The Wirth-Rathenau government still had some small shreds of substance with which to make a verisimilitude of policy after the disappearance of the loan. These were picked over in desultory fashion at the cabinet committee meeting of June 12. Rathenau erected a verbal construction, remarking that Germany was now in a “situation of a two-fold conditional character.” He meant that the government’s promises of deflationary action had been conditional on the loan, but that the original concessions made by the Reparation Commission in March had themselves been conditional on deflationary action. It was not useful to think in this way. The point, and Rathenau knew it, was that Germany was not going to undertake the promised measures, which would cause immediate disaster, but that she was slipping into disaster without them. Without positive help Germany’s finances would collapse, and there was no prospect of help now. Wirth could only say blankly: “In view of the loan failure our domestic and foreign policies must be reexamined.” The government decided on action at morning and evening cabinet meetings the next day. The action was feeble and defensive, support for the mark against the damage caused by the bad news, but it was

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1 Minutes in Ausführung, BA, R431/28.
2 Kabinettsprotokolle, BA, R431/1377.
absolutely necessary. As Rathenau put it: "We cannot bear this dollar rate. ... We must always anticipate the fact that ... the drop will become catastrophic." He dominated the meetings, which began with a long report by Carl Bergmann that failed to suggest any plan for dealing with the situation. The support action required the expenditure of 60 million gold marks to buy paper marks. Rathenau had to deal with the opposition of Reichsbank President Havenstein, who was taking advantage of the government's past efforts to mollify the Reparation Commission. At the end of May the law making the Reichsbank formally independent had been duly passed. The theory had been that the bank, directed by professionals of finance, would refuse to allow the government to act irresponsibly. No law could give a central bank that much power, but Havenstein's position had been strengthened and he was able to cause temporary difficulties. Rathenau was forced to use all his skill to call him to order and get the money. That accomplished, Rathenau was still faced with the limits to the government's ability to act. No other liquid resources were available, and the reserves of the Reichsbank, whether its president might be cooperative or not, were dangerously low.

Having interposed another brief delay in the process of bankruptcy, Rathenau returned again to the idea of a foreign loan. On June 22 he sent a telegram to the German Ambassador in London, inquiring into the chances of securing Bradbury's help. Actually, Bradbury was sympathetic to the idea, and Basil Blackett, the Treasury reparation expert, was trying to revive the small loan which the Loan Committee had just rejected. The British experts, however, had no command over circumstances, and circumstances were as negative as before. That was as far as the loan initiative went.

Rathenau also had to give his attention to another problem that promised no rewards at all. This was the arrival of the Committee of Guarantees, the Reparation Commission's subcommittee, on June 18. The next day he reported on the visit to the cabinet, but it was Andreas Hermes, still directly responsible for reparations, who drew

4 Discussed in cabinet committee meeting of June 30 and detailed in a report from the German embassy in London, dated July 1, in Ausführung, BA, R 431/29.
up a program for dealing with the committee. The committee's objective was to set up a financial inspection system, originally demanded in the Reparation Commission's note of March 21, which would prevent Germany from cheating on its promises. Humiliating negotiations—humiliating for either side—ended with a compromise on July 21 providing for limited inspection that violated German sovereignty without giving the Allies any useful information. Rathenau was working on another matter as well, the question of German war guilt. Later, Wirth tried to attribute great importance to it, but he only emphasized its futility. The German government had returned to the old argument. The Allies were using war guilt to justify reparations, and an honest study of war causes would destroy the justification. It was precisely because of their weak case that the Allied governments would never permit—and to this day have never permitted—the matter to be objectively considered. Walter Simons had encountered the Allied reluctance at the London Conference in March, 1921. German finances, moreover, were disintegrating faster than the Allies could think about fundamental questions. On the evening of June 13, after his long day of cabinet meetings, Rathenau made a speech to a private group in which he commented on the publication of German documents relating to the war's origins. He argued that Germany "had never misused [her] power."

On June 19 an official charged with studying public opinion reported to the cabinet. While Commissioner Kuenzer doubted that there would be a putsch of Left or Right, and recommended against taking special precautionary measures, he said: "Of course the increasing inflation is encouraging the tendency to acts of violence."

The actions of the United States, Great Britain, and France at this time confirmed Germany's isolation. A long British cabinet

\[ \text{Kabinettsprotokolle, BA, R431/1377.} \]
\[ \text{Copy of agreement, Ausführung, BA, R431/29. It permitted a few inspectors to see financial reports at the top level of the Finance Ministry, but not at various intermediate levels, as the committee had originally demanded. Of course the ministry could control the information shown to the committee's experts. There were discussions about the negotiations and reports on them at cabinet and cabinet-committee meetings throughout these weeks.} \]
\[ \text{In a speech to the Reichstag on June 24, Stenographische Berichte, 354: 8035.} \]
\[ \text{Rathenau, Gesammelte Reden, p. 422.} \]
\[ \text{It was the same meeting at which Rathenau discussed the visit of the Committee of Guarantees, Kabinettsprotokolle, BA, R431/1377.} \]
meeting on June 16 mentioned all the important international problems. Chancellor of the Exchequer Horne said there was nothing to be gained by delaying payment of war debts. Rather, it would “create fresh difficulties [since] public opinion in America had tended recently to harden on the subject.” Poincaré was sending a financial expert to Washington that month to try to get special terms, a fact that Horne reported with some discomfort but no moral indignation. The British were expediting their people to the United States for the same purpose. All the major nations, thus, were pursuing the policy of every-man-for-himself, the Allies among themselves and as a block in relation to Germany. Upon Horne’s recommendation the cabinet agreed to make a statement demanding payment by the debtors of Britain so that she could, in turn, make plans for paying the United States. Without any qualification, Horne went on to say that his proposal would result in “increased reluctance on the part of France to make any reparation concessions to Germany.” He saw no escape from the end result: “The latter country would go bankrupt and European revival [would be] indefinitely postponed.”

It would be impossible to find any coherent pattern in the more violent German responses to the country’s situation. Commissioner Kuenzer did not specify any acts as having actually taken place. He forgot to mention one incident that had occurred only a few days previously. The incident illustrated the difficulties of making any sense of the situation. It concerned a political leader, but one who had nothing to do with government policy in 1922. He was Philipp Scheidemann, the Social Democratic colleague of Friedrich Ebert and the man who had called out the republic in the course of the revolutionary overthrow of November 9, 1918. If the Right could hate him for that, he ought to have purchased its tolerance, at least, when he patriotically resigned as Chancellor in May, 1919, rather than accept the Versailles Treaty. On June 4, now in 1922, while Scheidemann was taking a Sunday walk in Cassel, where he was mayor, two men jostled him and splashed prussic acid in his face. Escaping permanent harm, he put his assailants to flight with a pistol. This active defense gave the rightist newspapers an opportunity to condemn him for his tendency to violence. A back-

10 Cabinet Conclusions, PRO, CAB 23/30.
The character of violence during the republic's early years has never been well defined. Judgments about it have been heavily influenced by the thesis advanced in the title of an often-quoted book, *Vier Jahre politischer Mord* (Berlin, 1922), but the contents fail to support the thesis. The author, E. J. Gumbel, was a statistician of distinction, but his other writings show that he was a Marxist and an apologist for the Soviet regime. In his study of political murder he found 376 homicides occurring as a result of political disorder in those four years, but few were political murders by commonly accepted standards. Gumbel had properly included the deaths of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Kurt Eisner, Karl Gareis, and Matthias Erzberger. He then listed an indiscriminate collection of summary executions or retaliations. Beastly enough, they could not be called premeditated murder for political ends. Gumbel's calculations were all the more suspect since he attributed only 22 of the cases to the Left and accused the Right of all the rest—a total of 354. The various radical groups, however, had contributed their share to the destruction of life in the Berlin fighting of December, 1918, and January and March, 1919; the anarchist-Communist putsch in Munich in April, 1919; and the rising of the Red Army of the Ruhr in the spring of 1920. It is a fact, furthermore, that the radicals had started these actions. Gumbel's conclusions were clearly influenced by his political orientation, and his book has failed to assist a fair judgment.

The murderous character of rightist thought and action, combined with such tendentious studies by partisans of the Left, has given an impression of much more system and clearer motivation to rightist violence. The Right talked much more political murder than it committed. The Left also talked murder, but never carried out its threats. After Erzberger's assassination the *Hessischer Volksfreund* of Darmstadt speculated on the salutory effects that would result if the "Helfferichs, Ludendorffs, Westarps and Tirpitz's..."
had made the acquaintance of the lantern post." None of them ever did, although Helfferich had good cause for apprehension. One day late in June, 1922, he received twenty letters threatening his life. Helfferich’s relation to the violence illustrates the problems concerning its place in the history of the Weimar Republic. Honorable and sincerely desirous of the best for his country, he refused to appeal to violence. The effect of his political leadership was to encourage it.

Helfferich’s career also illustrates the complexity of the problem of the republic’s existence. Helfferich came from a background of political liberalism, his father having been a leader in the old Progressive Party. Helfferich himself had been important in the imperial war government, first as State Secretary (i.e., Minister) of Finances, then as State Secretary of the Interior and Vice-Chancellor. He was a man of great ability and overwhelming energy, but his enemies and his association with the defeat combined unfairly to denigrate his accomplishments. Bitter at the ingratitude, he subsequently devoted his ability to attacking the republic. In July, 1919, he began a campaign in the Kreuz-Zeitung against Erzberger as a corrupt politician and, as such, the republic’s personification. A speech Helfferich gave at the University of Berlin on June 26, 1919, contributed to the murderous formulae in the mythology of the Right: “Our nation collapsed because of a failure of moral force. Let us fight to the death against the dark powers who led our people into this path of shame.” He arrived at his man: “Issue and person are simply not to be distinguished in the case of Erzberger.” He went on to accuse Erzberger of making private profit out of his political position. The Centrist leader was forced to bring suit for libel. At the trial, extending from January 19 to March 12, 1920, Helfferich could only claim that Erzberger had passed certain persons on to government offices for help, but prejudice and archaic standards of governmental practices produced an odd verdict. Helf-

13 Scheffbuch, *Helfferich*, pp. 86–88. There was strong motivation in this case; Helfferich was being held responsible for the attack on Rathenau.
14 Collected in the pamphlet, *Fort mit Erzberger* (1919), which also includes Erzberger’s replies. These were originally published in the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung. Erzberger, who understood this style of conflict, was no gentler with Helfferich. He unfairly accused Helfferich of mishandling the nation’s war finances: “the most irresponsible of all Finance Ministers” — quoted on p. 24.
Helfferich was found guilty of libel and ordered to pay a nominal fine. Erzberger, however, was held to be guilty of impropriety, perjury, and mixing business and politics. While the trial was going on, in January, a discharged ensign shot and lightly wounded Erzberger, explaining: "Erzberger was a borer-from-within, working against Germany's interests." The verdict drove Erzberger out of public life and, incidentally, gave Joseph Wirth, who had been close to Erzberger, his great opportunity. It also left a cloud of killing connotations above Erzberger's head, and he was more efficiently shot in October, 1921. Helfferich had destroyed an important leader of the republic and seriously damaged the republic itself. Nevertheless he had a compulsion to be constructive that led him repeatedly to deny his principles and help the government. After supporting it during the time of the London Ultimatum, he would later conceive of the plan for a sound currency introduced in 1923. The Helfferich plan provided the domestic financial strategy that led the country out of the great inflation. In 1921 and 1922 Helfferich represented a potential of valuable assistance and a present danger to the republic and its leaders.

Helfferich, having begun as a critic of the republic, went on to condemn its policy of fulfillment as one more betrayal of the true national interest. The figure of Rathenau provided him with a new personification for the wretched government. Perhaps the Erzberger tragedy restrained him. He did not take advantage of the opportunity, and refused to attack Rathenau personally. He preferred to deal directly with the issues and, with his undoubted competence as a financial man, to attempt to show that he could solve the problems. He never brought any suggestion of anti-Semitism into his criticism. Indeed, he helped combat the anti-Semites among the Nationalists so effectively that they resigned from the party before the end of 1922. But Helfferich's criticism, fair or not, provided a base for other, less controlled, less responsible persons and groups.

The wilder man, unlike Helfferich, preferred to personify fulfillment. Rathenau suited them excellently. The choice, however, was not always clear, and the Right had more hatred than could be ex-

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16 Quoted in Gumbel, Vier Jahre politischer Mord, p. 70.
17 The question of whether he might have ended as a thorough supporter of the republic remains unanswered. He was killed in a train accident in Switzerland on April 23, 1924.
hausted upon one man. The *Vossische Zeitung* called Scheidemann "the best hated man after Erzberger." On June 13, a week after the Scheidemann assault, the Karlsruhe *Volksfreund* expressed the fear that Wirth would be assassinated. Rathenau was still the best candidate for murder. Long before he became identified with an unpopular policy he had been able to inspire blinding anger. There was the episode at the upper-class luncheon during the war when the guests competed with each other in denouncing him for evils they knew he had not wrought. He was an intellectualizing Jew and disgustingly wealthy. Disgustingly wealthy, he was urging the nation to greater sacrifices. People found many reasons—old and new—to hate Rathenau.

German resentment about policies and persons, however, was not as great as selected and unexamined facts could suggest. It was true that the nation was angry and unhappy. The anti-Semites were active. In early 1922 a shabby racist publisher railed in a pamphlet: "Our Chancellor, blindly helping the drive toward Jewish world control, switches us onto the right track. Germany has its Jewish foreign minister.... The nomination is a bald provocation of the German people." The *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi organ, was directing its early journalistic violences against the Wirth government. The headline of one article read: "The Resurrected from Marx to Rathenau." The sum of all these attacks was rather modest. Few Germans were willing to reduce their thinking to the level of psychotic commonplaces, while those who did had many other concerns. The German Right, sane or mad, was too confused to know very well what it was against, since it really did not know what it wanted. The blows it delivered against half-perceived enemy shapes were scattered and uncertain. A dissertation studying fulfillment and German public opinion was unable to show any great weight or consistency in the attacks on the fulfillment policy, the fulfillment policy and Rathenau, the fulfillment policy and the Wirth government, or the fulfillment policy and the Weimar Republic.

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19 June 6 (A.M.).

20 Clipping in Reichskanzlei: Personal-Akten, Prof. Dr. Joseph Wirth, BA, R43l/3631.


22 On May 14, 1921. The article called the government "the same old coalition team which Germany can thank for revolution, armistice, and peace treaty" (clipping in Ausführung, BA, R43l/19).

In 1922 many signs were pointing to violence—futile, mindless, and perverse violence. The perversity was articulated very precisely in a hate verse threatening Scheidemann, Wirth, and Rathenau. It mocked Scheidemann with the famous phrase he had used when he resigned as Chancellor: "What hand would not wither that gave itself and us up to these chains?" The verse ran: "Scheidemann with his withered hand,/ Traitor and fat cat—to the wall!" His patriotic action was one more reason to destroy the man. As for the present Chancellor: "Give it to Wirth—but hard." The verse then repeated an older couplet about Rathenau that went back to 1921: "Knock off Walther Rathenau,/ The god-damned Jew pig." The reasons for hating Rathenau had been dulled by his political action in 1922. He had withdrawn from direct fulfillment responsibility after the Cannes Conference. His Reichstag speech of March 29 had been well received by the Right because of its eloquent criticism of Allied demands. The dispute within the government at the end of May, moreover, had marked Andreas Hermes as more conciliatory to Germany's oppressors. The Treaty of Rapallo, reasonably interpreted, was an even more forceful argument for Rathenau's loyalty to the fatherland. Nearly all right-wing opinion agreed with him that the treaty's assistance to bolshevism was incidental to the great strengthening it meant in Germany's international position. All this was too logical.

German society had been trained to look for a scapegoat. The racism of the latter part of the nineteenth century had tried to find someone to blame for the discomforts of progress. The need was all the greater afterward, when the country was experiencing real pain. In 1919 Rathenau himself described the general tendency: "We understand logic of this sort: 'It's the fault of the police, the rationing system, the Prussians, the Jews, the English, the priests, the capitalists.'" He concluded: "Long before the educated classes have become capable of making sensible verdicts, the utterly incompetent masses of the rawest youth ... will be turned loose and handed the job of hanging judges."

25 Quoted by the Karlsruhe Volksfreund article, above. Rathenau had a newspaper clipping of an earlier version of the verse. The recent killing of Gareis was celebrated in this, while Rathenau and Wirth were suggested as the next victims. Rathenau sent the clipping to his racist correspondent, Wilhelm Schwaner, in a letter of June 26, 1921 (in Rathenau-Nachlass, BA).
In April, 1922, a boy of 17 got the idea of killing Rathenau and mentioned it to a 25-year-old former Free Corps officer named Erwin Kern. A blond Nordic of the type that Rathenau found so attractive, Kern was attached to Captain Ehrhardt's Organisation Consul. Kern shouldered aside the adolescent and took the leadership in the conspiracy. All of the nearly twenty plotters were either secondary-school students or men of Kern's age. According to one of them, Kern had made these statements: Rathenau was a dangerous leftist carrying out a "policy of fulfillment [that was] treason committed against the German people [and] would inevitably lead to the destruction of the German nation"; Rathenau became a minister by giving President Ebert a 24-hour ultimatum; Rathenau was an exponent of creeping Bolshevism and had married his sister to Karl Radek to bind the alliance with Russian bolshevism; Rathenau was one of the 300 Elders of Zion who were trying to control the world; and Germany needed a civil war between Right and Left to clear out the corruption. Neither the trial of the surviving assassins—Kern had been killed—nor the other sources of information suggest that more responsible thoughts or persons were behind the conspiracy.

Rathenau had been repeatedly warned. Shortly after he became Foreign Minister, according to Lili Deutsch, a priest was told a story of a murder plot in the confessional. He reported it to Wirth after getting permission from the Papal Nuncio. Wirth, "his teeth chattering," informed Rathenau, and Rathenau let him assign a guard. Rathenau, however, repeatedly sent the men away.

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27 According to the trial of the Rathenau assassins, held in Leipzig, October 3–14, 1922. Minutes of the (probably) most important testimony in the pamphlet by Karl Brammer, Das politische Ergebnis des Rathenau-Prozesses (1922). Analysis in Gumbel, Vier Jahre politischer Mord, pp. 71–72. Two of the conspirators published memoirs about the plot. One of them, Ernst-Werner Techow, appears to be telling the truth more often than not, from comparison with the minutes, in "Gemeiner Mörder?!" Das Rathenau-Attentat (1934). The other conspirator, the Free Corps chronicler and screenwriter Ernst von Salomon, obviously used his facile talent for fiction in his account in The Outlaws (1931), pp. 179–85 and 239–42.

28 This was the testimony of Techow, in Brammer, Das politische Ergebnis, pp. 25–26; quotation, p. 25.

29 Kessler, Tagebücher, p. 555. The Nuncio was Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII.
then it happens not arbitrarily, but because that life has found its conclusion." It was the same self-conscious valedictory note that he had sounded during the war. A member of the British embassy visited him in the Grunewald in June, 1922, and mentioned that he had been questioned by a plainclothesman. Rathenau thereupon made a telephone call complaining that his guests were being disturbed. No police were visible when the Englishman left. Lili Deutsch, interpreting one aspect of Rathenau, said: "He could not endure to have people...continuously keeping him under guard and spying on him." Lord d'Abernon wrote in his diary on May 10, 1922, while in Genoa: "Rathenau has to face the undying hatred of the Right." D'Abernon added, innocently capturing Rathenau's truly morbid vanity: "But he has often held me he is sure to be assassinated."

In the latter part of June, while renewing his efforts to get reparation relief, and while supporting the action to keep the mark from collapsing entirely, Rathenau carried out the less important but no less demanding duties of the public man. He was in the Reichstag on Wednesday, June 21, to answer interpellations about incidents involving the French in the occupied Rhineland and Saar. Among those speaking were Gustav Stresemann and Wilhelm Marx, the latter a Centrist leader and future Chancellor. Stresemann and Marx were not trying to embarrass the government. Indeed the subjects indicated cooperation between the deputies and Minister, so that Rathenau might protest against what all Germans agreed were injustices committed by the French. It was another moment in the conventional quarrel between the occupiers and the humiliatingly occupied. Rathenau's politically indignant statement was well received, eliciting expressions of approval from the Right—"Hear, hear!" The Right applauded when he finished.

On Friday, June 23, Rathenau was lending his services to the industry of the Rhine and Westphalia in negotiating an adjustment in deliveries of reparation coal. The point was to satisfy the Allies on
their coal demands without causing domestic shortages that would force German blast furnaces to shut down. Rathenau met with Hugo Stinnes, Fritz Thyssen, and other industrialists in rooms in the Reichstag at 6 p.m. While they were talking, Karl Helfferich, in the Reichstag's great hall, launched into a speech of an hour and a half that challenged every important aspect of the government's policy.\[36\] Reported to Rathenau, the speech caused him some distress and delayed his arrival at the American embassy, where he had been invited to dinner. Helfferich, referring to Rathenau's protest of Wednesday, accused him of failing properly to stand up to the French: "Bei Gott, that is pretty weak stuff." Helfferich went on to a general criticism of fulfillment. The occasion had been provided by enabling legislation, before the Reichstag at this moment, for two agreements deriving from Rathenau's Wiesbaden Agreement. No one, surely not Helfferich, believed in the reality of these arrangements, but they provided a political target. "The Calvary of fulfillment... has brought us the frightful devaluation of the German currency," he said. "It has crushed our middle class, dragged countless persons and whole families into the depths of poverty, driven countless others into despair and suicide." Helfferich raised his pitch: "It has handed great chunks of our own resources over to foreigners. It has shaken our economic and social order to the foundations!"\[37\] Accusing the government of permitting Germany's sovereignty to be violated, Helfferich said that its members "should be brought up before the Supreme Court."\[38\] The speech was unfair enough. He was implying treason, but then he was only implying it. As Lord d'Abernon commented, the speech was "not of an exceptionally violent character."\[39\] Helfferich was often attacked as harshly and unfairly, and, indeed, that happened in the course of the speech itself, a Communist calling him "Bankruptcy Minister" and "war criminal."\[40\] Helfferich had begun on the defensive, impelled once again to try to justify his wartime services. Nor was the speech an attack on Rathenau. It dealt him a glancing blow on the


37 Ibid., 355: 7792.
38 Ibid., 355: 7797.
39 Rapallo to Dawes, p. 53.
40 Stenographische Berichte, 355: 8001.
Rhineland-Saar matter and passed on to other things. When Helfferich reached the subject of fulfillment he mentioned Wirth and not Rathenau, discussing it as a policy of the whole government. He was also saying things about the disastrous economic effects of reparations with which anybody in the government would agree. After the irresponsibly argued negatives, furthermore, he actually tried to suggest a positive policy. Of course, his ideas were useless: the government should refuse to buy dollars when the mark had declined beyond a certain point (a Social Democrat, who interrupted to ask, “And then what happens?” went unanswered) and appeal once again to England and America. Helfferich had been restrained by his own sense of responsibility. He had treated Erzberger much worse.

No one thought the Reichstag session was important. The debate was diffuse. Helfferich had introduced at least three other subjects, and other speakers brought up still more. A Communist speaker drove out nearly all the deputies with a conventional denunciation of everything middle class; only a half-dozen were left when he had finished. The *Vossische Zeitung* reported the debate in detail, but on the fourth page. A Democrat defended fellow-Democrat Rathenau only casually, obviously because he had not felt that the reference to him was an important part of Helfferich’s remarks. The Democrat went on with gentle humor to suggest that Helfferich was making use of “an exaggerated expressionism or Dadaism” to characterize conditions. It was indicative of the government’s division of responsibility that Hermes and not Rathenau made the rebuttal to Helfferich. Thereupon the Reichstag quietly passed the enabling act for the useless reparation agreement, and, at 9:04 P.M., adjourned.

At the embassy dinner Rathenau undertook one more action on reparations and had another confrontation with Hugo Stinnes. Rathenau had gotten himself invited to discuss the coal problem, and after going through it with the American Ambassador, Alanson B. Houghton, he suggested that Stinnes be called. The Ambassador thought that Rathenau wanted to see Stinnes not for the coal prob-

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42 According to article in *Vossische Zeitung*, June 24 (A.M.).
43 He was Adolf Korell, *Stenographische Berichte*, 355: 8014.
45 The dinner was in honor of James A. Logan, the U.S. deputy representative on the Reparation Commission.
lem, which was only an excuse, but so that he could attempt to come to some sort of understanding with him on reparation policy in general. In any case, Rathenau asked Stinnes, according to the industrialist’s recollection, what he now thought about reparations. Consistent with his style, Stinnes launched into aggressive criticism. He thought government policy was mistaken, although, like Helfferich and all the other critics, he had no good ideas himself. Nevertheless, Houghton thought that Stinnes was willing, on principle, to cooperate with Rathenau. The two men had so much to say that they did not separate when they left the embassy at 1 A.M. They went to the Hotel Esplanade, one of the Stinnes properties and his residence in Berlin, and continued talking there until about 4 A.M. According to Stinnes, the interchange ended amicably but vaguely. Rathenau departed for his office about 10:45 A.M. that Saturday, June 24, slightly later than usual because of his later retiring hour.

On that day, one of the first days of summer, Rathenau’s automobile had its top down. It was overtaken about a half-mile from his villa, still on Königsallee in the Grunewald, by another open automobile. A Berlin construction worker noticed two young men in “spanking new” leather jackets and caps in the back seat of the car. They were Erwin Kern and his friend Hermann Fischer, also a young former officer. The driver was a still younger man. When their vehicle was a half-length ahead, it forced Rathenau’s automobile to the side, and Kern calmly shot Rathenau with a submachine gun. A moment later Fischer threw a hand grenade, the force of the explosion lifting Rathenau from his seat. The conspirators’ vehicle then accelerated and disappeared.

A nurse who happened to be nearby climbed into Rathenau’s automobile, and found him unconscious and presumably dead. A few minutes later, after the unharmed chauffeur had driven the vehicle back to the villa, the doctor arrived and examined the body. He found that Rathenau had been shot five times. The jaw and backbone had been shattered.

47 His account, along with others, in the Vossische Zeitung, June 25 (Sunday).
In 1899 Rathenau had published a story in biblical style that told of a prophet who restored the sanity of the king but aroused the anger of the people. It was said that “he yearns for the staff and diadem.” The story went on: “The people called out, ‘the prophet is mad.’ And they seized him, dragged him before the gates, and stoned him.”

The police, finding an informant among the conspirators, ran Kern and Fischer to ground in a small town near Cassel on July 17. They killed Kern in an exchange of gunfire. They said that Fischer killed himself after shouting: “Hurrah for Captain Ehrhardt!”

The mark went from 332 to 355 to the dollar on the assassination day.

The nation expressed itself incoherently. On Sunday, workers marched in the western districts of Berlin, and a crowd of some 200,000 listened to speakers in the Schlossplatz in the city center making conventional attacks on the Right. At noon on Tuesday, June 27, on the occasion of a 24-hour funeral holiday, another great demonstration took place in Berlin, as a million workers marched heavily. A half-dozen other cities had parades of more than 100,000 workers. There was a great trampling of boots and shoes, and a respectful listening to overstrained commonplaces.

The funeral service began in the Reichstag after Joseph Wirth led Mathilde Rathenau, “her face looking as if it had been chiselled of stone,” into the emperor’s box. The orchestra played the Coriolanus Overture, and at the end, the funeral march for Siegfried from Götterdämmerung. The cortege, with an honor guard and under the rolling of drums, went through the Brandenburg Gate and on to the Rathenau family plot. Kessler remembered that Ferdinand Lassalle, the brilliant and vain socialist leader of the mid-nineteenth century, and a Jew, had dreamed of entering Berlin through the arch as President of a German republic.

In the Reichstag on Sunday, two days before, Wirth had tried to discover a usable meaning in the event. He began and ended with a denunciation of the Right. He quoted a Nationalist who had

49 Vossische Zeitung, July 18 (P.M.).
50 Kessler, Tagebücher, p. 326.
51 Stenographische Berichte, 355: 8055–56. He had also spoken on Saturday, pp. 8034–35.
charged the government with being the agent of French policy and turned to the Nationalists: "Doesn’t the blush of shame rise in your faces?" He failed to mention Helfferich, whom some persons had accused of inspiring the assassination. Kessler had written in his diary on the assassination day: "Helfferich is the murderer, the real one, the responsible one." Kessler was too completely the aesthete to be sound in his instincts. If Helfferich had his responsibility, only an arbitrary judgment would exclude the countless others who bore more or less guilt, or neglect all the other contributing causes. Wirth’s tribute to Rathenau was manfully moving, the expression of honest friendship and professional esteem. Wirth ended, according to the minutes of the Reichstag: “There (pointing to the right) is the enemy—pouring his poison into the wounds of his nation. There is the enemy—and no one can have any doubt about it—the enemy is on the Right!” It was the best Wirth could do, but it was not good enough. Kessler wrote in his diary the day before: “A new chapter of German history begins with this assassination—” But then he went on: “—or should begin.” It did not.

The assassination produced no suggestion of a crisis. On June 25 Georg Bernhard wrote not unfeelingly about Rathenau: “He would use a simile and believe he had produced a proof." Rathenau had, after all, represented a policy that every German detested; and the policy had lost touch with reality. The nation could not be made to mourn. On June 24 Bernhard had written: “The republic itself is in danger,” but his Vossische Zeitung was entirely calm by the next day. There had been no danger. The Right did not have the remotest idea of a putsch at the time, and the marching workers were making an unnecessary gesture. Most responsible Germans remained loyal to the republic at the moment for lack of something better. When the ghost of danger would be gone, they would have to go on living in a worn world where the best efforts seemed always to fail. In losing Rathenau the government had lost the promise of a solution to its crushing problems, but only a few moments before the promise was shown conclusively to be empty.

52 Tageb"ucher, p. 322. Kessler also thought that the “Reichstag should be adjourned and accounts should be settled with murderers like Helfferich.” The best republicans of the Weimar Republic were sometimes shocked out of their republicanism.
53 P. 324.