

How far did the Weimar Republic recover from 1924 to 1929?

STRESEMANN SAW THE Republic out of the crises of 1923, but his fragile coalition government could not keep the support of the Reichstag. Stresemann was too right-wing for the socialists and too moderate for the nationalists. However, he was very able and was a member of every government from 1923 until his death in 1929. Although he was only Chancellor for a few months, he remained the most influential politician in Germany as the government attempted to recover from the disasters of the early 1920s.

Foreign policy

Stresemann was Foreign Minister from 1924 to 1929.

SOURCE 1 A letter from Stresemann to the Kaiser's son, September 1925

“ In my opinion there are three great tasks that confront German foreign policy in the immediate future:

- 1. The solution of the reparations problem in a way that is tolerable for Germany.*
- 2. The protection of those ten to twelve million Germans who now live under foreign control in foreign lands.*
- 3. The readjustment of our eastern frontiers; the recovery of Danzig, the Polish Corridor, and a correction of the frontier in Upper Silesia. ”*

SOURCE 2 Chancellor Marx in a speech in the Reichstag, February 1927

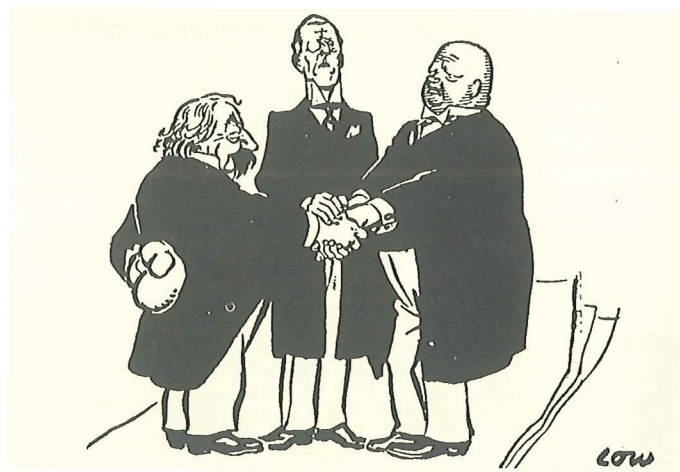
“ The foreign policy which the government has pursued since the end of the war rejects the idea of revenge. Its purpose is rather the achievement of a mutual understanding. ”

1. Why might Stresemann be writing to the Kaiser's son (Source 1)?
2. Do Sources 1 and 2 give the same impression of Weimar foreign policy? Explain any differences you notice.

Stresemann was responsible for a series of foreign policy successes. In 1925 Germany signed the Locarno Treaties with Britain, France and Italy. They guaranteed Germany's frontiers with France and Belgium. Stresemann avoided giving any guarantees over Germany's eastern frontiers.

In 1926 Stresemann took Germany into the League of Nations. Its status as a great power was recognised as it was given a permanent seat on the League's Council alongside Britain and France.

In 1929 the Young Plan produced a final agreement on the issue of reparations. As a result, Allied occupation forces were withdrawn from the Rhineland area of Germany.



SOURCE 3 A British cartoon showing the French, German and British foreign ministers joining hands in the Locarno Pact. The French politician, Briand, is wearing a boxing glove, prepared to deal Germany a knock-out blow

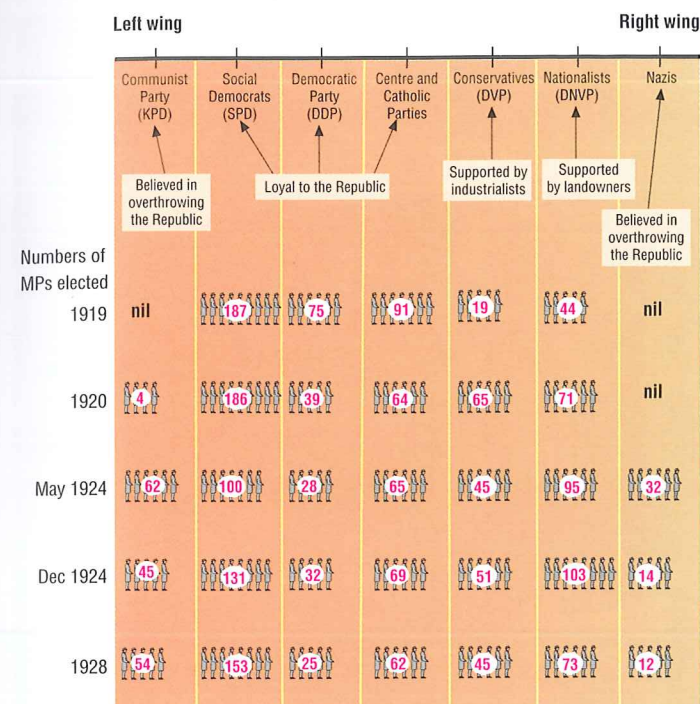
Political problems

During the years of the Weimar Republic no single party ever won a majority of seats in the Reichstag. Up to 1930 the Social Democrats always won the most votes, but never enough to govern on their own. So governments had to be formed from coalitions of parties working together. Sometimes these coalitions did not work well, and the governments were therefore unstable. There were twenty-five separate governments in fourteen years. Some governments lasted only a few weeks. Stresemann hoped that successes in foreign policy would make it easier for the political parties in Germany to work together. This did not happen.

Many nationalists opposed Stresemann's policies as being too cautious. They wanted to reject the Versailles Treaty completely, not just have it revised. All the centre and right-wing parties were suspicious of the Social Democrats. Parties such as the Communists and the Nazis made no secret of their wish to overthrow the Weimar Republic entirely.

In 1925 Hindenburg was elected President. He had been one of Germany's war leaders under the Kaiser and was a prominent critic of the Weimar Republic. This showed how weak support for the Republic was amongst the German people. Hindenburg represented old Germany. Before he took up the post of President, he actually asked the permission of the ex-Kaiser Wilhelm!

On the other hand, the period 1924–29 saw more stable governments. After the 1928 election the Social Democrats, for the first time since 1923, joined a government coalition with the other parties committed to the Republic. This showed that the middle-class parties were no longer so suspicious of the socialists.



SOURCE 4 Political parties in the Weimar Republic

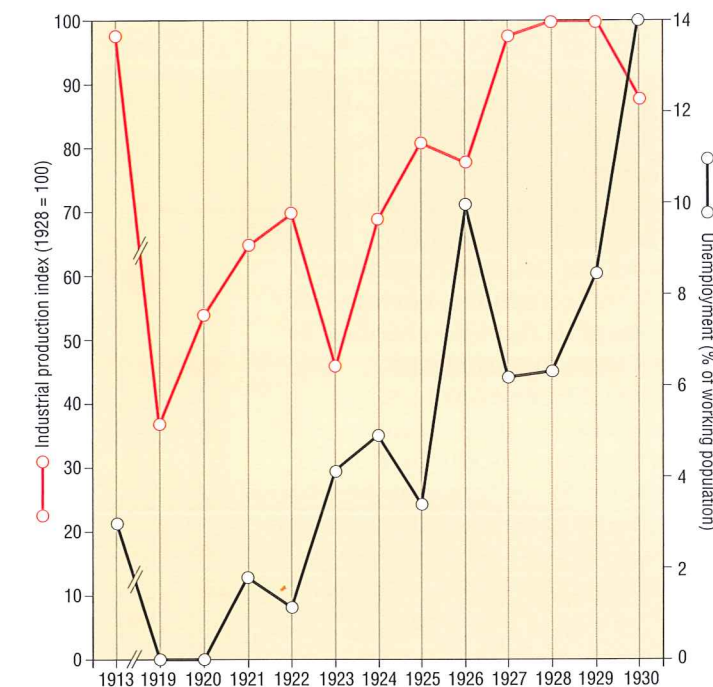
The economy

The inflation of 1923 had destroyed people's savings, so there was little money in Germany itself for investment. In 1924, through the Dawes Plan, Germany was lent 800 million marks by the USA to invest in industry and commerce. The economy began to recover. In 1928 industrial production finally surpassed pre-First World War levels. By 1930 Germany was one of the world's leading exporters of manufactured goods.

However, the German economy still had serious weaknesses.

- It depended on American loans which could be withdrawn at any time
- Unemployment was a serious problem. The economy might be growing, but it wasn't creating jobs fast enough for Germany's rising population
- Employers complained about the money the government spent on welfare benefits for the poor and unemployed. They said taxes were too high

- Some sectors of the economy were in trouble throughout the 1920s, farming in particular. Income from agriculture went down from 1925 to 1929. Farmworkers' earnings were, by 1929, little more than half the national average
- There were extremes of wealth and poverty in Germany
- There was still a concentration of power in the hands of just a few industrialists who ran more than half of Germany's industry.



SOURCE 5 Graph showing changes in industrial output and unemployment

TASK

It is 1929. You have been asked to write a confidential report for the Chancellor on the current health of the Weimar Republic.

Using the following three headings, explain how far Germany's situation has improved since 1924.

- Relations with other countries
- Politics
- The economy.

Mention which problems have been solved and which remain unsolved by 1929.

Of the problems which have not been solved, which do you think is the most serious? Explain your answer.