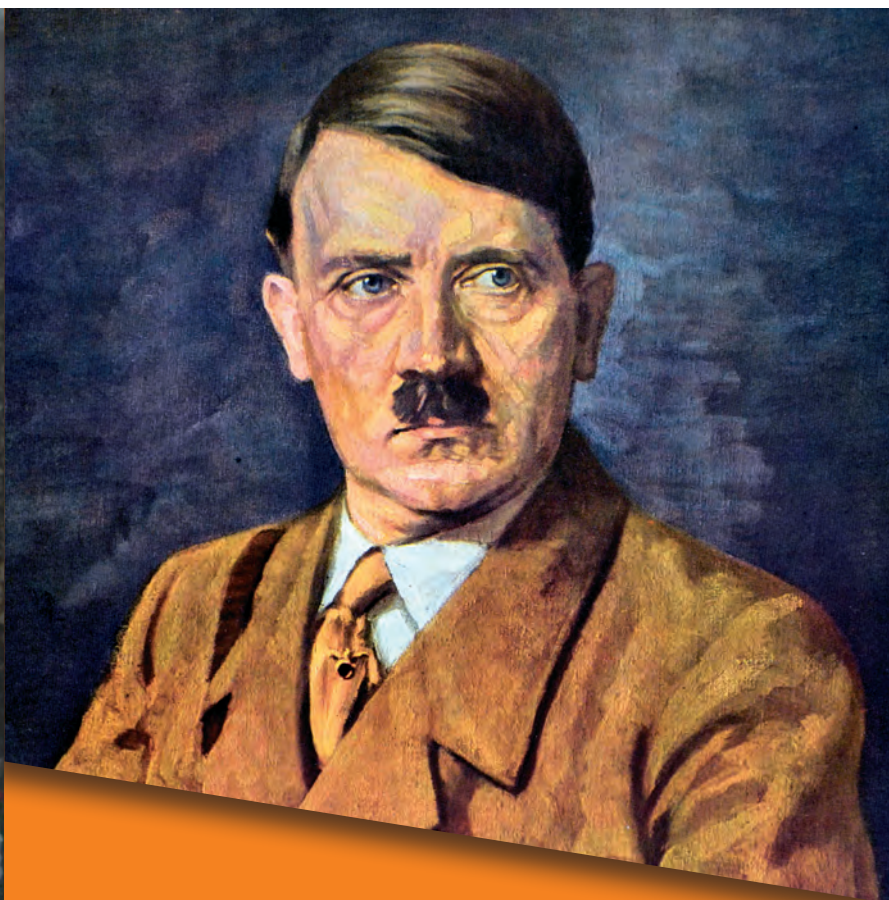
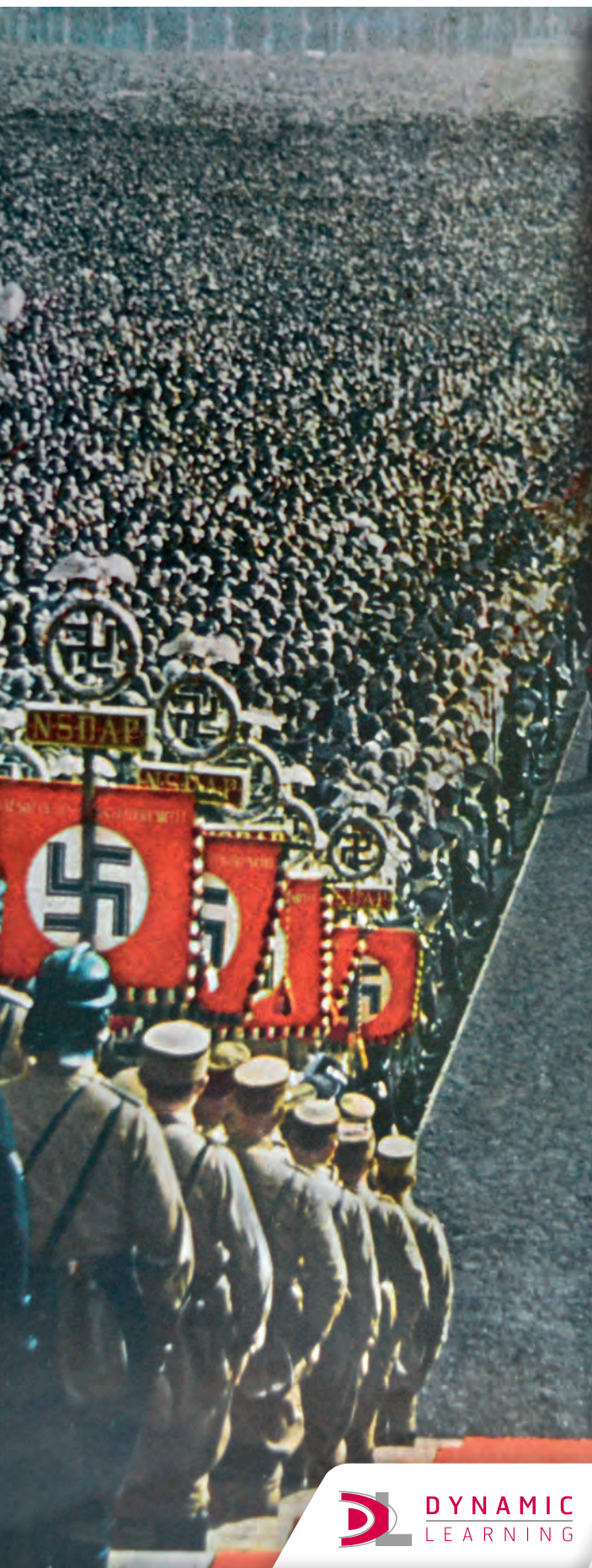


HODDER **GCSE** HISTORY FOR **EDEXCEL**



WEIMAR AND NAZI GERMANY

1918–39

Steve Waugh • John Wright

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KEY TOPIC 1

The Weimar Republic, 1918–29

This key topic examines the key developments in the Weimar Republic, from its inception and early challenges to its recovery under Gustav Stresemann. This was a time of despair and also great hope for Germany. At the beginning of the period it was thought that the country could accept a new democratic constitution, but the challenges the Republic faced during the period of chaos, violence and economic instability after the First World War called this into question. However, by the end of 1923 political and economic stability were being restored to Germany, and Weimar was not challenged during the period of prosperity that lasted until 1929.

Each chapter within this key topic explains a key issue and examines important lines of enquiry as outlined in the boxes below.

There will also be guidance on how to answer the interpretations question.

- Understanding interpretations (page 18)
- How to answer the first question on interpretations – what is the main difference between the views? (page 23)

CHAPTER 1 THE ORIGINS OF THE REPUBLIC, 1918–1919

- 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.

CHAPTER 2 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: *Freikorps*, the Spartacists and the Kapp Putsch.
- The challenges of 1923: hyperinflation, the reasons for and effects of the French occupation of the Ruhr.

CHAPTER 3 THE RECOVERY OF THE REPUBLIC, 1924–29

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

CHAPTER 4 CHANGES IN SOCIETY, 1924–29

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

TIMELINE

1918 November	Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates	1924	Dawes Plan
1919 January	Spartacist uprising	1925	Locarno Pact
1919 June	Signing of the Treaty of Versailles	1926	Germany joins League of Nations
1919 August	Weimar Constitution finalised	1928	Kellogg–Briand Pact
1920	Kapp Putsch	1929	Young Plan
1923	French occupation of the Ruhr and hyperinflation		

2 The early challenges to the Weimar Republic, 1919–23

The setting up of the Weimar Republic did not signal peace for Germany and its citizens, it merely ushered in a period of chaos and violence. The five years after the First World War saw an attempted Communist revolution, political assassinations, putsches (armed uprisings) and massive inflation. Above all, Germans had to accept what they felt was a vindictive peace settlement – the Treaty of Versailles. Many Germans said that all the problems of the post-war years were the result of the decisions that had been made by the politicians of the new Weimar Republic. These politicians were given the name November Criminals. However, by the end of 1923, political and economic stability were being restored to Germany.

2.1 The early unpopularity of the Republic

The main reason for the early unpopularity of the Republic was the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

The Treaty of Versailles

Although the Germans signed the armistice on 11 November 1918, it was not until 28 June 1919 that the treaty ending the First World War was signed. The Germans expected the peace settlement to be based on US President Wilson's Fourteen Points and they expected to return lands that they had conquered. However, they looked to President Wilson's idea of **self-determination** as a safeguard of Germany's **sovereignty**. When the terms of the settlement were published, huge numbers of Germans were horrified.

The French, led by Clemenceau, wanted revenge and sought to make sure Germany could never threaten France again. One British politician said that 'Germany will be squeezed until the pips squeak.'

The Treaty of Versailles imposed extremely severe terms on Germany (see Figure 2.1, and Table 2.1 on page 12). Germany lost 13 per cent of its land, 48 per cent of its iron production and more than 6 million citizens were absorbed into other countries. Perhaps the harshest term for Germany was Article 231 – the War Guilt Clause. This stated that Germany had to accept blame for starting the war in 1914. This was compounded when the treaty denied Germany entry to the **League of Nations**, thus showing that Germany was a pariah.



Figure 2.1 The territorial terms of the Treaty of Versailles

Territorial terms	Military terms	Financial terms
All colonies to be given to the Allied Powers	Army not to exceed 100,000	Coal to be mined in the Saar by France
Alsace-Lorraine returned to France	No tanks, armoured cars or heavy artillery permitted	Reparations fixed at £6.6 billion
Eupen-Malmedy given to Belgium after a plebiscite	No military aircraft permitted	Cattle and sheep to be given to Belgium and France as reparations
Saar to be administered by the League of Nations	No naval vessel to be greater than 10,000 tons	Ships over 1,600 tons to be given up
Posen and West Prussia to Poland. Eastern Upper Silesia to Poland after a plebiscite	No submarines permitted	Germany to build merchant ships to replace Allied ships sunk by U-Boats
Danzig created a Free City	Rhineland demilitarised	
Memel to be administered by the League of Nations		
No union (<i>Anschluss</i>) with Austria		
Northern Schleswig to Denmark after a plebiscite		

▲ Table 2.1 Some of the most important terms of the Treaty of Versailles

The 'stab in the back' theory

For most Germans, the Treaty stoked the fire of shame and humiliation. Versailles was nothing more than a dictated peace (*Diktat*). A **scapegoat** was needed – and Ebert, the Weimar Government and its politicians fitted the bill and people began to call them the November Criminals. Yet, there was much irony in this criticism. The German cabinet initially rejected the terms of the peace settlement and on 19 June 1919 Scheidemann resigned as Chancellor in disgust. Ebert called the terms a *Gewaltfrieden* (an enforced peace). The German public was unaware that the Allies had informed the German leaders that refusal to accept the terms would lead to a renewal of hostilities and an immediate invasion of Germany. Nevertheless, from this point, criticism of the Government began to grow and the idea that the politicians had stabbed the army in the back (the *Dolchstoß* theory) really took hold and gained currency.

Source A From a German newspaper, *Deutsche Zeitung*, 28 June 1919

Vengeance! German nation! Today in the Hall of Mirrors [Versailles] the disgraceful treaty is being signed. Do not forget it. The German people will, with unceasing work, press forward to reconquer the place among nations to which it is entitled. Then will come vengeance for the shame of 1919.



▲ **Source B** A cartoon entitled 'Clemenceau the Vampire'. From the German right-wing satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch*, July 1919. Clemenceau was the leader of France. The cartoon is commenting about the Treaty of Versailles.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 What does Source A show about the German newspaper's attitude to the peace settlement?
- 2 Why was Article 231 important for many Germans?
- 3 Work in groups of three or four. Choose either the territorial, military or financial terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Present a case for the class indicating that your choice had the most drastic consequences for Germany.



Practice questions

- 1 Give two things you can infer from Source A about German reactions to the Treaty of Versailles. (For guidance, see page 78.)
- 2 How useful are Sources A and B for an enquiry into attitudes in Germany towards the Treaty of Versailles? Explain your answer using Sources A and B and your knowledge of the historical context. (For guidance, see pages 62–64.)

2.2 Challenges to the Republic from the left and right

At the same time that Ebert and Scheidemann were trying to establish a new government in Germany, there was political turmoil across the country. In its early years, the Weimar Republic faced constant threats from the left and right and there were several uprisings across Germany that threatened the existence of the Government (see Figure 2.2). It seemed that the Weimar Government could not win. Its politicians were criticised for ending the war, accepting the Treaty of Versailles and then introducing high taxes for the better off in society in order to meet the Allied reparations.

Firstly, it must be understood that the radical changes that occurred in Germany in late October and early November 1918 came about because those in power in Germany saw there was no alternative. Some Germans felt that democracy had been imposed on them. Furthermore, the consequences of the war were creating unrest in Germany. As a result of the British naval blockade, there were still shortages of food. Moreover, the German people were beginning to experience inflation. Add to these problems the impact of the **Bolshevik Revolution** in Russia, and it is easy to see why unrest spread.

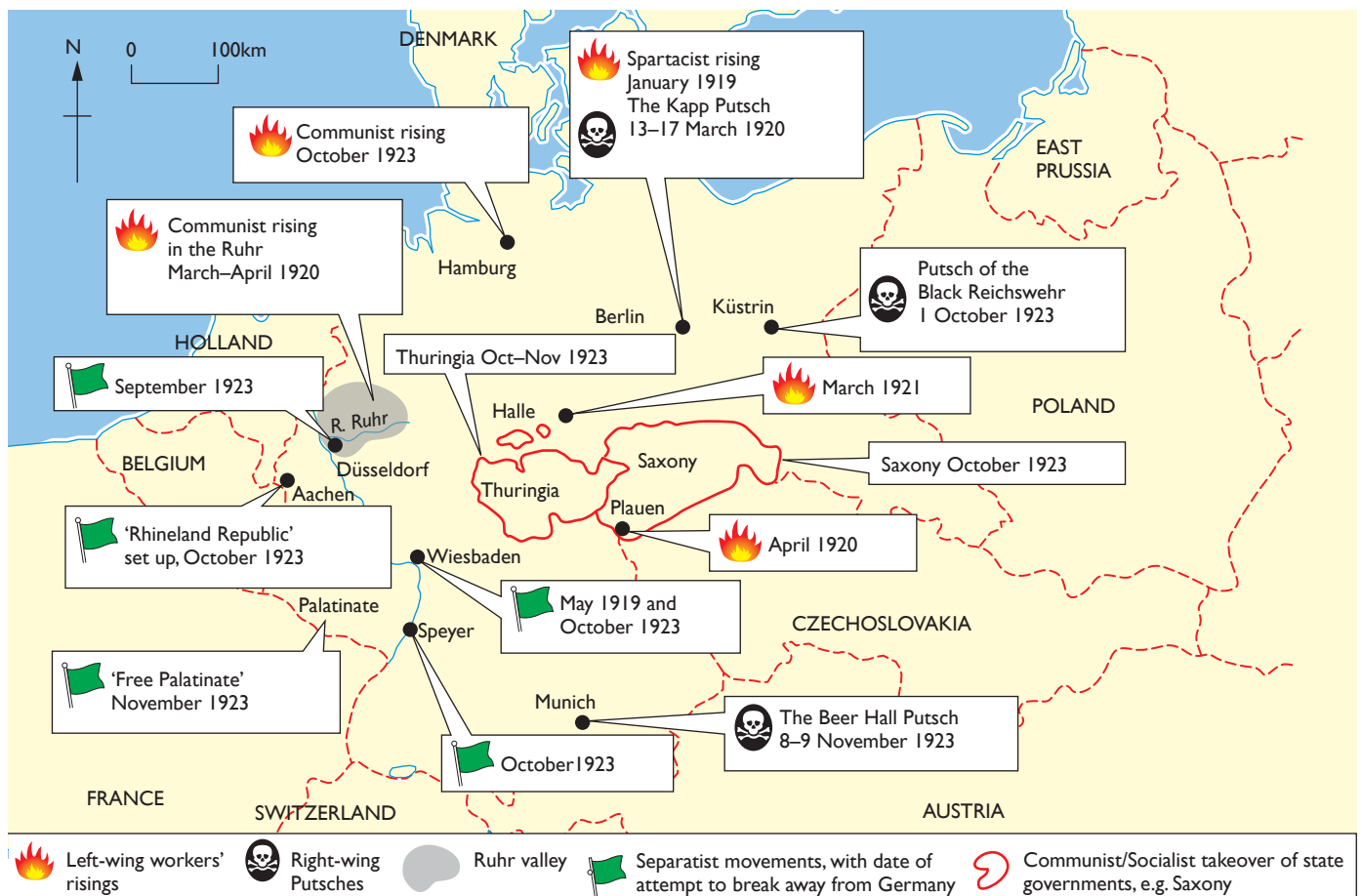
Threat from the left

After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in October 1917, when the Provisional (temporary) Government was removed by the communists Lenin and Trotsky, many Germans hoped that a **socialist** country could be established in Germany as well. Soldiers, sailors and workers set up councils (soviets) in October and November 1918. Because of the fear of revolution, Ebert made a deal with the new army leader, Groener.

It was agreed that the army would support the new government against revolution and Ebert would support and supply the army. Thus the new government was dependent on the army, many leaders of which did not want democracy but preferred it to a Bolshevik style of government. For some Germans, this dependency on the army weakened the authority of the Weimar Republic.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Why was there a fear of a Bolshevik Revolution in Germany?
- 2 Why was the deal between Ebert and Groener significant for the Weimar Republic?



▲ Figure 2.2 Political violence in Germany, 1919–23

The Spartacist Uprising

During the war, several groups emerged from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). The most radical was the Spartacist League led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who eventually sought to establish a state based on **communist** ideals. (The League took its name from the Roman slave Spartacus, who led a rebellion in 73BC.) In December 1918, the Spartacists' demonstrations against the Government led to clashes with the army and resulted in the deaths of sixteen Spartacists. At the end of the month, the Spartacists formed the **German Communist Party (KPD)**.

Freikorps

Paramilitary groups formed from demobilised soldiers at the end of the war. They refused to give up weapons and uniforms and were led by ex-army officers. Most *Freikorps* were monarchists who sought to save Germany from Bolshevism even though they did not support the Weimar Republic. There were about two hundred different groups across Germany.

On 6 January 1919, the Spartacists began their attempt to overthrow Ebert and the Weimar Government in order to create a Communist State. Ebert and his defence minister, Noske, used the *Reichswehr* (regular army) and the Berlin *Freikorps* (see box) to put down the rebellion. Within days the rising was over. The Spartacists were no match for the army and *Freikorps*. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were captured and killed. It was the violence of the rising that forced the new Assembly to move to Weimar.

In March, a further communist-inspired rising in Berlin was put down with great ferocity and more than 1,000 people were killed. Another communist rising in Munich was crushed by the *Freikorps* with great severity in April.



◀ **Source C** Photograph of *Freikorps* in front of the *Vorwärts* newspaper building, which they captured from the Spartacists in January 1919. The *Vorwärts* was a socialist newspaper

Source D From an article in a government newspaper, 1919

The despicable actions of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg soil the revolution and endanger all its achievements. The masses must not sit quiet for one minute longer while these brutal beasts and their followers paralyse the activities of the republican government and incite the people more and more to civil war.

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Study Source C. Who were the Spartacists? Why was it important for them to control the *Vorwärts* building?
- 2 How did the Spartacists threaten the Weimar Republic?

Practice question

Give two things you can infer from Source D about the Spartacists. (For guidance, see page 78.)

The Kapp Putsch

Having resisted the challenge from the left, Ebert had to face the right in 1920. When the Weimar Government announced measures in March 1920 to reduce the size of the army and also disband the *Freikorps*, there was uproar in Berlin. The leader of the Berlin *Freikorps*, Ehrhardt, refused to comply. Together with a leading Berlin politician, Wolfgang Kapp, a plan was drawn up to seize Berlin and form a new **right-wing** government with Kapp as the Chancellor. Kapp stressed the communist threat, the *Dolchstoß* theory (see page 12) and the severity of the Treaty of Versailles. The *Reichswehr* in Berlin, commanded by General Lüttwitz, supported Ehrhardt and Kapp. Following Kapp's successful seizure of Berlin on 13 March 1920, the Weimar Government moved to Dresden and then Stuttgart. The new regular army had been asked to put down the Kapp Putsch, but the Commander-in-Chief, von Seeckt, said 'The *Reichswehr* does not fire on *Reichswehr*.'

Ebert and Scheidemann called on the people of Berlin not to support the Kapp Putsch and asked them to go on strike. **Trade unionists** and civil servants supported the Government and, because it had little support, the Putsch collapsed. More than four hundred *Reichswehr* officers had been involved in the Putsch but very few were punished.

Further uprisings

One week after the Kapp Putsch began, a communist rising occurred in the Ruhr. This time the army became involved and brutally put down the rebellion. Hundreds were killed. Violence continued in Germany during the next two years and both **left-wing** and right-wing groups were involved.

It has been estimated that there were 376 murders (354 of them carried out by the right) in the period 1919–22. No right-wingers were sentenced to death but ten left-wingers were. Two leading Weimar ministers were assassinated during this time:

- In 1921, Matthias Erzberger, leader of the Centre Party and a signatory of the Treaty of Versailles.
- In 1922, Walther Rathenau, the Foreign Minister.

The final threat to Weimar in this period came in November 1923, when there was a putsch in Munich, led by Adolf Hitler. This will be examined on pages 33–35.



ACTIVITIES

- 1 What grievances did Kapp and the Berlin *Freikorps* have in 1920?
- 2 Which do think posed the greatest threat to the Weimar Republic, the Spartacists or the Kapp Putsch? Give reasons for your answer.



▲ **Source E** Soldiers and *Freikorps* troops in Berlin 1920. Note the swastika on some of the helmets and the presence of the flag of the Second Reich, the name given to the German Empire, 1871–1918

Practice question

Give two things you can infer from Source E about the *Freikorps*. (For guidance, see page 78.)

2.3 The challenges of 1923

The problems facing the Weimar Republic worsened in 1923 due to the French occupation of the Ruhr and the effects of hyperinflation.

Germany had experienced inflation during the First World War and had borrowed extensively to finance its war effort. When the reparations figure was announced – £6,600 million at £100 million per year – the Weimar Government claimed that it could not pay. Moreover, the loss of wealth-making industrial areas exaggerated the problem. As inflation continued, the Weimar Government began to print more money in order to pay in order to pay workers in the Ruhr during the French and Belgian occupation (see below). The value of the German currency started to fall rapidly and, because no reparations were paid, France sent troops into the Ruhr, Germany's main industrial area. The Ruhr is sited in the Rhineland (see Figure 2.1, page 11 and Figure 2.2, page 13) so there were no German troops to stop the French invasion.

The French occupation of the Ruhr, 1923

An occupation by French and Belgium troops took place in January 1923 when Germany again failed to pay reparations to both these countries. The French were angry because they needed the money to help to pay off their own war debts to the USA. The French and Belgians had decided to take the goods they needed, rather than to wait for the Germans to send them.

German resistance

This time the French occupation was met with **passive resistance**. However, the resistance turned sour and Germans carried out acts of industrial sabotage. The German workers in the Ruhr went on strike as a protest against the invasion. Some strikers took more direct action and set factories on fire and sabotaged pumps in some mines so they flooded and could not be worked. A number of strikers were shot by French troops; their funerals led to demonstrations against the invasion. The occupation only served to stir up old enmities and remind people of the war.

The results of the occupation

The invasion certainly united the German people in their hatred of the French and Belgians. The strikers became heroes of the German people as they were standing up to the humiliating Treaty of Versailles and showing that the German people had not been crushed. The German Government backed the strikers and printed more money to pay them a wage. The strike meant that even fewer goods were being produced. The extra strike money plus the collapse in production turned inflation into hyperinflation (see Table 2.2).

Date	Value of mark
July 1914	£1 = 20 marks
Jan 1919	£1 = 35 marks
Jan 1920	£1 = 256 marks
Jan 1921	£1 = 256 marks
Jan 1922	£1 = 764 marks
Jan 1923	£1 = 71,888 marks
July 1923	£1 = 1,413,648 marks
Sept 1923	£1 = 3,954,408,000 marks
Oct 1923	£1 = 1,010,408,000,000 marks
Nov 1923	£1 = 1,680,800,000,000,000 marks

▲ Table 2.2 The decreasing value of the mark against the pound, 1914–23

Hyperinflation

Those people with savings or those on a fixed income found themselves penniless. People were quick to blame the Weimar politicians. This was yet another humiliation for the new government.

Inflation did, however, benefit certain people:

- Businessmen who had borrowed money from the banks were able to pay off these debts.
- Serious food shortages led to a rise in prices of necessities, especially food, which helped farmers.
- Foreigners who were in Germany suddenly found that they had a huge advantage. People who had dollars or pounds found that they could change them for millions of marks and afford things that ordinary Germans could not.

In the summer of 1923, Gustav Stresemann became Chancellor. He began to steady things and introduced a new currency, the Rentenmark. The following year the new currency and loans from the USA (see page 19) enabled an economic recovery. It seemed as if the Weimar Republic had weathered the storms and could look forward to a period of stability and prosperity.



▲ **Source F** A cartoon published in Germany by the left-wing magazine *Simplicissimus* in 1923. It had the caption 'Paper money' at the top and 'Bread' at the bottom

ACTIVITY

Why do you think people who had savings in banks suffered more than most in the period of hyperinflation?

Practice questions

- 1 How useful are Sources F and G for an enquiry into the effects of hyperinflation on Germany? Explain your answer, using Sources F and G and your knowledge of the historical context. (*For guidance, see pages 62–64.*)
- 2 Explain why there were challenges to the Weimar Republic in the years 1919–23.

You may use the following in your answer:

- The Treaty of Versailles
- The Kapp Putsch

You must also use information of your own.

(*For guidance, see pages 94–95.*)



▲ **Source G** A German woman in 1923, burning currency notes, which burn longer than the amount of firewood they can buy

2.4 What are interpretations of history?

You will have to answer three questions about interpretations in the examination. These are:

- 1 What is the main difference between these interpretations?
- 2 Why are these interpretations different?
- 3 How far do you agree with the view given by one of the interpretations?

An interpretation of history is a view given of the past – an event, a movement, the role of an individual and so on – written at a later date. It could be a view given by an historian, from a textbook, from a history website. The writer has the benefit of hindsight and is able to consult a variety of sources of evidence to give their view of what took place.

There are different interpretations about a past event or person because the writer could focus on or give emphasis to a different aspect of a past event or person, or may have consulted different sources from the past. The writer will carefully choose words and select or omit certain details to emphasise this view. The fact that there are different interpretations of the past does not necessarily mean that one of them is wrong. The two writers might simply have used different sources or they might have used the same sources and reached different conclusions.

Your first task is to identify the view that is given by the interpretation of the event or person. Here is an interpretation of the Treaty of Versailles:

Interpretation 1 From *Versailles and After, 1919–1933* by Dr Ruth Henig, published in 1995

Compared to the treaties which Germany had imposed on defeated Russia and Rumania in 1918, the Treaty of Versailles was quite moderate... The Treaty of Versailles was not excessively harsh on Germany, either territorially or economically. However, the German people were expecting victory not defeat. It was the acknowledgement of defeat as much as the treaty terms themselves, which they found so hard to accept.

The view that is given here is:

This interpretation gives the view that the Treaty of Versailles was not unfair nor too harsh on Germany. It uses phrases such as 'quite moderate' and 'not excessively harsh' to show this view. It also focuses on the harsh treaties that Germany imposed on Russia and Rumania to emphasise the moderate impact of the Treaty on Germany.

Here is a second interpretation of the Treaty of Versailles

Interpretation 2 From an online article *The Treaty of Versailles – the Peace to end all Peace*, by Alan Woods Monday, 2009

The Versailles Treaty of 1919 was one of the most outrageous treaties in history. It was a blatant act of plunder perpetrated by a gang of robbers against a helpless, prostrate and bleeding Germany. Among its numerous provisions, it required Germany and its allies to accept full responsibility for causing the war and, under the terms of articles 231–248, to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions and pay reparations to the Entente powers.

And here is an interpretation of the effects of hyperinflation on Germany in 1923:

Interpretation 3 From *Germany 1918–45* by Richard Radway, published in 1998

However, not everyone suffered from the effects of hyperinflation in 1923. Many businessmen did well. High inflation could lead to big profits, especially as the increase in wages did not keep pace with the increase in prices. Also many businessmen had borrowed money from the banks and these debts were wiped out. The rise in prices was also good for farmers. In a period of serious inflation food prices will always rise highest. People will give up buying less essential goods before they stop buying food!

ACTIVITY

Read Interpretation 1 and the information underneath it. This outlines the view it gives of the Treaty of Versailles and the evidence it uses. Now try answering the questions below on Interpretations 2 and 3 in a similar way.

Interpretation 2

- 1 What view does it give of the Treaty of Versailles?
- 2 What evidence from the interpretation supports this view?

Interpretation 3

- 3 What view does it give of the effects of hyperinflation in 1923?
- 4 What evidence from the interpretation supports this view?

You will be given advice in the next three chapters on how to answer interpretation questions.