

German Cinema and  
Economic Inflation

# The Weimar Republic

# Contexts for the Film Industry

- the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the first democratic government
- foreign occupation
- political rebellion (the Communist Spartacists)
- assassinations
- postwar inflation due to reparations

# Conditions after 1919

- aristocracy → the working class/proletariat
- imperial grandeur → economic depression
- industrialization → preindustrial production
  - glorification of the “simple life”

# Postwar Inflation, 1918–1924

Date	German Marks per Dollar
1 October 1918	4
2 January 1921	74.40
2 January 1922	186.75*
2 January 1923	7,260
1 August 1923	1.1 million
4 September 1923	13 million
1 October 1923	243 million
1 November 1923	130 billion
30 November 1923	4.2 trillion
* In December 1922, a loaf of bread cost 250 marks.	

# Results of Inflation

- those who had little starved
- those who had a lot spent extravagantly
- life in cities → combined picture of decadence, luxury, and despair
- the middle class was especially hard-hit

# Economic Recovery

- Turning point: 1925
- Frederich Ebert, a Socialist, succeeded by Paul von Hindenburg
- Hindenburg's diplomatic successes helped Germany recover its international status
- Currency stabilized: 1 billion old marks = 1 new mark
- Berlin, a leftist bastion, becomes the center of the cultural and technological world.
- But political climate shifts to the right.

# German Film Industry during the Weimar Republic

- feelings of inferiority in relation to the U.S., French, English, and even Danish film industries
- creation of Ufa: Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft
- 1918–1924: only the USA and Germany had viable film industries
- hyperinflated mark decreased US interest in distribution to Germany

# German Film Industry during the Weimar Republic

- The film industry is “Germanized”
- German films dominated local markets
- German government established stringent quotas on foreign films
- These quotas were relaxed as part of the currency-stabilization plan

# German & U.S. Feature Films

Year	Total # of features	German-made (%)	U.S.-made (%)
1923	417	60.6	24.5
1924	560	39.3	33.2
1925	518	40.9	41.7
1926	515	35.9	44.5
1927	521	46.3	36.9
1928	520	42.5	39.4
1929	451	33.3	21.6

# “Outsiders” in the Weimar Republic

“Outsiders” in positions of influence in academia, politics, the economy, and culture:

- democrats
- cosmopolites (as opposed to nationalists)
- Jews
- e.g., Ernst Lubitsch, Joe May, Erich Pommer,
- F. W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, Joseph von Sternberg

# Ufa

- highly capitalized
- vertically integrated
- expected to support Germany's political and cultural rehabilitation after World War I
- → a divided identity;
  - film as art; a setting for artistic creation
  - film as propaganda; a patriotic responsibility

# Ufa's dual identity

- Commercial success versus government regulation
- Politicians: film as a “danger to the nation” and a symptom of moral decline
- Filmmakers stylistically experimental
- filmmakers asserted their right to offend
- after 1921 the government had other things on its mind

# German censorship

- Ministry of War: “the presentation of worthwhile films of a serious nature . . . likely to maintain and encourage love of the fatherland and good morals”
- threatened disciplinary action including theater closings if order was disregarded

# German sensationalism

- popular film featured
  - trash and intrigue
  - whores and crooks
  - humor and pranks

1910: 250 films

97 murders

51 adulteries

19 seductions

35 drunks

25 prostitutes

# Key terms to describe Weimar film

- disquieting
- intriguing
- extremely varied
- romantic
- thoroughly German
- visually experimental
- the New Objectivity