

## Year 9- Weimar and Nazi Germany

**Title: How did Germany change through the German Revolution of 1918-19?**

### Learning Objectives:

**To explore the ending of WW1 and use this to understand Germany's government and power.**

### **TASKS:**

1. Copy down the following key terms and write their definitions in your own words so you understand them.

*Abdication: A leader, such as a king or queen, gives up their throne and position in the country.*

*Constitution: The rules which are in place to show how a country is run.*

*Republic: A country which is ruled by the public (via a government) rather than a monarch.*

2. Explain why Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates from the throne of Germany. Summarise your ideas from the information below.

### **The abdication\* of the Kaiser**

On 9 November 1918, the Kaiser was at the army headquarters in the town of Spa, 700 kilometres from the capital, Berlin. His ministers told him that the only way to restore order in Germany was for him to abdicate, giving up his position as the emperor of Germany. At first, he refused.

However, the Kaiser had lost the support of the German army. The officers at army headquarters refused to support him. When told this news by General Wilhelm Groener, the army's second-in-command, the Kaiser had no choice. On 9 November, he abdicated and, in the early hours of 10 November, went into exile in Holland.

3. After the Kaiser fled the country, there needed to be someone in power to take over. This was the 'Council of People's Representatives'. Remember, Germany had always had princes in power, or the Kaiser once they were unified.

Draw a short timeline outlining the key events following the Kaiser's abdication:

9<sup>th</sup> November

Berlin- Some peaceful protesters at the Reichstag (Parliament building) and others collected guns/weapons to take over the city.

### The declaration of a republic

On 9 November, the streets of Berlin were full of people. Some gathered peacefully outside the Reichstag, the German parliament, while others collected guns and took over parts of the city.

Inside the Reichstag was Philipp Scheidemann, a leading member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the biggest party in the German parliament. He was told that armed rioters were preparing to announce a communist\* government in Berlin. Scheidemann was keen to retain control of events and keep a more moderate form of government. He rushed to an open window of the Reichstag and proclaimed to the crowds below that the Kaiser had gone and that there was a new German Republic. He appealed for a peaceful transition to the new regime (see Source B).

### The Council of People's Representatives

The SPD had to work quickly to establish the new republic.

- On 9 November, the Kaiser's chancellor (equivalent to a British prime minister), Max von Baden, handed over his office to Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the SPD.
- On 10 November, Ebert made an agreement with General Groener for the army to work with the government to keep the communists out of power.
- Also on 10 November, Ebert suspended the old Reichstag (parliament) and named six moderate politicians who would form the Council of People's Representatives. This council would head the government of the country, but only until a new constitution\* could be agreed.
- By taking these steps, moderate politicians in the SPD were able to take control of Germany, preventing anarchy or a takeover by communist extremists.

4. Read the information below, and use the information from the lesson to help you answer the question: Who should take the credit for the peaceful transition of power in Germany?
- Friedrich Ebert
  - Phillip Scheidemann
  - General Groner.

## Setting up the Weimar Republic

The nine months from November 1918 to July 1919 were uneasy for the new Republic whilst a new government was put in place. Ebert took several steps to increase people's confidence in the new Republic.

- Ebert arranged for the civil servants\* who had helped run Germany under the Kaiser to stay in office. They were instructed to work alongside soldiers' and workers' councils, where local people had set these up. This ensured that the state would keep running – for example, collecting taxes and running public services such as schools.
- He reassured General Groener that the army would not be reformed. Officers kept their ranks. In return, Groener agreed to use the German army to help keep the new Republic in power.
- Ebert also reassured leaders of industry, like the coal and shipping entrepreneur Hugo Stinnes, that the new Republic would not confiscate land or factories and that there would be no nationalisation (state control) of private industries. This helped ensure that businesses and the economy continued to operate.
- Finally, Ebert won the support of the trade unions\*. He promised their leader, Carl Legien, that the new Republic would try to achieve an eight-hour working day.

Despite Ebert's efforts, some extreme political parties were still dissatisfied. Demonstrations, and even riots, were common in the major cities. Germany was still on the edge of anarchy.

Still, Ebert had achieved a fragile control, which lasted long enough to agree a new constitution for the new republic.

***Well done for your efforts so far, Year 9!***