

Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918-1939

Module One: The Weimar Republic 1918-1929 Revision Guide

In this module you will revise:

The origins of the Republic, 1918–19

The legacy of the First World War. The abdication of the Kaiser, the armistice and revolution, 1918–19. The setting up of the Weimar Republic. The strengths and weaknesses of the new Constitution

1

The early challenges to the Weimar Republic 1919–23

Reasons for the early unpopularity of the Republic, including the 'stab in the back' theory and the key terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Challenges to the Republic from Left and Right: Spartacists, Freikorps, the Kapp Putsch. The challenges of 1923: hyperinflation; the reasons for, and effects of, the French occupation of the Ruhr

2

The recovery of the Republic, 1924–29

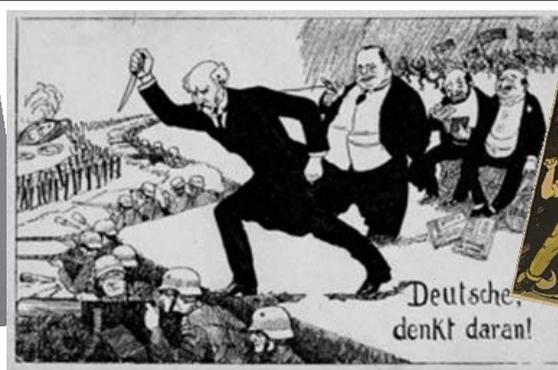
Reasons for economic recovery, including the work of Stresemann, the Rentenmark, the Dawes and Young Plans and American loans and investment. The impact on domestic policies of Stresemann's achievements abroad: the Locarno Pact, joining the League of Nations and the Kellogg-Briand Pact

3

Changes in society, 1924–29

Changes in the standard of living, including wages, housing, unemployment insurance. Changes in the position of women in work, politics and leisure. Cultural changes: developments in architecture, art and the cinema.

4



KT 1.1 The Origins of the Republic

The Legacy of WW1:

WWI was long, bloody and expensive. Germany was left in a very poor state, and German people were suffering:

- fighting lasted four years, from **1914-18**
- 11 million Germans fought. **2 million died** and over **4 million were wounded** - so **55% of troops became casualties**.
- The German government's **debt tripled, from 50 billion marks to 150 billion marks**
- A British **blockade** on German ports led to food shortages in Germany, causing the **death of over 750,000 civilians**.



Germany was crumbling from within. Prices were rising (inflation), people were starving, and riots were breaking out. This was the beginning of ...

The German Revolution:

It was clear that Kaiser Wilhelm had lost control of Germany. It was time for him to go.

- In many towns, **workers and soldiers had set up their own, unofficial councils** to replace the Kaiser's officials.
- The Kaiser had **lost the support of the army**

On 9 November 1918, the Kaiser abdicated, and fled to exile in Holland. This led to ...

The declaration of a republic:

Moderate members of the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) – the biggest party in Germany's parliament – scrambled to take control and establish a new republic:



- **9 November: Frederick Ebert**, the leader of the SPD, took over the position of **chancellor**
- **10 November: Ebert agreed** with General Groener to **work with the army**
- **10 November: He suspended the old Reichstag** (parliament) and named six moderate politicians who would **form the Council of People's Representatives** which would head the country until a new constitution could be agreed.

They had managed to prevent anarchy or a takeover by communist extremists.

The armistice:

The temporary government then agreed with the Allies to end the First World War:

- **On 11 November 1918 the armistice was signed.**
- The terms of the peace, the **Treaty of Versailles**, were to become a permanent burden to the new republic.

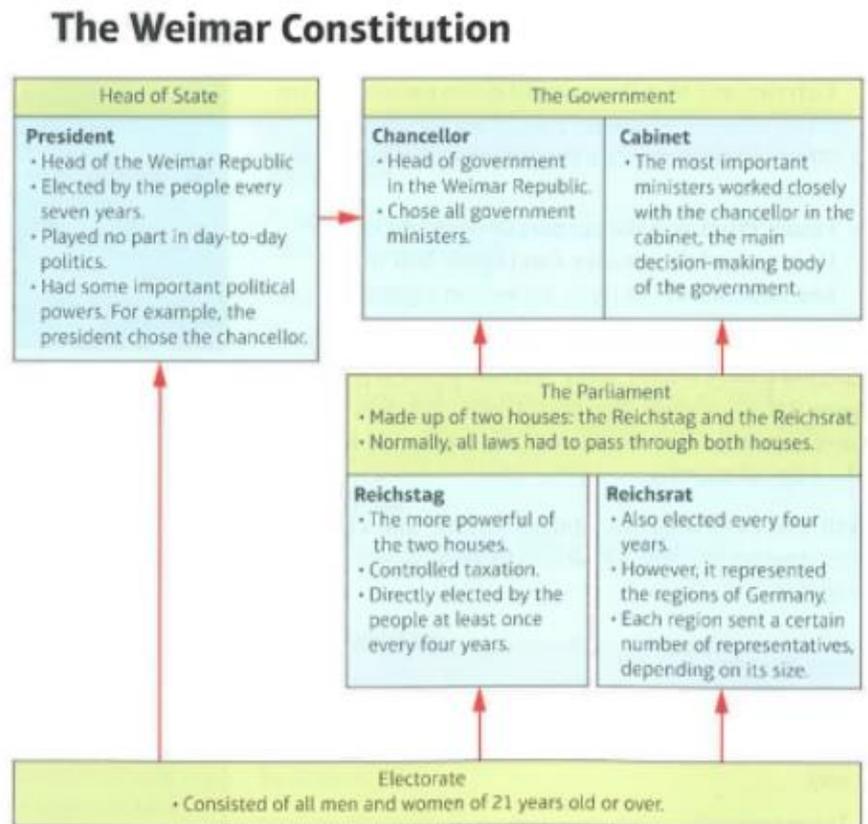


Setting up the Weimar Republic:

The Weimar Constitution:

The newly elected **National Assembly** met in the peaceful town of Weimar to agree a new constitution. On July 31 1919 they it was finalised. The new republic, now governed by the constitution agreed in Weimar became known as the **Weimar Republic**. Their new rules included:

- everyone **over the age of 20** could vote.
- **People voted for MPs** who would sit in the Reichstag
- The **Reichstag would make Laws**.
- The **Chancellor** would be head of the Reichstag and would be voted for **every 4 years**.
- **The President** would be in charge of the country, control the army and choose the Chancellor. He would be **voted for every 7 years**.



Strengths and Weaknesses of the Weimar Constitution:

Strengths of Weimar Constitution

- **Very fair, particularly the voting.** Most democratic country in the world with everyone over 20 being able to vote
- Allowed lots of people to have their say State governments would **ensure local issues were addressed**
- **Wouldn't allow one person to take over.** The Chancellor and president balanced each other.
- **A poor Chancellor or President would only be around for a limited time.**

Weaknesses of Weimar Constitution

- **Proportional representation** meant that there were lots of different parties in the Reichstag – it was difficult to get them to agree on anything!
- **ARTICLE 48** meant that the president could make laws without asking the Reichstag which could be abused so that the President could become a dictator!
- In allowing state governments to continue, **State governments could pass laws that went against what the Reichstag wanted.**

K.T 1.2 Early Challenges to the Republic

Unpopularity of the Republic

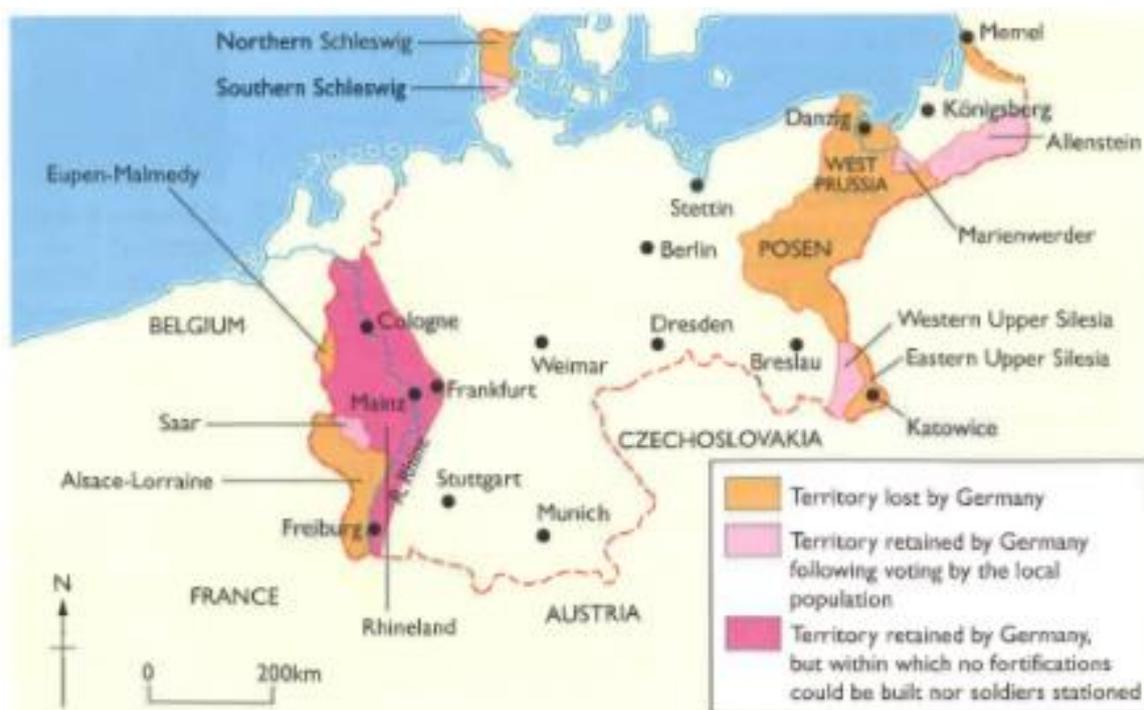
The Weimar Republic did not formally start until July 1919. However, the politicians who set up and ran it were the same ones who surrendered at the end of the First World War and accepted an unpopular peace treaty. **The Weimar Republic was therefore always linked to surrender and harsh peace treaty terms.**

The Treaty of Versailles (T.O.V.).

Remember L.A.M.B: Land, Army, Money, Blame

Signed on 28 June 1918, the Treaty consisted of 440 Articles setting out the terms for Germany's punishment. Germany was not allowed to attend the meetings when the terms were discussed and the treaty was met with shock and disbelief by the German people.

- 1) **Article 231** of the treaty said **Germany had to take the blame** for the war.
- 2) **Germany's armed forces were reduced** to 100,000 men. They weren't allowed any armoured vehicles, aircraft or submarines, and could only have six warships.
- 3) **Germans were forced to pay £6600 million in reparations** for the damage caused by the war.
- 4) **Germany lost its empire.** Areas they used to control were put under the banner of the League of Nations, but Germany was not allowed to join the League themselves.
- 5) **The German military was banned from the Rhineland** – and area of Germany on its western border with France. This left Germany open to attack from the West.
- 6) The Saar (**rich coalfields**) and Alsace-Lorraine were **given to France**.



What did the German people think about this?

- **Germans called the treaty a 'Diktat'** (a treaty forced in Germany) and blamed Ebert for accepting its terms.
- Some Germans believed that the armistice was a mistake and that Germany could have won the war. **They felt 'stabbed in the back'** by the Germany's new leaders.
- Payment of reparations and the loss of industrial areas meant that **Germany would have economic problems for years.**
- **Many Germans did not feel safe** in their own country with the reduction of their army and loss of their navy and air force. They were in constant fear of being invaded.
- By having the treaty forced upon them and not being able to join the League of Nations, **international relations between Germany and other countries was at an all-time low.**

A German poster from 1931. It advertises a NSDAP rally and shows a German figure in handcuffs labelled 'Versailles'.



The T.O.V. caused resentment towards Germany's new leaders. The Treaty was so harsh that people resented the leaders of the new German republic who signed it. They became known as the 'November Criminals'.

Challenges to the Weimar Republic from the Left and Right:

In the National Assembly moderates were in the majority. The Social Democrats (SDP) worked with other moderate parties to create the Weimar Republic in 1919. However, there were extreme left-wing and right-wing parties which did not support the Weimar Republic.



Inside the Reichstag:

Extreme right-wing, what did they want?

- Return to strong government with a strong army headed by a powerful leader.
- Capitalism
- Traditional values
- Placed the interests of the nation over the individual

The main right-wing party in 1919 was the **National Party (DNVP)**

Extreme left-wing, what did they want?

- For Germany to be controlled by people
- Opposed capitalism – wanted land and business in the hands of the workers
- Co-operation of nations

The **German Communist party (KPD)** was the main left-wing party in 1919.

For most of the 1920s, the moderate centre parties struggled to form majority coalitions, whilst being constantly attacked in the Reichstag by extremist politicians from the left and right wings.

Extremist	Moderate Parties				Extremist	
KPD	SPD	DDP	ZP	DVP	DNVP	NSDAP
Communist party	Social Democrats	Democrats	Centre Party	People's party	National Party	Nazi Party
Extreme left wing	Moderate left wing	Moderate left wing	Moderate	Moderate right wing	Right wing	Extreme right wing
Opposed the Weimar Republic	Supported Weimar Republic	Supported Weimar Republic	Supported Weimar Republic	Sometimes supported Republic	Grudgingly accepted Republic	Opposed Weimar Republic
Supported by workers and some middle classes	Supported by workers and middle classes	Backed by intellectual middle classes	Conservatives. Originally the party of the Catholic Church	Backed by upper middle classes	Landowners, the wealthy and big business	Founded in 1920, eventual main party of Germany in the 1930s
← LEFT						RIGHT →

Challenges from the left and right outside the Reichstag

A lot of Germans were not happy with the Weimar Government running Germany. Lots of groups thought they would do a better job and tried to take over Germany using violence.

The Spartacist Revolt 1919 – a left-wing uprising

WHO: Communist Party

WHERE: Berlin 1st January 1919

WHY: They wanted Germany to be a COMMUNIST COUNTRY. They did not want a democracy.

EVENTS: They took over the government's newspaper and other important buildings.

RESPONSE: The government sent in the FREIKORPS (groups of ex-WW1 soldiers). They stopped the revolt and killed the leaders.

THREAT: MEDIUM. This made the government look WEAK to the public. The only reason they won was because of the FREIKORPS.

The Kapp Putsch 1920 – a right-wing uprising

WHO: The Freikorps

WHERE: Stuttgart March 1920

WHY: The Weimar Government was going to get rid of the Freikorps. They were not happy about this and thought they should run the country instead

EVENTS: 5000 Freikorps took control of Berlin (Capital City)

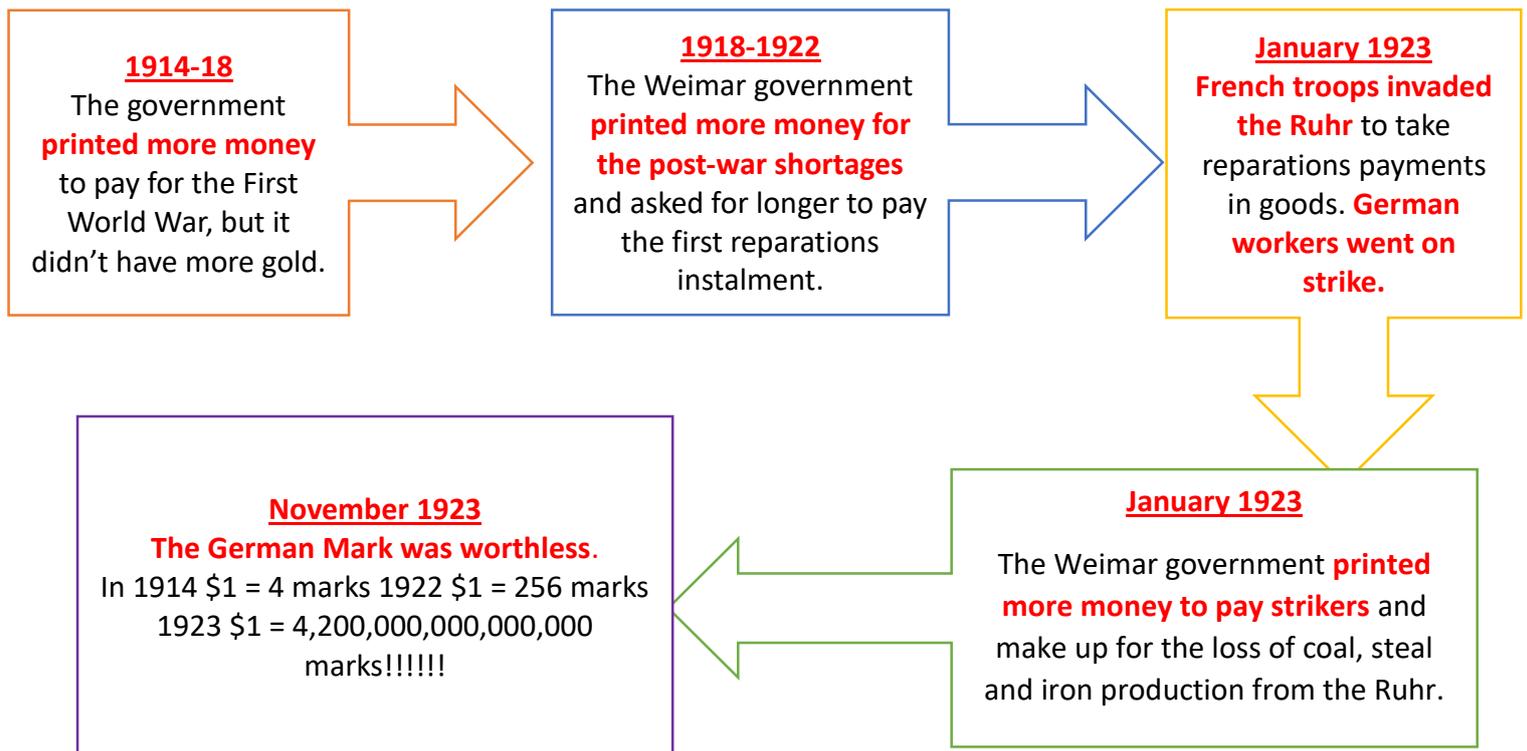
RESPONSE: The government asked the army to stop them but they were too scared. The German workers did not want the Freikorps to rule so they went on STRIKE (refused to work). Kapp ran away.

THREAT: STRONG. This made the government look even MORE WEAK to the public. If the workers had not gone on strike the Kapp Putsch would have WORKED!

The challenges of 1923 – Inflation and Hyperinflation

In 1919 the German economy was in ruins:

- The **war had cost millions of marks** and in the Treaty of Versailles the allies demanded that Germany pay **reparations of 6.6 billion pounds** and give up their important industrial areas.
- This meant that many **businesses had to close, high unemployment** and no way of Germany making any money.
- The government decided **the only way to solve the problem was to print more money** that they didn't have. This resulted in hyperinflation.



<u>Negative Effects</u>	<u>Positive Effects</u>
Prices rose very quickly People had to be paid three times a day The price of a loaf of bread could double in the space of one day There was widespread panic	Farmers benefitted, as they were paid more for goods.
People could not afford food like bread Many people starved	Wages rose (but not as much as prices)
Businesses went bankrupt people lost their jobs	Poor people who had lots of debt could easily it off
Savings became worthless, pensioners suffered the most Weimar government was hated	Those with fixed rents for rooms or shops were much better off.

KT 1.3 The Recovery of the Republic, 1924-1929

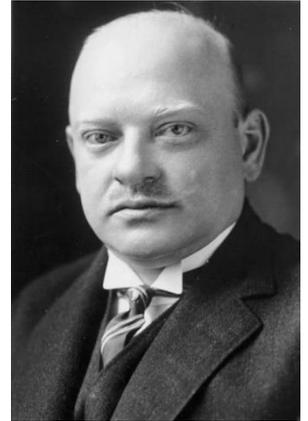
At the end of 1923 the Weimar Government faced many problems. By 1929 however, Germany's problems all seemed to be solved and the German economy recovering from the dangerous situation of 1923.

Stresemann's strategy:

Who was Stresemann?

Appointed the **chancellor and new foreign secretary in Germany in 1923**

Because of his work in economic and foreign policy things in Germany changed for the better.



What did he do?

Problem 1: Hyperinflation



Solution:

- He stopped the printing of paper money
- Replaced all old money with a new currency called the **RENTENMARK** (later renamed the Reichsmark), backed by Germany's gold reserve

Did it work?

- ✓ German **currency was trusted** both at home and abroad. The economy had a much stronger foundation for recovery and **hyperinflation ended...**
- ✗ People who had lost their savings never got them back!

Problem 2: French Occupation of the Ruhr

Solution:

- Ended passive resistance.
- Met with French, British and American leaders.
- **DAWES PLAN 1924**: Agreed to reorganise reparation payments and USA loaned Germany money.
- **YOUNG PLAN 1929** further reduced amount Germany owed.

Did it work?

- ✓ French troops **left the Ruhr** and they could **afford to pay the reparations**
- ✗ But under the plans Germany had to **keep paying the reparations until 1988. Relied heavily on America.** If they wanted their money back Germany would be in a lot of trouble.

The International Financial System Under the Dawes Plan and Young Plan 1924-30





Problem 3 : Other countries didn't trust Germany

Solution:

- In 1925 Germany signed the **Locarno Pact** with Britain, France, Belgium and Italy promising not to invade one another.
- In 1926, Germany was allowed to join the **League of Nations**.
- In 1928, Germany, along with 64 other countries, signed the **Kellogg-Briand Pact**. They all agreed not to go to war unless in self defence.

Did it work?

- ✓ Germany did become **a major European power** again.
- ✗ Some people said **they should have asked for the land back** which had been taken away in the Treaty of Versailles.

Problem 4: The German Economy

Solution:

- Loans from **AMERICA**.
- **Dawes Plan** 1924 and **Young Plan** 1929.
- Built new **factories, housing, hospitals, schools and roads**.
- **More jobs** with Germans earning more money.

Did it work?

- ✓ Slowly, **Germany became richer**. Some called it a '**golden age**'. Berlin had new night clubs, galleries, beer halls...
- ✗ But there were still worries that this only happened because of the loans from America- **what if America wanted the money back?**

Overall support for moderate political parties rose and by 1929 the Weimar Republic was a more secure and stable state.

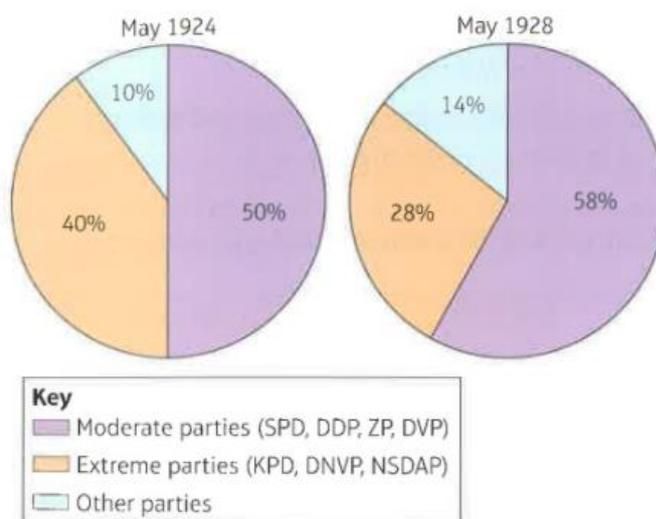


Figure 1.6 A breakdown of the election results.

KT 1.4 Changes in Society, 1924-1929

Changes in the standard of living:

Living standards suffered as a result of the economic problems between 1918 and 1923. However, there were gradual social improvement after 1924. Many of these were funded by the Weimar Government.



Unemployment and unemployment insurance: Gradual improvement with more help for the unemployed (The Unemployment Insurance Act 1927 unemployment and sickness benefits).

Work and wages: Wages and working conditions improved. Length of the working week shortened and real wages up by 25% 1925-192.

Housing: 1925 15% rent tax introduced to fund building associations to tackle homes shortage. The crisis had eased by 1928.



Other improvements: Help for veterans – 1920 Reich Pension Law. Education also improved with an increase of the number of students in higher education.



These improvements were fragile, and not seen as positive by all. These changes benefitted working people but alienated big businesses who resented their loss of power and profit, and the lower middle class who saw their own position as under threat.

Changes for women in the Weimar Republic

Women in politics

- **Women given the vote** and the right to stand in elections
- Article 109 of the constitution stated:

Women had **equal rights**

Marriage was an equal partnership

Women should be able to enter all professions

Women at leisure:

Rise of 'new women':

Young, unmarried women living in cities with job opportunities – greater social independence.

Women at work:

In some ways **back to pre-war conditions** and did not get equal treatment –

Paid less on average, expected to give up work once married, fewer entered high-status jobs.



Changes for women was the source of many social tensions

Women in work:

Some progress:

Booming retail and service sectors produced lots of part-time jobs

Professions like education and medicine saw rise in number of females.

Society divided:

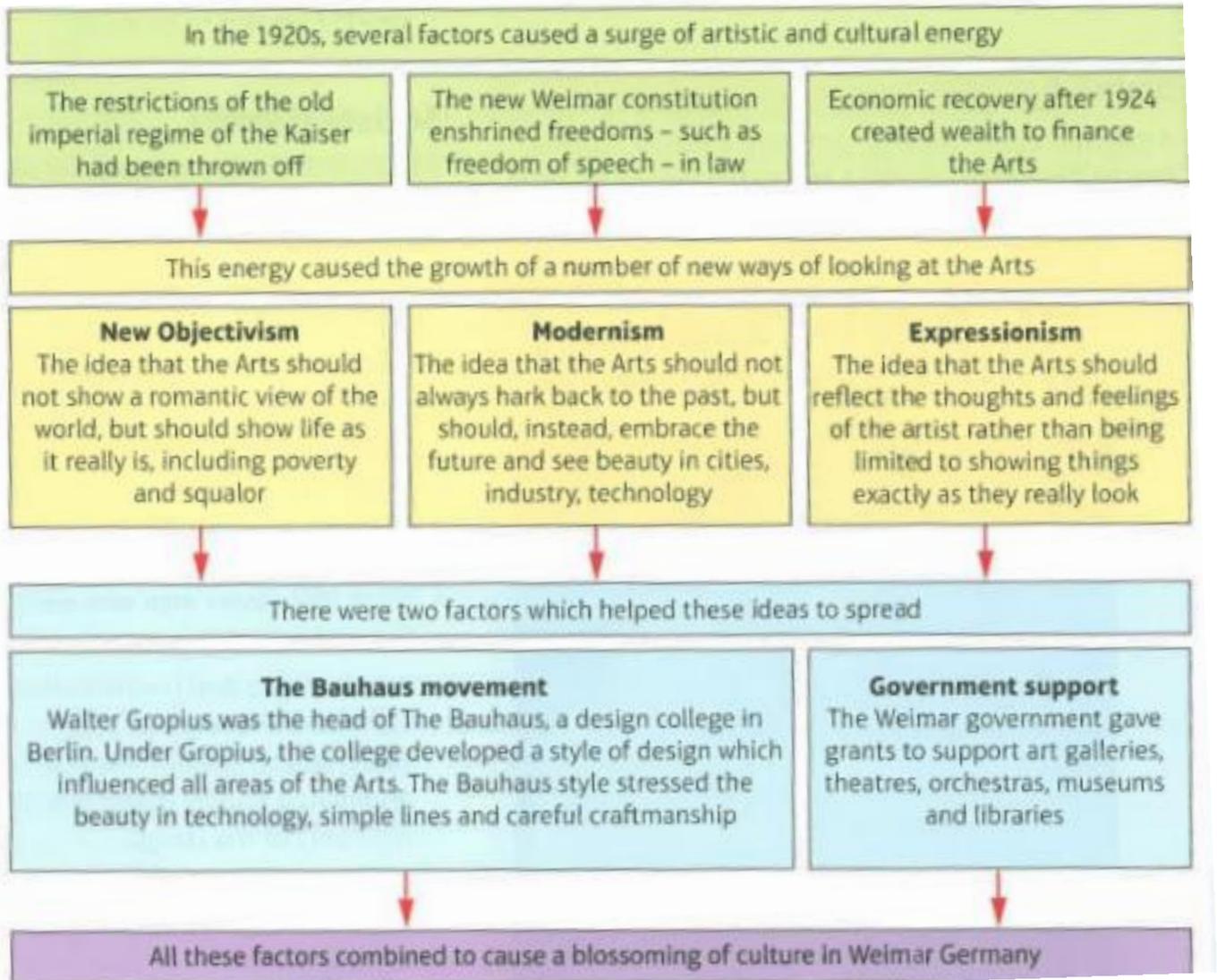
Some **women were frightened** of the changes

Some men said that **'new women' threatened the role of men** in society

Conservatives said they should **focus on being wives and mothers**

Some **blamed economic instability on women** upsetting the labour market

Cultural Changes in the Weimar Republic



What Changed?

- Criticism of the government and even songs and books mentioning sex were allowed!
- Berlin became a thriving centre of the arts, with over 120 newspapers and 40 theatres.
- Throughout the 1920s Berlin challenged Paris as cultural capital of Europe, with new and significant developments in painting, the cinema, architecture, design, the theatre and other fields.
- This did not help the reputation of the Weimar Republic, however; in the eyes of its right-wing critics (such as the Nazis), its artists were undermining traditional German values.



Quick recap multiple choice quiz:

1. What area did France occupy in 1923 when reparations were stopped?

- A. The Rhineland
- B. The Ruhr
- C. The Rügen
- D. The Reich

2. What did the German government organise among workers, in response?

- A. Armed resistance
- B. Co-operation
- C. Passive resistance
- D. A putsch

3. By printing money to pay its debts, what did the government trigger?

- A. Hyperinflation
- B. Deflation
- C. Financial escalation
- D. Capitalisation

4. What did Stresemann introduce in 1924 to save the economy?

- A. A new currency
- B. Emergency powers
- C. Higher taxation
- D. Full employment

6. What was Germany invited to join in 1926, raising its international status?

- A. The United Nations
- B. The League of Nations
- C. The National League
- D. The United League

7. What were reparations reduced to under the Young Plan of 1929?

- A. £3 billion
- B. £6.6 billion
- C. £2 billion
- D. £4 billion

8. Which political groups gained support during the Stresemann years?

- A. Extremist parties
- B. Moderate parties
- C. Nationalists
- D. Communists

9. Which social group gained political rights, job opportunities and more chance to express themselves?

- A. Women
- B. Gay people
- C. Jewish people
- C. Disabled people

Exam Style Questions:

Source A

From the papers of Jan Smuts, a South African politician who visited Germany in 1918.

... mother-land of our civilization [Germany] lies in ruins, exhausted by the most terrible struggle in history, with its peoples broke, starving, despairing, from sheer nervous exhaustion, mechanically struggling forward along the paths of anarchy [disorder with no strong authority] and war.

Study Source A. Give two things you can infer about how well Germany was being governed in November 1918 (4 marks)

A good answer will select details from the source and will suggest what can be inferred from these details about how well Germany was being governed in 1918.

Explain why there were economic problems in the Weimar Republic from 1918 to 1923. You may use the following in your answer:

- **Reparations**
- **The French occupation of the Ruhr**

You must also use information of your own (12 marks)

A good answer will:

- Include several factors that caused economic problem
- Contain detailed information about each economic factor and its economic effects
- Explain why each factor caused economic problems

Study Source B and Source F (below). How useful are they in an enquiry into the recovery of the Weimar Republic between 1923 and 1929? (8 marks)

Explain your answer using the sources and your own knowledge to explain the historical context.

A good answer will consider:

- How useful the information in each source is
- How the provenance of each source affects how useful it is
- How knowledge of history at the time affects judgement of how useful each source is

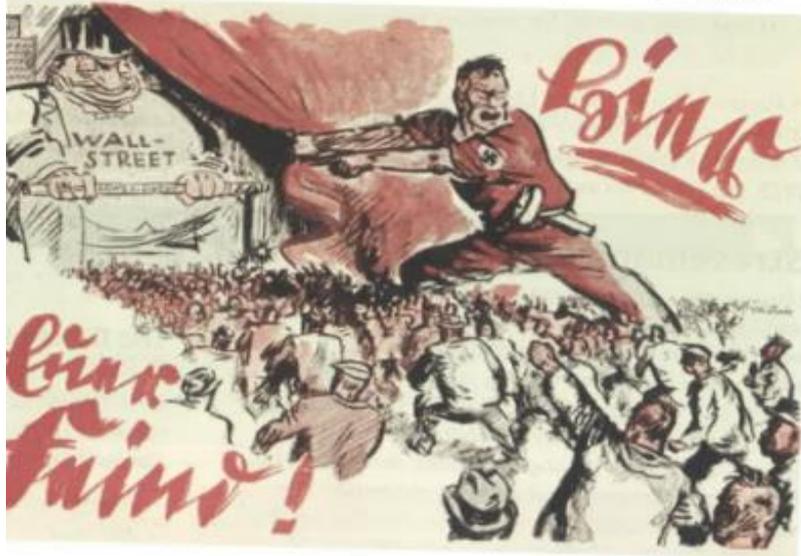
Source F

A German journalist, writing in 1929.

In comparison with what we expected after Versailles, Germany has raised herself up. It now shoulders the terrific burden of that peace in a way we should never have thought possible. The bad feeling of Versailles has been conquered.

Source B

A right-wing cartoon published in 1923. The figure behind the curtain represents the USA. Wall Street was the US financial centre. The caption says 'Here is your enemy'.



Interpretation 2

From an article on women in Weimar Germany, written by Rudiger Graf in 2009.

Because of women's improved position in the workforce and their newly acquired rights as citizens... women themselves seemed to have changed... Magazines... presented a new generation of women that differed fundamentally from their mothers.

Interpretation 3

From *Weimar and Nazi Germany*, by Stephen Lee published in 1996.

The 1920s saw a huge cultural revival in Germany. Indeed, these years have been seen as the greatest period of experimentation in the whole of Germany's history. As things settled down politically, writers and artists had more of a chance to try out new ideas. The results were impressive and spread across all areas of the Arts.

Study interpretations 2 and 3 (above) They give different views about the attitudes towards women in Weimar Germany.

What is the main difference between these views?

Explain your answer, using details from both interpretations (4 marks)

A good answer will not just find difference of detail between interpretations. The key is:

- To decide how the view in one interpretation is different from in the other
- To use details in each interpretation to illustrate how the views differ