

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 213

“1919 – Germany IV”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

In the autumn of 1919, Erich Ludendorff, returned to Germany. He was dining with members of the British Military Mission in Germany, including its chief, Major General Sir Neill Malcolm. Ludendorff harangued the British officers at some length on the subject of how the German Army could have and should have won the war, but was betrayed by socialists and revolutionaries on the home front.

General Malcolm offered up a summary of Ludendorff’s claims, asking, “Do you mean, General, that you were stabbed in the back?”

Ludendorff embraced the phrase at once. “Yes, that’s it exactly. We were stabbed in the back.”

A few weeks later, Paul von Hindenburg testified before a Committee of Inquiry of the National Assembly, which had been created to investigate the causes of the war and of Germany’s defeat. Hindenburg echoed the claim, now attributing it to General Malcolm. He told the committee, “As an English general has very truly said, the German Army was ‘stabbed in the back.’”

And so a legend was born.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 213. 1919: Germany, part four.

We’re back from an off week, and in the home stretch of the 1919 World Tour, with three more episodes to go, all on Germany. We return where we left off, when the time came for the Allies to present their demands to the new German government.

Germany’s new republican government spent the early months of the Armistice anticipating peace negotiations with the Allies. This was the “dreamland of the Armistice,” during which most Germans, including most in the German government, believed, or had convinced themselves, that Germany would get off with relatively easy peace terms.

The only official contacts between the German government and the Allies during this period were through the joint Armistice Commission. Germany's foreign minister in the new government was Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, an aristocrat from Schleswig who had served for 25 years in the German Foreign Office, most recently as German ambassador to Denmark during the war. Despite his aristocratic background, Brockdorff-Rantzau was a liberal who believed in democracy and supported the new Republic. He also believed in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, and under the principle of self-determination, looked forward to German unification with Austria, and to German participation in the coming League of Nations.

But Germany's only diplomatic relations at this time were with neutral countries like Denmark and Switzerland, Austria, Russia and some of the new states in Eastern Europe. So there wasn't much for the Foreign Office to do, other than plan for the time when German representatives would be invited to Paris to begin negotiations.

Remember that the Paris Peace Conference was originally convened with the thought that the Allies would first hammer out their joint negotiating position among themselves and then invite the Germans for talks on a final peace agreement. And it should be noted here that some of the early positions taken up by the Allied expert committees, particularly on German border questions, were deliberately padded for the sake of the negotiating process. That is, the experts deliberately made territorial demands on Germany that exceeded what they considered acceptable, because they were intended as the Allied opening position, leaving some bargaining room for concessions to be made when it came time to negotiate with the Germans.

There would be no negotiations. There would be no concessions. Between January and April, the Allies changed their minds. The peace terms that they spent months working out among themselves would not be reopened. They would be presented to Germany on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

The Germans learned this on April 18, when they were told, through the Armistice Commission, that the Allies were now ready for a German delegation to come to Paris to receive the draft treaty. The German government responded that if all this delegation was going to do was receive a finished treaty, then they would only send low-level civil servants to collect that treaty and bring it back to Berlin to be studied and discussed. The Allies told them no, they should send a delegation authorized to conclude the treaty.

The delegation that traveled to Paris was led by the foreign secretary, Brockdorff-Rantzau. When their train passed through French territory, the French forced the train to slow down so that the Germans could get a good, long look at the devastation the war had brought to the French countryside. When they reached their hotel in Paris, their French escorts dumped their luggage on the sidewalk; the Germans were told to carry their bags themselves. This baggage included trunks full of maps and memoranda meant to back up German claims at the negotiations. But no such negotiations would ever take place.

The Germans were left to cool their heels for a week before finally being notified that they were to appear at a meeting on May 7 to receive the Allied terms. The Germans would then have two weeks to submit a written reply. It was probably just a coincidence that this date marked the fourth anniversary of the sinking of *Lusitania*. Brockdorff-Rantzau would be the spokesperson for the delegation. He knew it would not be an easy meeting; just a few German representatives would have to face down a hall packed with Allied officials. The floor plan labeled the place where the Germans were to sit as the prisoners' dock. And yet, this might well be a German representative's only opportunity to address the Allies directly. What should he say? The Germans debated this question late into the night the evening before the big day.

At the appointed time, Brockdorff-Rantzau arrived with two speeches in his pocket and not yet having decided which to use. The first was short and conciliatory. The second was long and defiant.

The session began. Georges Clemenceau chaired the meeting. He read out a summary of the treaty terms in cold, disdainful tones that left the Germans convinced that conciliation was futile. When Brockdorff-Rantzau spoke in reply, he read the defiant speech. He came across as arrogant and equally disdainful, although in hindsight, his manner may have reflected nervousness rather than arrogance.

He was a fussy German aristocrat with a neat little mustache and a monocle; everyone's stereotype of an upper-class German. His presentation made David Lloyd George so angry that he snapped in two the letter opener he was handling. Woodrow Wilson said afterward, "This is the most tactless speech I have ever heard. The Germans really are a stupid people."

Back at their hotel, the Germans tore the proposed Treaty of Versailles apart, literally, as sections were ripped out and handed to different teams for translation and transmittal to Berlin. At dinner that night, the dining room was filled with the babble of German voices expressing their disbelief and dismay at the harshness of the terms. One delegate announced, "This shameful treaty has broken me, for I believed in Wilson until today." Yes, all hope that Wilson and the Americans would act to protect Germany against the vindictive Allies was dashed. Brockdorff-Rantzau summarized the mood by declaring, "This fat volume was unnecessary. They could have expressed the whole thing more simply in one clause: 'Germany hereby renounces its existence.'"

Most Germans still viewed the Great War as something that had been forced upon their country by the Serbians and the Russians, and still viewed the end of the war as German victory in the East, and a draw in the West. Why should Germany alone be forced to disarm? Why should Germany surrender 10% of its territory and population? Whatever happened to "peace without victory?"

Once again, it's not as if these treaty terms should have come as a complete surprise. German military intelligence was monitoring the peace conference. The Foreign Office was reading

newspapers from Allied nations and had a pretty good handle on the mood of the Allied publics. Nevertheless, the Germans kept hoping. But hope, as the saying goes, is not a plan.

The proposed treaty not only dashed German hopes, but it looked to them like the realization of their worst fears. Particularly disturbing was Article 231, which Germans interpreted as Germany assuming sole responsibility for the war. That's not what it said, but that was how it was received.

Some Americans also saw the treaty as excessive, including Secretary of State Robert Lansing. A number of lesser American officials resigned in protest, led by William Bullitt, whom we've discussed before. Some British were having second thoughts, too; apparently having already forgotten last year's election campaign. The Archbishop of Canterbury said he was "uncomfortable" with the treaty. Perhaps most significantly, in a by-election held to fill the parliamentary seat made vacant by the death of Sir Mark Sykes—he of the Sykes-Picot agreement who, you'll recall, died in the influenza pandemic—the Liberal candidate, Joseph Kenworthy, a Navy veteran who had called for a "non-revengeful" peace with Germany, squeaked past the candidate of the Lloyd George's coalition, even though Sykes himself had won the seat just a few months earlier with 80% of the vote. A sign of things to come.

The French, by contrast, thought the treaty too weak, although some were willing to forgive Clemenceau on the grounds that he'd had to compromise with the Brits and the Americans. Ferdinand Foch famously denounced the treaty as nothing more than a twenty-year armistice, a remark that sounds prophetic, only the first time it appeared in print was in 1963, so maybe this is a case of prophecy after the fact, though there's no question that Foch disapproved of the treaty, and not because it was too harsh, but because he thought it was too gentle.

The Germans submitted their written reply to the treaty terms on May 29. Their critique of the treaty boiled down to this: that Germany had agreed to the Fourteen Points, but the Allies were not applying their own principles to Germany or to the German people. The territorial losses were severe and unfair, given the German-speaking populations in the affected territories, and asking Germany to agree to pay reparations, the sum of which would only be decided later, was akin to signing a blank check. The clause limiting German liability to what Germany could actually pay was no consolation; it amounted to a declaration that German workers would become Allied slaves for a generation.

The French government and press dismissed the German response, but some in the British and American delegations were sympathetic. South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts told David Lloyd George he wasn't sure he could sign the treaty in its present form. Lloyd George asked Smuts whether he was willing to give South West Africa back to the Germans in order to make the treaty a little easier on them. Smuts replied that South West Africa was insignificant compared to the reparations burden being placed on Germany, though he did not offer to give it back.

Lloyd George held a joint meeting of all the British Empire delegations on June 1, at which Smuts pleaded the case for easing up on Germany. They were persuaded, and the next day Lloyd George informed the other members of the Big Four that he could not sign the treaty in its present form, nor would the British Government agree to send its Army or the Royal Navy back to war against Germany to impose these terms.

Wilson and Clemenceau reacted about the way you'd expect to the news that Lloyd George was, apparently, proposing to throw out months of painstaking work he had personally participated in and start all over. "It makes me a little tired," Wilson said. A couple of weeks of testy negotiations followed. Lloyd George won only some very modest tweaks to the treaty, the biggest one being a change in the terms of the plebiscite on the future of Upper Silesia.

On June 16, the Allies informed the Germans they must agree to the slightly revised treaty within three days or face renewal of the war. That deadline was later extended to seven days. Brockdorff-Rantzau and his staff left Paris that night for Weimar to confer with the German government.

Allied military intelligence agencies reported their view that it was unlikely that Germany would accept the treaty. Brockdorff-Rantzau had already telegraphed ahead his recommendation that Germany refuse to sign. He believed the Allies were bluffing and would back down if confronted. The Allies were not bluffing. Allied militaries were much reduced from their wartime peak, but Marshal Foch still had 42 Allied divisions at his disposal, ready to march east as soon as the deadline expired. The Royal Navy was prepared to resume the blockade.

In Germany, public opinion ran heavily against the treaty. Even socialists opposed signing it, while the political right was positively furious. Philipp Scheidemann, the German Chancellor, had already told the German National Assembly in Weimar that the Treaty of Versailles was "unacceptable," but had hoped it could be adjusted through negotiation. By early June, though, it had become apparent that wasn't going to happen. The only major figure in the German government who supported signing the treaty was Center Party leader Matthias Erzberger, the man who had signed the Armistice last November 11. He was currently a minister without portfolio in the Scheidemann government.

Scheidemann's government asked the opinion of the military, which was at this time still commanded by Marshall von Hindenburg and Ludendorff's replacement, General Wilhelm Groener, on whether the German Army would be able to resist an Allied military assault. They said no, although Hindenburg recommended against signing the treaty anyway, on the grounds that honorable defeat was better than a dishonorable peace.

In the east, Prussian military and political figures spoke of turning eastern Germany into a fortress that would hold out against the Allies. This suggestion went down not at all well with political leaders from western Germany, the places that would likely be overrun by the Allies in a matter of days once the fighting resumed.

The Cabinet was unable to come to a decision and on June 20, the government resigned. President Ebert almost resigned too, but was persuaded to stay on. Bad enough that Germany was without a government three days before the Allied deadline; how much worse would it have been if it was also without a President?

German leaders seriously considered handing control of the German government over to the Allies, but the following day, June 21, a new Cabinet was formed, with Gustav Bauer, the erstwhile Labor Minister as Chancellor. Bauer addressed the National Assembly on behalf of the new government the following day, which was a Sunday. He told them, "We are not standing here out of party interest and even less out of ambition. We are standing here out of a feeling of responsibility, in the awareness that it is our duty to save what can be saved."

Prolonged deliberations followed. With the deadline looming, the treaty's staunchest opponents on the political right softened their opposition and allowed that perhaps there simply was no alternative. General Groener, consulted once again on the prospect of the German Army resisting the Allies, declared the situation hopeless. The Assembly voted to accept the Treaty of Versailles, except for Articles 227 through 231. These were the provisions that called for war crimes trials against German military and civilian leaders, including the former Kaiser, and the so-called War Guilt clause that the Germans interpreted as assigning them full blame for the war.

The National Assembly thought its work was done and it adjourned, but within hours came the Allied response: Germany must accept the treaty in full, as written, without reservations. The new government asked for another extension of the deadline. The Allies refused. The Cabinet met Sunday night to discuss the situation, while the National Assembly was hastily called back into session on Monday, the deadline day. The Assembly voted to approve the treaty. The president of the Assembly, a Center Party member named Constantin Fehrenbach, told the Assembly, "We commend our unhappy country to the care of a merciful God."

In Paris that afternoon, the Big Four had gathered to await word of Germany's decision. At 4:30, the news came that a reply was on the way. The German telegram was delivered an hour later and translated for the four heads of government. Wilson and Lloyd George broke into smiles, while Georges Clemenceau sent two telegrams. One was to Marshal Foch, calling off the assault into Germany. The other was to the military command in Paris, ordering them to fire their guns in celebration of the official end to the Great War.

The signing ceremony was held the following Saturday, June 28, the fifth anniversary of the assassinations in Sarajevo, at the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, the very same chamber in which the German Empire was born almost fifty years ago. Neither of those were coincidence; they were the work of Clemenceau. Signing the treaty for Germany would be Hermann Müller, a member of the SPD and the new German foreign secretary, and Johannes Bell, member of the Center Party and colonial minister.

The Hall of Mirrors was packed, except for the section reserved for the Chinese, who boycotted the ceremony. Clemenceau arranged it so that at the front of the French section sat a group of disabled French veterans, where their missing limbs would be visible to the Germans as a mute accusation. Other treaties were signed that day. The so-called Little Treaty of Versailles with Poland, episode 179, and the treaties by which the UK and the US would guarantee the French border, treaties that never took effect because the US failed to ratify them. Colonel House confessed to Woodrow Wilson that he doubted the US Senate would approve the guarantee treaty. Wilson told House that it didn't matter, because the League of Nations would be sufficient to protect France.

Finally, Müller and Bell were ushered in, pale and shaking, fully cognizant of the hostility of the hundreds of people before them. They looked nothing like the image of German militarism portrayed in years of Allied propaganda. Many in the Hall of Mirrors felt sorry for them. After the signing ceremony, they insisted on returning to Germany that very evening. Woodrow Wilson also left for home that very night. Paris erupted into one huge party, while in Germany, flags flew at half staff.

[music: Beethoven, *Symphony No. 5*]

Among its provisions, the Treaty of Versailles required Germany to reduce its army to 100,000 members. At the time the treaty was signed, there were about 350,000 soldiers in the official German Army, with an additional 250,000 or so members of the *Freikorps*, the private paramilitary organizations that had helped put down Communist revolutionaries at home and were fighting the Red Army in the Baltic States, episode 182.

The 100,000 soldier cap was to take effect in 1920, and the Allies were keen on reducing both the official German military and the *Freikorps* as soon as possible. The German government also wanted the *Freikorps* disbanded. They had been useful when the Communists were trying to bring Bolshevik-style revolution to Germany, but they were also bitter opponents of the Treaty of Versailles and the government. It hardly took any time after the Treaty was ratified for its right-wing opponents to forget the dire situation that Germany had been in back in June and to begin questioning how any patriotic German could have signed such an unjust and humiliating agreement. First Ludendorff and soon Hindenburg were promoting their "stab-in-the-back" explanation for the Army's defeat. Germany had not been defeated by the Allies, but by cowardly and probably traitorous politicians in Berlin who undermined the war effort at home.

Everyone knew who they were talking about. They meant the Reichstag peace resolution and the politicians who had supported it: the SDP, the Center Party, and the German Democratic Party. And hey, these were the same parties who signed that despicable treaty. Makes you think, doesn't it?

They also meant the Jews, because hey, why not? As long as we're pointing fingers anyway. As you know from episode 122, accusations were rife during the war that Jewish Germans were

dodging the draft and shirking their war duties. The Army had gone so far as to conduct a census of the Army and found that Jewish Germans were serving in numbers comparable to their share of the German civilian population, which was about 1%. In other words, there was no basis for this accusation, but those making it, instead of being satisfied, simply began accusing the Army of a cover-up.

There was a lot of this right-wing extremist thinking to be found among the *Freikorps*, and quite a bit even in the regular Army. But releasing hundreds of thousands of angry young men all at once into civilian life posed its own set of political challenges. The economy was broken and unemployment was high. At least in the regular Army, soldiers were getting paid. Once they were discharged, as the Allies were demanding, they would likely find no work and their dissatisfaction and mistrust would only grow.

One of the hundreds of thousands of disgruntled soldiers still in uniform in early 1919 was someone we've encountered before; Adolf Hitler. (I will not call him a friend of the podcast, because we *do* have our standards around here.) We last met Hitler back in episode 50, during the Belle Époque days of the podcast, back when he was coloring postcards at the Männerheim in Vienna and dreaming of a career as an artist. Maybe it's time to get caught up.

The year 1914 found Hitler living in Munich, in Germany, apparently to avoid conscription into the Austrian Army. He was 25 years old when the Great War broke out. He sought to enlist in the Bavarian Army. That required special permission though, since he was an Austrian national, but he managed to get it. Later in life, Hitler would say that he preferred to serve in the German Army rather than in the Austrian Army because he was uncomfortable serving in a multiethnic military. After the war, the Bavarian authorities looked into the matter and determined that Hitler was enlisted by mistake. He should not have received that special permission; he should have been deported back to Austria.

Hitler had a respectable record during the war. His unit was assigned to the Western Front and was involved in some of the worst fighting, including the First Battle of Ypres, the Battle of the Somme and the Battle of Passchendaele. Hitler became a message runner, which was a difficult and dangerous job. He was promoted to corporal, wounded twice, and decorated twice. The second time he was wounded was on October 15, 1918, in a British mustard gas attack. He was still recovering in a hospital in Germany when the Armistice was declared.

He was discharged from the hospital soon after and returned to Munich, still in uniform. This put Hitler and his unit right in the middle of the Communist uprising that declared the Bavarian Council Republic in early 1919. Hitler and his unit remained in their barracks and did not support either the uprising or its suppression by the German military, though Hitler himself was sufficiently outspoken in his anti-Bolshevism that after his unit was discharged from the army in May 1919, he was asked to stay on and assigned to military intelligence, which was monitoring

leftist political groups in Munich. As part of this new assignment, Hitler was sent to a special army training program that educated soldiers on the dangers of Bolshevism.

Like many returning war veterans, Hitler was outraged by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and bought into the idea that the German Army had not been defeated in the field, but rather undermined by radical leftists, Jewish Germans, and traitorous politicians at home.

After he completed his training, he was given his assignment, which was to infiltrate meetings of a new extremist political party in Munich, called *Die Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, that is, the “German Workers Party,” or DAP, to use the German initials. He was to monitor what was discussed at DAP meetings and report back to his superiors in the military.

The DAP had been founded by a 35-year-old locksmith named Anton Drexler. Drexler had previously been involved with the Munich chapter of a group called the “Free Workers’ Committee for a Good Peace,” a war-time peace advocacy organization that, as the name suggests, advocated for an end to the war on terms they deemed fair and equitable to Germany. Drexler formed the DAP after the armistice. It took up a similar position, denouncing the Treaty of Versailles as unjust and embracing the stab-in-the-back analysis of Germany’s defeat.

Hitler attended a DAP meeting on September 12, 1919. It was held in the back room of a beer hall, and about 25 people were present. The speaker was one of the DAP’s co-founders, a 36-year old civil engineer and self-taught economist named Gottfried Feder. Feder expounded upon an economic theory he had himself devised, which rejected both Bolshevism and capitalism. Capitalism, he argued, was a tool used by Jewish financiers to oppress German workers, while Bolshevism was an expression of the barbarism of the peoples of the East, Slavs and Asians, organized and led again by Jews, which meant to destroy European civilization and culture. Feder viewed the German Republic as already a captive of these two malign forces. He advocated for Bavaria to secede from Germany and make itself into a citadel for the protection and preservation of German civilization.

Afterward, a lively debate broke out in the room between people who found Feder’s analysis persuasive and those who thought it was malarkey. In the former group was Adolf Hitler. While it was probably unwise for a military intelligence agent to call attention to himself, Hitler was fired up and he loudly defended Feder against his critics at that meeting. By his own account, he was able to refute every criticism and sent Feder’s critics away defeated. Whatever. But his debating skills and his zeal were sufficient to attract the attention of Anton Drexler, who invited Hitler to join the DAP. This was a little complicated, since German soldiers were forbidden to join any political party, but it seemed likely to be useful to have an agent embedded in the party membership, so his superiors granted Hitler an exemption, and he signed up.

While a couple of dozen people who wielded no power or political influence were bandying political and economic theories in Munich, the people who actually ran the country were getting on with things in Berlin. The Chancellor, the Cabinet, and the National Assembly had returned to

the capital from Weimar in September 1919, having deemed the city secure. They were wrong. By this time, high-ranking military officers were already contemplating overthrowing the Republic and reestablishing the Empire, or something like it.

As the year 1920 opened, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles began to come into effect, but the German government and military resisted them from the beginning. One of the first demands was a list of almost 900 German nationals who were accused of committing war crimes in Belgium and France. The list included some of the most prominent names in the German military, such as Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and the former Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, now a private citizen. Pursuant to the treaty, the Allies wanted the people on this list handed over to them for trial. The Germans refused. The Allies also asked the Dutch government to hand over Kaiser Wilhelm and his son, the Crown Prince. The Dutch government also refused.

So enforcement of the treaty was off to a shaky start. The neutral Dutch government's refusal provided some political cover for the German government until Matthias Erzberger, currently the German finance minister, proposed a compromise under which the accused Germans would be tried in Germany. The Allies accepted the compromise.

Reparations were not yet an issue, because the commission that the treaty had put in place to calculate them had not completed its work. So after war crimes trials, the next sticking point in the implementation of the treaty was demobilization of the Army. The Allies were in no mood to back down on that one. And not only did they want the regular Army downsized, they demanded the dissolution of the *Freikorps* as well. Most of these *Freikorps* units were getting government stipends and amounted to a whole second army, but the Allies were not about to be conned into allowing Germany to keep its old army under a new name. The Allies wanted the 350,000 regular Army soldiers and 250,000 *Freikorps* members reduced to 100,000, per the terms of the treaty.

This was a thorny problem for the German government. They had a tiger by the tail. They knew perfectly well how bitter most of the war veterans were. Support from the Army and the *Freikorps* had been the only thing that kept the Republic together when the Communists tried to instigate a German version of the October Revolution. But what a difference a year makes. The Army and the *Freikorps* were now the leading centers of opposition to the civilian government. The "stab in the back" explanation for Germany's defeat was widely accepted among the soldiers, and the members of the government were now being called the "November criminals," by the German right wing, their name for those who had agreed to the Armistice.

The irony here is that the government these soldiers held in such contempt was also paying their salaries. The German government was all but broke, and those reparations payments would soon have to begin, so demobilizing 80% of the military would certainly help balance the budget. Not to mention that disarming and dismissing all those hostile veterans would eliminate the biggest

threat to the Republic's stability, at least in the short run. It was widely believed that army commanders were already plotting a coup; this would be an excellent way to nip it in the bud.

They were indeed plotting a coup. At the end of February, 1920, when the defense minister, Gustav Noske, began ordering the disbandment of *Freikorps* units in Berlin, the general in command of the Berlin military region, Walther von Lüttwitz, refused to comply. Noske and Lüttwitz were both called into a meeting with President Ebert, who hoped to negotiate a compromise to the impasse. Instead, Lüttwitz came into the meeting with a long list of demands, including the dissolution of the government and the National Assembly, new elections, withdrawal of the order to disband the *Freikorps*, and the appointment of himself as supreme commander of the German Army.

Naturally, Ebert and Noske refused these demands and told Lüttwitz to either comply with his orders or resign. Instead, Lüttwitz set into motion a coup, using the *Freikorps* to seize the capital, which they did, overnight on March 12-13. The regular Army units and police did not resist. The coup leaders set up a provisional government under Wolfgang Kapp, a National Assembly member from the pro-monarchist German National People's Party, who declared himself the new Chancellor. This coup is known to history as the Kapp Putsch, although Wolfgang Kapp was not the person behind it, Lüttwitz was. The word *putsch* is simply German for coup.

The actual German government fled the city for Stuttgart, where Ebert and the SPD members of the cabinet put out a call for a general strike by German workers to block the coup. The farther left political parties, the Independent SPD and the Communist Party, or KPD, joined in the call for a general strike, though they were not themselves part of the government coalition.

The general strike was a complete success. The Kapp government found itself paralyzed. German government workers, transport workers, telegraph operators, they were all out on strike. The Kapp government found it couldn't even communicate with the rest of the country, and it negotiated a surrender in a matter of days.

On the face of it, this moment would seem a triumph for the forces of democracy in Germany against a reactionary attempt to restore the discredited autocracy. But in fact, the elected Bauer government made a number of concessions to the putschists in order to win their surrender. One was to dissolve itself and form a new cabinet. Another was to dissolve the National Assembly and hold a new election for a proper Reichstag. That was one of the key concerns of the right wing; they argued that the National Assembly had been elected merely to write a new constitution, not to serve as a governing legislature. They were also worried that as long as the National Assembly was in place, the German constitution could be altered or amended. Another key demand was a more presidential system of government, with the president elected directly and not appointed by the Reichstag. They got all these demands, plus amnesty for most of those involved in the coup. The coup leaders, like Lüttwitz, were allowed to slip out of the country.

In fact, the Bauer government treated its allies worse than its enemies. In the west of Germany, in the industrial Ruhr Valley, leftist worker groups that had answered the call for a general strike went further, forming workers' councils and taking control of local government. It was, perhaps, the Bolshevik revolution in Germany, take two. Once the putsch failed and the newly reshuffled Cabinet was restored to power in Berlin, it called for an end to the general strike. The leftist workers in the Ruhr Valley refused to give up what they had just won.

This time, the government, in stark contrast to its velvet glove approach to the right-wing putschists, did not negotiate. It sent in the Army. And the *Freikorps*, including some of the very same *Freikorps* units that had been supporting the putsch a week ago. The workers' uprising was put down by force. By the time the fighting was over, hundreds of soldiers and over a thousand workers lay dead. For the second time, a government that included the Social Democratic Party had turned to the Army and the *Freikorps* to put down a leftist uprising, this one begun in defense of that very same government. The Weimar Republic could claim democratic legitimacy, but it bore upon its brow the Mark of Cain.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Colin for his donation, and thank you to Jenna for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Colin and Jenna help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to everyone who has helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

The website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. Sometimes it's my own work, sometimes it's licensed, but most of the music you hear here is free and downloadable. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you get curious and would like to know more about it, including a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue the story of postwar Germany. The German government struggles to pay the bills, ducks its reparations payments, inflation gets out of hand, and so do radical politicians. All that and more, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The German Workers Party in Munich was too small and insignificant to have had any role in the events surrounding the Kapp Putsch, although you can probably guess whose side they were on.

In January 1920, the party began issuing numbered membership cards. The first batch were issued in alphabetical order and Adolf Hitler received membership card number 555. That's because the party began with number 501 instead of just 1, because they were a little embarrassed by how few they were. If Hitler was number 55, I'd guess the whole party roster numbered something less than 200.

Later in his career, Hitler would boast of having been party member number seven. This wasn't quite true. A small discrepancy, to be sure, but a forged membership card, bearing the number seven, was quickly produced to provide documentation for Hitler's claim and shield him from accusations that he was exaggerating. Because that's how fascists roll.

[music: Closing Theme]

© 2020 by Mark Painter. All rights reserved.