

The legacy of the First World War

The First World War ended in 1918 and left Germany scarred and crumbling, having been defeated by the combined force of Britain, France, Russia, Italy and the USA. Friedrich Ebert, leader of the Social Democratic Party, became the first German president and declared Germany a republic.

What was the impact of the First World War on Germany?

- Two million German troops died and over four million were wounded (11 million in total fought in the war).
- Government debts increased from 50 billion marks to 150 billion marks.
- More than 750 000 Germans died because of food shortages.

The devastating effects of the war left many people with no option other than to revolt by striking and rioting.

The abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II (the Emperor)

Timeline

- **9 November 1918**
- The Kaiser visited army headquarters in Spa.
- Ministers tried to persuade the Kaiser to abdicate.
- The Kaiser refused.
- Army officers refused to support the Kaiser.
- The Kaiser had no option but to abdicate.

10 November 1918

The Kaiser fled to Holland.

Revolution and the declaration of the republic

Once the Kaiser had abdicated, the German Republic was declared on 9 November 1918.

On 10 November, Friedrich Ebert suspended the old Reichstag and formed the Council of People's Representatives as a temporary measure.

The Berlin streets were crowded. Some people were armed, hoping to take over parts of the city.



Scheidemann talking to the crowds from a window of a house in Berlin, 9 November 1918.

Philipp Scheidemann, of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the largest party in the German government (Reichstag), declared the new Republic to the crowds. He was fearful that armed rioters were preparing to declare a communist government in Berlin, and, keen to prevent this, he promoted a peaceful transition.

The revolutionary period continued until August 1919, when the Weimar Republic was finally established.

The armistice – the peace agreement between Germany and the Allies

- It was signed on 11 November.
- It was the first major decision of Ebert's new Republic.
- The terms of the peace, the Treaty of Versailles, became a very big burden for the country.



War leaders outside the railway carriage where the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918.

Now try this

Why did the end of the First World War lead to economic and political problems for Germany?