

Art and Culture in Weimar Germany

Unemployment in Weimar Germany

At the start of the Weimar Republic unemployment was a serious problem in 1924. Approximately 4% of the German population was unemployed but there were improvements being made and it eventually reduced from 2 million in 1926 to 1.3 million in 1929.

In addition to unemployment reducing the Weimar Republic also started to put into place an Unemployment Insurance Act in 1927 to help those people struggling the most. Each employed worker paid in 3% of his wages and would receive 60 marks a week if they ended up unemployed or off sick.

Work and Wages

Working conditions improved for Germans. Their working week shortened from 50 hours a week in 1925 to 46 hours a week in 1927 and the value of goods even rose 25% between 1925-1928.



Housing

Housing even improved under the Weimar Republic. When the Republic started there was a housing shortage of one million homes. The government introduced a 15% rent tax to try and fund building more houses. By 1929 private companies had built 37,000 new homes and the government had built 64,000 new homes – it was a start but there was still a shortage.

War Veterans

The Government was determined to look after war veterans. A new pension law was passed in 1920 which saw 750,000 veterans paid a pension, 400,000 war widows were looked after and 200,000 parents were given compensation.

German Education

Germany needed an educated workforce and the Republic decided to fund better access to higher education. Prior to WWI the number of students in higher education was around 70,000 but the Weimar Republic increased it to 110,000 by 1928.

Women in the Weimar Republic

In 1919 Article 109 of the Weimar Constitution stated that men and women had the same fundamental rights and duties as citizens, including the right to vote and to hold office. During Weimar Republic era, most of the eligible electorate were female because so many men had died in WWI or were so wounded that they were unlikely to vote. In 1919, the first year women could vote in Germany, they held 10% of the seats in the Reichstag, and their numbers continued to rise throughout the next decade.

During and after the war, the role of women in the workforce began to change. While the proportion of women who had jobs remained about the same as before the war, women started to take on new types of jobs that had previously been dominated by men. For instance, they became tram conductors and department store clerk, factory workers, lawyers and doctors.



Most of these positions would be filled by men again after the war but women also moved into professions that many associate with women in the years that followed, such as teaching, social work, and secretarial work. All in all, more than 11 million women were employed in Germany in 1918, accounting for 36% of the work force.

As women gained more power in both society and government, their position in society began to change. The new Weimar culture produced a certain sense of freedom in the big cities, especially for some intellectual and professional women.

Women were new economic figures who went out into public economic life as an independent worker or wage-earner entering the job sector that had up until then been men only. German women were new political figures who appeared at parties and in parliament, at demonstrations and gatherings. A new woman cut her hair, shortened her skirts and freed herself from the physical limitations of being female.

The new women were pioneers who never constituted a majority and did not succeed in changing most Germans' ideas about the role of women in society but did prove that women could evolve into a new person in Germany. Some German women never fully embraced the new woman and held traditional views about their place in society, criticizing younger women who preferred dance-halls to reading groups.

Art and Culture in Weimar Germany

It was during the Weimar Republic that Germany experienced many changes in the cultural arts. There was a resurgence of creative flair that made Berlin the centre of art and culture of the world. Many new movements, such as expressionism and modernism, shaped the new culture of the time and this is represented in, among other things, the Berlin architecture of the time.



There were significant changes in the world of art for example the development of expressionist artwork, where the world and reality were interpreted by the artists. The use of new techniques to express feelings and emotions. Otto Dix, a famous modernist, sought to capture feeling by depicting his subjects with brutal honesty. Famous Berlin artists of the time

were Paul Klee, Max Beckmann, Heinrich Zille and George Grosz. They all openly criticised the middle class conservatives. In the 1920s Berlin replaced Paris as the world centre of modern art.

German literature flourished with Thomas Mann winning The Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929. Much of the literature at the time was heavily influenced by WWI, such as the famous Novel by Erich Maria Remarque, 'All Quiet on the Western Front'.

Architecture was allowed more creativity and new architectural designs were brought on by the cultural and societal ideas at the time -- especially modernism. These new designs challenged the traditions of German architecture. In 1919 Walter Gropius founded the famous Bauhaus School for architecture. At this new school Gropius taught that art should work with the new technology and that there should be an emphasis on functional design in buildings.

Theatre developed greatly, particularly provocative theatre and Cabaret. Many new plays and works had a satirical edge. A famous playwright at the time was a Marxist called Bertolt Brecht who voiced his communist opinions in his works.

Cinema was becoming important as well. Berlin became the world leader of Cinema. In fact Germany in the 1920s produced more films than the rest of Europe put together. This period was the home to many brilliant directors, such as Fritz Lang, Joseph von Sternberg and Ernst Lubitsch. Berlin produced 'cinematic masterpieces' such as Metropolis, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Nosferatu and The Blue Angel.



Questions:

1. In what ways did the Weimar Republic help people financially between 1919-1929?
2. How did housing and living conditions change in the Weimar Republic?
3. Why do you think that the Weimar Government placed an importance on improving living conditions, education and social welfare?
4. To what extent did the lives of women change under the Weimar Republic?
5. Why might some people dislike the changes that occurred for women?
6. Why did art and culture change and flourish in Weimar Germany?