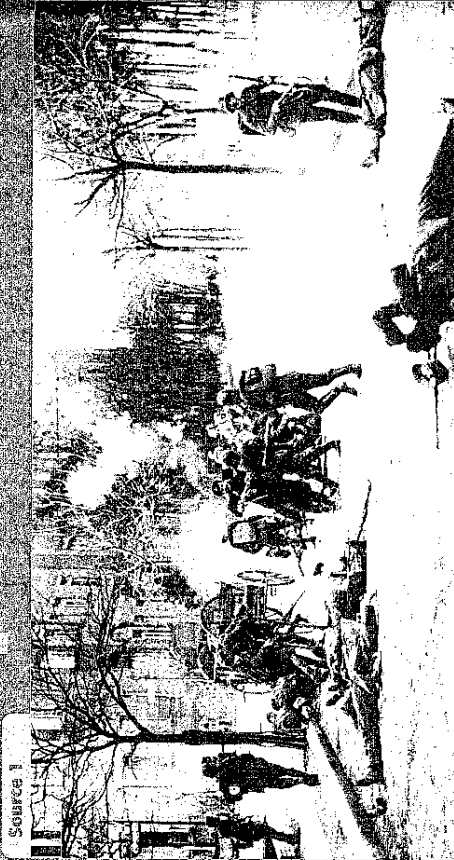
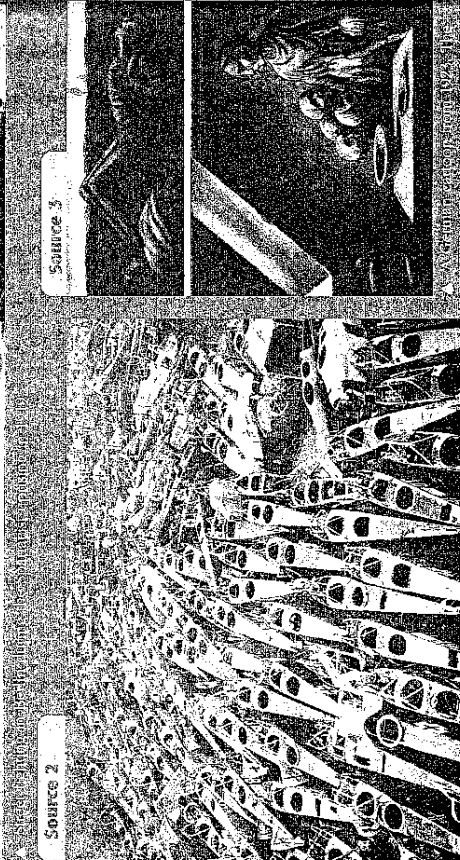


# Chapter

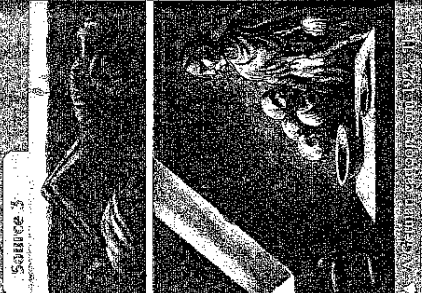
## 4 The early years of the Weimar Republic 1918–1923



Source 1



Source 2



Source 3

Source 3: The German High Command accepted that the war was over. Plans were made to request an armistice with Wilson, the American

### Introduction

Sources 1 to 3 are all images from the years 1918–1923. Together they create an impression of violence, humiliation and starvation. But to what extent is this an accurate image? It is all too easy to view the period known as the Weimar Republic, which began in 1919 and ended in 1933, merely as the prelude to Hitler's rule. Historians have searched endlessly for the clues to explain his rise to power. The answer must lie partly in the years before 1933. It is not surprising, therefore, that historians have often tended to concentrate on the more negative aspects of the Weimar Republic.

It is certainly true that the early years of Weimar up to 1923 were dogged with many problems. The humiliation of defeat in the war, the forced abdication of the Kaiser, political violence of all kinds, a detested peace treaty, a severe economic crisis, the invasion of a foreign power and the first attempt by a little known party, the Nazis, to take power all contributed to the instability of these years. One historian describes Germany by 1920 as 'one step from chaos' (Davies, 1996) whilst another writes that it is 'almost a miracle that the Weimar democracy succeeded in maintaining its existence during these years...' (Kolb, 1988).

### Key questions

- What happened in the revolution of 1918?
- How was the new Republic run?
- How serious was the opposition to the new Republic?
- Was the Treaty of Versailles too harsh?
- Was the Weimar Republic doomed from the start?

### The end of the war

#### Germany's defeat

By the summer of 1918 it was clear that Germany would lose the war. Despite advances on the Western Front in the early part of the year, the collapse of Bulgaria and the weakness of Austria left Germany ill-defended on her eastern side. Troops from the Western Front could not be spared and, to make matters worse, Germany's enemies were by now receiving support from America after she joined the war in 1917. By August 1918, the Allies had regained all the land lost during the previous three months. German territory was now under threat. America offered her allies huge numbers of troops and vast amounts of vital supplies. Germany was fast running out of both. Although she lost fewer men (about 2 million) than some countries, she could not afford to split her army in half in order to fight effectively on two fronts, nor could she send men to fight without weapons. Britain's blockade of Germany during the last two years of the war severely restricted supplies to Germany. Not only did this affect the troops; it also led to severe food shortages in Germany. These were made worse by poor harvests in 1917 and 1918, and agricultural production in general fell. By 1918, Germany was producing only 50 per cent as much butter and 60 per cent as much meat as in pre-war years. Each German was receiving only 1000 calories a day towards the end of the war and as many as three-quarters of a million people died of starvation or malnutrition.

### Towards an armistice

By September 1918, the German High Command accepted that the war was over. Plans were made to request an armistice with Wilson, the American

### Further reading

- For a good overview of the Weimar years, try:
  - Lyton, *From Bismarck to Hitler: Germany 1890–1933*, 1995
  - Hiden, *The Weimar Republic*, 1974
- For a more detailed account, see:
  - Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 1988
  - Fenchelwanger, *From Weimar to Hitler*, 1993

### A consequence of the Russian Revolution in 1917 was the ending of war between Russia and Germany. In the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, March 1918, Russia lost all the gains she had made on her western side over several hundred years. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland were given to Germany and Austria, whilst Finland, Georgia and the Ukraine became independent states.



President, who had already outlined possible peace terms, known as Wilson's 'Fourteen Points'. As a sign of good intent, reforms of the political system were begun, moving Germany further towards a parliamentary monarchy which the Allies would find more acceptable. The Reichstag was given greater political influence. Prince Max of Baden, Germany's new Chancellor from October, formed a government which met the approval of the biggest parties in the Reichstag and he was himself responsible to the Reichstag rather than to the Kaiser. Thus, a significant step away from autocratic rule was taken suddenly from within the Reichstag, not in response to popular demand.

The new government, under pressure from the High Command, asked Wilson for the immediate conclusion of an armistice on land, at sea and in the air. The German people were stunned. Propaganda had convinced them that victory was within sight. Those who now accepted that defeat was the only possible outcome simply wanted the war to end.

**Sources 4**

Germany's needs became ever more desperate. The bread got still worse, the milk got thinner; the farmers would have nothing to do with the towns. And would-be hoarders came home empty-handed; the men at the front were incensed... at the misery at home... For four years they had fought, on the Eastern Front, on the Western Front, in Asia, in Africa; for four years they had stood their ground in the rain and mud of Flanders... During the night of October 3rd the Peace Note was despatched to President Wilson. This unexpected bid for peace opened the eyes of the German people at last; they had had no idea of the impending catastrophe. So it was all for nothing - the millions of dead, the millions of wounded, the starvation at home. All for nothing... The people thought only of peace. They had been thinking of war too long, believing in victory too long. Why hadn't they been told the truth?

Extract from *I Was a German* by Ernst Toller, 1924

**Revolution**

The October reforms outlined above were one step towards a new, more democratic Germany but they could hardly be described as revolutionary. Although left-wing parties such as the SPD had been calling for changes to the political system for some time, the October reforms took them by surprise and were not the result of popular pressure. However, once the news of an impending armistice spread, the German people began to take matters into their own hands. On 28 October the High Seas Fleet was instructed by the Admiralty to sail into the Channel. This order had to be abandoned as sailors in Wilhelmshaven refused to carry out what they saw as a pointless suicide mission in a war already lost. A few days later, sailors mutinied at the port of Kiel and took control of the city. Their actions were initiated elsewhere in Germany. Workers' and soldiers' councils took control of various German towns and cities (see Source 5) and they met little resistance from the police. Their key demand was an end to the war but President Wilson's insistence on the resignation of those responsible for Germany's policy led to another demand: the abdication of the Kaiser.

**Parliamentary monarchy**

A parliamentary monarchy is where the king has to share some power with parliament.

A prince had taken over from a count as Chancellor, from the point of view of the mass of the population nothing had changed.

The October Reforms described by Heiber, *The Weimar Republic*, 1993

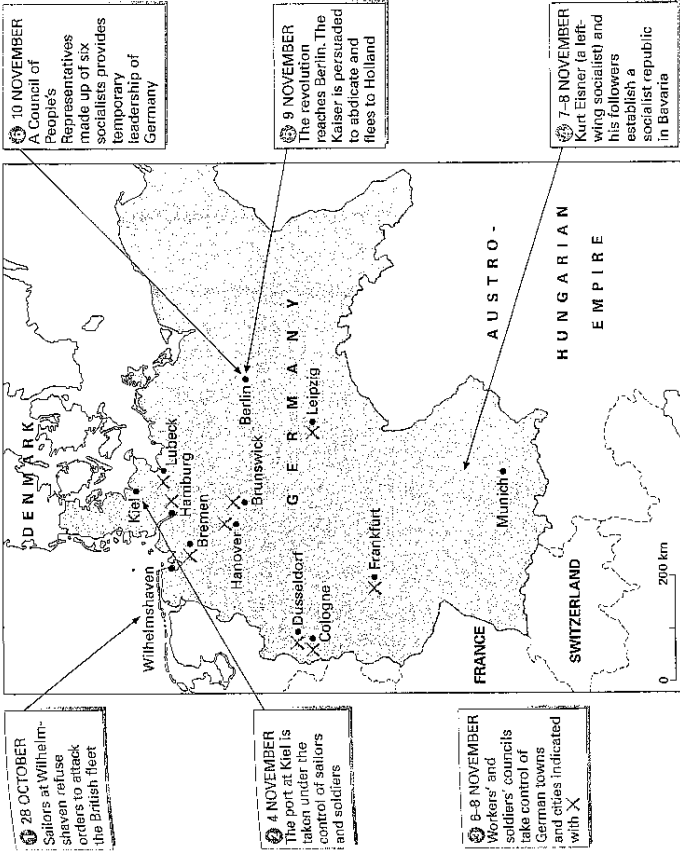
**Think about**

Ernst Toller was a young poet and playwright who witnessed the events of 1919 first hand. He supported the communist cause and was imprisoned in 1919 for revolutionary activities.

➤ Compare Toller's reaction to peace with Adolf Hitler's (below). What are the similarities and differences between their reactions?

'Since I had stood at my mother's grave I had not wept... now I could not help it... so it all had been in vain... all the sacrifices... the hunger and thirst... the shame of indignation burned my brow!'

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925



➤ Steps to revolution.

**Bio-ography**

**Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925)**

Ebert was a soldier by trade but was elected to the Reichstag in 1912 and became President of the SPD the following year. He was appointed Chancellor after the revolution in 1918 and was made President in 1919. Between 1919 and 1925, he did all he could to protect the new Republic, crushing uprisings from the left and the right and earning the laurel of both.

By November, the revolutionary movement had spread to Berlin and Prince Max hurriedly persuaded the Kaiser to step down. Later that day, Philipp Scheidemann, a member of the Social Democratic Party, proclaimed Germany a republic from a window in the Reichstag. Friedrich Ebert was quickly appointed Chancellor. What followed was an attempt by the liberal and socialist parties to prevent the revolution from going any further. There was a very real fear that the workers' and soldiers' councils were the first step towards a communist take over as had happened in Russia in the previous year. In actual fact, the councils' members were far more moderate than was supposed and the Spartacus League, later to become the Communist Party in Germany, could muster the support of no more than about 1000 people at the end of 1918.

A Council of People's Representatives was approved by an assembly elected by Berlin workers and soldiers. It contained members of the SPD and the USPD (independent socialists who had broken away from the SPD during the war) and was intended to provide temporary leadership until an election for a new National Assembly was held. The revolution was over and any future changes would be decided through legal means. Meanwhile, an armistice was signed on 11 November and one of the deadliest wars in history came to an end. Most Germans were relieved that the war had ended, although nationalists accused the government of 'stabbing them in the back' by ending the war when Germany could, they believed, have gone on to win.

### The Spartacist Rising

Although many Germans were relieved that the revolution had not gone any further, members of the Spartacus League remained deeply frustrated. They felt that Germany had lost a golden opportunity to transform itself into a fairer, more equal state in which power and wealth would be shared out amongst all the people and not just the privileged few. The founders of the Spartacus League, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, both lost their lives in the struggle to achieve their aims.

#### 548F2E-6

A study of the existing situation enables us to predict with certainty that in whatever country, after Germany, the proletarian revolution [revolution of the workers] may next break out, the first step will be the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils... On November 9th, the first cry of the revolution, as instinctive as the cry of a newborn child, was for workers' and soldiers' councils... [but] we have to recognize that these were no more than the first childish and faltering steps of the revolution, which has many difficult tasks to perform and a long road to travel before the promise of the first watchwords can be fully realized... How can we best deal with the situation with which we are confronted in the immediate future? Your first conclusion will doubtless be a hope that the fall of the Ebert-Scheidemann government is at hand and that in its place a socialist, proletarian, revolutionary government will be declared. For my part, I would ask you to direct your attention, not to the apex (top) but to the base... There is only one way of achieving the victory of the proletarian revolution. We must begin by undermining the Ebert-Scheidemann government by destroying its foundations through a revolutionary mass struggle on the part of the proletariat... first and foremost, we must extend the system of workers' councils in all directions.

Extracts from Rosa Luxemburg's founding manifesto of the KPD (German Communist Party), 31 December 1918

On 5 January, revolutionaries staged an uprising in Berlin, led by the USPD, the Spartacus League (by now part of the German Communist Party or KPD) and other revolutionary leaders. They occupied offices of middle-class newspapers and proclaimed the end of the Ebert-Scheidemann government, but most left after three days due to the lack of a clear strategy. Only the Spartacus fought on until they were brutally crushed by ex-soldiers known as the *Freikorps* (free Corps) who were brought in by the government's defence minister, Gustav Noske. The use of ex-soldiers who had fought in the name of the Kaiser further discredited the government in the eyes of the revolutionaries. However, they had simply been overpowered and on 15 January, Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered by a group of officers. Ebert was said to be horrified and ordered an investigation into the murders.

### The Weimar Constitution Agreeing on a new constitution

Four days after the murder of the Spartacist leaders, elections were held for a National Assembly. The main job of this assembly was to draw up a new Constitution for Germany. The abdication of the Kaiser in November had left a power vacuum in Germany and it was now necessary to decide how

The KPD refused to stand in the election in protest against the Republic.

**Biography**  
Rosa Luxemburg was born in Russian Poland but gained German citizenship through marriage. She was a revolutionary socialist and took part in the 1905 Russian Revolution. After spending the First World War in a German prison, she co-founded the communist Spartacus League in 1918 with Karl Liebknecht who was also a revolutionary. Liebknecht was elected to the Reichstag in 1912 as a member of the SPD but moved towards more radical politics. Both Luxemburg and Liebknecht helped to organize the Spartacist uprising in January 1919 and both were brutally murdered by members of the *Freikorps*.

**Think ahead**  
How does Luxemburg feel about the new Weimar Government in Source 6?

How does she believe a 'proletarian revolution' will occur?

How do you think Luxemburg wanted Germany to be run?

#### Activities

1 Discuss the meaning of the following terms:

- Nationalist
- Socialist
- Communist
- Liberal
- Right-wing
- Left-wing

2 Which of the parties described here were left-wing? Which were right-wing? Which were in the middle? Place each party in order starting with the most left-wing and ending with the most right-wing.

3 What would each party want from the new constitution? Which parties wanted to destroy it?

4 Why would agreement on the new constitution be difficult to reach?

5 What kind of election results would have been disastrous for the Weimar Republic?

### The main political parties in Weimar Germany

<p><b>Z (Centre Party)</b> Formed in 1870 to protect Catholic interests. In favour of political reform and defended the Weimar Republic until 1930. Usually to the right of the DDP in its policies. Took part in Weimar governments up to 1932. Most support came from Catholic workers &amp; middle class.</p>	<p><b>NSDAP (Nazis)</b> Formed in 1919 as the German Workers' Party. An extremely nationalist and racist party which opposed the Weimar Republic. Initially pursued violent methods of winning power but later focused on winning elections. Appealed to all sectors of society after 1929.</p>
<p><b>DNVP (German National People's Party)</b> A nationalist party formed in 1918 to protect the interests of the land-owning class. Rejected the Republic, the Treaty of Versailles and democracy. Most support came from Junkers (landed nobility) and some urban lower middle class.</p>	<p><b>DVP (German People's Party)</b> Formed in 1918, this was a right-wing liberal party which opposed the Weimar Republic in principle but took part in governments. Most support came from the upper middle class and employers. Led by Gustav Stresemann who became Chancellor and Foreign Minister.</p>
<p><b>DDP (German Democratic Party)</b> A left-wing liberal party formed in 1918. Supported the Weimar Constitution but lost electoral support after 1919. Most support came from liberal intellectuals and businessmen.</p>	<p><b>SPD (Social Democratic Party)</b> Formed in 1875, this socialist party was the Weimar Republic's strongest supporter. Received more votes than any other party up to 1932. Most support came from workers and lower middle class. Radical members were thrown out in 1917 and formed the USPD.</p>
<p><b>KPD (Communist Party)</b> Formed in 1918 by the Spartacus League. Joined Communist (international) communist organization led by Russia in 1919. Opposed the Weimar Republic and wanted to establish a communist state in Germany. Became more popular after 1929.</p>	<p><b>BVP (Bavarian People's Party)</b> A Catholic Party representing Bavaria. Effectively a branch of the Centre Party, but willing to work with anti-democratic politicians in Bavaria in order to exclude the SPD.</p>

# The Weimar Constitution

## Old Constitution

### Head of State

- ☉ Kaiser
- ☉ Inherited his position
- ☉ Could appoint and dismiss Chancellor and other ministers
- ☉ Could dissolve the Reichstag
- ☉ The Chancellor was responsible to him and no-one else
- ☉ Had the power to declare martial law and rule without the Reichstag if public security within the federal territories is threatened

### Reichstag (Parliament)

- ☉ Elected by all men aged 25 or over
- ☉ New laws required the approval of a majority of Reichstag deputies
- ☉ Shared power with the Bundesrat, which represented the German states
- ☉ Had no power over who was in the government (i.e. the ministers)

### States

- ☉ The Constitution begins 'His majesty the King of Prussia, His majesty the King of Bavaria; His majesty the King of Württemberg'
- ☉ Laws had to be passed by the Reichstag and the Bundesrat, which represented the German states
- ☉ The right to vote in many states (e.g. Prussia) was based on wealth

### Civil Liberties

- ☉ Basic rights: 'There shall be a common citizenship for all Germans and the citizens of each member state shall be treated as natives in every other state.'
- ☉ No mention of social rights

## Weimar Constitution

- ☉ President
- ☉ Had to be 35 or over
- ☉ Elected by men and women aged 20 and above every seven years
- ☉ Could be re-elected
- ☉ Could appoint and dismiss Chancellor and other ministers
- ☉ Could dissolve the Reichstag
- ☉ Could rule without the Reichstag in times of emergency (Article 48)

- ☉ Elected by all men and women aged 20 or over
- ☉ New laws required the approval of a majority of Reichstag deputies
- ☉ Reichstag could overrule the Bundesrat (see below) by a two-thirds majority
- ☉ The Chancellor and other ministers were responsible to the Reichstag - a vote of no confidence would force a resignation

- ☉ The Constitution begins 'The German People'
- ☉ Reichstag replaced the Bundesrat and still represented the German states but had less power
- ☉ Reichstag could be overruled by the Bundesrat (see above) or by a referendum (popular vote)
- ☉ Everyone aged 20 and above could vote in state elections

- ☉ Basic rights: 'All Germans are equal before the law'
- ☉ Social rights included the freedom to travel and live throughout Germany, exercise free speech, be free of censorship, follow any religion, negotiate for better working terms, receive an education, be treated equally no matter what, own property and be protected by the State

newspaper article from the perspective of one of the members of the group could choose different perspectives. Overmight we have become the most radical democracy in Europe' (Ems. Troeltsch, *The German Democracy*; December 1918). Do you feel that this Constitution made Germany into a radical democracy? Give reasons for your answer.

- 1 Identify the similarities and differences between the two Constitutions.
- 2 What were the most significant changes in your opinion? Why?
- 3 Were there any obvious weaknesses in the Weimar Constitution? Why do you think Article 48 was included? Why have some historians criticized its inclusion?
- 4 How would each of the political parties summarized on page 75 have reacted to the new Constitution? Write a

## PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

The new Reichstag was to be elected using a system called PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION. This basically meant that seats in the Reichstag were allocated to the different parties according to the number of votes they received. Although this is a very fair electoral system in terms of making sure that everyone's vote counts, it rarely produces an overall MAJORITY in Parliament. In other words, no single party gets more seats in Parliament than all the other parties put together. In Weimar Germany, therefore, if a government was formed consisting of only the biggest party, then every time it wanted a law passed, all the other parties in the Reichstag could vote against it and it would fail. The answer to this problem is to form a COALITION. This is a government that contains more than one political party. The advantage of a coalition is that laws will get through the Parliament. The disadvantage is that members of the coalition may not agree on policies and there will be frequent changes in government.

## PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

- 1 Study the results of the 1920 election below. In pairs/groups, create a coalition government by selecting the parties you want to be represented in it. You must consider the following points very carefully:
  - ☉ What combination of parties will give you a majority (more seats than the other parties put together)?
  - ☉ Which party should your Chancellor come from?
  - ☉ What combinations of parties might be able to work together (look back at the summary on p. 75)?
  - ☉ What problems would you still expect with your government?

## Elections for the Reichstag during the Weimar Republic (% of vote)

Party	1920	1924	1928	1932		1933
				July	Nov.	
NSDAP	-	3.0	2.6	18.3	37.3	33.1
DNVP	14.9	20.5	14.2	7.0	5.9	8.8
DVP	13.9	10.1	8.7	4.5	1.2	1.9
ZBVP	17.9	17.3	15.1	14.8	15.9	15.0
DDP	8.3	6.3	4.9	3.8	1.0	1.0
SPD	21.6	26.0	29.8	24.5	21.6	20.4
USPD	17.9	0.30	1	-	-	-
KPD	2.1	9.0	10.6	13.1	14.3	16.9
Turnout	79.1	78.8	75.6	81.9	84.0	86.6

- 2 New study the election results for the years after 1920.
  - ☉ Between 1923 and 1928 the SPD refused to take part in a coalition. What problems do you think this caused and why?
  - ☉ Look at the election results for 1930-1932. Why was it difficult to form successful coalitions?
  - ☉ How would you describe the general trends in voting patterns between 1919 and 1932?

## Reactions to the Weimar Constitution

### SOURCE C

At five o'clock this afternoon Ebert's sweating-in at the National Assembly... The house was crowded except for the seats belonging to the nationalists and independents... Ebert appeared on the stage in a frock coat, small, broad-shouldered with gold-rimmed spectacles... Ullstein's *Berliner Illustrierte* saw fit to publish today a photograph of Ebert and Noske in bathing trunks. The memory of the picture haunted the ceremony... Ebert made a speech. All very decorous but lacking go, like a confirmation in a decent middle-class home. The Republic should avoid ceremonies, they are not suited to this type of government. It is like a governess dancing a ballet. All the same, the whole occasion had something touching and, above all, tragic about it... Pondering the deeper significance of it can bring tears very close.

Count Harry Kessler, *The Diaries of a Cosmopolitan*, 1971

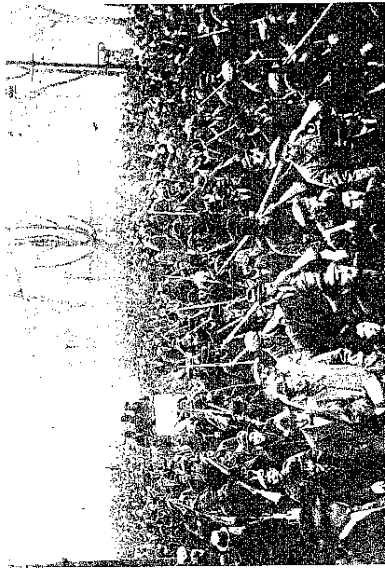
The National Assembly passed the Constitution by 262 votes to 75 but it pleased no one entirely. It was a compromise between the different parties, representing what most people found tolerable rather than what people really wanted. However, only the DNVP and DVP voted against it, signalling a desire by most of the other parties to co-operate with this democratic experiment. Unfortunately, the electorate as a whole did not feel as inclined to support the new Republic. The election of January 1919 proved to have been a high point in support of the Republic. The next election in 1920 saw a fall in the support for the pro-Weimar parties, whilst support for anti-Weimar parties such as the DNVP grew.

Meanwhile, it became clear that the Spartacist uprising was not the last attempt to bring down the government by violent means. In March 1920 the Ehrhardt Brigade, a unit of the *Freikorps* which had refused to disband, marched into Berlin and, under the leadership of Wolfgang Kapp, attempted to overthrow the government. The Kapp Putsch (uprising), as it became known, met with initial success. The Weimar government was unable to crush the Ehrhardt brigade and President Ebert and his government were forced to flee to Driesden. The only weapons left in the government's hands were the workers in Berlin. It persuaded the trade unions to stage a general strike and, as a result, Berlin ground to a standstill. Kapp and his accomplice, General Lüttwitz, were forced to surrender although, in contrast to the Spartacist uprising, they were barely punished. This not only demonstrated the right-wing bias of the courts; it also reflected the government's anxiety about losing valuable right-wing support. Two days later, the communists staged an uprising of 50,000 workers in the Ruhr. This time, the government was able to rely on the regular army which had proved so reluctant to crush the Kapp Putsch and the uprising was easily suppressed.

This was not the end of violent opposition. Assassinations of key government members carried out by the nationalists punctuated the next few years. In 1921 the victims included Matthias Erzberger, Germany's representative on the Reparations Commission, which was responsible for fixing the sum of money which Germany had to pay the Allies for war damage. In 1922, the unfortunate victim was Walther Rathenau, Germany's Foreign Minister.

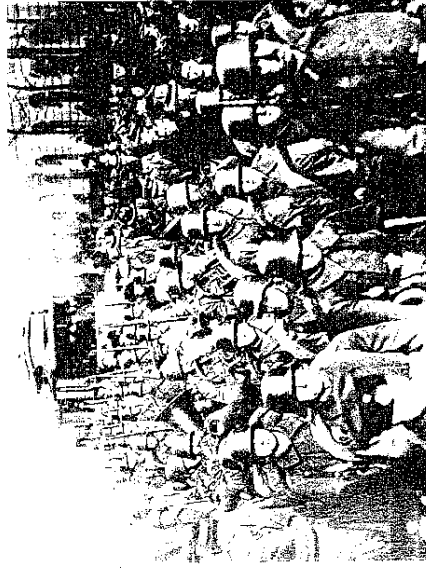
The Weimar Constitution therefore had a mixed reception and did little to dampen opposition to the Republic from either side of the political spectrum.

However, was this the fault of the Constitution or was it simply inevitable given the circumstances? Clearly there were those who felt the Constitution was a mistake and indeed, many have since blamed the Constitution for the collapse of the Weimar Republic in 1933. However, this is not entirely fair. As we have seen, the Constitution was certainly a compromise. By giving the President the right to rule by decree, there was always the possibility that he might try to establish a dictatorship. However, this was not an unusual right in a democracy and in the correct hands, did not herald a return to dictatorship. Ebert, for example, used it wisely in 1923 to cope with a string of crises. Similarly, the use of proportional representation did not inevitably weaken government or encourage the growth of political extremes. The Nazis would have received similar results under a more traditional electoral system. On the other hand, the Weimar Constitution did not provide Germany with the kind of stable government necessary to see it through some difficult times and was open to misuse in the wrong hands. You will have an opportunity later to reflect on the role of the Constitution in the fall of the Weimar republic.



SOURCE D

Armed workers marching through Berlin as part of the Spartacist uprising in January 1919.



SOURCE E

Freikorps soldiers march into Berlin as part of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920.

### THINK ABOUT IT

- Who posed the biggest threat to the Weimar Republic between 1919 and 1922 – the left-wing or the right-wing?

### THINK ABOUT IT

- Why do you think some seats were empty at the ceremony?
- What were Kessler's overall impressions of the ceremony?
- Why do you think Kessler was close to tears?
- Why do you think the *Berliner Illustrierte* published the photograph of Ebert and Noske in bathing trunks? (Note: for more information about Kessler, see page 110)

### DATE THIS

- 1919: Spartacist uprising
- 1933: Kapp Putsch
- Communist uprising in the Ruhr
- 1931: Assassination of Matthias Erzberger
- 1922: Assassination of Walther Rathenau

### Document exercise: reactions to the Weimar Republic

#### 1918

##### Prince von Bulow expresses concerns about the Republic

But our new masters were equally unfit to govern. Most characteristic of their mentality was the speech from the Reichstag steps delivered by Scheidemann, an ex-imperial state secretary, who, in proclaiming the Republic, began his oration with the following: 'the German people have won all along the line'. A stupid lie! And a very cruel piece of self-deception! No, alas, the German people had not 'won' - it had been conquered, overpowered by a host of enemies, wretchedly misled politically, reduced by famine and stabbed in the back... The republic that emerged from our revolution was, as I have said, flimsy, amenable, unacceptable... its leaders the perfection of mediocrity. But at least there were no serious disorders.

Extract from the memoirs of Prince von Bulow, first published in 1931

#### 1919

##### The frightened middle class

The middle class is frightened and at its wis' end, not knowing what to do or where to turn, most of them are fluttering like birds who have fallen out of the nest and do not know where to go. They must be found another nest, and those who are simply asking all the time 'What is to happen now?' must be given the courage that comes to them only with being in a numerous company and having something to lean on... Social Democracy and Catholicism are two forces of immense importance... But Germany is Germany and anybody with his eyes open and able to look ahead cannot accept these two strong pillars as enough in the long run to give the needed support to a Republic - for the Republic has become the only possible thing... Thus it is necessary now to organize those strata of the non-Catholic middle-class who are at all inclined towards democratic ideas....

Theodor Wolff, *Through Two Decades*, 1936

#### 1920s

##### The Communist threat



This poster from 1919 says 'Vote Spartacist', and shows them crushing the Reichstag and the old order.

#### 1919

##### Doctor Kapp's proclamation, March 1920

The Reich and nation are in grave danger. With terrible speed we are approaching the complete collapse of the state and of law and order. The people are only dimly aware of the approaching disaster. Prices are rising unchecked. Hardship is growing. Starvation threatens... The Government, lacking in authority, impotent [powerless] and in league with corruption, is incapable of overcoming the danger...

#### 2. Examination-style questions

##### 1. Comprehension in context

- 1. Study Source A. Using the source and your own knowledge, why do you think Bulow objected to the phrase 'the German people have won all along the line'?
- 2. Comparing the sources: Study Sources A and B. What are the similarities and differences in their response to the new Republic?

##### 3. Assessing the sources

How reliable is Source C as evidence about the extent and nature of opposition to the Republic?

##### 4. Making judgements

'The Weimar Republic lacked popular support from the start'. Using all the sources and your own knowledge, explain how far you agree with this statement.

### The Treaty of Versailles

On 18 January 1919, representatives from 32 states met to determine peace terms. Their task was enormous. Not only did the Treaty have to satisfy public demands that the aggressor be punished; it also had to meet the different demands of the three key players, France, Britain and America. And to make matters worse, it was of course also intended to prevent such a war from ever happening again. Not surprisingly, these tasks were in conflict with one another, not least the desire for revenge and the desire to avoid future war. That the Treaty was far from perfect is hardly surprising. Perhaps more surprising is that a treaty was drawn up at all.

### The aims of the Big Three

By far the most influential powers represented at Versailles were Britain, France, America and Italy who together formed the Council of Four which met daily for over three months. After Italy walked out in protest, the 'Big Three' were left to thrash out the terms between them.

President Wilson of America had already outlined possible peace terms a year previously in his famous 'Fourteen Points'. They reflected Wilson's own interpretation of why the war started by calling for more openness in diplomatic relations, for a reduction in armaments and for the freedom to trade and navigate the seas without obstruction. He also called for 'a general association of nations to be formed to afford mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.' In other words, Wilson believed that future wars could only be avoided with greater co-operation between nations. Of course, this depended on the readiness of nations to co-operate with one another and in this sense Wilson's vision was an

The cost of the First World War was immense. Around 8 million soldiers died, a further 7 million were permanently disabled and 15 million were wounded. In addition, there were around 5 million civilian casualties in Europe (excluding Russia) who died mainly of disease and famine. The material cost was equally high. It has been estimated that the total cost of war, including the destruction of land and the cost of mobilization, was somewhere in the region of \$200 billion.

#### 1919

##### Woodrow Wilson

was born in 1856 and was the American President between 1912 and 1920. Wilson's most famous achievements were the Fourteen Points and the League of Nations. He was the first American President ever to leave the country and negotiate a European peace; but he suffered an isolationist reaction among American Republicans who wanted to avoid any future commitments in Europe. He suffered a stroke in 1919 and died in 1924. He once declared 'What is expected of me only God could perform.'

ideal which underestimated national feelings of pride, security and ambition. Nevertheless, his points provided a useful starting point and the League of Nations, set up to mediate between countries in disputes, owed much to Wilson's vision.

In terms of Wilson's feelings towards Germany, it is true that the Points did not outline specific punishment beyond the loss of land such as Alsace-Lorraine. It is unlikely that Wilson felt comfortable with the notion of revenge, although he did believe Germany should be punished and had to respond to an American public, which was increasingly hostile in its attitude to Germany. At the same time, however, the people of America were increasingly determined not to get embroiled in European disputes in the future. In the end the American Senate refused to ratify either the Treaty or America's membership of the League of Nations.

In Britain, Lloyd George had a similarly careful path to tread between his own aims and public opinion, although the two were not so different as has been supposed. His primary aims were to maintain a balance of power in Europe, eliminate Germany as a colonial and naval rival and gain a share of any money paid to the Allies by Germany. He agreed that Germany should accept blame for the war and therefore pay for war damage as well as lose land. However, too harsh a punishment could have the effect of weakening Germany to the extent that it would no longer provide any kind of barrier against Russia. With communism now established in Russia, the British were anxious to limit its impact on Europe, if Germany were pushed too far, it might even give in to communism herself.

France was in a different position to Britain. Its material losses were greater and it was geographically more vulnerable to future German attack. Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, had security issues at the forefront of his mind. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, Germany could in theory assert its influence in Central Europe even more firmly. Now was the time to exploit German weakness and ensure future security. Clemenceau therefore called for a drastically reduced armed force in Germany, further losses of land on Germany's east and west borders, extensive payments to cover war damage and a firm anti-German alliance system which would centre around a stronger Poland. Although sympathetic to many of Clemenceau's arguments, an overly powerful France was as much of a threat to Lloyd George's concept of a balance of power in Europe as a strong Germany, and he therefore sought to water down some of Clemenceau's more extreme demands.



**Biography**

**Lloyd George**

was born in 1863 and was an MP for 55 years. He was Prime Minister from 1916-1922. A member of the Liberal Party, he never had the complete backing of his party and led a coalition government with the support of the Conservatives. He tended to neglect domestic issues in favour of foreign affairs which eventually lost him support. A notorious womaniser and a very strong character, he had enemies in high places who kept him out of office after 1922.

**Biography**

**Georges Clemenceau**

was born in 1841. He entered politics in 1870 when he became Mayor of Montereau. He was without fear, fighting many duels in his life, and was passionate in his devotion to France. One of his primary aims as a politician was to recover Alsace-Lorraine from the Germans. At Versailles (aged 79) he fought tirelessly on France's behalf and demanded ruthless terms against Germany, although he was forced to compromise on all of them. During the peace conference he survived an assassination attempt but later that year lost support in elections and was forced to retire.

**Activity**

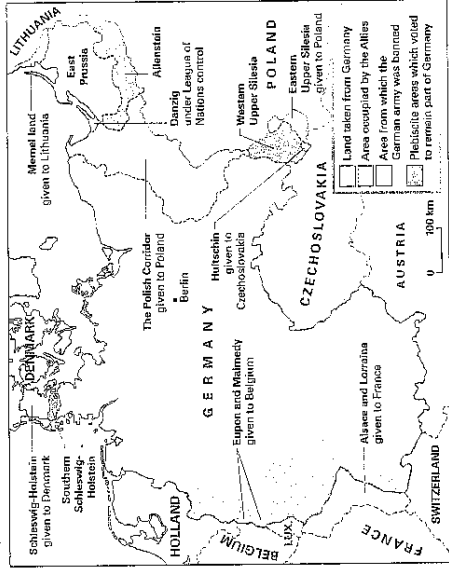
Design a political cartoon for a newspaper in January 1919. Your cartoon should illustrate the negotiation process at Versailles and give a sense both of the demands that the different countries were going to make and the likely clashes between them. Try not to draw the cartoon from a single country's perspective.

**Sources 11**

From the left, Clemenceau, Wilson and Lloyd George at Versailles, 1919.

**The terms of the Treaty**

**Source 12**



**ARMED FORCES**

The German army was not allowed to exceed 100,000. All tanks, military and naval aircraft, submarines and heavy artillery were forbidden. Six battleships only were permitted.

**WAR GUILT**

Known as the 'War-Guilt Clause', article 231 of the Treaty contained Germany's acceptance that she was responsible for the war. This clause made Germany liable for war damage costs.

**REPARATIONS**

The most contentious issue at Versailles was money. How much should and could Germany pay? A Reparations Commission was set up and in 1921 fixed the bill at 66,000 million.

**The reaction in Germany**

Germany was not permitted any representation at Versailles and was only summoned to receive a draft of the Treaty in May, at which point her protests were largely ignored. Not surprisingly, Germany felt aggrieved at this treatment, calling the Treaty a 'Diktat', which echoed her complaints of a dictated peace. However, there was little she could do but accept the Treaty: her bargaining powers were non-existent in the light of her total surrender and inability to fight on. The acting Chancellor, Bauer, brought in after the failure of the previous Cabinet to reach a decision on the Treaty, pledged to 'fulfil the imposed conditions of the peace' but added that these terms went beyond the limits of Germany's ability to comply.

There is no doubt that the Treaty had a profound impact on Germany, although there is disagreement about the extent to which it made an economic collapse in Germany inevitable. More agreement exists on the psychological impact. The Treaty was overwhelmingly loathed by the German people, not just for the material losses but also the humiliation of the War-Guilt Clause. The severity of the Treaty played into the hands of the nationalists who accused the Weimar governments of betraying Germany's interests and perpetuating the crimes of the 'November Criminals' who had ended the war too soon.

**Activity 12**

1 Discuss how each of the Big Three might have reacted to the final Treaty. How satisfied would they have been? What concerns might they have had?

2 Write an editorial for a French, American or British newspaper in July 1919. You have just heard the details of the Treaty. What views are your newspaper likely to have? (Note: if you wish to write an editorial from a German perspective, you should read the section below on 'The reaction in Germany'.)

The Versailles Treaty was only one of several treaties concluded between 1919 and 1921. Separate treaties dealt with the other defeated powers, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. The complete disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was confirmed and new independent states emerged including Czechoslovakia and what was to become known as Yugoslavia.

Meanwhile, nothing was done to ensure lands forfeited by Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk leading to further new independent states including Poland, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. Self-determination (turning your own country) was the order of the day. It has been argued that the creation of so many relatively weak and inexperienced nations left Central and Eastern Europe exposed to the aggression of the bigger powers.

## Was the Treaty of Versailles too harsh?

### Reactions at the time

SOURCE 13

[The Treaty of Versailles] seeks to punish one of the greatest wrongs ever done in history, the wrong which Germany sought to do to the world and to civilization, and there ought to be no weak purpose with regard to punishment. She attempted an intolerable thing, and she must be made to pay for the attempt.

Extract from President Wilson's speech at Omaha, September 1919

SOURCE 14

I reach, therefore, the final conclusion that, including all methods of payments ...£2,000,000,000 is a safe maximum figure of Germany's capacity to pay. In all the actual circumstances, I do not believe that she can pay as much...the Treaty includes no provisions for the economic rehabilitation (recovery) of Europe...nothing to stabilise the new states.

John Maynard Keynes (economist and a British representative at the Peace Conference). Extract from Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, 1920

SOURCE 15

Our Fatherland finds itself in the most difficult hour of its history...We in our party are aware of the results for our people which a rejection of the peace treaty will entail. ('Very True!' from the right.) The resulting harm, however, will only be temporary, but if we accept this treaty we will abandon countless generations of our people to misery... For us the acceptance of the treaty is impossible for many reasons...In addition to making Germany defenceless, there is also the matter of theft of our territory.

The German National Assembly debate on the Treaty of Versailles, June 1919

SOURCE 16

This is not Peace. It is an Armistice for twenty years. Ferdinand Foch, French Marshal

SOURCE 17

I have every hope that Lloyd George, who is fighting like a Welsh terrier, will succeed in...imposing some modification [change] in the terms...Now that we see them as a whole, we realise that they are much too stiff...the real crime is the reparation and indemnity chapter, which is immoral and senseless. There is not a single person among the younger persons here who is not unhappy and disappointed at the terms. The only people who approve are the old fire-eaters.

Harold Nicholson (member of the British delegation to Paris). Extract from Nicholson's letter to his father, June 1919, from *Peace-making 1919*, 1933

SOURCE 18



GIVING HIM HOPE!

Peace is made, the allied states think, I say soon, you're assured, yes, it is, it is, I want, unless, except, it may be able to withdraw out of their way.

## The reactions of historians

SOURCE 19

In the first place, it came to be felt that there was a moral aim about treaties signed under duress (pressure). This feeling attached itself mainly to the Versailles Treaty, signed by Germany under the terms of a five-day ultimatum. German propaganda worked hard to popularise the conception of the Versailles Treaty as a Diktat which had no moral validity...[However] the moral objections most frequently expressed against the Versailles Treaty seem, in fact, to have been based not so much on its signature under duress as on the severity of its contents, and on the fact that the Allied Governments, reversing the procedure followed at all important peace conferences down to and including that of First-Litovsk, refused to engage in equal negotiations with the representatives of the defeated power. This act of unwisdom probably discredited the Treaty more than the ultimatum which preceded its signature.

Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, 1939

SOURCE 20

Although Germany lost some 13% of her territory and some 6 million subjects, it is no longer acceptable to blame the ultimate failure of the Republic on the Treaty of Versailles, and even its economic effects are disputed, given the economic 'recovery' of Germany in the middle-twenties. For Weimar governments there was a real possibility to work patiently and skilfully in their relations with the foreign powers... Yet there remained the perennial problems for Weimar governments of convincing internal opposition of the validity of this approach...Germany's exclusion from the new peace-keeping organisation, the League of Nations, undermined the arguments of German nationalists against the Diktat of Versailles. This disillusionment made it easier for Germans to accept the false notion propagated by rightist and nationalist circles that such an 'unjust' peace need never have been signed, in the first place. To accept this one had to believe, incredibly enough...that Germany had not been militarily defeated but could have fought on had the army not been 'stabbed in the back' by the civilian leaders...The pernicious (destructive) effect of the Versailles Treaty lies thus in the way it created added dimensions to existing internal conflicts...

Hiden, *The Weimar Republic*, 1974

SOURCE 21

The settlement neither crippled Germany nor reconciled her to the new order; instead it left her with grievances and the latent potential to make trouble. It based its judgments on three premises: that Germany had started the war; that she had fought a dirty war; and that she had lost. Accepting none of these the Germans believed the settlement was unjust... Foch, the French commander of the Allied armies, condemned the Treaty as 'an Amistice for 20 years'. His verdict proved uncannily accurate but was not inevitable. Any fair judgement must consider the reasons why there had been a war in 1914, the difficult circumstances of 1919, and the performance of those who governed Europe after the peace had been made. Even if the settlement was a 'tragedy of disappointment' it was as much because of its virtues as its faults. It did not destroy Germany, it tried to draw maps around people and, through the League, to create a more just and successful international system.

Sharp, *Versailles 1919: A Tragedy of Disappointment* in Carr and Vinen (eds), *Europe 1914-1945*, 1994

SOURCE 22

For twenty years the public had been led to believe that Germany had been crushed at Versailles... Had not Mr Keynes demonstrated that Germany could not be expected to pay...more than £1,000 million per annum for Reparations? That her annual savings were even likely to fall below that sum? How then could she find many, many times as much to finance rearmament on a scale adequate to beat the combined forces of the Democracies?

Mantoux, *The Carthaginian Peace or the Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes*, 1946

SOURCE 23

'The Treaty of Versailles did more harm than good.' Divide into two groups. Using all the evidence on these two pages and your own knowledge, prepare for a debate on the Treaty of Versailles. One group will be proposing the motion and one will be arguing against it. Once you have read everything and added anything from your own knowledge, write a short introductory speech outlining your arguments. Try to anticipate the arguments from the other side. Can you pick holes in the evidence they are likely to use? At the end of the debate, try to reach a group decision on the issue.



### Conclusions

The final version of the Treaty, ratified by all the represented states except America, was a curious mixture of punishment and peace making. It dealt the new Republic in Germany a severe blow by undermining an already failing economy and confirming the claims of the far right opposition. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote of the souls of the German people 'afloat with a feeling of rage and shame'. He was to use the Treaty to his own advantage in his attempt to stir up nationalist opposition to the Republic.

But did the peacemakers at Versailles make a mistake? Could they have made a better peace? The historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote that the Treaty was 'doomed from the start, and another war was therefore practically certain' (Hobsbawm, 1994). However, there is also a case for arguing that it was the circumstances in which the Treaty was (or was not) implemented that determined its fate. Had the German economic recovery of the mid-1920s continued, had the League of Nations been stronger with American support, had a policy of co-operation between Germany and other states continued in the 1930s, then we would probably not study the Treaty so closely for signs of self-destruction. On the other hand, any treaty which depends on wholly favourable circumstances to be effective might be deemed a weak one. As with so much in history, there is no simple answer. But we do need to guard against making judgements solely in the light of 'what happened next'.

### Towards economic collapse

#### The impact of the Treaty of Versailles

By the end of the war, the national income was two-thirds its pre-war level and both industrial and agricultural production had fallen considerably. Germany had financed the war largely through borrowing and printing more money, both of which continued after 1918 with disastrous consequences. After 1919, the entire Reich budget was needed to pay the interest on the wartime loans. In addition, the government's policy of simply printing more money led to rampant inflation: by 1922, the German mark was worth 1 per cent of its pre-war level and the had harvest of 1918 forced food prices up further.

This was the situation in which the Treaty of Versailles made its demands. The Treaty deprived Germany of 75 per cent of her iron ore resources, 25 per cent of her coal and 15 per cent of her arable land, and of course the reparations bill came on top of this. The reparations sum of 132,000 million (132,000 million gold marks) was payable over 42 years and opinions differ over whether Germany could have realistically repaid such an amount. Keynes, in his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, calculated that the Allies needed something in the region of \$1,600-43,000 million to cover war losses and argued forcefully that it was impossible for Germany to repay a larger amount. However, some historians claim that the sum fixed in 1921 might not have been so unrealistic. The government's slowness to act in the face of a growing budget deficit may have been a way of convincing the Allies to reduce reparations repayments.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the economy in Germany was spiralling out of control even before the events of 1923.

### Activity 33.5

This activity is intended to follow the debate on page 85. If you did not take part in the debate, then you must ensure that you have read through the sources on pages 84-85 and familiarised yourself with the issues they raise.

Your task is to produce a detailed analysis of the Treaty of Versailles, which draws on the work you have done so far, the sources in this chapter, other books and information from the internet. You may also want to read pages 86-8. The focus of your analysis should be on whether the Treaty was fair and provided for a lasting peace. Recommended websites include:

[Search.britannica.com/searchquery=seattle+versailles](http://Search.britannica.com/searchquery=seattle+versailles) (this provides a number of useful links)

[www.people.virginia.edu/~vs44/versailles/jun](http://www.people.virginia.edu/~vs44/versailles/jun) (a recent academic assessment of the treaty)

The format of your analysis is important and must develop your ICT skills. Decide with your teacher what format it should take. Your analysis should include at least one primary source, one image such as a map and one graph, for example showing the scale of Germany's losses.

You should present your findings and judgements to the rest of the group, producing a summarised version of your analysis to illustrate your presentation.

#### Think about

► Why do you think the government's policy of printing more money would lead to higher prices (inflation)?

### The invasion of the Ruhr

At the end of 1921, Germany proclaimed itself unable to meet the reparation payments for the following year. Although it was agreed to halt the payments temporarily, the French were looking for an excuse to take action. The excuse came in the unlikely form of telegraph poles – part of the timber promised to the Allies – which were not delivered to France on time. Delivery of coal was also delayed. The French Prime Minister Poincaré sent 100,000 French and Belgian troops into the Ruhr in January 1923 to collect the coal for themselves. They faced no military opposition – Germany was hardly in a position to fight back – but they did face a workforce ready to back a government policy of passive resistance. As German workers refused to work for the French, leading to the collapse of services such as transport, the French brought in their own workers. Not surprisingly, there was a great deal of ill will between the former enemies and frequent outbreaks of violence and hostility. The worst incident occurred when German workers tried to stop French soldiers taking vehicles belonging to a German business. A total of 13 workers were killed in the gunfire.

This policy of passive resistance might have gone some way to alleviate the feelings of humiliation amongst the Germans, but it had catastrophic consequences on the German economy. The central question was who would pay the striking workers? The government regarded this as its responsibility and paid out millions of marks to the workers and industrialists who were out of pocket. Meanwhile, tax revenue from the Ruhr dried up, as did coal supplies which had to be obtained through imports. The combined cost of all this to the government was twice the annual reparation payments. There were two options open to the government at this point. Firstly, they could raise taxation, rejected on the grounds that the tax burden on the nation was already too high. Secondly, the policy of deficit financing could be continued – in other words to print yet more money. The government opted for the latter and what followed was an unprecedented rise in prices and a dramatic fall in the value of the mark.

### Hyperinflation: money gone mad



The Ruhr was the industrial heartland of Germany. It produced 80 per cent of Germany's steel and more than 80 per cent of her coal.

#### Think about

► What is going on in Source 29? (What do you think the kite is made of?)

#### Source 23

► A practical demonstration of inflation in Germany in the 1920s.

In December 1922, there were 8,000 marks to the US dollar. By April 1923, this figure had risen to 20,000 marks and, by August 1923, there was an incredible 1 million marks to the dollar. People no longer carried their money in purses and wallets. Instead they stuffed banknotes into wheelbarrows. A loaf of bread in Berlin in November 1923 cost you 201,000,000,000 marks, compared with 0.65 marks in 1918.

While not everyone suffered to the same degree, many lost almost everything. The groups that suffered most were those living off a fixed income such as pensioners, students and disabled war veterans. White-collar workers such as teachers and civil servants were also badly affected as they received salaries, which were difficult and time-consuming to negotiate. This latter group had been prominent in its support for the Republic in 1919, but after 1923, began to vote increasingly – and ominously – for more extreme parties. Those with savings saw the value of them wiped out and certain sectors of the population became severely malnourished.

However, some groups were slightly shielded from the worst of the crisis, such as farmers, who despite shrinking markets, did at least have a source of food to eat or barter with. Small tradesmen, shopkeepers and craftsmen all did good business while some members of the working class also had union leaders fighting hard on their behalf. In some cases, workers were paid twice daily and allowed time in between to go and spend the money before it depreciated further. Industrial leaders found their debts wiped out and were able to exploit bankruptcies and acquire more holdings.

Nevertheless, the crisis had a significant impact on Germany and brought considerable hardship.

### The political consequences of the 1923 crisis

In October and November 1923, both the extreme left and right attempted to exploit the government's difficulties and seize power. The KPD made preparations for revolutionary action in central Germany and tried to use an unusual alliance with the SPD in Saxony to gain the basis for an uprising. The government called a state of emergency and the uprising was finally called off. Similarly, the Nazi Party tried to take advantage of nationalist fury over the ending of passive resistance in September. However, they failed in their attempt to win the support of the Bavarian authorities and march to Berlin. As many as 4000 Nazis, including Hitler, were arrested. Their sentences, as with the Kapp Putsch, were mild in the circumstances (they were accused of treason). Hitler was in prison for just nine months.

Dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the crisis was not restricted to the extremes, however. Although it was clear to the more detached observer that the roots of the crisis did not lie exclusively with the Republic's government – the effects of the war, the Treaty and the irresponsible behaviour of German business were at least as much if not more to blame – it nevertheless provided a convenient target to blame. Organizations representing the lower middle class or 'Mittelstand', such as artisans and small traders, accused the Government of violating its responsibility to protect an independent middle class in agriculture, trade and commerce. This resentment did not disappear once the economy had stabilized and members of the 'Mittelstand' were to become some of Nazism's most eager supporters.

### 5.4.2 THE 1920S

Even when the worst material impact was over, the psychological shock of the experience was to have longer-lasting effects, confirming a deep-seated dislike of democracy – which was thereafter equated with economic distress – and a heightened fear of the possible consequences of economic instability.

Fullbrook, Germany 1918-1950, 1991

### Document exercise: The Ruhr invasion and hyperinflation

#### The impact of hyperinflation

The savings of the middle classes and working classes were wiped out at a single blow with a ruthlessness which no revolution could ever equal; at the same time the purchasing power of wages was reduced to nothing. Even if a man worked till he dropped it was impossible to buy enough clothes for his family – and work, in any case, was not to be found. Whatever the cause of this phenomenon... the result of the inflation was to undermine the foundations of German society in a way which neither the war, nor the revolution of November 1918, nor the Treaty of Versailles, had ever done.

Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, 1952

#### The impact of hyperinflation on the middle class

...historians are agreed in their view that the widespread belief as to the 'destruction of the middle class' by the inflation is untrue. The middle class consisted of very different groups which were affected in very different ways by the almost complete devaluation of the currency and consequent wiping out of all debts... While savers, mortgagees and bondholders lost their wealth... small tradesmen, shopkeepers and craftsmen did good business and suffered scarcely at all from the inflation, and farmers were on the whole unaffected... It cannot be denied, however, that the redistribution of wealth within the middle class hastened the dissolution (breaking up) of the German middle class as a social and political factor...

Kolb, The Weimar Republic, 1968

#### Number 2: A summary of the effects of hyperinflation

	July 1914	4.2
January 1919		8.9
January 1920		64.8
January 1923		17,972.0
July 1923		353,412.0
August 1923		4,620,455.0
September 1923		98,860,000.0
October 1923		25,260,208,000.0
15 November 1923		4,200,000,000,000.0

What do you think is meant in source 2a by the psychological shock of the experience?

According to Fullbrook, how did the experience of hyperinflation affect people's view of the Weimar Republic? Was this fair?

The effects of hyperinflation were at times bizarre. People burnt paper money because it was cheaper than coal and banknotes were used as wallpaper. There were stories of the price in the time it took to drink it. A man walking down the street carrying a bag full of money was mugged; the thief emptied the notes onto the pavement and stole the bag.

#### Activity

Draw a summary diagram (possibly a flow chart) explaining as clearly as you can the causes of hyperinflation.

This Nazi uprising became known as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch. For more information, see page 119.

**Middle classes sell belongings to raise money**



Explain how the Weimar Republic collapsed from the start?

**Comprehension in context**

Was the invasion of the Ruhr the main cause of hyperinflation in Germany? Use Source C and your own knowledge.

**Comparing the sources**

To what extent do Sources A and B agree about the impact of hyperinflation on German society?

**Assessing the sources**

Which of the sources C and D is most useful to a historian researching the impact of hyperinflation in Germany?

**Making judgements**

Hyperinflation and the invasion of the Ruhr severely undermined the strength of the Weimar Republic. Using the sources and your own knowledge, to what extent do you agree with this statement?

**Conclusions**

The early years of the Weimar Republic were extremely unstable. Opposed by many from the very beginning, it faced problems on every front, political, economic, social and foreign. That it managed to survive at all is in many ways remarkable. In answer to the key questions posed at the beginning of the chapter we have seen that:

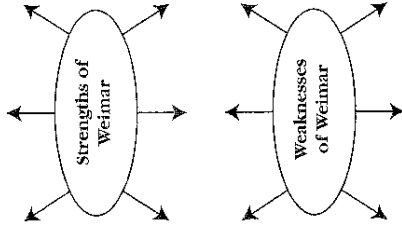
- Germany's revolution was not particularly violent or radical, but it did turn Germany into a democratic republic
- The new Republic was run according to the Weimar Constitution
- Opposition to the Republic came from both ends of the political spectrum but only once (the Kapp Putsch) did it pose a serious threat
- The Treaty of Versailles was hard on Germany, although Germany was not destroyed and was able to rebuild herself in later years
- The Republic was weak from the start – but was it doomed? The following activity invites you to reach your own conclusion.

**Is it fair to say the Weimar Republic was doomed from the start?**

Some students see the Weimar Republic like the *Titanic*: doomed to fail right from the start. But was the *Titanic* really doomed to sink from the moment she was built, or did it depend on another factor, the iceberg? Maybe she was doomed to sink if she hit a big iceberg, but that's not quite the same as being doomed to sink no matter what. Can we compare the Weimar Republic with this ill-fated ship? It could be argued that the Republic was not completely doomed to fail, just as Adolf Hitler was not inevitably going to become leader of Germany from birth. In the right circumstances, the new Republic might have survived, but just as the *Titanic* hit an iceberg, so the Republic hit its own series of obstacles. A stronger republic might have survived these blows, if it was, but that itself does not condemn the Weimar Republic.

**YOUR TASK**

Study the timeline below to refresh your memory of the main events. Then copy out and complete each spider diagram.



<b>1918:</b>	Clear that the war is lost
September:	Reforms of the political system
October:	Mutiny of the German fleet begins
November:	Ebert becomes Chancellor
	Armistice is signed
<b>1919:</b>	Springer Uprising
January:	National Assembly elected
June:	Treaty of Versailles signed
July:	New Weimar Constitution adopted
<b>1920:</b>	The Kapp Putsch
March:	Communist uprising in the Ruhr
<b>1921:</b>	Reparations Commission agrees sum for Germany to pay
April:	Assassination of Matthias Erzberger
August:	Assassination of Walter Rathenau
<b>1922:</b>	Occupation of Ruhr by French and Belgian troops
January:	Straussmann becomes Chancellor
August:	Beginning of hyperinflation
September:	Passive resistance called off
September – November:	Communist, socialist and Nazi uprisings

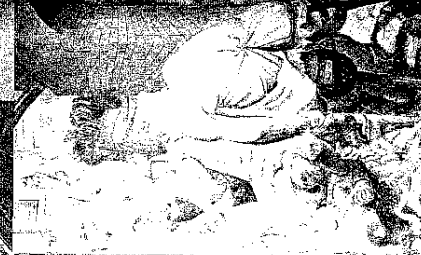
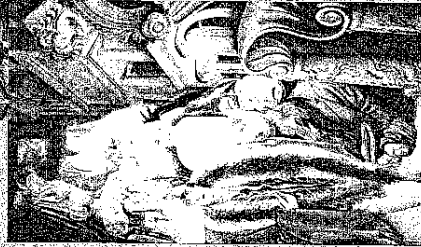
**Activity**

It is November 1923. As editor of *The Times*, you have decided to write an editorial on the future of Germany. Passive resistance has been called off, political uprisings have been crushed and the Allies are considering ways to ease the pressure on Germany. Do you think the Weimar Republic has a future? Or do you believe the new Republic is ultimately too weak to last for much longer? Think back over the previous four years. What are the signs that it will survive or collapse?

# Chapter

## The Golden Years 1924-1929

Source 1.1



The second half of the 1920s has been described as Weimar's 'Golden Years'. Although not strictly accurate – not everyone prospered and many problems remained – it does at least reflect the way that life in Germany improved compared to the troubles reached by 1923. The economy partially recovered, political threats to the Republic quietened down and better foreign relations were restored. For some, these years offered a welcome distraction from the gloom of war and economic depression. It was the age of cabaret, cinema, theatre – and experimentation. But not everyone approved of the changes taking place. The opposition of the nationalists continued, especially as Germany embarked on a quest to build better relations in Europe and negotiate better peace terms. In addition, the return of some stability in Germany encouraged even the more moderate political parties to act in their own interests rather than in the interests of Germany as a whole. Even the social and cultural changes and experiments brought opposition; not everyone approved of the lifestyle they witnessed in the cities. They disapproved of what they saw as immoral behaviour in the nightclubs and the way in which issues such as sex were now openly discussed.

### Introduction

### Key questions

- How did the economy recover from hyperinflation?
- Did the economy recover completely?
- Did the Republic continue to face opposition?
- How successful was Stresemann's foreign policy?
- How were society and culture changing?
- How golden were the 'Golden Years'?

### The end of the crisis

#### The appointment of Gustav Stresemann

In August 1923 Gustav Stresemann was appointed to lead a new coalition government as Chancellor. This government was the first to include parties from both the left and the right. Stresemann's own party, the People's Party (DVP), shared power with the Centre Party, the Democrats (DDP) and the Social Democrats (SPD). It was a sign of the crisis of the time and also Stresemann's skill that the SPD were prepared to work in a government headed by a member of the DVP. Stresemann was determined to act in the wider national interest rather than simply in the more narrow interests of his own party.

#### How did the economy recover?

Stresemann succeeded in solving the two major problems of 1923 in the 103 days that he was Chancellor. Passive resistance in the Ruhr was called off in September and the mark was stabilized. Stresemann knew that Germany had no real option in the Ruhr, but he also realized how unpopular a move it would be. After the humiliation of Versailles, it would seem – correctly – as though Germany was once again being forced to surrender and publicly acknowledge its own weaknesses. As we saw in the last chapter, the political consequences of this were far reaching, involving a threat to the government from the extreme right.

In November, a new currency was issued, the Rentenmark, which was based on a mortgage of all land and industry and therefore relatively secure. Each Rentenmark was exchanged for one trillion old marks; purses and wallets could

Source 1.2

The painting, shown in Source 1.1 is 'Big City' by Otto Dix, painted in 1927-1928. It presents mixed messages about Weimar's 'Golden Years'.

What is Dix trying to say about city life?

Source 1.3

Gustav Stresemann



Stresemann was born in 1878, the son of an innkeeper. He gained a doctorate with a thesis on the Berlin bonded beer trade in 1902 and went on to enjoy a successful career in business. He entered the Reichstag in 1907 as its youngest member. He supported the monarchy and was a co-founder of the right-wing DVP in 1918. But a natural supporter of the Weimar Republic at first, he went on to contribute more than almost anyone else to its survival. Appointed Chancellor in 1923 at the height of hyperinflation, he went on to serve as Foreign Minister from 1923 until his death in 1929.

again be used in place of wheelbarrows. Stresemann was able to enforce the new currency by decree after the Reichstag voted to give the government full power to make decisions in currency matters. The Reichsmark was really just a bluff - new banknotes on which only a dozen zeros had been cancelled' (Herber, 1966) - but it worked.

Meanwhile, the end of passive resistance in the Ruhr had opened the door to international negotiations. The French invasion had notably lacked any British support and it had helped to deepen distrust between the two countries. The British were alarmed at the heavy-handed tactics of the French and approached America about establishing an international commission of financial experts to regulate any reparations problems. The Americans agreed, despite French objections, and it was from this commission that an important report named after its president, Charles Dawes, emerged in the spring of 1924. This report formed the basis of the Dawes Plan which reorganized the Reichsbank, reduced the total reparations bill and spread out the repayments with annual payments of one billion marks until 1929 and 2.5 billion marks thereafter. Even more crucially, the Plan approved an allied loan to Germany of 800 million gold marks to help her meet the first revised repayment and this opened the floodgates for American capital into Germany. Between 1924 and 1930, loans of up to 25.5 billion marks were received in Germany, mainly from the United States. The Reichstag passed the Dawes Plan in August 1924, but not without opposition from the nationalists who were furious at the idea of Germany's finances being controlled by external powers.

Although the Dawes Plan has generally been regarded as vital to German economic recovery, its long-term effects have not always been seen so positively:

Snyder, p. 4

While it helped with the immediate problem, the Dawes Plan actually promoted a cycle harmful for international finance. American funds poured into Germany; Germany used the money to pay reparations; Britain and France, who received most of this money, were supposed to pay their war debts to the United States; the United States sent more money into Germany. The Germans fell into the habit of expecting that funds from the United States would flow on indefinitely.

Snyder, *The Weimar Republic*, 1966

## How golden were the Golden Years? Did life get better?

Compared to the years of inflation and hyperinflation, the second half of the 1920s did appear to be golden years. With capital flowing in from America in the form of both short and long-term loans, the economy seemed, on the surface at least, to prosper. Public works schemes provided new stadiums, apartment blocks and opera houses. New welfare schemes were brought in, such as a more comprehensive unemployment insurance system in 1927. Wages increased, particularly for those employed by the state, and working hours continued to be regulated, although some modification was made to the eight hour day in 1923 when a ten hour day could operate as long as a collective

agreement had been made. Industrial production increased and, by 1927, Germany was producing at pre-war rates despite her losses at Versailles.

However, it is much too simplistic to view 1924-1929 as the prosperous filling sandwiched between two periods of economic depression. For one thing, the economic recovery did not affect everyone equally. Although hyperinflation had helped big businesses to pay off their debts and make larger profits, it had deepened the divide between the rich and the poor. Amongst those who were never fully to recover during the second part of the decade were the lower middle class - the *Mittelstand*. This group refused to be categorized with the working class, even though their economic position was no better. Instead they prided themselves on a skilled and professional status which set them apart from unskilled manual workers. Their occupations ranged from skilled craftsmen to newer jobs in commerce, the civil service, the service industries and small businesses. They felt their interests were being squeezed between those of big business, which could fend for itself, and the working class, who had trade unions, the SPD and the KPD to defend it.

Farmers were another group who would have been astonished by the term 'golden years'. Affected by a worldwide agricultural depression, farmers needed to modernize in order to remain competitive both on the home and foreign market. However, lack of profit led them further into debt and discouraged investment in new machinery. Agricultural production was patchy and did not keep pace with industry. In 1929, when industrial production had returned to pre-war levels, agricultural production was still 74 per cent of its pre-war total. Not surprisingly then, farmers were amongst the first group clearly to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the government by voting for extremist parties, most notably the Nazis in 1928, the same year which saw farmers rioting in protest at their circumstances. Their response was an ominous sign of things to come. The *Mittelstand* also moved towards the political extreme and was to become the Nazis' most loyal group of supporters after 1929, voting for the party in higher proportionate numbers than any other group in Germany.

The industrial workers were in a slightly better position during this period in so far as their wages increased and working hours remained more or less at the eight hours agreed in 1919. However, wages did not go much above the rising cost of living and after the expectations raised by the new Republic, workers were disappointed that their position had not improved further. Superficially, relations between workers and industry improved, with fewer strikes between 1924 and 1929. This was the result of state arbitration which, after 1924, took a fairly middle line in disputes and often defended the rights of the workers. However, the figures concealed a more uneasy relationship between workers and employers; the latter were unhappy at being forced to pay out high wages and were regularly trying to get their workers to work longer hours in return.

Overall, then, experiences between 1924 and 1929 varied widely. Although life for many was much better than it had been in 1923, not everyone prospered to the same extent. For some, their experiences were laid enough to encourage them to cast votes for an extremist party which laid the blame for economic problems at the door of the Jews and the Republic.

### Average annual working hours

1913	3,290
1925	2,910
1929	2,770
1938	2,750

### Which political parties

look back at the political parties summarized on page 75. Which parties might the lower middle class have turned to in a crisis?

### Number of strikes

1913	2464
1919	3719
1920	3807
1921	4485
1922	4755
1923	2046
1924	1973
1925	1708
1926	351
1927	844
1928	739
1929	429
1930	353

### What do you think

- to what extent do the statistics on wages, working hours and strikes prove the following statements?
  - ⊕ Workers were better off between 1924 and 1929 than before
  - ⊕ Workers worked shorter hours between 1924 and 1929 than before
  - ⊕ There were fewer disputes between workers and employers between 1924 and 1929 than before
  - ⊕ Life was better between 1924 and 1929 than before

Consider the value of statistics as evidence. What CAN they tell us? What CANNOT they tell us? What other information do you need to get the most out of these particular statistics?

### Wages and working hours

- What do you think Snyder means by a 'harmful cycle' in Source 2?
- Do you think the Dawes Plan was a good move for Germany or not?

### Average real wages (1936=100):

	Per hour	Per week
1913/14	84.7	76.0
1925	94.5	93.4
1926	100.8	97.1
1927	110.6	109.6
1928	122.9	124.5
1929	129.5	128.2
1930	125.8	118.1
1931	116.3	103.9
1932	97.6	85.8
1933	94.6	87.7

**Why didn't the economy recover completely?**

There were many reasons why the German economy did not make a full recovery between 1924 and 1929. Some of these reasons were to be found outside of the country; others were unique to Germany.

**INTERNATIONAL REASONS**

**The Treaty of Versailles** The Dawes Plan certainly helped Germany cope with the demands of reparations, although repayments briefly exceeded 3 per cent of Germany's GNP at the end of the 1920s which was a significant amount. However, the main result of Dawes was a German reliance on American loans which turned sour in 1929 when the American stock market collapsed and loans were recalled.

**World economy** Germany was not the only European state to experience slow growth in industrial production. In 1925, Germany's industrial production was 95 per cent of its 1913 level; Britain's figure was only 86 per cent and France's was 114 per cent, still only a small improvement. Part of the reason was the growth of other world economies. America profited from the war and her production figure in 1925 was 148 per cent of the 1913 level while Japan's soared to 222 per cent.

**World export market** In the 1920s conditions were not favourable to an export economy which Germany traditionally had. New competitors such as Japan were undercutting prices and traditional markets were lost. In addition, the export market was shrinking due to a Europe-wide fall in population. Germany's export quota fell from 17.5 per cent in 1910-1913 to 14.9 per cent in 1924-1929.

**DOMESTIC REASONS**

**Industrial production** Figures fluctuated and barely exceeded pre-war levels even by 1929. There was some attempt to modernize production methods by bringing in American-style technology, especially in the coal and car manufacture industries. Other industries proved more resistant to change, such as steel. Where successful, the new methods led to a new problem in Germany: long term unemployment. This was the result of attempts to make each individual worker work as productively as possible, therefore reducing the total number of workers required.

**Workers' wages and the welfare state** Inflation had benefited big businesses. When it ended, industry became less tolerant of its obligations to workers. Germany's workforce had become too expensive compared to other countries and employers were frustrated to lose so much of their profits in wages, not to mention in welfare schemes such as the unemployment insurance scheme.

**Trade** The knock-on effect of high wages was higher prices for goods, which were therefore less attractive both to foreign and domestic customers (who could buy cheaper imports). Cartels (groups of businesses involved in the same industry) also helped to keep prices high by agreeing between themselves what prices to put on their products. One result was therefore a shortage of foreign trade. German industry had by 1929 increased its production of goods for export, but they could not find adequate markets for these exports. Not surprisingly, industrialists wanted to find a guaranteed market. It was partly this need that made them so supportive of rearmament, which would enable them to sell their goods to the government. This paved the way for an alliance between the Nazis and the big industries in the 1930s.

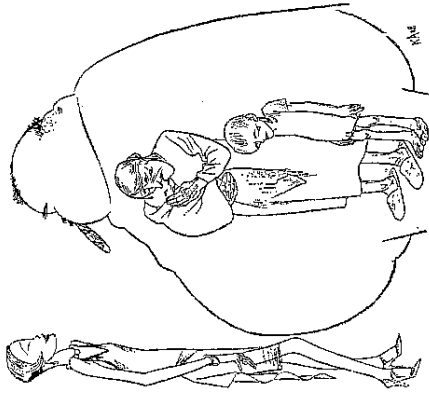
**Philosophical debate**

The debate about the extent of an economic recovery between 1924 and 1929 is part of a wider debate about exactly when the fate of the Weimar Republic was sealed. If there were serious problems with the economy before the Wall Street Crash in 1929, then this might lend weight to the theory that the Weimar Republic was doomed to fail even before the events of 1930-1933. **James** (1986) stresses the structural weaknesses of the German economy before 1929 and points out that there were signs of economic decline before the American collapse. He writes 'The German economy of the inter-war years was marked by a high degree of instability and low growth rates...'. **Peukert** (1987) similarly focuses on the weaknesses of the pre-1929 economy, describing it as 'The Sick Economy of Weimar'. Several historians such as **Geary** and **Kolb** highlight the deteriorating relations between workers and employers and also the tensions created by an extension of the welfare state. Not all historians paint such a gloomy picture, however. Both **Snyder** (1966) and **Bookbinder** (1996) pay greater attention to recovery, although neither dispute its limitations. Bookbinder, for example, writes 'Although the recovery was not uniform...the period 1924-1929 represented a positive change for many Germans...By 1929 Germany had become the world's second industrial power behind the United States...'

**Document exercise: The economic recovery**

**Sources**

**A cartoon about the rich and the poor**



A cartoon by Karl Arnold in 1928. Some are fat by choice, some are thin by choice and some are thin because they have no choice.

**Sources**

**Snyder on the economic recovery**

The country was still beset by political troubles, but economically the picture was changed. Bolstered by the Dawes Plan, the economy made a surprising recovery. The distressing days of the inflation were forgotten as the people tasted prosperity. It was a spectacular development, to be compared with the equally rapid economic revival of Germany after the nightmare of Hitler's war. True, the coating was thin and the wounds underneath had never completely healed but for the time being at least, happy days were back again.

Snyder, *The Weimar Republic*, 1966

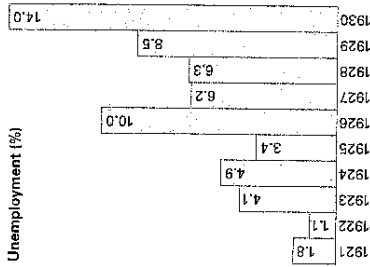
In November and December 1928, the Ruhr ironworks dispute became the worst industrial dispute of the period. Employers refused to accept the arbitration of the state on wages and prevented 220,000 workers from working until new wage rates were accepted. Eventually a compromise was found.

**Index of exports and imports (1913=100)**

	Exports	Imports
1913	100	100
1926	66.4	82.3
1930	92.2	86.0
1932	55.6	62.5

**Source C**  
**Statistics on the Weimar economy**

Year	Industrial Production (1928=100)
1913	98
1918	56
1919	37
1920	54
1921	65
1922	70
1923	48
1924	69
1925	81
1926	78
1927	98
1928	100
1929	100
1930	87



**Source D**  
**James on the economic problems**

Germany's economic crisis preceded both the world depression and the political collapse. Weimar's economy suffered from a basic instability and like any unstable structure required only a relatively small push to bring down the whole structure. Some of the causes of Germany's problems stemmed from the world economic setting, but many of them were endogenous [growing from within].

James, 'Economic Reasons for the Collapse of Weimar' in Kershaw (ed), *Weimar - Why did German Democracy Fail?*, 1990

**Examination-style questions**

- Comprehension in context**  
Using Source C and your own knowledge, explain what was happening to German industry between 1924 and 1929 and how this affected unemployment figures.
- Comparing the sources**  
Study Sources A and D. To what extent do they differ in their view of the German economy between 1924 and 1929? Can you suggest any reasons for their differences?
- Assessing the Sources**  
Study Source B carefully. Of what use is this source to a historian studying the impact of the economy on the German people between 1924 and 1929?
- Making judgements**  
Using all the sources and your own knowledge, how accurate is it to describe the years 1924-1929 as a period of economic recovery?

**Foreign policy: an era of fulfilment?**

The German acceptance of a reparations repayment plan in 1921 marked the beginning of what we now call the 'era of fulfilment'. This basically meant that Germany would show willingness to fulfil the terms of the Versailles Treaty as far as it could. This did not reflect any change of heart by the Germans. They still privately raged against the Treaty and Weimar foreign policy never wavered from its fundamental aim of revising the terms. But it was felt that an appearance of goodwill, together with clear signs that Germany could not possibly afford to repay such a large amount, might lead to more revision than an openly hostile attitude. The nationalists, of course, were opposed to such a policy and did their best to sabotage it for the remainder of the decade.

**The Treaty of Rapallo, 1922**

In April 1922, Germany signed a treaty with its former enemy, Russia, at the World Economic Conference at Genoa. Neither Germany nor Russia gained much from the Conference: the French at this point refused to consider any easing of the Versailles terms and communist Russia was frustrated in its desire to establish trading relations with individual states. The Treaty of Rapallo went some way to compensate. Firstly, Russia offered Germany a new export market whilst Russia stood to benefit from German investment. Secondly, the sheer size of Russia offered Germany the chance to develop weapons and train pilots well away from Allied scrutiny. Thirdly, both states had an active interest in preventing Poland from becoming too powerful with French support: if Poland were sandwiched between two allies, Russia and Germany, its scope for action was limited. General Seeckt was a passionate believer in fostering good relations with Russia in order to destroy Poland:

**Source 3**

Poland's existence is intolerable, incompatible with the survival of Germany. It must disappear, and it will disappear through its own internal weakness and through Russia - with our assistance. For Russia, Poland is even more intolerable than for us; no Russian can allow Poland to exist. With Poland falls one of the strongest pillars of the Treaty of Versailles, the preponderance of France... Poland can never offer any advantages to Germany... The re-establishment of the broad common frontier between Russia and Germany is the precondition for the regaining of strength of both countries.'

Memorandum by Seeckt, September 1922

However, Germany was hardly in a position to launch an offensive against Poland, nor did the Russian alliance help her to develop good relations with the West. France in particular was horrified by Rapallo - it seemed to confirm her worst fears. Rapallo was of no use to Germany in 1923 when the French invaded the Ruhr and would be of little use in any negotiations about the Versailles peace terms. It was this realization that influenced Stresemann's foreign policy in the years he was Foreign Minister.

**Who: Seeckt**

Known as the 'Sphinx with the iron face' because of his well-dressed appearance. Seeckt was the commanding officer of the German army from 1920 until 1926 when he was dismissed for offering a military post to Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, a member of the former royal family. Although he played a major role in suppressing the attempted Nazi *putsch*, he later became a supporter of Hitler during the depression.

**Think: about**

- ▶ Why do you think Seeckt wanted Poland to disappear?
- ▶ Why did Seeckt support an alliance with Russia?
- ▶ What might have been the disadvantages of an alliance with Russia?

### Stresemann's aims

Gustav Stresemann was Foreign Minister from 1923 to 1929. During that time he did more than anyone else to bring stability to the Weimar Republic, although he earned the anger of the Nationalists, including many in his own party, the DVP. His aims were no different to any other German at that time. He wanted the peace terms revised to enable Germany to regain her great power status in Europe. His methods, however, were more controversial. He realized that Germany needed a policy which looked both east *and* west. It was no good focusing on relations with Russia; the co-operation and support of the West was equally, if not more, crucial. In particular, France needed to be reassured and some trust re-established, as it was France who was proving most stubborn over revision of the peace terms.

Such aims and methods seem to us perfectly sensible and realistic, but at the time, it seemed to the nationalists as if Stresemann was acting more in the interests of European peace and stability than the interests of his own country. They greeted the Dawes Plan with the words 'No new Versailles!'. However, for most of the 1920s, the nationalists were outnumbered by those who supported Stresemann; it was only Stresemann's death in 1929 that removed one of the obstacles to the nationalists' cause.

### Stresemann's methods and achievements

In 1923 Stresemann, as Chancellor and Foreign Minister, was responsible for both the ending of hyperinflation and the end of passive resistance. In 1924, the Dawes Plan was the first sign that the Allies were prepared to take Germany's plight seriously and offer some constructive assistance. Furthermore, the last French troops evacuated the Ruhr in July 1925. Stresemann was therefore in a good position to press on with further revision of the Versailles Treaty, but he was aware of the need to reassure France. He returned to an earlier idea of a security pact and in December 1925, in London, the Locarno Pact was signed. This has been regarded by some as Stresemann's greatest achievement.

The pact consisted of several treaties. Germany, France and Belgium signed treaties of mutual guarantee of their shared borders, with Britain and Italy offering further guarantees. Germany was, in effect, accepting her western borders as defined in the Treaty of Versailles. In the east it was a different story. Although Germany signed arbitration treaties with Czechoslovakia and Poland, promising that any future disputes about borders would be submitted for arbitration, she refused to sign a treaty of mutual guarantee of her borders with either country. In other words, Germany was leaving the door open for further revision of the eastern borders as settled at Versailles. Despite this, the Locarno Pact was accepted by the Allies (although France needed a nudge from America and Britain) demonstrating that they were increasingly seeing the western and eastern parts of the Treaty as two separate issues, an approach which would suit Germany just fine.

Locarno was quickly followed by two successes for Germany. The first Rhineland zone was evacuated before the end of 1925 with hopes that a total evacuation would be completed well ahead of 1935. Secondly, Germany gained admission into the League of Nations in August 1926.



Source 7

Gustav Stresemann speaking at the League of Nations in September 1926.

#### Think aloud

'The euphoria of the 'Age of Locarno' was best illustrated by the ubiquitous love-presentation pictures of Stresemann addressing the League of Nations, a source of pride for many Germans. There was in short supply during the Weimar Years.'

Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany, 1896*

► Why was Germany's entry into the League of Nations a source of pride?

► Do you think everyone in Germany shared this view?

In the summer of 1927, the Allies agreed to reduce the occupation forces in the Rhineland by 10,000 and two years later, as part of the Young Plan, they promised to evacuate the area fully by June 1930, five years earlier than stated in the Treaty of Versailles. The Young Plan also set, for the first time, a time limit for reparation repayments and revised the overall figure to 112,000 million Reichmarks. Germany was to pay an average of 2,000 million Reichmarks each year for the next 39 years. A key advantage of this for Germany was that the sum they would repay for the next three years would be less than that fixed in the Dawes Plan.

Thus, Germany ended the 1920s in a very different position, not as an outcast in Europe but as a key player.

### Document exercise: The Locarno Treaty

#### Stresemann defends the treaty against nationalist opposition

Our present purpose is to become an active Great Power once again, and thus to be regarded I would ask you all to postpone these discussions at least until the result of Locarno is before you as a whole, and in all this conflict over political theories at home, consider the effect that must be produced abroad by the general spectacle now presented by Germany... When we came back from Locarno, at Chamberlain's request, the English Ambassador was there to welcome us and made a speech in which the following sentence appeared: 'The world will never forget that it was Germany that took the initiative towards peace in Europe.'

Extract from Stresemann's speech to the Dresden Press in October 1925



**Preparations of a plot to kill Stresemann**

LOCARNO, Switzerland, October 4. - On the eve of the Locarno Conference the preparations have been unmasked (spoiled) by a persistent rumour that German nationalists have planned to assassinate Dr Stresemann rather than permit him to conclude with the Allies a commitment for the security of Europe laid within the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Discovery of the plot by the Berlin police is responsible, it is understood, for the strange action of Dr Stresemann and Dr Luther in leaving the special German delegation train at Bellinzona and motoring to Locarno after dark last night.

Extract from *The New York Times*, 5 October 1925

**Locarno was a diplomatic triumph for Stresemann**

...Locarno stands without question as Stresemann's greatest diplomatic triumph. In terms of domestic policy, however, it must be regarded, along with the election of Hindenburg, as a defeat, since it marked the failure of more than a year's efforts to bring the DNVF to accept his foreign policy... Moreover, after the nationalists left the government, their leaders joined the Nazis and other extremist groups in hurling charges of appeasement and fulfilment at Stresemann and the DVP... It deprived him of full recognition for his diplomatic achievement by handing much of the German public to the gains he had made.

Turner, *Stresemann and the Politics of the Weimar Republic*, 1963

**Locarno was a diplomatic triumph**

[The Locarno Treaty] was the turning point of the years between the wars. Its signature ended the First World War... If the object of an international agreement be to satisfy everyone, Locarno was a very good treaty indeed... They had reconciled France and Germany and brought peace to Europe... The Germans could be satisfied too. They were firmly protected against a new occupation in the Ruhr; they were treated as equals, not as the defeated enemy, and they kept the door open for a revision of their eastern frontier. A German statesman of 1919, or even of 1923, would have found no cause for complaint.

Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1961

**Coalition governments 1923-1929**

- 1923**  
August - September: SPD, DDP, Centre, DVP (Grand Coalition)
- October - November: SPD (until 3 Nov), DDP, Centre, DVP (Grand Coalition)
- 1924**  
November - June: DDP, Centre, DVP, DVP (Centre-right coalition)
- June - January: DDP, Centre, DVP (Centre-right coalition)
- 1925**  
January - December: Centre, DVP, DVP, BVP (Centre-right coalition)
- 1926**  
January - May: Centre, DDP, DVP, BVP (Centre-right coalition)
- 1927**  
January - June: Centre, DVP, DNVF, BVP (Centre-right coalition)
- 1928**  
June - March 1930: SPD, DDP, Centre, BVP, DVP (Grand Coalition)

For a profile of Hindenburg, see page 133.

**Examination-style questions**

- 1 Comprehension in context**  
Using Source B and your own knowledge, explain why German nationalists might have planned to assassinate Stresemann.
- 2 Comparing the sources**  
To what extent and why do Sources C and D differ in their views on the success of the Locarno Treaty?
- 3 Assessing the sources**  
How useful is Source A for assessing Stresemann's aims?
- 4 Making judgements**  
Using all the sources and your own knowledge, explain whether or not you think the Locarno Treaty was a success for Stresemann.

**Politics 1923-1929**

Although support for anti-Republican parties such as the DNVF and KPD increased in the first election of May 1924, the pro-Weimar parties went on to achieve modest success for the rest of the decade. In the second election of 1924 there was a slight move away from the political extreme and in 1928, the SPD increased its share of the votes from 26 per cent to 29.8 per cent whilst the DNVF's share fell from 20.2 per cent to 14.2 per cent. In addition, there were no significant challenges to the government, a marked contrast to the previous four years.

However, coalition government did not get any easier: in 1923, a grand coalition was put together with no fewer than four political parties. It was a noble attempt, but the differences between the parties were too great. In fact, as stability increased in Germany and the air of crisis was over, parties began to act less in the national interest and more in the interest of their own supporters. The SPD, for example, opted out of 'bourgeois' or middle-class coalitions between 1923-1928 in an attempt to keep the support of the trade unions and prevent the workers from defecting to the KPD. Unfortunately, the SPD remained the largest party in the Reichstag until 1932 and its absence from coalitions was a blow to political stability. It also led the way for a series of Centre-right coalitions which were suspicious of left-wing politics.

The cause of the left-wing was further undermined by the weaknesses of the KPD. After 1923, comparative stability seemed to rob the communist movement of its sense of urgency. Many members and supporters disappeared and those who remained spent much of their time arguing about links with Russia and possible future action. One historian writes 'in 1924-30 the KPD was not a truly significant force within the workers' movement or on the stage of national politics; though conspicuous, it had little real power.' (Koll, 1988).

One of the biggest blows to the Left, however, came in 1925 with the death of Ebert and the election of a new President. The KPD refused to support the SPD candidate, Wilhelm Marx and this failure of the Left to work together brought victory to the right-wing candidate, General Paul von Hindenburg, Field Marshal in the First World War.

## Was Stresemann a great statesman?

### A SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

The reputation of Gustav Stresemann has been debated since his death in 1929. Initially, both up to 1933 and after 1945, he was regarded by some as a hero, as someone who abandoned his nationalist, expansionist ambitions and who became a European statesman, fighting for peace and prosperity. This sudden conversion apparently took place around 1920. However, the publication of his letter to the ex-Crown Prince (see Source 7) provided a different view of Stresemann, this time as someone who wanted only to restore German power through expansion. From the 1950s, historians no longer regarded Stresemann as a great European statesman, but a calculating nationalist in the tradition of Kaiser Wilhelm II before him and Hitler after him. More recent appraisals have indeed accepted that Stresemann's methods of co-operation in Europe were a means to an end and that ultimately he wished to see Germany as a great power again. The difference however is that recent historians have not therefore condemned him as a hypocrite. If Stresemann was a 'coolly calculating realist, nationalist and power-politician' then he 'was no different in that respect from other European statesmen of his time...' (Kolb, 1988)

### TWO CONTRASTING VIEWS

#### Source 5

Stresemann's long-term policy was one of preparing for warlike expansion...He worked towards a war, but always kept in view that armed force as a political instrument was, under certain conditions, not calculated to serve the interests of the classes he represented.

Ruge, *Stresemann*, 1965

#### Source 6

[There was a] great outcry against Stresemann after this death when his papers revealed clearly his intention to destroy the existing settlement. The outcry was grotesquely unjustified...it was inconceivable that any German could accept the Treaty of Versailles as a permanent settlement...Stresemann wanted to do it peacefully...and this belief entitles him to rank with Bismarck as a great German, even as a great European, statesman. Maybe even greater.

Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1981

### Activity

Consider these questions before completing the task below:

- 1 How do the two views (Ruge and Taylor) differ?
- 2 Which of the sources 7 to 11 support each view?
- 3 Why do you think the two historians differ?

### TASK

Your task is to produce three appraisals of Stresemann. Each one should draw on the information about Stresemann in this chapter, paying particular attention to the material presented here. They should also contain evidence of further research, either from other books or the internet, and appropriate images of Stresemann.

- 5 An obituary written immediately after Stresemann's death
- 6 An entry into a biographical dictionary written in 1960
- 7 A summary of his life written for a GCSE textbook in the present time.

Each appraisal should include something about his life, his aims and his achievements.

#### Source 1

In my opinion there are three great tasks that confront German foreign policy in the more immediate future:

In the first place the solution of the Reparations question in a sense tolerable for Germany... Secondly, the protection of Germans abroad, those 10 to 12 million of our kindred who now live under a foreign yoke in foreign lands.

The third great task is the readjustment of our eastern frontiers, the recovery of Danzig, the Polish Corridor, and a correction of the frontier in Upper Silesia.

In the background stands the union with German Austria, although I am quite clear that this not merely brings no advantages to Germany, but seriously complicates the problem of the German Reich...[The Locarno Treaty] rules out the possibility of any military conflict with France for the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine...The question of a choice between east and west does not arise as the result of our joining the League. Such a choice can only be made when backed by military force. That, alas, we do not possess...

Letter from Stresemann to the ex-Crown Prince, 7 September 1925, outlining his aims

#### Source 2

I should like to know how a statesman can pursue a policy if the conditions for maintaining it are absent. Think of the winter now before us. All these matters, credits, etc., will only be granted to a peaceful Europe, and that is one of the results of Locarno... When I consider, however, the German nationalists voting against us, and the Social Democrats voting against us too...and the whole affair coming to nothing in the end, as a German I can hardly understand it, and a foreigner could not understand it at all. A refusal would have the effect of a hard frost after a succession of lovely May days.

Extract from Stresemann's speech to the Dresden Press, October 1925

#### Source 3

Germany's relations with the League are not...confined to the possibilities of co-operation in general aims and issues. In many respects the League is the heir and executor of the Treaties of 1919. Out of these Treaties there have arisen in the past, I may say frankly, many differences between the League and Germany. I hope that our co-operation within the League will make it easier to discuss these questions.

Extract from Stresemann's speech to the League of Nations, September 1926

#### Source 4

In the course of my life I have come to believe that nothing great and permanent has ever been done in the world without give and take, compensation and compromise.

Stresemann, 1927

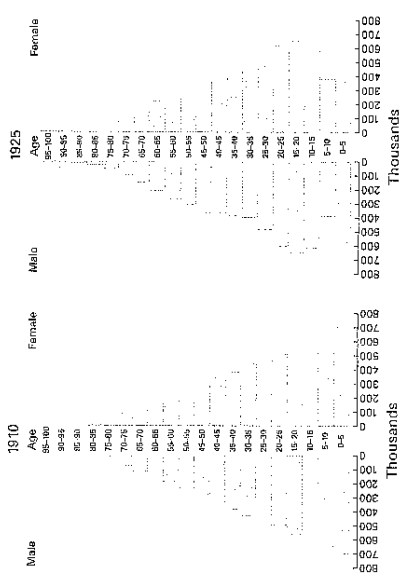


## Weimar society

The 1920s were a time of social change throughout Europe and this was especially true of Germany. The war had left its mark on society as had the industrial expansion of pre-war years which had led to the growth of cities such as Berlin. In addition, the changing expectations of women, the increased leisure opportunities and the first signs of a relatively new phenomenon, long-term unemployment, were all examples of how society was facing new challenges and inevitable change.

The Weimar Constitution promised freedom and equality to everyone, but not everyone accepted this. The German historian Penkert has described the period as a crisis of modernity. It is true that perhaps the biggest tension was between those who wanted change and a more 'modern' way of life and those who clung on to more traditional values and lifestyles. This type of conflict is hardly unique, but in Germany it was being fought at a time of acute political and economic crisis. It was also used to the advantage of right-wing groups, such as the Nazis, who claimed the moral high ground and promised to protect society against evil modern influences.

## Population changes



The population changes were partly the result of long-term trends, such as the growing ideal of a smaller family and an extended life expectancy. Added to that was the impact of the First World War and a baby boom between 1900 and 1910. Both of these latter changes had a profound impact on society. There were more single women in need of employment and there was also a large number of adolescents reaching employment age with an economic crisis just around the corner.

## Youth

The youth of Germany were pioneer audiences and made the most of new commercial opportunities such as cinema, the radio and the gramophone. They were also active in setting up youth clubs although the presence of alternative groups known as *Wilde Chiquen* (wild bunch) seemed to confirm fears that youths were rejecting authority. It was true that during the war, absent fathers

and increased hardship led to an increase in juvenile delinquency, but on the other hand, in the 1920s increased leisure time and fewer children per family meant that working-class children were receiving greater attention from their parents than before. One thing was certain, however. Higher unemployment hit youths especially hard, and this led to a restlessness which helped to cultivate a hostility to the Weimar system and increase support for extreme political parties. This included support for the Nazis who became the most popular party among university students.

## Women

The Weimar Republic appeared, on the surface at least, to welcome the emancipation and equality of women. The Constitution stated that all Germans are equal before the law and women were allowed to vote in national and state elections for the first time. In 1920 111 women were elected to the Reichstag. In addition, images of the 'new woman' arrived from America, particularly in film. Not only were women now expected to keep a spotless home - the result of new so-called labour-saving inventions - but they were also expected to be glamorous and have a life and even a career of their own.

The reality was somewhat different. Although many women did work, often out of necessity they did not necessarily gain equal pay and often had to make do with lower status jobs. Despite this, employed women were the target of male resentment, especially in times of economic recession when, ironically, their lower rates of pay shielded them from redundancy. Criticism of the *Doppelverdienst* (a married woman bringing home a second wage) was voiced by both men and women and led in 1932 to the 'Law Governing the Legal Status of Female Civil Servants' which allowed women who were second earners to be dismissed from their job.

It isn't entirely clear, however, what women themselves wanted. Whilst some clearly welcomed the opportunity to study and carve out a career, others felt burdened by the expectations placed upon them by the 'new woman' image. The largest women's group, the IDF (League of German Women's Associations), was moderate in its outlook, stressing the difference between sexes and encouraging women to take jobs where their 'natural' qualities would be most needed - such as social work. It is in this context that high female support for the Nazis can perhaps be explained.

## Jews

Another group which stood to benefit from the social rights enshrined in the Weimar Constitution were the Jews. They made up less than 1 per cent of Germany's population: 570,000 out of a population of 60 million. They were mainly middle class and made a significant contribution to the cultural and professional life of Germany. Eleven per cent of Germany's doctors and 16 per cent of Germany's lawyers were Jewish, for example. Many were involved in trade and commerce but contrary to propaganda at the time, did not control the major industries nor did they control the banks. They generally considered themselves German first and Jewish second.

Although anti-Semitism had existed in Germany, as elsewhere, for a long time, the rise of nationalist right-wing parties in Weimar intensified anti-Semitic behaviour. Jews were made the scapegoats for Germany's humiliating defeat in the First World War and the economic crises of the 1920s. When compared with the horrors that were to come, the position of Jews in Weimar Germany seems good, but it was a long way from total acceptance and toleration.

The eight-hour day imposed by the government led to increased leisure time. New technology, such as the cinema, helped to satisfy people's desire for entertainment and also brought new influences into Germany, especially from America.

## Sources 12

Changes in the German population between 1910 and 1925.

### The task ahead

- ▶ How did the population change between 1910 and 1925?
- ▶ Think about the following areas in particular. Was the population rising or falling? Was the birth rate rising or falling? What was the impact of the First World War? Which age groups were particularly well represented in 1925? What was the balance between men and women?
- ▶ Now consider what impact the changes might have had on Weimar society.

### Further reading

The best source on Weimar society is Penkert, *The Weimar Republic, 1911*. See also Brodhörster, *Weimar Germany, 1996*.

By 1925, it was claimed that 4.3 million out of a possible 9 million young people belonged to an official youth club or organization.

Between 1917 and 1925, the proportion of women in work increased from 31.2 per cent to 35.6 per cent. The types of work women tended to do also changed, with a shift away from domestic service and farm work and towards industry, commerce and public employment such as typing, shop work and teaching.

### Activity

Divide into small groups or individually, choose one of the following areas to research in more detail:

- ▶ Youth
  - ▶ Women
  - ▶ Jews
  - ▶ Culture (see pages 108-9)
- Use the information in this book as a starting point. Then use other books and the Internet/CD ROMs to research into your chosen area in more detail. Focus your research around the following question: Was Weimar society stable and united? Present your findings to the rest of the group, using at least one image to illustrate your points. After the presentations, discuss the question as a whole group, drawing on all the information which has been shared.

We in no way felt we were assimilated like everyone else; Jews, but Germans like other Germans... our whole life was deeply rooted in German life and had no other foundation...

Richard Bendix

## The Roaring Twenties: the life of an aristocrat

### Source 17

14 January 1919: Sad to say, our revolution has not been the triumph of a growing body of political opinion, but simply the consequence of the old political structure crumbling away. Had it not been for the war, it would have continued in its jagged way a long time yet...

11 February 1919: He [Ebert] is respectable, likeable and efficient, but how much he will contribute to the invigoration of political life is at least questionable...

10 January 1920: Today the Peace Treaty was ratified at Paris, the war is over. A terrible era begins for Europe, like the gathering of clouds before a storm...

18 December 1924: I talked for quite a while to Albert Einstein at a banker's jubilee banquet where we both felt rather out of place. In reply to my question what problems he was working on now, he said that he was engaged in thinking...

22 December 1924: In the evening saw Sternheim's play '1913'... A strong and profound play

29 January 1925: In the evening saw Pirandello's 'Six Persons in Search of an Author' at Reinhardt's theatre...

22 December 1925: Opening night of a series of guest performances by Diaghilev and his ballet company... storms of applause. I went behind the footlights and congratulated him...

19 January 1926: With Max to the first night of Richard Strauss's 'Elektra'. The orchestra... played with splendid, headlong, tempestuous verve...

17 February 1926: In the evening I went again to the Negro revue starring Josephine Baker. All these shows are a mixture of jungle and skyscraper elements. The same holds good for the tone and rhythm of their music, jazz, Ultramodern and ultra primitive...

27 October 1928: Saw Reinhardt's production of 'Romeo and Juliet' at the Berliner Theatre. An incredible middle. So much intellect and bright ideas that the upshot is an inferior provincial performance...

30 October 1928: An evening at Piscator's attractive bright flat, designed by Gropius [founder of the Bauhaus] without frills but pleasant and providing a good background for people... was introduced to Brecht [famous German playwright] - strikingly degenerate look, almost like a criminal...

7 October 1929: It becomes ever more obvious to what an intense degree the nation as a whole has participated in the obsequies [funeral rites] for Sresenmann. Hundreds of thousands paid their last respects to him at his lying-in-state. One newspaper has justly commented that his was a national, not a state, funeral...

Extracts from *The Diaries of a Cosmopolitan: Count Harry Kessler 1918-1937*, 1971

### Biography

#### Count Harry Kessler

Kessler was born in 1868, the son of a Hamburg banker and a famous Irish beauty. He was educated in France and England and went to university in Bonn and Leipzig. He went on to fight in the First World War in Belgium and the Eastern Front and became the first German Minister in Warsaw. Kessler hated the Kaiser and welcomed the Republic which earned him the nickname 'Red Count' although he was never a supporter of the SPD or the left in general.

Instead he helped to found the DDP. He was never a Reichstag deputy but did serve on various diplomatic missions, combining his two beliefs

of patriotism and pacifism. However, Kessler's diaries are not restricted to his political observations. They also provide a fascinating account of the life of a wealthy gentleman living in Berlin in the 1920s.

### Think about

▶ What can we learn from Kessler's Diaries?

▶ How valuable are Kessler's Diaries as evidence about the Weimar Republic?

## The Wall Street Crash

The so-called 'Golden Years' of the Weimar Republic ended abruptly on 24 October 1929. After a few days of wild speculation, the American stock market crashed. No more American loans were granted and Germany had to find a way of repaying the loans she had received in the previous years. The impact on Germany, not surprisingly, was considerable. Banks closed, industry laid-off workers, unemployment soared and foreign trade suffered badly. Between 1929 and 1932, the value of German exports fell from £630 million to £280 million and national income fell by 39 per cent. Unemployment rose from 1.3 million in 1929 to over 3 million by September 1930. By the beginning of 1933, it stood at over 6 million, a figure which does not include those who had been unemployed for too long to claim unemployment benefit.

It is difficult to imagine the impact that this must have had, psychologically as well as physically. At one point, one in three Germans were unemployed and this time they could not turn to America or the rest of Europe for help. Hyperinflation six years before had already robbed many of their savings. Now they had nothing to fall back on. Fear was spreading, not just among the unemployed but amongst those lucky enough to have a job, for who knew when that security would be taken away?

### Source 18

An almost unbroken chain of homeless men extends the whole length of the great Hamburg-Berlin highway... The only people who shouted and waved at me and ran along beside my automobile... were the newcomers... But most of the hikers paid no attention to me. They walked separately or in small groups with their eyes on the ground. And they had the queer, stumbling gait of barefoot people... some were guild members - carpenters with embroidered wallets, knee breeches, and broad felt hats... but they were in a minority. Far more numerous were... the unskilled young people for the most part who had been unable to find a job and never expected to have one. There was something else that had never been seen before - whole families that had piled all their goods into baby carriages and wheelbarrows that they were pushing along as they plodded forward in dumb despair. It was a whole nation on the march.

Heinrich Haesser *The Unemployed*, 1932

## Conclusions

The economy did recover from its terrible state in 1923, although not completely. Higher wages and increased production figures concealed problems such as poor export figures and growing unemployment. Some groups flourished in Germany and many enjoyed a happier and more prosperous time. Others did not share such good fortune and parties such as the Nazis began to make small inroads into groups such as farmers and the lower middle class, though nothing on the scale of 1930-1933.

In foreign policy, Germany was no longer seen as an outcast by the rest of Europe and small gestures towards a revision of the Treaty of Versailles were accomplished. This was at a political cost, however, and the divisions between the parties grew bigger. Despite this, there was less open opposition to the Republic during this period with no attempted coups or assassinations.