

PRUSIAN COUP IN 1932

Y. O. Matskevich

yaroslavm01.2.5@gmail.com;

Supervisors – I. I. Szumski, Candidate of Science (History), Associate Professor;

O. B. Tesevich, Senior Lecturer

The article is devoted to the coup in Prussia in 1932, one of the most important events in the history of the Weimar Republic and German federalism as a whole. It is underlined that the elements of the process of winding down federalism and establishing a centralized state were identified in Weimar Germany even before Hitler came to power. The topic is relevant for the study of German democracy in the interwar period. The background and ideas behind the politicians' actions are analyzed.

Key words: Prussian Coup; Weimar Republic; Free State of Prussia; German federalism; Constitutional Court in Leipzig.

The debate on the reorganization of the federal states had been held since 1919, as part of the discussion of a new imperial constitution, the so-called *Reichsreform*. The relationship between the federal center and Prussia was a subject of discussion among the German elite. It was assumed that Prussia with its own parliament, government, power apparatus, contrary to the interests of the whole nation, as a state, strove for both hegemony and dangerous autonomy within the existing national structure. Therefore, ideas were put forward that the Prussian government and parliament should be replaced by the President of the Reich, the Reich government and the Reichstag. A major victory for the reformers was the unification of the small central German states into the newly-formed state of Thuringia. However, this success came to an end when other proposals were rejected by local authorities [4, p. 316], [3, p. 63, 66].

But the main threat to the stability of the Weimar state was a destructive force. Neo-conservative concepts, one of which was the «New State», united the opponents of liberal democratic parliamentarism. The reactionaries argued that the republican system was to blame for Germany's troubles. They wanted to replace it with a hierarchical state, essentially a dictatorship based on the principles of nationalism, Christianity and corporatism. Their aim was to create a precursor to monarchy, an authoritarian presidential regime with a chancellor dependent on the president's trust, similar to the German Empire. Franz von Papen, together with General Kurt von Schleicher, decided to seize the moment of the economic crisis, but their plans were thwarted by the Free State of Prussia. Having its own government, apparatus of power, dominating every single state, Prussia at the same stood strictly on the principles of

federalism and democracy. Therefore, the main blow fell on Prussia [11, p. 108]. That is why the main blow came to Prussia.

Altona Bloody Sunday of July 17, 1932, allowed the von Papen government to return to the idea of striking at Prussia again. The Prussian ministers Hirtzifer, Severing and Klepper were invited to a talk at Reich Chancellery, which was scheduled for 10 am on July 20 [9, p. 13]. Papen informed the ministers of Hindenburg's decree which enabled him to become Reichskommissar and gave him the power to remove the government. He explained this move by saying that «public safety and order in Prussia can no longer be guaranteed» [5, p. 64]. A state of emergency was declared with immediate effect and the Reichswehr was given the authority to enforce the decree. Prussian Representatives objected to the coup, but took no concrete action.

On July 20, the decree on the Reichsexecution was promulgated. Paul von Hindenburg, at Franz von Papen's request, replaced the legal government of the Free State of Prussia with von Papen as Reichskommissar by his first decree. The second decree on the same day transferred executive power in Prussia to Kurt von Schleicher, Minister of the Armed Forces, and restricted the fundamental rights of citizens. The Reichswehr was involved in the arrest of the top Prussian power apparatus [10, p. 433].

The Prussian government refused to respond to violence with violence. The deployment of the Prussian police and the paramilitary organization of the Social Democrats, Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold was not carried out. Calls from the left to go on strike, as during the Kappa Putsch, were also ignored because of the high unemployment rate during the Great Depression. The Prussian government responded moderately in court, which in fact meant that the coup was successful [2, p. 122].

The coup of July 20, 1932 was not only a blow to the republic, but also to federalism. It was for this reason that all the southern German federal states, especially Bavaria, immediately sided with Prussia. Already on July 20, the Bavarian government appealed to the Constitutional Court. Baden did the same the next day. On July 21, Württemberg and Hesse on July 22 protested to the Reich President over the legality of the July 20 decree.

On July 21, 1932, the Prussian government brought a constitutional complaint to the State Court of Justice for the German Reich (Der Staatsgerichtshof für das Deutsche Reich). The Prussian government's legal reasoning was persuasive. Under no circumstances did The Reich have the right to deprive the federal state of constitutional government, nor the right to representation in the Reichsrat [6, p. 47]. Since the presidential decree did just that, the cabinet's actions constituted a violation of the constitution – nothing less than a coup d'état.

On July 25, the Constitutional Court in Leipzig issued its preliminary ruling: the court rejected the deposed Prussian government's request to strip the Reichskommissar of his duties. As justification for the court's decision, its president stated that the order desired by Prussia would cause «the division of state power», «chaos in the life of the state». The German nationalists were pleased with the verdict of the court: they noted the dismissal of the Prussian appeal as a great moral success of the imperial government [8, p. 504].

In its ruling of October 25, the Supreme Court described the measures taken by Reichskommissar von Papen to maintain order and security under the state of emergency as partly legal, but ruled that Prussian government of Brown should retain its status under state law [11, p. 451] in its relation to the state parliament (Landtag), the Reichstag, the Reichsrat and the Reich government. His dismissal was considered unjustified. However, as the Prussian ministers refused to cooperate with the Reichskommissar, Papen's provisional government replaced the highest administrative and police officials in Prussia [7, p. 209], [3, p. 64].

State power in the largest state of the Weimar Republic, led by a coalition led by Social Democrat Otto Braun, passed to the imperial government of Franz von Papen. All possibilities for civil society and the state to protest or resist were declared illegal by Reich President Paul von Hindenburg. The result of the coup was the weakening of the federalism of the Weimar Republic and the elimination of one of the possible forces of resistance in Germany to the policy of centralization. Germany, guided by the authoritarian actions of the Reich Chancellor, the connivance of society and ultimately the constitutional court, approached Germany with the ease with which Adolf Hitler subsequently defrauded the entire republican system of Weimar Germany and established a totalitarian regime after he came to power in January 1933.

References

1. *Зорилэ Д. В.* Конституционно-правовые взгляды Гуго Пройса как разработчика конституции Германской Империи (Веймарской) 1919 г. [Электронный ресурс] // Право и государство: теория и практика. 2016. №7 (139). URL : <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/konstitutsionno-pravovye-vzglyady-gugo-proysa-kak-razrabotchika-konstitutsii-germanskoy-imperii-veymarskoy-1919-g/viewer> (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
2. *Гинцберг Л. И.* Ранняя история нацизма. Борьба за власть [Электронный ресурс]. Москва: Вече, 2011. URL: <https://coollib.com/b/149883-lev-izrailevich-gintsberg-rannyyaya-istoriya-natsizma-borba-za-vlast/readp> (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
3. *Максимов И. П.* Истоки и исторические предпосылки немецкого федерализма [Электронный ресурс] // Вестник Балтийского федерального университета им. И. Канта. Сер.: Гуманитарные и общественные науки. 2020. № 2. С. 61–67. URL:

- <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/istoki-i-istoricheskie-predposylki-nemetskogo-federalizma/viewer> (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
4. *Попов И. Д.* Региональная политика Германии периода Веймарской республики (1918-1933) в советской и постсоветской историографии [Электронный ресурс] // Научный диалог. 2019. №8. С. 308–344. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/regionalnaya-politika-germanii-perioda-veymarskoy-respubliki-1918-1933-v-sovetskoy-i-postsovetskoy-istoriografii/viewer> (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
 5. *Папен Ф.* Вице-канцлер Третьего рейха. Воспоминания политического деятеля гитлеровской Германии. 1933-1947 [Электронный ресурс]. М. : Центрполиграф, 2005. URL: http://loveread.ec/view_global.php?id=70401 (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
 6. *Ширер У.* Взлет и падение Третьего Рейха [Электронный ресурс]. М. : АСТ, 2016. URL: http://loveread.ec/view_global.php?id=55423 (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
 7. *Górnisiewicz A.* Dispute over the Guardian of the Constitution: Hans Kelsen, Carl Schmitt and the Weimar Case [Electronic resource] // Politeja. № 3 (72). 2021. URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/27107244?read-now=1&seq=17#page_scan_tab_contents (date of access: 1.05.2023).
 8. *Winkler H. A.* Weimar 1918 – 1933: Die Geschichte der Ersten Deutschen Demokratie [Электронный ресурс]. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1993. URL: <https://books.google.by/books?id=C5qqLpiJNLoC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
 9. *Keßler M.* Der Preußenschlag am 20. Juli 1932 [Электронный ресурс]. Berlin, 1999. URL: https://www.audimax.de/fileadmin/hausarbeiten/geschichte/Hausarbeit_Geschichte_Der_Preussenschlag_am_20._Juli_1932_ahx0324.pdf (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
 10. *Morsey R.* Zur Geschichte des «Preußenschlags» am 20. Juli 1932 [Электронный ресурс]. München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1961. URL: https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/heftarchiv/1961_4_5_morsey.pdf (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).
 11. *Schulze H.* Weimar. Deutschland 1917–1933 [Электронный ресурс]. Berlin, 1982. URL: <https://prussia.online/books/weimar-deutschland-1917–1933> (дата обращения: 1.05.2023).