

In early 1919, Germany put in place a new government to begin rebuilding the country after its crushing defeat in World War I. But the right-wing forces that had led the country into the War and lost the War conspired even before it was over to destroy the new government, the "Weimar Republic." They succeeded.

The U.S. faces a similar "Weimar Moment." The devastating collapse of the economy after eight years of Republican rule has left the leadership, policies, and ideology of the right utterly discredited. But, as was the case with Germany in 1919, Republicans do not intend to allow the new government to succeed. They will do everything they can to undermine it. If they are successful, the U.S. may yet go the way of Weimar Germany.

World War I left Germany utterly devastated. The landed aristocrats, industrial magnates, wealthy financiers, weapons makers, and the officer corps of the military that formed the locus of right wing power were completely discredited. Their failure in provoking and prosecuting the War was catastrophic, undeniable, and complete.

The economy was destroyed. Prices were at 800% of pre-war levels and rising quickly. Agriculture, pillaged for the War, lay in ruins. Social insurance payments for the War's injured, to widows and orphans, and newly unemployed soldiers were astronomical. And all this was before the cost of rebuilding was even begun.

At the same time, Germany faced massive reparations payments to the Allied victors, France and England. But Germany's foreign properties had been confiscated and its colonies turned over to the victors. The combination of these conditions, both domestic and international, made it extraordinarily difficult for the German economy to recover.

As a result of the failure of the right, the German people elected a moderately leftist government to lead the nation's rebuilding. It was named the Weimar Republic for the city in which the new post-imperial constitution was written. The new government was led by Friedrich Ebert, head of the German Socialist Party.

But the country's new parliamentary system had allowed dozens of parties to run, making it impossible for any one party to win an outright majority. Ebert's party had achieved the highest portion of votes, 38%, in the first post-War elections, held in January 1919. Ebert would have to govern by coalition.

It was at this time that the right wing made its crucial decision. Despite its shocking, naked failure over the prior decade, despite the horrific devastation it had wrought on the German people, despite the discrediting of everything they had purported to stand for, they would fight Ebert, his new government, and its plans for recovery. They would do everything they could to make sure that the new government failed.

Their strategy was two-fold: first, stoke the resentment of the population about the calamitous state of its living conditions-no matter that those conditions had been created by the very

right-wing oligarchs who now pretended to befriend the little guy. Rage is rage. It is glandular and unseeing. Once catalyzed it is easy to turn on any subject.

And stoking resentment was easy to do. Just before the War ended, the military concocted its most sensational lie: the German army hadn't actually been defeated. It had been "stabbed in the back" by communists, traitors, and Jews. It was an easy lie to sell. It entwined an attack on an alien political ideology - liberalism- with the latent, pervasive myth of German racial superiority.

The second strategy of the right was to prevent the new government from succeeding. To begin with, success of the left would conspicuously advertise the failure of the right. Moreover, success by the left would legitimize republican government, so hated by the oligarchs of the right. Much better for the people to be ruled by the self-aggrandizing right-wing autocracy that had governed Germany for centuries.

So the rightists set out to do everything they could to make it impossible for the leftists to govern. They would use parliamentary maneuver, shifting coalitions, domination of the new mass media, legislative obstruction, staged public relations spectacles, relentless pressure by narrow but powerful interests, judicial intimidation and, eventually, outright murder of their political opponents.

Contrition for their abject failure, humility for their destructive hubris, compassion for their crippled country-those had nothing to do with it. All they possessed was a blinding, visceral hatred of the left and a masturbatory lust for the return to power.

Eventually, they succeeded. Every setback in recovery - and there would inevitably be many - was met with hysterical demonizing of the left wing government. The lie was repeated relentlessly that the government was run by communists, traitors, and Jews-the same furtive cabal that had purportedly stabbed the country in the back at the end of the War. They steadily chipped away at the efficacy and, thereby, the legitimacy of successive republican governments.

By the time of the Great Depression, Adolph Hitler's ironically named National Socialist Party had become the biggest vote getter in the nation. The Nazis had once been derided as the lunatic fringe of the far right. But the "respectable" right-wing power brokers who had started and lost the Great War anointed Hitler Chancellor in January, 1933.

He immediately suspended the constitution, abolishing most civil liberties. He outlawed opposition parties, began a massive military build-up and a relentless propaganda campaign, and set Germany and the world onto the path of the greatest destruction it would ever know.

America now faces its own "Weimar moment."

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