

D.4. CHRONOLOGY, 1920-1929

(The following calendar should summarize the most important events during the middle years of the Weimar Republic. Sorry for not writing out everything.)

1920

Kapp Putsch, March 1920; causes general strike and left-wing uprisings.

Reichstag elections, 6 June 1920. Vast gains for the anti-democratic parties. Coalition of SPD, DDP, and Center loses majority.

Grudgingly the new German government, led by the Center, the DDP, and the DVP, embarks on a policy of fulfillment. By trying to fulfill the conditions of Versailles, the government wants to show that this is impossible. Radical German nationalists, however, interpret the policy of fulfillment as a betrayal. Some vow to kill all politicians associated with it.

1921

War between Polish units and German Free Corps in Upper Silesia. Plebiscite, March 1921. German public is outraged because the drawing of voting districts by the Allies favors Poland.

Left-wing uprisings in Saxony and Thuringia, spring 1921. Repression through the army and Free Corps.

Fixation of German reparations by allied conferences and determination of a schedule of payments in London (April and June 1921).

Assassination of Matthias Erzberger, the former finance minister, by a right-wing terrorist, August 1921.

1922

Treaty of Rapallo between Germany and the Soviet Union: April 1922. Economic cooperation. Secret military understandings are already in the making. German government tries to make the western powers more willing to make concessions in the reparation question and to stifle possible Russian claims on Germany, but the Treaty of Rapallo antagonizes the west without bringing tangible gains. It is nevertheless very popular in Germany because it looks like an independent and self-assertive foreign policy.

Assassination of Foreign Minister Walther **Rathenau** by a group of right-wing terrorists, June 1922. Anti-Semitism, hatred of the Republic, and resentment against the policy of fulfillment conducted by Rathenau are the motives.

In reaction to the Rathenau murder: Reichstag issues **Laws for the Protection of the Republic**, July 1922; exacerbates conflict between the Reich Government in Berlin and Bavaria. Bavaria, having lost most of the autonomy that Bismarck had granted it in 1871, fears further intrusions by the central government in Berlin. Political difference also plays a role: the Bavarian government stands far more to the right than the Reich Government in Berlin.

1923

Due to a delay in the payment of German reparations, French and Belgian forces occupy the Ruhr district and other areas right of the Rhine in January. **Ruhr occupation** triggers national outrage at France in all of Germany; temporary national unity.

Britain condemns the Ruhr occupation.

In reaction to the Ruhr occupation, the German government declares **passive resistance** (a gigantic, state-sponsored mass strike in the occupied areas), which fans hyperinflation, since the government in Berlin pays the strikers in the Ruhr. Having no monetary reserves left, the government resorts to the printing press, thus destroying the currency, which had lost value already since 1914 (effect of huge wartime deficit spending). The **hyperinflation** wipes out all middle-class savings and has catastrophic social effects in 1923.

German sabotage. Bloody clashes in the occupied territories. France tries to set up separatist governments in West Germany.

At this time of renewed hostility, efforts for secret German rearmament intensify. Rightist paramilitary groups receive military help from the army (formation of secret units, the "Black Reichswehr"). The Inter-Allied Military Control Commission stops its missions in the face of popular outrage. Resumes controls only in the summer of 1924.

As the catastrophic economic consequences of passive resistance become more visible, separatism and particularism intensify, especially in Bavaria. Radical unrest also grows. The rearming rightist bands start planning to overthrow the Republic, should it give up resistance to France. The Communists intensify their own preparations for a putsch. They hope to strike a decisive blow in October 1923 ("Red October"), six years after the

successful Russian Revolution.

In the growing crisis, a grand coalition from SPD to DVP is formed under Gustav **Stresemann**, the DVP's chairman (August to November 1923). After hesitating for several weeks, Stresemann breaks off passive resistance on 26 September 1923. President Ebert declares a national state of emergency in order to deal with the expected unrest following Stresemann's decision.

Bavarian right-wing activism, virulent, well-armed, and politically radical, is the first to challenge the Republic. In order to check the most militant rightists in Bavaria (including the Nazis), the Bavarian government forms an emergency government, practically a dictatorship, under the more moderate rightist Gustav von **Kahr**. Bavaria also moves toward greater autonomy from Berlin.

Buchrucker Putsch, 1 October 1923. Attempt of some military units from the Black Reichswehr to transform the passive resistance into an active war against France and to overthrow the democratic government. Fails immediately because the rest of the army does not cooperate.

In Saxony and Thuringia leftist governments including the SPD and KPD are formed. The communists build up their own paramilitary formations ("red hundreds").

Culmination of rightist quasi-legal putschism. Army leaders, businessmen, and conservatives seek to take power and establish a dictatorship through intrigue, while avoiding the risks of an open putsch. Tirpitz is a key figure in these efforts.

The German army deposes the leftist governments of Saxony and Thuringia (late October/early November 1923). The SPD, outraged because no similar step is considered against Kahr's (even more) refractory Bavaria, leaves the national government. A minority coalition continues in office under Stresemann.

Inflation reaches record heights in November: 1 US dollar=4 Trillion marks. Germans see hyperinflation not only as an economic catastrophe but also as an expression of a huge moral crisis.

Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch, Munich, 8/9 Nov. 1923. The Nazis, still a party with no significant base outside Bavaria, feel that the culmination of the crisis is near and hope to seize power in Germany through a march on Berlin. They are inspired by similar examples of takeovers by radicals who had assembled forces in the provinces and then seized power by marching on the capital (Mussolini's march on Rome in October 1922; Turkish revolution in 1922). The Nazis occupy a beer hall and force the Kahr government to consent to march on Berlin with all Nazi and other right-wing paramilitary bands. Kahr pretends to support the enterprise but deserts Hitler in the night. When Hitler and Ludendorff seek to save the putsch by marching through the center of Munich the next day, Kahr's Bavarian police units shoot at the putschists. Hitler is wounded, escapes, but gets caught and imprisoned a day later. Although the putsch is a total failure, Hitler gains prestige on the right by at least trying to overthrow Weimar (and Versailles). See a detailed account of the [Hitler-Putsch](#).

Ebert reacts to the Hitler Putsch by giving General **Seeckt**, the chief of the army, emergency powers.

The Stresemann government achieves currency stabilization, 15 November 1923. A strict revaluation of the mark puts it on a stable foundation. Revaluation, carried out by emergency decrees, is a small miracle, but it hits hard and leaves a lasting hatred of the Weimar Republic among the middle classes. Slow economic normalization follows.

As Foreign Minister in a new (minority) cabinet under Center politician **Marx** (formed in the end of November), Stresemann seeks reconciliation and international agreement. Hopes thus to win better recognition for Germany and to revise Versailles peacefully. The British ambassador in Berlin speaks full of admiration about the Republic mastering so many crises during this horrible year. But the social and political legacy of hyperinflation is depressing and has long-term effects.

1924

A severe financial crisis breaks out in France in January; makes France more dependent upon American capital and more willing to find a cooperative solution to the reparations problem (rather than extraction reparations alone and through violence).

Hitler Trial, February to April 1924. Hitler receives a five-year prison term, of which he serves only one year. Ludendorff acquitted. In prison, Hitler writes the first volume of his autobiography/political program, **Mein Kampf** (My Struggle).

New settlement for German reparations, offering lower yearly payments and American loans to Germany: **Dawes Plan**, proposed in April 1924, ratified in August. American loans to Germany are supposed to restart the German economy, so that Germany will be able to pay reparations to France and Britain, which in turn can start paying off their war debts to the United States.

Reichstag elections in May 1924 reflect the intense anger left by the chaotic preceding year. Radicals on the left and right make massive gains. DNVP (right-wing nationalists, against democracy) becomes strongest party. SPD and the middle parties loose. A radical rightist party (successor to the dissolved and illegal Nazi party) under Ludendorff emerges and wins about 6%. The minority cabinet under Marx and Stresemann continues to govern, as

no majority in the polarized Reichstag can be found.

Political stabilization continues slowly despite much anti-republican resentment. The influx of American credits secures a phase of relative, though unsound and deceptive, prosperity over the next few years.

New Reichstag elections in December 1924 benefit the moderate parties. The SPD wins a lot of votes but prefers to remain in the opposition. The KPD remains strong despite some losses. The Nazi radicals under Ludendorff suffer a catastrophic defeat and are nearly wiped out. The centrist minority coalition now includes the rightist DNVP, which gives it a majority. Former Finance Minister Hans **Luther** (without party affiliation) becomes chancellor. The DNVP has a pragmatic wing, which supports Stresemann temporarily for economic reasons. But the right wing of the party resents participation in government and does everything to torpedo Stresemann. Tirpitz becomes a key figure in the DNVP's anti-Stresemann group.

1925

After his amazingly early release from the prison, Hitler reorganizes his party and starts to expand it to the rest of Germany. In all elections until 1929, however, the NSDAP remains a splinter party.

Stresemann continues to work for reconciliation and international agreement. Finds congenial partners in France (Aristide **Briand**) and Britain (Austen **Chamberlain**).

Presidential elections after Ebert's death in office. After an intrigue masterminded by Tirpitz, Hindenburg runs and wins second ballot against former chancellor Marx (April). Once Tirpitz's hopes to manipulate the president fail, however, rightists feel ambivalent about Hindenburg's presidency. They fear that the monarchist war hero as head of state will increase the prestige and legitimation of the hated Weimar Republic. Hindenburg, at age 78 in 1925, acts against his authoritarian, monarchist convictions and remains a loyal head of state until the early 1930s.

Treaty of Locarno, signed by Luther and Stresemann for Germany, guarantees that the German western border will not be changed except by peaceful means (October 1925). This forms part of an intelligent policy by Stresemann, who sets out to create two standards for Germany's treaties: if Germany recognizes some selective parts of Versailles, the original treaty (forced upon the Germans) becomes increasingly hollow. What Stresemann does amounts to a covert renegotiation of the peace terms in the spirit of reconciliation and mutual trust and leads to conditions much more advantageous to Germany. The DNVP, subordinating the subtleties of Stresemann's foreign policy to a hollow nationalist rhetoric, leaves the government in protest against Locarno. The government continues to rely on the old minority coalition, led by the Center and the DVP, with some tacit support from the SPD.

1926

Marx becomes chancellor again (May) after Luther antagonizes the middle parties through a minor faux pas.

Germany is now allowed to enter the League of Nations. Visible success of Stresemann's policy of reconciliation, which receives international recognition. (Stresemann and Aristide Briand received the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in 1926.) German rightists criticize entry into the League of Nations viciously and try to induce Hindenburg to block it. To them, the League of Nations is a cover for Versailles. Hindenburg, however, accepts Stresemann's decision.

1927

DNVP, pushed by its pragmatic (economic) wing, reenters government in January 1927 but leaves again in February 1928. Unemployment rises but reaches no dramatic levels. Quiet year in Weimar politics.

1928

Reichstag elections in May 1928 seem to confirm the trend toward stability and democratic government started during the December elections of 1924: The SPD gains votes and forms a coalition with the Center, the DDP, and the DVP (a great coalition, as in 1923). Chancellor: Hermann **Müller** (SPD). Stresemann remains foreign minister until his death in October 1929. Nazis receive less than 3%. KPD remains strong. The DNVP's losses lead to a sharp rightist turn of the party under industrialist Alfred **Hugenberg**, who soon aligns the DNVP with the Nazis.

1929

Unemployment in Germany rises to a high level early in the year.

The crash of the New York stock market in September 1929 leads to a worldwide depression with dramatic effects on Germany. Unemployment rises sharply in the end of the year and reaches unprecedented heights in the following years. Stresemann, exhausted and overcommitted, dies of a heart attack (at age 51) just as the crisis starts. His untimely death has been considered a dramatic blow to the Weimar Republic by many.

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