

History, Weimar and Nazi Germany

Lesson 5

**Worksheet:**

**Why was there a rise in political extremism after WWI?**

Mr McNally



# The Spartacist Revolt

The **Spartacists** were led by **Karl Liebknecht** and **Rosa Luxemburg**. They wanted a full-scale **Communist revolution**. They were named after the Roman slave Spartacus, who had led a slave **rebellion**. In December 1918, the Spartacists' **protests** against the Government led to violent clashes with the army, which killed sixteen **Spartacists**. At the end of December 1918 the **Spartacists** created the **German Communist Party (KPD)**.

On 6<sup>th</sup> January 1919, the **Spartacists** began their attempt to overthrow **Ebert** and the Weimar Government in order to create a Communist State. In **Berlin**, they took over the government's newspaper and telegraph headquarters.



# Why did the Spartacist Revolt fail?

**Ebert** used the **Reichswehr** (regular army) and the **Berlin Freikorps** (units made up of ex-soldiers from the war) to put down the rebellion. Within days the rising was over. The army and the **Freikorps** were far too strong for the **Spartacists**. **Liebknecht** and **Luxemburg** were captured and killed. Without their main leaders the **Spartacists** struggled. It was the violence of the rising that forced the new government to move to **Weimar**.

In March, a further **communist**-inspired rising in **Berlin** was put down with force and more than 1,000 people were killed. Another **communist** rising in Munich was crushed by the **Freikorps** in April.



# The Kapp Putsch

The Weimar Government decided to reduce the size of the army and also disband the **Freikorps**. It had little need for them now that the left-wing groups had been crushed. The leader of the **Freikorps** refused. Together with a **Wolfgang Kapp**, a leading Berlin politician, a plan was made to seize Berlin and form a new right-wing government. They wanted to bring back the Kaiser.

Kapp argued the **communist** threat, the **Dolchstoss** theory and the impact of the **Treaty of Versailles**. The **Freikorps** marched to **Berlin**. The **Reichswehr** (regular army) in Berlin supported the **Freikorps** and **Kapp**. Following Kapp's successful seizure of Berlin on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1920, the Weimar Government was forced to flee.



# Why did the Kapp Putsch fail?

**Ebert** called on the people of **Berlin** not to support the **Kapp Putsch** and asked them to go on strike. **Trade Unionists** and **civil servants** supported the government and strikes broke out across **Berlin**. As the **Putsch** had little support from the working class, it collapsed.

After four days **Kapp** fled from **Berlin** and **Ebert's** government remained. More than four hundred **Reichswehr** officers had been involved in the **Putsch** but very few were punished. Violence continued in Germany in the next two years and both **left-wing** and right-wing groups were involved.



# Political assassinations

After the **Spartacist Revolt** and the **Kapp Putsch**, political challenges continued from both extreme sides of the political spectrum. Between 1919 and 1922, there were **376 political assassinations**, mostly of left-wing or moderate politicians. This included **Matthias Erzberger**, the person who signed the armistice.

The judges did not convict any right-wing assassins for the murders but did order the **execution** of 10 left-wing murderers. This suggests that the courts favoured the right-wing parties, even at the expense of the **Weimar Republic**.



# Glossary

**Putsch** - a violent attempt to overthrow the government

**Freikorps** - A group of ex-soldiers which effectively fought as mercenaries.

**Mercenaries** - Soldiers who are not part of their country's army and fight for money.

**Communism** - An extreme left-wing political ideology which wants to abolish the private ownership of land.

**Revolt** - An uprising against the government/leader of the country



# Comprehension Questions

1. What did the Spartacist Revolt want to achieve?
2. Who were the Freikorps?
3. Why did the Freikorps turn on the Weimar Republic?
4. How were the judges sympathetic to the right-wing parties?
5. Challenge question: Explain how the Weimar Republic dealt with its political challenges in the years 1919-1920.

