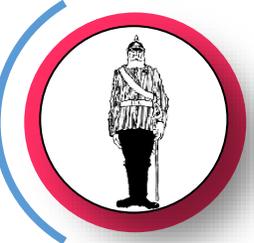


What challenges did Germany face at the end of the First World War?



Political challenges

The German Parliament, the Reichstag, was weak even before 1918. There was no effective opposition to Kaiser Wilhelm II and this monarch ruled as a dictator. The Kaiser struggled to control Berlin in the wake of a naval mutiny and strikes and demonstrations. Revolution seemed a real possibility as by November 1918 soldiers' and workers' councils had taken over many cities. This sparked fears into the hearts of the politicians as Russia had experienced a revolution of workers and soldiers the previous year resulting in a socialist revolution and the rise of Lenin. The largest political party in the Reichstag, the Social Democrats (led by Friedrich Ebert) called for the Kaiser's abdication. The Kaiser fled to Holland and Germany was declared a republic and would be led by the Reichstag not a monarch. The new government, led by Ebert (the Chancellor of Germany), was set up in Weimar, far away from the revolutionary atmosphere in the capital, Berlin. Ebert signed the armistice with the Allies.

Social challenges

Germans were facing starvation as a result of the British Navy's blockade of German ports in the north. People were demoralised and bitter about the way the war had ended and sought scapegoats to explain why they faced such hardship. Workers were striking and there were genuine fears of anarchy on the streets. The future was uncertain for Germany people after the war. The great influenza pandemic of 1918-19, often called the Spanish flu, decimated the German Army. Over 400,000 German civilians died of the disease in 1918; approximately 750,000 German people died of a combination of starvation and flu.

Economic challenges

Between 1913 and 1918 the German Mark lost 75% of its value. Agricultural production fell, particularly in relation to milk and potatoes. The winter of 1917 was dubbed 'Turnip Winter' as turnips were the main food available to most citizens. Germany had financed her involvement in the war by printing money and borrowing. This led to inflation which had a negative impact on the value of money and the cost of goods.

Military challenges

Many German people were annoyed as they felt that they had been led to believe that Germany was winning the war by the Kaiser and his government. The Ludendorff Offensive of 1918 was successful in breaking through the Western Front, and so soldiers were led to believe that victory was within Germany's reach. The German people blamed the politicians for the situation. At the end of the war, thousands of demobilised and exhausted soldiers returned to Germany and joined in demonstrations against the Kaiser and German government.