

Ebert, Friedrich

By [Bernd Braun](#)



Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925)

Friedrich Ebert, first president of the Weimar Republic and chairman of the SPD, is seated at his desk on 15 February 1925, in the last photograph of him before he passed away on 28 February 1925.

Pahl, Georg: Friedrich Ebert, black-and-white photograph, Berlin, 15 February 1925; source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-00015, via Wikimedia Commons,

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Ebert, *Friedrich*

German Social Democratic politician

Born 04 February 1871 in Heidelberg, Germany

Died 28 February 1925 in Berlin, Germany

Summary

Friedrich Ebert became the most important leader of the SPD during the First World War, alongside Philipp Scheidemann. During the revolution, Ebert rose to the top position within party hierarchy and drew Germany towards parliamentary democracy, first as Volksbeauftragter (people's representative) in the revolutionary government, then in February 1919 as Reichspräsident (president).

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Career before the War

On 20 September 1913, Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925) was elected as one of two chairmen of the [Social Democratic Party](#) (SPD). [Hugo Haase \(1863-1919\)](#) was the other chairman, and he held office two years longer than Ebert. The new leaders Ebert and Haase had neither the authority nor the experience that [August Bebel \(1840-1913\)](#) and [Paul Singer \(1844-1911\)](#) had built up in twenty years of party leadership.

The War Years

Just ten months after Ebert's election, the First World War broke out. The war initially plunged the SPD into severe internal party conflicts and, in 1917, led to the split of the party into the SPD and the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party). In 1914, the SPD followed almost universally the idea of [Burgfriedenspolitik](#), which meant approving the war credits in the *Reichstag* and dispensing with fundamental opposition to the monarchical system. However, a growing minority within the SPD, including Haase, was not willing to support this policy. Ebert tried in vain to preserve the unity of the party (dating back to 1875) and to unify the party factions from the left, represented by [Karl Liebknecht \(1871-1919\)](#) to the right, represented by [Eduard David \(1863-1930\)](#).

Career after the Party Split

After the party split in 1917, Ebert became parliamentary party leader as well, and he advanced to the top position within the party, surpassing [Philipp Scheidemann \(1865-1939\)](#), who was elected in 1917 to succeed Haase as chairman. It was only during the war that Ebert became a politician of national importance who spoke alongside Scheidemann in the great debates of the *Reichstag*. Ebert's policy during the war was by no means frivolous, because all four of his sons were soldiers; two of them, [Georg Ebert \(1896-1917\)](#) and [Heinrich Ebert \(1897-1917\)](#), were killed in 1917.

During the Revolution

In the fall of 1918, Ebert pleaded vehemently for SPD participation in the final monarchical government, which was the first one to be formed on a parliamentary basis. Ebert was considered a moderate and pragmatist who was prepared to take on responsibility in parliament. For these reasons, as well as his strained relationship with Scheidemann, Prince [Max von Baden \(1867-1929\)](#) transferred to him the office of Chancellor on 9 November 1918. He gave this office up one day later to become a member of the [revolutionary](#) transition government (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*).

Head of State

During the winter of 1918–1919, Friedrich Ebert was the most important policymaker in establishing a parliamentary democracy in Germany. As *Reichspräsident*, Friedrich Ebert at first rejected the [Treaty of Versailles](#) because he did not accept the terms of peace nor that Germany was solely responsible for the outbreak of the First World War. But within a few days he accepted as *Realpolitiker*, that Germany had to sign the peace treaty.

Bernd Braun, Friedrich-Ebert-Gedenkstätte

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External Links

- [Die Leichenfeier des Reichspräsidenten Friedrich Ebert in Berlin und Heidelberg, Wiener Bilder, 15 March 1925, p. 5 \(Österreichische Nationalbibliothek\)\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Die Verfassung des Deutschen Reichs, 11 August 1919 \(100\(0\) Schlüsseldokumente\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Fischer, Conan: 'A very German revolution'?: the post-1918 settlement re-evaluated, in: Bulletin for the German Historical Institute London 28/2, 2006, pp. 6-32 \(Perspectivia\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Friedrich Ebert nach seiner Vereidigung, 21 August 1919 \(Internet Archive\) \(Audio\)](#)
- [Friedrich Ebert und die Unterzeichnung der Weimarer Verfassung in Schwarzburg \(Schloss Schwarzburg\) \(Article\)](#)
- [General Groener über seine Übereinkunft mit Friedrich Ebert, "Ebert-Groener-Pakt", 9. November 1918 \(100\(0\) Schlüsseldokumente\) \(Primary Source\)](#)
- [Treaty of peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany, Versailles 28 June 1919 \(Census\) \(Primary Source\)](#)

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