

Further Reading

Texts designed for AS and A2 Level students

From Bismarck to Hitler: Germany 1890–1933 by Geoff Layton (Hodder & Stoughton, Access to History series, 1996)
Imperial Germany 1890–1918 by Ian Porter and Ian Armour (Longman, Seminar Studies series, 1991)

More advanced reading

Germany 1866–1945 by Gordon Craig (Oxford University Press, 1978)
The German Empire, 1871–1918 by Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Berghahn, 1985)
From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871–1945 by Fritz Fischer (Unwin Hyman, 1986)
Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany by R.J. Evans (ed.) (Croom Helm, 1978)
Imperial Germany 1850–1918 by Edgar Feuchtwanger (Routledge, 2001)
The Fontana History of Germany 1780–1918: the Long Nineteenth Century by David Blackbourn (Fontana, HarperCollins, 1997) provides an excellent introduction to recent work on German history in this period.

6 From democracy to dictatorship 1918–1945

Key Issues

- How stable was the Weimar Republic in the 1920s?
 - Why was Hitler able to establish such a powerful dictatorship in Germany in the course of the 1930s?
 - What were the effects of the Nazi dictatorship upon German politics and society?
- 6.1 How true is it that the Weimar Republic was brought into being by, and represented, democratic interests in Germany?
 - 6.2 What forces in Germany opposed the Weimar Republic and for what reasons?
 - 6.3 Why were the years 1920–1923 a period of crisis for the Weimar Republic?
 - 6.4 In what respects did the years 1924–1929 constitute 'the golden age of the Weimar Republic'?
 - 6.5 Why was the Weimar Republic unable to survive the crisis generated by the Wall Street Crash?
 - 6.6 What was the contribution of Adolf Hitler to the rise of Nazism?
 - 6.7 What were the main political and social doctrines of National Socialism?
 - 6.8 How did Hitler ever become Chancellor of Germany?
 - 6.9 How was Nazi power consolidated after 1933?
 - 6.10 How did the Nazi state impose its authority?
 - 6.11 How radical were the economic changes that the Nazis brought about in Germany?
 - 6.12 Did the Nazis bring about social and cultural revolutions in Germany?
 - 6.13 How did Nazi racial politics turn into genocide?
 - 6.14 To what extent was Nazi authority resisted within Germany?
 - 6.15 Was Hitler responsible for the Second World War?
 - 6.16 Historical interpretation: Was Hitler a weak dictator?
 - 6.17 What was the impact of the Second World War upon civilian life in Germany?

Framework of Events

1918	November: Abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Armistice signed to end First World War
1919	February: Friedrich Ebert elected President of the German Republic July: Adoption of Weimar constitution. Spartacist rising
1920	March: Failure of Kapp Putsch
1921	May: Germany agrees to pay reparations demanded by allies
1922	April: Treaty of Rapallo between Germany and Russia
1923	January: Occupation of the Ruhr by French and Belgian troops August: Appointment of Gustav Stresemann as Chancellor November: Failure of Hitler's Beerhall Putsch. Introduction of Rentenmark as German currency
1924	September: Introduction of Dawes Plan
1924	April: Election of Paul von Hindenburg as President of German Republic December: Signature of Locarno Treaties
1926	September: Germany admitted to League of Nations
1929	February: Germany accepts Kellogg-Briand Pact October: Collapse of American Stock Market

1930	March: Brüning becomes German Chancellor
	September: Nazis win 107 seats in Reichstag elections
1931	June: Hoover moratorium on reparation payments
1932	April: Hitler wins 13 million votes in presidential election, but is defeated by Hindenburg
	June: Von Papen becomes Chancellor
	July: Nazis win 230 seats in Reichstag elections
	December: Von Schleicher becomes Chancellor
1933	January: Hitler appointed German Chancellor
	February: Reichstag fire
	March: Enabling Law grants Hitler emergency powers
	April: National boycott of Jewish businesses
	October: German withdrawal from League of Nations
1934	January: German–Polish non-aggression pact
	June: Purge of SA leaders in 'Night of the Long Knives'
	August: Death of President Hindenburg; Hitler assumes title of <i>Führer</i>
1935	January: Plebiscite authorises return of Saarland to Germany
	September: Nuremberg Race Laws against Jews
1936	March: German remilitarisation of Rhineland
	August: Introduction of compulsory military service
	October: Introduction of economic Four-Year Plan
1938	March: German <i>Anschluss</i> with Austria
	October: German occupation of Sudetenland
	November: 'Crystal Night' (<i>Kristallnacht</i>) anti-Jewish pogrom
1939	March: Germany renounces non-aggression pact with Poland
	May: Conclusion of 'Pact of Steel' with Italy
	August: Conclusion of pact with Soviet Union
	September: German invasion of Poland. Britain and France declare war on Germany
1941	September: Removal of teachers considered disloyal to Nazis
	December: 'Rationalisation Decrees'
1942	May: Start of bomber raids on German cities
1944	July: Attempt to assassinate Hitler

Overview

THE Weimar Republic was not simply an artificial regime brought into existence by the peculiar circumstances that prevailed in 1918. In part, it had its roots in a tradition of German social democracy that can be traced back, through the Bismarckian period, to the 1848 revolutions and beyond. This tradition, committed to constitutional government and to the rule of law, had attracted sufficient support in the pre-war years to make the Social Democrats the largest party in the Reichstag (German parliament). The Social Democrats were hurried into power in 1918, not by the due process of parliamentary election, and certainly not by significant long-term shifts in social and economic structures. Instead the change was precipitated by the catastrophe that overtook the German war effort in that year. At that point, finding themselves at a military disadvantage from which there seemed to be no escape, the German generals sued for peace in the full expectation that the terms would reflect the even nature of the long conflict. As a means to that end, they entered into an unlikely alliance with Social Democrat politicians, and abandoned the Kaiser who had seemed hitherto to provide the best guarantee of their interests. When much harsher peace terms

were put to them, they had no choice but to accept them, given the military situation on the Western Front and the political instability at home.

After such promising parliamentary progress in peacetime, therefore, German social democracy was catapulted into power with three substantial handicaps. One, of course, was its share of responsibility for the harsh peace terms imposed upon Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Another was that social democracy had to compete in the years after 1918 with other powerful political traditions and with new political forces. Even if the German army had been defeated, and that certainly was not the case on the Eastern Front, German conservatism and German nationalism remained strong and influential. From the east, too, came the influence of the Russian Revolution to make German Communism a far stronger force than it had ever been in the pre-war years. The third handicap was of a more practical nature, for this new government was obliged to meet the enormous economic demands imposed upon it by the victorious allies.

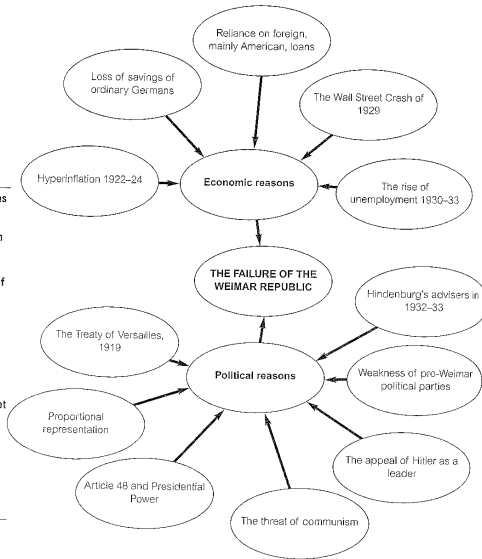
However, the Weimar Republic survived in spite of, and perhaps because of, these circumstances. It survived the challenge of political extremism in the years immediately after the war because conservative elements, such as the army, were willing to support it against the 'greater evil' of Communism. It survived the economic chaos of 1923 for two main reasons. In part its image was enhanced by the patriotic stance that it was able to strike when French forces occupied the Ruhr. It was also of the greatest importance that the subsequent collapse of the German currency convinced the United States of America that they should participate actively in a more moderate enforcement of the peace terms. It was possible to believe, in the later 1920s, that the German Republic was edging towards normality.

A second catastrophe – the collapse of the American stock market in 1929 – undermined the Republic's position altogether. The very nature of the crisis ensured that Germany would receive no further assistance from the powerful capitalist economies that had come to its aid in 1923. In the early 1930s, moreover, social democracy faced a new threat from the right wing of German politics. After their failure to seize power by naked violence in the early 1920s, the National Socialists (Nazis) had reinvented themselves as a parliamentary party with a manifesto that embraced the whole range of German political discontent. In these catastrophic economic circumstances, their appeal as a new and radical force proved irresistible to many German voters and, ultimately, to Germany's political hierarchy.

Adolf Hitler came to office with an insane vision of Germany's political future, but with a remarkable talent as a pragmatic politician. The circumstances under which the Nazis came to power imposed two priorities upon them. One was the elimination of rival political forces in what was still, in 1933, a constitutional state; the other was the solution of the enormous social and economic problems that had played such a major role in the Nazis' success. Both of these goals had been achieved to a large degree by 1937 by ruthless and single-minded means. Many historians doubt the long-term viability of the Nazi economy by this date, and some have recently begun to question whether Nazism had indeed overcome all differences of political opinion within Germany. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Nazi regime was turning in the late 1930s towards the fulfilment of its wider ideological aims. Whether Nazi anti-semitism, the revision of the Versailles Treaty,

and the pursuit of territorial expansion in eastern Europe followed a master plan, or whether Hitler improvised such policies as circumstances allowed, these were clearly among the priorities of German politics in the late 1930s. They led German policy into a wider arena. If they were not the sole causes of the world conflict that developed between 1939 and 1941, they contributed enormously to the destruction of the German state and to a dramatic redirection of German history in the second half of the 20th century.

1. What do you regard as the most important reason why the Weimar Republic failed? Explain your answer.
2. Place the reasons in the mind map in order of importance. Which do you regard as more important – economic reasons or political reasons? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Can you find links between reasons? (For instance, the 'Wall Street Crash' led to a 'rise in unemployment' and increased 'the appeal of Hitler' and the Nazis.) Can you find any other links which contain economic and political factors?



6.1 How true is it that the Weimar Republic was brought into being by, and represented, democratic interests in Germany?

The political forces within the Republic

Republican government in Germany was born (9 November 1918) under the most unfavourable circumstances. Quite apart from the imminent collapse of the war effort, and the abdication of the Kaiser, the fleet was in mutiny at Kiel and at Wilhelmshaven. Soldiers' and workers' councils had appeared in Berlin, Cologne and Munich, where a Bavarian Republic had been declared. The name by which the German republic is commonly known derived from the fact that the dangerous condition of the capital in 1919 obliged the newly elected National Assembly to meet in the small provincial town of Weimar. The early failure of successive emergency governments, the desire of many conservatives to present a liberal front to the allies, and the radical nature of much anti-government agitation, all placed the Social Democratic Party (SPD) at the forefront of events. The shape of the Weimar Republic was to be determined by the state and by the aims of that party.

The German socialist movement was deeply divided. An Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) had broken away from the SPD (April 1917), and a more extreme Communist Party (KPD) had been formed in November 1918. While the Communists supported the seizure of power and the implementation of radical programmes, the SPD followed the lead of its chief, Friedrich Ebert, in preferring peaceful, democratic change through an elected assembly. The non-revolutionary nature of Ebert's government was confirmed on the first day of the Republic's life, when he accepted the offer from General Groener of army assistance against the forces of the left. His decision undoubtedly strengthened his government by alliance with such a traditional and respected force. Groener possibly saved Germany from the intervention of allied troops. Naturally, however, the decision drew fierce criticism from the left. This was increased in the next few weeks when army units, aided by a newly formed Volunteer Corps (*Frickorps*), bloodily suppressed a Communist ('Spartacist') rising in Berlin (January 1919) and dispersed the Soviet that had briefly held power in Munich (April 1919). Thus, while the Republic came to power across the corpses of some of its enemies, it owed that passage to a force that was merely a temporary ally. In the light of subsequent events, it was ominous that Groener had made no promise to protect the Republic from the forces of the right.

The Weimar constitution

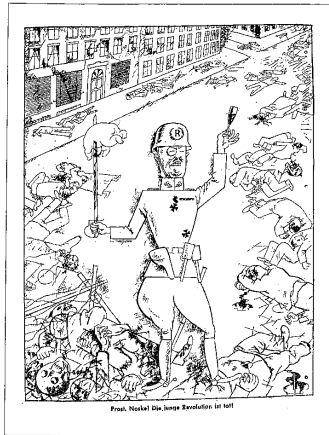
The elections to the National Assembly (January 1919) placed the SPD at the head of the poll, but without an overall majority. It was thus obliged to enter a coalition with the Centre Party and the Democratic Party (DDP), which was to characterise the fragmented nature of political life in the Weimar Republic. The constitution drafted by the Assembly (July 1919) nevertheless represented a considerable democratic advance since 1914. It named the Reichstag as the sovereign authority of the state, and decreed that it should be elected every four years by proportional representation, by all men and women over the age of 21. The President, elected every seven years, was subject to the authority of the Reichstag, although he also possessed special powers for use in an emergency. A further outstanding break from the principles of the Bismarckian constitution concerned the powers of the upper house (*Reichsrat*). This continued to represent the interests of the component parts of the federal state, but was now

Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925)
Of relatively humble background, Ebert joined the SPD in 1890; as a trade union activist, he was on the police 'black list'; he held assorted jobs, until elected to the Reichstag in 1912; and became joint leader of the SPD in 1913. Nominated first Chancellor of the newly declared Weimar Republic on 9 November 1918, Ebert oversaw the armistice and the difficult transition to parliamentary democracy. He became Weimar's first President in August 1919, and used Article 48 to stabilise Weimar democracy. Ebert was criticised by the left for using the Army and Free Corps units to suppress workers' uprisings, and for failing to engage in a radical revolution; he was criticised by the right for his support of trade unions and workers' rights. Died prematurely from appendicitis in 1925.

General Wilhelm Groener (1867–1939)
Military commander and politician. Succeeded Erich von Ludendorff as head of General Staff (1918). Subsequently Minister of Transport (1920–23) and Minister of Defence (1928–32) under the German Republic.

Proportional representation: System of voting in which each political party is represented in the parliament in proportion to the number of people who vote for it in the election.

A satire by artist George Grosz on the conservative triumph in the early years of the Weimar Republic. The caption reads: 'Cheers, Noske! The Young Revolution is Dead.'



subservient in all respects to the Reichstag. These component parts, instead of existing as sovereign kingdoms or duchies, were now designated merely as provinces (*Länder*).

A vigorous historical debate has surrounded the events of 1918–19 and their significance. For historian A.J. Nicholls they represented a true democratic advance for Germany (*Weimar and the Rise of Hitler*, 1968), bringing peace and a more genuinely representative system in place of the parliamentary 'charades' of Bismarck's time. Yet to Gordon Craig (*Germany 1866–1945*, 1978) these events constituted an 'aborted revolution' which failed to change basic political attitudes and prejudices, and which thus condemned the republic to failure in the long run. John Hiden has compromised between the two positions, seeing the 1919 constitution, like the events that gave birth to it, as 'a synthesis between progressive political and social ideas and the desire to protect traditional institutions'.

1. What reasons led to the formation of a republican government, under Social Democrat leadership, in Germany in 1918?

2. To what extent was a democratic form of government established in Germany 1918–1919?

6.2 What forces in Germany opposed the Weimar Republic and for what reasons?

As imminent defeat in war brought the Republic into being, so its most pressing task was the conclusion of peace. In this task its freedom of action was almost nil. Advised by the military chiefs that continuation of hostilities was impossible, and forced to accept the allies' terms as the only alternative to invasion, the Weimar Republic nevertheless inherited a

Fourteen Points. The 'Fourteen Points' were listed in a speech by President Woodrow Wilson in January 1918, intended to set out a blueprint for lasting peace in Europe after the First World War.

Social democracy. A kind of socialism in which people are allowed a relatively large amount of freedom.

Reparations. Payments made by a defeated state to compensate the victorious state(s) for damage or expenses caused by the war.

legacy of bitterness and resentment at its actions. German hopes that peace would be based upon Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', and that the replacement of the Kaiser by social democracy would incline the allies to leniency, proved misplaced. The terms that the republican ministers Müller and Bell finally accepted caused resentment. Among the causes of resentment were the following:

- Germany would not be accepted into the League of Nations.
- Germany lost eastern territories to states that could not pretend to have defeated it.
- Future German industry would pass the fruits of its labour to foreign capitalists in the form of reparations.

Worse, it was claimed that the German armies had not been beaten by the allies at all, but betrayed by the secret enemy at home – the socialist and the Jew. The myth of the 'Stab in the Back' (*Dolchstoß*) was born.

Despite the widespread feeling that the true basis of the Republic is not the Weimar Constitution but the Treaty of Versailles, it is not fair to imagine that the regime was doomed by the circumstances of its birth. For all its losses, republican Germany still had potentially the strongest economy in Europe, and its recovery was rapid. The political demoralisation caused by Versailles was a more serious problem, for it not only guaranteed a constant right-wing opposition to the Republic, but also undermined the initial enthusiasm of more moderate patriots for the regime. The future of the Weimar Republic, therefore, depended upon surviving long enough for such passions to cool.

Opponents on the left

The acceptance of the Weimar constitution in the Reichstag, by 262 votes to 75, and the success of the more moderate political parties in the elections of 1919, should not obscure the hostility that existed in Germany to the new regime. The election result, as the left-wing commentator E. Troeltsch explained it, was not really a vote of confidence, for 'this democracy was in essence an anti-revolutionary system, dedicated to the maintenance of order and opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat'. On the left extreme of the Republic's enemies stood the KPD, separated from the regime by a gulf of bitterness formed during the risings of 1919, and by the brutal murders of Communist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg by *Freikorps* men. By December 1920, when its decision to join the International (the International Organisation of Communist and Socialist Parties) attracted many converts from the USPD, the KPD could boast a membership of 400,000 with 33 daily newspapers at its disposal. Although closely tied to a pro-Moscow policy by the leadership of Ernst Thälmann (1925–33), the party pursued a cautious policy, preferring to consolidate its strength, membership and influence steadily rather than undertaking further adventures of the sort that had failed in 1919. Its achievement was, however, unimpressive. It failed to win any great influence among the trade unions, and alienated many potential supporters by its pro-Soviet stance. Nevertheless, the hostility between communists and social democrats continued into the next decade and helps to explain the failure of the left in Germany to resist the rise of Nazism.

Ernst Thälmann (1886–1944)

Originally active in the trade union movement and in the Social Democratic Party, Thälmann joined the German Communist Party in 1924. Party Secretary and twice party candidate in presidential elections. Arrested by the Nazis (1933), and died in Buchenwald concentration camp.

Opponents on the right

A more daunting array of political opponents lay to the right of the Republic. The nationalists, grouped especially around the German National People's Party (DNVP) represented the brand of conservatism

Völkisch: German adjective used to describe a policy or idea based upon the principle of race. The *völkisch* groups laid their stress upon the concept of race (*Volk*), preaching the superiority of German racial characteristics and culture, and the need to protect them against alien influences, especially the harmful influence of the Jews.

Putschism: Violent insurrection. *Putsch* is a German word indicating the violent seizure of power by a group or party; it is the equivalent of the French *coup d'état*.

Stormtroopers: Small groups of well-armed four soldiers. The *Sturmabteilung* (SA or Brownshirts) was a paramilitary force in Germany in the early 1930s. It was an organisation of about 4.2 million men who fought street battles against their opponents.

Gregor Strasser (1892–1934) Joined the Nazi Party in 1920 and took part in the Beerhall Putsch (1923). Favoured the left-wing elements of National Socialist doctrine and opposed Hitler's alliances with 'big business'. Strasser resigned his party office in protest in 1930, and was murdered during the 'Night of the Long Knives'. His brother Otto (1897–1974), also prominent on the left wing of the movement, left the Nazi Party in 1930, and fled into exile in Canada.

1. What reasons did German nationalists and German communists have to feel that they had been betrayed by the Weimar Republic?

2. To what extent do you agree with the claim that 'the greatest handicap of the Weimar Republic lay in the fact that it had accepted the terms of the Versailles Treaty'?

that desired a return to the principles and institutions of Wilhelmine Germany. The DNVP had influential support in the civil service, within the legal system, among industrialists, and in the churches. Indeed, the hostility of the legal system towards the Republic was clearly shown in the lenient sentences passed against right-wing terrorists and rebels. The nationalist threat to the regime was, nevertheless, limited by several factors. The leadership of the DNVP was divided over the issue of co-operation with the republican regime, and the whole emphasis of the party's policies was upon principles partly compromised by the defeat of the old Germany in the First World War.

In the course of the later 1920s, the nationalists began to surrender the leadership of the right-wing opposition to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP or 'Nazis'), the most successful of the *völkisch* groups that appeared on the right of German politics. Founded in 1919 by Anton Drexler, but soon dominated by the brilliant orator Adolf Hitler, the Nazis came close to ruin in their early life by placing their trust in a policy of *putschism*. This resulted in public discredit and in the imprisonment of their leaders. Although the subsequent change of tactics – whereby the NSDAP now sought power by parliamentary means – led to poor results, the party had hidden strengths. Its local organisation, although uneven, was especially strong in Bavaria. Elsewhere it employed some notable local leaders, such as Gregor Strasser and Julius Streicher, who ensured tight local discipline.

It also deployed a powerful paramilitary force, the *stormtroopers* (*Sturmabteilung* or SA), which proved more than a match for its Communist rivals in the street violence that scarred the political life of the Weimar Republic. Lastly, its broad policy appealed to the resentments of defeated Germans, both 'national' and 'socialist'. Although this policy had little success in the years of republican prosperity, it promised to serve the party well should Germany once more fall upon hard times.

It is open to dispute whether the German Army (*Reichswehr*), in its reduced, post-Versailles form, should be numbered among the Republic's enemies. Although it had done a great deal to enable the Weimar government to survive its first weeks, there was much in the principles of the traditional officer class, which still drew 21% of its membership from the nobility, that was at odds with the philosophy of the social-democratic Republic. The view of Hans von Seeckt (Chief of Army Command 1920–26) was that the *Reichswehr* should be an apolitical body, preserving its traditional values above the hurly-burly of party rivalry. Comparison between *Reichswehr* action in 1919, and its refusal to act against army veterans in *Freikorps* units during the Kapp Putsch, clearly showed that its attitude towards the government was merely lukewarm. In the words of John Hiden, in *The Weimar Republic* (1974), it 'would tolerate the Republic for the time being in its own interests'.

6.3 Why were the years 1920–1923 a period of crisis for the Weimar Republic?

The Kapp Putsch (1920) and the Beerhall Putsch (1923)

In its first months the Weimar Republic fought for its life against the hostility of the left, surviving by virtue of its temporary allies. In the next four years, however, there was much to maintain the sense of crisis and bitterness. The publication in April 1921 of the magnitude of Germany's reparation payments to the allies, combined with Matthias Erzberger's plans to strengthen the national economy by taxes upon war profits and inherited wealth to create enormous resentment on the right. This merged with existing nationalist hostility to subject the Republic to increasing right-wing violence. During these stages of the Republic's life, wrote historian Gordon Craig, 'its normal state was crisis'.

The first of these violent assaults was the Kapp Putsch (March 1920). Although this attempted coup was a symptom of wider right-wing discontent, the immediate trigger was the government's attempts to disband a *Freikorps* unit under Captain Ehrhardt at the request of the allies. Obviously, the *Reichswehr* took up a neutral stance, claiming that 'obviously there can be no talk of letting *Reichswehr* fight against *Reichswehr*'. Wolfgang Kapp's plans were frustrated instead by Berlin workers and civil servants who refused the orders of the rebels and denied them transport facilities and publicity. Unfortunately, this action was not repeated in later moments of republican peril.

Meanwhile, Germany experienced political violence and assassination unparalleled in its history. The most spectacular examples were the murders of Matthias Erzberger (August 1921) and of Walter Rathenau (June 1922). The final drama of this period of right-wing pressure was played out in Munich in November 1923, when Hitler and some Nazi followers attempted to exploit a clash between the reactionary government of Bavaria and the federal authorities. Their aim was a 'March on Berlin' after the style of Mussolini's recent 'March on Rome'. Police action reduced the so-called 'Beerhall Putsch' to a fiasco. Taken out of context the activities of Kapp and Hitler appear to pose little threat to the Weimar Republic. Nevertheless, the lenient sentences passed on the offenders – five years' imprisonment for Hitler and no punishment for any of Ehrhardt's *Freikorps* men – made clear the sympathy for their cause in high places. The Reichstag elections held in June 1920 added further indications of the ascendancy of the right.

The French Invasion of the Ruhr

By 1920 the bases of French security proposed at Versailles lay in ruins. Domestic developments in Germany offered little prospect of its willing acceptance of the settlement and an increasing reluctance to maintain its reparation payments. By the Wiesbaden Accords (October 1921), France agreed to help German payments by accepting a proportion in raw materials and industrial produce, rather than in cash, but in the next year these payments in kind had slipped into arrears.

Faced with the choice of using conciliation or confrontation to exact its due from Germany, public and political opinion in France inclined more and more toward the latter solution.

In November 1922 Germany requested a suspension of its payments for up to four years in the face of domestic economic difficulties. It was Germany's third such request in three years and strongly suggested that

Matthias Erzberger (1875–1921) Reichstag deputy (1903) and leader of the Centre Party. Favourable to a peace settlement from 1916, he was a member of the delegation that signed the armistice in 1918. Foreign Minister in the German Republic, he was assassinated by nationalists.

Walter Rathenau (1867–1922) President of the AEG electrical company, and director (1916) of Germany's war economy. Foreign Minister of the German Republic (1922) and signatory of the Treaty of Rapallo, he was assassinated by nationalists.

Erzberger
Rathenau

the whole question of enforcing the Versailles settlement was at stake. It was this vital issue that prompted France, with support from Italy and Belgium, to send troops across the Rhine and into the industrial heartland of the Ruhr in January 1923. Protesting, with justification, that the invasion of its sovereign territory was against the terms of the peace treaty, the German government appealed with great success for a policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr. In February 1923, coal production there fell to 2.5 million tons, where 90 million had been mined in 1922. Three iron smelting furnaces operated in March where 70 had worked in the previous year. Occasional terrorist attacks on troops and military action against German demonstrators raised the overall tension.

July 1914	4.2
July 1919	14.0
July 1920	39.5
July 1921	76.7
July 1922	493.2
Jan. 1923	1 737.0
July 1923	353 412.0
Aug. 1923	4 620 455.0
Sept. 1923	98 860 000.0
Oct. 1923	25 260 208 000.0
15 Nov. 1923	4 200 000 000 000.0

Source: Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*

Inflation

Here we have to consider the domestic effects of the occupation of the Ruhr upon Germany. The most sensational of these was the acceleration of the decline of the *Reichsmark* (German currency) that had been in progress since the war. The initial blame lay, not with the French invasion, but with the crippling cost of the war, the pressure of reparation demands, and the Republic's misguided policy of printing money to meet budget deficits. As the table shows, the decline now raced out of control. Apart from its role in the origins of inflation, the government bore some responsibility for not checking it at an early stage. 'Cheap money' had its attractions for industrialists who now found plant and wages cheap, and for landowners whose mortgages were easier to pay off. Some enormous fortunes, such as that of the industrialist Hugo Stinnes, were forged out of this financial chaos. Inflation, on the other hand, had no consolations for the small saver or investor whose carefully accumulated sums and guaranteed interest became worthless in a matter of days.

1. What evidence was there of political and economic instability in Germany in the years 1919–23?

2. What were the main causes of the inflation that struck Germany in 1923, and upon whom did it have the greatest impact?

The collapse of the value of pensions and savings ruined many, and the number of recipients of public relief in 1923 was three times that in 1913. 'Millions of Germans,' wrote Gordon Craig in *Germany 1866–1945* (1981), 'who had passively accepted the transition from Empire to Republic suffered deprivations that shattered their faith in the democratic process and left them cynical and alienated.' As a further ominous by-product many trade unions, unable in the crisis to protect their members' interests, suffered a sharp drop in their rolls and in their political influence.

6.4 In what respects did the years 1924–1929 constitute 'the golden age of the Weimar Republic'?

Stable political leadership: Gustav Stresemann and Paul von Hindenburg

The Weimar Republic not only survived, but launched upon the most successful period of its life, a period when long-term survival at last seemed possible. Two factors contributed greatly to this recovery. For the first time, the Republic had leaders who commanded respect, for the fall of Chancellor Cuno (August 1923) brought into office the major political figure of the Republic, Gustav Stresemann. Stresemann became republican because he was horrified by the more radical alternatives. His political

Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929)	1923, Stresemann successfully resolved the major crises of that year (French occupation of the Ruhr, massive inflation). From 1924 until his untimely death from a stroke in 1929, Stresemann served as Foreign Minister. Although initially an	authoritarian and supporter of the use of military force, Stresemann became convinced of the need to support the Republic and to find peaceful solutions to Germany's problems; the renegotiation of reparations in the Dawes Plan (1924) and Young	Plan (1929), and the diplomatic achievements of the Locarno Pact (1925), the Treaty of Berlin (1926) and Germany's admission to the League of Nations (1926), were key elements in the potential stabilisation of Weimar democracy.
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background, nevertheless, was that of an orthodox conservative, and made him acceptable to many people who could barely tolerate his predecessors. Although Chancellor for only three months, he continued to exert a profound influence upon German politics from the Foreign Ministry until his death in 1929.

Shortly after the emergence of Stresemann, the death of Friedrich Ebert (February 1925) brought to the presidency of the Republic the wartime hero Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, a man of impeccable patriotic credentials. His election was largely an expression of nostalgia for the stability and strength of the 'old' Germany. 'The truth is,' Stresemann testified, 'that Germans want no president in a top hat. He must wear a uniform and plenty of decorations.' Hindenburg, however, wore both his uniform and his office with tact, and effectively defended the Republic from the worst barbs of its right-wing opponents.

The second vital factor in the recovery of the Republic was the desire of the wartime allies to prevent the collapse or political disintegration of Germany. Foreign co-operation was central to the regime's new lease of life.

The establishment of financial stability

The first achievements of the revived Republic were the rescue of the German currency and the regulation of reparations. At the end of 1923, thanks to the work of Hans Luther at the Ministry of Finance, the discredited *Reichsmark* was replaced by the so-called '*Rentenmark*'. In the absence of sufficient gold reserves, the new currency was backed in theory by Germany's agricultural and industrial resources. It was a new, largely fictitious, form of security, which relied heavily upon foreign goodwill for its general acceptance. There was enough of this goodwill, however, not only to support the stabilisation of the currency, but also to regulate the question of Germany's reparation payments through the formulation of the Dawes Plan in 1924. Outwardly, the German economy presented a picture in the later 1920s of stability and prosperity. The emergence of giant industrial combines such as I.G. Farben and United Steelworks (*Vereinigte Stahlwerke*) in 1926 seemed to testify to the renewed dynamism of German heavy industry. In 1927, overall production figures at last matched those of 1913.

Paul Scheidemann	1919 (Feb.–June)	W. Marx	1923–1924
G. Bauer	1919–1920	Hans Luther	1925–1926
H. Müller	1920 (March–June)	H. Müller	1929–1930
C. Feilerbach	1920–1921	Heinrich Brüning	1930–1932
Joseph Wirth	1921–1922	Franz von Papen	1932 (May–Nov)
Wilhelm Cuno	1922–1923	Kurt von Schleicher	1932–1933
Gustav Stresemann	1923 (August–Nov.)	Adolf Hitler	1933–

Referendum (or plebiscite): A form of political consultation in which the electorate is asked for its response to a specific measure proposed by the government.

The achievement of domestic political stability

Financial stability was accompanied by a greater degree of political stability. Apart from the acceptability of Stresemann and Hindenburg, the economic recovery blunted nationalist opposition to the Republic by appeasing the industrialists who played a substantial role in the DNVP. The armed forces, too, seemed to be on better terms with the Republic after the resignation of von Seeckt (October 1926) as commander of the Wehrmacht. After the appointment of General Groener (December 1927) as Defence Minister, 1928-29 provided two pieces of electoral comfort for the government. The Reichstag elections in May 1928 provided the worst results for a decade for the parties of the political extremes. Between them the DNVP (14.2%), the NSDAP (2.6%) and the KPD (10.6%) secured less than 30% of the popular vote. In December 1929 a referendum took place, forced by a coalition of nationalists and Nazis, trying to condemn the Young Plan and proposing treason charges against the government for doing deals with foreign interests. Only 13.8% of the votes cast agreed with this interpretation of government policy.

Why, and with what success, did Weimar Germany adopt a 'policy of fulfilment' in foreign affairs?

'For most Germans,' writes John Hiden in *The Weimar Republic* (1974), 'foreign policy meant an unremitting effort to revise the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.' Successive German governments sought to remedy the dangerous diplomatic isolation that resulted from defeat, and to restore the degree of national independence lost to the allies and to their occupation agencies. The first method they used was the simple tactic of sullen obstruction.

- The clauses of the treaty directed against the Kaiser and other alleged war criminals were never effectively enforced.
- The disbanding of paramilitary organisations was slow and unreliable.
- The clauses relating to disarmament were implemented only under constant allied supervision.

Such a policy could not be successful for long against opponents with both the determination and the means to enforce the treaty terms. German policy thus changed under the chancellorship of Joseph Wirth (May 1921-November 1922) to one of 'fulfilment' (*Erfüllungspolitik*). This apparent co-operation with the allies was one of the greatest causes of bitterness among the right-wing opponents of the regime. It played a direct role in stirring the political violence of the period.

It was, nevertheless, a sensible and realistic policy. It was designed to encourage future allied leniency towards Germany, and its introduction coincided with a successful solution to the problem of diplomatic isolation. The conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo with the Soviet Union in April 1922 created investment opportunities for Germany. It also greatly improved the prospects of evading the military restrictions imposed at Versailles. However, it may also be argued that it did a great deal, in combination with the chaos caused by French occupation of the Ruhr, to frighten the western allies into taking a more reasonable attitude towards Germany.

The greatest successes of *Erfüllungspolitik* were achieved whilst Gustav Stresemann controlled the Foreign Ministry. He combined the broad principles of 'fulfilment' with an attempt to lay foundations for the revision of the peace treaties. Stresemann was portrayed by liberal historians as a 'good European', eager to put co-operation in the place of confrontation, while historians of the Marxist left saw him as a capitalist reaching an

accommodation with the other western powers for essentially anti-Soviet reasons. The publication of his official papers indicated that Stresemann was neither of these things. His primary aim was to rid Germany of foreign restraints, and to regain full sovereignty and freedom of political action. Thus the Locarno Pact of 1925 guaranteed Germany's western borders against further incursions, without committing Germany to acceptance of the hated territorial settlement in the east. It also paved the way for Germany's acceptance into the international community of the League of Nations. The agreement of the Dawes Plan in 1924 and the Young Plan in 1929 were classic examples of this policy of fulfilment. They reduced Germany's total reparations debt, and gained foreign recognition of its difficulties in paying it off at all.

Steadily, from January 1926, Germany began to reap the fruits of this policy. In that month, British withdrawal from Cologne marked the first major reduction of the occupying forces. This was followed in January 1927 by the withdrawal from Germany of the Inter-Allied Control Commission, the major watchdog of the Versailles terms. Before the fall of the Republic, the evacuation of foreign troops was completed by the French withdrawal (August 1929). Within two years, the continuation of reparation payments had been dealt a near fatal blow by Chancellor Brüning's successful application to the USA for a 'moratorium' (June 1931). No area of policy under the Weimar Republic could claim to rival the success of its foreign policy. Its tragedy was that the government failed consistently to convince the political extremists of the constructive good sense of that policy. When the international economic crisis undermined the Republic, its foreign policy of restrained national reassertion was to be one of the first casualties of its collapse.

Was the Republic secure at the end of the 1920s?

For all these shifts in policy, and for all the improvements that had taken place in its status and stability, the Weimar Republic still had its weaknesses. It seemed to be winning the public relations battle as the end of the 1920s approached, but it had established few durable institutions to sustain it in time of crisis. The lukewarm toleration of the regime shown

Moratorium: A legally authorised delay in the performance of a legal duty or obligation. From the Latin *morā* = delay.

Political parties in Weimar Germany

DNVP (the German National People's Party): a conservative, nationalist party that was opposed to the creation of German democracy. Wanted a return to the authoritarian type of government under Wilhelm II. Supported the large-scale landowners of eastern Germany. Wanted protective tariffs against imported foodstuffs. Developed from the Fatherland Front and the Conservative Party of the last years of the Kaiser's reign.

DVP (the German People's Party): Weimar equivalent of the National Liberal Party of Bismarck's and Wilhelm II's Germany. Represented the interests of 'big business'. Most prominent politician was Gustav Stresemann.

Zentrum (the Centre Party): represented the interests of the Catholic Church in Germany. Linked with the BVP (Bavarian People's Party) which represented Catholic interests in Bavaria.

DDP (the German Democratic Party): supported German democracy, Weimar equivalent of the Progressive Liberal Party of Bismarck's and Wilhelm

II's Germany. Supported by the middle class. Electoral support declined rapidly from 1920.

SPD (the Social Democratic Party): the largest party in Germany for most of the Weimar period. Represented the interests of the German working class. It had existed since 1875 and supported the creation of a socialist state through democratic means.

KPD (the Communist Party): formed in 1920 from the Spartacists and elements of the Independent Social Democratic Party. Wanted to create a communist state. Opposed to democracy. Main rival for working-class support of the SPD.

NSDAP (the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party): Hitler's party. Wanted to overthrow Weimar democracy and the Treaty of Versailles. Initially planned to achieve this through revolution. After 1925 Hitler attempted to achieve power through the ballot box and intimidation by the SA stormtroopers. Largest party in the Reichstag by 1932 but never gained more than one-third of the votes before January 1933.

by the *Reichswehr* was not widely imitated by the civil service, the universities or the schools. The historian K.S. Pinson describes in detail the atmosphere of German education in the 1920s.

'The essential control of both lower and higher education remained in the hands of those who had nothing but contempt for the Republic and who therefore made no effort to prepare the German youth for republican citizenship. Not a single school text in Weimar Germany presented the true story of German defeat in 1918. Germany geography texts still inculcated in the minds of the young the definition that Germany was a country surrounded on all sides by enemies.'

Nor had the Republic developed a system of parliamentary parties strong enough to give stability to its democracy. The classic Weimar coalition parties – the Social Democrats, the Democratic Party and the Centre Party – remained divided on many points of economic, political and religious doctrine. Their lack of cohesion in the face of the rise of a popular anti-democratic movement would play a major role in the disasters of the early 1930s.

Lastly, for all the appearance of superficial prosperity, the basis of the German economy was unsound. Industrial investment and government expenses were not adequately financed from German capital or German profits. More than a third of all capital invested in Germany in the late 1920s came from foreign loans. Imports between 1924 and 1930 were always greater than exports. The total deficit of the German budget over these years amounted to nearly 1.3 billion Reichsmarks. It is impossible to deny that in the years 1924-29 the Weimar Republic was progressing and was achieving some signs of permanency. In that limited period, however, normality was never quite achieved, and when it appeared close it proved only a brief interlude between two disasters.

1. In what respects were domestic politics in Germany more stable between 1924 and 1929 than they had been in the previous five years?
2. How convincing is the claim that 'the Weimar Republic was on the verge of success until undermined by the international economic crisis of 1929'?
3. Did the foreign policy of the Weimar Republic serve Germany's best interests?

6.5 Why was the Weimar Republic unable to survive the crisis generated by the Wall Street Crash?

The economic impact of the crash upon Germany

Stresemann had warned in 1928, 'Germany is dancing on a volcano. If the short-term credits are called in a large section of our economy would collapse'. Indeed, within days of Stresemann's premature death (3 October 1929), the slump in the Wall Street stock market (24 October 1929) triggered off just such a phenomenon. Germany's foreign capital, which had stood at 5 billion marks in 1928, dropped by half in 1929, and shrank to a mere 700 million marks in 1930. Loans began to be called in and bankruptcies multiplied. With the government consistently reluctant to set off renewed inflation, the crisis manifested itself primarily as massive unemployment. The problem had haunted Germany since the recovery of 1925, with 2 million out of work in the winter of 1925-26 and 1.5 million jobless a year later. The rise towards the disastrous figures of the Depression began in the summer of 1928. In mid-1929, 1.5 million were unemployed and in the following year the figures soared out of control. Three million were affected in the winter of 1929-30, 5 million by the end of the following summer and 6 million in January 1932.

The political impact of the crash upon Germany

The main political result of the economic slump was a substantial revival of extremism. As the table on page 127 indicates, the elections of 1930-32

Extremism The behaviour or beliefs of people who wish to bring about political or social change by doing things that other people consider too severe or disruptive, often using violence.

were marked by a dramatic growth of influence for those parties that offered extreme solutions to the contemporary distress. The KPD achieved greater support than it had ever had before, but above all it was the Nazis that benefited from the economic tragedy.

Elections to the Reichstag, 1919-1932

	Jan. 1919	June 1920	May 1924	Dec. 1924	May 1928	Sept. 1930	July 1932	Nov. 1932
NSDAP	-	-	32	14	12	107	230	196
DNVP	44	71	95	103	73	41	37	52
DVP	19	65	45	51	45	30	7	11
Centre	91	85	81	88	78	87	98	90
DDP	75	39	28	32	25	20	4	2
SPD	165	102	100	131	153	143	133	121
USPD	22	84	-	-	-	-	-	-
KPD	-	4	62	45	54	77	89	100

There can be no doubt that the economic crisis played a major role in the increasing popularity of the NSDAP. For example, the research of historian Martin Broszat, in *The Hitler State* (1981), has established that, of all the working class recruits joining the Nazi Party in 1930-33, some 53% were unemployed. Nevertheless, there was nothing inevitable about the Nazi advent to power. They never represented a majority in the Reichstag and their electoral fortunes were in decline by late 1932. Their triumph resulted from the degeneration and miscalculations of republican politics in the years of economic crisis.

Brüning's administration

The resignation of Chancellor Müller's cabinet (March 1930) – the Republic's last Social Democrat administration – marked the end of majority government in Germany. As the political parties of the centre continued to place sectional interests before national needs, the effective government of the state fell into the hands of President Hindenburg and advisors such as General Groener and General von Schleicher. Their primary aim was less the protection of democracy and parliamentary government than the formation of a more authoritative and authoritarian government to face the economic crisis. Their first choice as Chancellor, Heinrich Brüning, had admirable qualifications for the office. He sought to cement his administration with some foreign success, such as the suspension of reparation payments, and he tackled Germany's domestic crisis by orthodox, deflationary economic tactics. Reductions in social services and in unemployment benefits, at the time when they were needed most, were unlikely to rally wide support, and they led to Brüning's damaging reputation as the 'Hunger Chancellor'. They also drove many of the unemployed into the ranks of the paramilitary organisations. Meanwhile, military expenditure and subsidies to the *Junker* farmers were maintained.

Brüning's greatest political error, however, was the dissolution of the Reichstag (July 1930) in search of a secure majority. Instead, at a time of mounting crisis, he found the political extremists and the violence of the streets translated into Reichstag seats. Continued failure to curb economic depression, and to achieve ministerial stability, finally encouraged the President to replace Brüning with Franz von Papen in May 1932. This was the move which, according to the liberal historian Erich Eyck, 'killed not only the German Republic, but the peace of Europe'.

Heinrich Brüning (1885-1970)
A leading figure in German Catholic politics, prominent in the Centre Party (becoming its leader in 1929). Brüning was a social, political and economic conservative, a war veteran, and hostile to the principles of social democracy. Appointed Chancellor (1930), and Foreign Minister (1931). Resigned both offices in 1932, and lived in exile in the USA.

Franz von Papen (1879-1969)
Member of the Centre Party and deputy in the Prussian Landtag (1923-32). Chancellor of the German Republic (1932). Narrowly escaped assassination during the 'Night of the Long Knives'. Tried at Nuremberg for his role in assisting the Nazis to power, but acquitted.

General Kurt von Schleicher (1882–1934)
After active service in the Imperial German Army, he became a senior officer in the Reichswehr (1919–29). Appointed Defence Minister in von Papen's government (1932), he then served briefly as Chancellor. Unable to reach agreement with Hitler, Schleicher resigned (1933), and was murdered during the 'Night of the Long Knives' (1934).

1. What was the economic and political impact of the Wall Street Crash upon Germany?
2. How did the economic crisis of 1929 help to bring Hitler and the Nazis to power in Germany?
3. Why did the Weimar Republic survive the crisis of 1923, but not that which began in 1929?

6.6 What was the contribution of Adolf Hitler to the rise of Nazism?

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

Born in the small Austrian town of Braunau am Inn (20 April 1889), Hitler was the son of a customs official already well into middle age. Academically and socially, the young Hitler was a failure. His inability to gain admission to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (1907) formed the prelude to 'five years of misery and woe', living by odd jobs and occasional artistic work. Hitler's 'Greater German' nationalism was already formed, and he later claimed that it was in Vienna that he first formulated the intense hatred of Jews and Judaism that was thereafter a central feature of his political beliefs. Convinced of the decadence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and of the invincibility of the racially purer German Reich, Hitler evaded Austrian conscription in 1914 to serve in a Bavarian regiment. After a creditable military career at the Western Front, he was stunned by the sudden collapse of the German war effort in November 1918. For him, there could be no other explanation than that all patriotic Germans had been vilely betrayed by the socialists, Marxists and Jews prominent in the November 'revolution' and in the subsequent Weimar Republic. In subsequent years, Hitler propagated the myth of the 'stab in the back', not only because of its propaganda value, but also because he was personally convinced of its truth. His natural place thereafter was in the ranks of the extreme nationalist opposition to the Republic. In September 1917 he joined the German Workers' Party which shortly afterwards changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). By July 1921 Hitler was its chairman.

Judaism: Religion of the Jewish people, which is based on the Old Testament of the Bible and the Talmud (book of laws and traditions).

Papen, Schleicher and the advent of the Nazis

Franz von Papen's responsibility for the advent of the Nazis was great. In June, he lifted the ban that Brüning had placed upon the *Sturmabteilung*. In July he used the resultant street violence, and the spate of deaths in clashes between Nazis and Communists, as the pretext to dismiss the Social Democrat provincial government in Prussia, one of the last strongholds of democratic government in Germany. Like Brüning before him, his decision to hold new elections (July 1932) played into the hands of the Nazis with their increasing support. Papen's efforts to establish an electoral alliance with Hitler as the junior partner were frustrated, both by Hitler's refusal to accept any office less than that of Chancellor, and by the aged President's personal and social dislike of Hitler. With Papen's resignation, the President had only one alternative to Hitler himself. When Kurt von Schleicher failed in his brief chancellorship (December 1932 – January 1933) to split the Nazi leadership by negotiating with Gregor Strasser, Hindenburg at last accepted Adolf Hitler as the only alternative to political chaos and possible civil war.

Hitler thus became Chancellor on 30 January 1933, with a cabinet of three Nazis and ten conservatives, the latter representing the vain hope of the traditional German right that they might still use the dynamic force of Nazism for their own purposes. A seven-hour torchlight parade by the SA in the streets of Berlin formed the funeral celebrations of the Weimar Republic.

Hitler as orator and publicist

Hitler's tenure of power in Germany lasted only 12 years. His tenure of real international power was shorter by half. Yet the fact that his is undoubtedly the best known face, and his the best documented political career of the century, bears witness to the extraordinary impact of the man. Hitler's primary qualification for a political career was his extraordinary talent as an orator. In part, this was based upon careful study of all the elements of public speaking, and brilliant mastery of the tactics of dogmatic assertion, sarcasm and emotional appeal. As W. Carr wrote in *History of Germany, 1815–1985* (1987), 'a Hitler speech was superb theatre. Hitler was his own script writer, choreographer and actor-manager all rolled into one.'

His success was not wholly explained, however, by contrived effects, but was largely due to the intense sincerity of his nationalistic feelings, and by his ability to communicate with the outrage and frustration of millions of Germans. A contemporary, Otto Strasser, described the effect of a speech as follows.

'He enters a hall. He sniffs the air. For a moment he gropes, feels his way, senses the atmosphere. Suddenly he bursts forth. His words go like an arrow to their target; he touches every private wound on the raw, liberating the mass unconscious, expressing its innermost aspirations, telling it what it most wants to hear.'

Such skills were more than adequate for one who saw himself at first only as a 'drummer' preparing the way for a greater leader, a John the Baptist, smoothing the way for Germany's true saviour. The stage at which he came to believe in himself as that saviour is unclear, perhaps as he reformulated his political views after the failure of the Munich Putsch of 1923. The years after 1923 saw the emergence of Hitler as unchallenged party leader.

Hitler achieved and fulfilled his role in an unorthodox fashion, for his were not the usual talents of political organiser and administrator. He was lazy, and often bored by practical detail. Administrative inefficiency, however, was outweighed by a remarkable political instinct, an unconquerable will power and self-confidence, total ruthlessness, and a talent for winning the dogged devotion of individuals. It is quite possible that Hitler cultivated his disinterest in detail and practicalities to maintain party unity, and to present the image that he maintained so well as the man of destiny, far above the petty wrangling that corrupted mundane politics. These were the talents that transformed Adolf Hitler from the 'nobody of Vienna' into the most dynamic and fateful figure in German history.

1. What was the impact of Germany's defeat in the First World War upon Adolf Hitler's political thinking?

2. To what extent do Hitler's personal talents explain the rise and the appeal of Nazism in the late 1920s and the early 1930s?

6.7 What were the main political and social doctrines of National Socialism?

The ancestry of Nazism

The intellectual roots of Nazism must be sought in a variety of locations. Many commentators, especially in the years immediately after the Second World War, interpreted Nazism as a movement that grew naturally from the authoritarianism and nationalism of earlier German history. It is hardly surprising that many German historians, such as Gerhard Ritter in *The Historical Foundations of the Rise of National Socialism* (1955), favoured a different view of Nazism. They saw it, not as the product of German history, but as the product of the unprecedented social and economic pressures upon Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Another prominent German authority, Karl Bracher, in *The German Dictatorship* (1978), may be closest to the truth

Realpolitik: Policy that is based upon real, practical considerations, rather than upon abstract principles or ideals.

Darwinism: The views of Charles Darwin (1809–1882), the great British biologist, who defined the principles of evolution among animal species. Some political and social commentators believed that similar laws of development applied to the human race as well, and that some races were thus more highly developed than others. Such views are usually referred to as 'Social Darwinism'.

Aryan races: Term used by racists to indicate those Nordic and Anglo-Saxon races which the Nazis supposed to be superior to others.

Lebensraum (German = living space). That foreign territory which, in the view of extreme German nationalists, had to be seized for the proper future maintenance of the German race.

Führer (German = leader). Name for the person in charge of the Nazi organisation, namely Adolf Hitler. An essential feature of Nazism. The Führer, wrote Nazi theorist Ernst Hübner in 1933, 'is the bearer of the people's will; he is independent of all groups, associations, and interests. In his will the will of the people is realised.'

when he combines the two schools of thought. 'Past research has made clear that an examination of the roots of National Socialism must be conducted simultaneously on two levels; the German and the overall European.'

Essentially a distillation of resentments and fears, Nazism was a rag-bag of elements borrowed from most of the major political tendencies of the last century. From Germany alone it borrowed the conservative *Realpolitik* of Bismarck, the nationalism of Johann Fichte and the godless humanism of Friedrich Nietzsche. Its racial theories leaned heavily upon those of the Comte de Gobineau (*Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, 1853) and of Houston Stewart Chamberlain (*Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 1899). Both men had argued from the lunatic fringes of Darwinism that the key to human development lay in the inevitable triumph of the Aryan races over 'lesser varieties of mankind'. From further afield, and more recently, came the practical examples provided by Italian Fascism, with its attractive trappings and its bold seizure of national power. Also there was the ruthless example of Stalin in his consolidation of power in the Soviet Union. Although he was distanced from Stalin's political aims, Hitler could only feel the greatest respect for Stalin's coldly logical methods. 'Stalin and I,' he was to declare, 'are the only ones who see the future.'

The philosophy of *Mein Kampf*

Some semblance of cohesion and consistency was given to this variety of influences by the initial programme of the National Socialist Party (February 1920) which predated Hitler's dominance over the party and, more importantly, by Hitler's own political testament *My Struggle* (*Mein Kampf*). This was written during his imprisonment after the failure of the 1923 coup, and published in 1925. A rambling and highly personal work, *Mein Kampf* provided no precise manifesto for future government, but made clear the essential principles upon which the Nazis and their leader intended to proceed.

Central to Hitler's argument was the conviction that the only true basis of the state was not that of class interest (an invention of Marxism and Judaism) or of community or economic interest, but that of race. It was thus the primary duty of the German state to unite within its borders all those of common racial origin, and to eliminate alien elements that might weaken or corrupt the ethnic community (*Völkergemeinschaft*). In the case of Germany, this meant the elimination of the influence of the Jews. In Hitler's view their international conspiracy bore the responsibility for all Germany's recent ills. Subsequently, the major duty of the state would be the provision of adequate resources and 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) for the population that dwelt by right within its boundaries. As the preservation of its people was the reason for the state's existence, it was not only permissible, but positively desirable, for the state to acquire this *Lebensraum* by struggle against neighbouring races. Nor did Hitler attempt to dodge the implications of this doctrine in the specific case of Germany. 'History proves,' he declared in *Mein Kampf*, 'that the German people owes its existence solely to its determination to fight in the east and to obtain land by military conquest. Land in Europe is only to be gained at the expense of Russia.'

Political authority: the *Führerprinzip*

To provide the dynamism and the unity of purpose necessary for the achievement of such a visionary programme, Nazism defined the 'leader principle' (*Führerprinzip*). Thereby, each level of Nazi organisation was committed to unquestioning obedience to its chief, with ultimate allegiance owed to the man at the apex of the pyramid of command, the *Führer*. This gave the appearance of consistency to a divided movement

1. What were the main racial theories and beliefs of the Nazi Party when it came to power in 1933?

2. What was the relative importance of nationalism and socialism in the doctrines of the Nazi Party?

6.8 How did Hitler ever become Chancellor of Germany?

Totalitarianism: This term has been defined in a variety of ways: it generally refers to a centralized state with one leader, one party and one ideology based on repression and indoctrination, and it emphasises the similarities between dictatorships of the Right (Hitler's Nazism, Mussolini's Fascism) and the Left (Stalin's Communism).

Fascism: Originally referring to Mussolini's Italy, this concept has been generalised by some historians to encompass modern right-wing dictatorships, including Nazism.

and ensured Hitler's personal authority. It also appealed to millions of Germans for whom representative democracy seemed a short road to economic ruin and to national humiliation. This principle allowed the Nazis to pose not merely as the latest candidates for party political power, but as the appointed guardians of the destiny of the whole German nation.

Given the appalling consequences, the arguments about who or what was responsible for Hitler's rise to power range over an immensely wide terrain. Historical controversies range from detailed empirical questions – such as which social groups voted for the NSDAP or what was the role of big business in financing Hitler – to much wider interpretations of the period as a whole.

Some historians emphasise long-term peculiarities of German history, appealing to notions of a *Sonderweg* ('special path') to modernity; others point to features common to many European states after the First World War. For some, the problem has to do with 'modern mass society' and hence Nazism is an instance of totalitarianism; for others, adopting a Marxist approach, Nazism has to do with 'crises of capitalism' and is hence a variant of fascism. And some concentrate primarily on one individual: Hitler. Hitler's personal power has been emphasised – indeed over-emphasised – in many popular biographies and films, as well as historical works, as though Hitler's 'spell' had been something people could not resist. Even among those historians focusing on the same period, there are often huge differences of emphasis in choosing where precisely to lay the blame.

It is possible to simplify this complex story somewhat by analysing two separate but closely interrelated developments. One was the instability and eventual destruction of democracy in Weimar Germany. The other was the rise of a mass party under Hitler's leadership. It was when the political and economic crises came to a head that the combination proved fatal. Those individuals who played a key role in destroying democracy were unable to find a stable solution on their own; they thought that in 'taming' Hitler, they could harness the power of the masses to the purposes of the elites. This final gamble proved tragically flawed.

Thus Hitler benefited from much wider historical currents. Only in very specific circumstances was this Austrian drifter able eventually to gain a position of power in the German state, from which he could go on to shape European and world history.

Was Weimar democracy 'doomed from the start'?

The legacies of the First World War
As Ian Kershaw has aptly written, the First World War 'made Hitler possible'. The experience and aftermath of war shaped Hitler's outlook and gave him the opportunity to enter post-war German politics; at the same time it created an audience receptive to his prejudices. Kershaw continues: 'Without the war, a Hitler on the Chancellor's seat that had been occupied by Bismarck would have been unthinkable' (Kershaw, *Hitler*, 1989, 1936; *Hubris*, p.73). But – as Kershaw also reminds us – making 'Hitler possible' does not mean making Hitler inevitable. How important, then, was the war in explaining the collapse of Weimar democracy?

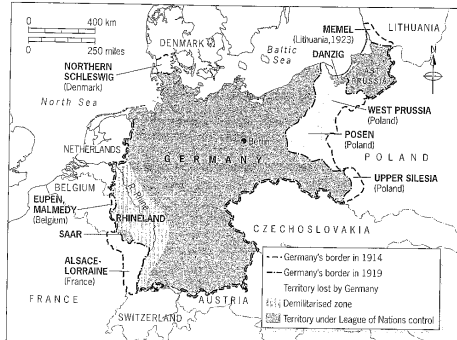
Versailles Treaty, 1919

Territorial changes:

- Loss of colonies abroad
- Alsace-Lorraine to be returned to France
- France to benefit from the coal production of the Saar
- West Prussia, Upper Silesia and Posen to go to a reconstituted state of Poland
- Danzig to become a free city under the supervision of the new League of Nations
- Demilitarisation of Germany's border areas
- Left bank of the Rhine to be under Allied supervision for 15 years

Restrictions on power:

- No union of Germany and Austria permitted
- German Army to be reduced to 100 000 men, for domestic and border-guard duties only
- Restrictions on German Navy, and submarines forbidden
- No German Air Force permitted



The psychological and social consequences of the 'Great War' of 1914–18 were undoubtedly of massive significance. The experience of 'total war' involved not merely soldiers but also civilians on the home front: women and young people participated in economic production, and in food riots and strikes. For some soldiers at the front, the experience of the mud-filled trenches, the daily witnessing of the maiming and deaths of comrades in stalemated battles over a few yards of territory, aroused a hatred of war itself. For others – like Hitler – it fed into rabid hatred of the culprits allegedly responsible for German defeat, the 'Jews' and 'Bolsheviks', and a determination to take revenge. This 'stab in the back' myth proved to be of major importance in the turmoil and upheavals of the post-war years. So too, in very different ways, did the shell-shock, the sense of disorientation, and the difficulties of reintegration into civil society following demobilisation. The immediate post-war years were characterised by widespread

hunger and high death rates from diseases such as influenza, as well as rioting, strikes, political instability and violence. Many people in this devastated post-war society – with its high numbers of war widows, orphans, teenagers without fathers or elder brothers – had a totally unrealistic set of expectations about what the new Republic could offer, as Richard Bessel has shown (*Germany after the First World War*, 1993).

In this wider context, the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty of 1919 caused massive resentment. Loss of colonies abroad and territory at home, the ban on an air force, restrictions on the size of the army and navy, and demilitarisation of border areas, were heavy blows, as was the infamous 'War Guilt clause' laying primary blame for unleashing the war on Germany and her allies. Weimar was born of a humiliating defeat, and the nationalist resentment caused by the Versailles Treaty could readily be exploited as a binding force across different social groups who would otherwise have had little in common.

Reparations, when the extent was revealed in 1920, also proved to be a long-running source of discontent. However, there is controversy over precisely why reparations were such a liability. For a long time it was held that the absolute level of reparations was indeed a major economic millstone, rendering Weimar capitalism intrinsically weak. More recently, as Theo Balderston outlines (*Economics and Politics in the Weimar Republic*, 2002), historians have argued that the major problems were the ways in which reparations were perceived and presented, in terms of Germany's 'capacity to pay' (or not), and the ways in which politicians chose to deal with reparations. Inflation, already rooted in the financing of the war through bonds rather than taxes, was made very much worse by the government's decision simply to print more and more paper money, leading to the massive inflation of 1923. Whatever the balance of these debates, the reparations issue dogged Weimar's brief life.

More generally, the balance between structural economic and political weaknesses on the one hand, and the 'freedom of manoeuvre' or choices available to politicians on the other, are common general themes underlying a number of debates over the collapse of Weimar democracy.

Intrinsic political weaknesses?

It has often been argued that further weaknesses were rooted in the constitution and political system. On further inspection, this view proves somewhat problematic, since aspects of political culture affected the way in which the constitution worked in practice.

The Weimar Republic appeared to be immensely democratic: women as well as men over the age of 20 had the right to vote; and the system of proportional representation meant that all votes cast were given appropriately weighted representation in the Reichstag (national parliament). Yet, in a country where there were numerous political parties representing very narrow sectional – religious, regional or social class – interests, this in effect led to a multiplicity of small parties gaining parliamentary representation. With no single party able to acquire a majority of seats on its own, parties were in a constant process of negotiating unstable coalitions on the basis of one, or another shabby compromise, and there were frequent changes of government. It was not necessarily the system of proportional representation as such that was the problem therefore, but rather the character of Weimar parties under particular social and economic circumstances.

The role of the President, who was voted in for seven years by direct popular vote, was often said to be that of an *Ersatz Kaiser*: a 'substitute Emperor', with considerable personal powers. In particular, the President's powers to appoint and dismiss Chancellors, and to rule by emergency decree under the notorious Article 48, have been the subject of much

- The role of the President of the Weimar Republic:**
- Elected directly by the people, to serve for a seven-year term
 - Has power to appoint and dismiss Chancellors
 - Article 48: power to rule by emergency decree

Weimar Republic: The Republic was created following the abdication of the Kaiser in November 1918 and named after the town of Weimar in which its first parliament met, because of the continuing political unrest in Berlin at the time.

critique. But such powers could be used to stabilise, as well as to undermine, democracy: it was not Article 48 itself, which was used by Weimar's first President and committed democrat, Friedrich Ebert, to stabilise the Republic, but rather its later misuse by President Hindenburg to undermine democracy, which proved problematic.

Flawed revolution and fatal compromises?

The birth of the Weimar Republic – a result of sailors' and soldiers' mutinies and massive revolutionary unrest, causing the flight of the Emperor and the ad hoc declaration of a Republic – was accompanied by a series of compromises which dogged its brief life.

One such compromise was the agreement made between the civilian government under Friedrich Ebert, and the Army under General Groener, in November 1918. Ebert's pact with the Army has been criticised as unnecessary, allowing the old regime to retain its power and regroup; it has been defended as essential to orderly demobilisation and maintaining order in a time of crisis. The result was that the Army continued to play a powerful role in politics, which was eventually to prove fatal in undermining democracy. It also played a role in unleashing bitter splits among the left. Along with the so-called 'Free Corps' units, the Army was involved in suppression of popular unrest, particularly that of a left-wing persuasion. The murder of the Spartacist (left-wing communist) leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919 led to lasting hostility between Social Democrats and Communists, making co-operation against Nazism much more problematic a decade later.

Another key compromise was that between the employers' organisations and the trade unions, in the Stinnes-Legien agreement of November 1918. This gave trade unions formal recognition and rights which, in employers' eyes, were fundamentally linked to the democratic system as such. Although the institutional framework was partially dismantled within a matter of years, and the resources and strength of trade unions declined massively with widespread unemployment after 1929, this too would prove to be a highly problematic legacy in discrediting democracy in the eyes of many leading industrialists.

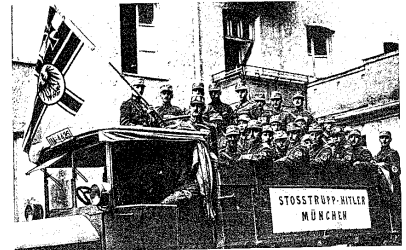
Ebert has been further criticised for failing to engage in full-scale social revolution, resting content with a mere political revolution, leaving the power of the old elites intact. A committed democrat, Ebert felt people should be able to make their preferences known through the ballot box. In the event, the ballot box proved indecisive, the early 'Weimar coalition' of moderate parties led by the SPD lasting little over a year.

On both the left and the right, massive discontent continued. There were repeated attempts to take political control by violence, from the left-wing uprisings in Munich in 1919 and in Thuringia and Saxony in 1923, to the right-wing Kapp Putsch of 1920 and the Nazi 'Beer Hall Putsch' of 1923. Amidst continued violence on the streets, there were frequent political assassinations, including that of the Foreign Minister Walter Rathenau in 1922.

Was there the potential for stabilisation?

For all these undoubted weaknesses, the 'doomed from the start' school of historians have not clinched their case. Hitler's first unsuccessful attempt at seizure of power, in November 1923, was in the very year in which Weimar democracy suffered its worst early crises, with the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr, and massive inflation spiralling out of control. Hitler's miserable attempt to emulate Mussolini's successful march on Rome ended as a damp squib, the hoped-for 'march on Berlin' stopped dead in its tracks, still in the centre of Munich within hours of its muddled

Munich Putsch, 8–9 November 1923. A special unit of Putschists.



launch. Despite a successful propaganda stand by Hitler at his trial, which received national publicity, by 1924 the early troubles of the Weimar Republic seemed effectively over, the chances of a Hitler ever becoming German Chancellor effectively nil.

In the middle years of the 1920s, with inflation under control, reparations repayments renegotiated under the Dawes Plan of 1924, and considerable foreign policy successes under the long-serving Foreign Minister, Gustav Stresemann – known as a *Vernunftrepublikaner* ('Republican of conviction') – the Weimar Republic looked set for long-term stabilisation (for a recent evaluation, see Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann*, 2002). Historians dispute the extent of 'stabilisation' in Weimar's middle years, which were not entirely the 'golden twenties' they are sometimes portrayed as being; but war-time legacies, new political structures and the general turbulence of the early years do not, on their own, amount to a sufficient explanation of Weimar's eventual collapse a decade later.

How important were attacks on the system by elites?

The various weaknesses and ambiguous legacies of Weimar's difficult birth need not inevitably have caused serious problems. It was rather the ways in which they were represented (in the case of German defeat) or dealt with (in the case of reparations) that led to the real problems. Such perceptions and choices were, moreover, rooted in a wider problem: that of a lack of widespread support for democracy in principle.

The real problem of Weimar was, it is sometimes suggested, that it was a 'Republic without Republicans'. The right criticised Weimar for being an ineffective parliamentary democracy tainted by dishonourable defeat and by forms of cultural modernism; and on the left, socialists were critical of the ills of capitalism, while Communists were not committed to the democratic political system either. Thus a highly divided political culture was a key ingredient in Weimar's fragility. But we have to be very clear about where precisely to lay the blame for bringing democracy down.

The roles of key elites

Weimar democracy was ironically itself arguably a victim of a 'stab in the back' – and this precisely by those most important individuals and groups who should have shouldered the responsibility of upholding the political system.

Coalition government: A government made up of more than one party, in coalitions which, during the Weimar period, were generally very unstable.

President Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934)

A military man - who had fought already in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 - Hindenburg was brought out of retirement to serve in the First World War. Having scored a notable victory at the battle of Tannenberg in 1914, Hindenburg went on to play a prominent role in the war, as Field Marshal and then Army Chief of Staff. Widely popular as a military hero, despite his advanced age Hindenburg was elected President on Ebert's death in 1925, and narrowly re-elected on a second ballot in 1932. By the time he appointed Hitler Chancellor in 1933 - a mere 18 months before his own death - he was already suffering from senility.

'The real meaning of the Hitler salute': famous poster by political photomontage artist John Heartfield (1891-1968) of Hitler receiving a backhander.



The 'revolution' of 1918 was only a partial one. Many of the traditional elites - the civil service, the judiciary, the Army, teachers in universities and schools, business elites - were far from enthusiastic about the new political system, and harked back to the 'good old days' of Imperial Germany. Thus, for example, the lenient sentences meted out by judges to those found guilty of political crimes on the right contrasted strongly with the very harsh sentences given to those found guilty of similar offences on the left. The frequent changes of coalition government gave rise to widespread criticisms of the 'system' with its petty squabbling; many thought that the real problem was the 'emergence of the masses' in a democracy, and that the old authoritarian political system had been a great deal more effective.

President Paul von Hindenburg, a military hero from the Great War, replaced Weimar's first president, Friedrich Ebert, when the latter died prematurely from appendicitis in 1925. Although constitutionally empowered to uphold the Republic, Hindenburg from the very start yearned for a more autocratic form of government. Hindenburg's use of presidential rule under Article 48 from 1930 onwards effectively brought democracy to an end well before he made the final mistake of appointing Hitler to the Chancellorship. The Army leadership, too, under General von Schleicher from 1926, held anti-democratic views, and was deeply committed to revision of the Treaty of Versailles. Von Schleicher was to become particularly important in the political machinations of 1932-3.

Economic elites were not on the whole convinced democrats either, associating democracy with increased power and voice for workers and trade unions. Many agrarian elites - particularly the landowners who in Prussia, known as *Junkers*, had long held a dominant political position - were severely hit by an agrarian crisis in the 1920s, which set in well before the Wall Street Crash; they also generally favoured a return to authoritarian government along the lines of Imperial Germany.

The role of big business in the rise of Hitler has been a particular focus of historical controversy. According to the orthodox Marxist interpretation, Nazism was a variant of the wider phenomenon of 'fascism', the last ditch of modern capitalism in a period of crisis. The famous John Heartfield poster, showing Hitler with his hand outstretched backwards to receive a wad of money, fed the myth that business tycoons 'paid Hitler'. However, research by Henry Ashby Turner (*German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler*, 1985) and others has revealed a far less simplistic picture.

Many businessmen were against the Weimar system of parliamentary democracy and political parties. They were against Marxism, which, like Hitler, they understood to include Social Democrats and other non-Marxist socialists as well as Bolsheviks; and they were opposed to what they saw as the power of trade unions which appeared to be guaranteed by the system. Most wanted some form of authoritarian government. In all of this, their general aims were compatible with those of Hitler.

However, this did not by any stretch of the imagination make most of them pro-Nazi. Many despised Hitler, who did not fit in well with their social circles; very few were actually supporters of the NSDAP. The handful of exceptions included the long-time financial supporter and Ruhr steelworks magnate, Fritz Thyssen; the relatively small businessman and organiser of the 'Keppler circle' of economic advisers to Hitler, Wilhelm Keppler; the right-wing President of the Reichsbank Hjalmar Schacht, who finally broke with Hitler's

government in 1937; and the Cologne banker Baron Kurt von Schroeder, whose capacity to speak on behalf of the wider business community appears to have been greatly over-estimated.

After the election of 1930, however - when the NSDAP gained a surprising 18.3 per cent of the vote - and in face of the growing political and economic crisis, many businessmen began to hedge their bets. At the same time, Hitler seized the opportunity to woo the business vote, or at least to neutralise potential hostility. He had greatly benefited from association with the conservative press baron Hugenberg (leader of the DNVP) in campaigning against the Young Plan (to replace the Dawes Plan on reparations) in 1929. He remained associated with - though keeping some distance from - the forces of 'national opposition' in the Hartzburg Front of 11 October 1931, and followed this up with a speech at the Düsseldorf Industry Club on 27 January 1932.

Many businessmen remained unconvinced by Hitler's (often deliberate) vagueness on economic policies, and continued to greet Nazism with a degree of scepticism. Nevertheless, in 1932, in the context of growing political crisis, attitudes were shifting. A small number of businessmen and bankers handed in a petition to Hindenburg on 19 November 1932, which falsely gave Hindenburg the impression of a far wider basis of support among this community for Hitler. Some key individuals were also involved in the final discussions of late January 1933.

Thus, while business antipathy to 'the system' was an element in the destruction of Weimar democracy, on the whole big business played much less of an active role in levering Hitler into power. Even Hitler's attempted neutralisation of the business community had a price to be paid, since it aroused disquiet among some of his own more radical supporters in the NSDAP. The difficulties of juggling the demands and interests of both radical followers and powerful traditional elites were to become increasingly evident once Hitler was in power.

The two separate strands - the disillusionment of the elites with the system of Weimar democracy, and Hitler's own pursuit of power - were increasingly flowing together. But it took conditions of major crisis for the NSDAP to become a genuinely mass party, and for the old elites to run out of alternative strategies, and to turn in desperation to Hitler.

How did the Nazis achieve political breakthrough?

In 1925, when Hitler returned to political life, the NSDAP was disintegrating into squabbling factions. He soon found a capacity to unite different wings under loyalty to his own person as undisputed Leader. Yet in the relatively stable period of the mid-1920s, the party itself was little more than a tiny drop in the complex ocean of Weimar politics: in the elections of 1928, the NSDAP scored a mere 2.6 per cent of vote, with twelve deputies in the Reichstag. Its staggering rise in the following years can only be explained in terms of the way in which it was able to exploit and benefit from the mounting economic and political crises following the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

Nazi ideology, propaganda, organisation and tactics

Most Weimar political parties appealed to the particularistic interests of different sections of the community, with material interests directly opposed to each other (conservative nationalists versus Communists, for example) or specific religious interests to defend (the Catholic Centre Party). The NSDAP, by contrast, claimed to be a *Volkspartei* ('People's Party'), capable of healing the divisions of modern society and uniting all Germans together in a harmonious 'national community'. Most Weimar parties projected a somewhat dry, dull and bureaucratic image, an image of

DNVP: The national conservative, and under Hugenberg increasingly right-wing, 'German National People's Party' (Deutschnationale Volkspartei).

Young Plan/Dawes Plan: The Dawes Plan of 1924 regularised Germany's reparations payments in the short term and promoted an influx of foreign loans to boost the German economy.

The Young Plan of 1929 was designed to be a final settlement of a much-reduced reparations bill, to be paid over a long period (59 years).

Hartzburg Front: A loose right-wing grouping resulting from a meeting of nationalist opposition forces in Bad Hartzburg, including the DNVP and the veterans' organisation, the *Stahlhelm*.

'November criminals': Those accused of being responsible for Germany's military defeat in November 1918.

middle-aged men embroiled in self-serving coalition squabbles. The NSDAP by contrast appeared youthful, dynamic, and vigorous, as well as totally untainted by power and responsibility.

The NSDAP was not even saddled with any very specific policies. Nazi ideology was both grandiose and vague. Vehemently nationalist, Nazis railed against the Treaty of Versailles, the 'November criminals', Jews and Bolsheviks. On capitalism, the arguments were equally negative: against large department stores which were increasingly threatening the livelihood of small shopkeepers, against 'international finance capital', behind which allegedly lay the hand of 'international Jewry'; against all the cultural evils of 'modern capitalism', including 'decadent' jazz music, the emancipation of women, and 'degenerate' morals. At the same time the Nazis were virulently anti-Communist, and again saw the hands of Jews lurking behind Bolshevism. There was a scapegoat for everything.

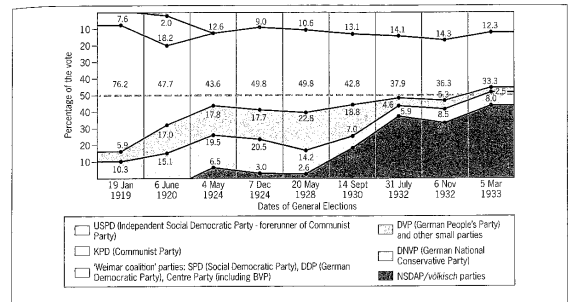
The Nazi message was put across through well-targeted propaganda and clever organisational tactics. An extensive regional system allowed the infiltration and on occasion take-over of social and professional organisations, targeting groups such as small farmers, lawyers, doctors and teachers, women and students. In an age before television, and with slowly increasing but still limited radio ownership, personal appearances and well-orchestrated campaign meetings were of vital importance. Perhaps the first modern politician to make major use of the aeroplane to speak in as many places as possible, Hitler was able to exploit campaign meetings with enormous success, developing his oratorical powers and other tricks for heightening audience expectations.

Who voted for the NSDAP?

Yet without the economic and political crises unleashed by the withdrawal of short-term American loans from the already fragile German economy following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the NSDAP might still have remained a fringe party. Its growing electoral support in the elections of 1930 and July 1932 was directly related to the growth of mass unemployment, and the growth of political instability, in this period.

The SPD-led Müller coalition cabinet of 1928-30 eventually fell apart over the question of whether to deal with rising unemployment by lowering unemployment benefits, or raising taxes. Müller's successor as Chancellor, Brüning, was unable to command a parliamentary majority. When, in the elections of September 1930, the NSDAP suddenly scored 18.3 per cent of the vote, and a threatening phalanx of 107 Nazi deputies

Campaigning in front of a polling station for the presidential elections in March 1932, Berlin.



The vote for the Catholic Centre Party (and its Catholic 'sister party', the BVP) remained remarkably constant. It was primarily the parties of the 'bourgeois centre' which catastrophically lost votes to the NSDAP. Had the Social Democrats (SPD) and Communists (KPD) combined forces, they would have presented stronger opposition to the Nazis.

marched into the Reichstag, many parties including the SPD decided it would be better to tolerate the Brüning government rather than risk further elections. Thus from 1930, Weimar democracy was essentially at an end, as Presidential use of Article 48 allowed Brüning to put through unpopular legislation against the wishes of the majority of members of parliament.

Brüning's economic policies have been the subject of massive controversy among historians. Brüning chose to adopt deflationary measures, preferring rising unemployment to other possible strategies for tackling the growing crisis. By 1932, six million people - around one in three of the workforce - were unemployed. Historians (notably Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich and Knut Borchardt) disagree about the extent to which alternative policies were or were not available to Brüning, or the extent of his 'freedom of manoeuvre' (see Balderston, and Holtfrerich's essay in Ian Kershaw (ed.), *Weimar: Why did German Democracy Fail?*, 1990). But there is no doubt about the consequences: as unemployment rose, so too did support for the Nazis.

This is not because the unemployed voted for the NSDAP as the research of Thomas Childers (*The Nazi Voter*, 1983) has shown, it was the fear of unemployment, rather than unemployment itself, which tended to make people look to the Nazi party for ways out of the crisis. The NSDAP vote was concentrated particularly among the agrarian and small-town lower middle classes, in the predominantly Protestant areas of northern and eastern Germany; in other words, among those who still had something to lose, and who feared loss of social status. Catholics tended to remain loyal to the Catholic Centre party; and the workers who were laid off first, and hence were unemployed, tended to remain loyal to the traditional parties of the working class, the SPD and KPD. The NSDAP appears to have benefited from what Larry Eugene Jones (*German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System*, 1988) has called the collapse of the 'bourgeois middle'. While never genuinely representing the whole 'national community', the NSDAP nevertheless was able to mobilise a relatively wide cross-section of society in times of crisis. At its peak, it drew not only on the core voters mentioned above, but also garnered significant support among some sections of the working class - particularly those in

small enterprises who had not been organised in unions or other workers' movements – and among the middle and professional classes.

The Brüning government fell, not because of increased support for Nazism – there was no further general election during Brüning's Chancellorsip – but because Brüning lost the support of President Hindenburg (in part because of Brüning's mismanagement of Hindenburg's campaign to stand again as President when his seven-year term came to an end in 1932). Brüning's successor, Franz von Papen, was totally unable to cobble together any kind of parliamentary support. In the elections of July 1932, following his appointment as Chancellor, his position worsened dramatically: the NSDAP won a staggering 37.8 per cent of the vote – their highest under more or less genuinely democratic conditions, – and, with their 230 deputies in the Reichstag alongside the equally anti-democratic communist bloc, there was an anti-democratic 'wrecking majority' that could block normal parliamentary processes. The government seemed to be caught in deadlock, with Hitler as leader of the largest party.

How did Hitler finally get appointed Chancellor?

Yet Hitler was not offered the Chancellorsip in the summer of 1932. The most that Hindenburg could bring himself to offer was the Vice-Chancellorsip, a suggestion which Hitler greeted with derision, much to the dismay and anger of many members of his party who felt he had thrown away the best chance they would ever get. Von Papen limped on for a few more months, losing a vote of no confidence in the Reichstag on 12 September by 512 votes to 42.

Nazi fortunes apparently on the wane

During the autumn of 1932, the first signs of economic recovery began to be felt. Meanwhile, the fortunes of the Nazi party appeared to take a turn for the worse, with funds and energy exhausted by the almost constant electioneering of the year. In the elections of 6 November 1932, the Nazi vote declined to 33.1 per cent of the vote, with 196 deputies in the Reichstag. The party itself was split further by the willingness of its more radical wing, in the person of Gregor Strasser, to enter into discussions with the new and short-lived Chancellor, General von Schleicher, who had finally taken over government after playing a key role in many of the political machinations of preceding months.

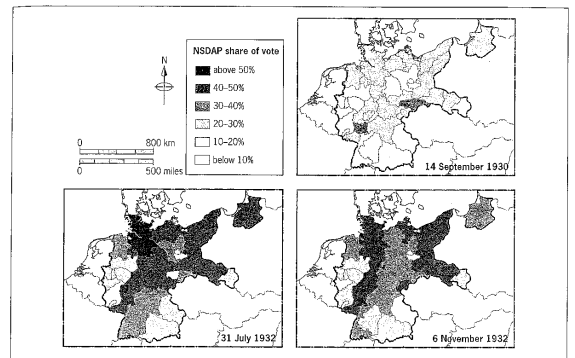
Ironically, it was precisely because Hitler had been losing popular support – while yet remaining leader of the largest party in the Reichstag – and because his party appeared split and weakened, that Hitler no longer appeared quite so much of a threat. Thus, it looked more likely that he could be co-opted and 'tamed' by those who wished to harness his mass following for their own purposes.

Political deadlock: the apparent lack of any stable alternative

Von Schleicher's Chancellorsip of a matter of weeks from December 1932 to January 1933 was even more short-lived than that of his predecessor. During this period, he failed to gain the support of trade unionists and the 'left wing' of the NSDAP, and at the same time managed to antagonise industrialists and agrarian elites. By January 1932, there was almost total political deadlock in Germany. Von Schleicher himself had commissioned a report (the 'Ott Report') the previous autumn which claimed to show that the Army could not control the rising levels of political violence on the streets, particularly in the event of civil war.

The final 'backstairs intrigue'

In late January 1933, the fatal combination came together. Elites were not prepared to uphold democracy at any cost; most wanted some form of



The electoral performance of the NSDAP 1930–33.

authoritarian government. Hitler, as leader of the largest party, was insistent on the Chancellorsip or nothing. With loss of votes, morale and membership, organisationally split, and suffering heavy debts, the NSDAP no longer seemed so dangerous. In these circumstances, an ageing Hindenburg was persuaded, by a small group including his own son and von Papen, to appoint Hitler leader of mixed cabinet in which there were only two other Nazis.

On the evening of 30 January 1933, the SA celebrated Hitler's appointment as Chancellor with a torch-lit parade through the centre of Berlin; within days, political opponents were being rounded up, brutally beaten and tortured, while Hitler unveiled his megalomaniac plans for the future. Following the Reichstag fire of 27 February, under conditions of intimidation and violence, the Nazi party still failed to gain an absolute majority of the vote; in the elections of 5 March 1933, the NSDAP polled just under 44 per cent of the vote. Hitler had been handed power by the old guard, while a majority of the population remained unwilling to support him. It did not take Hitler long to ensure he would no longer need to pay heed to such electoral matters.

The death of Weimar democracy: accident, suicide or murder?

The answer to this question is complex: there was an element of each. 'Accident', because had the Wall Street crash not occurred there would have been some chance for continued stabilisation over time; 'suicide', because key elites had no will to uphold democracy and took the wrong decisions, most tragically at the very end; and 'murder', because Hitler made no secret of his intention to destroy democracy, having abused the democratic system to attain power by constitutional means. On balance, Hitler had a great deal of luck as well as political ability; he was the beneficiary of developments which had taken place for reasons not of his own making.

SA. The brown-shirted Sturmabteilung ('storm troopers'), a paramilitary organisation of the NSDAP.

Reichstag fire. The German parliament building (Reichstag) was set on fire by an arson attack which the Nazis blamed on Communists and used as a pretext for declaring a state of emergency in the run-up to the election.

1. Identify the main groups that supported Hitler in Germany in 1933.
2. Explain the popularity of the Nazis in Germany in 1933.