Was the German Revolution of 1918 really a ‘revolution’?

L/O – To identify and explain the causes and effects of the Revolution
The German Revolution

- In late 1918, there was unrest across the whole of Germany. The emperor fled for his life and a new government took control. These events are called the **German Revolution**.

- This new government became known as the **Weimar Republic**. It was eventually usurped by **Hitler** when he was elected Chancellor in 1933.
What caused the German Revolution?

• 1. Failure in the First World War
   Germany’s army was not totally defeated but by 1918, had been pushed back. The Spring Offensive had failed.

• Over 2 million had died since 1914 and morale was very low.

• The army was unlikely to have held out another year. The Kaiser and his government were criticised.
What caused the German Revolution?

2. Hardship in Germany - The Allied blockade was working and prevented imports of supplies.

- Food shortages led to great suffering and military failure caused a sense of hopelessness.

- This was made worse by a deadly influenza infection which spread through Europe in August 1918, killing millions.
What caused the German Revolution?

• 3. The Russian Revolution – Helped to cause **discontent** in Germany.

• The Russians had replaced their **Tsar** with a government of the **people** led by the Communist **Vladimir Lenin** after October 1917.

• Many Germans wanted to replace the **undemocratic rule** of the Kaiser by **councils** of workers & soldiers
Events of the Revolution

- **29th October 1918** – German sailors at Wilhelmshaven refuse to follow order and mutiny spreads to Kiel.

- **4th November 1918** – 40,000 sailors join dock workers and set up a workers’ and soldiers’ council, taking over the dockyard.

- Government soon **broke down** all over Germany in towns such as Hamburg, Bremen and Lubeck.
Events of the Revolution

- 7\textsuperscript{th} November – German workers in Bavaria force the local King, Ludwig III, to step down. Other regional monarchs begin to abdicate.

- 9\textsuperscript{th} November – Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates following pressure from his own ministers and Allies who say they will only negotiate with ‘representatives of the people’. The Chancellor Prince Max von Baden also resigns and Social Democratic Party (SPD) member Friedrich Ebert becomes the new Chancellor.
Events of the Revolution

• Two hours after the declaration of a new government, Karl Liebknecht – a far more radical socialist and leader of the ‘Spartacus League’ – announced the birth of the ‘Free Republic of Germany’.

• The Sparticists were led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. They had broken away from the SPD party in 1915 and wanted to create a Communist state in Germany.
Events of the Revolution

• On Christmas Eve 1918, the Sparticists attempted a communist revolution. In Berlin they began to occupy government buildings.

• On 30th December, they held a Congress in Berlin and declared the formation of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

‘The 9th of November was a weak, half-hearted, half-conscious and chaotic attempt to overthrow the existing public power and to put an end to class rule. What now must be done is that all the forces of the proletariat should be concentrated in an attack on the very foundations of capitalist society. There, at the base, where the individual employer confronts his wage slaves... there, step by step, we must seize the means of power from the rulers and take them into our own hands... And we must not forget that the revolution is able to do its work with extraordinary speed.’

Rosa Luxembourg, 30th December 1918
Events of the Revolution

• On 5\textsuperscript{th} January they began an armed takeover of Berlin. Hundreds of workers were given weapons and Berlin became paralysed by street fighting.

• Meanwhile, Chancellor Ebert organised over 3,000 former soldiers called \textit{Friekorps} to come to Berlin. The Friekorps were fiercely nationalist and anti-communist and on the 10\textsuperscript{th} January, began to attack the Sparticists.
Events of the Revolution

• After 3 days of fierce street to street fighting, Liebknecht and Luxemburg had been captured. Luxemburg was beaten to death with rifle butts and her body thrown into a canal. Liebknecht was shot in the head.

• About 100 Sparticists and 17 Friekorps were killed in the fighting. Ebert had regained control of Berlin but had to rely on the extremely right-wing nationalist volunteers – the Friekorps. This undermined the credibility of the new government.
Events of the Revolution

• In April 1919, Communists in the southern state of Bavaria attempt another revolution, taking over the capital, Munich and declaring an ‘Independent Soviet Republic’.

• In May, the Soviet was attacked by 9,000 German Army soldiers and over 30,000 members of the Freikorps.

• Over 1,700 Communists were killed in Munich. By the Summer of 1919 the threat from the Communists were over. Ebert’s new SPD government had survived.
Effects of the Revolution

1. **Short Term** - New government agrees an **armistice** on 11\textsuperscript{th} November. Germany had to **withdraw from all land won** and pull back 30 miles into Germany.

2. **Medium-Term** – Politics in Germany became very unstable as **extreme left-wing** (Communists/Sparticists) and **right-wing groups** (Friekorps) fought for power.

3. **Long Term** – **The Weimar Republic** formed after the Kaiser abdicated but Ebert’s new government doesn’t form new constitution until mid-1919 due to political turmoil.
**Exam Question (Section A, Part B)**

- ‘Describe **one effect** of the November Revolution on Germany’ (4 marks)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>A basic answer (level 1, 1-2 marks)</th>
<th>The Weimar Republic was created</th>
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<td>Will give a consequence, or effect, but no supporting detail. Will tell the story without focusing on the effect.</td>
<td>Or</td>
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<td>An armistice was agreed with the Allies</td>
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<th>A good answer (level 2, 3-4 marks)</th>
<th>One effect of the November Revolution of 1918 on Germany was the Weimar Republic was created. <strong>This was because</strong> the Kaiser abdicated on the 9(^{th}) November after his government faced large scale disobedience and the Allies refused to discuss surrender terms with the Kaiser. <strong>As a result</strong>, a new system of government representative of the people was needed which led to the creation of the Weimar Republic in August 1919.</th>
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