

§ 48

John Heartfield criticised § 48 of the constitution of the Weimar Republic (the first fully democratic regime in Germany, from 1918 to 1933) in two photomontages published in AIZ. This paragraph gave the president the right to declare a state of emergency and issue emergency decrees in the event of a threat to public order.

In the photomontage *The Dead Parliament* Heartfield plays with the number 48, which symbolises both the paragraph on emergency decrees and the revolutionary year of 1848, and thus also the first German parliament: 'This is what remains of 1848!' Heartfield was commenting on the start of the period of 'presidial cabinets' after the Grand Coalition under the Müller government collapsed on 27 March 1930. Thereafter, all German chancellors were appointed by President Paul von Hindenburg without a parliamentary majority.

The caption to the photomontage *On 30 August 1932* announces the next fateful step towards the abolition of parliamentary democracy: '*... If the parliament dares to make itself unamenable to the president, the Reichstag will without hesitation be dissolved once more and the parliamentary system abolished once and for all. DAZ (Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung)*'.

From 4 June 1932 onwards the Reichstag – the German parliament – was dissolved time and again, all made possible by paragraph 48. The emergency decrees reached a dismal lowpoint with the Reichstag Fire Decree issued on 28 February 1933, confirming the transfer of power to the Hitler regime.