
Depiction Of Life In The Weimar Republic In Little Man, What Now By Hans Fallada

Between 1919 when the Treaty of Versailles condemned Germany to scandalous debt to 1934 when Adolf Hitler became Führer, major changes that greatly impacted citizens' lives occurred in Germany. Public issues began inserting their way into the private lives of Germans. In his novel *Little Man, What Now?* Hans Fallada depicts life under the rapidly changing Weimar Republic shortly before the Nazis obtained absolute political power. He does so by telling the story of two young lovers, Johannes and Emma Pinneberg, and how their private lives are affected by the social, economic, and political changes surrounding them. The couple's lives are mainly impacted due to the social changes regarding the "New Woman", the economic crisis due to the 1929 Great Depression in Germany, and the political tensions among existing parties under the Weimar Republic. The desperation citizens felt from suffering under low wages and unemployment, ultimately gave rise to Hitler coming into power, an idea discreetly resonating in Fallada's work. Although Fallada's novel is fiction, the author is able to captivate life under the chaotic changes that occurred in Germany during the early 1900s and the very real emotions Germans felt during this time.

The social changes regarding women were a major theme of Fallada's novel, specifically the rise of the New Woman. For example, the book begins with Pinneberg and Emma visiting a doctor, during which the former asks Dr. Sesame about birth control methods, "you want to know an entirely preventable reliable means of prevention. . .Pessaries," said the doctor." This encounter, although brief, helps convey to the audience the changes regarding women's rights and feminist movements. By 1918, Germany's birthrate decreased from 6 children per family to 1. This was due to the wider use of condoms and an increased number of illegal abortions. These permitted German women to have more freedom and control regarding their bodies. As birth control became more popular, women's sexuality and how it was perceived changed too. For instance, Pinneberg's mother represents the New Woman in the sense she gains her wealth by running a brothel. While Pinneberg's coworkers taunt him about his mother's business, readers can also see how Mrs. Pinneberg's actions are becoming more accepted, specifically with the character of Jachmann. Jachmann, Mrs. Pinneberg's lover, explains, "I like her for being so greedy. . .did you know Mama's got over thirty thousand in the bank? Mama's clever. Mama prepares for the future. . . and doesn't want to be dependent on anybody." During this time there were large amounts of prostitutes and brothels throughout Germany. Although publicly shamed, the brothels never had a shortage of customers, primarily middle-class men and police didn't prioritize arresting the entertainers despite prostitution being illegal. Taking this into consideration, Germany's tolerance for women's sexuality can be seen

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as laxer compared to earlier years. A final example of the New Woman in Fallada's book would be how Emma became the breadwinner of the family and Pinneberg is fired from Mandel's. She explains to Jachmann that while she sews during the day and pays the bills, her husband looks after the house, cooks, and takes care of their son. This went against traditional norms since it was seen as disgraceful if a married woman had to work, implying the husband was incapable of providing for his family. In reality women began working more during Germany's economic crisis, thus establishing more independence from patriarchal authority. Needless to say, the New Woman partially stemmed from the changes Germany's economy underwent.

Financial issues stemming from Germany's economic depression is the constant, underlying struggle Fallada's characters battle with. Following World War One, Germany's economy was in disarray. The Treaty of Versailles gave rise to the "stab in the back legend" and soured public opinion of the Weimar Republic or the "November criminals" as they would later be known as. In addition, since Germany relied on loans from the United States to pay war reparations, the Great Depression of 1929 was a devastating blow to the European nation, resulting in hyperinflation and increased unemployment. Throughout the novel Pinneberg struggles to find and maintain a job in order to provide for his family, while the couple consistently worry about whether they'll have enough money to care for their son. The percentage of unemployment is alluded to when Pinneberg's boss, Mr. Spannfluss reprimands him for his constant tardiness and threatens, "the next time you're late you'll be thrown out on the street without warning. Then you'll learn what it's like on the dole. Along with all the others." Every decision Emma and Johannes made in the novel was done so after constantly worrying about their funds. The depression in Germany resulted in worker's wages decreasing over 30%, the unemployment rate rising to 8.5 million by 1932, and 40% of the individuals fortunate enough to still have a job depended on the government for some form of financial relief. An example of how the Pinnebergs depended on the government can be seen after Emma gives birth to their son and Johannes anxiously awaits the Insurance check from the government. The book describes Pinneberg as being nervous in the Health Insurance Fund building, noting that he is there for a simple 100 marks whereas others have more pressing matters to deal with. Regardless he and Emma are desperately relying on the government's money. Germany had not experienced this level of poverty since the pre-March and the government soon failed to provide support to Germany's citizens. As aforementioned the rise of the Nazis is implied throughout the novel, in reality the depression allowed Adolf Hitler to become more favorable amongst Germans since his regime offered more employment opportunities. In addition, the fact that the several political parties could not agree on a decision to help Germany's economic crisis led to the situation only worsening.

Feuding political parties under the Weimar Republic make several appearances throughout the book, reflecting the chaos Germany's government underwent during the postwar years. Taking place just before Adolf Hitler and the Nazis rose to power, *Little Man, What Now?* explores the

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rise of the Nazi Party as well as the Social Democratic Party competing with the Communist Party. A character in the book, Lauterbach, is described as, "a real German. . . sworn enemy of Jews, wogs, reparations, Social Democrats and Commies." The period in which Fallada's book takes place is one where the Nazi party was not as popular as it would become by the mid and late 1930s. This results in Lauterbach constantly getting into fights with opposing party members while he is out recruiting, highlighting the tensions that arose due to political mayhem. Another moment in the book to consider when discussing the way political issues affected private lives is when Emma's father and brother argue at the dinner table. Mr. Morschel, a Social Democrat, and Karl Morschel, a Communist, get into a heated debate the night Emma brings Johannes over to break the news of their engagement. Karl proceeds to call his father a social fascist, to which the elder Morschel exclaims, "I'd like to know who's the real fascist here, you Soviet slave." Karl responds by stating the Social Democrats promised peace instead of war and broke that promise. One can see the tensions that existed between the two parties when noting that during the elections of in 1928 the KPD managed to increase their power by twenty-three seats while the SPD suffered losses. The KPD did this by labeling the Social Democrats as the traitors of Germany. However, the Nazis succeeded in holding 107 seats and 2.6 million votes from the population. By 1932 the number of seats the Nazis held in the Reichstag rose from 107 to 230. The Nazi's rise to power is alluded in the novel when considering how Lauterbach was the only devoted Nazi in Pinneberg's workplace, yet as the book progresses Pinneberg realizes that most of the workers at Mandel's are members of the Nazi party.

Issues that were public quickly became private in Germany under the Weimar Republic in the sense the two merged where public changes influenced the daily lives of people. In *Little Man, What Now?* readers can see social changes impacting the feminist movement, allowing women like Hans Fallada's Emma Pinneberg to have more independence regarding the workforce and sexual freedoms. Economically, the characters within the book struggle to maintain a job to provide for themselves, much like the way German citizens suffered from hyperinflation and the unemployment epidemic. Lastly, political changes regarding the feuding parties sparked tension among everyday citizens in Germany. This would lead to the Nazis gaining more seats in Germany's government and ultimately end with Adolf Hitler dissolving the Weimar Republic and becoming Führer. Fallada's book successfully conveys each of these three realms of society and examines how it affects the protagonists' daily lives despite them wanting to simply take care of their growing family.

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