

Del mainNine theses on the Republic of Mainz

by Franz Dumont, translated and slightly abridged by Raymond Barglow.

The original German version, published in 2013, can be found [here](#).

1. The Republic of Mainz has two faces: it was, on the one hand, an export of the French Revolution, but at the same time a German experiment in democracy.
2. The Republic was made possible by the French military occupation of Mainz and nearby regions. Without this expansion of revolutionary France into Germany, this experiment in democracy would not have occurred.
3. France's "expansion revolutionnaire" had two sides: that of liberation and that of conquest. France wanted to bring freedom to its neighbors, but also to widen its own borders.
4. Convinced of the rightness of their new, revolutionary form of government, the French military that occupied Mainz granted self-determination to Mainz in 1792, but went back on this promise when those "liberated" turned out to be not as revolutionary as expected.
5. The existence of Jacobins (supporters of the French Revolution) in the towns and villages around Mainz shows, however, that the French Revolution found supporters in all classes. The leading Jacobins, however, were intellectuals and civil servants.
6. Among the residents of Mainz, resistance to the newly formed republic came particularly from guilds, clergymen and the upper classes. Their reasons included satisfaction with the old regime, political apathy, loyalty to the church, nationalism, and the desire for reform rather than revolution.
7. As the first German attempt at democracy, the Republic of Mainz failed primarily due to a lack of popularity and internal contradictions.
8. During the era of the French Revolution (1798-1814), much of its program was realized in Mainz, but were mandated "from

above." These achievements included legal equality, freedom of trade, an independent justice system, and permission to marry outside the church. The German revolution in 1848 was able to build on this legacy.

9. The Mainz Republic was always controversial: in an era of nationalism it was condemned in Germany as an import from France. The French-German reconciliation in the 1950s and the German debate about democracy in years following 1968 led to a wider appreciation of the Republic. At the same time, though, it became a subject of debate during the Cold War. Today we are still discussing whether the Republic was a unique historical "aberration" or an illuminating test case in the development of democracy in Germany.