

The Abdication of The Kaiser



The October Reforms

In October, following the advice of General Ludendorff, the Kaiser introduced a series of reforms. These included:

1. Prince Max* would become his new chancellor
2. The chancellor would be responsible for the Reichstag and there would be a new democratic government based on the majority parties in the Reichstag (the Weimar)
3. The armed forces were put under control of the civil government

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* Prince Max, in the war, devoted himself to the Red Cross and to work for the welfare of prisoners of war (on both sides). On Oct. 3, 1918, when Germany was on the verge of collapse, he was appointed chancellor of the empire and prime minister of Prussia

The Peace Note

On 3 October 1918, Prince Max wrote to President Wilson asking for an armistice*. Wilson replied and demanded that Germany must evacuate all occupied territory, call an end to submarine warfare and fully democratize the system. These terms essentially demanded an armistice and the abdication of the Kaiser.

The Peace Note (cont)

These terms were too much for General Ludendorff to accept and he attempted to gather support for a last-ditch military effort. After this, he resigned and fled to Sweden.

* President Wilson took almost three weeks to reply as he was suspicious that the German High Command were buying time to regroup and form a new offence.

The Effect on the German People

This was earth-shattering to the German people. It was an admission that Germany had lost the war, and this was absurd to the German people, who believed they had been winning. Their respect for the Kaiser was undermined and civilians who had suffered through food shortages and fortitude were no longer willing to show restraint. Many soldiers and sailors lost respect for their officers.

The Kaiser was seen as an obstacle to peace but he refused to abdicate*

On the 28 October the German Navy's high command ordered ships from Wilhelmshaven to attack British ships on the English channel but the crews of two cruisers refused to obey. This naval mutiny was the beginning of the revolutionary movement.

* During a strike in Friedrichshafen on 22 October, workers shouted "The Kaiser is a scoundrel!" and "Up with the German republic"

"Germany's needs became ever more desperate." "The unexpected bid for peace opened the eyes of the German people at last - they had no idea of the impending catastrophe." - Ernst Toller

The November Revolution of 1918

On the 3 November 1918 sailors at the German naval base in Kiel mutinied against their officers and took control of the base*. On the following day, the revolt spread to the city and workers' and soldiers' councils were established (similar to Russia). It also spread to many other German ports and cities. By November 6 there were workers and soldiers councils all over Germany.

* kiel mutiny extensive info

Chancellor Ebert



The Weimar Constitution

