**Structured Question:**

**The Weimar Republic**

As you have 40 minutes on the question, it’s a good idea to aim (roughly) for about 8 minutes on (a), 12 minutes on (b) and 20 minutes on (c).

**The Weimar Republic**

**a. What were the main features of the Weimar Constitution? [4]**

**b. Why did the Weimar Republic face difficulties in 1923? [6]**

**c. How successful was the Republic between 1924-1928? [10]**



**Student follow-up task based on model answers**

**The Weimar Republic**

**Task 1**

▪ Start by seeing if you can remember the exact questions you were asked. Write these three questions into the spaces provided.

**Task 2**

There are **three** deliberate mistakes in the answer which follow. Can you identify and correct them?

**Task 3**

▪ Underline any facts that you did not already know.

▪ Try to identify how these answers could be IMPROVED.

▪ Consider what tips you would give yourself about how to improve your performance in the real examination which is coming up in the Summer.

**a.**

One main feature of the Weimar constitution was that it was a democracy, not a monarchy: the Kaiser was forced to abdicate and fled to Belgium. Under the new system, the members of the Reichstag were elected by universal suffrage (all men and women were allowed to vote from the age of 18). The votes were translated into seats using a system of Proportional Representation (PR) - if a party gained 20% of the votes, they would gain 20% of the seats. Proportional representation made it unlikely that any party would have overall control, resulting in coalition governments. In addition, a president was elected once every 5 years. He would then appoint a Chancellor to lead the Reichstag. Article 48 gave the President the power to rule alone in time of emergency.

**b.**

One reason that the Republic faced severe difficulties in 1923 was because it was militarily severely weakened after the Treaty of Versailles and unable to defend itself. As a result, when Germany failed to make her reparations payments the French and the Belgians were able to march into the Saar unopposed to take goods for themselves in compensation. This humiliated the Germans, led to violent clashes which led to over 300 deaths, and resulted in the Germans adopting a policy of non co-operation (passive resistance) which brought the German economy to a standstill.

This military occupation therefore led to severe economic difficulties. With the economy at a standstill, the German government took the decision to simply print off more paper money to plug the gap. This led to spiralling deflation where very soon a wheelbarrow full of money was required to purchase the most basic household essentials. Hyperinflation effectively destroyed the national currency and thereby wiped out people’s life savings: the only beneficiaries were wealthy businesspeople who were able to pay off their mortgages with worthless currency. Eventually the currency had to be scrapped altogether and replaced with a new currency (the Rentenmark).

This economic and military chaos led to political difficulties. Adolf Hitler, trying to capitalise on the disaffection with the Weimar Republic, led the Berlin “Beer Hall Putsch” against the government. Although the revolt was crushed with relative ease and Hitler was promptly arrested, he gained a great deal of publicity for his cause at the subsequent trial, where he effectively attacked the Weimar Republic’s “November Criminals” who had “stabbed Germany in the back” by signing the Armistice in 1918 and who were now presiding over the wholesale destruction of German society.

**c.**

In political terms, the main problem faced by the government was that the government was seen as being a bunch of “November Criminals” who had “stabbed Germany in the back” by signing the Armistice in 1918: as a result there was little affection for the new Republic amongst the German people. In some respects the Weimar republic dealt with these problems very successfully. Ebert, in his role as Chancellor and Foreign secretary, was a stabilising influence in the Reichstag; by 1928 extremist parties were picking up only 3% of the national vote; and the Munich Beer Hall Putsch had been successfully crushed. However, the Beer Hall Putsch was not dealt with entirely successfully: Hitler gained a great deal of favourable publicity at his trial, was given the most lenient sentence possible by the judge, and took the opportunity to write “Mein Kampf” in jail.

A similarly mixed picture is evident when we look at socio-economic factors. Germany’s problem in 1923 was that she had been saddled with a colossal reparations bill of £6.6 billion. In terms of success, the government negotiated a loan of 800 million Gold Marks from the USA in the Dawes Plan of 1924, and a reduction of the overall sum payable to £4000 million in 1929 (the Young Plan). This helped produce an economic boom which meant that culture (e.g. the Bauhaus movement, the Dada art movement, the Expressionist cinema of Fritz Lang) blossomed. However, we should remember that the Dawes Plan was only necessary because the German economy collapsed altogether following the hyperinflation crisis of 1923, when the catastrophic decision to simply print gigantic sums of paper money in order to make its reparations payments.

Diplomatically too the Weimar Republic enjoyed mixed success between 1923-1928. The period began terribly when France invaded the Ruhr when Germany failed to make her reparations payments; although France was entitled to do this under the Treaty of Versailles it humiliated the Germans and annoyed the British. However, from this weak position the German government secured a number of successes. The Treaty of Locarno (1925) normalised relations between France, Belgium and Germany when all three countries agreed to respect their mutual borders. This paved the way for German entry into the League of Nations as a full council member in 1926 and for Stresemann’s receipt of the Nobel peace prize. Nevertheless even here there were weaknesses: Stresemann was accused by the Nazis of selling out to Germany’s former enemies, and accused by the USSR of betrayal (Germany already had the Kellogg-Briand Pact with the USSR, and the Locarno Treaty famously didn’t ask the Germans to respect her Eastern borders).

In conclusion, the Weimar Republic dealt successfully with the problems she faced in a superficial, short-term sense. However, at the heart of the “recovery” of Germany was a booming economy which was almost entirely dependent upon the goodwill of the United States for its survival. Stresemann himself recognised this when he said that “Germany is dancing on a volcano…if her short-term loans are recalled, a large section of her economy will collapse”. The truth of his words was made abundantly clear following the Wall St. Crash of 1929, which paved the way for Hitler’s rise to power and the destruction of the Weimar Republic.

**Teacher notes / model answers**

**The Weimar Republic**

**a. What were the main features of the Weimar Constitution? [4]**

One main feature of the Weimar constitution was that it was a democracy, not a monarchy: the Kaiser was forced to abdicate and fled to Holland. Under the new system, the members of the Reichstag were elected by universal suffrage (all men and women were allowed to vote from the age of 21). The votes were translated into seats using a system of Proportional Representation (PR) - if a party gained 20% of the votes, they would gain 20% of the seats. Proportional representation made it unlikely that any party would have overall control, resulting in coalition governments. In addition, a president was elected once every 7 years. He would then appoint a Chancellor to lead the Reichstag. Article 48 gave the President the power to rule alone in time of emergency.

**b. Why did the Weimar Republic face difficulties in 1923? [6]**

One reason that the Republic faced severe difficulties in 1923 was because it was militarily severely weakened after the Treaty of Versailles and unable to defend itself. As a result, when Germany failed to make her reparations payments the French and the Belgians were able to march into the Ruhr unopposed to take goods for themselves in compensation. This humiliated the Germans, led to violent clashes which led to over 300 deaths, and resulted in the Germans adopting a policy of non co-operation (passive resistance) which brought the German economy to a standstill.

This military occupation therefore led to severe economic difficulties. With the economy at a standstill, the German government took the decision to simply print off more paper money to plug the gap. This led to spiralling inflation where very soon a wheelbarrow full of money was required to purchase the most basic household essentials. Hyperinflation effectively destroyed the national currency and thereby wiped out people’s life savings: the only beneficiaries were wealthy businesspeople who were able to pay off their mortgages with worthless currency. Eventually the currency had to be scrapped altogether and replaced with a new currency (the Rentenmark).

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**c. How successful was the Republic between 1923-1928? [10]**

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