

What did the Kapp Putsch reveal about the Weimar Republic

<p>Even before the November 1918 armistice, Germany was fast becoming a hotbed for political extremism.</p>	<p>On 13 March the Ehrhardt brigade took up key points around Berlin and took control of the capital, forcing Weimar ministers to flee to Stuttgart.</p>	<p>The trigger for this <i>putsch</i> came in March 1920, when the government removed von Luttwitz from several posts for encouraging defiance of the Versailles treaty. The outraged von Luttwitz connected with the Marinebrigade Ehrhardt, a 6,000-strong Freikorps unit located in Berlin which itself had been resisting government orders to disband.</p>
<p>Military commanders and some in the government encouraged and supported the Freikorps. General Hans von Seeckt, for instance, considered the Freikorps to be a reserve army, illegal under Versailles but essential for the defence of Germany (in some quarters the Freikorps was known as the 'Black Reichswehr'.</p>	<p>As the army was demobilised and its soldiers discharged, they returned to civilian life, only to find Germany exhausted by the war, starved by the Allied food blockade and disrupted by attempted communist revolutions. Civilian jobs were hard to come by so many ex-soldiers found themselves out of work.</p>	<p>As the Freikorps grew steadily through 1919, the relationship between Ebert's government and the regular Reichswehr deteriorated. The civilian government urged reductions in the Reichswehr and structural reforms to its officer corps and recruitment - the first to comply with the terms of Versailles, the second to ensure the Reichswehr's compliance and its loyalty to the republic.</p>
<p>The 'stab in the back' myth contributed to the survival of German militarism and military prestige, at a time when they should have been scrutinised, criticised and dismantled.</p>	<p>SPD ministers called on the German people to protect the republic by implementing a general strike. This move was broadly supported by the USPD, other left wing and centrist parties and trade unions, which provided organisation for these strikes. The response was rapid. Within two days, Berlin had no trains, no water, no gas and no electricity.</p>	<p>Reichswehr generals resisted the changes to their structure under Versailles. They opposed significant reductions, claiming they would put Germany at risk from external threats or an internal revolution. The Reichswehr officer class was also panicked by rumours, totally unfounded, that the government was about to consent to the extradition of some officers to Allied countries, to stand trial for war crimes.</p>

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<p>The Reichswehr found itself so divided by the putsch that it did almost nothing. The army defied government orders to move against the rebellious Freikorps in Berlin - but it also ignored Kapp's call to arms against the government.</p>	<p>Five days after it had begun, Kapp and von Luttwitz's attempted coup fizzled and both men fled Berlin. Ironically, the Kapp Putsch almost triggered the communist revolution it was fomented to prevent. The mobilisation of KPD, USPD and radical union groups in response to the putsch led to several communist uprisings around Germany.</p>	<p>Many joined the ranks of the Freikorps, the paramilitary brigades and militias formed to suppress the Spartacist revolution in early 1919. By the middle of the year Freikorps membership was estimated at around 300,000 men. Its numbers grew in response to the Treaty of Versailles, which limited the size of the regular army to just 100,000.</p>
<p>The Reichswehr, which should have come to the government's assistance, had failed to do so and left the government to its own fate. The Freikorps, a group the civilian government had encouraged and relied on January 1919, seemed to have turned against it. The realities of power and influence in the republic had been exposed.</p>	<p>The defeat suppressed the nation's faith in and affection for monarchism and ultra-nationalism - but only in some circles.</p>	<p>Some officers began to talk of a military putsch to remove the SPD government. One of their number was Walther von Luttwitz, commander-in-chief of Reichswehr divisions in Germany's north, one of the country's highest ranked officers.</p>
<p>The aspiring Kapp government was confined to the capital and paralysed by what one socialist called the 'terrible silent power' of the general strike.</p>	<p>To disguise the military nature of the putsch, von Luttwitz recruited Wolfgang Kapp, a minor public servant, as its nominal leader. For two days Kapp attempted to justify the putsch and whip up support.</p>	<p>These ideas instead took refuge in a number of political parties and fringe groups, who clung to theories like the 'stab-in-the-back', a conspiracy theory that Germany had lost the war because of treacherous elements in the civilian government. The Dolchstoßlegende allowed the military to dodge criticism or accountability for Germany's defeat in 1918.</p>

Tasks

1. Colour-code the table into:

- a. causes
- b. events
- c. consequences.

2. What were the long-term causes of the Kapp Putsch?

3. What were the short-term causes of the Kapp Putsch?

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4. What weaknesses in the Weimar government did the Putsch reveal?



5. What strengths in the Weimar government did the Putsch reveal?

