

HANDOUT

Which Political Party?

Which political party—the Social Democrats, the Communists, or the Nazis—would be most likely to appeal to each German citizen* described below in 1932?

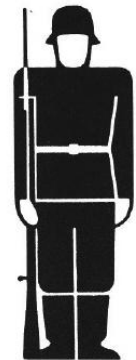
Before deciding, review the party platforms in the reading “Hard Times Return” in Chapter 4 of *Holocaust and Human Behavior*. Support your conclusion by connecting details from the biographies to the party platforms and to other information you have encountered about life in the Weimar Republic. Think, too, about the variety of factors that might persuade a voter to choose one party over another. What effect might such emotions as fear and pride have on the decision to support one party over another?

* Biographies are of fictional German citizens created for this activity.

Hermann Struts

Hermann Struts, a lieutenant in the German army, fought bravely during the war. He comes from a long line of army officers and is himself a graduate of the German military academy. Struts has always taken pride in the army's able defense of the nation and its strong leadership.

Yet Struts is bitter about the fact that he has not had a promotion in over ten years. Few soldiers have, mainly because the German army was so drastically reduced by the Treaty of Versailles. In the old army, Struts would have been at least a captain by now and possibly a major. The treaty, he argues, has done irreparable harm not only to Germany's honor but also to his own honor as a soldier. He feels that if the civilian government had refused to sign the treaty and allowed the army to fight, both he and Germany would be better off.



Elisabeth von Kohler

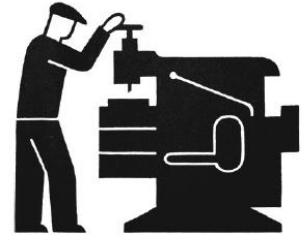
Elisabeth von Kohler, a prominent attorney who attended the University of Bonn, has a strong sense of German tradition. She believes that her people's contributions to Western civilization have been ignored. Von Kohler would like to see the republic lead a democratic Europe. She disapproves of the methods the Weimar Republic often uses to repress extremist parties. Her sense of justice is even more outraged by the way the Allies, particularly France, view Germany. She would like to prove to



the world that the Germans are indeed a great race. She is proud to be an attorney and a German woman in the Weimar Republic.

Otto Hauptmann

Otto Hauptmann works in a factory in Berlin. Although his trade union has actively worked for better conditions and higher wages, it has not made many gains. Hauptmann blames this lack of success on the 1923 inflation and the current depression. He believes that the union would be more successful if the economy were more stable. Still, it is the union that has kept him employed. At a time when many of his friends have been laid off, his union persuaded the owners of his factory to keep men with seniority. In factories with weaker unions, managers kept only the young, claiming they are more productive.



Hauptmann worries about some of the ideas his fellow workers have expressed recently. They argue that when the owners are forced to cut back production, they take it out on the workers. So the only way to end the depression is to let the workers control the factories and the government. Hauptmann disagrees. He thinks that the workers do get fair treatment as long as they have a strong union. Moreover, he believes that managing the factories and government should be left to those who understand these complicated jobs.

Eric von Ronheim

Eric von Ronheim, the owner of a Frankfurt textile factory, is very concerned about the depression. Sales are down and so are profits. If only Germany had not been treated so ruthlessly at Versailles, he argues, the nation would be far better off. Instead the government has had to impose heavy taxes to pay reparations to its former enemies. As a result, Germans are overtaxed, with little money to spend on textiles and other consumer goods. The worldwide depression has made matters worse by eliminating possible foreign markets for German products. Even if the depression were over, von Ronheim does not think taxes would come down because of reparation payments.



Von Ronheim considers the Communists a serious threat to Germany. He fears that if they set up a government like the one in the Soviet Union, capitalists like him would receive no mercy from the workers. He also thinks that Germany would become subservient to its old enemy, Russia.

Karl Schmidt

Karl Schmidt is an unemployed worker who lives in the rich steel-producing Ruhr Valley. Like so many men in the Ruhr, he lost his job because of the depression. Yet



Schmidt notes that the owners of the steel mills still live in big houses and drive expensive cars. Why are they protected from the depression while their former employees suffer? Although the government does provide unemployment compensation, the money is barely enough to support Schmidt, his wife, and their two children. Yet the government claims that it cannot afford to continue even these payments much longer.

Schmidt feels that the government would be in a stronger position to help people if it cut off all reparations. But he also knows that if the government did so, the French might occupy the Ruhr Valley just as they did in 1923. What is needed is a government that is responsive to the workers—perhaps even one that is run by the workers, as some of his friends maintain. And he is convinced that Germany needs a government strong enough to stop reparation payments.

Albert Benjamin

Albert Benjamin is a professor of mathematics at the University of Berlin. While his grandparents were religious Jews and so are his three brothers, Benjamin is not religious. He is very proud of his German heritage, and he even volunteered to serve in the German army during World War I. After the war, Benjamin married Eva Steiner. Eva is Protestant and they are raising their three children as Christians. Benjamin is concerned because prices have gone up while his salary as a professor has not. His family can no longer afford vacations and special presents for the children. His wife worries that if the economic problems continue, the family might have to cut back on spending for food.



Wilhelm Schultz

Wilhelm Schultz works with his father on the family farm in East Prussia. The treaty has had a profound effect on Schultz and his family. The treaty turned part of East Prussia over to Poland. So now his uncle, whose home is just a few miles away, lives in Poland rather than Germany. Schultz's grandfather lives in Danzig. Although it is still part of Germany, it cannot be reached without traveling through Poland. As a result, the family cannot visit him without a passport and other official documents. That does not seem right to Schultz. As a child, he was taught to admire Germany's heroes, some of whom fought the Poles. So he is dismayed that his government signed a treaty that has subjected many Germans, including his uncle, to Polish rule. He is also bothered by what he sees as greed and corruption in government leaders. This is not the way Prussians should act.



Schultz also worries about the Communists. Neither he nor his father wants a system that would eliminate private property. Both are proud to own their own land, and anyone who wants to take it away is the enemy.

Gerda Munchen

Gerda Munchen is the owner of a small Munich grocery store started by her parents. For years, her parents saved to send her to the university. But Munchen chose not to go, and the money stayed in the bank. In 1923, she had planned to use the money to pay for her children's education. But that year, inflation hit Germany. Just before her older daughter was to leave for the university, the bank informed the family that its savings were worthless. This was a blow to Munchen, but even more of a blow to her daughter, whose future hung in the balance.



Munchen does not think she will ever regain her savings. With so many people out of work, sales are down sharply. And Munchen's small grocery is having a tough time competing with the large chain stores. They can offer far lower prices. She and her children question a system that has made life so difficult for hardworking people.