

# **History Paper 1**

## **Weimar Germany**

### **Model Answers**



- **2 Model Answers**
- **Revision Notes**

## WEIMAR GERMANY MODEL ANSWERS TO PAPER 1, 2015

### **In-Depth Study questions**

**The Weimar Republic faced many problems.**

#### **1. Describe the German Revolution of 1918. [4]**

The German Revolution of 1918 was a dramatic change in Germany's political leadership – from being a Monarchy led by Kaiser Wilhelm II to being a Republic led by an elected government. The drastic change in leadership was a result of several factors, however Germany's losses during the First World War, coupled with the severe hardships that Germany people faced during the War meant there were huge tensions in Germany. Indeed, a British naval blockade had led to severe food shortages and in 1918, 293,000 Germans died from starvation and hypothermia. Also it became clear to the Germany military leaders, Generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff, that Germany would likely lose the First World War so they advised the Kaiser that Germany should ask the Allies for an armistice. However, the Kaiser stubbornly wanted to continue waging war and this came to a head in October 1918 when the Germany Navy mutinied against the Kaiser in what was called the "Kiel Mutiny." Realising he had little popular support and the Army had ceased their support for the War, the Kaiser abdicated and fled in November 1918. On 11 November 1918 World War One ended when an armistice was agreed with the Allies (Britain, France and the USA) and Germany surrendered. By December, Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had declared a new Republic after being voted to lead Germany by the National Congress of German Workers' and Soldiers' Council in December 1918. As a result, Germany underwent a Revolution and it went from being ruled by an autocratic Kaiser to being ruled by a Democratically-elected government.

#### **2. Why was the Weimar Republic facing problems in 1919–20? [6]**

The Weimar Republic from the outset was beset with many problems. The first problem is many Germans perceived the government as "traitors" to Germany as they mistakenly believed that Germany would have won the war if Germany had persisted and the Treaty of Versailles had not been officially signed to end the War. Many of these people, most of whom supported political parties on the Right, labelled the SPD government the "November Criminals" as they believed the new government had betrayed Germany in the war and surrendered many German privileges over to the Allies at the end of the War.

On the other hand, the Weimar Republic faced challenges from more extreme political parties on the Left. The SPD, which was led by President Ebert, was a moderate Socialist party and although they wished to implement reforms that would benefit Germany's working classes as well as strengthen trade unions, the more extreme Leftist party which was the USPD, believed that the new German Republic should undertake more extreme changes and measures – similar to the Bolshevik Revolution which had swept through Russia and essentially ousted the Tsarist Monarchy and instituted a Communist regime. Within the USPD was the even more extreme Left party called the KPD, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Inspired by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, they attempted the Spartacist Putsch in 1919 to overthrow the SPD government. However this Revolt was ultimately unsuccessful as the SPD used the Army as well as the Freikorps, who were Right-wing German military volunteer units,

crisis that had destroyed the living standards and savings of many ordinary Germans. Moreover, during the hyperinflation crisis when Germany was unable to keep up with its reparation payments, the French and Belgian governments decided to occupy the Ruhr – an industrial area of Germany which was also rich in national resources – as a way to take payment directly from Germany in the form of extracting its resources. However, Stresemann managed to negotiate their exit and restore the Ruhr back to Germany – which helped build the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic in many German people’s eyes.

As a result, between 1924 and 1929, the Weimar Republic recovered and prospered leading this period to be called its “Golden Years.” Indeed the Republic rebuilt itself and many German workers saw their wages increase by 25% between 1925 and 1928, leading their quality of life to improve. Furthermore between 1924 and 1931 more than two million new homes were built and by 1928, homelessness has been reduced by more than 60%. This meant the Weimar Republic leadership experienced political stability as more extreme Left and extreme Right parties were pushed to the margins. To be sure, centre, pro-Weimar parties acquired the greatest number of votes during this period and democracy appeared to have been accepted by a majority of German people.

Moreover, Stresemann became the dominant face of the Weimar Republic as Foreign Secretary as he successfully negotiated the Dawes Plan in 1924, which reduced reparation payments by Germany and made the payments far more affordable for the country. Also under the Dawes Plan, the USA loaned Germany \$5 billion to help re-build its economy and keep up with its reparation payments. Moreover, the Weimar Republic overcame its problems internationally because Stresemann was able to negotiate several international agreements with countries to ensure that they would mutually respect each other’s’ borders and not resort to conflict when there was a disagreement. In 1925, the Locarno Pact was signed between Germany, France, Belgium, UK and Italy and they all agreed not to fight each other. Furthermore the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 was an agreement made between France, Germany and USA to settle disputes peacefully. Germany’s ascension into the League of Nations in 1926 further meant that it was seen as a positive and stable partner by all the European member states and it could be argued that the Weimar Republic enjoyed international political stability as a result of this.

**3. The weaknesses in the Weimar Constitution were the main reason for the collapse of the Republic.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. [10]**

To a large extent, it appears that the Weimar Constitution played a primary role in leading to the collapse of the Weimar Republic. The Weimar Constitution, which was drafted in 1919 following the German revolution which ushered in a democratically elected SPD-led government, was seen as containing significant weaknesses that were ultimately used by Adolf Hitler in 1933 to end the Weimar Republic. However, that being considered, there were several other factors which also were key contributing factors to the collapse of the Weimar Republic.

The Weimar Constitution, which was written by the National Assembly after it had been elected in January 1919, wanted to create a highly democratic system of government to prevent a return to the autocratic leadership style of a monarchy. Drafted by the lawyer and liberal politician Hugo Preuss, the Constitution attempted to ensure that democracy would be entrenched in the new government and the competing political interests of all the parties in the National Assembly would be balanced and represented – and this led to a system of

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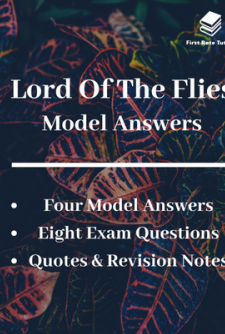
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