

## **ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO**

### **The British-German relations in the 1920s**

In order to understand the present relationship of Germany and Great Britain and to maintain as well as enhance the connections between the two countries in the future, it is necessary to look at their history. For this reason the following paper deals with the British-German relations as they existed one hundred years ago.

To elaborate on the relation between Germany and Britain in these years after the First World War, at first the situation in each of these countries at that time has to be examined. Back then the Weimar Republic was in a quite difficult state. Although it handled the immediate results of World War One, such as the social and economic reintegration of the German soldiers, rather well, it was affected by numerous other problems. In the economy the biggest challenge was the hyperinflation, which had already started during the First World War and reached its peak in the year 1923. One of the reasons why the Weimar Republic could handle neither this phenomenon nor the Great Depression in 1929 very well were the reparations. These payments were arranged in the 1919 signed *Treaty of Versailles* and had to be remitted by Germany to the victorious nations of World War One, which included Britain. In the German population the general spirit was rather negative as well. Separate from all the economic trouble the people had to deal with the trauma of the war. Furthermore, the war guilt had been completely attributed to Germany, which many Germans did not accept or found unjust. These issues were also used and deepened by political opponents of the republic, such as the National Socialists.

However, the period of the 1920s was, for that matter, not entirely negative. For instance, the Weimar Republic opened up countless opportunities for society to develop. The description of this period as *The Roaring Twenties* can be traced back to the cultural development that took place in theatre, literature, art and many more areas of society. The new attitude of life that came along formed a countermovement to more traditional and conservative views and values.

If now the situation in Britain at that time is being examined, it becomes apparent that there are many similarities to the German condition.

For one, the British economy and society had also been seriously affected by the First World War. A major industrial decline started with a wave of unemployment in the early 1920s. In addition to this, Britain was in great debt with the US after the war, which made the economic situation even worse. These problems could not be solved in the whole decade and were only heightened by the Wall Street crash and Great Depression. The people expressed their discontent and distress in strikes, such as the Hunger March in 1929.

But the *Golden Twenties* could be noticed in British society as well. The culture was thriving, and especially for the upper classes and younger generations it was a time of enjoyment and a lust for life, which may be seen as an attempt to defy the traumatic experiences of World War One.

Comparing the situations of Britain and Germany in the period of the 1920s, they appear quite similar. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that Germany had lost the past war and Britain, on the contrary, counted as one of the victorious nations. That created a big challenge regarding their relation.

In the political context the nations aimed to get closer. For example, Britain, unlike other nations such as France, voted for rather moderate conditions to include in the *Treaty of Versailles* and tried to reintegrate the Weimar Republic into the international community of states. The German foreign policy headed in a similar direction.

However, because of the economic decline in Britain, it did not oppose the reparations. And, as said before, these payments were a major reason for a general discontent and negative view of the victorious nations within the German population. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the British opinion of Germany was not very positive either, because of its primary responsibility in provoking the First World War.

When all the different aspects mentioned in this paper get compared, it becomes clear that both the British-German relations and the situation in the individual countries were rather unstable and affected by various crises regarding social, political and economical aspects. But nevertheless it is of great and universal importance to remember every part of the individual and shared history, not only of Germany and Great Britain but the whole world, in order to continuously try to work together for a better future.