



History

Paper 20 (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 02 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0 26/02/16

Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 20 (AS): Specimen question paper

02 'The main reason why the Weimar Republic survived its difficult early years, 1919 to 1923, was the skilful leadership of Friedrich Ebert.'

Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

In November 1918 the situation in Germany was one of unrest and discontent due to national shock at the loss of WW1 and the growing anger over socio-economic conditions. The political situation needed changing so on the 9th of November 1918 Prince Max allowed Friedrich Ebert to create a provisional coalition government when Kaiser Wilhelm (2nd) abdicated. Ebert was then chosen as the country first president on the 11th of February and remained so until his death (28th April 1925). Many historians argue that his skilful leadership sustained the Weimar republic between the early years of 1919-1923 but others argue that there were other factors that played a role in its survival. I disagree with the statement because I think that it was due to other factors such as mistakes of the republics opposition that it did not collapse.

Firstly I disagree with this statement because I believe that as the situation in Imperial Germany had become so desperate, due to World War One, people wanted change from an autocracy. Many had lost respect for imperial Germany after the war. Additionally communism was not appealing as Russia had just become communist and they were Germany's enemies during the war. As a result parliamentary democracy was appealing to many as it provided a structured government and the right to vote for everyone. At the time it seemed the only logical change to make. After the loss of world war one many Germans would have wanted to have a say in how the country was run which votes provided. This is supported by the fact that on the 19th of January 1919 when elections for the national constitution took place 76.1% of the electorate voted for pro-democratic parties suggesting that most Germans had faith in the idea of democracy. This implies that the Weimar republic survived between 1919 and 1923 because there was a huge amount of public support democracy.

Furthermore I disagree with this statement because I believe a major reason that the Weimar republic survived its early years was due to weaknesses of its opposition. The extreme Left Wing were disorganised and had poor leadership. In January 1919 there was a Spartacist revolt which was easily crushed and resulted in the deaths of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (KPD leaders). They were the extreme lefts most able and spirited leaders and without them the extreme left were never likely to take power as the later leadership often disagreed on tactics leading to internal divisions. This is further supported by the fact that USPD disbanded in 1920 due to internal disputes and joined either the KPD or SPD. Also the Right Wing were made weak as they didn't have any obvious leaders meaning that they didn't have a driving force or a strong ideology in opposition to the Republic. As the Extreme Right and the Extreme left were unable to gain sufficient support due to a lack of strong leaders and ideas to replace the Republic, the republic became the only option for a

sustainable government and its opposition couldn't take power by force (due to their disorganisation) or through elections (weak leaders meant they had insufficient support). If the Weimar opposition had been stronger I believe they would have easily collapsed the Republic. This is supported by the fact that in 1930 when the extreme right did have a strong leader (Hitler) they took over Germany.

Finally I disagree with this statement as the hyperinflation crisis suggests weak leadership from Ebert. In 1923 Germany's economy was declared in default and as they had already postponed a couple of reparations payment in early 1922 Franco-Belgium troops invaded the Ruhr (Germany's industrial heartland) to try secure reparations. Cuno (chancellor) proposed a policy of 'passive resistance' which Ebert supported. This showed that he wasn't a skilful leader because passive resistance contributed to hyperinflation. The policy involved calling a strike for the workers in the Ruhr, but still paying them. This increased government expenditure and decreased its income because no products were produced from the Ruhr and taxes weren't collected due to the occupation. It was not an example of skilful leadership and if Stresemann hadn't become chancellor in August 1924 it was likely that the Weimar republic would have collapsed. This is implied as the extreme right and left gained more votes during the crisis as people lost faith in democracy. This was because Ebert didn't narrow the gap between government expenditure and income by increasing taxes but employed the policy of deficit financing which allowed Germany to slide deeper into hyperinflation and the value of marks to become worthless.

It could be argued that the Weimar republic survived its early years (1919-23) because of Ebert's skilful leadership because on the 10th November, the day after Ebert formed a provisional coalition government, he telephoned General Groener. Ebert negotiated an agreement whereby the Supreme Army Command agreed to support the new government using troops to maintain the republic's stability. In return Ebert agreed to oppose communism and to preserve the authority of the army officers. This was called the Ebert-Groener agreement. This was seen as successful as Ebert acted quickly and gained the support of the imperial army who held a lot of respect in Germany. In the Weimar republic's early years this was indeed a success as there were multiple communist uprisings which were easily suppressed by the army, however his agreement not to reform the army (who were conservative) did prove to be a disadvantage when the Kapp putsch took place in 1920 as the army did not support the government as they had promised forcing Ebert and his government to flee to Stuttgart.

Secondly people believe that Ebert showed skilful leadership when accepting that signing the Treaty of Versailles (June 1919) was essential, despite how unpopular it was. The 'stab in the back' theory instigated by Ludendorff as a way of shifting the blame for the loss of World War One away from himself led people to believe that Ebert was betraying Germany by signing the Treaty. Ebert himself was reluctant to sign it if there was a possibility for further military action but it was clear that that was not a possibility. Germany had been weakened by the long drawn out war because they had been expecting a short war to victory. As a result they sank into national debt. Additionally the allies maintained their naval blockade around Germany, threatening further military action if Germany didn't sign the treaty. This increased food and fuel shortages every day it continued. Many believe that the unhygienic conditions caused by World War One and the food and fuel shortages led to so many deaths in the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918. Additionally the number of civilian deaths from starvation and hyperthermia amounted to 293,000 in 1918. It was clear that war had crippled Germany and as a result it was a skilful decision that Ebert made to accept the treaty, securing peace so Germany could recover as they didn't have the military capacity to resist another war. If Ebert had refused, Germany would have fallen into chaos which would have led to no one trusting a democracy again. As a result his skilful leadership helped the republic to survive its early years.

Furthermore by 1920 it was clear that Ebert was a respected leader. This is proved by the fact that in 1920 when the Kapp Putsch took place he managed to gain control of Germany again despite the fact that the army didn't support him. The Kapp Putsch was led by Wolfgang Kapp and General Luttwitz. They decided to use the disbanding of two brigades of the army as an excuse to take over Berlin. 12000 troops marched with them to Berlin where they took control of main buildings and tried to install a new government. The army didn't attempt to stop the putsch which forced Ebert and his government to flee to Stuttgart. However before leaving Berlin, Ebert called for a national strike. The public did strike which crippled the capital and then the rest of Germany. After four days it was clear the Kapp had no real authority so he fled the city. The fact that the general public did respond to Ebert's call for a strike showed that they trusted him and respected him. They risked not being paid for four days showing that they must have seen Ebert's capabilities and wanted to follow him. Although this could also imply that the public supports democracy and it wasn't just Ebert that they were supporting.

To conclude I believe that the Weimar Republic survived its first few difficult years due to the weakness of the republics opposition and the publics support for democracy not because Ebert was a skilful leader. I believe that the public's desire for change led to the creation of the republic and the disorganisation of its opposition meant that it seemed to be the only option. Although Ebert had the ability to recognise the need for peace he did make a mistake when he agreed not to reform the army and he supported Cuno in 1923 when he allowed Germany to slide into a hyperinflation crisis.

Commentary – Level 4

The answer has strengths. Its assessment is consistently linked to the question and there is a clear argument throughout. It has balance; it assesses the reasons other than Ebert for the survival of Weimar and then considers Ebert's contribution. Most of the assessment is supported by relevant detail. There are, however, weaknesses. The first part of the introduction is 'scene setting' and adds little to the answer; there are stylistic weaknesses and references to 'many historians' are best avoided if historians cannot be cited; the assessment of the extent of support for democracy in 1919 is dubious and unconvincing in places and there is no extensive reference to the financial recovery after 1923, although there is an acknowledgement of Stresemann's contribution. The strengths outweigh the weaknesses and this is a Level 4 answer.