



History

Paper 1L (A-level) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.1 09/09/15

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 1L (A-level): Specimen question paper

01 Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments in these three extracts are in relation to the economic and political strength of the Weimar Republic before 1929.

(30 marks)

Student Response

In terms of the economic situation of the Weimar Republic before 1929 and the Great Depression, Extract A argues that a boom was evident, even if it was only in the heavier industries such as coal and iron. However, the argument does suggest that all was not as it seems, as claims may have been "greatly exaggerated". For example, references are made to an "unsteady" nature, such as increasing unemployment and falling "capital investment by 1929". This can be seen through the falling agricultural sectors and the rise of welfare systems, causing issues in the national budget in the period described as the "golden years" (Extract B) states. However, whilst this extract can be seen as mainly pessimistic, there was reason for optimism, for example through the 1924 Dawes Plan, funded by western loans as an investment in German industry. In addition, the hyperinflation crisis was improved by 1924 by the economic work of Schacht and Stresemann. Whilst the extract manages to suggest the flaws in the economy, it fails to suggest the reasons for optimism in this period.

Extract A suggests the "reasonable grounds for optimism" as well as the possible underlying problems in the political system by 1923. For example, "steady progress" of the moderate parties (73% of the vote) suggests a general consensus that the Weimar Republic was flourishing, as the Nazi and Communist parties fell. This can therefore be seen as a victory for democracy, suggesting that the turmoil and uncertainty of the early years had been overcome. However, the issue of proportional representation "accentuated the difficulty" (Extract B) of forming effective coalitions during this period. For example, despite the SPD holding the majority from 1919-1929, it was not in a coalition from 1923-1928, suggesting that the ability to "form coalitions with majority support" may have been "difficult". However, with the May 1928 election, the SPD based coalition was formed, making 61% of the Reichstag deputies, showing that whilst it may have been "immensely difficult" it was not impossible.

Extract B states that this time period was referred to as the "Golden Twenties" as the optimism spread due to the "impressive boom" in industry after the 1923 financial crisis. However, although industry was improving, "by 1929 it had surpassed 1913 levels by 4%", it was still far behind the main western powers, especially the USA. Extract B argues that "western loans" were a key factor for industrial upturn and innovation, including many public works programmes to produce jobs. However, these loans drawn up through the Dawes Plan were extremely precarious and short term and Germany was once more living beyond her means.

In terms of the political situation before 1929, Extract B suggests that an “improvement in international relations” was due to the western investment in the German economy. Whilst the Dawes and Young Plans did increase international relations, especially in terms of reparations payments, this relationship was partially precarious due to the short term nature of these loans. Americans invested because they believed they would ‘get rich quick’ from the increase in German industry, issues that would increase following the 1929 Great Depression.

The decrease in “political temperature in Germany” relates to the economic upturn following the hyperinflation crisis and the invasion of the Ruhr. Once the Rentenmark had been stabilised there were no more coups and the Republic regained respectability with the instatement of Hindenburg as President. An old war hero, Hindenburg was respected by many and so many became more onside to the Republic. In contrast, many elected Hindenburg as they believed, as a monarchist, that he would destroy the Weimar Republic and reinstate a more authoritarian system, much like the pre-war system, suggesting there was still opposition to the government.

Extract C suggests that despite certain advancements in industry after 1924, the economic situation was already decreasing before the Wall Street Crash; “3 million unemployed by February 1929”. Although the “moderate levels of unemployment” could be dealt with in 1927, through the unemployment insurance bill, there was economic downturn beginning in 1928, springing the introduction of the Young Commission. Should the Wall Street Crash have not occurred, it is uncertain as to whether this downturn would merely be temporary, as shown through industrial dips in 1926.

The extract also suggests that both the Nazi party and other right-wing parties held influence, after gaining exposure to the “campaign against the Young Commission”. Although this campaign did increase his support with the middle classes, their influence was still small and there was no telling how long this support would last, much like the lacklustre support of the Munich Putsch in 1923. In addition, the extract states that the rise of the NSDAP “escaped the notice of the politicians in Berlin”. The party was still very small, only gaining less than 3% of the 1928 vote. At this point in time, a small extremist party was not worth much notice to the Berlin government, who could not have anticipated the future successes of the party.

Commentary – Level 3

The answer lacks direction, its principal weakness is that it tends to summarise the extracts rather than assess how convincing the arguments are. It does contain occasional comment on what is said, but there is no sustained evaluation. It also tends to conflate extracts A and B rather than assessing and evaluating them separately, which is a more effective approach to adopt. However, arguments are identified and some of the supporting information is appropriate, leading to a Level 3 mark.