

2

Why did the Weimar Republic survive the crises of 1919–23?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The Weimar Republic's infancy was just as traumatic and turbulent as its birth. Early in 1919, just as the new state was being created, it faced its first threat, the communist-inspired Spartacist rising. Then, in August 1919, even before the constitution had been formally adopted, the Republic received a hammer blow when the peace terms in the Treaty of Versailles laid full blame for the war on Germany and exacted crushing financial compensation. Within a year, in 1920, came a second attempt to overthrow the Republic, this time in the right-wing Kapp Putsch. A brief period of relative calm followed, only to be disrupted in 1923 by HYPERINFLATION that threatened economic chaos and undermined the government's reputation. Finally, in this period, came another right-wing assault, the Munich Putsch led by Adolf Hitler.

Despite these threats, the Republic survived – but why? Was its survival the result of its own strengths or because of the weaknesses of the challenges? This chapter enables you to answer these questions by looking at the following issues:

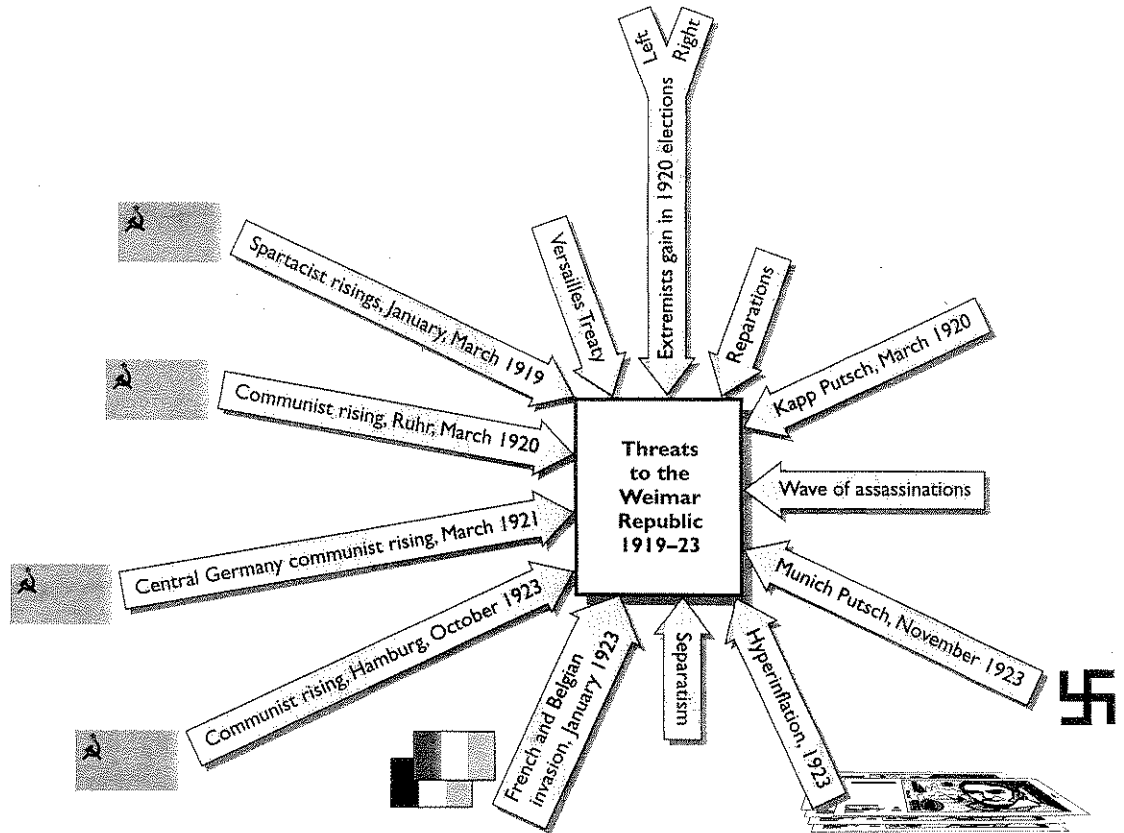
- A** How great a burden for the Weimar Republic was the Treaty of Versailles? (pp. 35–9)
- B** Did Weimar democracy face a serious challenge from the Left? (pp. 40–1)
- C** How strong was the challenge from the Right? 1: The Kapp Putsch and assassinations (pp. 42–4)
- D** Did the hyperinflation crisis of 1923 undermine Weimar democracy? (pp. 44–50)
- E** How strong was the challenge from the Right? 2: Hitler's Munich Putsch, 1923 (pp. 51–5)
- F** Review: Why did the Weimar Republic survive the crises of 1919–23? (p. 56)

FOCUS ROUTE

As you read this chapter, you will be asked to copy and complete a table like the one below. It will help you to assess the danger posed by each challenge and to decide why the Weimar Republic survived. Use the table to compile evidence of the reasons why the challenges failed. The Review at the end of the chapter (page 56) refers back to this Focus Route.

	Major challenges to Weimar democracy			
	Radical Left		Radical Right	
	The Spartacist rising 1919	Further unrest 1919–23	The Kapp Putsch 1920	The Munich Putsch 1923
Reasons for challenges				
Possible reasons for failure	Evidence			
1 Lack of support				
2 Lack of firm leadership				
3 Lack of a clear strategy				
4 Internal divisions				
5 Actions by the government				
6 Support for the government				
7 Attitude of elite/powerful people, army and police				
Degree of danger (scale 1–5, with 1 = minimal danger)				

■ 2A Problems facing the Weimar Republic 1919-23



■ 2B Key events 1919-23

- 1919 Jan** Left-wing Spartacist rising
Jun Treaty of Versailles lays blame for war on Germany: Allies demand reparations
1920 Mar Right-wing Kapp Putsch attempts to overthrow the new Republic
1923 Jan French and Belgian troops occupy the Ruhr. Hyperinflation threatens economic chaos
Nov Right-wing Munich Putsch led by Adolf Hitler challenges the Weimar regime

THINKING TIME

Using what you have already learned, would you expect the greatest threat to the Weimar Republic to come from the Right or the Left?

THINKING DEEPER

A lot of words with similar meanings are used in this chapter, such as revolution, COUNTER-REVOLUTION, COUP, putsch, INSURRECTION and revolt. What does each one mean?

■ Learning trouble spot

The Armistice, November 1918, and the Treaty of Versailles, June 1919

Students often confuse these events, not appreciating the time gap between the two. The First World War formally ended at 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918 when Germany and the Allies signed the Armistice. This laid down certain conditions, many of which were then built into the final treaty. The economic blockade and threat of renewed war were used as a lever to pressurise Germany to agree to the eventual terms. It took months of negotiations between the Allies before the actual Versailles Treaty (along with others with Germany's allies) was signed in June 1919.

A How great a burden for the Weimar Republic was the Treaty of Versailles?

FOCUS ROUTE

- 1
 - a) List the key features of the Versailles settlement.
 - b) Give two examples where the principle of self-determination did not apply to Germans.
 - c) Give two examples where it was applied, with the effect of harming Germany.
- 2 Which aspects of the treaty were most likely to
 - a) annoy
 - b) damage Germany?
- 3 In what ways did the treaty harm the prospects for Weimar democracy?
- 4
 - a) What arguments are there that in practice Germany was not greatly burdened by the Treaty of Versailles?
 - b) Do these arguments mean that the treaty did not undermine the Weimar Republic?

'Death rather than slavery' thundered the nationalist newspaper *Deutsche Zeitung* in response to the Treaty of Versailles. But it was not just the Right that was infuriated by the treaty. Virtually the whole German nation rejected it. Even the government was split over whether to accept it but in the end it had no choice. The threat of the Allies to resume the war and the fear of total German dismemberment led the government reluctantly to urge acceptance. The Constituent Assembly finally did so in June 1919 by 237 votes to 138.

German outrage at the treaty is explained in a number of ways. Most Germans, as late as spring 1918, had expected victory and to make major gains. The sudden collapse of their hopes bred anger as well as frustration. Secondly, Germany hoped that the Fourteen Points (proposed by President Wilson of the USA in 1917 as the basis for a treaty) would lead to a fair peace.

They were in for a major shock. The Fourteen Points were applied selectively so that millions of Germans were denied their national rights. The German government was excluded from the negotiations and was merely asked for comments within 21 days of a final draft. Two minor amendments were made and then the settlement was imposed as a Diktat, a dictated peace. In the hated 'war guilt' clause, Germany was blamed for the war in order to justify making her pay compensation to the Allies in the form of reparations.

Throughout the Weimar Republic's history its opponents laid the blame for Germany's humiliation at Versailles at the door of the new republic and the 'November criminals' who had stabbed the German army in the back. Did the democratic regime's association with the hated Treaty of Versailles severely weaken its prospects for survival? We focus on this issue below.



Demonstration for the Fourteen Points and against the Treaty of Versailles in Berlin in 1919

ACTIVITY

Complete the following statements by matching the phrases in the two columns.

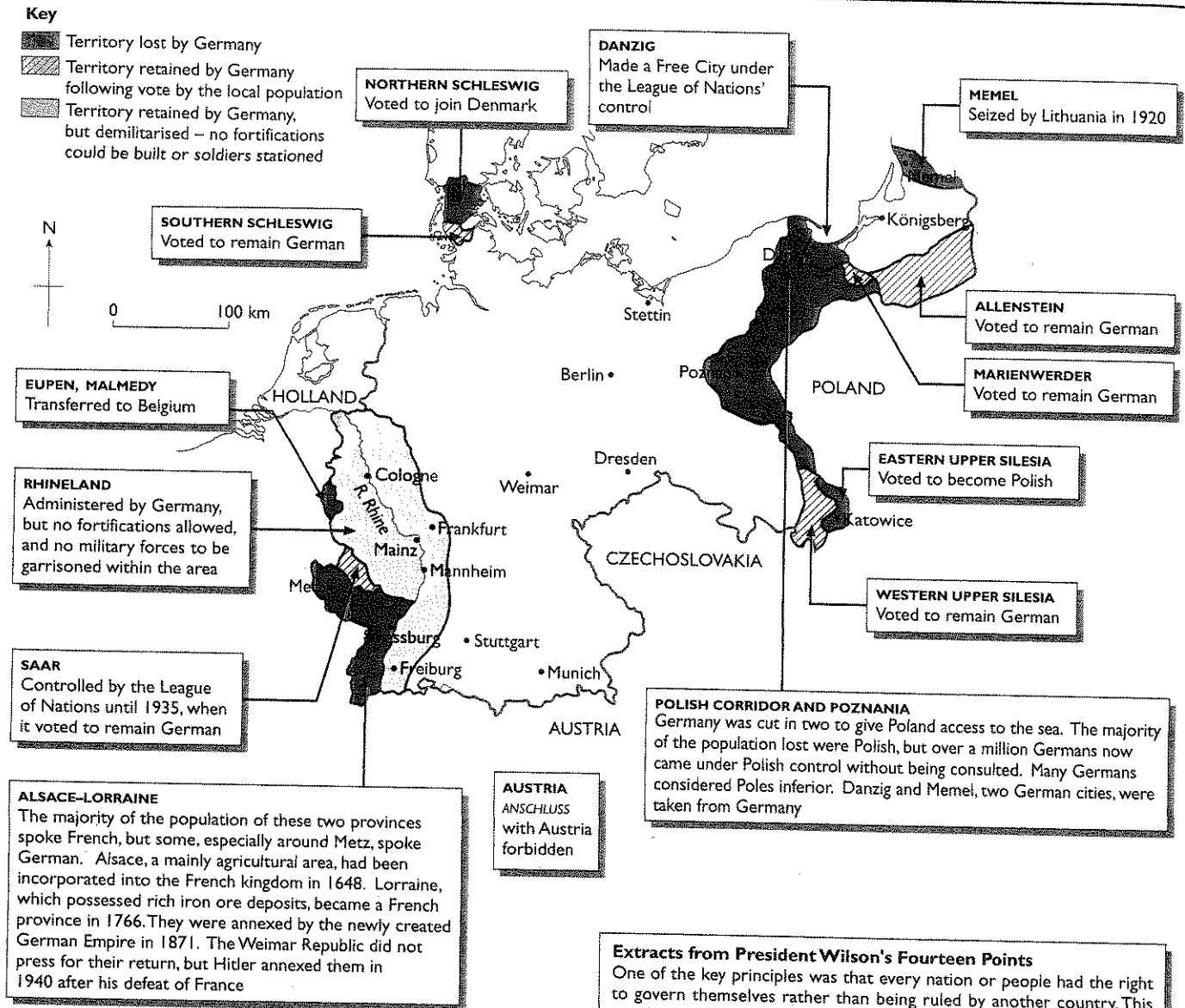
Under the treaty

- a) *Anschluss* was forbidden
- b) Germany was blamed for the war
- c) The Rhineland was permanently demilitarised
- d) The Rhineland was temporarily occupied
- e) Germany was split in two
- f) A German air force and U-boats were banned

Intended result

- g) so reparations could be demanded.
- h) to give independent Poland access to the sea.
- i) to reassure France against German attack.
- j) to stop Germany gaining territory.
- k) to weaken Germany militarily.
- l) to make sure Germany paid reparations.

2C The key features of the Treaty of Versailles



People and events that influenced the treaty
Most work was done by a council of four government leaders, President Wilson of the USA, French Prime Minister Clemenceau, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the Italian Prime Minister Orlando.

The experience of total war raised great passions amongst the Allied populations. In December 1918 Lloyd George won the 'khaki election' on a fiercely patriotic, anti-German platform. The French were determined to exact revenge and to remove German power from the Rhineland so that the threat of a further German invasion was ended. The 'hawks' in Britain and France pointed out that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Russia in March 1918 showed German harshness in peacemaking and their assumption that a defeated enemy paid the cost of the war. An Allied economic naval blockade of Germany continued until the permanent peace treaty was signed. Another significant factor was the fear of communism spreading from Bolshevik Russia

Extracts from President Wilson's Fourteen Points
One of the key principles was that every nation or people had the right to govern themselves rather than being ruled by another country. This was known as the right to self-determination. Other points included:

- 4 'Armaments would be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety'
- 7 Evacuation and restoration of Belgium
- 8 Evacuation and restoration of French territory and the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France
- 10 AUTONOMY for the peoples of Austria-Hungary
- 13 'Creation of an independent Poland ... and this state to have secure access to the sea'

Effects on Germany

- Lost 13 per cent of its territory
- Lost 12 per cent of its population (6.5 million); half of whom were ethnic Germans. One and a half million Germans became part of new Polish state
- Lost 48 per cent of its iron ore; 16 per cent of its coal; 15 per cent of its agricultural production

SOURCE 2.1 British economist J. M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, 1919

I believe that the campaign for securing out of Germany the general costs of the War was one of the most serious acts of political unwisdom for which our statesmen have been responsible.

SOURCE 2.2 Harold Nicholson, British observer at Versailles

Now that we see [the terms] as a whole, we realise that they are much too stiff. The real crime is the reparations and indemnity [compensation] chapter, which is immoral and senseless. There is not a single person among the younger people here who is not unhappy and disappointed at the terms. The only people who approve are the old fire-eaters.

Disarmament

Section V 'In order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations, Germany undertakes strictly to observe the military, naval and air clauses ...' This meant:

- Abolition of conscription and reduction of army to 100,000. No tanks or military aircraft allowed
- Navy limited to 6 battleships, 6 cruisers, 12 destroyers, 12 torpedo boats. No submarines allowed

War guilt

The principle of war guilt and the resulting reparations was laid down in Article 231:

'The Allied Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.'

The process

- 1918 Oct The German government seeks an armistice on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points. Britain and France broadly accept but stipulate that there should be compensation for damage to the civilian population
- 1919 Jan Peace Conference begins. Germany not invited
- 7 May Terms formally presented. Germany allowed fifteen days (later extended to 21) for observations
- 29 May German counter-proposals lead to only minor changes
- 16 June Germany presented with the final terms; acceptance required within seven days. The German government discusses the possibility of renewed fighting; Hindenburg says success is impossible, but favours heroic defeat
- 20 June Chancellor Scheidemann resigns rather than sign terms; President Ebert persuaded not to resign
- 22 June Constituent Assembly accepts terms by 237 to 138
- 28 June Foreign Minister Müller signs the treaty. Nineteen minutes before the deadline the German fleet is scuttled at Scapa Flow

The estimated cost of the war

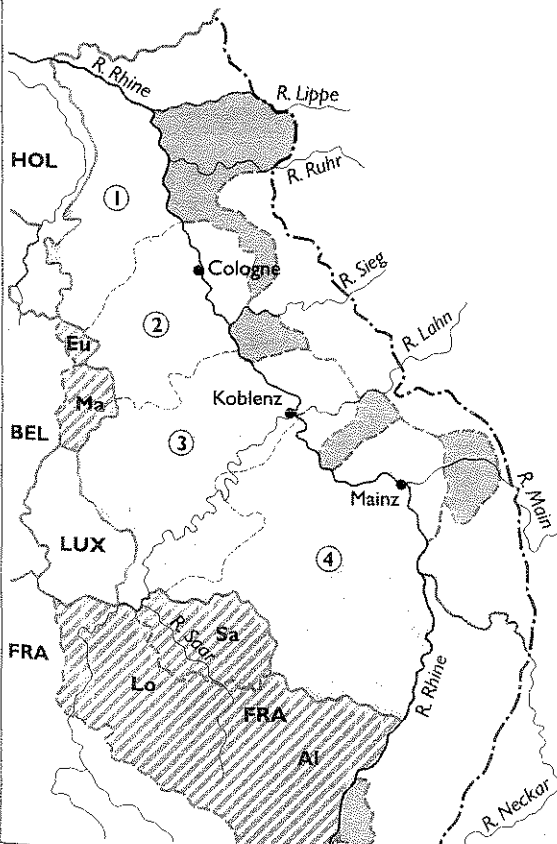
Costs	France	British Empire	Germany
Dead (m)	1.3	1	2
Wounded (m)	4	2	6.3
Physical damage	300,000 buildings destroyed 21,000 km ² farmland destroyed	Small	Small
	Allies	Germany	
Financial costs	£29,000m	£8,500m	

Reparations

Germany was made liable to pay for physical damage caused in the war (most of which would go to France and Belgium), but also for war pensions (so Britain would gain major reparations). The actual amount of compensation was left to a commission to decide. In the meantime, 20,000 million marks of reparations (mainly paid in kind, e.g. industrial goods) were paid. In April 1921 the Allies fixed the total amount at 132,000 million gold marks over 30 years. See pages 82-3

Learning trouble spot

The Rhineland and the Ruhr



The Rhineland

The economically and militarily strategic area of the Rhineland played a crucial part in German history from 1919 to 1936. Under the Treaty of Versailles the areas either side of the river Rhine were DEMILITARISED, that is Germany could not keep troops there and had to disband fortifications. This was stated to be permanent. In addition, to ensure German compliance with Versailles, especially the paying of reparations, the four Allied powers occupied the west bank and a few areas on the other side. This was expected to last for fifteen years. There was the possibility of phased withdrawal or extended occupation depending upon Germany's behaviour. From 1924 some troops were withdrawn.

In the Locarno Pact of 1925 (see pages 81 and 85), Germany voluntarily accepted her western borders, including permanent demilitarisation; and France agreed not to invade unilaterally as she had done in 1923 (see below). The Allies withdrew their last troops in 1930.

The Ruhr

France and Belgium extended their occupation of Germany by marching into the adjacent Ruhr region briefly in 1921 and for over a year in 1923 in reaction to Germany's technical infringement of reparations payments. The French invasion provoked a major crisis in Germany.

Key

- - - Left bank of Rhine and 50 km of right bank up to this limit permanently demilitarised
- Occupied in 1918 by:
 - 1 Belgium
 - 2 Britain
 - 3 France
 - 4 USA
- Occupied by French and Belgian troops, January 1923-5
- Territory lost by Germany at Versailles:
 - Sa Saar (until 1935 plebiscite)
 - Lo Lorraine
 - Al Alsace
 - Eu Eupen
 - Ma Maimédy

HOL Holland LUX Luxembourg
 BEL Belgium FRA France

The political effects of the peace treaty on the Weimar Republic

ACTIVITY

- 1 Look at Sources 2.3-5. Which aspects of the treaty did the cartoonists resent?
- 2 a) According to Source 2.6, how did the treaty affect German attitudes to the Weimar Republic?
b) How valuable a witness is Preuss (Source 2.6) for the attitudes of the German people?
- 3 Read Sources 2.7 and 2.8. According to these historians how did the treaty affect
a) the German economy
b) German attitudes to the Republic?
- 4 To what extent do the historians agree with Preuss?

What are the benefits and problems of using political cartoons as historical evidence?

SOURCE 2.3

Captioned 'Clemenceau the Vampire', this cartoon appeared in the conservative German newspaper *Kladderadatsch* in July 1919



SOURCE 2.4 Signing the Diktat: a German cartoon



SOURCE 2.5

This picture appeared in a German school textbook published in 1933



SOURCE 2.6 Hugo Preuss, the lawyer chiefly responsible for writing the Weimar constitution in 1919, on the effects of the Versailles settlement, 1923

... the German Republic was born out of ... terrible defeat. This ... cast from the first a dark shadow on the new political order, as far as national sentiment was concerned; but initially the belief still predominated that the new order was necessary for the rebirth of Germany. That is why the democratic clauses of the Weimar constitution met with relatively little resistance, despite the unrivalled severity of the armistice terms. For everyone still expected a peace settlement in accordance with Wilson's Fourteen Points, which all the belligerent [fighting] countries had bindingly accepted as the basis for the peace ... The criminal madness of the Versailles Diktat was a shameless blow in the face [to hopes of political and economic recovery]. The Reich constitution was born with this curse upon it. That it did not collapse immediately under the strain is striking proof of the intrinsic [genuine] vitality of its basic principles; but its implementation and evolution were inevitably fatefully restricted and lamed thereby.

SOURCE 2.7 A. Nicholls, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler*, 1979, p. 44

Much more important than the fairness or unfairness of the treaty was its impact on the new German Republic. How far is it true that the Versailles Treaty wrecked German democracy? That Germany's economy was ruined by reparations and her security undermined? ... Economically and DEMOGRAPHICALLY speaking there was no foundation in these assertions ...

Much more serious was the political demoralisation which the treaty caused within the Reich itself ... The real damage the treaty did to Germany was to disillusion more moderate men who might otherwise have supported their new republic ... The peace settlement continued to poison the political atmosphere in Germany for many years.

SOURCE 2.8 J. Hiden, *The Weimar Republic*, 1974, p. 14

It is no longer acceptable to blame the ultimate failure of the Republic on the Treaty of Versailles, and even its economic effects are disputed, given the economic 'recovery' of Germany in the mid twenties ... The pernicious [evil] effects of the Treaty of Versailles lie ... in the way it created added dimensions to existing internal conflicts and contradictions which had, to some extent, survived the revolution.

The cartoons opposite show German hatred for the Allied peacemakers, but that hatred was transferred to the German politicians who had signed the treaty. The government's acceptance of the terms, though realistic, made it seem weak and reinforced the stab-in-the-back myth. Therefore, the Treaty of Versailles reinforced the hostility of many Germans to the new Weimar system. Hatred of Versailles allowed the radical Right to gain support and helped inspire two right-wing challenges in 1920 and 1923. The disarmament issue was the precipitant for the Kapp Putsch (see page 42), and reparations helped cause the hyperinflation of 1923. A. J. Ryder (*Twentieth Century Germany*, 1973, pp. 204-5) concluded: 'In extracting the republicans' signature to the treaty, the Allies had practically forced them to sign the death warrant of German democracy. Nor did public resentment lessen with time: subsequent events, notably the occupation of the Ruhr, exacerbated [worsened] it. Ten years after the signing of the Versailles treaty a German pastor (who was no nationalist) declared, "This war educated our German people to peace; this peace has educated it to war."'

However, recent analysis has stressed an alternative perspective, arguing that Germany was not that harshly treated. In this view Germany was in a potentially strong position after Versailles for three reasons:

- The break-up of the Tsarist, Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires created opportunities for Germany, since it was now surrounded by small, weak states, especially in the east.
- France failed to achieve its aims of a permanently weakened Germany and a secure border.
- Reparations were not so burdensome that they destroyed the German economy (see pages 82-3).

Furthermore, the hope that as time progressed the Allies might modify at least the reparations terms proved justified. By the mid-1920s the issue of Versailles by itself was probably not a major obstacle to the consolidation of the Weimar Republic. However, when a major problem hit Germany, such as hyperinflation in 1923 and the Depression in 1929, Versailles could easily be blamed by DEMAGOGIC politicians who could rapidly revive German hatred of reparations and the loss of territory. Thus it remained a potentially deep flaw throughout the Weimar period.

ACTIVITY

- 1 'The practical impact of Versailles was not very burdensome; but what mattered was how the Germans felt about it.' How accurate is this interpretation?
- 2 'Too harsh to be acceptable to most Germans but not harsh enough to keep Germany suppressed.' How valid is this criticism of the Treaty of Versailles?

The harsh treaty the Allies imposed on Germany has been blamed on the fact that these countries had popularly elected democratic governments. Can you explain this comment?

FOCUS ROUTE

Complete the first two columns of your copy of the table on page 33.

■ Learning trouble spot

Coup (d'état) or putsch

These terms, the first French and the second German, literally mean a blow. They are used to refer to a secretly plotted and sudden attempt to overthrow a government, usually by force. A coup is normally organised by a small group of people, such as generals or a political party, who try to take control, initially by seizing the key centres of power.

In contrast to a revolution, a coup does not need mass support to succeed. Normally, a coup or putsch comes from the political Right, attracting support from the elite, and a revolution from the Left, attracting support from the lower classes.

ACTIVITY

With which of these statements do you agree? Explain your reasons.

- Left-wing challenges had a strong chance of overthrowing the Weimar government.
- Left-wing challenges did not seriously challenge the Weimar government but did help to reduce the confidence of many Germans in the government.

B Did Weimar democracy face a serious challenge from the Left?

As you have seen (page 21), the new Weimar government had used the army to crush the Spartacist rising of January 1919. However, opposition was not completely suppressed and for the next four years the government faced a series of threats from the extreme Left. Workers were angered by economic problems and disillusioned by the lack of real gains from their revolution. In the spring of 1919 the industrial areas of Germany were wracked by radical unrest. A wave of strikes occurred in the Ruhr mines, central Germany and Berlin. The strikers demanded shorter hours, the socialisation of industry and a government based on councils. However, the wave of protests was uncoordinated, with radical 'leaders' desperately following rather than leading the protests. The KPD had neither strong leadership with a clear strategy nor a tightly organised party structure, as the Communists did in Russia. Furthermore, it lacked support, both in terms of numbers and depth of commitment. Eventually, a mixture of government promises and the use of the army and Freikorps quelled the unrest, with considerable loss of life in some places.

Only in Bavaria did the revolutionaries temporarily gain control. After the overthrow of the Bavarian monarchy and the creation of a republic on 7 November 1918, there had been considerable political confusion. In March 1919 a soviet republic was proclaimed, which created RED GUARDS and workers' councils. In May 1919, this was bloodily suppressed by the Freikorps, with over 700 killed, and a right-wing government was established.

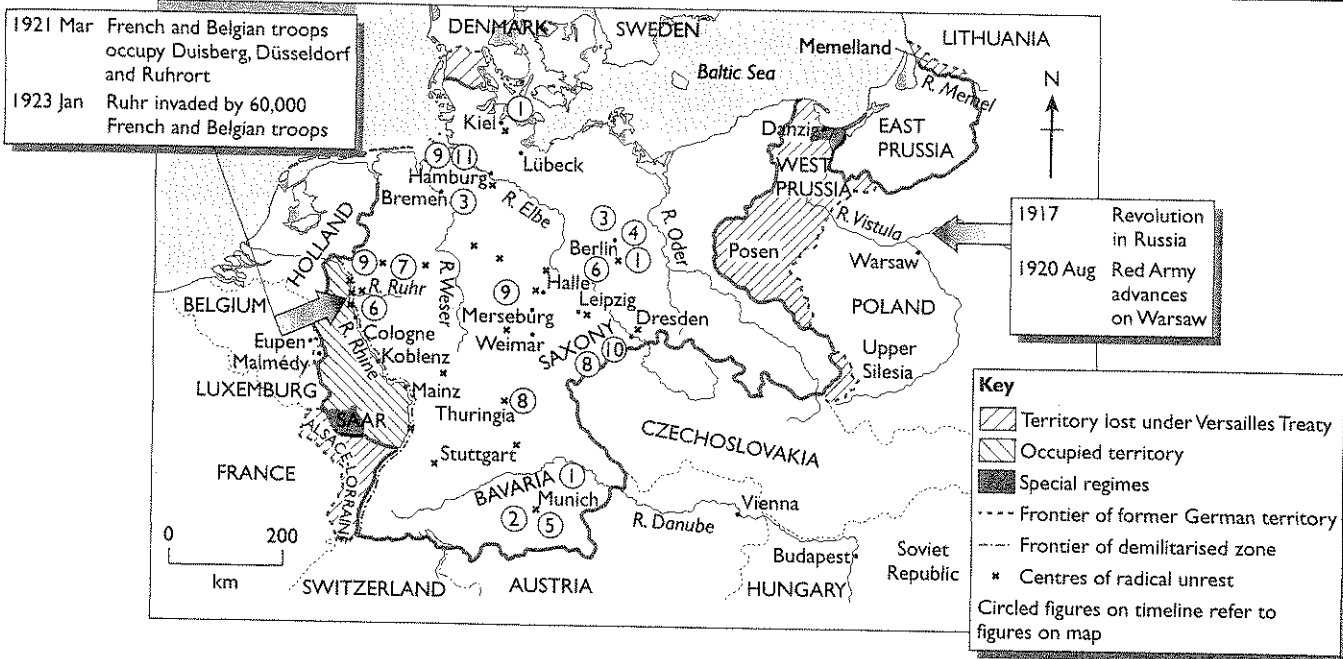
By the summer of 1919, the best chance of establishing communism in Germany had gone, even though Marxists considered Germany the country most ripe for revolution. For the next three years unrest continued but it never seriously threatened the government's control. There were numerous demonstrations and strikes, some of which developed into attempted insurrections, especially in the key industrial areas in the Ruhr and central Germany. Workers felt that their gains from the revolution of 1918, especially the symbolic eight-hour day, were under threat and that the revolution needed to be deepened. Some looked to Russia and argued the need for a German 'OCTOBER' – a second-stage revolution that would establish a true communist state. In the aftermath of the Kapp Putsch (see pages 42-3), attempts were made to exploit the fragility of the Republic to establish a more revolutionary regime but they came to nothing.

The KPD's approach has been described as a combination of foolhardiness and hesitancy. It failed to exploit the post-Kapp MILITANCY. Then in 1921 it rushed into a poorly supported rising. It reacted to this by being overcautious during the mass protests of mid-1923, then acted too late in October 1923. Inadequate leadership, poor organisation, internal divisions, lack of support and government repression (accompanied by minor concessions) meant that the revolts of 1920-3, just like those of 1919, failed.

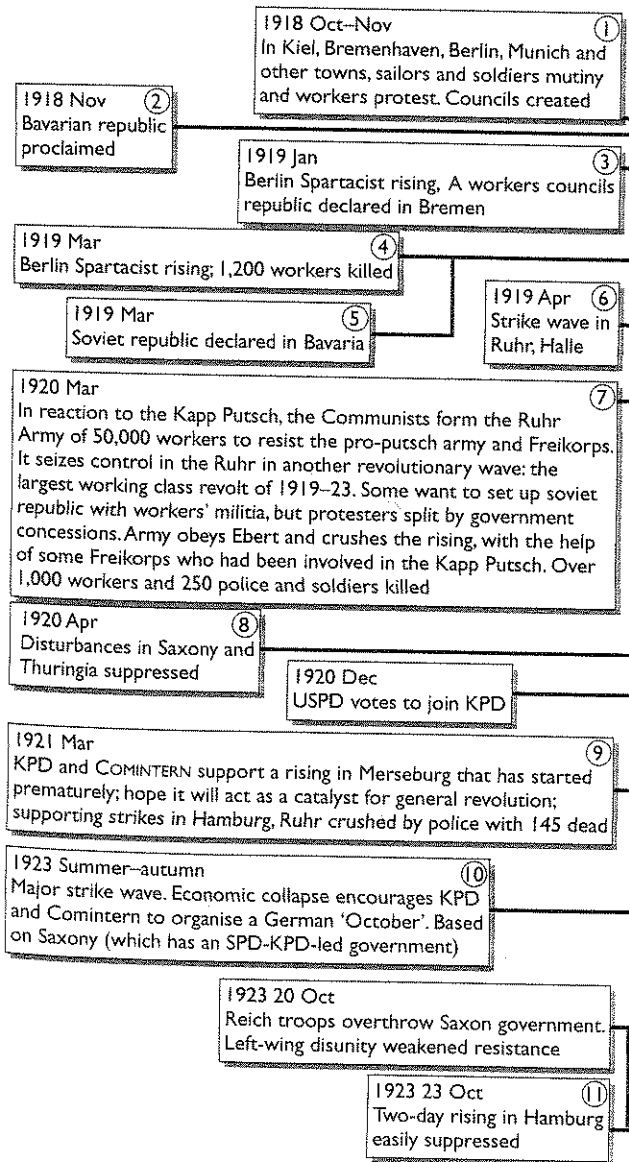


Left-wing revolutionaries from the Ruhr 'Red Army' fighting the Freikorps in 1920

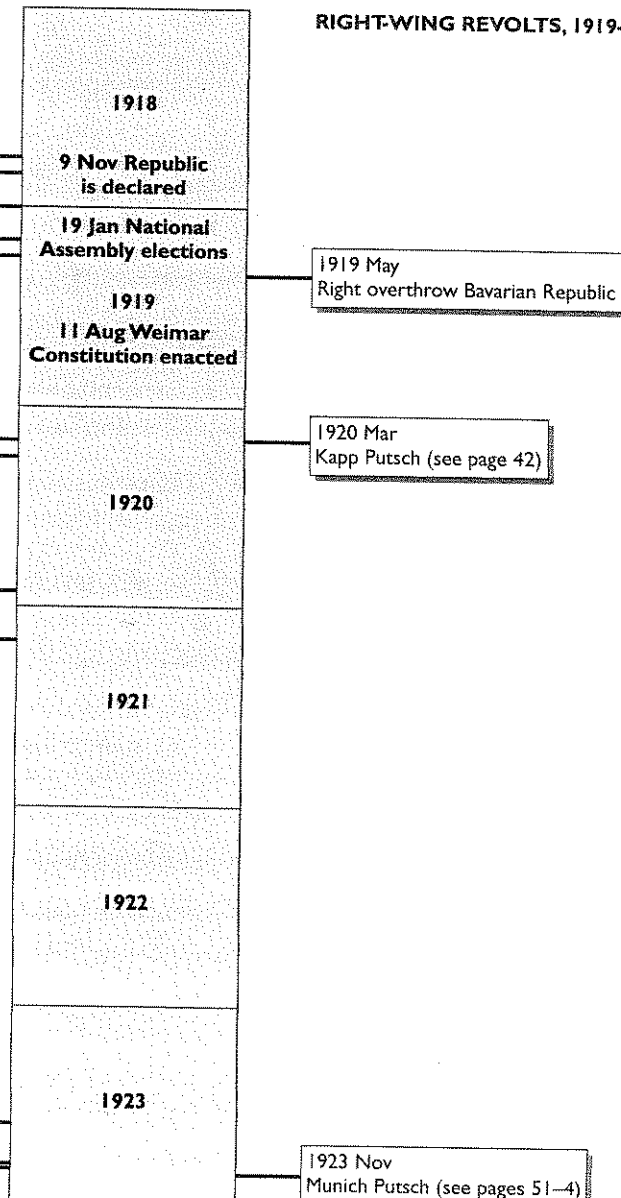
2D Germany in turmoil 1918-23



LEFT-WING REVOLTS, 1918-23



RIGHT-WING REVOLTS, 1919-23



FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 Complete the third column in your copy of the table on page 33.
- 2 Make notes on the assassinations of this period. What do they, and the reaction to them, reveal about attitudes to the Weimar Republic?

Wolfgang Kapp, 1868-1922



- A right-wing journalist and civil servant, Kapp helped found the right-wing Fatherland Party during the First World War.
- In 1919 he was elected to the Reichstag as a monarchist.
- Rather surprisingly, Kapp became Chancellor of the new government briefly established by the Kapp Putsch, though the Freikorps leader Captain Hermann Ehrhardt and General Lüttwitz had been its main organisers.
- After its failure, he fled to Sweden where he died in 1922.

SOURCE 2.9 Prosecution of the 705 people involved in the Kapp Putsch

Granted amnesty	412
Proceedings discontinued	285
Proceedings reviewed	7
Punished	1

C How strong was the challenge from the Right? I: The Kapp Putsch and assassinations

In addition to the left-wing threat to Weimar democracy, there was strong right-wing opposition. This came partly from powerful conservative forces such as the army, industrialists and landowners and other members of the elite. There were also the Freikorps and paramilitary groups which thrived in post-war Germany and the numerous VÖLKISCH groups that had their roots in the pre-war period. These groups felt great bitterness towards the Weimar regime, and their activities weakened the new parliamentary democracy.

The Kapp Putsch

The first major crisis from the Right was the Kapp Putsch in March 1920. After some order had been restored by the end of 1919, the Socialist-led government had less need for the Freikorps. It was also trying to reduce the size of the army to conform to the disarmament requirements of Versailles. So in February 1920 the Defence Minister ordered two Freikorps brigades (about 12,000 men) to disband. One of their leaders, General Walther von Lüttwitz, refused. Along with other disgruntled army officers and Wolfgang Kapp, leader of the Fatherland Party, he planned to overthrow the government. He contacted other generals, including Seeckt and Ludendorff, but they were non-committal.

On 12 March, 12,000 Freikorps marched twelve miles to Berlin where, crucially, the army refused to support the government. General Hans von Seeckt told Ebert: 'Troops do not fire on troops; when REICHSWEHR fires on Reichswehr all comradeship within the officer corps has vanished.' The government had no alternative but to flee and the Freikorps entered Berlin. A new government headed by Kapp was proclaimed. However, it failed to gain widespread support, even from most conservatives. In a few places, the army supported the putsch; in most areas, it was neutral.

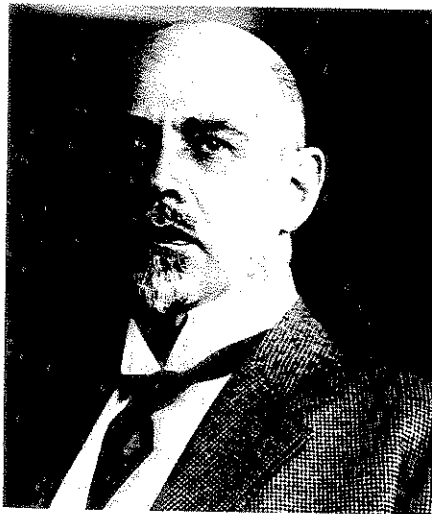
The Left organised a general strike in Berlin and elsewhere in protest at the putsch. Berlin was paralysed. Even civil servants and bankers refused to recognise Kapp's government. It was occupying government buildings but was not able to govern. After four days the Kapp government fled and Ebert's government returned to Berlin. In the aftermath, there were several clashes between workers and the army, especially in industrial areas such as the Ruhr, Halle and Dresden, as some workers tried to extend the successful strike to impose more radical changes on the restored government.

The government took no action against Seeckt and other army leaders for their lack of support. It realised it might still need them against the Communists. Kapp died before he could be prosecuted, but those actually involved in the putsch were treated leniently as Source 2.9 shows.

SOURCE 2.10 A poster proclamation issued by the government in response to the Kapp Putsch. It was issued in the name of the SPD members of the government, including Ebert, and was probably sanctioned by him

Workers, Party comrades! The military putsch has started. The Baltic MERCENARIES, fearing the command to dissolve, are trying to remove the republic and to form a military dictatorship. Lüttwitz and Kapp [are] at their head ... The achievements of a whole year are to be smashed, your dearly bought freedom to be destroyed. Everything is at stake! The strongest countermeasures are required. No factory must work while the military dictatorship of Ludendorff and Co rules! Therefore down tools! Come out on strike! Deprive the military clique of oxygen! Fight with all means for the Republic! Put all quarrels aside. There is only one way against the dictatorship of Wilhelm II: paralysis of all economic life. No hand must move! No proletarian must help the military dictators. General strike all along the line! Proletarians unite! Down with the counter-revolution!

SOURCE 2.11 The Berlin general strike in protest against the Kapp Putsch



Walther Rathenau, 1867–1922

Assassinations

Between 1919 and 1923 Weimar politicians lived in fear of assassination. The brutalising effect of war, the revolutionary origins of the Republic, the political struggles of the period and the challenge to traditional values encouraged some right-wing Germans to resort to murder to weaken the democratic regime. The lenient attitude to such actions of conservative judges, who had been kept in their posts in the new Republic, reinforced this trend. The Republic lost hundreds of devoted servants through assassination, including one of its greatest statesmen, Walther Rathenau.

Walther Rathenau

Rathenau was head of the massive AEG electrical firm. He developed imaginative views about industrial organisation and the co-operation of workers and employers. During the Second Reich he had been a strong monarchist, favouring German expansionism, and had played a major role in running the war economy. He participated in arranging the armistice and attempts to improve the Treaty of Versailles. Like his more famous successor Stresemann, his political ideas became more progressive. He was a founder of the Democratic Party. In 1921 he became Minister of Reconstruction and Foreign Minister in February 1922.

Rathenau's involvement at Versailles and his Jewish background made him a target for nationalist extremists. Some Rightists chanted, 'Shoot down Walther Rathenau, that God-damned son of a Jewish sow.' After several failed attempts he was assassinated in June 1922 by a right-wing terror group, Organisation Consul. His death was seen as a major blow to the stability of the Weimar Republic but it led to a general revulsion against these tactics. Over 700,000 people demonstrated in Berlin against his assassination and the murderous Organisation Consul was forced to disband. After 1923 political assassinations declined.

Although there was a strong reaction against these murders, all the revolts and assassinations served to foster disillusionment with the new regime. Most Germans had the opportunity to express their opinions in elections in 1920 after the Spartacist rising and the Kapp Putsch. Source 2.16 compares their reactions one year into the regime with their initial feelings for the Republic.

SOURCE 2.12 Political assassinations

	Left	Right
Murders committed	22	354 (326 unpunished)
Number convicted and sentenced to death	10	0
Number convicted and sentenced to severe punishment	17	1

SOURCE 2.15 Cartoon of judges passing sentence on right-wing rebels. Many were reluctant to convict them. In 1926 a judge surveyed the political allegiance of his colleagues and reported the following results: 5 per cent republican, 15 per cent reactionary, 80 per cent waverers

**FOCUS ROUTE**

- 1 Why did the Weimar Republic suffer a major inflationary crisis in 1923?
- 2 How did inflation affect the German people?
- 3 How seriously did it harm the prospects for Weimar democracy?

SOURCE 2.13 Finance Minister Matthias Erzberger, who had sponsored the Reichstag Peace Resolution in 1917 and had signed the Armistice, was wounded in January 1922 and killed in August. After his murder the Chancellor, Wirth, told the Reichstag

A state of political bestiality [beast-like behaviour] prevails. I need only to mention poor Frau Erzberger who is constantly receiving letters announcing the intention to defile her husband's grave. Is it surprising, then, that I also received letters yesterday, headed 'on the day of Rathenau's execution', and declaring: 'You men of FULFILMENT mania have not listened to the voices of those who have tried to dissuade you from a bad policy. Let hard fate, therefore, take its course, so that the fatherland may prosper.'

SOURCE 2.14 Kurt Tucholsky, left-wing satirist

When the Republic was created, these judges held over from the monarchy found it impossible to transfer their allegiance to the new organisation of the state... They created a private law and subverted [undermined] the public law of the Republic by refusing to administer justice in an equal manner to all people.

SOURCE 2.16 Election results 1919-20 (% of votes cast)

Main pro-Weimar parties	January 1919 (%)	June 1920 (%)
SPD	38	21
DDP	19	8
Z	20	18

Anti-republican parties	January 1919 (%)	June 1920 (%)
USPD/KPD	8	19
DVP	4	14
DNVP	10	15

ACTIVITY

- 1 From the point of view of Weimar's survival what were
 - a) the most encouraging aspects
 - b) the most ominous aspects
 of the Kapp Putsch and the assassinations?
- 2 What did the political opponents of Weimar hope to achieve by these assassinations?
- 3 What evidence do Sources 2.12-15 provide of the problems for democracy in Weimar Germany caused by
 - a) the limited nature of the 1918 Revolution
 - b) the Treaty of Versailles?
- 4 How successful were the right-wing attacks on the Republic in the period 1919-22?

D Did the hyperinflation crisis of 1923 undermine Weimar democracy?

The impact of inflation

'Two women were going to the bank with a washing basket filled with notes. They passed a shop and saw a crowd standing round the window, so put down the basket for a moment to see if there was anything going that could be bought. Then they turned round and found that all the notes were there, untouched, but the basket had gone.'

It is difficult to believe that such a theft actually happened but it did - in Berlin in 1923. It happened because the German people had lost all confidence in their currency. Monetary systems are based on confidence. In Britain today,

■ Learning trouble spot

Economic terms

Many students have problems with economic terms in history. If this applies to you, before you study this subsection you might like to look at the guidance on economic terms on page 75.

you can be confident that a £5 note will be accepted in a shop in return for a purchase. Both you and the shopkeeper are confident about the value of a banknote. If that confidence is lost, the shopkeeper might only hand over what you want if you offer him more paper money, so in effect the price goes up. Once confidence in a currency is lost, its value plummets and inflation soars.

This is what happened in Germany in 1923 when the Weimar Republic was hit by one of the worst inflationary crises in history. By November 1923 the German mark was worthless, as confidence in the economy collapsed. Inflation was so extreme that at one stage an egg cost 80 million marks and a glass of beer 150 million marks. People resorted to barter, for example, using coal or sausages as currency. Workers rushed to spend wages before they lost even more value with prices rising between 20 and 100 per cent in a day. There were major food shortages, since farmers were reluctant to sell food for worthless money.

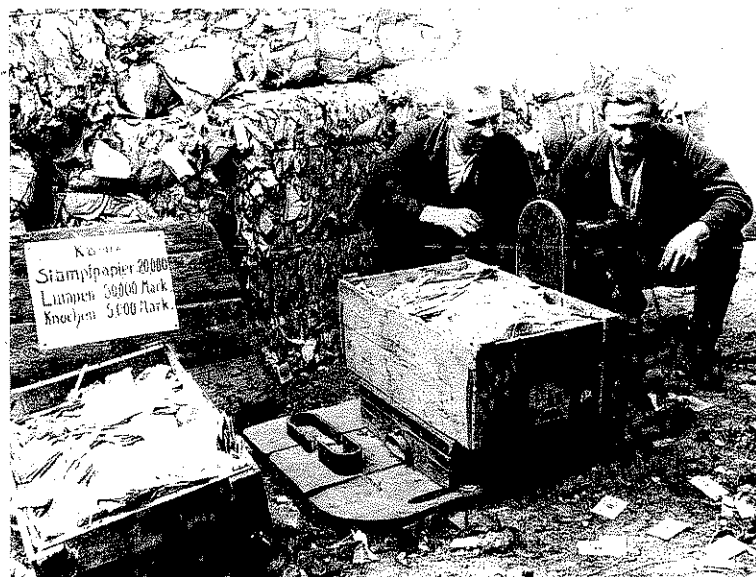
ACTIVITY

- 1 What can you learn from each of Sources 2.17-23 about the inflationary crisis?
- 2 Explain who gained and who lost from the hyperinflation of 1923.
- 3 How far can the effects be explained in class terms?

SOURCE 2.17 The awful statistics of hyperinflation

	Marks to the \$	Wholesale prices
1914 Jul	4.2	1 (1913)
1919 Jan	8.9	2
1920 Jan	14.0	4
Jul	39.5	
1921 Jan	64.9	14
Jul	76.7	
1922 Jan	191.8	37
Jul	493.2	100
1923 Jan	17,792	2,785
Jul	353,412	74,787
4 Aug	620,455	
Sep	98,860,000	23,949,000
25 Oct	260,208,000	7,095,800,000
4 Nov	200,000,000,000	750,000,000,000

SOURCE 2.18 Money as waste paper



SOURCE 2.19 K. Heiden, *Der Führer: Hitler's Rise to Power*, 1944. Heiden was a German democrat who lived through Weimar and Nazi Germany; he carefully collected evidence to use in his anti-Nazi writings

On Friday afternoons in 1923, very long lines of workers waited outside the pay windows of the big German factories, department stores, banks and offices, watching the clocks until at last they reached the pay window and received a bag full of paper bank notes.

According to the figures on the notes, they were worth anything from 700,000 marks up to 380 billion or even 18 trillion marks; the figures rose month by month, then week to week, then day to day.

People began running as soon as they could. They dashed to food stores where there were further slow queues. Had you got there first, a half kilo of sugar might have been bought for 2 million marks. If you were at the back, by the time you got to the counter, 2 millions would buy only a quarter kilo.

The government printing presses could not keep up. People carried their money around in sacks or prams. Life was madness, nightmare, desperation, chaos.

SOURCE 2.20 Notice in a Berlin shop window: 'No sales to foreigners'



SOURCE 2.21 Letter from a bank to a German about his savings built up during a life of hard work under the Second Reich. The envelope bore a 5 million mark postage stamp

The bank deeply regrets that it can no longer administer your deposit of 68,000 marks since the costs are out of all proportion to the capital. Since we have no bank-notes of small enough denominations at our disposal, we have rounded out the sum to one million marks. Enclosed: one 1,000,000 mark bill.

SOURCE 2.22 Impoverished middle-class Germans selling their household possessions to raise money in 1922



Who benefited and who lost out

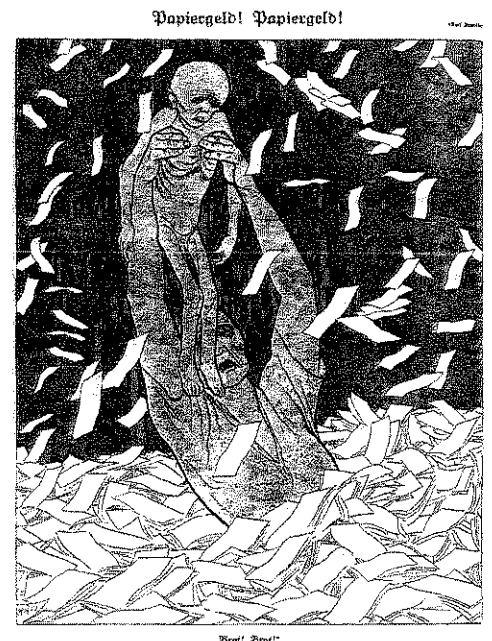
You are probably used to being told by governments that inflation is bad. However, many Germans actually benefited from the collapse in the value of the mark. Many people in debt, such as mortgage holders, paid off their loans with the devalued currency. Many entrepreneurs with access to cheap credit, especially via the Reichsbank, used loans to extend their holdings, and then easily repaid the loans when their income had increased in money terms. People who rented property with long-term rents gained as the real value of their payments fell. Owners of foreign exchange and foreigners in Germany who converted their money into millions of marks also greatly benefited. Exporters gained from the mark's falling exchange rate.

However, hyperinflation was catastrophic for the majority. The greatest losers were those with savings, especially many pensioners who lived off fixed-interest investments. The value of their hard-earned savings disintegrated. Those who had patriotically purchased WAR BONDS (with fixed rates of interest) found their investments and the interest paid lost almost all their value. Those relying on welfare benefits and landlords receiving fixed rents found the value of their incomes fall. By 1923, the cost to a landlord of one window replacement might be greater than all the rents received in the last ten years.

Workers initially secured compensatory wage rises, but these lagged behind rising prices. It has been estimated that unskilled workers lost 30 per cent of their spending power between 1913 and September 1923. Civil servants, who initially made gains in 1920-2, found their real income declining again.

These were the main groups of winners and losers from hyperinflation, but the historian Peukert (in his book *The Weimar Republic*, 1991, p. 66) has warned against simple class-based generalisations such as 'the destruction of the middle class': 'Two individuals from the same broad social class might be affected very differently, depending on the precise period in question, the part of the country in which they lived and their exact role within the fabric of the economy. Indeed, it was precisely through the confusion experienced by individuals and their fears for their social status that the real psychological impact of the inflation made itself felt. A profiteering ethic became common among people who had previously prided themselves on their rectitude [good behaviour]. Others turned to crime out of sheer hardship. The shifts in the relative standing of the different social groups ... made individuals uncertain about their social status.'

SOURCE 2.23 Cartoon from the German magazine *Simplicissimus*, 1923. Drowning in a sea of paper money, the mother screams, 'Bread! Bread!'



■ 2E Hugo Stinnes – symbol of riches amidst inflation

Under the Second Reich Hugo Stinnes owned businesses in the coal, iron and electrical industries. Despite his conservative views, he compromised during the revolution, granted workers more rights and became a DVP member of the Reichstag. As inflation increased, Stinnes used his ties with the Reichsbank to gain cheap credit to buy up struggling competitors. He converted foreign currency gained from selling his products abroad into millions of marks to expand and re-equip his plant. He paid off loans in near valueless marks. By 1924 'the King of the Ruhr' owned 1,535 companies, an estimated 20 per cent of Germany's industries, covering coal mines, steelworks, paper mills, chemical concerns, newspapers, hotels, land and shipping lines. His wealth, in the midst of despair, aroused great resentment. His economic power was matched by his political ambitions. The American Assistant Secretary of State Castle described him as 'the strongest man in Germany ... and one of the most dangerous men in the world'. He hoped to support a dictator capable of 'speaking the language of the people' who would defeat Bolshevism and restore Germany to greatness. Stinnes died in 1924 but his vision was supported and taken on by other industrialists. After his death, his industrial empire crashed.

SOURCE 2.25 Hugo Stinnes, 1870–1924



ACTIVITY

- 1 Explain how Stinnes benefited from inflation.
- 2 Did this success make him more supportive of the Weimar Republic?
- 3 What criticism did the Left make of him?

SOURCE 2.24 A 1922 left-wing cartoon satirising the industrialist Hugo Stinnes

Stinnes repariert — — feine Finanzen.



„Die 10-Stundenarbeit bringt uns wieder hoch.
Und kürzen den Arbeitslohn nur noch.“

Only the ten-hour day can solve this mess.
Of course we'll pay the worker less.

Zahlen schmerzlos und schnell wie die Reparationen
Und füllen den eigenen Beutel schonen.

Pay reparations – quickly, without pain
And then – fill our pockets once again.



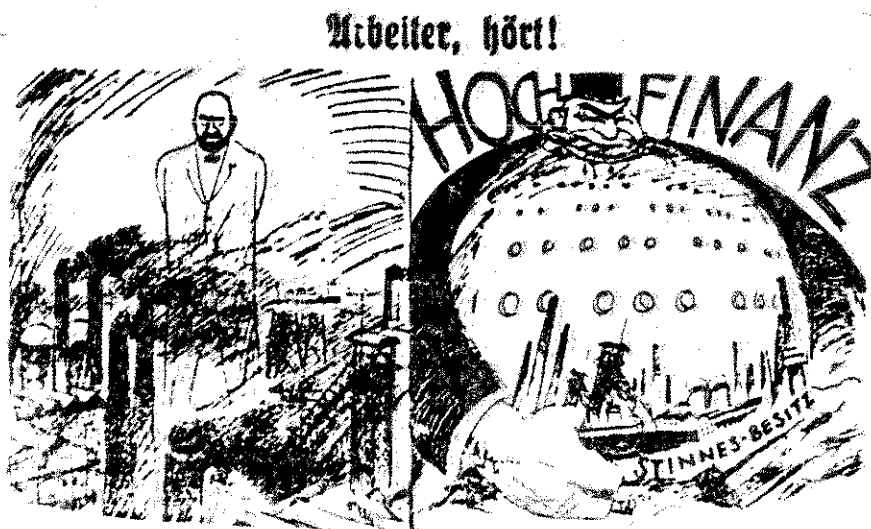
Dann gibt's Arbeitlos? Ja, indessen
Nicht länger kriegen die zu essen.

The unemployed out on the streets
Have nothing now at all to eat.

Für des Vaterlands Blüte und unsern Gewinn
Müssen alle, alle zum Reichhof hin.“

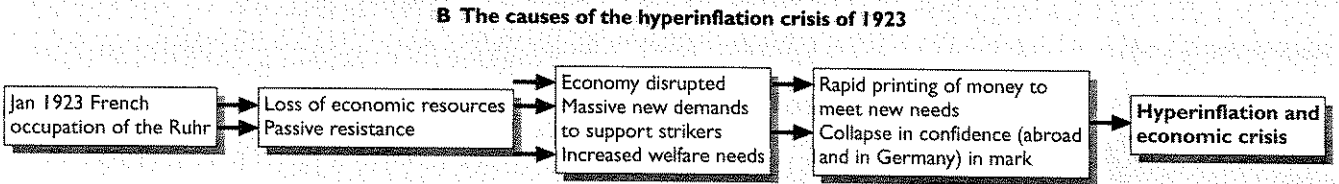
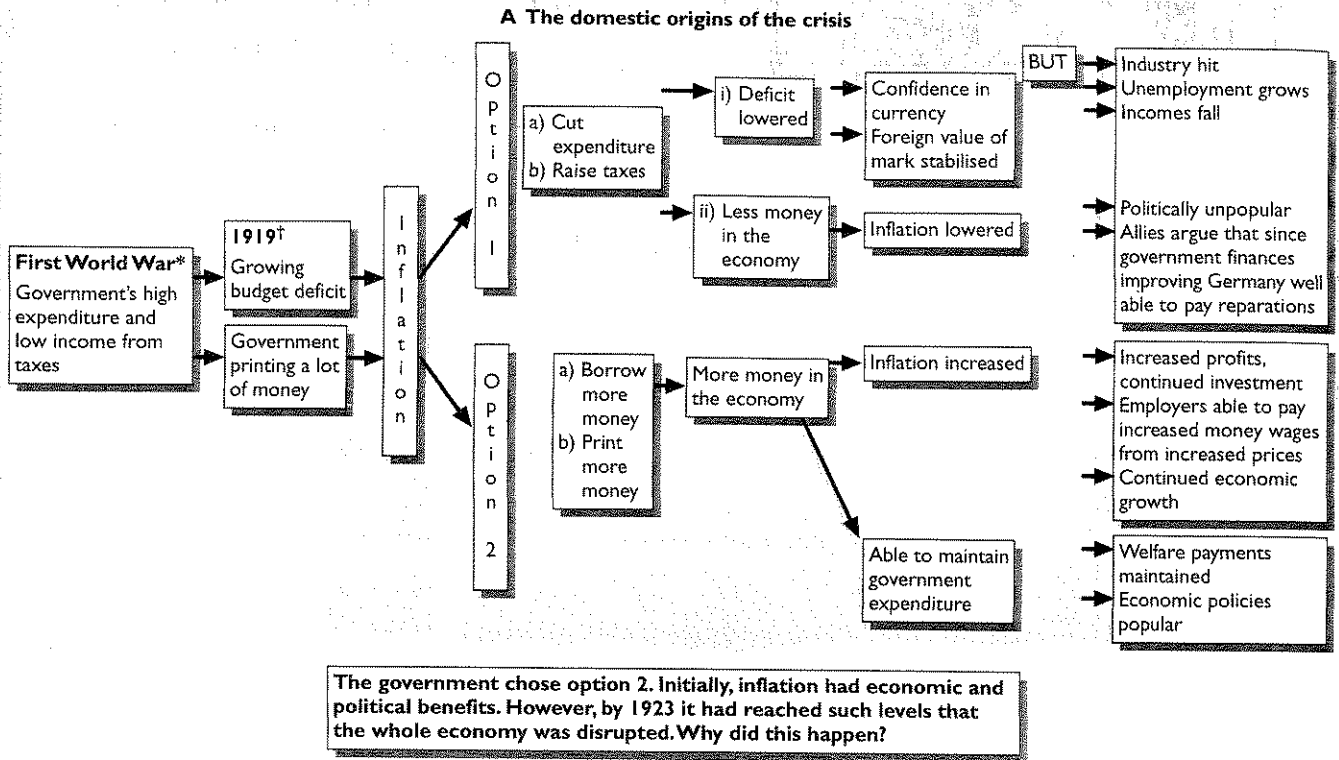
For the fatherland (and our profits) to bloom
All! All must meet their doom!

SOURCE 2.26 A cartoon from the Nazi weekly newspaper *Der Angriff* (The Attack), 19 March 1928, shows Stinnes as a victim of the Jews. The caption reads: 'The mighty Stinnes – eaten up by Jacob Goldsmith.'



Den mächtigen Stinnes — — fraß Jakob Goldsmith!

■ 2F The inflationary crisis 1923



* Government did not fund the war mainly from increased taxation, but by borrowing and printing money

† New, insecure democratic government lost major raw material and population resources. It also faced extra financial demands, e.g. war pensions, extended welfare, reparations

Inflation and Reparations
 Contrary to what many historians say, the government did not encourage inflation in order to be able to pay off reparations in devalued marks. Reparations had to be paid in goods, gold or foreign currency. However, rising inflation did lead to a lack of confidence in the German economy which could be used to argue that Germany was unable to pay reparations.

The causes of inflation

Many people, both at the time and later, blamed the Allies for causing the hyperinflation crisis of 1923. Chart 2F, however, tries to show how the French occupation of the Ruhr was only one factor, exacerbating an inflationary problem that had its origins in the German government's actions in the First World War. Then, from 1919, Weimar governments faced a growing budget deficit. There were two broad policy options, the tough policies of Option 1 in Chart 2F or the more attractive, but inflationary, policies of Option 2. The insecure Weimar governments opted for the second approach. This contributed to the hyperinflation crisis of 1923.

ACTIVITY

Match up the methods with the disadvantages of each method of funding the war.

Method	Disadvantage
a) Raise taxes	d) Causes inflation
b) Borrow money	e) Politically unpopular
c) Print money	f) Leaves government with a large debt

■ Learning trouble spot

The German government's funding of the war, and its consequent financial problems

Wars cost governments a lot of money. To cover the cost, three main approaches can be taken, but each has its problems. They are:

- a) raise taxes b) borrow money c) print money.

The German government relied mainly on b) and c). It did not worry too much about getting into debt as it assumed it could repay debts with the money and resources it would receive from its defeated enemies. So when Germany was itself defeated, this plan collapsed; Germany had a large debt, worsened by having to pay reparations rather than receive them. The government also faced a large post-war pensions bill. Faced with these problems, the new democratic regime followed its predecessor by printing more money rather than greatly increasing taxes.

Thus, though in 1923 most Germans blamed the economic crisis on the French and British demands for reparations, in many ways German governments were responsible. In some respects the government actually favoured inflation, since it reduced the real burden of its internal debt – interest and debt repayments on money borrowed from its citizens. (Reparations were payable in gold or goods so their real value would not be affected by inflation.) Modest inflation can be beneficial to stimulate an economy, and some historians, for example Holtfrerich (in *Weimar: Why Did German Democracy Fail?*, ed. I. Kershaw, 1990), argue that the German government's economic policy in 1919–21 was economically rational as well as politically wise.

The government continued to print money. By 1923, 300 paper mills and 2,000 printing firms, including newspaper firms, were working 24-hour shifts to produce money. The government needed money to pay compensation to war victims and to those who had lost land under the Treaty of Versailles. It also needed to pay wages to civil servants, welfare benefits and subsidies and provide cheap credit to help industry readjust and maintain full employment. Another factor was the hope that continuing economic problems would reinforce the argument that Germany could not pay reparations and so influence Allied governments to lower the level of their demands.

Foreign governments must also share some blame for the crisis. The French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923 came as the final blow to the faltering mark. Sixty thousand troops took control of all industries and railways in order to seize resources in lieu of payments that were overdue. However, it was not so much the invasion itself as the government's response to it that let loose hyperinflation. The government called for passive resistance, that no one should co-operate with the invaders. Civil servants, miners and others went on strike, financed by the government. In places resistance was far from passive and over 140 Germans were killed in clashes with French troops. Revenues to the government fell as Germany's industrial heartland was disrupted but expenditure on welfare increased rapidly, again funded by increased printing of money.

The end to hyperinflation

The inflationary crisis, a long time in the making, was actually solved remarkably quickly. In November 1923 the new Chancellor, Stresemann, took decisive action to restore confidence in the currency. He appointed the expert financier Hjalmar Schacht to the Reichsbank. The old currency was replaced with a new one, the Rentenmark. One Rentenmark replaced 1,000 billion paper marks. The supply of new currency was strictly limited to 3,200 million Rentenmarks. The new currency was quickly accepted. In November, the weekly *Berliner Illustrierter Zeitung* cost 1 billion marks. In December, it cost 20 pfennigs! The government showed its determination to prevent a recurrence of inflation by cutting expenditure, partly by dismissing many civil servants.

ACTIVITY

- 1 To what extent was hyperinflation caused by:
 - a) the policies of the Second Reich during the war
 - b) the policies of Weimar governments
 - c) the French/Belgian occupation of the Ruhr
 - d) reparations?
- 2 Look at Chart 2F. What reasons are there why the government did not try to fight inflation?

The effects of the inflationary crisis

The inflationary crisis had major economic, social, political and psychological effects, some of which left deep scars that help to explain the eventual collapse of the Republic. Most Germans suffered badly. Basic values were challenged. With millions desperate, it was easy for DEMAGOGUES to offer simple explanations and solutions. Thus the crisis was variously blamed on Jewish finance, the Versailles Treaty, Weimar democracy and Socialists. The inflationary crisis also helped provoke increased unrest in 1925. However, despite the fact that millions of Germans lost their savings, radical right-wing groups did not win mass support.

The German state actually gained financially since it lost its debt (the new currency meant a government debt of 150,000 million marks was reduced to 15 pfennigs). However, the Weimar Republic was weakened politically, since the great financial losses that people with savings suffered turned many of them against the democratic regime. Health too suffered, especially among the elderly, as a result of inflation-induced poverty, and this also was blamed on the Weimar government. The hyperinflation crisis thus inflicted wounds that in the long term contributed to Weimar's death.

SOURCE 2.27 Mary Fulbrook, *Fontana History of Germany*, 1991, p. 34

The savings, hopes, plans and assumptions and aspirations of huge numbers of people were swept away in a chaotic whirlwind . . . Even when the worst material impact was over, the psychological shock of the experience was to have longer lasting effects, confirming a deep-seated dislike of democracy, which was thereafter equated with economic distress, and a heightened fear of the possibility of economic instability.

SOURCE 2.28 General John Hartment Morgan, Disarmament Commission, December 1923

Inflation has destroyed the equipoise [balance] of society. It has ruined the middle classes and impoverished the workers . . . It has been a tremendous solvent [weakening agent] of society . . . Inflation has undermined the political basis of the Republic and concentrated all real power in the hands of a few, namely the great industrialists . . . In no country in the world is capital so strong or politically so DESPOTIC. The economic form of society fails to correspond to the political theory; a republic in name, it is capitalist despotism in fact.

SOURCE 2.29 Gustav Stresemann, Foreign Minister, 1927

The intellectual and productive middle class, which was traditionally the backbone of the country, has been paid for the utter sacrifice of itself to the state during the war by being deprived of all its property and by being PROLETARIANISED.

ACTIVITY

Choose four phrases from Sources 2.27-9 that sum up the crucial effects of the great inflation.

■ Learning trouble spot

Why did Germany not suffer mass unemployment, 1919-23?

The period 1919-23 was primarily an inflationary crisis with no major unemployment problems until the virtual collapse of the economy in 1923. The end of the First World War led to a drop in demand for war-related products, and mass demobilisation returned millions to the labour market. Furthermore, Germany lost some of its major economic resources. However, Weimar governments managed to control unemployment. This was partly due to the need to restock after the war, but primarily because the initially mild inflation served to stimulate the economy. In addition, reparations may actually have helped since they were paid in goods, the supply of which required labour.

The second major economic crisis of the Weimar Republic, that of 1929-33, took a very different form. Then the major problem was mass employment. There was no inflationary problem; in fact, prices fell.

E How strong was the challenge from the Right? 2: Hitler's Munich Putsch, 1923

FOCUS ROUTE

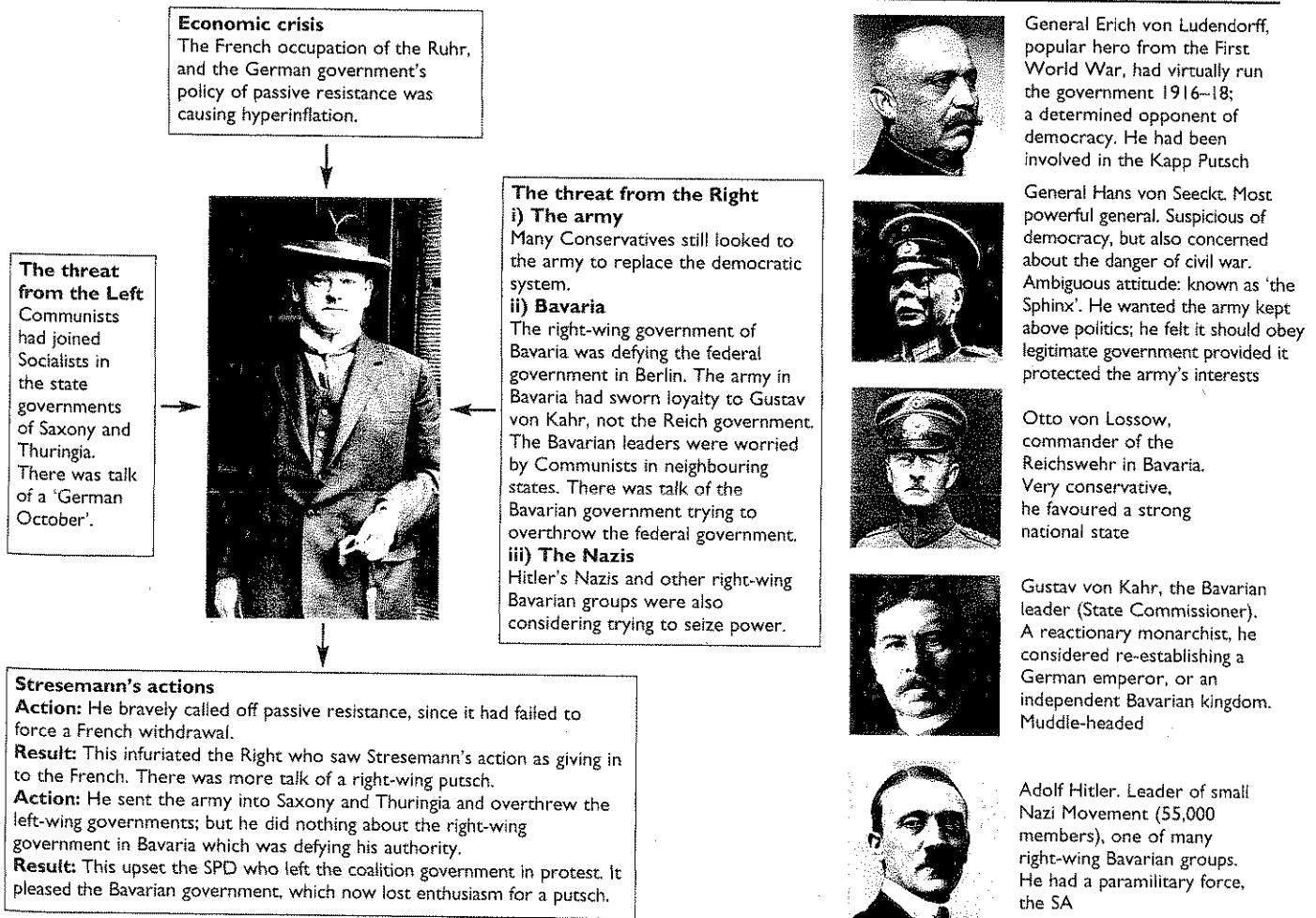
Complete the fourth column of your copy of the table on page 33.

Gustav Stresemann became Chancellor of Germany in August 1923 as the leader of a coalition ranging from the SPD to the moderate conservative DVP. By November his government was having some success in tackling the economic crisis. The new currency was restoring stability to the economy and passive resistance to the French occupation of the Ruhr (which had only worsened the economic situation) had been called off. However, Stresemann still faced major political problems.

The Bavarian state government opposed his decision to call off passive resistance and regarded the national government as too weak to withstand threats from the Left. Bavaria had been one of the most turbulent areas in Germany since 1918. It had experienced both a brief soviet republic and a right-wing regime opposed to Weimar democracy. Traditionally, Bavaria was hostile to Prussia, had its own cultural traditions and acted independently, having kept its own monarch during the Second Reich.

In September 1923 right-wing politicians in Bavaria, backed by the Bavarian Reichswehr commander, Otto von Lossow, considered marching on Berlin to replace the central government. Only the Weimar government's action in driving Communists from the Saxon and Thuringian governments finally dissuaded the Bavarian government from challenging Berlin. However, this was not the end of the threat from the Right. In November 1923 the little-known Nazi Party tried to seize power in Munich, an attempt which is the main focus of this subsection.

2G The crisis facing the Weimar regime in autumn 1923



The rise of the Nazis

In 1923, Adolf Hitler emerged from obscurity. (If you wish to read about his background, you can turn to page 55.) Before we study his first and unsuccessful attempt to come to power it will be useful to see what his Nazi Party stood for.

ACTIVITY

- 1 Identify clauses in Source 2.30 that are

a) nationalist	c) socialist/anti-capitalist
b) racist/anti-semitic	d) opposed to parliamentary democracy.
- 2 Which of the following groups might be more likely to be:

a) attracted by the programme	v) Ex-soldiers
b) alienated?	vi) Industrial workers
i) People in debt	vii) Generals
ii) Small business people	viii) Lower middle class
iii) Big industrialists	
iv) War profiteers	
- 3 Use your answers to questions 1 and 2 to suggest whether the Nazis might be a threat to Stresemann.

SOURCE 2.30 The Programme of the German Workers' Party, Munich, 24 February 1920

- 1 We demand the union of all Germans ... to form a Great Germany.
 - 2 We demand equality of right for the German People in its dealings with other nations, and abolition of the Peace Treaties of Versailles and St Germain.
 - 3 We demand land and territory [colonies] for the nourishment of our people and for settling our surplus population.
 - 4 Only members of the nation may be citizens of the State. None but those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. No Jew, therefore, may be a member of the nation ...
 - 6 The right of voting ... is to be enjoyed by the citizens of the State alone. We demand, therefore, that all official appointments shall be granted to citizens of the State alone. We oppose the corrupt Parliamentary custom of the State of filling posts merely with a view to Party considerations ...
 - 9 All citizens of the State shall possess equal rights and duties.
 - 10 It must be the first duty of every citizen of the State to perform mental or physical work. The activities of the individual must not clash with the interests of the whole, but must proceed within the framework of the community and must be for the general good.
 - 11 We demand therefore:
 - 11 Abolition of incomes unearned by work. Abolition of the thraldom [slavery] of interest.
 - 12 We demand therefore the ruthless confiscation of all war profits.
 - 13 We demand the nationalisation of all businesses.
 - 14 We demand that there shall be profit-sharing in the great industries.
 - 15 We demand a general development of provision for old age.
 - 16 We demand the creation and maintenance of a healthy middle class, immediate communalisation of wholesale warehouses, and their lease at low rates to small traders.
 - 17 We demand a land reform suitable to our national requirements ... the abolition of interest on mortgages, and prohibition of all speculation in land ...
 - 18 We demand an all-out battle against those who damage the common interest by their actions; criminals against the nation, profiteers, racketeers, etc. should be punished by death, without regard to religion or race.
 - 19 We demand the replacement of the system of ROMAN LAW, which serves the materialistic world order, by a system of Germanic COMMON LAW.
 - 20 In order to make it possible for all capable and diligent Germans to receive a good education ... the state must carry the burden of a thorough overhaul of the national education system. The curricula of all institutions of education must adapt to the practical requirements of life. We must aim to instil national ideas from the earliest age in lessons [in citizenship]. We demand that the brightest children of poor parents should be supported by the state irrespective of their class or job.
 - 21 The state must ensure the general good health of its citizens, by providing for mothers and children, by banning child labour, by encouraging the development of physical fitness, by making it a legal obligation to participate in sport and gymnastics.
 - 22 We demand the abolition of the professional army and its replacement by a people's army.
 - 23 ... Newspapers which are deemed to be against the common good should be banned. We demand a legal battle against any art and literature which exerts a harmful influence on public life.
 - 24 We demand the freedom of religion in the Reich so long as it does not endanger the position of the state or adversely affect the moral standards of the German race. As such the Party represents a positively Christian position without binding itself to one particular faith. The Party opposes the materialistic Jewish spirit within and beyond us and is convinced that a lasting recovery of our people can only be achieved on the basis of: Common Good before Personal Gain.
 - 25 In order to achieve all the foregoing requirements we demand the creation of a strong central power of the Reich, unconditional authority of the politically central Parliament over the entire Reich and its organisation in general.
- The leaders of the Party swear to proceed regardless of consequences, if necessary at the sacrifice of their lives, towards the fulfilment of the foregoing Points.**

2H How did Hitler first try to gain power? The Munich Putsch



8 November 1923
Otto von Lossow and Gustav von Kahr address a meeting of 2,000 right-wing supporters in a Munich beer-hall.



Hitler and his stormtroopers burst into the meeting. They declare a national revolution. Gun in hand, Hitler forces Kahr and Lossow into a side room. The two men are forced to state their support for a march on Berlin to impose a new government, with General Ludendorff as the new Commander-in-Chief.



Meanwhile, thousands of stormtroopers seize other members of the Bavarian government; they terrorise their opponents but they fail to gain control of the army barracks.



After Lossow and Kahr promise loyalty to the putsch, Ludendorff allows them to leave the beer-hall.



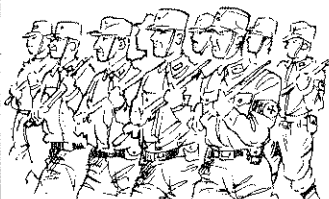
9 November
Berlin: President Ebert declares a national state of emergency because of the treason in Munich. General Seeckt orders Lossow to crush the revolt.



Lossow and Kahr now issue a proclamation denouncing the putsch.



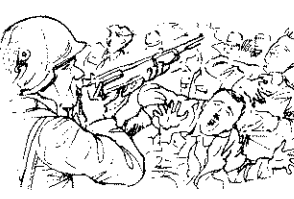
Ludendorff persuades Hitler not to give up and to march into Munich to seize power, as a first step to marching on Berlin. Ludendorff is convinced that soldiers will support their former commander, and certainly not fire on him.



At noon 2,000 armed Nazis, gaining some public support, march to a military base in Munich.



They are met by armed police and Bavarian soldiers. A shot is fired, probably by a Nazi, and police return fire.



Fourteen Nazis are killed, including the person next to Hitler. Most Nazis fall to the ground and take cover. Hitler dislocates a shoulder in his fall, then flees. Ludendorff continues to march up to the police. He is arrested.



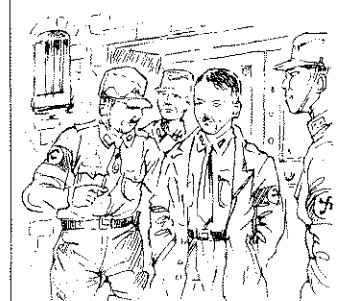
Aftermath
11 November: Hitler is arrested. Seeckt bans the Nazis.



February 1924: Hitler, Ludendorff and other leaders are tried for treason which carries the death penalty. Hitler turns the trial into an opportunity to attack the Weimar regime and expound his views. Hitler achieves national fame. The trial, just before the elections, helps the Nazi vote. The Nazis become the third largest group in Bavaria. The judges are sympathetic. Ludendorff is acquitted. Hitler is sentenced to the minimum possible sentence of five years in prison. The judges accepted Ludendorff's explanation that he had only been present 'by accident' (an excuse he had also successfully used in 1920 over his involvement in the Kapp Putsch).



Hitler kept in good conditions in Landsberg prison. While there he dictates *Mein Kampf*.



The Nazis nearly disintegrate without their leader. On 24 December 1924 Hitler is released after nine months.

Why did Hitler's putsch fail?

SOURCE 2.31 A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, 1992, p. 100

Hitler proved singularly ineffective. Nothing had been properly planned, and when Hitler was forced to recognize that von Lossow and von Kahr had resumed their freedom of action and were taking measures to suppress the rising he suffered a nervous collapse in which he passed through a whole succession of moods – anger, despair, apathy, renewed hope, hesitation. He remained shut up in the Beer Hall, isolated from the crowds from which he had always drawn strength, and unable to make up his mind whether or not to risk a demonstration. It was Ludendorff who decided for him, and at noon next day led out Hitler and the other Nazi leaders at the head of a column of several thousand men, which . . . marched into the centre of the city. Eyewitness accounts strongly suggest that Hitler had already lost all faith in what they were doing. When a police cordon opened fire, 14 in the procession and 3 policemen were killed, and many more wounded. While Ludendorff marched on and pushed through the cordon, Hitler, after being pulled to the ground and dislocating his shoulder, scrambled to his feet and fled . . . The chances of bringing off a coup in 1923 comparable with Mussolini's March on Rome the year before had never been more than marginal.

ACTIVITY

What, according to Bullock, were the main reasons for the failure of the putsch?

Was the Munich Putsch a complete failure?

SOURCE 2.32 Hitler comments in 1933 on the failed coup

It was the greatest good fortune for us National Socialists that the Putsch collapsed because:

- 1 Co-operation with General Ludendorff would have been absolutely impossible.*
- 2 The sudden takeover of power in the whole of Germany would have led to the greatest of difficulties in 1923 because the essential preparations had not even been begun by the National Socialist Party.*
- 3 The events of 9th November 1923 with their blood sacrifice have proved the most effective propaganda for National Socialism.*

SOURCE 2.33 Hitler talking to Kurt Lüdecke in 1924, from *I Knew Hitler*, 1938. Lüdecke, a former Nazi supporter, broke with Hitler in 1934 and became a bitter critic

When I resume active work it will be necessary to pursue a new policy. Instead of working to achieve power by an armed coup we shall have to hold our noses against the Catholic and Marxist deputies. If out-voting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own Constitution! . . . Sooner or later we shall have a majority – and after that, Germany. I am convinced that this is our best line of action, now that conditions in the country have changed so radically.

SOURCE 2.34 William Shirer was an American journalist living in Germany in the 1930s. His book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* was published in the US in 1960

Hitler was shrewd enough to see that his trial would provide a new platform from which he could . . . for the first time make his name known far beyond the confines of Bavaria and indeed Germany itself . . . By the time it ended . . . Hitler had transformed defeat into triumph . . . impressed the German people by his eloquence and the fervour of his nationalism, and emblazoned his name on the front pages of the world.

ACTIVITY

Look at Sources 2.32–4.

- 1 Why did Hitler consider the Nazis not ready for power?
- 2 In what ways did the failure help the Nazis?
- 3 Does Source 2.33 show that after the Munich Putsch the Nazis became a democratic party, and accepted the Weimar constitution?
- 4 Was the Munich Putsch a complete failure?

ACTIVITY

Write a police report on Hitler and the Munich Putsch. Use pages 51–4 and the page opposite giving you information about Hitler. Refer to the following areas:

- a) Background: general political, economic situation in Bavaria; Hitler and Nazi Party
- b) Aims of the putsch
- c) Why the putsch failed
- d) Assessment: degree of threat in 1923 and whether the Nazis are likely to be a threat in the future.

F Review: Why did the Weimar Republic survive the crises of 1919-23?

The new republic had faced major political, international and economic problems but it had survived. This was partly because the extremist forces of both Left and Right failed to attract much support and were both divided and disorganised. Although many in the army and elite were not committed to democracy, they were not yet prepared to overthrow it as they feared this could lead to greater chaos. President Ebert used Article 48, as intended, to take firm action against threats to the regime, and Stresemann tackled hyperinflation successfully. By the end of 1923, it looked as if the worst was over and that, having survived such turbulence, Weimar democracy had a chance of taking root.

FOCUS ROUTE

Look back at the table on page 33. Identify why

- a) the left-wing
- b) the right-wing

revolts failed.

Did they fail for the same reasons? Explain your answer.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 2: Why did the Weimar Republic survive the crises of 1919-23?

- 1 The imposed Treaty of Versailles was hated by virtually all Germans. The new democratic government was blamed for accepting it.
- 2 Germany lost land, all its colonies and was partially disarmed.
- 3 The war-guilt clause and reparations were especially hated. Reparations remained a running sore.
- 4 The Kapp Putsch of 1920 was resisted by a general strike as the army stayed neutral.
- 5 The Bavarian authorities suppressed Hitler's ill-organised Munich Putsch in 1923.
- 6 Between 1919 and 1923 the Communists made several uncoordinated attempts to overthrow the Weimar government; they were suppressed by the army and the Freikorps.
- 7 Inflation, beginning in 1914, reached astronomic levels in 1923 when the value of the mark collapsed.
- 8 Millions of Germans lost savings; others exploited the crisis to build up assets.
- 9 The inflationary crisis left permanent scars.
- 10 By the end of 1923 the worst of the economic and political turmoil was over.

Part 1.1 Review

Chapters 1 and 2 have covered the early, turbulent years of the Weimar Republic in some detail. The following exercises look at the period 1918-23 in overview.

REVIEW ACTIVITY 1

Explain which of the following issues posed the greatest threat to the consolidation of democracy in Germany:

- a) The limited nature of the German revolution
- b) The nature of the Weimar constitution
- c) The Treaty of Versailles
- d) Right-wing extremism
- e) Left-wing extremism
- f) The economic crisis
- g) The attitudes of the German elite
- h) The attitudes of ordinary people.

REVIEW ACTIVITY 2

This task allows you to think about your own views on the first four years of the Weimar Republic. The table on the right gives contrasting viewpoints on various aspects of the Weimar Republic, 1919–23.

Identify the statement in each pair with which you most agree. (Are there any where you feel both alternatives have considerable merit?) Discuss your views, then write a brief summary of your assessment of each issue.

REVIEW ACTIVITY 3

Essay: What problems faced the new republic in Germany from 1918 to 1923? Why did it survive?

In an exam, you are likely to be asked for a two-stage essay on this topic.

The first part is easier. You have to describe the problems (the left-wing revolts, the right-wing revolts, the economic crisis, etc.). As well as displaying your knowledge of the problems, you would gain extra marks for making judgements about the comparative seriousness of the problems.

The second part is more complex. You could go through each problem in turn, analysing how it was overcome. Alternatively, you could make general points about why the Weimar regime survived, such as the weakness and divisions of its opponents as well as its own actions, and substantiate (back up) your opinions with relevant examples from the various problems. The second approach is probably best if you are going for the highest grade. What matters is that you approach the essay in a structured way.

Event/issue	Comment
1 Setting up of the Weimar Republic	<p>a) The fact that many of the old elite were prepared to support the new regime was promising.</p> <p>b) The initial support from the elite for the new regime was purely tactical and might be ominous for the prospects for secure democracy.</p>
2 Nature of the German Revolution	<p>a) The events of 1918–19 can be seen as a series of complex revolutions: initially one from above, then a limited, unrevolutionary revolution from below, followed by the defeat of the real revolutionaries.</p> <p>b) The creation of a democratic republic must be considered as a real revolution.</p>
3 Ebert's role	<p>a) Ebert must be considered a traitor to the cause of the working class for his deal with the army and the crushing of the Spartacist rising.</p> <p>b) Ebert correctly judged the mood of the majority of the German people and was justified in using the army to maintain the new government.</p>
4 The Armistice	<p>a) An armistice was sought by the generals and cannot be blamed on the new civilian politicians.</p> <p>b) The new republican government was unwise to accept the Armistice as the peace terms were bound to be harsh and unpopular.</p>
5 Versailles Treaty	<p>a) Considering the context, the terms of the Versailles Treaty were understandable, though the Allied diplomats could have shown greater wisdom.</p> <p>b) The Treaty of Versailles was an act of criminal irresponsibility by short-sighted, vengeful politicians.</p>
6 The Weimar constitution	<p>a) The constitution was far too democratic for the situation facing Germany in 1919.</p> <p>b) The Weimar constitution was a well-considered mix of democracy and protective measures against anarchy; the regime's greatest weaknesses lay elsewhere.</p>
7 Kapp Putsch	<p>a) Although a failure, the Kapp Putsch suggests how it might be only a matter of time before the Weimar Republic was overthrown.</p> <p>b) The defeat of the Kapp Putsch illustrates the strength of democratic forces in Germany.</p>
8 Communist threat	<p>a) The Communists posed a major threat in 1919–23 to the infant democratic regime.</p> <p>b) The Communists aroused the fears of moderate Socialists and conservatives but were far too weak to gain power.</p>
9 Causes of the inflationary crisis	<p>a) The Allies bear sole responsibility for the German inflationary crisis.</p> <p>b) German governments were partly to blame for the inflationary crisis of 1923.</p>
10 Significance of the inflationary crisis	<p>a) The fact that the Weimar regime overcame the crisis of hyperinflation means it cannot be considered a factor in the Republic's later collapse.</p> <p>b) The 1923 inflationary crisis might have caused the regime's collapse and its aftermath was to contribute to the Republic's eventual disintegration.</p>
11 Hitler's Munich Putsch	<p>a) Hitler's putsch was a minor event. Its importance lies in the lessons Hitler learned from it.</p> <p>b) The Munich Putsch was important in causing the eventual collapse of the Weimar Republic.</p>
12 Overall judgement	<p>a) The fact that the Weimar Republic survived so many crises in its first four years suggests it had considerable strengths.</p> <p>b) Although the Weimar Republic survived its turbulent first four years, it was permanently scarred by the experience, and the prospects for democracy were poor.</p>