



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 1L (A-level)
Question 01 Student 2
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

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

The argument in Extract A is that the traditional picture of Germany between 1924 and 1929, which is one of economic prosperity and political stability, is wrong. These years are often referred to as the 'Golden Years' and are seen as a time when all went well under the careful guiding hand of Gustav Stresemann. These are the years after the hyperinflation of 1923 when American loans under the 1924 Dawes Plan enabled economic growth and brought higher living standards for many. This is usually taken to explain the absence of political putsches (such as occurred during the early years of the Weimar Republic) and relative political quiet of this period.

Whilst Extract A acknowledges that some industries, such as iron and steel, coal, chemicals and electrical products 'recovered quickly' after World War I, it suggests that the subsequent economic growth was 'unsteady'. It is true that there were fluctuations in growth, with the electrical, chemical, car and plane industries far outstripping the expansion of smaller industries and less well-funded industries such as textiles. Although the extract mentions the growth of heavy industry, coal production was only 79% of its 1913 level by 1927 and whilst productivity improved, neither iron nor steel had surpassed their pre-war performance before 1927, so this comment is slightly misleading. Germany's balance of trade had been in deficit since 1926 and there were certainly signs, as the extract suggests, that the German economy was slowing down before 1929 and that capital investment had fallen back. Furthermore, the extract's mention of growing unemployment can also be corroborated by statistics. Unemployment never fell below 1.3 million in these years and by February 1929, it had reached 3 million.

Extract A's interpretation of the difficulties of political life in the late 1920s is also borne out by the facts. Multi-party coalitions (the result of proportional representation which created a mass of different parties within the Reichstag and no one majority ruling group) continued and there was a high turnover of governments with six different coalition governments between November 1923 and June 1928. Extract A singles out 'the existence of a multi-party system' as the key reason for political weakness, ignoring the importance of the growing domination of the right and the division within the Zentrum which also added to the political problems between 1924 and 1929. The SPD, although the largest single party, did not serve in any government between November 1923 and 1928 and it was less than number of parties than their inability to compromise that weakened the political strength of the Republic before 1929. Furthermore, the extract fails to acknowledge that, unlike the economic problems, Weimar's political ones appeared to be improving from 1928 when Muller's 'Grand Coalition' was formed.

In relation to the political and economic strength of Germany between 1924 and 1929 Extract A therefore offers a balanced picture which can mostly be corroborated by evidence. Although some of the detail could be questioned this does not affect the validity of the overall argument

Extract B offers a positive interpretation of Germany's economic and political strengths in the years between 1924 and 1929, although even here, comments such as 'persuaded many that the crisis of 1923 had been resolved' suggest that the author appreciates there is another side to the view of prosperity that the extract gives. Economically, Extract B puts forward the view that foreign investment, which was used to finance public and to modernise industry, was the key factor behind economic strength. It is certainly true that capital was necessary to enable German companies to exploit their country's huge economic potential and that following the 1924 Dawes Plan and the stabilisation of the currency (with the Rentenmark and subsequent reichsmark), foreign investors poured money into the country. The extract rightly links this capital to 'the modernisation of industry'. This involved the rationalisation of production, so that huge cartels came to dominate the growth industries. Modernisation also involved investment in scientific research, for example in chemicals and electricals, both of which had also been stimulated by the war. Investment in public works is also put forward as an important factor, although this had a downside which is not acknowledged in the extract. The calls on government finance, given its commitment to welfare and pensions were enormous and by 1929 Germany was living well beyond its means. Furthermore, Extract B fails to point out that Germany's dependence on foreign loans and export markets was also a liability. When world trade slumped in 1929, loans were recalled and overseas investment came to an abrupt end.

Politically, Extract B suggests that the Weimar Republic flourished thanks to improved international relations and the instatement of President Hindenburg who 'observed his oath despite his monarchical convictions'. This interpretation has some validity but fails to emphasise Hindenburg's strongly conservative and nationalist views which encouraged the growth of the right-wing and the continuation of the right-wing judiciary, civil service and universities. Whilst he may have helped provide an air of respectability, encouraging former opponents on the right to support the regime before 1929, he did nothing to increase commitment to democracy in Germany, so Extract B's praise is rather too simplistic. Furthermore, whilst international relations improved as Germany joined the League of Nations and participated in international treaties such as Locarno and the Kellogg-Briand Pact, this was not a political strength since these actions created more internal political division. The moves gave ammunition to those that opposed fulfilment and suspicion of Stresemann's intentions was a factor weakening the political coalitions before 1929.

Overall, the argument put forward in Extract B is too one-sided to be totally credible. Whilst the author backs his opinions with some factual detail, he ignores both the economic and political weaknesses of the 1924 to 1929 period.

Extract C provides an argument focused on 1927-1929. It suggests that there was an economic crisis in these years and this sapped the Weimar Republic's political strength, allowing the emergence of the Nazis. The Extract's analysis of the economic situation is correct. It is true that a slow-down in the economy was already being felt in 1927 and that by February 1929 unemployment had reached 3 million. However, the extract appears to suggest that it was the acceptance of the Young Plan in June 1929, as a result of the government's inability to meet demands for unemployment benefit and Dawes Plan payments that was the trigger for the growth of the Nazi Party. This is far too simple and the suggestion in Extract C that the Weimar government failed to notice what was happening is highly unconvincing given the Nazis'

propaganda efforts and the behaviour of the SA, whose involvement in street brawls would hardly have gone unnoticed. It is true that Hitler won many converts because of the economic crisis from 1929 and that he made a bid for middle-class support, money and votes. However, to suggest that the Nazis were sapping the political strength of the Republic before 1929 is untrue. The Nazi party only had 12 deputies (following the 1928 elections) and remained a minority party, even if a growing one.

Overall, the argument in Extract C is of limited value in relation to the economic and political strength of the Weimar Republic before 1929 because of its limited time-span and its tendency to anticipate post-1929 developments.

Commentary – Level 4

There is a clear attempt to assess and evaluate the interpretations in the extracts and much appropriate knowledge of context is deployed to support the assessments. The answer is, however, unbalanced, with extensive assessment of Extract A but limited assessment of Extract C. Whilst it offers strong judgments, these are occasionally overstated. For example, Extract A suggests that the traditional picture of Weimar has been 'greatly exaggerated' which is not the same as 'wrong' as suggested in the answer. There could also be further development in places, such as in the comments relating to Stresemann's foreign policy. Overall, it is a solid Level 4 answer.