

The Weimar Republic under Stresemann

Achievements

The economy

Although Chancellor for only a few months, Stresemann was a leading member of every government from 1923 to 1929. He was a more skilful politician than Ebert, and, as a right-winger, he had wider support. He was also helped by the fact that through the 1920s the rest of Europe was gradually coming out of its post-war depression. Slowly but surely, he built up Germany's prosperity again.

Under the Dawes Plan (see page 181), reparations payments were spread over a longer period, and 800 million marks in loans from the USA poured into Germany. Some of the money went into German industry, replacing old equipment with the latest technology. Some of the money went into public works like swimming pools, sports stadia and apartment blocks. As well as providing facilities, these projects created jobs.

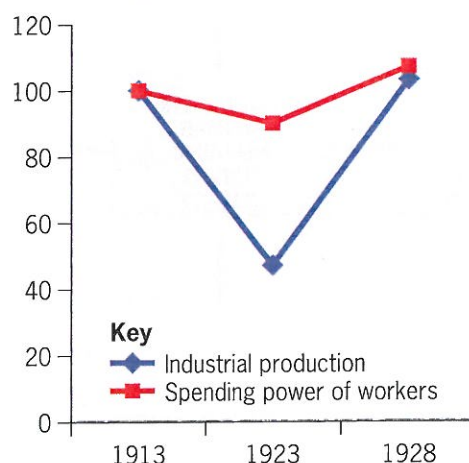
By 1927 German industry seemed to have recovered very well. In 1928 Germany finally achieved the same levels of production as before the war and regained its place as the world's second greatest industrial power (behind the USA). Wages for industrial workers rose and for many Germans there was a higher standard of living. Reparations were being paid and exports were on the increase. The government was even able to increase welfare benefits and wages for state employees.

SOURCE 17

Since the whole of German industry was being renovated technologically, since new manufacturing plants were being installed and the old reorganised, and new machines were being put to work, the demand for building materials, machines, tools, and steel was very high ... Since they employed more workers at better wages, the market for industries producing consumer goods also expanded. Thus the economic crisis following the collapse of the mark was overcome by 1926. The years 1926 to 1928 were the great boom ...

Otto Bauer, a German Marxist writer, commenting on the impact of American investment.

SOURCE 18



Comparison of aspects of the German economy in 1913, 1923 and 1928.

- 1 What factors helped Germany's economy to recover?
- 2 In what ways did economic recovery affect the lives of ordinary Germans?

Foreign policy

Stresemann's greatest triumphs were in foreign policy. In 1925 he signed the Locarno Treaties (see page 30), guaranteeing not to try to change Germany's western borders with France and Belgium. As a result, in 1926 Germany was accepted into the League of Nations. Here Stresemann began to work, quietly but steadily, on reversing some of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, particularly those concerning reparations and Germany's eastern frontiers. By the time he died in 1929, Stresemann had negotiated the Young Plan, which further lightened the reparations burden on Germany and led to the final removal of British, French and Belgian troops from the Rhineland.

Activity

Prepare a presentation based on Sources 19 and 20. Make sure you explain the points each image is making and the ways in which the points are made.

Culture

There was also a cultural revival in Germany. In the Kaiser's time there had been strict censorship, but the Weimar constitution allowed free expression of ideas. Writers and poets flourished, especially in Berlin. Artists in Weimar Germany turned their back on old styles of painting and tried to represent the reality of everyday life, even when that reality was sometimes harsh and shocking. Artists like George Grosz produced powerful paintings like Source 20, which criticised the politicians of the Weimar period. Other paintings of Grosz showed how many soldiers had been traumatised by their experiences in the war. Otto Dix produced paintings like Source 19 which highlighted the gaps between the rich and poor in Germany at the time.

SOURCE 19



Parts of Big City, painted by Otto Dix, 1927–28.

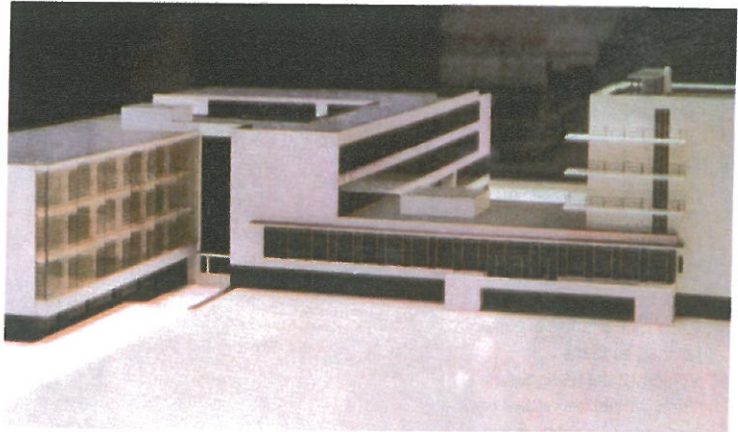
SOURCE 20



Pillars of Society by George Grosz, 1926. Grosz criticised Weimar Germany because he felt too many leading figures in society still believed in the ideals of the Kaiser's Germany (in this painting you can see the civilians still dream of military glory).

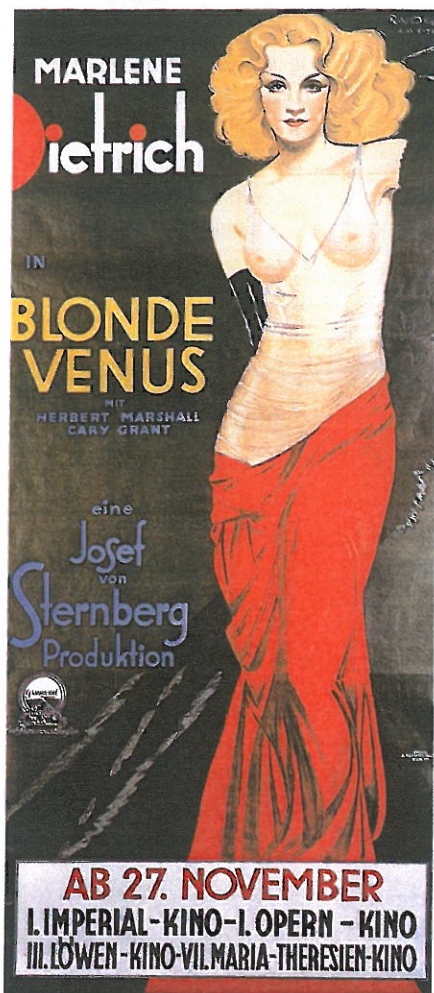
The famous Bauhaus style of design and architecture developed. Artists such as Walter Gropius, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky taught at the Bauhaus design college in Dessau. The Bauhaus architects rejected traditional styles to create new and exciting buildings. They produced designs for anything from houses and shops to art galleries and factories. The first Bauhaus exhibition attracted 15,000 visitors.

SOURCE 21



The Bauhaus design college in Dessau, built 1925–26.

SOURCE 22



Poster for one of Marlene Dietrich's films.

Activity

Imagine you are interviewing people in the streets of a large German city in 1928 about what they know of the achievements of Weimar Germany and which achievements make them proud. You give them five achievements to look at:

- The success of **German industry** – that Germany is back to number two in the world.
- That Berlin has plenty of clubs and 900 **dance bands**.
- That Germany has joined the international **League of Nations**.
- The **Bauhaus** movement are producing inspired modern designs.
- Otto Dix and George Grosz are world-famous **artists**.

- a) Which of these achievements do you think would be **most well-known** by ordinary Germans living in the city?
- b) Which of these achievements would ordinary, city-living Germans be **most proud of**? Choose a top three and suggest a rank order with reasons. If you think there is something else we have not mentioned that would make them more proud add it to the list.

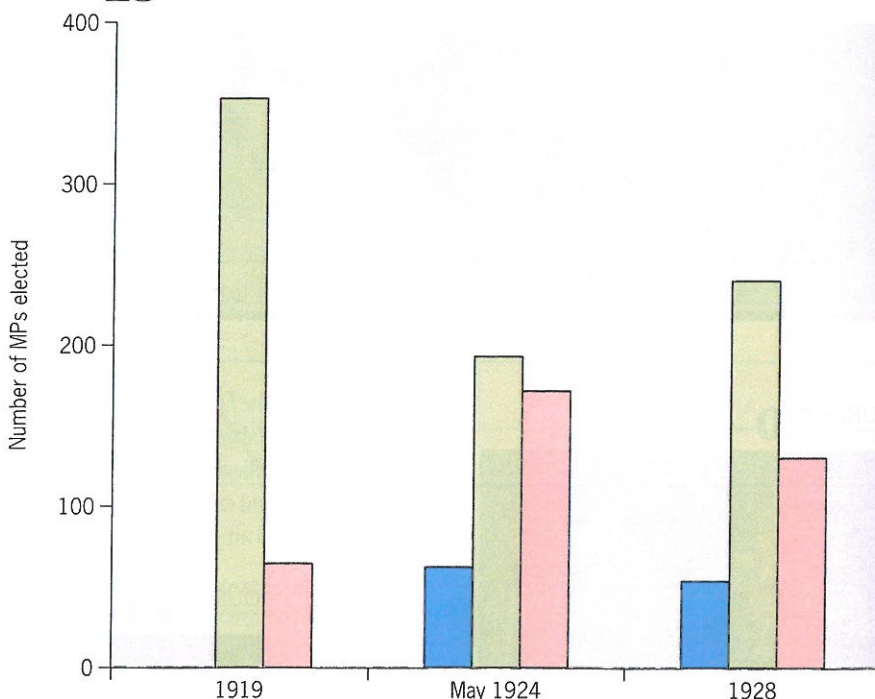
The 1920s were a golden age for German cinema, producing one of its greatest ever international stars, Marlene Dietrich, and one of its most celebrated directors, Fritz Lang.

Berlin was famous for its daring and liberated night life. Going to clubs was a major pastime. In 1927 there were 900 dance bands in Berlin alone. Cabaret artists performed songs criticising political leaders that would have been banned in the Kaiser's days. These included songs about sex that would have shocked an earlier generation of Germans.

Politics

Even politics became more stable. To begin with, there were no more attempted revolutions after 1923 (see page 178). One politician who had been a leading opponent of Ebert in 1923 said that 'the Republic is beginning to settle and the German people are becoming reconciled to the way things are'. Source 23 shows that the parties that supported Weimar democracy did well in these years. By 1928 the moderate parties had 136 more seats in the Reichstag than the radical parties. Hitler's Nazis gained less than three per cent of the vote in the 1928 election. Just as important, some of the parties who had co-operated in the revolution of 1918 began to co-operate again. The Socialists (SPD), Catholic Centre Party, German Democratic Party (DDP) and the German People's Party (DVP) generally worked well together in the years 1924–29.

SOURCE 23



Key

- Left wing opposed to the Republic
- Left wing supporting the Republic
- Right wing opposed to the Republic

Support for the main political parties in Germany, 1919–28.

Problems

Economy

The economic boom in Weimar Germany was precarious. The US loans could be called in at short notice, which would cause ruin in Germany.

The main economic winners in Germany were big businesses (such as the steel and chemical industries) which controlled about half of Germany's industrial production. Other winners were big landowners, particularly if they owned land in towns – the value of land in Berlin rose by 700 per cent in this period. The workers in the big industries gained as well. Most Weimar governments were sympathetic towards the unions, which led to improved pay and conditions. However, even here there were concerns as unemployment began to rise – it was six per cent of the working population by 1928.

The main losers were the peasant farmers and sections of the middle classes. The peasant farmers had increased production during the war. In peacetime, they found themselves overproducing. They had mortgages to pay but not enough demand for the food they produced. Many small business owners became disillusioned during this period. Small shopkeepers saw their businesses threatened by large department stores (many of which were owned by Jews). A university lecturer in 1913 earned ten times as much as a coal miner. In the 1920s he earned twice as much. These people began to feel that the Weimar government offered them little.

Foreign policy

There was also the question of international relations. Nationalists attacked Stresemann for joining the League of Nations and for signing the Locarno Pact, seeing it as an acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles. Communists also attacked Locarno, seeing it as part of a plot against the Communist government in the USSR.

Activity

Source 24 was meant to be a souvenir to be kept as a reminder of a momentous event. It would have been treasured by its owner, who was a supporter of Stresemann. Now imagine that the postcard has fallen into the hands of Communists or Nazis. What kind of graffiti might they put on it? You may be able to use your own copy of this image to add authentic graffiti, but ask your teacher first!

SOURCE 24



A postcard of the delegates at the Locarno Conference of 1925 signed by some of the important officials who were present.

SOURCE **25**



A Wandervogel camp in the 1920s.

Culture

The Weimar culture was colourful and exciting to many. However, in many of Germany's villages and country towns, the culture of the cities seemed to represent a moral decline, made worse by American immigrants and Jewish artists and musicians. As you have read, the Bauhaus design college was in Dessau. What you were not told is that it was in Dessau because it was forced out of Weimar by hostile town officials.

Organisations such as the Wandervogel movement were a reaction to Weimar's culture. The Wandervogel wanted a return to simple country values and wanted to see more help for the countryside and less decadence in the towns. It was a powerful feeling which the Nazis successfully harnessed in later years.

Politics

Despite the relative stability of Weimar politics in this period, both the Nazis and Communists were building up their party organisations. Even during these stable years there were four different chancellors and it was only the influence of party leaders which held the party coalitions together (see Source 26).

SOURCE **26**

What we have today is a coalition of ministers, not a coalition of parties. There are no government parties, only opposition parties. This state of things is a greater danger to the democratic system than ministers and parliamentarians realise.

Gustav Stolper, a Reichstag member for the DDP in 1929.

More worrying for the Republic was that around 30 per cent of the vote regularly went to parties opposed to the Republic. Most serious of all, the right-wing organisations which posed the greatest threat to the Republic were quiet rather than destroyed. The right-wing Nationalist Party (DNVP) and the Nazis began to collaborate closely and make themselves appear more respectable. Another event which would turn out to be very significant was that the German people elected Hindenburg as President in 1926. He was opposed to democracy and wrote to the Kaiser in exile for approval before he took up the post! It was clear that the Weimar Republic had not won the loyalty of all sections of German society.

Focus Task

How far did the Weimar Republic recover after 1923?

Look back to the Focus Tasks on pages 176 and 181 which examined the state of the Weimar Republic in 1918 and 1924. You are now going to look at the state of the Republic in 1928. You have to write or present another report, this time to discuss the view: 'How far has the Weimar Republic recovered?' You will find the information you need in pages 182–86.

You could use the same headings as you used in your 1924 report:

- ◆ Political opposition to Weimar
- ◆ Economic problems
- ◆ Popular support
- ◆ Germany and the wider world

You could also add an additional section about the cultural achievements of the Weimar Republic. Mention failings and achievements in your report. You could give Weimar a mark out of ten for each heading.

Finally, you need to decide on an overall judgement: in your opinion, how far had the Weimar Republic recovered? In your answer, do remember that, in the view of many historians, it was probably a major achievement for the Weimar Republic just to have survived at all.