living organism in constant flux, adapting to new perspectives and events, both influencing and being influenced by the people who experience it every day.

¹ “So stellt der Übersetzer den AT [Ausgangstext] zum einen unter Einbeziehung vorhandener sprachlicher wie nichtsprachlicher Wissensbestände von seinem historischen Standpunkt und seinen kulturspezifischen Konventionen und Traditionen aus in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen. Zum anderen liest er ihn mit bestimmten Intentionen, Einstellungen, Dispositionen, normativen Vorstellungen (d.s. affective Faktoren). In seine interessegeleitete Lektüre gehen ebenfalls angenommenes Vorverständnis und die Erwartungshaltungen des ZT [Zieltext]-Empfängers mit ein.”

II. A Note on the Translation Process

Walter Benjamin, although he was the mind behind of one of the most influential essays on translation of the twentieth century, wrote many things in “The Translator’s Task” with which I do not agree.² However, there is one sentiment he expresses in his essay that precisely echoes both my personal philosophy and my approach to translation: “All purposeful phenomena of life...are in the final analysis purposeful not for life, but for the expression of its essence, for the representation of its significance. Thus translation has as its ultimate purpose the expression of the most intimate relationships among languages” (154).

English and German, by virtue of belonging to the same language family, share many similarities. The differences between them, however, serve to provide a richer understanding of each other both in their own right and as the systems in which Benjamin’s “purposeful phenomena of life” are rooted.

There was no shortage of difficulty in translating these German academic essays which were first published in 1987. Setting aside the complexities of German grammar which are absent from the English language, as well as the convoluted syntactic structures which are common in specialized writing in German-speaking countries, both essays were filled with historically situated concepts and ideas and with German terms which are so heavily nuanced depending on their usage that translating them in a way that is both comprehensive and concise is not always possible.

² Chief among these is the idea that translations for “the most significant works” do not appear until long after those works’ original times of publication (Benjamin 153).

Perhaps the most prevalent example of this is the German word *Geist/geistig*. A native English speaker is most likely to jump to the conclusion that *Geist* means “ghost,” on account of the words’ relative homophony. The most common English translation of *Geist* (“spirit”), however, has no relation whatsoever to the realm of the supernatural; rather, it refers to something much more abstract, something rooted in the realm of everyday living and perception.³

Geist and *geistig* appear often in the first essay translated here, “The Political Culture of the Weimar Republic.” I consistently translated *geistig* as “intellectual(ly),” but wherever *Geist* appeared, one of three English words was used: “spirit” (the most common), “mind,” and “esprit.” Native English speakers tend to see more of a separation between “spirit” and “mind,” with the former being assumed to tend toward issues of theology and the sacred while the latter is generally understood as belonging to areas of secular knowledge, such as philosophy and natural science. The divergence of the German *Geist* into these separate English terms reveals an idea present in Germanic cultures that is absent in (American) English culture.

Although it is dependent on the reader (and the translator) of German to rely on the context of *Geist*’s appearance to determine which usage is most fitting, the fact that the German language allows for a single lexeme to stand for concepts that, in English, are constructed as two separate human faculties, may point to a belief among native speakers of German that a singular cognitive function is the source of all the words — and hence of all the rationalizations — used to describe the world and to impose order on one’s surroundings.⁴

³ “The term ‘Geist’ covers a range of English equivalents, including mind, intelligence, spirit, and understanding” (Phelan 2).

⁴ Sontheimer’s association of psyche — what we understand to be an ever-fluctuating composite of feelings and impulses — with irrationalism and of mind (orig.: *Geist*) with rationality further serves to solidify this argument. See pg. 44 of this work.

Another term from these essays which, though it posed no difficulty for me specifically, may be contested by readers who are familiar with the German language, is *Teilkulturen*, as found in Sontheimer's essay. In German vocabulary, *Teil-* is a prefix which can carry one of two meanings. The first, "partial," carries a connotation of incompleteness. For example, a *Teildruck* is a "partial print" rather than a full print; a *Teilverlust* is a "partial loss" rather than a complete loss, etc. The second meaning, "sub-," implies the existence of a hierarchy, a ranking, or some form of contingency or dependency. A *Teildisziplin* is a "subfield" or "subdiscipline," a *Teilkategorie* is a social "subclass," etc. Neither of these meanings seemed sufficient to me to convey the meaning behind Sontheimer's use of *Teilkulturen*.

Below is the original passage from Sontheimer where the term *Teilkulturen* appears:

Zur Rolle der uneinheitlichen und widersprüchlichen politischen Kultur im Rahmen des gesamten Weimarer Systems muß die intensive und systematische Erforschung von politischen Kulturen einzelner Elemente des Systems hinzukommen, z.B. der politischen Kultur der Jugendbewegung oder der NS-Massenbewegung. *Erst durch die Erforschung und nachfolgende Zusammensetzung dieser politischen Teilkulturen gewinnen wir einen Blick auf die Gesamtheit des Phänomens der politischen Kultur der Weimarer Republik.* (464, emphasis mine)

I translated this passage as follows:

To the role of the irregular and contradictory political culture in the context of the entire Weimar system must be added the intensive and systematic research of the political cultures of individual elements of the system, e.g. of the political culture of the Youth Movement or of the Nazi mass movement. *Only by the research and subsequent merging of these political component cultures do we get a glimpse of the sum of the phenomenon of the Weimar Republic's political culture.* (emphasis added)

By conforming to the standard definitions of the prefix *Teil-* which I outlined earlier, there arise two alternate translations of *Teilkulturen*: "partial cultures" and "subcultures." If I had used the term "partial cultures," the implication would have been that the many cultures which

comprised the Weimar period were not complete cultures, that they were lacking some crucial piece marking them as having their own life, their own purpose, their own practitioners. And, as evidenced by Sontheimer's explicit mention of the Nazi movement, the term "partial cultures," simply does not fit as an acceptable translation.

On the other hand, if I had used the word "subculture," which is admittedly far more understandable to an English audience, an entirely different problem would have presented itself. Calling, for example, the Nazi movement a political "subculture" would imply the preexistence of an overarching political culture in Germany from which the Nazi movement somehow was derived or to which it was in some way inferior or subordinate. However, this completely rejects the entire premise of Sontheimer's essay, which is that such a culture — political or otherwise — *did not exist*. Therefore, the term "subcultures" would not work.

In the end, what led me most firmly to use the phrase "component cultures" as the English equivalent of *Teilkulturen* was Sontheimer's reference to "elements." From a natural science perspective, elements by definition are the building blocks for forming other compounds, but they also have the capacity to stand on their own, especially as they grow heavier and more complex in their subatomic composition. The same holds true for the various cultures referenced by Sontheimer as contributing to the cultural map of the Weimar Republic. In a way, elements are like the "components" used to build a machine: Like a nut or a bolt, they are recognizable for what they are, and they can be either actively fulfilling their purpose or be lying idle. Either way, a nut remains a nut, and a bolt is still a bolt.

Yet another German concept which poses some complication — and which I only rendered twice into an English equivalent — is *Reich* (and *Reich-* compounds).⁵ In English, *Reich* is typically translated as “empire,” “kingdom,” or “realm.” Given this, the coexistence of the terms *Reich* and *Republik* (“republic”) during a time supposedly marked by democratic rule points to a confusing rhetoric which, in my opinion, further limns the political-ideological schism which existed at the time of the Weimar Republic.

After the end of World War I, Germany’s hopes of imperial power were dashed not only by financial burdens and demilitarization but also by the end of the monarchy, which to the German people had been the symbol of their nation’s strength and unity since 1871.⁶ On the other hand, the Republic — which wasn’t even the ideal that sparked the November Revolution in the first place⁷ — was a reminder both of the Kaiser’s abdication and of the failure of the labor movement’s political leaders to take advantage of their momentum and overwhelming majority to establish a nation which held unquestionable authority and legitimacy.⁸

The ideas of “empire,” “kingdom,” and “realm” — all of which connote the existence of a monarch, a ruler by birth or divine right rather than by popular election — conflicts with the conception of a government selected by the people. Even so, ignoring the uses of the words

⁵ *Reichsbahn* became “German State Railways,” and *Reichsbahngesetz* became “German State Railways Act.”

⁶ Perhaps it was for this reason — as well as to help provide a sense of continuity in the transition from monarchy to republic — that Germany’s official name remained *Deutsches Reich* (German Empire) and the term *Reich* was kept in public discourse even after the Republic’s founding.

⁷ “The Munich ‘Räterepublik’ was the final attempt to institutionalise a particular conception of government (the ‘Rätegedanke’ or ‘councils idea’) which had provided the initial impulse for the revolution, and its demise signified either the successful removal of the bolshevist threat or the dashing of hopes for a representative grass-roots democracy in Germany, depending on one’s point of view (Lamb 137 – 138, emphasis mine).”

⁸ “[T]he nationalism of 1918 was not identical with that of 1871 or 1890. Instead, it deliberately sought to forge a link with 1848 and 1849. Unlike the imperialist aims of the Wilhelminian era, the goal of the leaders of 1918 was defensive: to preserve the elusive national unity of the Reich” (Orlow 199). Because the SPD turned to antirepublicans for guidance in handling postwar issues after the Republic’s founding, it squandered important opportunities to implement the kind of government they had fought for (Vincent 449).

“Reichstag” (and compounds thereof), “Reichswehr” (and compounds thereof), and “Reichsmark,” Schwabe’s essay “The Path of the Republic from the Kapp Putsch of 1920 Until the Collapse of Müller’s Cabinet in 1930” employs both the word *Reich* and *Reich-* compounds a total of 83 times, almost half of which occur in the section “The State Crisis of the Year 1923,” wherein he summarizes the chancellorships of Wilhelm Cuno and Gustav Stresemann, both of which were marked by foreign occupation, hyperinflation, numerous uprisings, and failed putsches.

Reich was the word most commonly used by Schwabe to describe the relationship of the nation to the constituent states (*Länder*) and regions which were most in crisis, whereas *Republik* mostly seemed to evoke an ideal that nobody could agree upon and which was thus never fully realized. The *Reich* was the “realm” of action, of power, of decisiveness, of strength; but the *Republik* was internally weak, needed protection, and — much to the dismay of Germans of all political leanings — lacked an unwavering leader at its helm.⁹

Finally, the German term *Vernunftrepublikaner*, although it *can* be translated literally, does not have a true sense equivalent in the English language. Literally, it means “rational republican”; others have translated it as “republicans out of reason” (Krois 110), “‘rational’ republicans” (Peukert 226), “pragmatic republicans” (McElligott xiii), and “republicans from intellectual choice rather than passionate conviction” (Gay 23).

Both Schwabe and Sontheimer used *Vernunftrepublikaner* in their essays. However, I have chosen an excerpt from Sontheimer to demonstrate how I justified my translation:

⁹ “In the Weimar period itself, right and left alike were drawn to the idea of a strong leader” (Woods 73).

Neben ihnen fand sich eine Spezies von politisch aufgeschlossenen Intellektuellen, die man als *Vernunftrepublikaner* bezeichnet hat. [...] Diese Männer und Frauen hatten zwar ihren Frieden mit der Republik gemacht, weil sie eingesehen hatten, daß das Kaiserreich sich nicht mehr halten ließ, aber ihr Engagement für die Republik war eher lau und abwartend. (Sontheimer 460)

Here is how I translated the passage:

Alongside them were to be found a species of politically open-minded intellectuals who have been termed as *pragmatic republicans*. [...] These men and women had indeed made their peace with the Republic, because they understood that the empire was no longer sustainable, but their commitment to the Republic was rather tepid and cautious.

In this context, the term “rational republicans” — which was how I initially translated *Vernunftrepublikaner* — would certainly make sense. I realized later, however, that using the word “rational” would contradict what Sontheimer named as one of the symptoms of the Weimar period: irrationalism. Looking at how other Weimar scholars and translators of German had handled *Vernunftrepublikaner*, I decided that McElligott’s “pragmatic republicans” was more suitable; it reflects the tendency of the Germans holding this designation to accept republicanism out of practicality, as a necessary shift in government which had no bearing on (or root in) their beliefs.

It is not the purpose of this work to outline to the reader the linguistic-rhetorical strategies in the German language which were used to attack or defend republicanism during the Weimar era and which are invoked in Weimar research today. Nevertheless, this relatively brief introduction into the richness of German vocabulary should serve as a reminder that anybody — myself included — who seeks to translate German works must keep in mind not only the intent of the author, not only the circumstances of the audience’s culture, but also the realization that not even the greatest expense of effort will convey the fully nuanced meaning of an original text to its translation.

III. A Note on the Original Anthology

The essays translated here were first published in the 1987 anthology *Die Weimarer Republik, 1918 – 1933: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft*¹⁰ in the city of Bonn as part of a series called *Studies in History and Politics*.¹¹ I mention the city of publication for an important reason: In 1987, Germany was still split into East and West, at which time Bonn was the capital of West Germany. Furthermore, the very first words in the foreword to the anthology is an adage adopted from the title of a book written in the 1950s: “»Bonn is not Weimar«”¹² — an instantaneous recognition of what almost seems like a need to reaffirm the “natural relationship that the citizens of the Federal Republic have found to state and society”¹³ (Schultheiß et al. 9).

Remembering the political situation at the time of these essays’ publication reminds us of their unique perspective on Weimar which may be easily forgotten today: the perspective of a democratic nation haunted by its predecessor’s catastrophic failure. Ullrich says that “the collapse of Weimar had triggered a sort of trauma that continued to have an effect in the Federal Republic. The first German democracy extended into the present as an unresolved past and induced a »Weimar complex« that has accompanied the Federal Republic to this day”¹⁴ (17). At first, “Bonn is not Weimar” was a self-fulfilling mantra that West Germans from the 1950s would invoke to convince themselves that a democratic German state could still be established in spite of the disastrous first attempt. However, “the fear that, despite everything, Bonn could

¹⁰ *The Weimar Republic, 1918 – 1933: Politics, Economy, Society*

¹¹ *Studien zur Geschichte und Politik*

¹² »Bonn ist nicht Weimar«

¹³ “natürliches Verhältnis, das die Bürger der Bundesrepublik zu Staat und Gesellschaft gefunden haben”

¹⁴ “[D]er Untergang Weimars [hatte] eine Art Trauma ausgelöst, das in der Bundesrepublik fortwirkte. Als unbewältigte Vergangenheit ragte die erste deutsche Demokratie in die Gegenwart hinein und bewirkte einen »Weimar-Komplex«, der die Bundesrepublik bis heute begleitet hat.“

become Weimar, survived. The conviction that the history of the first German democracy had teachings in store and the connection to Weimar could be administrable to understanding the present became a fixed feature of the Federal Republic's political culture"¹⁵ (Ullrich 418). That fear is explicitly named — and soothed away — in *Die Weimarer Republik, 1918 – 1933: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft*.

The 1980s were a period of great political activism in West Germany, marked by, for example, protests against both the Cold War powers' arms race and the use of nuclear power. It was a time which "offered a simple worldview on ideas pertaining to who was the enemy that needed to be defeated; the world was an incredibly polarized place" (Hoffmann). Recognizing the binarism and militaristic enmity of the time as something reminiscent of a less than pleasant period earlier in Germany's history — and wanting to, in a sense, check on the Federal Republic's progress in the "span of a generation"¹⁶ (Schultheiß et al. 9) after the adage cited above — the organization that commissioned the series *Studies in History and Politics*¹⁷ wished to reassure German readers that, within the greater context of German history, the Federal Republic was far more stable than Weimar had ever been, and thus would not fall into the chaos and catastrophe that marked and ultimately ended the Weimar Republic. They pointed out that government institutions could prove but not purge the overwhelming lack of democratic consensus in the Weimar Republic; and that the Weimar period was rife with "reasons and

¹⁵ "[D]ie Angst [blieb] erhalten, dass Bonn trotz allem Weimar werden könnte. Dass die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie Lehren bereithielt und der Bezug auf Weimar zum Verständnis der Gegenwart hilfreich sein könnte, diese Überzeugung wurde zu einem festen Bestandteil der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik."

¹⁶ "Zeitspanne einer Generation"

¹⁷ Federal Center for Political Education (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*)

approaches enough to put »learning from history« within the scope of political education to good use”¹⁸ (Schultheiß et al. 10).

The volume’s editors expand on this theme of learning from history by denouncing previous assessments that the Weimar Republic was an incomplete experiment or that the Republic’s failure was the fault of any singular catalyst (Bracher et al. 11). By asserting that the old Republic’s collapse was the result of compounding crises — especially of the terms of peace following World War I, “of the collision of authoritarian-state societal norms with the Age of the Masses’ pushes toward modernization”¹⁹ (11), and of the Great Depression – the editors also realize that readers will automatically ask themselves:

What is freedom worth to us Germans in times of diminished prosperity? Is citizens’ commitment to the state dependent on the material standard? Do our parties live up to their obligation to the common good? Does parliamentarianism function to pump oxygen in the bloodstream of the societal balance of interests? (12)

The editors’ response is that the Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany is free of the structural weaknesses in Weimar’s constitution²⁰ that exacerbated the delicate political situations which arose in the Weimar period. This does not preclude German citizens, however, from the responsibility to be educated in civics and history²¹:

¹⁸ “Anlässe wie Ansätze genug, um das »Lernen aus der Geschichte« im Rahmen der politischen Bildung mit Nutzen zu betreiben”

¹⁹ “des Zusammenpralls obrigkeitsstaatlicher Gesellschaftsnormen mit den Modernisierungsschüben des Massen-Zeitalters”

²⁰ The four major flaws of the Weimar Republic’s constitution were 1) proportional representation for the parties in the Reichstag, 2) the multiple-party system which contributed to the difficulty in electing a Reich President with an absolute majority, 3) the Reich President having so much power that he was basically a quasi-emperor, and 4) the fact that civil servants held lifelong appointments, which allowed them to hinder any attempt at administrative reforms (Vincent 74 – 75).

²¹ Henning praises the editors’ description of the anthology’s dual purpose as thus being “a twofold heritage for our modern state” (103, orig.: *ein doppeltes Erbe für unseren heutigen Staat*).

That responsibility's particular dignity is to quarrel, without standards of meaning and with as little fear as possible, over the significance of our history and to openly configure it to the future as that realm of experience from which the freedom of the individual evolves and precisely is not given over to a closed ideology.²² (Bracher et al. 13)

The way the anthology is organized is intended to build an understanding of the Weimar Republic from the ground up. "Part I: Groundwork and State Structure of the Republic"²³ consults the knowledge of political and constitutional scholars, as well as a former justice on Germany's Federal Constitutional Court, to analyze the conditions in which the Weimar Republic was founded, to outline the creation and ratification of the Weimar constitution, and to describe how the national government was structured.

"Part II: Shaping Forces and Lines of Development in Politics, Economy, and Society"²⁴ contains essays that mostly deal with domestic socioeconomic conditions of the Republic.²⁵ The contributions here start with the political, then move on to depictions of socioeconomic groups and their role in the Republic, and ultimately conclude with two essays on Protestants and Catholics and their reactions to the new state.

"Part III: Preconditions and Goals of Foreign and Security Policy"²⁶ handles discussions of Germany's reactions to, among other things, the Treaty of Versailles, the reparations issue, and the role of the military under the new regime. "Few issues were as highly contested between 1918 and 1933" as World War I, its interpretation, and its aftereffects (Natter 15), and the

²² "Deren [der Verantwortung] besondere Würde ist, ohne Deutungsvorgaben und möglichst angstfrei über den Sinn unserer Geschichte zu streiten und sie damit offen zur Zukunft als jenen Erfahrungsraum zu gestalten, aus dem die Freiheit des Individuums entfaltet und gerade nicht einer geschlossenen Ideologie überantwortet wird."

²³ "Teil I: Grundlegung und Staatsaufbau der Republik"

²⁴ "Teil II: Gestaltungskräfte und Entwicklungslinien in Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft"

²⁵ It is in this section of the anthology where the second essay of this work, "The Path of the Republic from the Kapp Putsch of 1920 Until the Collapse of Müller's Cabinet in 1930" is found.

²⁶ "Teil III: Voraussetzungen und Ziele der Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik"

German Empire's censorship of war narratives in German newspapers during the war contributed to Germans' belief after the war was over that the nation had merely capitulated (Natter 40), that Germany had not in fact been defeated — an attitude which poisoned the citizens' reactions to the country's relationship with the Allied Powers throughout the life of the Republic.

In regards to its content, “Part IV: The Intellectual Situation of the Time — Trends and Profiles”²⁷ is something of an amalgam because it deals with ways of thinking that affected multiple spheres of Weimar society, from the public's discussions of war guilt to the legal system to even literature.²⁸ Germany before the 1930s is understood by general audiences to be a time of cultural growth and enrichment; the advent of film and radio revolutionized how information and news were disseminated, and literary modernism ushered in new techniques of storytelling and writing, and innumerable clubs and associations formed to materialize their collective goals for education.²⁹ Throughout all of this, however, the German people were stuck with incommensurable ideas of culture, of nation, and of government that were ultimately responsible for the parliamentary gridlock and ineffectiveness that caused the Weimar Republic's collapse.

“Part V: The Republic's Phase of Dissolution” details how the NSDAP was able to become the largest party in the Reichstag, how voter behavior adapted to the NSDAP after 1928, and how the destruction of parliamentarianism paved the way for dictatorship. Of particular importance to this theme was the rise in 1930 — after the collapse of Chancellor Hermann

²⁷ “Teil IV: Die geistige Situation der Zeit – Tendenzen und Profile”

²⁸ It is in this section where the first essay of this work, “The Political Culture of the Weimar Republic,” is found. Originally, I had intended the second essay of this work to be Hans-Helmuth Knütter's “The Weimar Republic in the Clutches of Right-Wing and Left-Wing Extremism” (orig.: *Die Weimarer Republik in der Klammer von Rechts- und Linksextremismus*). However, while doing background research on the author, I discovered that he was himself a right-wing extremist with a record of attacking the freedom of the press and accusing the German media of leftist bias. This, among other alarming characteristics, prompted me to change my choice of second essay.

²⁹ “The entire flowering of Weimar culture was possible only because the revolutionaries removed the Wilhelminian barriers to experimentation and innovation” (Orlow 201).

Müller's second cabinet — of presidential governments (*Präsidialregierungen*) which could be formed by the Reich President without a parliamentary majority (Hucko 160).³⁰

“Part VI: Yields of Research and History of Effects” reviews how research into the Weimar Republic has led to questions that were not considered before 1987 and how the task of “learning from history” (as discussed in the editors’ introduction to the volume) has its own problems, not just for the Federal Republic of Germany, but for anybody who is interested in history. One of the essays in this section summarizes the difficulty of the latter so well — especially when it comes to comparing the past to the present — that I think it bears repeating here: “Not the identity of the event is to be looked for, but rather the similarity of the constellation”³¹ (Schulze 618).

The fact that the essays in this anthology “were written by experts and selected in such a way that...a profound and balanced, yet also overall engaging assortment has emerged”³² (Henning 103) corresponds with the editors’ wishes that the volume “be a hinge”³³ (Bracher et al. 12) between previous general studies of the Weimar Republic and the new case studies that were abounding in Germany at the time of original publication. My hope is that my own work will serve the same purpose for speakers of English with little to no prior knowledge of the Weimar Republic.

³⁰ This power was granted to the Reich President by Article 48 of the Weimar constitution, an article also responsible for allowing the passage of emergency ordinances that ignored parliamentary process for the sake of expediting policy changes. The Communist Party of Germany referred to government by these means as the “establishment of Article 48 dictatorship” (Weimar Republic, p. 174, orig.: *Errichtung der Artikel-48-Diktatur*).

³¹ “Nicht die Identität des Ereignisses ist aufzusuchen, sondern die Ähnlichkeit der Konstellation.”

³² “von Spezialkennern verfaßt wurden und so ausgewählt worden sind, daß...eine fundierte und abgewogene, überall aber auch zugreifende Zusammenstellung entstanden ist”

³³ “ein Scharnier sein”

IV. Cultural and Political Overviews of the Weimar Republic

These essays held a specific appeal to me both as a translator and as a scholar of German. They have the unique ability to incite the curiosity of readers who are eager to know more about the beliefs which shaped the Weimar period and to look more closely at the political developments which existed in a symbiotic relationship with those beliefs. Perhaps the most relevant contribution of the essays translated here is that they provide a big-picture perspective of a complex era in German political history without oversimplifying the multiple factors involved or otherwise overvaluing or depreciating the significance of individual people, events, or trends.

Some might view Kurt Sontheimer's assertion at the beginning of "The Political Culture of the Weimar Republic" that his essay "can only be judged as a further effort to shine a light on the baselines and fundamental problems of an investigation into the political culture of the Weimar Republic"³⁴ (454) as a way to avoid providing a more detailed analysis of Weimar Germans' political beliefs and their attitudes towards the new republican government. However, once he begins to outline the psychosocial, political, and intellectual perspectives that were pervasive in Germany even before the Republic's founding³⁵, Sontheimer's statement seems not only accurate but justified.

After introducing his dual definition of "political culture,"³⁶ Sontheimer divides his essay into the five components contributing to the indefinability of *a* political culture of the Weimar

³⁴ "kann nur als ein weiterer Versuch gewertet werden, Grundlinien und -probleme einer Erforschung der politischen Kultur der Weimarer Republik aufzuzeigen"

³⁵ Vogt notes that "doctrinairism...had molded even the interpartisan discussions in the Empire" (136, orig.: *Doktrinarismus [hatte] bereits die zwischenparteilichen Diskussionen im Kaiserreich geprägt*).

³⁶ 1) the totality of attitudes, values, and mindsets that determines whether a political system is accepted by its populace, and 2) the way that political parties and social groups act and interact within a political system, especially with regard to that system's various institutions (Sontheimer 454 – 455)

Republic: the creation and adoption of a new national constitution without the consent of the people, the presence of polar-opposite political beliefs, the spectrum of intellectual perspectives that sought to justify those polarized beliefs, the broad market of cultural products that encouraged those beliefs, and the introduction of irrationalism into all areas of Weimar life.³⁷

Instead of a single political culture to characterize the Republic, Sontheimer postulates an amalgamation of “political component cultures”³⁸ (464) — such as those of the Youth and Labor Movements — as more representative of Weimar’s political-cultural waters.³⁹

One observation Sontheimer makes which I believe deserves further elaboration is the high concentration of conservatives in positions of power and/or influence (459), particularly in the justice and education systems. Antirepublicanism was rampant in Germany’s university system; “professors and students alike...spurned the democratic principles of the Republic” (Vincent 502).⁴⁰ Furthermore, the court system of the Weimar Republic had a large number of judges and justices who believed that a “conservative fatherland-ish mindset was more important there than faithfulness to the constitution”⁴¹ (Rasehorn 417). When individuals who shape both the future of legal interpretation and the minds of Germany’s most educated voters tolerate — if not encourage — perspectives which are hostile to the success of a political system, it is hard to

³⁷ Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba’s *The Civic Culture* (1963), considered the first major work in the field of political culture, was in fact an attempt to explain the collapse of the Weimar Republic (Ullrich 23).

³⁸ See pp. 6 – 8 of this work for more on “politischen Teilkulturen.”

³⁹ The term “Teilkulturen” also occurs in Föllmer et al.’s discussion of how the term “crisis” was used during the Weimar period; specifically, “crisis” as an “open decision situation” is associated with the creation of “politicized component cultures which opposed each other antagonistically” (38 – 39, orig: *offene Entscheidungssituation; politisierten Teilkulturen, die sich feindselig gegenüberstanden*).

⁴⁰ Interestingly enough, while the professors generally “retreated to nonpolitical simplicity and warmed only rarely to the NSDAP,” it was primarily the students at German universities who “increasingly identified with a *völkisch* ideology deemed more revolutionary than the nation-oriented philosophy of their elders,” especially once they realized that the country’s economic situation would not guarantee them work after graduation despite their advanced education (Vincent 503).

⁴¹ “Konservative vaterländische Gesinnung war da wichtiger als Verfassungstreue.”

imagine a future in which that system is given the opportunity to prove itself capable of winning popular support and thriving in the future.

It is also important, in my opinion, to emphasize the prevalence of irrationalism — and specifically, irrationalism as a conscious rejection of rationality and reason in favor of “wholeness, solidarity, and depth”⁴² (Sontheimer 463). This rejection is represented by Stanley as “in particular, a kind of anti-intellectualism,” “an attacking of the truth” which “creates a petri dish for conspiracy theories.” Perhaps the greatest conspiracy theory of the Weimar period, which began in 1916 and was perpetuated long after, is the stab-in-the-back myth (*Dolchstoßlegende*), which claimed that “civilian incompetence” on the home front — especially in the Reichstag — had led to the German Revolution and later to Germany’s capitulation (Vincent 98); there were even formal trials in the courts determined to establish guilt for these perceived crimes against the German state. This conspiracy theory “was a major obstacle to providing a legitimating ground for a democratic order during the Weimar Republic” (Natter 41).

Yet another such obstacle was the difficulty for Weimar’s political parties (see Figure 1) to form majority coalitions in the Reichstag — an occurrence which Schwabe outlines in detail in “The Path of the Republic from the Kapp Putsch of 1920 Until the Collapse of Müller’s Cabinet in 1930.”⁴³ Schwabe divides up this ten-year period based on common political themes — the government scramble immediately after the war, the state’s most critical year, the period of apparent stability, and the final parliamentary decline — that spanned various lengths of time.

⁴² “Ganzheit, Gemeinschaft und Tiefe”

⁴³ Specifically, Schwabe investigates “voter behavior, ... the stance of the parties..., and the influence of interest groups, the relationship between government and opposition, the legislative performance of parliament, and its attitude toward basic foreign policy problems” (95, orig.: *Verhalten der Wähler, ... die Haltung der Parteien..., und den Einfluß von Interessengruppen, das Verhältnis zwischen Regierung und Opposition, die gesetzgeberische Leistung der Volksvertretung und ihre Einstellung zu außenpolitischen Grundproblemen*).

Ranking and Defining Characteristics of Weimar Political Parties
(1=far left, 9=far right)

1. KPD: based in Marxism, measuring progress against the Russian Revolution
2. USPD: revolutionary, inspiring agitation through words to create change
3. SPD: revisionist, working within the parliamentary system to create change
4. DDP: leftist national-liberals concerned with theoretical issues more than reality
5. DVP: educated monarchists and rightist national-liberals against antisemitism
6. Center: federalist in word but centrist in action
7. BVP: Bavarian offshoot of the Center dedicated to Bismarckian federalism
8. DNVP: antiparliamentarian believers in the *Dolchstoßlegende*
9. NSDAP: staunchly nationalist, anti-Marxist, and anti-Semitic

Figure 1. The information summarized in this table came from Vogt, especially from pp. 135 – 136, 141 – 145. Understanding the Republic's political parties is essential to understanding the fluctuation in the Reichstag's coalition governments, chancellors, and cabinets.

The years 1920 – 1922 deal with the confusion of establishing the Republic at a point when all the participants in World War I were struggling to define more concrete military and financial terms for Germany's surrender. In addition, the division (and eventual reunification in 1921) of the Social Democrats consistently complicated the building of stable coalition governments. The Social Democrats' distrust of the DVP also contributed to that difficulty; "as a result of large divergences between SPD and DVP"⁴⁴ (Raithel 253), the Weimar Republic found itself in numerous economic and governmental crises, including the inflation of 1922 – 1924.

The year 1923 is a section all to itself because of the chaos it witnessed. French and Belgian troops occupied large areas of western Germany to make sure that the Weimar Republic would honor its reparation payments; both the right and the left staged attempted coups throughout the country, to which the Reich reacted with military force; and hyperinflation crippled the German economy. This uncertainty is purported to have contributed to the strengthening of

⁴⁴ "infolge der großen Divergenzen zwischen SPD und DVP"

extremist right-wing parties: “Undeniably, the crisis year 1923 brought a strong influx to the parties of the radical right; faith in a moderate politics waned”⁴⁵ (Vogt 146).

Even so, despite occasional changes in the chancellor and cabinet, the Republic was supposedly stable — though perhaps only from a parliamentary standpoint⁴⁶ — from 1924 to 1928, with cabinets containing politicians mostly from the bourgeois parties. The solutions to hyperinflation which were partially initiated in 1923 first started to yield positive results during this time. Paul von Hindenburg, a prevailing figure of the German military during World War I, was elected Reich President upon the death of his predecessor Friedrich Ebert. And the enactment of the Dawes Plan, the first plan for reparation that based Germany’s payments on the strength of its economy, allowed the nation to recover from the hyperinflation that had plagued it before.

Finally, 1928 – 1930 saw the final years of government by parliamentary majority. The collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929 notwithstanding, Germany was already experiencing an economic recession. The Reichstag could only form a majority government with the participation of all the political parties, a phenomenon which was impossible due to strained interparty relations, such as between the SPD and the KPD, or between the SPD and the bourgeois parties. The Dawes Plan was replaced with the Young Plan after a controversial fight over ratification of the latter — a fight which was led by the DNVP and the NSDAP, who wanted more than anything to end German reparations and to punish the politicians who had supported fulfilling those obligations.

⁴⁵ “Unbestreitbar hat das Krisenjahr 1923 den Parteien der radikalen Rechte einen starken Zulauf gebracht; das Vertrauen in eine gemäßigte Politik schwand.”

⁴⁶ “The German ‘stability’ of 1924 – 1929, dubbed *die goldenen zwanziger Jahre* (the Golden Twenties), was an illusion. These years were marked by high unemployment, a high rate of bankruptcy, and banks making long-term investments with short-term money” (Vincent 87).

By Schwabe's own admission, his primary concern in studying this period of Weimar history is to discover if the fledgling Republic was doomed from its inception. His conclusion is that "a long-term stable economic situation and steady foreign-policy advances would have been able to lead to a stabilization of parliamentarianism in Germany in the long run"⁴⁷ (133); however, due to hyperinflation, recession, the Great Depression, foreign occupation, and incommensurable views on reparation and Germany's role as a world power, there could be no consensus among the leaders of the Weimar Republic.

Throughout the essay, Schwabe does an excellent job of analyzing the party relationships that most influenced the Weimar Republic's various policy directions; not only that, but he also looked into personal correspondences and memoirs of such political figures as Hindenburg and Stresemann in order to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on the events that transpired during their political careers. He delineates the political parties' guiding principles by example rather than direct expression — for example, the extreme nationalist views of the DNVP and NSDAP through their support of a law against both the Young Plan and the supporters of reparation fulfillment, or the SPD's commitment to German laborers by demanding that the state be partially responsible for financial contributions to unemployment insurance.

One important explanation for the general instability of the Reichstag from 1920 to 1930 is that in following an imperial regime where the parliament was essentially a glorified debate society (Vincent 386), the new representatives in the German legislature were to some extent unsure of what their responsibilities as lawmakers actually were. It has been posited that the bourgeois middle in particular, "partially from the new expectations of unity, partially from

⁴⁷ "eine langfristig stabile Wirtschaftslage und stetige außenpolitische Fortschritte hätten auf lange Sicht zu einer Stabilisierung des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland führen können"

Wilhelminian constitutionalism”⁴⁸, “remained...underdeveloped”⁴⁹ in their parliamentary functions (Föllmer et al. 34). Furthermore, “approaches to a competitive parliamentary practice were...stifled, and radical political powers could profit from this”⁵⁰ (Raithel 254), especially when the bourgeois middle believed that their “political consciousness of responsibility in crisis situations required functional withdrawal by the Reichstag”⁵¹ (258).

There were also clauses in the Weimar constitution which ultimately threatened the performance of the legislature. “The fathers of the Constitution wanted Parliament to be the dominant institution of the political system,” but the work of the Reichstag — which represented the people, much like America’s House of Representatives — could easily be interrupted by the Reichsrat, which represented the individual states in the Republic (Hucko 53); and Article 48 of the constitution gave the Reich President practically “dictatorial powers” (56) to be used any time that a “threat to public order and security was assumed to exist” (56), as well as authorized him to appoint the Reich Chancellor and approve the members of the cabinet (57).

Of equal importance to discussion of the Reichstag’s dysfunction is the fluctuation of German voters between the various political parties. Schwabe notes to what extent the major political parties lost or gained seats in the Reichstag from election to election.⁵² This fluctuation was encouraged by the way Reichstag elections were actually conducted: “The voter elected lists of candidates whose selection he could not influence,” a process which “promote[d] a multi-

⁴⁸ “teils aus den neuen Einheitserwartungen, teils aus dem wilhelminischen Konstitutionalismus”

⁴⁹ “blieben...unterentwickelt”

⁵⁰ “Ansätze zu einer kompetitiven parlamentarischen Praxis wurden...erstickt, und die radikalen politischen Kräfte konnten hiervon profitieren”

⁵¹ “erforderte das politische Verantwortungsbewusstsein in Krisenlagen den funktionalen Rückzug des Reichstags”

⁵² Vincent describes, for example, how “many priests, intellectuals and Catholic landowners, repelled by democracy and the Party’s inclination to work with socialists, deserted the Center in favor of the DNVP” (63).

party system with splinter groups and a constant pressure to form coalition governments” (Hucko 53).

V. Conclusion

Through the lenses of language and culture, this translation project may serve as a first glimpse into the complexities of the Weimar Republic, or it may provide deeper insight to scholars already familiar with the figures and events of this short yet crucial period 20th-century history. In any case, the essays translated here, as well as the circumstances of their original publication, provide a window into aspects of German language and culture which influenced the Weimar Republic and former West Germany, and even persist into the present day — aspects which may be easily glossed over during the transfer of such information into the English language.

Both political terms of great significance to discussions of past and present Germany and heavily nuanced, everyday German terms may under some circumstances be translated only tenuously, even problematically. Diving into them has hopefully helped to reduce the ambiguities and gray areas in studies of the Weimar Republic.

The anxieties of a democratic republic with an unsettling predecessor informed the motives of the editors who compiled the anthology where these essays were originally published; the exact nature of these anxieties cannot easily be understood by nations which have not fully embraced fascism. And the authors translated here each provide comprehensive insights into the political and cultural developments of the Weimar Republic, as well as the leading leaders and intellectuals who influenced them.

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Chapter 2

The Political Culture of the Weimar Republic

This chapter is a translation of an essay by a German political scientist:

Sontheimer, Kurt. “Die politische Kultur der Weimarer Republik.” *Die Weimarer Republik: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft*, edited by Karl Dietrich Bracher, Manfred Funke and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen. Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 1987, pp. 454 – 464.

My primary contributions to this paper include (i) translation from German into English and (ii) alteration of the citation style in the author’s original footnotes to match a citation style more familiar to American readers.

Abstract

Any attempt to define *a* political culture of the Weimar Republic *as a whole* hits substantial roadblocks in light of both Weimar’s sheer sociopolitical diversity and Germans’ mixed feelings regarding the replacement of a monarchy with a republican system of government. Furthermore, when a people who were previously accustomed to the politics of the German Empire not being their responsibility were suddenly thrust into a position to control the direction of the new Republic, their lack of experience in the practical application (and compromise) of their political ideas birthed a sort of irrationalism that caused the German people to abandon the values of the Enlightenment.

The artistic and literary creations from the Weimar era which have entered the canon of German studies tend to reinforce an image of early 20th-century Germany filled with jazz and glamor — an image which resonates especially well with Americans. Those creations, however, come from individuals who were essentially outsiders to the reality of the Weimar Republic and do not reflect all of the social and political realities of everyday life in Germany at that time.

The triumphal procession which the concept of political culture is making through the modern social sciences, a concept first emerging almost twenty years ago, presents contemporary political science with the interesting task of satisfying the current demand for information about the political culture of a historical or present-day political system. In fact, the question of the political culture of the Weimar Republic thus far has been attempted to be answered only in a few scholarly endeavors. Even the following essay can only be judged as a further effort to shine a light on the baselines and fundamental problems of an investigation into the political culture of the Weimar Republic.

At the same time that an investigation of the Weimar Republic from the perspective of its political culture is an especially attractive and productive task, the Weimar period is, however, precisely characterized by how both the political and the cultural at that time underwent a particularly intense and fateful imprinting process. But the relative meaning of politics and of culture with regard to the history of the Weimar Republic still does not make a meaningful political culture. Nevertheless, precisely the investigation of Weimar's political culture is of special interest because it obviously possesses a key function for the dramatic development and the ultimate collapse of this first German democratic republic.

By political culture one commonly understands the relationship of a population to the political system in which it lives, whereby cognitive, value-based, and emotional mindsets are differentiated and appraised for their effect on the political life in this republic. Political culture in this sense thus makes decisions concerning the *acceptability* of a political order both by the rulers and especially by the ruled. A democratic political culture is to be found wherever the

behaviors required by democratic institutions and positive attitudes and identifications on the part of the people are yielded relatively effortlessly and with a certain efficiency.

The second area one can link to political culture concerns the political behaviors and manners within the framework of political institutions, namely between the various parties and social groups active in politics as well as within these groups themselves, of which some, like the workers' movement, are in a position to cultivate a specific political culture. In a broader sense, political culture thus means political life in its diverse forms of expression and communication, including the prevailing values that mold and influence political behavior.

In regard to the first issue, namely political culture as a problem of acceptance of the new democratic order of Weimar by German society, the answer is comparatively simpler than for the second area, which involves a variety of forms of political articulation and behavior.

Historical research about the Weimar Republic has come to the conclusion relatively quickly that the Weimar Republic wasn't a true fresh start in German history, although a few political groups and even some political intellectuals nurtured this belief. The defeat of the empire in World War I did not lead to a qualitative renewal in the intellectual and political sense. Therefore, no republic as a constitutional order and a system-sustaining political option in the shape of a democratic political culture could develop. The political culture of the Weimar Republic essentially lacked that democratic readiness for the cooperation and acknowledgement of the liberal-democratic system that would have been necessary for support of the order on society's part. A truly democratic political culture could not develop under the conditions of the Weimar period, with its crisis phenomena and its strong social and ideological ties to the pre-democratic era of the Imperial Age. With the parties of the Weimar Coalition, who also voted in

the Weimar Constitution by a majority, primarily a numerical political majority was guaranteed for the democratic system, but this majority ruptured already in the year 1920 and could not be restituted from then on anymore. This meant that — at least in the party political spectrum — a majority political culture in support of the democratic order of Weimar could no longer be found and also no longer mobilized.

In the political culture of the Weimar Republic, there was therefore no majority of the population in favor of defending the democratic system of government as it had evolved under this constitution. In fact, in the context of the devastation of the Great Depression, the aversion to the republic and its democratic order, which contemptuously became known as “the system,” went so far that the defenders of the democratic republic found themselves in a hopeless minority against the opponents of this republic charging from the left as well as from the right.

It’s certainly not surprising that the democratic constitution and political order of the Weimar Republic could not be accepted by a large number of Germans. In part, that was associated with the traditions of the past; on the other hand, the order of the Weimar Republic was by no means so efficient that one could put his trust in the democratic state. In addition, from the beginning there were surging, prodigious strains from the lost war and the ideology of the stab-in-the-back myth. So neither could there be talk of a somewhat unified and democratic political culture of this Weimar Republic, nor were the democratic elements within it strong enough to adequately support the existing system of institutions in its difficult quarrels and struggles for self-assertion.

Even if the governments of the Weimar Republic already were relatively weak and short-lived, even if furthermore the avowed enemies of Weimar democracy were able to do their work

relatively unimpeded, still the political culture of the Weimar Republic offered too few opportunities to offset these deficits and burdens and to handle them accordingly. In simpler terms: There was no relying on the democratic political culture of the Weimar Republic. The difficult functioning of the institutions had a negative effect for the democratic political culture; conversely, the political culture of the population was not conditioned in such a way that it could have made up for the weakness and extensive discord of the democratic state's institutions. On the contrary, increasingly volatile inclinations toward the vanquishing of the democratic order grew out of the traditional remnants of the political culture of the authoritarian state and out of the new experiences of democratic and demagogical mass politics precisely in the framework of the Weimar political culture. The weakness of the political culture is therefore an explanation for the weakness of the Weimar state and its ultimate downfall. For the political culture of the Weimar era, different forces and powers proved themselves to be more crucial than the liberal and the democratic.

If, in the literature about Weimar, one has previously been able to encounter over and over again the proposition that the Weimar Republic was a democracy without democrats, then one can phrase the same issue somewhat more precisely in reference to the political culture: The democratic culture of the Weimar Republic was not strong or tenable enough to be able to stabilize the republic and save it from its dissolution into a national-socialist Führer state.

As a result, one has to declare that the political culture of the Weimar Republic was intrinsically divisive and contradictory, that the democratic element which could have propped up and supported the institutions wasn't strong enough to guarantee the republic assistance in

maintaining its existence, and that finally the antiliberal and antidemocratic elements in the political culture of the Weimar Republic achieved a dominating position with the result that these elements of the political culture strongly facilitated the rise of Hitler and his national socialist mass movement.

If one sees the core problem of the political culture of the Weimar period essentially in the critical-skeptical attitudes of the citizens, as well as of the political and social organizations, towards the political system of the Weimar Constitution, then the Weimar Republic may be represented in detail as follows:

I. A Constitution Without Consent

It was a singularity of the Weimar Republic's political life that the democratic constitution was looked at by the majority of political powers as a deficient, even corrupt product of compromise which — particularly toward the end — even those parties that had launched it at the time, like the Social Democrats and the Center, only grudgingly defended and supported. Only at the beginning, when it still didn't have to prove itself, was the new political order of Weimar democracy carried by a sufficient majority consensus of the people and of the political powers articulating the people's political will. As it later developed, it scarcely conformed to the concept of any party. For the Socialists, to say nothing of the Communists, the republic was too bourgeois and at most a bad imitation of their long-cherished visions of a new democratic and socialist society. For the conservatives, viz. for the more liberal ranks among the German People's Party as well as the reactionary ranks among the German Nationals, the democratic republic was a weak, un-German state, a deplorable deterioration of the great Bismarckian imperial splendor and power

politics. For the few liberals and the constitutionally somewhat fickle Center, the legal constitution was hardly an irritant, but they operated in isolation and were incapable of mobilizing identification with the new order en masse.

For the National Socialists first strongly emerging in the late 1920s, who surpassed the reactionary conservatives through an explosive combination of a perfect command of the masses and political irrationalism, the “November Republic” was the badge of German shame par excellence. From the main ideological movements of the time, socialism and nationalism, under the exploitation of institutional weaknesses and the defenseless liberality of the Weimar regime, bolstered by a worldwide catastrophe of the capitalist system, Hitler and his followers distilled a turbid but foamy brew of massive-impact slogans against the Republic, a brew that — combined with a new political culture of the Führer principle and of the manipulation of the masses — yielded great appeal and facilitated the seizure of power.

With political parties that hardly liked this state and for this reason only tepidly defended it, and with oppositional radical forces that fought it not only verbally but also with the aid of violent methods, that at times made it appear that civil war was a real threat, a functional state was truly undoable. Already the short life span of the governments, which was attributable to the poor cohesion of the transient political coalitions and to the fluctuation of voter opinions, was scarcely suited to rouse the people’s confidence in the efficiency and the political capability of a parliamentary system of government. Politics seemed to have degenerated into an absurd game between powers that were at odds with each other, a game that ultimately benefited the political actors themselves alone, but not the state and its citizens. So a growing doubt in the viability and legitimacy of Weimar democracy took hold in a major portion of public opinion which could

only be defended with difficulty against the growing strength of its adversaries. A false perception of a democracy-based political freedom of activity of all groups, even those who wanted to strangle this freedom, paralyzed this system's defense-readiness further in the face of its increasingly acute crisis and threat. The crisis led to ruin.

II. A Political Culture of Antagonisms

The broad fan of the Weimar Republic's intellectual-political life contained everything that the nineteenth century had already unleashed in terms of political forces: revolutionaries and reactionaries; old liberals opposed to democracy and progressive neoliberals; Catholics primarily interested in clerical cultural policy and Protestants obsessed by *völkisch* ideas; moderate Social Democrats and conservatives not completely loath to reform; defenders of the most unsocial capitalism with unbridled pursuit of profit and exploitation and more frugal advocates of a social capitalism who wanted to free it from its excesses and inequities through interventions on the part of the state; followers of the Führer principle and people who trusted only in the automatism of the institutions; militarists and pacifists, etc. For everything that could be encountered by way of political articulation and ideological orientation, the Weimar Republic had samples at hand.

Owing to the weakness of the revolutionary beginning, and on the basis of the reorganization that wasn't handled very well at the end of the lost war, all political currents and ideologies from the far left to the far right could jostle beside and against each other so that a consensus sustaining the political new order could not take shape. What can at times be productive and fruitful in the realm of purely ideological and intellectual debate, namely polarization, polemics, provocation, proves itself to be dangerous, even deadly, in the debate of real political powers.

The political crisis of the Weimar Republic was a crisis of political authority caused by a lack of consensus and democratic political culture. The democratic powers, anti-authoritarian in their intent, had insufficient leeway and time to achieve authority and legitimacy through their own accomplishments; the enemies of the Weimar Republic, above all those on the right, did everything to derogate the abhorrent system and to not allow it to put down roots. In many ways they were supported in this by the bureaucracy and judiciary, with their persevering authoritarian spirit, who only reservedly served the Republic's potentates and acted on an undemocratic national ethos that promoted the undermining of the democratic state idea.

III. The Intellectuals in the Weimar Republic

The political literature of the Weimar era was a reflection of this contradictory and irregular political culture. Even the elites among the intellectuals lacked any orientation toward shared core values and basic beliefs.

At the beginning of the Republic, there was a small group of engaged leftist intellectuals — for which Heinrich Mann may stand as an example — who saw in the proclamation of the Republic the abundance of the age, so to speak, and thus reacted enthusiastically. No wonder that this enthusiasm was only short-lived and gave way to resigned disillusionment as the Republic proved itself to be not so new as they had hoped it would be; as much of what they had deemed necessary for the construction of a democratic life was not accomplished. So most of them became disappointed critics of the system, which they measured against their lofty, democratic but therefore also utopian ideals, without being able to find a truly positive attitude to that which actually existed. The most critical and dismissive among them, like Kurt Tucholsky, became the

greatest satirizers of the Republic — amusing to read, witty, and funny but unable or unwilling to devise a constructive policy that could have fended off the calamity they saw approaching Germany.

Alongside them stood — also weak in numbers themselves — the moderates and liberals for whom the Republic was the right thing in and of itself; in their opinion the Republic didn't function properly only because all too many people didn't observe the rules of play without which there simply couldn't be an orderly freedom. They saw in Hitler, when he appeared, a charlatan and rabble-rouser who wouldn't get far if he were one day to honor his great dictums in the reality of the political. They watched in silent disgust the violent political goings-on in the streets that made the Republic so unstable and menacing in the final years, but the best they knew to say at the end was merely that the German people simply were not yet mature enough for the democratic order that came with the Weimar Constitution.

These overly liberal, rational, level-headed individuals sat chiefly in the editorial offices of the major bourgeois newspapers, at the *Vossische*, at the *Berliner Tageblatt*, or at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Theodor Heuss is perhaps their most well-known representative. What they lacked, that for which they had no capacity and against which they above all had no prescription, was the power of the irrational, the glorification of myth and violence which was spreading rampantly in the intellectual and political life of the Republic. They were enlightened citizens, but the voice of their rationality sounded weak and helpless. Militancy, even for the liberal democracy, did not fit in their worldview.

Alongside them were to be found a species of politically open-minded intellectuals who have been termed as *pragmatic republicans*. The historian Friedrich Meinecke is the most well-

known advocate of this relatively large group of the German educated classes. These men and women had indeed made their peace with the Republic, because they understood that the empire was no longer sustainable, but their commitment to the Republic was rather tepid and cautious. Peter Gay described this type aptly in his book on the Weimar Republic: “In the Weimar period there were thousands — professors, industrialists, politicians — who hated the Nazis, to be sure, but didn’t love the Republic. Highly educated, intelligent, and hardly inclined to barter the values of the empire for the obscure blessings of democracy, many of these men were crippled by inner conflict ... They learned to live with the Republic and to see its coming as a historical necessity. They even respected some of the Republic’s leaders, but they never learned to love the Republic and to believe in its future.”¹

These pragmatic republicans were mostly conservative liberals, far too caught up in their national-bourgeois background to find the way to social democracy, as was the case with Thomas Mann, the writer illustrative of this period. Thomas Mann, who in the fall of 1930 suggested to the German educated classes in his famous “Appeal to Reason” that social democracy was the party to support, was, as a previous defender of the old regime, a paragon of intellectual support of the Republic, which was slaving away in difficult circumstances. But even Thomas Mann’s decisive and subtle Weimar republicanism did not resonate well.

Finally, in the educated German middle class, there was a fairly large group of people who as of 1930 either were unwilling or, due to lack of insight, were unable to make their peace with the existing Republic. They were more or less young and radical conservatives. Among them were German professors, large portions of the academic youth, the majority of Protestant

¹ Gay, Peter. *Die Republik der Außenseiter. Geist und Kultur in der Weimarer Zeit 1918 – 1933*. Frankfurt 1970, p. 44.

ministers, numerous secondary-school teachers. The German universities — in some places more than in others — were dominated by a mostly German nationalist-oriented establishment with a student body becoming noticeably more national-socialist. The established conservatives were reluctant to tolerate political dissenters, even from the class of pragmatic republicans, and distanced themselves intellectually from the political culture of Wilhelminism only insofar as it seemed unavoidable in the new reality.

Rather than latching onto a sense of reality and rational sobriety, many bourgeois intellectuals — even at the universities — enthused about the powers of the occult, the mythical, the irrational. Profundity was more important to them than ingenuity, psyche more than mind and intellect. They were the pillars of a vogue irrationalism which desired a *conservative revolution* and provided an intellectual background for the political irrationalism on which national socialism thrived.

Thomas Mann, who had a keen instinct for the intellectual trends of this time, described it in the aforementioned “Appeal” from 1930 in these words: “With the economic downturn of the middle class, coalesced a sentiment that preceded it as intellectual prophecy and contemporary criticism: the sentiment of a change in the times which heralded the end of the bourgeois epoch dating from the French Revolution, and of its world of ideas. A new psychic condition of humanity that wanted nothing more to do with the bourgeois and their principles: freedom, justice, education, optimism, belief in progress, was proclaimed, and expressed itself artistically in the expressionistic cry of the soul; philosophically as the rejection of rationalism, of the simultaneously mechanistic and ideological worldviews of decades past; as an irrational counterstroke that put the concept of life at the center of thought, that chose as their leader the only life-giving

forces of the unconscious, the dynamic, the darkly creative, that frowned upon the mind, under which was generally understood ‘the intellectual,’ as murderous and instead celebrated the darkness of the psyche, the maternal-chthonic, the sacred fecund underworld as the truth of life.”²

IV. A Culture of Contradictions

The diversity, contrariness of the articulations of intellectual and cultural life was in no way inferior to the variety and polarity of the political clusterings, quite the contrary. Even in the intellectual-artistic field, there was everything that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had developed in regard to intellectual and creative possibilities, herded together in a short period of time on the ground of an unstable coexistence. Characteristic of the novelty of the Weimar cultural situation was that the middle class’ predominant Wilhelminian culture had to relinquish its claim to leadership without the new forces of liberalism, enlightenment, and rationalism managing to become dominant themselves. As a result, a unified intellectual and political culture could not develop. So there was a mythical philosophizing alongside positivist rationalism, Marxism alongside organicism, legal positivism alongside politically oriented jurisprudence, etc. On top of that, thanks to the mythical-irrational escape routes that intellectual life was looking for, the pessimistic, anti-civilization tendencies in the Weimar Republic of all places grew especially strong. Its political system was denounced as mechanistic and rigid, while people dreamed of any kind of *völkisch* wholeness and blood-rich organic solution which had abundantly little in common with the social and economic reality of the modern industrial society.

² Mann, Thomas. “Deutsche Ansprache. Ein Appell an die Vernunft, 1930.” *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. XI: Reden und Aufsätze*. Frankfurt 1960, pp. 870 – 890.

No doubt the fullness, wealth, and creative breadth of the Weimar years' intellectual life was the discharge of the diversity of opinions, movements, orientations, and trends. No doubt the collapse of the Wilhelminian-middle class-feudal culture created that temporarily so productive situation of crisis and upheaval which is the only thing that can explain the creative diversity and wealth of the intellectual life of this period. Indeed, it is established that the most innovations in literature and art already arose before the beginning of the Weimar Republic, but only the war-time and the Republic could help provide them further development, thanks to the latitude that the Republic gave all intellectual endeavors. The versatility and diversity of intellectual and cultural life created an atmosphere of enhanced sensibility; on the other hand, the impression of the untamed, the seething, and the relative that was elicited by this very diversity fostered the perception and foreboding of a possible ending.

So the vitality, the wealth, and the above-average level of the Weimar Republic's cultural life are explained chiefly by the tension arising out of incompatible, temporary, but at the same time productive contradictions. The reason politics necessarily had to fail was that for the governing of a nation, one needs consent, the consensus of its important political and social groups; for a time, the culture profited from the lack of such consent, for it could afford to be elitist and controversial and is also able to live and work wherever it finds only meager or even no general consensus at all.

V. Irrationalism as Symptom of the Weimar Epoch

And yet the notion of a Weimar culture that is rich in and therefore thriving on productive contradictions conveys a somewhat one-sided, fallacious image. Certainly, there was the diver-

sity, the confrontation, the tension of contrariness, but at the bottom of Weimar culture, that current which linked culture with politics, and which ultimately led to culture's very destruction, broadened more and more.

Remarkably enough, Weimar culture is rarely cheerful and almost never lively. Where it claimed to be more than the glue and maintenance for a civilization — and that also goes for its most important products — there it is rather stolid, militantly obstinate, intolerant. It did not utilize the tension of the contradictions which constitutes its productivity for limitless creativity; the relativism of which contemporaries considered themselves to be witnesses could not last forever. For many, the desire for a new worldview of wholeness and of wholesome living grew ever stronger. It mixed with the political desire for a new order, for the hero and leader who would lead the people as their savior out of their adversity, out of the wrong track of un-German Western democracy.

So just as in the political the most dangerous opponents of the Republic stood on the right, so too was the conservative movement of irrationalism, despite all evidence to the contrary that we take from the established cultural history of Weimar, the intellectually determining force of the Republic which prepared and accelerated its downfall. Did not Hofmannsthal himself predict in 1927 the advent of a conservative revolution of a scope which European history had never known before? Did he not also espouse the seductive vision of an intellectual unity which was supposed to once again overcome all “divisions of life through intellect?”

The truly powerful zeitgeist declared itself in such expectations. The idea and practice of reason were the ones who suffered from this forceful intellectual movement which overran the Weimar Republic more and more and eventually caused the end of both its messy politics and its

richly complex culture. The hatred and disdain of the many people who were thirsting for wholeness, solidarity, and depth were directed at the Republic and at its political daughter, liberalism. The cause of this diffuse desire for wholeness and spirit — in which the most powerful movement of Weimar intellectual life and the political demand for a new order beyond democracy and tolerance by an insecure middle class both found a common home that drowned out all reason — was a diffuse fear of modernity. It was at the root of the Youth Movement, it was behind the Romantically inspired demonization of big cities, it determined the superficially driven struggle against materialism and capitalism. In this situation there was absolutely no shortage of voices exhorting rationality — Thomas Mann was one of the most mellifluous — but in the end they remained powerless. And so that which makes the intellectual, literary, and artistic life of the Weimar Republic so interesting to us descendants, which we link to the *esprit* of the 1920s, and which has still survived, or at least should have survived, to us of the modern age in our cultural appropriation of that time, became a creation of outsiders. As paradoxical as it sounds, Weimar culture is not really that which is typical of Weimar; it was, as Peter Gay phrased it, a “dance on the volcano’s edge.” A short dance by the by, but its artistic figures still beguile and fascinate today.

What remains to us of Weimar is the legacy of these outsiders. True, only a fragment of Weimar’s fragile world appears within it, but this fragment is richer and more lasting than the whole of the Weimar epoch.

The high esteem which the Weimar Republic’s culture enjoys to this day is contrasted with the negative role of the political culture in this brief period. Ultimately, learning from Weimar, as even the constitutional fathers of the Basic Law deemed it necessary to do, means, if

nothing else, making sure that the political culture of democracy must be strong and potent in order to mold the life of politics in the democratic spirit and to keep it on the right track.

To research the Weimar Republic from the perspective of political culture is a rewarding task which is still far from sufficiently handled. Even this essay is only capable of addressing the problem, not of scientifically answering it satisfactorily. To the role of the irregular and contradictory political culture in the context of the entire Weimar system must be added the intensive and systematic research of the political cultures of individual elements of the system, e.g. of the political culture of the Youth Movement or of the Nazi mass movement. Only by the research and subsequent merging of these political component cultures do we get a glimpse of the sum of the phenomenon of the Weimar Republic's political culture.

Chapter 3

The Path of the Republic from the Kapp Putsch of 1920 Until the Collapse of Müller's Cabinet in 1930

This chapter is a translation of an essay by a German historian:

Schwabe, Klaus. “Der Weg der Republik vom Kapp-Putsch 1920 bis zum Scheitern des Kabinetts Müller 1930.” *Die Weimarer Republik: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft*, edited by Karl Dietrich Bracher, Manfred Funke and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen. Düsseldorf, Droste Verlag, 1987, pp. 95 – 133.

My primary contributions to this paper include (i) translation from German into English and (ii) alteration of the citation style in the author’s original footnotes to match a citation style more familiar to American readers.

Abstract

One question commonly asked among those who research the Weimar Republic as a political system is whether it was doomed to fail from the start. The answer presented here is that this is not necessarily the case, but that only a stable economic situation, a willingness of the Weimar political parties to compromise, and voters’ sustained faith in parliamentary democracy would have been crucial to the Republic’s survival in the long term.

From 1920 to 1930 there were many obstacles to creating true stability in Germany: strained foreign relations following World War I, a military *and* a general public which were not consistently loyal to republican and democratic values, propaganda from extreme political groups averring the corruption of the new government and further poisoning Germans’ minds against the Republic, hyperinflation, etc. There was no continuity of values or definable goals as the Reich Chancellor and the cabinet changed throughout this period, especially because a parliamentary majority was necessary for the Reich Chancellor to be approved, the cabinet to be

formed, and legislation to be pushed through the Reichstag. Coalition governments shattered easily due to the rigidity of their political positions, which sometimes led to a recall of the Reichstag and new parliamentary elections.

I. The Attempt at Consolidation in the Shadows of the Consequences of the War (1920 – 1922)

The ten years of the Weimar Republic's domestic policy that are to be illustrated here include the performance test of this first parliamentary democracy in Germany¹. At its beginning stood the Kapp Putsch and the workers' uprising in the Ruhr region — the final offshoots of the revolutionary upheaval that had begun in November 1918 — and at its end, the collapse of the Republic's last majority coalition and the resigning readiness for the transition to a system of presidential governments, to the overture of the state crisis that began in the fall of 1930. A failed performance test, then? But did the Republic not after all have a real chance of survival as a parliamentary democracy after the difficult years at the beginning? Questions — which the following overview would like to attempt to answer. In doing so, it must proceed from voter behavior, then must acknowledge the stance of the parties, especially in the Reichstag, and the influence of interest groups, the relationship between government and opposition, the legislative performance of parliament, and its attitude toward basic foreign policy problems; finally, it must not discount the personal factor if it wishes to answer the question of the degree of responsibility for the merits and shortcomings of the first democracy in Germany.

¹ Introduction and bibliographical information in Eberhard Kolb's *Die Weimarer Republik* (Grundriß der Geschichte, Bd. 16), Munich 1984 and Karl Dietrich Erdmann's *Die Zeit der Weltkriege, 1. Teilband: Der Erste Weltkrieg. Weimarer Republik* (Gebhardt, Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, Bd. 4, 1), Stuttgart 1973. Individual information and constitutional historical perspective predominantly in Ernst Rudolf Huber's *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte seit 1789, Bd. 6 (Die Weimarer Reichsverfassung)*, Stuttgart 1981, and *Bd. 7 (Ausbau, Schutz und Untergang der Weimarer Republik)*, Stuttgart 1984. Polished representation from the most recent years: Heinrich August Winkler's *Von der Revolution bis zur Stabilisierung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1918 bis 1924*, Berlin 1984, and *Der Schein der Normalität. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1924 bis 1930*, Berlin 1985. Most important source: *Akten der Reichskanzlei Weimarer Republik*, edited by Karl Dietrich Erdmann and Wolfgang Mommsen, Boppard 1968 (from here on in abbreviated as "ARK"). Only the volumes for the third and fourth Marx administrations are missing from this sequence for the period of review.

The year 1920, with which our period of review begins, forms a clear turning point in the internal history of the Weimar Republic: With the elections of June 6, the first regular Reichstag took the place of the provisional National Assembly. The governing parties of the so-called Weimar Coalition — the SPD, the DDP, and the Center — tried to get a postponement of this election date to allow those portions of the German people to vote who initially could not vote yet because the national referendums designated by the peace treaty (e.g. in Upper Silesia) had not yet decided on their permanent continuance in the German Reich. But the procrastination of the governing majority was also due to their fear of a swing to the political right, which they hoped to avoid by further consolidating the Republic².

In fact, there were headwinds to the governing parties since the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Adding to the foreign-policy defeat which the young Republic suffered at the hands of the peace agreement, the Munich stab-in-the-back trial and the Erzberger trial became further factors that powered the mills of the political right's antirepublican propaganda. Even now — 1920 — the name Hindenburg surfaced as a possible candidate for the office of Reich President³.

The dismal failure of the Kapp Putsch in 1920, as one may have expected, ought to have discredited the right. This was only the case temporarily, however. The military and especially the civil service were cleansed of a few untrustworthy elements, of course; certainly, after the resignation of the Bauer government on March 26, 1920, a labor government (SPD-USPD) that

² Schulze, Hagen. *Weimar. Deutschland 1917 – 1933* (Die Deutschen und ihre Nation, Bd. 4), Berlin 1982; also, Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 33, 38.

³ Huber, Bd. 6, p.311; Bd. 7, p. 41; Morsey, Rudolf. *Die deutsche Zentrumspartei 1917 – 1923*, Düsseldorf 1966, p. 293ff; Schulze, p. 207.

even the KPD promised to tolerate was under debate for a short time. Yet not even union president Carl Legien, who had initially demanded such a government, volunteered his support for it⁴. So in the end, until the elections, there remained only a new version of a Weimar Coalition government. With Hermann Müller, a proven, top-ranking official of the SPD and close confidant of Reich President Ebert came to the forefront. Of bourgeois southern German origin, he had first served the SPD as a journalist. Belonging to the executive committee since 1906, he was respected even outside of his party due to his upstanding and reliable character and his intelligence. Admittedly, he lacked oratorical skills. Already immediately after his inauguration, he showed that he didn't think of himself as the chancellor for a labor government when he outright denied the labor unions the right of control they demanded from his administration⁵.

That the scales in this new Reich government, compared to its predecessor, had in fact tipped somewhat to the right, was demonstrated by, if nothing else, a change in the area of military leadership: Here the SPD relinquished the thankless department of the army minister after Noske's resignation and ceded it to the DDP politician Otto Geßler, who described himself as a mere pragmatic republican. The military leadership of the Reichswehr had already previously passed to General Hans von Seeckt, a Prussian aristocrat who in fact had not compromised himself in the Kapp Putsch but otherwise was completely averse to democratic ideas, a virtual soldier-only as it were, who by outward appearances considered himself exclusively situated at

⁴ Miller, Susanne. *Die Bürde der Macht. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie 1918 – 1920*, Düsseldorf 1978, p. 385ff.; Winkler, 1918 – 1924, pp. 311, 320: Obviously Legien recognized that the task he had set himself, i.e. to reunite the USPD and the SPD within the labor unions, would not be at all manageable as Reich Chancellor. The primarily tactical aspect of Legien's behavior is emphasized by Heinrich Potthoff, *Gewerkschaften und Politik zwischen Revolution und Inflation*, Düsseldorf 1979, p. 276f.

⁵ Deuerlein, Ernst. *Deutsche Kanzler von Bismarck bis Hitler*, Munich 1968, p. 279.

the preservation of the state order, but who in reality was anything but free from political ambition⁶.

Even the general political climate in Germany quickly exhibited once again a clear move to the right, as the events surrounding the Kapp Putsch sparked new party infighting among the parties of the middle and the left⁷. Whatever solidarity between the labor parties that the Kapp Putsch had left behind, broke down during the Reichstag election campaign in early 1920: The USPD and SPD quickly reproached each other for their perceived mistakes during the Kapp Putsch⁸.

The Reichstag elections of June 6, 1920 were a disaster for the parties of the Weimar Coalition. They fell from their 76.2 percent solid majority in the National Assembly to a 43.6 percent minority of Reichstag seats. So they came close to a halving of the number of their voters. The DDP suffered the most losses, their share of votes declining from 18.5 percent to 8.3 percent; for the SPD, the share of votes dropped from 37.9 percent to 21.7 percent. Only the Center's losses were limited. The winners of the elections were the fringe parties (other than the KPD) — on the right, the DNVP and even more the DVP (from 4.4 percent to 18.5 percent), on the left, the USPD, which became the second strongest party in the Reichstag with a 17.9 percent share of the votes. In spite of the USPD's gains, the labor parties had lost 5.1 percent of the votes in total compared to 1919, to wit in part obviously to the benefit of the DNVP⁹. The expression “republic without republicans” began to spread.

⁶ Miller, p. 396; Carsten, Francis L. *The Reichswehr and Politics 1918 – 1933*, Berkeley 1973, p. 103ff.

⁷ Even in the Center! See Morsey, p. 308.

⁸ Miller, p.410; also, Morsey, p.305; Albertin, Lothar. *Liberalismus und Demokratie am Anfang der Weimarer Republik. Eine vergleichende Analyse der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei und der Deutschen Volkspartei*, Düsseldorf 1972, p. 377ff.

⁹ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 350f.

The result of the election thus challenged the governability of the new Republic when its everyday political life had barely begun. A majority was only possible with an enlistment of the DVP or the USPD to the Weimar Coalition. But it was inconceivable. The USPD wanted only to “be a member of a purely socialist government” which it wished to influence “decisively”¹⁰; because of its nationalist posture in foreign policy, the DVP was, as the SPD saw it, incapable of forming a coalition¹¹. Because no majority could be found in the SPD executive committee for the continuation of the Weimar Coalition — which now formed a minority cabinet — the only option left to this party, which was still the strongest, was a retreat to the opposition, in order to, as co-chairman Otto Wels expressed it, “emerge from the failure of the old and win back the dwindling trust of the laborers”¹². In other words: the right needed to reap what it had itself sown of the foreign-policy problem it had gotten Germany into during the war. But even the DVP, which had led the election campaign with the slogan of freeing Germany from its “red chains,” lacked any inclination for an affiliation with the SPD¹³. In any case, this continued the SPD’s retreat from power in “their” Republic which had begun with their abandonment of the war office. It consoled itself over this loss with the fact that, just like before, it controlled the office of the Reich President through Friedrich Ebert, whose term the Reichstag extended to June 30, 1925, and that it further maintained leadership in the Prussian government under Otto Braun. Otherwise, it trusted in the inevitable victory of socialism¹⁴.

¹⁰ Miller, p. 416.

¹¹ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 362.

¹² Miller, p. 418.

¹³ Miller, p. 415ff.

¹⁴ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 364; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 144. — In the Prussian state parliament, in spite of the significant losses they had suffered at the elections from 1921, the parties of the Weimar Coalition maintained the majority. See Huber, Bd. 6, p. 749.

Left to their own devices, the bourgeois parties of the Center, the DDP, and the DVP agreed on a minority government which the SPD ensured in advance it would tolerate. The new Reich Chancellor became the Center politician from Baden, Konstantin *Fehrenbach* — an eloquent as well as conciliatory personality, well-known as the last president of the Reichstag before the November Revolution and then of the National Assembly. Like countless other members of the Center, he had accepted the Republic as fact, without being able to get enthusiastic about it. In an accurate self-evaluation, he had declared himself “not truly equal” to the office of Reich Chancellor. During his administration the complaints about his deficient leadership qualities went on and on¹⁵. Admittedly, he didn’t have it easy as chancellor of a government minority in an extremely difficult foreign policy situation, especially since his own party was quarreling amongst itself.¹⁶

The legislative work of the Reichstag accomplished during his term may be summarized in a few sentences: In light of the ever more acute distress of the German economy, the government (like its predecessors before) obtained the authority it requested for the enactment of economic ordinances by way of two enabling acts passed by a two-thirds majority on August 3, 1920 and February 6, 1921. In the same way, the Reichstag approved an amnesty law for criminal acts committed in connection with the Kapp Putsch and the Ruhr Uprising¹⁷. Yet another domestic policy decision was overshadowed by foreign policy. It came after the parliament’s commencement in April 1921, when the Reich cabinet resolved to postpone all plans to socialize the coal-mining industry. It was the temporary end of the current efforts of the labor unions,

¹⁵ Morsey, pp. 291, 299, 336, 342, 355; Deuerlein, p. 299.

¹⁶ Morsey, p. 360ff.

¹⁷ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 160f; *ibid* Bd. 6, p. 439.

which intensified after the Kapp Putsch, to introduce a “communal economy.” The reason for this decision was conveyed by many legal opinions which predicted that the victorious powers from the war would directly seize the German coal industry as reparative collateral if it was transferred into state property¹⁸.

Thus the government even at this juncture ran up against the main problem that constantly held it and the Reichstag in suspense: the victorious powers’ reparation claims that were presented to the German representatives at the London Conference (March 1 – 8, 1921)¹⁹. In this issue the government could count on a clear majority from the Reichstag — so it also rejected the reparation claims as unrealizable. Only the USPD and the KPD disapproved of this decision as implausible; the right, on the other hand, found it too yielding²⁰. Outside of parliament, the KPD attempted, under the decisive involvement of the Saxon party official Max Hoelz, to exploit the German population’s agitation over the Allies’ reparation claims by triggering uprisings in a few centers of industry, which were able to be quelled everywhere, however, in the final days of March when the Reich President declared martial law by the police. A prelude to the events of the year 1923²¹!

In the question of reparation, the government clung to the hope of a mediation by America, with whose help it also hoped to be able to fend off the sanctions (i.a. the occupation of the Ruhr region) threatened by the Allies. When the US declined the role intended for them, Fehrenbach had to admit to himself the failure of his foreign policy. He resigned even before (on

¹⁸ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 168; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, pp. 197, 430. The Center itself had backed away more and more from thoughts of socialization; Morsey, p. 350.

¹⁹ Krüger, Peter. *Die Außenpolitik von Weimar*, Darmstadt 1985, p. 129f. The nominal amount of German reparations was set at 132 billion gold marks (in addition to 6 billion for Belgian war debts).

²⁰ Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 174, 190f.

²¹ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 516f.

May 5, 1921) a short-term ultimatum by the victorious powers arrived, demanding the immediate acceptance of the victorious powers' reparation claims²². With that Fehrenbach's successor stepped into a more than difficult legacy. No wonder that the SPD once again quickly renounced the candidacy (that was due them) of a politician from their ranks (Gustav Bauer). DVP chairman Gustav Stresemann and Cologne mayor Konrad Adenauer were even further open to debate. But then the Reich President's choice fell to the Baden politician suggested by the Center faction, Joseph *Wirth*, the only one ready to unconditionally accept the London ultimatum which even the Center felt was unavoidable if Germany did not want to risk an occupation of the Ruhr region and the loss of Upper Silesia.

Wirth had only his origins and his natural talent for speaking in common with his predecessor. Apart from that, he was unlike Fehrenbach, a new breed of professional politician. Coming from the artisan class on his father's side, the highly talented Wirth quickly built his career and in his early years already switched from his career as an established secondary-school teacher to politics. In Fehrenbach's cabinet he became the Minister of Finance. The youngest German Reich Chancellor at 41 years old, this full-blooded politician, all too ready to make decisions, was also truly determined to exert his political authority to issue directives as granted to him by the constitution. With his ideal of the "social people's state," for which in his speeches he was able to enthuse even the broader masses, this staunch republican belonged to the leftmost wing of his party²³.

²² Huber, Bd. 7, p. 191.

²³ Morsey, pp. 379ff, 386, 423; Deuerlein, p. 308ff.

Together with his Minister of Reconstruction and later of Foreign Affairs, Walter Rathenau, Wirth became the leading exponent of a “policy of appeasement” towards the victorious powers, a policy that wanted, by attempting to honestly satisfy the Allies’ reparation claims, to demonstrate their practical infeasibility and thus pave the way for negotiations. This policy, which was initiated by the acceptance of the London ultimatum, but which in light of the Reich’s financial hardship already led to the German government’s request for a moratorium in the fall of 1921, could usually depend on the consent of the Reichstag’s centrist and leftist parties (including the USPD), whereas on the side of the right (especially among the DNVP) the expression “policy of appeasement” already became an invective²⁴. The constellation of internal powers that Wirth won over for his most sensational foreign policy maneuver, the conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo with Soviet Russia on April 16, 1922, looked very different. Here, along with the KPD, the right preferred to rally behind the chancellor, whereas the treaty was quite controversial among the SPD and USPD. This would surely be the case all the more for a simultaneous defense collaboration between the Reichswehr and the Red Army — of which Wirth was aware — if it were to have been made publicly known even then²⁵.

The fate of the Wirth cabinet was otherwise once again dependent to a great extent on foreign policy developments. To Wirth’s disappointment, the policy of appeasement didn’t pan out in the way he hoped. Contrary to his expectations, in spite of the voting result favoring Germany, Upper Silesia was not awarded by the League of Nations to the Reich, but rather was split between the Reich and Poland. Wirth responded to this decision with his resignation (October 22, 1921). The Reich President would have favored as the succeeding government a

²⁴ Deuerlein, p. 315; Morsey, pp. 380, 384, 389.

²⁵ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 242; Morsey, p. 491ff.

cabinet of the Great Coalition; but the DVP refused because it wanted nothing to do with executing the division of Upper Silesia. All that remained in the end was a weaker restructuring of a Wirth administration, now simply as a “black-red” coalition, seeing as the DDP was no longer a party of the administration, of course with Geßler retaining his office as the Minister of Defense²⁶.

It’s noteworthy that this minority government was able to survive a full year all the same, and that in early 1922 Wirth succeeded in bringing a tax compromise through the Reichstag that, while not fulfilling the maximum demands of the SPD, who above all wanted to burden personal property with taxes, still accommodated the wishes of the left with a mandatory government bond for the prosperous classes and in a countermove, even increased excise taxes (which burdened the lower classes more than anyone else). With this tax reform the government complied with a demand by the victorious powers, to whom it was a question of a better budgetary safeguarding of German reparation payments²⁷. Of course, with this measure Wirth could not tackle the basic economic problem of the post-war years, inflation, if only because that also depended on other factors. In fact, hyperinflation began in July 1922 — after the assassination of Rathenau — which could only be stopped at the end of 1923²⁸.

No other event during Wirth’s administration riled the German people so much as Rathenau’s murder. It constituted the highlight of a series of assassinations, the backers of which

²⁶ Morsey, p. 417; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 219.

²⁷ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, pp. 416, 454ff.; Huber, Bd. 6, p. 234; Morsey, p. 412ff. n3. The ending of the railroad workers’ strike, against which an emergency ordinance from the Reich President had been implemented, also belonged to the government’s victories. Wirth strongly condemned the strike as a “civil servants’ revolt.” See Huber, Bd. 7, p. 225ff.

²⁸ Holtfrerich, Carl-Ludwig. *Die deutsche Inflation 1914 – 1923*, Berlin 1980, pp. 15, 19, 66ff., 190f.; Feldman, Gerald. “Political Economy of Germany’s relative Stabilization during the 1920/21 World Depression,” in Feldman et al (eds.) *Die deutsche Inflation*, Berlin 1982, p. 204ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 263.

were to be sought in the former Freikorps and in radical-right secret organizations that stirred up hatred against the German “appeasement politicians.” Victims of these radical-right terrorist attacks were, among others, Mathias Erzberger (†August 26, 1921), the USPD representative Otto Gareis (†June 10, 1921), Philipp Scheidemann (who survived), and finally, on June 24, 1922, Walther Rathenau, the most prominent mind in the Wirth cabinet. The correlation of these murders with the radical right’s antirepublican smear campaign was obvious. The general populace loyal to the Republic demanded measures for the Republic’s protection. The Wirth administration responded to this call (even after the Erzberger murder) with many ordinances, and finally, after Rathenau’s assassination, with a bill that sought to make agitation hostile to the Republic a punishable offense and by trying to establish a special state constitutional court for the punishment of criminal offenses and violent acts hostile to the Republic. Even civil servants could be suspended from duty for severe violation of their constitutionally-mandated duties to the constitution.

The bill was supposed to, as Wirth pointed out, be directed exclusively against the enemies from the right. In this way he sparked the protest of Bavaria, which perceived its sovereign rights — above all its sovereign control — to be curtailed, demanded a law targeting enemies of the Republic from the right *and* from the left, and refused to enforce the law — a symptom of tensions existing since the Kapp Putsch between “red” Berlin and Bavaria, and that as a result of the putsch had preserved a government that stood on the far right. The Reich government avoided a conflict with Bavaria and repeatedly revised the bill for the Republic Protection Act according to Bavaria’s wishes, e.g. by creating a south German senate of the court. Only after

these concessions did Bavaria agree (on August 24, 1922) to enforce the Republic Protection Act²⁹.

Rathenau's assassination had unleashed a wave of solidarity among all the forces in the German population loyal to the Republic. The possibility of a Great Coalition — i.e. the admission of the DDP and especially the DVP to the existing coalition — was once again under debate. Wirth himself, however, had unintentionally obstructed this development at first, because in his famous Reichstag speech of June 25, 1922 ("This enemy is on the right!"), he did not exclude the DVP from his blanket criticism of the right's murderous campaign³⁰. He made plain how weak he estimated the parliamentary status of his cabinet to be once more on October 12, 1922, when he didn't dare to obtain the overdue management of the foreign exchange through the proper legal channels, but rather had these measures enacted by emergency decree of the president.³¹

Wirth also had to be mindful regarding the validity of his obviously unsuccessful policy of appeasement. At the end of October 1922, he decided to change tack and expressly refrain from unconditionally fulfilling the Allies' reparation claims in the future³². But for this change of course in foreign policy, he believed the broadest possible internal foundation of support was imperative, and now emphatically urged the admission of the DVP into the government coalition, especially since the DVP had proven its loyalty to the Republic in its voting behavior in the Reichstag — e.g. in their agreement to the Republic Protection Act on July 18, 1922 and to

²⁹ Huber, Bd. 6, p. 666ff.; Schulze, p. 241ff.; Jasper, Gotthard. *Der Schutz der Republik*, Tübingen 1963, p. 56ff. Schmahl, Hermannjosef. *Disziplinarrecht und politische Betätigung der Beamten in der Weimarer Republik*, Berlin 1977, p. 58ff.

³⁰ Schulze, p. 244.

³¹ Huber, Bd. 6, p. 267.

³² Morsey, p. 485ff.

an extension of Reich President Ebert's term of office on October 27, 1922³³. In fact, in November 1922 mediators from the SPD and the DVP managed to work out a shared program for a Great Coalition administration. But the result of this negotiation was not accepted by a majority of the SPD faction. It refused a coalition with them on the grounds that the DVP could not offer a guarantee for a financial "stabilizing initiative" as a prerequisite for resolving the question of reparation³⁴.

Behind this surprising refusal of the SPD was concealed one of Germany's most significant party-political regroupings in the 1920s and its effects on the SPD: In December 1920 the majority of the USPD converted to the KPD; the remaining minority in turn joined the SPD the following September after long negotiations. This had two results: on the one hand, through this fusion with the "true" USPD, the SPD faction in the Reichstag gained enough strength that it, along with both the other parties of the Weimar Coalition, once again commanded a majority in the Reichstag. On the other hand, of course, in order not to endanger their newly-won party unity, the old SPD had to incorporate the wishes of its new leftist wing. The SPD's programmatic path to becoming a people's party unbound by class, a path which the Görlitz convention of 1921 seemed to open, was thus blocked again, as was the possibility of a coalition with the DVP (a coalition which by that time was functioning well in the state of Prussia in the context of a Great Coalition)³⁵. The SPD's rejection of a Great Coalition in the cabinet was communicated to Wirth on November 14, 1922, and at the same time he was given to understand that a continuation of the current administration had also become impossible. In effect, the great

³³ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 459; Huber, Bd. 6, p. 312; Bd. 7, p. 265f.

³⁴ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 499.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 476, 496ff., 500; Schulze, p. 247f.

change of course he had planned for foreign and domestic policy fell through. He resigned that very same day³⁶. This time it was solely the Reich President who found the way out of the administrative crisis by commissioning Wilhelm *Cuno*, the director of the HAPAG Shipping Company, with forming the government. This man commended himself as an advocate for the economy and as a businessman well-versed in international trade and a financial expert for resolving the problem which caused the Wirth administration to fail — for an adjustment of Germany's reparation commitments that was consistent with Germany's own productive capacity. As the son of a minor Thuringian civil servant, he had worked his way up as a lawyer and financial expert — in the war as the right hand of Karl Helfferich in the Reich Treasury, until he was selected in 1917 for the directorate of the HAPAG, which he energetically rebuilt after the war. Politically, he was close to the DVP, but did not belong to that party³⁷.

Nevertheless, it became apparent quickly enough that this business man whose “principal business capital,” as contemporaries railed, consisted “of perfect manners,” was in no way equal to his new task. Behind the gentlemanly façade hid an ultimately weak and insecure personality, to which neither free speech nor dealings with members of parliament were suited. In any case, he confronted the parties reservedly and thus really may not have further regretted the failure of his exploration of a Great Coalition (for which the SPD was still unattainable). The administration that he built consisted of mixed professional and bourgeois minority cabinet in which the DDP, the Center, the Bavarian People's Party, and the DVP participated. There was no coalition settlement whereby the parties were less encumbered with the direct responsibility for this new cabinet. In any case, it could only assert itself if either the DNVP or the SPD tolerated it. The

³⁶ Morsey, p. 488f.

³⁷ Deuerlein, p. 326ff.; Harbeck, Karl-Heinz. “Das Kabinett Cuno” (=ARK), Boppard 1968, p. XXff.

SPD was ready to do so anyhow; but even the DNVP supported Cuno in the Reichstag initially and thus abandoned their fundamental opposition to the Weimar “system” for the first time³⁸.

II. The State Crisis of the Year 1923

With this heterogeneous administrative team at its head, the Weimar Republic entered into the most dangerous foreign and domestic-policy test of strength that it had yet to pass. What incited it was the dispute about reparations that once again entered an acute new stage directly after Cuno’s taking office. With the approval of the overwhelming majority of the Reichstag, on November 24, 1922, Cuno pledged himself here to his predecessor’s policy; that means he reiterated the German request for a moratorium but linked this to suggestions for stabilizing the German currency as a condition for later German reparation payments. This proposal was in no way adequate for the French Poincaré government. The French instead committed more and more decisively to a policy of “productive collaterals.” What they meant by this was an occupation of the Ruhr region that was to serve as a source of immediate reparation payments (especially in the form of coal deliveries) and as a safeguard for an unequivocal fulfillment by Germany of the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. When the Reparation Commission declared German payment-in-kind to be in arrears at the end of December 1922, the time had come: On January 11, 1923, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr area. The third occupying force on the Rhine — Great Britain — declined to take part in this move³⁹.

³⁸ Deuerlein, p. 329; Harbeck, p. XIXff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 272f.; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 554.

³⁹ Harbeck, p. XXII ff.; Schwabe, Klaus (ed.). *Die Ruhrkrise 1923*, Paderborn 1984, p. 1ff.

In an initial patriotic uprising reminiscent of the mood at the outbreak of the war, parties and public alike in Germany opposed this sanction unanimously. Cuno saw it as his main mission to uphold this consensus in the German people. But this brought about the political-psychological foundation for deploying the weapon with which the government sought to hamstring the French's sanction policy — passive resistance. Contrary to how the KPD wanted it to be, it definitely was not formally a question of a general strike, but rather of the most comprehensive boycott possible of the occupying forces and their ordinances in the Ruhr region and in the remaining regions of West Germany that had been occupied since 1918. On January 19 the government banned all civil servants — especially including railroad workers — from complying with the ordinances of the “invading forces” insofar as these served the purposes of the Ruhr occupation; the delivery of coal to the intervening forces was forbidden as a matter of principle. With that, in the first weeks of the Ruhr conflict, France's Ruhr “collateral” was substantially devalued⁴⁰.

Soon enough, passive resistance involved acts of resistance invoked by right-wing radical groups. Only Hitler's NSDAP steered clear; to them, the destruction of the Weimar “system” was more important than resisting the occupation of the Ruhr area⁴¹. The Reich government, which was at least indirectly connected via the Reichswehr to the acts of sabotage committed in the name of resistance, tolerated even this form of German resistance, and thus Cuno had no

⁴⁰ Cuno explained before the cabinet on January 9, 1923: “If it only comes down to sanctions and acts of violence in Rhineland, then the next result will surely be a strong national wave. It is necessary to make this wave subservient to the state, not to leave it to its own devices, and not by any chance to allow it to come under the sign of the swastika, not even under the black-white-red flag, but rather to see to it that from the outset it serves unification and reconciliation in the German people” (cited by Schulze, p. 252). See also Huber, Bd. 7, p. 282ff. The “invading forces” reacted by inflicting martial law and establishing a customs border between the occupied region and the rest of Germany.

⁴¹ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 315; Fest, Joachim. *Hitler. Eine Biographie*, Frankfurt 1973, p. 238.

problem in personally welcoming a representative of the German *Völkisch* Freedom Party — a radical right-wing split-off of the DNVP — for talks. The SPD admittedly had nothing to do with the active resistance but backed up the deployment of units from the “black Reichswehr” to protect the eastern border against feared incursions from the Polish⁴².

What was new was that the KPD finally joined the ranks of the national resistance front: The hymn of praise to the saboteur Albert Leo Schlageter, who was convicted and shot by the French occupying force, that Karl Radek, the intermediary between the KPD and Bolshevik leadership in Moscow, struck up in his sensational speech on June 21, 1923 demonstrated the Communist Party’s turn to a “national bolshevism” and to a tactical cooperation with “revolutionary elements of fascism” whereby, moreover, even anti-Semitic attacks for that matter would not be treated with contempt. From Moscow’s perspective this transition was primarily determined by foreign policy but was also influencing the KPD’s intensifying agitation for an armed conflict with the extreme right, who the KPD feared (not completely without good reason) would stage yet another coup as soon as the government had given up passive resistance. Armed “proletarian hundreds” were deployed as a precaution⁴³.

It became increasingly undeniable in the face of the tremendous costs that passive resistance caused that the government could not continue it indefinitely. The boycott of the occupying forces on the Rhine and the Ruhr led to countless expulsions of recalcitrant civil servants and generally to high unemployment. In any case, the Reich government paid compensatory allowances to everyone who was affected. The necessary funds for that could only be

⁴² Huber, Bd. 7, p. 295f.; Harbeck, p. XXIII; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, pp. 557f., 568. Cuno hosted Freikorps captain G. Roßbach, who had later participated in the Hitler Putsch.

⁴³ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, pp. 556f., 578ff., 583, 594, 597.

raised through loans — i.e. with the help of the money printing press. Hyperinflation was thereby inflamed even further. While the Reich Bank had been able to once again decelerate the Reichsmark's debasement by using the last of its gold and foreign currency reserves in March/April 1923, it had to give up on this rescue operation on April 18 for want of reserve assets. Since then there was no more waiting: While the dollar rate had amounted to approximately 20,000 marks during the attempt at stabilization, so the value of the mark sank to a ratio of 350,000 : 1 compared to the dollar between April 18 and the end of July 1923⁴⁴. Because wage increases didn't keep up with rising prices, the labor force was hit particularly hard by hyperinflation, while the income tax payers that were first assessed after the fact saw themselves benefiting — to say nothing of inflation speculators shamelessly enriched themselves by purchasing material assets on credit who from time to time, not merely one time. It should be understood that the longer this development went on, the more it must have endangered social harmony. The administration was helpless. It certainly had achieved, through an enabling law, special powers for fighting a few negative spin-offs of inflation (such as price gouging) on February 23, 1923, as well as passed a tax act at the beginning of August 1923 with the help of the Reichstag that promised to improve the state's revenues. But such means were now inadequate to put an end to the inflation⁴⁵. Negotiations with industry with the intent to win their support for a guarantee of reparation responsibilities broke down just like a similar credit initiative under Wirth's administration. Because if nothing else the policy of Poincaré, to whom it all came down to German coal deliveries, had unintentionally valorized the role of heavy industry in solving the reparation problem, industry could hardly be pressured by the government. So it met

⁴⁴ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 303; Harbeck, p. XXXVII f.

⁴⁵ Harbeck, p. XXXVI f.; Huber, Bd. 6, pp. 288, 303; Winkler, *1918 – 1914*, p. 601.

Cuno's request for help with a counterdemand to scale up performance requirements for the workers — a “social dismantling” that was unacceptable to the labor unions and thus was domestically unsustainable⁴⁶.

During these negotiations (end of May 1923), Cuno had created the impression that he essentially supported the counterdemands of heavy industry. That cost him the sympathies from the left and raised doubts about the justness of further supporting passive resistance⁴⁷. The somewhat ambiguous attitude of the government towards the enemies of the Republic also raised suspicion. The administration's contact with representatives of the German *Völkisch* Freedom Party in early 1923 had sparked a huge controversy with the Social Democrat-led Prussian government, which at the same time was preparing to ban this party which was obviously working toward overthrowing the republican state order. Of course, under pressure from the Reich government, the Prussian also had agreed then on May 5 to ban the KPD's “proletarian hundreds.”⁴⁸ It was even more detrimental to the government's reputation that it was incapable of enforcing strict implementation of the Republic Protection Act in Bavaria, which still remained an Eldorado of right-leaning fighting organizations⁴⁹. Even the enactment of an emergency ordinance on August 10, 1923, that authorized the Reich to implement the Republic Protection Act couldn't change that. These events in turn gave cause for the Saxon and Thuringian governments to legally renounce the front of national unity proclaimed under the banner of passive resistance. Led by left-leaning Social Democrats, both governments came

⁴⁶ Harbeck, p. XLI; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 575.

⁴⁷ Harbeck, p. XLI.

⁴⁸ Huber, Bd. 6, p. 307ff.; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 570.

⁴⁹ In light of Bavarian resistance, the government dropped a bill that would have enabled a ban of paramilitary associations at the Reich level. See Harbeck, pp. XXIII, XXVII.

under the growing influence of the KPD during the year 1923 and supported the establishment of leftist armed fighting organizations, because they doubted the Reichswehr's loyalty to the Republic. Similar to the attitude of Bavaria, which did not want to take action against right-wing radicalism, this was a challenge of the Reich government's authority over the states — hardly convenient for strengthening the Reich government's domestic standing. In any case, the German people's national solidarity had, spectacularly (as it wished to initially convey on the surface) displayed a few chinks from the outset. Cuno's at first uncompromising policy on the Ruhr conflict which excluded any negotiation with Poincaré as long as interventional troops did not withdraw from the Ruhr region had met with concerns from the SPD and the labor unions since the beginning⁵⁰. The preference for emergency ordinances over the regular legislative process further damaged the administration's standing in the Reichstag⁵¹. Furthermore, the economic distress of precisely the poorer classes was getting worse.

The more difficult the foreign and domestic situation became, the more urgently necessary a government that could rely on a clear majority in the Reichstag seemed — e.g. to the labor unions⁵². But then the SPD's stance became decisive in the fall of Cuno's administration at the end of July 1923. This party stood under the influence of an aggravating pressure from the left, which manifested itself in walkouts and increases of votes for the KPD in elections for labor unions and state parliaments. Once again, SPD leaders had to deal with demands to build a labor government along Middle German lines. Because an SPD/KPD government would not have commanded a majority in the Reichstag and also would not have been tolerated by the bourgeois

⁵⁰ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 573f.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 573, 589ff.

parties, in the final analysis, only a path of violence would have been open — in which case it was quite debatable whether the KPD would not have gained the upper hand in a course of events favorable to the left. At any rate, the fear of a civil war-like escalation of the internal situation in Germany made SPD leaders overcome their reservations towards a Great Coalition. The fact that a similar tendency was observable in the bourgeois parties since the end of July may have strengthened the influence of advocates for a Great Coalition within the SPD. Cuno saw this demand for the SPD's participation in the government, which was also personally submitted to him by Hermann Müller on August 12, as a call to resign, with which he readily complied. He was fully aware that his politics had run out of steam⁵³.

Gustav *Stresemann* received the order to build a new government. With that the leadership of Germany was taken over by the one politician who determined the fate of the Weimar Republic like no other and therefore is also counted by posterity, alongside Ebert, as the most distinguished representative of the Republic. Like a few of his predecessors in office, Stresemann came from a lower middle-class background. His father, a beer distributor in a Berlin working-class neighborhood, achieved modest prosperity that made it possible for him to send his children to university. His son studied national economy and became a legal adviser to various trade organizations after receiving his doctorate. Initially, he stood politically close to Friedrich Naumann and his ideal of overcoming class differences in the name of a socialism both national and liberal in nature. Stresemann then found his political home, however, further to the right in the National Liberal Party, and became its parliamentary leader in 1917. In the years of the World War, the talented tactician and orator Stresemann proved himself as an advocate for

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 593, 596ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 304ff.

comprehensive goals of German conquest and thus was considered the mouthpiece of the Supreme Army Command. He was justifiably accused by the left of toppling the relatively moderate Reich Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg. Meanwhile, he had made common cause with the left throughout the entire war insofar as he supported their demands for internal reforms. Nevertheless, he had politically disqualified himself in the eyes of the left after the end of the war. So he became the founder and chairman of a new right-wing liberal party, the DVP. Even after the Hohenzollerns' abdication, Stresemann remained an avowed monarchist, and yet he distinguished himself from his like-minded peers on the right by two crucial qualities: the readiness to learn from political mistakes and the ability to realistically assess what was politically possible in a given situation. In the early 1920s, that meant that he was prepared to take appropriate action from Germany's defeat and to accept the Republic as the best form of government for Germany under the given circumstances⁵⁴.

Although his party stood close to heavy industry — the industrialist Stinnes was a DVP representative in the Reichstag — in 1923 Stresemann was counted as a supporter of a “Great Coalition” from the SPD to the DVP — a wish that gained further urgency in the face of the tough decisions in store for Germany (settling the Ruhr conflict and restoring the currency). When Cuno resigned, Stresemann was even then under consideration as Cuno's most suitable successor. By numbers alone, a renewal of the Weimar Coalition would have been possible, but little inclination to this end existed among the bourgeois parties, because in such a combination

⁵⁴ Erdmann, Karl Dietrich and Martin Vogt. *Die Kabinette Stresemann I und II, 2 Bde.* (=ARk), Boppard 1978, p. XVII; Schulze, p. 256; Hirsch, Felix. *Stresemann. Ein Lebensbild*, Göttingen 1978; Turner, Henry A. *Stresemann and the Politics of the Weimar Republic*, Princeton 1963, p. 81ff.

the SPD, strengthened by the former USPD representatives, would have obtained an overwhelming domination, if possible; yet for precisely this reason, the bourgeois parties (other than the DNVP) had combined into a joint venture that they wanted to see incorporated as a whole into a coalition with the SPD⁵⁵.

The Great Coalition government which Stresemann was able to introduce to the Reichstag on August 14, 1923 was programmatically tied to a somewhat commonly held political declaration of intent by the SPD, in which was demanded, among other things, the ending of inflation and the settlement of the reparation issue “with full preservation of the nation’s unity.” Despite this hardly controversial “program,” the new government only won a narrow majority in the Reichstag, because not even the “governing parties” voted for it unanimously⁵⁶.

The Stresemann cabinet actually contained heterogeneous elements: the Marxist theoretician Rudolf Hilferding formerly of the USPD became the Minister of Finance, whereas DVP politician Hans von Raumer, a resolute advocate of industrial interests, became the Minister of Commerce. Further distinguishing themselves from the administrative team were Social Democrats Wilhelm Sollmann (Minister of the Interior) and Gustav Radbruch (Minister of Justice), and as an independent, local politician Hans Luther (Minister of Welfare). While there was the goodwill within the cabinet to bridge the unavoidable antagonisms of such a diverse lineup, the question was open of whether the partisan factions would share such a cooperative attitude. Therefore, Stresemann already announced in his government declaration on August 14

⁵⁵ Turner, p. 100; Erdmann and Vogt, p. XXIV.

⁵⁶ Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 306, 331f.: Both the right wing of the DVP as well as the left wing of the SPD did not vote for the government.

the bill for an enabling law that was supposed to release the cabinet from direct Reichstag control during the execution of currency and economic stabilization⁵⁷.

Any kind of rehabilitation of the German economy presupposed a settlement of the Ruhr conflict and an agreement on future reparation payments from Germany. Here Stresemann initially hoped — quite optimistically — for British mediation. When this failed to happen, and passive resistance began to crumble away on the part of employers and workers, while the Ruhr collateral gradually yielded profits for the occupying forces, the hour of truth struck for the new chancellor: The costly conflict had to be terminated — unconditionally, as Poincaré had always demanded. On September 26, 1923 Stresemann informed the Reichstag of his administration's decision to end passive resistance. He responded to the accusation of treason hurled against him by spokesmen from the right by professing a policy that possessed the “courage of responsibility⁵⁸.” It was this, as it would soon become apparent, which was perhaps the greatest service that Stresemann had rendered to the Weimar Republic — a step that signaled his statesmanlike qualities for the first time: Heedless of the patriotic outbursts of the moment, he made a decision that best matched the German situation after the lost war and German interests in the long haul, and, as it turned out after a few weeks, that laid the foundation for a tenable reparation settlement. With that he exposed himself to substantial internal risks.

As was feared, the concession of German defeat in the Ruhr conflict, on the one hand, brought about a worsening of Germany's economic crisis: The mark plunged from an exchange rate of 1 dollar – 9.7 million marks on September 3 to a rate of 1 dollar – 160 million marks on September 26. Afterwards its value sank by the billions and finally the quadrillions compared to

⁵⁷ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 333; Erdmann and Vogt p. XXVII ff.

⁵⁸ Cited by Schulze, p. 260.

the dollar until it hit rock bottom⁵⁹ — a total collapse of the German currency, which led to business operations being transacted more and more in foreign currency or by bartering.

The mark's collapse now also impaired the German economy's ability to compete internationally; the result, rapidly-climbing unemployment, was not long in coming⁶⁰. For the small man whose real wages likewise sank despite wage indexing, hyperinflation expressed itself in a scarcity of goods right up to basic foodstuffs, because the agricultural sector increasingly refused to accept the German paper mark as payment for their products. Long lines in front of stores, food riots, even pillaging of food stocks hoarded in the countryside were more and more the marks of the daily life of hyperinflation — for contemporaries, a nightmare that branded itself indelibly on their memory. While the Reich could pay off its war debts, the German people's assets were destroyed, whereby according to latest studies, the losses in large fortunes were the highest. Yet for the middle-income earner who lost all his cash assets, this was small consolation: The economic — and political — insecurity of the middle classes was a principle result of inflation⁶¹.

Admittedly, these economic hardships still receded in their direct significance behind the emotional effects which were brought about by ending passive resistance. This was the fourth surrender to which Germany consented — after the ceasefire, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, and the acceptance of the London reparation ultimatum on May 5, 1921. Each of these foreign-policy defeats had triggered domestic crises; now, in 1923, the extreme right had announced that it would not be contented with abandoning passive resistance, and in fact, in the

⁵⁹ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 609; Holtferich p. 15; Harbeck p. 1218.

⁶⁰ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, pp. 609, esp. 647.

⁶¹ Holtferich, pp. 274, 329f.; Schulze p. 37.

wake of ending the Ruhr conflict, plunged the Weimar Republic into the most difficult existential crisis since its founding. The events literally came one after another: As early as September 26, the right-leaning Bavarian government declared a state of emergency; on October 1 units of the Reichswehr staged a coup near Berlin under one Major Buchrucker; on October 20 the 7th Reichswehr Division stationed in Bavaria refused to obey the Berlin government; on October 21 and 23 revolts broke out by separatists in Aachen, Coblenz, and other leftist Rhenish cities; also on October 23, armed Communists rose up against the city of Hamburg's law enforcement forces after, on October 22, the Reichswehr in Saxony had gained the upper hand against armed groups of Communists; on November 5 the Palatinate at first broke with Bavaria, then even from the Reich a short time later — even here the separatists had initially prevailed. In these tension-filled weeks of autumn, “proletarian hundreds” from the KPD and armed formations of the extreme right faced off against each other on the Bavarian-Thuringian-Saxon border. A civil war threatened to break out; rumors of a march on Berlin planned by the right circulated. Under the given internal power dynamics, a right-wing infantry regiment resulting from such a coup was feared. To make matters worse, Stresemann's own administration suffered two more crises as well in the same period; Stresemann himself had to fend off the criticism in his own party, which was pressing for an affiliation between the DVP and the DNVP⁶². The crisis met its climax and turning point with the Hitler Putsch of November 8 – 9, 1923.

That the Republic survived these various threats at all was thanks to two circumstances: on the one hand, the insufficient coordination between the many attempted revolts, and on the

⁶² Turner, p. 132f.

other hand, and above all, the steadfastness and political skill of Stresemann, to whose aid came loyal support from Ebert as well as the internal stability of Prussia under Otto Braun.

Three sources of unrest emerged after the end of the Ruhr conflict: Bavaria, Central Germany, and the Rheinland. In *Bavaria* the attitude of passive resistance called on the right as a whole for a plan that demanded Germany's withdrawal from the Treaty of Versailles, even if the end of the Ruhr conflict had become unavoidable. At the same time, the combat teams of the extreme right closed ranks. Adolf Hitler was entrusted with their political leadership. With that, increasing influence was open to Hitler's party, the NSDAP, after it had already become, thanks to its ruthless propaganda and political interconnections, a political party which the Munich government took seriously for good reason⁶³. In any case, the Bavarian governor Eugen von Knilling proclaimed a state of emergency in Bavaria (on September 26) with supposedly imminent putsch attempts by the extreme right. Yet the appointment of the far right-leaning Gustav von Kahr as "commissary general," not to mention as the highest executive power in Bavaria, pointed to yet another motive: Bavaria obviously wanted to set an example as an "order cell" and rallying point of rightist forces in order to clear the way for a solidarification of the right throughout Germany. Kahr himself seems to have dreamed about a march on Berlin⁶⁴. The Reich government would have been able to immediately nullify the Bavarian state of emergency which was aimed as a pointed gesture against themselves. But such a move would have made the break with Munich irreparable and raised the question of the methods with which the Reich actually wanted to prevail over Bavaria. Therefore, Stresemann chose an indirect way to invalidate the Bavarian state of emergency: He had a state of emergency declared for the whole Reich on the

⁶³ Fest, p. 231ff. The Storm Troopers grew in the year 1923 to a force of 15,000 men. See also Huber, Bd. 7, p. 344f.

⁶⁴ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 648; Fest, p. 251.

same day. Relying on Bavarian constitutional law, however, Kahr did not acknowledge the Reich's state of emergency. This was a violation of the Reich constitution.

A contretemps that intensified the resulting potential conflict of jurisdiction was not long in coming: On September 29 Munich's national-socialist "*Völkische Beobachter*" (which was not without anti-Semitic innuendos) sharply criticized Stresemann and General von Seeckt libelously. Reichswehr Minister Geßler therefore called on the area's responsible authority, commander of the 7th Infantry Division Lieutenant-General Otto von Lossow, to ban this newspaper. The lieutenant-general, however, refused to comply with this order. Consequently, Seeckt challenged Lossow to quit the service; but Lossow was instead conscripted by the Bavarian government to discharge his duties, i.e. he was put under Munich's command. This was insubordination and yet another violation of the constitution all in one. The Reich government could no longer count on the Reichswehr units stationed in Bavaria and thus could not think of implementing a *Reichsexekution* against Bavaria as sanctioned by the constitution⁶⁵.

The SPD demanded this, to be sure; but Stresemann, in a similar quandary as the German government at the time of the Kapp Putsch, knew that the North German Reichswehr would not march against the renegade Bavarian division. Seeckt confirmed this in conversation with the chancellor and Ebert⁶⁶. Not to mention even Thuringia and especially Saxony, as will be described in more detail, found themselves in a state of quasi-rebellion against the Reich; the road from Berlin to Munich was thus blocked. The government could do nothing more than clarify the legal situation for everyone and otherwise sit tight. To top it all off, at the start of

⁶⁵ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 349ff.; also, *ibid*, Bd. 6, p. 696ff.

⁶⁶ During this conversation (on November 3) Seeckt had expressly answered no to Ebert's question of whether the Reichswehr would deploy against Bavaria in the event that the rogue 7th Division pushed forward to Berlin under Lossow. See Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 671, also pp. 616, 667.

November, Seeckt was still sounding out Kahr for the purpose of a conservative reorganization of the Reich, i.e. of the establishment of a directorate by the president that would have been independent of the Reichstag. At the same time, Seeckt withdrew his trust from Stresemann, whom he rightly viewed as his final obstacle on his own path to power. It's no wonder that in those first days of November, all of Germany was filled with rumors of a coup d'état⁶⁷.

Paradoxically, it was Hitler who inadvertently helped the Stresemann administration to take control of this very difficult crisis. His operetta-like, theatrical putsch attempt of November 8–9, 1923 — beginning with blackmailing Kahr and Lossow, then the march to the Feldherrnhalle, which ultimately came under fire by the Bavarian police — had discredited not only the NSDAP leader himself, but also the right altogether. For their own good, the Kahr – von Knilling administration had to look for support among the legitimate powers in Berlin⁶⁸. In a somewhat trusting and yet presumably well thought out plan⁶⁹, Ebert appointed Seeckt to the highest executive position in the Reich for the period of the state of emergency. The head of the Army Command fulfilled his duty loyally, banned the NSDAP as well as the DVFP and the KPD on November 24, 1923, and after overcoming the crisis in February 1924, turned the powers that were delegated to him back over to the Reich President. Around the same time, the still smoldering conflict of jurisdiction between the Reich and Bavaria was also successfully cleared up, which was outwardly highlighted by Lossow's dismissal⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ To this day it is still not completely clear to what extent Ebert endorsed these plans at the beginning of November 1923. In any case, he did not want to make *Seeckt* the chancellor of such a directorate, but rather the German ambassador to Washington at that time, Wiedfeldt. See Huber, Bd. 7, p. 395f.; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 670; Witt, Peter Christian. "Friedrich Ebert. Parteiführer, Reichskanzler, Volksbeauftragter, Reichspräsident." *Friedrich Ebert 1871 – 1925*, edited by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn 1980, p. 64ff.

⁶⁸ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 403ff.; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 672.

⁶⁹ Witt, p. 64; in contrast, Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 619.

⁷⁰ Kahr also resigned. State diet elections led to a government restructuring under BVP politician Held, under whom the process of political normalization continued. The bans of the KPD and NSDAP were rescinded by the Reich on

Kahr and his like-minded peers justified their disloyalty toward the Berlin government by pointing to Berlin's dependence on the left and to the danger of an uprising by the extreme left in *Central Germany*. The worries about a Communist uprising did not come out of thin air. Even among the KPD there was a latent readiness for civil war that was founded there by an expected right-wing putsch. What's more, the political and economic chaos that seemed to spread throughout Germany after the end of the Ruhr conflict solidified Soviet leaders' decision to sooner or later hazard an attempt at an insurrection in a Germany supposedly ripe for rebellion. The establishment of armed "proletarian hundreds" and other factors were supposed to serve this purpose. At the beginning of September, the continued course of action between the German and Soviet party leaders (Heinrich Brandler and Griogorij J. Sinowjew et al, respectively) was agreed upon and a date to strike out fixed for the start of November. This coup was supposed to have been set up by having Communists admitted to the Saxon and Thuringian governments. This occurred on the tenth and the sixteenth of October. Yet the final signal for the insurrection never happened, since a conference of work councils in which Social Democrats were also represented convened on October 21 and refused to approve the proclamation of a national strike demanded by the KPD. Obviously, the countermand could no longer reach Hamburg in time, where a Communist rebellion broke out on October 23⁷¹.

As early as October 22, Reichswehr troops were concentrated in Saxony and remaining droves of Communist resistance were eradicated. A week later, the Saxon government under Erich Zeigner was unseated by the leading commander of the military district, Lieutenant-

July 25, 1924 on the request of the left-wing and right-wing parties. The states followed suit. See Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 471ff., 493, 502.

⁷¹ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 377ff.; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 621ff. The KPD took over the departments of finance (Böttcher) and commerce (Keckert).

General Müller. Müller operated on a directive from Stresemann, who leaned on an emergency statute by Ebert (from October 29) that authorized him to implement a “*Reichsexekution*” and to appoint a Reich Commissioner. As early as October 31, an exclusively Social-Democrat minority government could be formed in Saxony, followed in January 1924 by a Great Coalition government with majority appeal⁷².

The Saxon government’s refusal to disband the “proletarian hundreds” predated this intervention by the Reich against the Saxon “government of republican and proletarian defense” under Governor Zeigner. But because of the rebellion plans which the Reich government justifiably ascribed to the KPD, the Reich government also deemed the participation of Communists in the Saxon government to be unacceptable. Stresemann first intervened when Zeigner refused to dismiss his Communist ministers. The events in Thuringia unfolded less dramatically, but with the same result. The notions of a “German October” as envisioned by the KPD were thus done away with⁷³. In this case, when it came to the “reds,” the Reich government had been able to depend on the Reichswehr.

In contrast to the insurrectionary activities in the heart of Germany, the events in *Rhineland* by and large eluded the influence of the Reich government. One beneficiary of the attitude of passive resistance in western Germany was the separatist movement. Starting from Aachen, where Belgian locations supported the “secessionists,” a series of briefly successful putsch attempts spread from Rhineland to the Palatinate. Although also shielded by the French

⁷² Stresemann justified his behavior before a party leadership conference on October 29: “I may not allow it to come to a right-wing putsch. Bavaria will only fall in line when Saxony releases tensions. The rectification of Saxony is the precondition for victory over Bavaria” (cited by Witt, p. 64). Thus, Stresemann hoped to win a political basis of legitimacy for his actions against Bavaria, even from the perspective of the Reichswehr and the right, who reproached him for his supposed dependence on the SPD.

⁷³ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 650ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 379ff.

occupying forces, this movement (other than in the Palatinate, where it was able to hold its ground until the start of 1924) quickly collapsed everywhere because it lacked support in broad sections of the population⁷⁴.

And yet at the height of the separatist riots, the cohesion of the German Republic appeared to be in danger not only from Bavaria and Central Germany but also from the west. The question of Rhineland remaining in the Reich federation was urgent at precisely this moment because now the long-planned reform of the German currency was on the agenda. Should the Reich government have continued the benefit payments for the occupied areas, thus channeling the new currency into a bottomless pit and once again making the currency vulnerable to inflation? Wasn't it more obvious to relinquish the material responsibility for these areas to the powers that continued to occupy them — even at the risk that such an “scuttling policy” would, hopefully, lead only to Rhineland's temporary disengagement from the rest of Germany, since the introduction of a separate Rhenish currency was under discussion anyway? This question led to vehement arguments within the Reich government as well as between them and Rhineland's spokesmen. Stresemann himself considered for one moment bowing to the inevitable and “lovingly separating” from Rhineland or even having an intermediary extensively independent from the Reich established who was supposed to become responsible for the occupied areas in the Reich government's stead⁷⁵.

Together with other politicians from Rhineland, Adenauer resolutely opposed the supporters of such an “scuttling policy.” The alternative he recommended was also risky, to be sure

⁷⁴ Schwabe, Klaus. “Die Ruhrkrise und das Rheinland.” *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins* (1986), p. 127ff.; Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, pp. 606ff., 641ff.; Schulze, p. 262f.

⁷⁵ Erdmann, *Stresemann*, pp. XLIV, 711.

— the creation of a west German federal state of the Rhine and Ruhr that was supposed to withdraw from the Prussian federation and maintain a special position even with the Reich. In return Adenauer, as he indicated during the probes among the French occupying forces authorized by the Reichstag, hoped for concessions from France on the reparation issue.⁷⁶ Ultimately, neither Adenauer and his friends nor the “scuttling politicians” prevailed: The Reich government brought itself to continue the benefit payments in the end, and the plans for Rhineland to become independent failed because of resistance from the states concerned, and became irrelevant due to the revision of the reparation issue that ensued in 1924⁷⁷.

Perhaps the most astounding accomplishment of the Stresemann administration is that during its “100 days” of existence, it managed, despite all the riots and crises, to implement an extensive and trendsetting body of legislation. In light of the precarious power relationships in the Reichstag, this was only possible with the help of the enabling law that above all gave the government free reign for monetary reform. The Stresemann cabinet would have failed by a hair on this hurdle because the SPD wanted to see the complex of working-hours regulations excluded from the authorization and the bourgeois parties saw the same complex as an integral part of the planned economic recovery. Only after an administrative crisis and reshuffling was a compromise achieved that formally left the principle of the eight-hour workday untouched but allowed for workday extensions in exceptional situations. In any case, the regulation was supposed to follow from a special law. As part of changing the administrative team, Hilferding passed the responsibility for finance to the independent bourgeois politician Hans Luther. Luther

⁷⁶ Erdmann, Karl Dietrich. *Adenauer in der Rheinpolitik*, Stuttgart 1966, pp. 321, 327ff.; now also in sharp criticism of Adenauer: Köhler, Henning. *Adenauer und die rheinische Republik*, Opladen 1986, pp. 214 and passim.

⁷⁷ Erdmann and Vogt, p. LXVIII.

put the finishing touches on the most important of the legislative complexes authorized by the enabling law of October 10: the rehabilitation of the German currency.

The compromise over this issue found within the government followed primarily from the suggestions of Helfferich (who was consulted as an expert) and Luther. It dispensed with a continuous burdening of property and tied the new currency — the “Rentenmark” — to the entire demesne of industry, agriculture, and trade in Germany. This mortgage was supposed to make possible the issuance of annuity certificates that for their part served the new Rentenmark as insurance coverage. Crucial to this new currency not based on gold was that it found the trust of the public. Accompanying measures (which were in part first mandated under Stresemann’s successor) were oriented toward this goal, such as introducing strict foreign exchange control, tightly limiting the credits to be administered to the Reich, relieving the public purse of a portion of unemployment welfare obligations, and drastically economizing on staff expenditures, partially by lowering wages, partially by rigorously reducing the number of civil servants. These measures were joined by curtailments of the eight-hour workday’s validity as a working period norm, an antitrust law, and a reorganization of mediation in pay disputes⁷⁸. In fact the “miracle of the Rentenmark” succeeded in stabilizing an exchange rate of 1 dollar – 4.20 Rentenmark – 4.2 trillion German paper marks. Shortly after introducing the Rentenmark on November 15, 1923, a normalization of economic life occurred, albeit at the cost of an increased unemployment rate⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ Holtfrerich, p. 321ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 423ff.; Erdmann and Vogt, p. LXXVIIff.; Heiber, Helmut. *Die Republik von Weimar*, Munich 1966, p. 149.

⁷⁹ Winkler, 1918 – 1924, p. 675; Erdmann and Vogt, p. LXXXIVff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 387ff.

For the crisis in which the Stresemann administration plunged at the beginning of November, this “miracle” came too late. The SPD had withdrawn from the government on November 2. This decision originated in primarily the partisan left’s indignation over Stresemann’s behavior in the *Reichsexekution* against the SPD/KPD government in Saxony. The chancellor, according to the SPD’s accusations, had not kept the SPD members of the cabinet adequately informed, and had applied a double standard in his behavior toward putsch attempts from the left and such attempts from the right. In Saxony and Thuringia, where the SPD had finally — even if only in alliance with the KPD — become a governing party, drastic measures were taken, but this had not been the case in Bavaria, even though the government there had violated the Reich constitution much more obviously than, for instance, the Saxon government had done. Such a “right-leaning” Republic, it seemed in the SPD, would no longer be seen by the masses as worthy of defending in the end⁸⁰. SPD leaders therefore demanded that the state of emergency be lifted immediately. Already because of the situation in Bavaria, Stresemann could only decline. With that the Great Coalition fell to pieces. With deference to the partisan left and for the sake of unity within its own party, the SPD had plunged the Republic, already in a particularly critical position, into a government crisis and — in sharp contrast to Ebert — chosen “party discipline” over public interest⁸¹. New elections, a self-evident means for preventing a government crisis, were out of the question due to the Republic’s continuously precarious domestic situation. Despite important upcoming foreign-policy proceedings, the SPD then voted with the DNVP, the KPD, and a few smaller parties against Stresemann when he asked for a vote of confidence on November 23. An equally heterogeneous and destructive majority had derailed the all-around

⁸⁰ Winkler, *1918 – 1924*, p. 660ff.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 669, 678.

surely most successful administration of the Weimar Republic⁸². Although the strongest party, the SPD for their part once again embarked on the path of the opposition — this time for a term of four years.

III. The Appearance of Stability (1924 – 1928)

Yet another minority cabinet (Center, DDP, DVP) under the Center Party chairman Wilhelm *Marx* that was tolerated by the SPD offered the way out of the subsequent, particularly difficult government crisis. The main achievement of this administration that took office as of November 20, 1923 lay in completing the legislative work for rehabilitating the German currency that Stresemann had begun. Like with Stresemann, this also now only seemed possible with the help of an enabling law, to which the Reichstag also consented on December 8, 1923. But when a few factions — including that of the SPD — then retrospectively demanded several changes to the regulations enacted because of the enabling law, Marx had the Reich President respond to this request by dissolving the Reichstag⁸³. The subsequent elections that took place on May 4, 1924 introduced a five-year period of seemingly secure stability in the development of the Republic. The first four of those years were characterized by bourgeois bloc governments that exhibited some similarities — including a significant susceptibility to crisis, without the actual crises generally leading to extensive personnel changes in the make-up of the individual cabinets.

⁸² Huber, Bd. 7, p. 429f.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 452ff.

Stresemann, for example, remained the German Minister for Foreign Affairs in every administration until his death. Marx (with four cabinets total) and Hans Luther (with two cabinets) took turns in the office of Reich Chancellor.

Marx on the one hand and Luther on the other embodied two strongly distinct types of politician: The Rheinlander Marx, of lower-middle class origin, had worked his way up as a lawyer. Early on, he found his political home in the Catholic league network and in the Center Party, which he represented in the Prussian state diet and (since 1910) in the Reichstag. At the beginning of 1922, he became the party chairman. An engaged defender of the Weimar Republic, he established himself through objectivity, oratorical persuasiveness, loyalty, and readiness to compromise. “Regulator and moderator,” “the good little Reich Chancellor,” as Seeckt jibed at him, Marx represented the load-bearing middle of his party, the task of which he saw as liaising to the left and the right⁸⁴.

Luther had grown up as the son of a small businessman in Berlin. He also completed law studies, but then he entered local government, in which he worked his way up to the post of mayor of Essen. He was not affiliated with a political party. Cuno had offered him the Ministry of Food; in the Stresemann administration (II), he was responsible for the finance department and contributed decisively to the planning and execution of the monetary reform. As mayor he had taken to a rather authoritarian style that made him unpopular among his colleagues; he was suited to neither rhetoric nor representation. Even so, he was a precise analyst of complicated fiscal or political issues. Marx’s ability to patiently persuade his political environment was rather

⁸⁴ Stehkämper, Hugo. “Wilhelm Marx (1863 – 1946).” *Zeitgeschichte in Lebensbildern*, edited by Rudolf Morsey, Mainz 1973, p. 174ff.; Abramowski, Günter. *Die Kabinette Marx I und II* (=ARK), Bd. 1, Boppard 1973, p. IX.

lacking. In spite of that, his unerring expertise won him recognition⁸⁵. Marx and Luther were similar to each other on one point: Neither of them was a charismatic, outwardly fascinating politician or even a “pacemaker” — Luther, the administrative expert, even less so than Marx. Both of them lacked the charisma with which they could have been able to distinguish themselves as effective spokesmen of republican Germany under difficult political circumstances. But the parameters under which they operated demanded as much. These parameters were first given with the results of the elections of 1924 and 1925.

In the year 1924 the German voter had to go to the ballot box because of two dissolutions of the Reichstag, once in May and then again in December. The May elections brought on yet another defeat of the Weimar Coalition that was hardly less disastrous than that of the year 1920. The winners alongside the DNVP, which together with the Agricultural League won 112 seats, and thus became the strongest Reichstag faction, were the extreme fringe parties — the National Socialist Freedom Party (32 seats) and the KPD (62 seats). The SPD commanded only over 100 seats, whereas in 1920 (i.e. before their unification) the SPD and USPD together had still won 170 seats. A portion of previously leftist voters had obviously cast their lot with the DNVP and the *völkisch* right.

Under the banner of an economic situation perceptibly improving for everyone, the middle parties could then adjust this result again somewhat in their favor at the December elections: The SPD made up the strongest faction once again with 131 seats; the *völkisch* were decimated by half; the KPD still maintained only 45 seats. But nothing about the basic power relationships in the Reichstag had changed as a result. Once more the parties of the Weimar

⁸⁵ Deuerlein, p. 377ff.; Minuth, Karl-Heinz. *Die Kabinette Luther I und II* (=ARk), Bd. 1, Bopard 1977, p. XXI f.; Luther, Hans. *Politiker ohne Partei. Erinnerungen*, Stuttgart 1960.

Coalition altogether remained in the minority (a very slight majority would have been conceivable through a coalition with the BVP), and stable majorities could only have been won with a Great Coalition or else with a right-wing bloc, to which the DNVP had to belong — with 115 seats (including the Agricultural League), they were the second-strongest faction⁸⁶.

With the death of Reich President Ebert on February 28, 1925, yet another stabilizing factor of the Republic was lost. Ebert's last year in office had stood in the shadows of conflicts with his own party, which in many ways thought he was too "right-wing," and above all in the shadows of a libel suit, in which a court found him guilty of treason in the legal sense. This blatant wrongful conviction had certainly excited outrage well into the bourgeois parties yet had exposed Ebert to even more venomous hostilities from the extreme right⁸⁷. At the elections for the office of Reich President held on March 29, 1925, none of the seven nominated candidates carried the necessary absolute majority. For the run-off elections that were fixed for April 26, 1925, Wilhelm Marx (for the moderate left), Paul von Hindenburg (for the right), and Ernst Thälmann (for the KPD) faced off against each other. Of the three candidates, only Thälmann had participated in the first elections. The SPD consented to the candidacy of former Reich Chancellor Marx after the Center for its part had accepted the SPD candidate Braun for the election of the Prussian governor coming up (in the state diet) at the same time. Hindenburg, towards whom the gaze of the right had been directed for a long time, was finally won over to the candidacy by the formal admiral Tirpitz, one of the most prominent exponents of the right. Hindenburg barely won over Marx. He had been made successful by the BVP, which had recommended voting for Hindenburg to its constituents, and by the KPD, which was unable to bring

⁸⁶ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 177ff., 188, 217ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 496, 532ff.

⁸⁷ Witt, "Ebert," p. 64f.; Huber, Bd. 6, p. 534ff.

itself to sit out of the election for Marx's benefit, even though this was even recommended to them by the party leaders in Moscow⁸⁸.

The well-known left-liberal journalist Theodor Wolff declared Hindenburg's election a "lost battle" of the republicans in Germany⁸⁹. In the short term he was perhaps incorrect with that assessment, but in the long run — thinking of the year 1933 — and in a deeper sense, he had indeed hit the bullseye: In the years of interest here, Hindenburg arguably proved that he took his oath to the Reich constitution seriously. He strove honestly for a parliamentary solution to the government crises with which he was confronted and was also prepared to accept a Great Coalition government, even though such a combination did not coincide with his political worldview. In the first years of his term, there were no emergency ordinances. It was also certainly a success of republican Germany that the famous World War field marshal lent his prestige to Germany as Reich President. But the right, which had made him their leader, did not want to accept precisely this aspect of him. The DNVP caucus chairman Kuno Graf von Westarp went so far as to even construe Hindenburg's election as a commitment to pre-1918 Germany and not to the "republican-democratic system" that was "imposed on" Germany by its "enemies"⁹⁰, and in fact, this election must be evaluated as yet another link in a series of election successes which the antirepublican right had achieved since 1920. There is no argument about it: With

⁸⁸ Heiber, p. 73.

⁸⁹ Cited by Schulze, p. 296.

⁹⁰ Cited by Möller, Horst. *Weimar. Die unvollendete Demokratie*, Munich 1985, p. 77. Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 261f. and especially p. 307 says that the possibility of a presidential government emerged as early as the turn of 1926 to 1927. In fact, Schleicher wanted to utilize this possibility as tactical leverage to bring about a middle-right coalition (with the DNVP). See *ibid*, p. 304. In my opinion it has not been proven whether Hindenburg himself seriously contemplated this expedient as an alternative to parliamentary government. Rather, earlier remarks of Hindenburg's indicate the opposite. There is also no doubt that Hindenburg had not hesitated to work together with a Great Coalition when this escape from the unsatisfactory system of minority governments had offered itself. See also Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 548f., 569, 587, and Schulze, p. 300.

Hindenburg's election a personality came to the switchpoint of the Weimar Republic that — uncritically marveled at by the majority of the bourgeoisie despite many a political and even temperamental shortcoming — embodied the monarchical Germany “undefeated in the field of battle.” Furthermore, his environment must have played a growing role at the age of 78 which Hindenburg had reached by the time of his election; and that environment's relationship to republican Germany, whether it was about the Reichswehr intermediary Lieutenant Colonel Kurt von Schleicher or about the president's son who “was not provided for in the constitution” (Kurt Tucholsky), was, to put it circumspectly, broken. It wasn't by chance that the DNVP owed its inclusion in the last bourgeois-bloc government (Marx IV) prior to the elections of the year 1928 to the pressure that Hindenburg and his office exerted over the remaining bourgeois parties (especially the Center).⁹¹

The coalition-political development of these years may be sketched out in a few words⁹²: Although the May 1924 election represented an unambiguous vote of no confidence by the electorate against the last Marx administration, ultimately no alternative to the foregone bourgeois minority cabinet (with Marx as Reich Chancellor) which the SPD would tolerate again was ever found, even after a prolonged crisis. Because in the following months an expansion of this government's parliamentary base also turned out to be impossible — the DDP stood by its protest against participation by the DNVP — Marx had the Reichstag dissolved for a second time on October 20, 1924. The subsequent elections, the result of which was once again disad-

⁹¹ Stürmer, Michael. *Koalition und Opposition in der Weimarer Republik 1924 – 1928*, Düsseldorf 1967, p. 182ff.

⁹² To this end, above all Stürmer; furthermore, Schulze, p. 300ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 530ff., 587ff., 600ff.; for the SPD, see Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 261ff., 268f., 285ff., 298ff.

vantageous to the government, prompted Marx to resign. After weeks of negotiations the independent politician *Luther* consequently succeeded on January 15, 1925 in forming a bourgeois majority government that included the DVP, the BVP, the Center, and — this was a first — even the DNVP. The DDP was not part of this government but was personally represented therein by the (reappointed) Reichswehr Minister Geßler.

The Luther cabinet remained in office a little more than a year. The bourgeois coalition that carried it ruptured on the conflict that broke out among the governing parties over ratifying the Locarno Treaty, which the DNVP refused to do. Only a short lifespan was allotted to Luther's second bourgeois minority government (DVP, DDP, Center, BVP) which was formed under great pains after this renewed "Christmas crisis." It fell apart as early as May 12, 1926 over a vote of no confidence introduced by the DDP (an actual "governing party"). This was related to a flag ordinance announced by Hindenburg and the administration that seemed to put the Reich's flag (black-red-gold) at a disadvantage in comparison to the merchant flag (black-white-red with an inset in the colors of the Republic)⁹³.

The coalition carousel went around one more time; negotiations led by Cologne mayor Konrad Adenauer for a Great Coalition failed again; the crisis ended once more with the formation of a bourgeois minority cabinet, now led however by Marx in place of Luther, that in its turn remained in office for about a year (until January 29, 1927). It fell victim to a no-confidence vote on December 17, 1926, for which the SPD and DNVP joined forces for various reasons. It

⁹³ The flag ordinance of May 5, 1926 mandated that Germany's diplomatic and consular agencies overseas and in port cities also had to run up the trade flag (black-white-red with inset) alongside the Reich's flag in the future. The ordinance harked back chiefly to the desire of German expatriates committed to tradition. In spite of the internal turbulence that it sparked, it was not canceled. See also Minuth, p. LXIV f.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 581ff.; Winkler, 1924 – 1930, p. 265ff. It was feared that Hindenburg would resign if it were canceled.

was caused by a controversy linked to the public notice of the secret arming of the Reichswehr demanded by Soviet Russia. In January 1927 a second middle-right majority coalition (DNVP, DVP, Center, BVP) resulted from this crisis after the DNVP had obligated itself, among other things, to support Stresemann's foreign policy and to agree to renew the Republic Protection Act (which also then happened). Marx became Reich Chancellor once again. Even this administration did not remain in office until the elections due in mid-1928, but rather the Reichstag dissolved ahead of schedule on May 31, 1928 because in the end it was no longer capable of agreeing on a legislative program. It had to do primarily with an education act submitted by the Center which the DNVP refused to pass. Marx himself had already previously encountered growing difficulties in the left wing of his party⁹⁴.

It was certainly typical of the deficient foresight of the majority of the German Reichstag representatives that the causes of the annual government crises of these four years generally bore no relationship to the harm that they inflicted on the parliament's reputation. The real domestic and foreign-policy problems that were waiting to be dealt with, on the other hand, did not in most cases cause these government crises at all. In foreign policy, returning Germany to the rank of an equal European power in accordance with the Western powers constituted the German administrations' main concern. The preliminary solution to the reparation plan that was found in the *Dawes Plan* in early 1924 was a first step on this path, since this plan acknowledged the unity of the German economic sphere and made the German reparation payments dependent on Germany's actual productive capacity. Of course, in return Germany had to accept restrictions to

⁹⁴ Huber, Bd. 7, p. 602ff.; Winkler, 1924 – 1930, p. 298ff.

its sovereignty — for example, such as converting the German State Railways into an organization which was burdened with reparation payments and was led by a board of directors that half consisted of foreigners. Yet as a result Germany obtained the assurance that the Ruhr region would be evacuated as well as the chance that the Allied occupying forces would pull out of Rhineland as well.

The Reichstag's ratification of the Dawes Plan had to follow from a qualified majority because the German State Railways Act had a constitution-changing character. This became possible on the day the votes were cast (August 29, 1924), by way of a vote by 48 DNVP representatives who decided — not without a few nudges from the Americans — to distance themselves from their party's campaign against this “second Versailles” (according to Helfferich)⁹⁵.

By contrast, a year later the DNVP faction didn't think of being able to ratify the Treaty of Locarno, which created a Western European security system and safeguarded Germany's western border. As mentioned, at that point it came to a collapse of Luther's second middle-right administration. With the help of the SPD's votes, the treaty still received the necessary majority in the Reichstag on November 27, 1925. Finally, the Reichstag virtually unanimously ratified the Treaty of Berlin between Germany and Soviet Russia that was finalized on April 24, 1926.

In domestic policy, after the years of inflation, it was all about finding a middle course between the steps demanded by the left to build a social state, fulfilling the wishes of the remaining interest groups, and the necessities that resulted from the restriction of public expenditures — and that were also wished for by foreign powers under the banner of the Dawes Plan. The budget was successfully balanced earlier than planned in 1924 because the rapidly improving economic

⁹⁵ Minuth, p. XXXV ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 509ff.; Link, Werner. *Die amerikanische Stabilisierungspolitik in Deutschland 1921 – 1932*, Düsseldorf 1970, p. 307f.

boom was reflected in rising tax revenues⁹⁶. And so the government could think about lowering taxes as early as 1925. Of course, as a result conflicts over allocation were unavoidable. The great finance reform of the DNVP Minister of Finance Hans August von Schlieben from the year 1925 chiefly benefited the agricultural sector and the well-to-do classes. Even protective tariffs, which the labor parties had quashed only a year before, were now being adopted by the Reichstag. Despite some onesidedness, the new financial reform legislation put the Reich's finances on a sustainable basis for the time being⁹⁷.

An epochal advance that in some measure balanced the disadvantageous aspects of the financial reform for the lower-income classes was made in the realm of social policy: Under Marx's rightist-bourgeois fourth administration, the Reichstag with a great majority adopted a law for unemployment insurance on July 7, 1927. In place of the previous local unemployment relief now came insurance whose contributions were to be raised half by workers and half by employers. A "Reich Institute for Job Placement and Unemployment Insurance" was established whose budget, when necessary, had to be offset by loans (or subsidies) made available by the Reich⁹⁸.

The domestic political climate during the Weimar Republic's phase of relative stability remains incomprehensible as long as the psychological-emotionally contingent controversies of these years are ignored. In the bourgeoisie the indignation over the victorious powers' so-called "war guilt lies" hampered sympathy for Stresemann's moderate-revisionist foreign policy; among the left — to say nothing of the SPD — the aforementioned "flag issue," the demand that

⁹⁶ Abramowski, p. XXIX.

⁹⁷ The progressive taxation rate was cut back, while at the same several excise duties were raised. See Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 246ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 567f.; Minuth, p. XLII ff.

⁹⁸ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 311ff.; Huber, Bd. 6, p. 1100ff.

former German princes be dispossessed, mistrust of the Reichswehr made emotions run high. The disposal of the German princes' property that was only first seized in 1919 was in principle a matter for the states. This issue was first made a concern for the Reich by the KPD, which on January 19, 1926 requested the complete and uncompensated dispossession of the German princes by means of a national referendum. This was an ingenious gambit, since the SPD could hardly defy the request to take part in this initiative that was supported by broad portions of the population. The result of the popular petition and national referendum arranged by both labor parties (March 4 – 7 and June 20, 1926, respectively) proved that even the bourgeois voters — primarily from the Center — supported the dispossession of the princes. Yet the somewhat more than 15 million yes-votes cast were not enough for the bill to become law. A corresponding bill failed in the Reichstag because the right rejected it with reference to the constitutionally embedded safeguarding of property. With that the final settlement fell back upon the states.

This initiative remained problematic as an attempt to bypass the Reichstag without material necessity — a further step in discrediting the German parliament. Furthermore, it provided additional fuel for conflict between the bourgeois and labor parties⁹⁹. The SPD's critical attitude toward the Reichswehr, which the SPD further accused of connections to right-wing radical groups, had the same effect. These tensions came to a breaking point in the fall of 1926 when the secret collaboration between the Reichswehr and the Red Army was made public. The SPD wanted to play off this revelation against the KPD as an accomplice to the "counterrevolution," but on the other hand also against the Reichswehr and its politically uncontrolled special position in the state. But then an intervention by Scheidemann before the Reichstag (on December 16,

⁹⁹ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 271ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, p. 590ff.

1926) led to an ostracism toward the Marx administration, as well. In any case, to the bourgeois politicians, Scheidemann's venture amounted to treason. The resentment between the middle and the left went proportionately deep. The chances for a Great Coalition, which hadn't been bad in the fall of 1926, vanished again. As it had already done many times before, the balance of interests between the SPD and the DVP, the only thing that could have provided a basis for a Great Coalition, proved to be impossible. The bourgeois right-wing bloc of the year 1927 inevitably resulted from this situation¹⁰⁰.

IV. The Collapse of Parliamentary Government (1928 – 1930)

The hour for a second — and final — attempt to govern the Republic with a Great Coalition first struck after the Reichstag re-elections which took place on May 20, 1928. At first glance their result could be taken as a triumph of the Republic: The SPD achieved their best election result since 1919 with 29.8 percent of votes cast, whereas the already-small NSDAP and furthermore the DNVP had to accept losses. On closer inspection, however, it turned out that the parliamentary situation had become more complicated. Once again, the German voter had punished political parties for having taken over the responsibility of government: All the bourgeois centrist parties had suffered losses, partly in favor of interest parties (such as the Economic Party) that were barely politically assimilable. Just as before, a Weimar Coalition majority government was not possible, but neither was a bourgeois-rightist majority bloc. So the only attainable majority combination remaining was the Great Coalition¹⁰¹. Thus, the SPD also bore down on that goal

¹⁰⁰ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 298ff.; Carsten, p. 254ff.

¹⁰¹ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 521ff.

singlemindedly. Its candidate was the party co-chairman Hermann *Müller*, who had temporarily been the Reich Chancellor once already after the Kapp Putsch¹⁰².

The Müller cabinet with a term from June 28, 1928 until March 27, 1930 became the most long-lived of all the administrations that the Republic had had up to that point. Even so, in the end it was the domestic-policy tasks facing the cabinet that caused it to fail. To understand the reasons for this, one must be familiar with a few economic and political parameters in which the cabinet's work took place.

Precisely according to most recent research, it can no longer be in doubt that the economic boom that Germany experienced after inflation exhibited alarming symptoms of weakness — a flat growth rate in industrial production, investments, and gross national product, a permanent crisis in the agricultural sector, an unemployment rate that (among labor union members) never fell below an annual average of 6.7 percent, an inadequate accumulation of capital that made the German economy dependent on capital imports, and not least an invariably passive trade balance.

The growth figures fell considerably as early as 1928, and after the hard winter of 1928/29, i.e. even before the stock market crash in New York in October 1929, the German economy already found itself in a recession. The Müller administration had to gear itself up for fierce conflicts over allocation influenced by dwindling funds, even before the arrival of a global economic crisis was foreseeable¹⁰³.

¹⁰² See p. 96f. [sic; here, p. 55]

¹⁰³ Borchardt, Knut. "Wirtschaftliche Ursachen des Scheiterns der Weimarer Republik." *Weimar. Selbstpreisgabe einer Demokratie. Eine Bilanz heute*, edited by Karl Dietrich Erdmann et al., Düsseldorf 1980, p. 218ff.; Feldmann, Gerald D. (ed.). "Weimar from Inflation to Depression: Experiment or Gamble." *Die Nachwirkungen der Inflation auf die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich 1985, p. 388ff.

A radicalization of the political groupings on the extreme right and the extreme left was only indirectly related to the ever more critical economic situation of Germany. The KPD had belonged to the electoral victors of 1928 — no doubt by benefiting from growing unemployment. Then, as early as September 1928, the party was set by Moscow headquarters on a resolute collision course that obligated it to ruthlessly fight the SPD, which was maligned as “socially fascist.” Bloody street riots between the Communist “Alliance of Red Front-Fighters” and the police, especially in Social Democrat-governed Prussia, occurred more and more frequently from then on¹⁰⁴. As the older labor party, the SPD was unable to ignore this rivalry when the interests of its constituency were at stake.

The right also made the headlines more and more after the elections of 1928. The vanguard was constituted by a rural movement primarily native to Schleswig-Holstein that wanted to draw attention to its members’ financial hardship with the aid of attacks on public buildings¹⁰⁵. Even more important became a radical turn to the right which the DNVP carried out under its new chairman, the “press baron” Alfred Hugenberg. It was also he who, due to his hostility against the republican “system,” sought a collaboration with the NSDAP (which had emerged from the elections of 1928 with all of 12 seats). On July 9, 1929, on behalf of the DNVP with the NSDAP and other radical right-wing organizations, he established a “Reich Committee for a Popular Petition Against the Young Plan” (a reorganization of reparations, which will be investi-

¹⁰⁴ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 673.

¹⁰⁵ Schulze, p. 309.

gated later). The law that was meant to be implemented by these means provided for the abolishment of all German reparation obligations and for the punishment of German politicians who signed the new plan¹⁰⁶.

Naturally, the necessary number of votes was reached only for the popular petition, but not for the subsequent referendum. Yet for months Hitler had won an excellent propaganda platform and could now also hope, for example, to use Hugenberg to gain access to heavy industry, in which his program had intrinsically been condemned as “Marxist” even at the end of 1929¹⁰⁷. Even in the Reichswehr, people were now hearing of the National Socialists’ first advertising successes, and the first overwhelming national electoral victory that the NSDAP achieved at the end of 1929 with an 11.3 percent share of votes in Thuringia can certainly be traced back less to the at first gradually worsening economic situation and more to the propaganda effectiveness that Hitler achieved in Hugenberg’s wake¹⁰⁸. Like the extreme left, the extreme right was also set in motion. They both forced the parties adjoining them to compensate for this extremist pressure in their political behavior.

Before the background of this gradually ever more ominous economic and political situation, the partners of the new Müller administration allowed themselves to fall into a tug-of-war over the cabinet’s composition that lasted more than nine months. After a precarious state of transition in which the parties had dispatched their confidants only as individuals and not as their representatives in the government, all without committing themselves thereby to supporting the

¹⁰⁶ Fest, p. 369ff.

¹⁰⁷ Turner, Henry A. *Die Großunternehmer und der Aufstieg Hitlers*, Berlin 1985, p. 122.

¹⁰⁸ Schulz, Gerhard. *Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus. Krise und Revolution in Deutschland*, Berlin 1975, pp. 455ff., 479ff.

government in the long run, the cabinet was first formed on April 13, 1929 as a coalition government in the proper sense of the phrase. Without the assistance that Stresemann had granted in these arduous negotiations, in which he repeatedly compelled the DVP — once even by threatening to leave the party himself — back onto a course favoring a Great Coalition, the heterogeneous political combination which had converged in the Müller cabinet would certainly have come apart again even in the year 1928¹⁰⁹.

In general, because of its fragile parliamentary basis, the administration also had little luck in domestic policy. A whole slew of propositions — i.e. on Reich reform, on expanding pensions and aiding the eastern German agricultural sector — became stuck in the deliberation stage and did not reach implementation¹¹⁰. During a labor dispute, the “Ruhr Railroad Strike,” in the late fall of 1928, the authority of the state was disregarded by employers, while at the same time the Minister of Labor Rudolf Wissell had to allow himself to be accused of legally incorrect behavior¹¹¹. The Republic Protection Act from June 21, 1922 was only successfully renewed in the Reichstag after a second attempt¹¹².

Particularly humiliating for the cabinet’s SPD members were events surrounding a law that allowed for building an armored cruiser in a size category approved by the Treaty of Versailles. During the election campaign — still as an opposition party — the SPD had in the

¹⁰⁹ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 534, 580. The DVP demanded a simultaneous participation in the government of Prussia, which Prussia’s Governor Braun refused; the Center occupied three departments and asserted itself with this demand, unlike the DVP (which still, however, retained the finance department).

¹¹⁰ Schulze, p. 304ff.; Vogt, Martin. *Das Kabinett Müller II* (=ARK), Boppard 1970, p. XXXIII ff.; Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 663, 676ff.

¹¹¹ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 557ff.

¹¹² For the first vote on June 28, 1929, the bill’s text required a constitution-altering two-thirds majority. It was voted down because the Economic Party withdrew its concerted support from the government at the third reading. An amended version of the text was then adopted on March 18, 1930 with a simple majority. See Huber, Bd. 6, p. 683ff., Bd. 7, p. 666.

same breath as the KPD condemned the construction of this “Armored Cruiser A,” the military necessity of which was certainly arguable. In the new Great Coalition government, the members of the SPD nevertheless deferred to the vote of their bourgeois partners who all advocated the cruiser’s construction. The new army minister Wilhelm Groener and Hindenburg, who even threatened to resign in the case that the law was not passed, campaigned particularly hard for this law. The Reichstag passed the bill on November 16, 1928 against the votes of the KPD and the SPD. The SPD faction had imposed party discipline so that the Social-Democrat government members, including the chancellor, were forced to vote against a proposition that they themselves had made — to voice their suspicion themselves, if you will. Word of the crisis of parliamentarianism began to circulate in Germany¹¹³.

The Müller administration could vindicate its inept and hapless domestic policy with the argument that it had been built in principle to tackle a foreign-policy task: the brokering and parliamentary passage of a reorganization of the reparation issue by means of the aforementioned *Young Plan*. The economic merits of this compact signed on June 7, 1929 were justly debatable. Even if the consideration of German productive capacity that was vouchsafed in the Dawes Plan and secured on an international scale (the so-called “transfer protection”) was discontinued, the sum to be paid by Germany (40 billion gold marks at the present value) was still sizeable and necessitated payment by installments which were supposed to extend into the year 1988. Even so, the advantages of the Young Plan prevailed, from the government’s perspective. France’s pledge to also vacate the last occupied zone in the Rhineland in the following year carried the most weight. For this reason, the majority of the German Reichstag then agreed to the “new

¹¹³ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 541ff., 550. Geßler had resigned on January 14, 1928 due to an embezzlement scandal in the navy. See Huber, Bd. 7, p. 618ff.

plan” on March 12, 1930, especially since Hindenburg had put in a good word for it. Stresemann did not experience this final and crowning achievement of his foreign policy. He died on October 3, 1929 just after he had advocated with the last of his strength once again among his party for the cohesion of the Great Coalition¹¹⁴. With him died not only the internationally recognized German Minister of Foreign Affairs but also perhaps the most capable domestic-policy expert that the Weimar Republic ever produced. But with him the Great Coalition lost decisive support. From the perspective of numerous contemporaries, primarily from the business sector, it had done its part anyhow by passing the Young Plan.

Once more it turned out that the SPD and the liberal parties chiefly held common interests in foreign policy. As soon as the tentative regulation of the reparation issue moved domestic policy back to the forefront, there was no longer any such commonality, but rather in light of the traditional economic and social-policy antagonisms between the SPD and the bourgeois, there were considerable tensions to reckon with. Prior to the parliamentary vote on the Young Plan, the Center feared this more than anyone — what’s more, under the ratification of the Young Plan, it saw itself and the centrist parties as already left alone by the SPD with the unpopular task of having to muster up the funds to settle the German reparation obligations. In order to avoid this, the Center faction issued an ultimatum through its new chairman Heinrich Brüning at the end of January 1930, demanding that the German budget must first be put in order before ratifying the Young Plan. The SPD accepted this composite bill with some misgivings. Admittedly, the Young Plan was then still passed before a regulation of the pending budget problem, but the Chancellor was still bound by his word to fulfill the Center’s demand¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁴ Krüger, p. 476ff.; Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 587, 794; Huber, Bd. 7, pp. 695ff., 711.

¹¹⁵ Brüning, Heinrich. *Memoiren 1918 – 1934*, Stuttgart 1970, p. 152f.; Vogt, p. LXIIIff.

With that, the thorniest issue that the Müller administration had ever been confronted with became immediately acute, since the administration after all had taken over an unbalanced budget from its predecessor. As a result of the recession and the correspondingly sinking tax collections, this problem had become even worse in the course of the year 1929. But the biggest hold in the budget was torn by loans and subsidies which the Reich Office for Unemployment Insurance needed in order to be able to perform its duties, which steeply increased in scope with the rising number of unemployed. At the beginning of February 1929, the number of unemployed surpassed the three-million mark for the first time. With that, balancing the budget and reforming unemployment insurance became two issues which interlocked with each other more and more¹¹⁶. The opinions about the measures to be embraced diverged diametrically between the SPD and the bourgeois coalition parties: The SPD advocated for contribution increases that would have burdened employers and workers. This was unacceptable for the DVP in particular. The DVP instead requested reducing the benefits from unemployment insurance which, in turn, as social degradation, was out of the question for the SPD and labor unions. There had been much wrestling over this controversial subject in the Müller cabinet since April 1929. Temporary compromise solutions were found, yet a conclusive regulation proved to be unreachable. In the meantime, the cash situation in the Reich and the states repeatedly escalated so critically that the payment of wages due became questionable. Astonishingly, the cabinet achieved a compromise at the last minute. A coverage bill that was agreed upon on March 5, 1930 provided for a four-percent maximum increase of unemployment insurance contributions (a success of the SPD) and even more, an “industrial debit” of 350 million Reichmarks; the DVP on the other hand had won

¹¹⁶ Latest account by Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 589ff., 739ff.; Vogt, p. LI ff.; Timm, Helga. *Die deutsche Sozialpolitik und der Bruch der großen Koalition im März 1930*, Düsseldorf 1982.

from its Minister of Finance Paul Moldenhauer the promise that the government would commit to an austerity program that allowed for tax decreases and would allow income tax refunding to be abolished in the future¹¹⁷. The DVP faction refused this coverage bill that had even been developed in conjunction with the minister who came from their own ranks. A final suggestion for arbitration by Brüning which further complied with the notions of the DVP and ultimately deferred the most controversial issue once again — the reform of unemployment insurance — then prevailed among the DVP, but not among the SPD faction, even though the Social-Democrat members of the government — especially Severing — supported it¹¹⁸. The SPD's refusal of the Brüning compromise then induced the DVP to exit the Great Coalition and thus induced the Müller administration to resign¹¹⁹.

The question of who is responsible for the collapse of the Great Coalition on March 27, 1930 is still contested. Most recent analyses assign a large portion of the blame to the DVP¹²⁰. Even so, it was the SPD which, by not accepting the final suggestion for arbitration, at least formally took on the odium for the Müller administration's collapse. At the time the Social-Democrat faction was sharply aware of the danger of the veritable crisis of parliamentarianism that could arise out of this government crisis. The alternative — a presidential government that would make itself largely independent of the Reichstag — was discussed not only in

¹¹⁷ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 787f.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 805ff.

¹¹⁹ Vogt, p. LXVIII.

¹²⁰ Such as Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 816; Vogt, p. LXVIII, according to which DVP-faction chairman Scholz himself confessed retrospectively to the intention of making the Great Coalition collapse. Hindenburg played a not unimportant role in the end phase of the crisis by assuring Müller for a moment — on March 11, 1930 — the use of the right due to the Reich President to issue emergency ordinances, which if need be would have safeguarded the survival of this administration. Yet in the last days of March, Hindenburg withdrew this pledge, and this was announced by the people around him. Knowledge of this fact contributed substantially to Müllers decision to resign. See Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, pp. 793ff., 808; Vogt, p. XVIII. See also Bracher, Karl Dietrich. *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik*, Königstein 1978, p. 270.

Hindenburg's circle but also even among the public. In pursuing the reasonable interests of its members, the SPD, in its decision against continuing the Great Coalition, had accepted this risk — and with it, the risk of itself becoming usurped of its political power in the long run. The DVP, which took just as much of a chance on the breaking of the Great Coalition, and which actually wished for such an event among its right-most wing, acted more congruously in this one point — it could hope to retain measurable influence even in a presidential government.

Yet internal-structural causes for this collapse of parliamentarianism in Germany should be discussed much more than personal blame for the fall of the Müller administration. With that the question that was asked initially is raised at the same time, concerning the survival chances of parliamentary democracy in Germany in the 1920s.

In contrast to the representatives of the government, the majorities of the SPD and DVP factions acted as pure lobbyists. Heinrich August Winkler thus speaks with good reason of a “class struggle” carried into the cabinet¹²¹. Not only opposing interests but also diverse economic notions of governing were abruptly facing each other in the end. This behavior from the factions was not new. Once involved in a government, they had always had a tough time seeing themselves as responsible “governing parties.” Hence their insufficient readiness to compromise, hence also the exaggeration of emotional controversies, the settlement of which only made the work of government more difficult.

To be sure, the parliament was no better than its voters: The German voter after 1919 no longer put his trust predominantly in the parties of the Weimar Coalition. There was never actu-

¹²¹ Winkler, *1924 – 1930*, p. 736ff.

ally an interaction of a loyal opposition to the Republic with a proportionately minded government. As such, the sad picture that the Reichstag from that time presents to contemporaries and to future generations is understandable. A fatal cycle began: The voters turned their backs internally on parliamentarianism more and more and voted accordingly; yet the Reichstag elected this way became more incapable of governing and thus deterred even more voters from the institution of parliamentarianism. That was also why the Weimar Republic held no esteem among intellectuals of both the left and the right, why its politicians — although, as we saw, they came in the majority from “the people” — nevertheless did not become popular. Only a long-term stable economic situation and steady foreign-policy advances would have been able to lead to a stabilization of parliamentarianism in Germany in the long run. But precisely these requirements were not present in the years after the fall of the Müller administration.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This chapter is a summation of the linguistic nuances and cultural and historical details working at several levels within both the individual translations and my thesis as a whole.

My primary contributions to this paper include (i) a reminder of the Weimar Republic's general state of disunity and (ii) a succinct restatement of the intricacy of reading and translating specific German terms in the context of Weimar research.

Abstract

Viewed within the specific cultural-political framework of the Weimar Republic, the German terms *Vernunftrepublikaner*, *Reich*, and *Republik* created complications when translating the essays included in this thesis because of the complex historical contexts in which they were used or developed. Similarly, the terms *Teilkulturen* and *Geist* proved problematic in light of, respectfully, the inadequate and the numerous English translations already available.

By inspecting these linguistic elements, a new dimension of understanding was created both for lay readers and for scholars interested in discovering how Germans' understanding of the Weimar Republic is rooted both in the everyday German language and the language which was adapted to the events of that particular epoch.

I. Conclusion

The Weimar Republic encountered a variety of problems in its short tenure as the first democratic society of Germany; arguably the most significant of these was the unwillingness of the German people at large to embrace the ideals of republican democracy. In true form to the nature of humanity, the beliefs, fears, and justifications of the Germans who lived during the Weimar period became mired in the language they used to talk about it — even to the extent of developing their *own* vocabulary (e.g. *Vernunftrepublikaner*) to pinpoint exactly where they fit within the new and confusing state order. Even more significant, the German language adapted to these shifts seemingly faster than did the people themselves, such as when the terms *Reich* and *Republik* were used simultaneously to talk about Germany as a state, but with separate connotations of power, legitimacy, and acceptance.

German speakers have utilized both old and new terms to conceptualize the Weimar Republic. *Teilkulturen* has come to signify the self-determining will of all Weimar Germans regardless of their political beliefs (Föllmer et al. 38 – 39), a will which was ultimately thwarted by the overall population's lack of political unity and of cooperative spirit. *Geist* and *geistig*, meanwhile, are holistic terms which embrace any way of thinking — sacred or secular — that seeks to rationalize the observable world; yet as Sontheimer argues, *Geist* was rejected by the nationalist, irrational sectors of the Weimar population (460).

Transferring such nuances between languages is difficult. Yet it is indispensable to a fuller understanding of the Weimar Republic, both for general readers and for scholars.

II. Works Cited

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Vita

Margaret Cross was born and raised in Bartlett, TN, to parents Joseph and Jeanne Cross. She is the second of three children, Elizabeth (elder) and Ben (younger). She graduated from Bartlett High School in 2010 and continued to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. There she immediately declared a double major. During her undergraduate years, Margaret studied for a semester at the University of Bonn in Germany. In May 2014 she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in English and German at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

After working full-time for two years, Margaret decided to continue her education. She returned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she accepted a graduate teaching assistantship in the German program. Her first academic year in the German master's program was spent studying abroad at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany; there she was inspired to study the Weimar Republic. Margaret graduated with a Master of Arts in German in May 2019.