

SOURCE 1 R. Bessel in M. Fulbrook (ed.), *German History Since 1800*, 1997, pp. 252-3

Even during the years of 'relative stabilisation' all was not well with the Weimar Republic. The profound social, economic, political and psychological destabilisation which had set in with the First World War had not really been overcome; underlying economic problems remained, and the relative political stability of Weimar's 'golden years' rested on shaky foundations...

While the two liberal parties saw their popular support dwindle and the (moderate) conservatives lost roughly a third of their supporters, many voters turned to special-interest parties - betraying a lack of faith in a democratic politics which focused on the common good.

SOURCE 3 M. Fulbrook, *The Fontana History of Germany, 1918-1990: The Divided Nation*, 1991, pp. 7-8

To moderate observers, it might appear that under Stresemann's guidance, a considerable amount had been achieved... Yet many observers in Weimar Germany were far from moderate. Each of the measures negotiated under Stresemann was highly contentious. Moreover, under the façade of apparent stabilisation there were many cracks, both political and economic.

SOURCE 4 P. Pulzer, *Germany 1870-1945*, 1997, p. 3

The era of Stresemann was the high noon of the Weimar Republic. Tempers dropped, political extremism subsided. In large part this was due to the return of prosperity. Between 1924... and 1928 money wages doubled and the value of the currency was maintained. The standard of living was higher in 1928 than in 1913. Unemployment was generally below one million. In 1927 the expansion of the German state culminated in the introduction of a comprehensive unemployment insurance scheme. German industry regained its technical and organisational lead. The Dawes loan... encouraged modernisation.

Historians' assessments

We can now finally assess whether the Weimar Republic experienced a secure recovery during this period. Read the historians' assessments in Sources 1-4 and complete the Activity below.

SOURCE 2 K. Fischer, *Nazi Germany. A New History*, 1995, pp. 179-87

The middle years of the Weimar Republic, sometimes referred to as the Roaring or Golden Twenties, saw a temporary return of domestic prosperity and a concurrent relaxation in international relations... Many western loans were made to Germany, creating an impressive boom that persuaded many that the crisis of 1923 had been resolved. Germany used the borrowed capital in two profitable ways: financing a program of public works and investing in the modernization of industry. In 1923 German industrial output had fallen to 47 percent of 1913 levels, but by 1929 it surpassed 1913 levels by 4 percent.

The return of prosperity brought with it a corresponding improvement in international relations, partly because the Western powers recognized that their economic well-being in an increasingly interconnected economic order rested on cooperation rather than on conflict and partly because a group of more moderate statesmen now took the helm in foreign policy in the major Western nations...

This relaxed atmosphere in international relations, combined with the return to prosperity, also lowered the political temperature in Germany... In 1925... the Weimar Republic gained new respectability with the election as president of the venerable [old and distinguished] Paul von Hindenburg, who would painstakingly observe his oath to the republic despite his monarchist convictions.

The political life of the republic... still had not stabilized or matured. Between 1924 and 1929 governments were glued together by tenuous coalitions of center to moderate right-wing parties... The republic had come into being as... an accidental republic, with a democratic constitution that few Germans understood or appreciated. Tarnished by its opponents with the stigma of Versailles and saddled with staggering socio-economic problems, the republic found few passionate supporters...

Political parties reflected the traditional social, religious, and regional cleavages that had divided the German people from each other in the past. Even parties located close to each other on the political spectrum found greater strengths in their differences than their similarities... Out of some ten major parties, none displayed a passionate commitment to the republic...

The political foundation of the republic was also under attack by Germany's elite institutions and groups... The overwhelming majority of judges were unsympathetic to the republic... The universities were bastions [strongholds] of institutionalized conservatism and elitism...

The military, of course, was the most powerful bulwark [defence] against democratization... The Reichswehr had managed to preserve its traditional structure and conservative ethos [spirit], though officially it pretended to stay above politics...

The leaders of heavy industry also wanted to dismantle the Weimar system because it supported the costly welfare state... German big business gradually mounted a counterattack against labor by trying to reduce wages and benefits...

In addition to these political and institutional cleavages, the Weimar Republic also faced intense cultural divisions stemming from the... process of modernization... [with] rapid urbanization and mass education... and new forms of expression suitable to a mass audience...

The republic, certainly in the eyes of cultural conservatives, became causally associated with every threatening wind of change in fashion, mores [customs] or intellectual attitudes... In the field of culture, as in so many other fields, Germany became radically polarized between the traditionalists... and the cultural pluralists.

ACTIVITY

Hold a debate: Which is the more accurate view of the Weimar Republic from 1924 to 1929:

- 'A remarkable period of recovery'
- 'A superficially promising period, but in reality marred by major weaknesses?'

Use the information on your completed chart from page 60 to support your arguments.