Foundation of the Weimar Republic

- Kaiser William II abdicated and went into exile in Holland as part of the Allied conditions for German surrender.
- A republic was proclaimed, with the Socialist leader Frederich Ebert as chancellor.
  - First act was to sign the armistice and acknowledge defeat.
- The situation in Germany:
  - 2.5 million Germans died in the war, 4 million wounded.
  - Economic problems – rising prices, unemployment, shortage of food.
  - Left wing unhappy – wanted a communist revolution.
  - Right wing unhappy – disagreed with the surrender, saw it as treason (called men who agreed to it **November Criminals**), disloyal to new republic.
  - The treaty being negotiated was harsh.
- Spartacus Revolt:
  - Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg led the Communist Spartacus League – seemed as if worldwide revolution predicted by Lenin had begun.
  - Crushed by the Weimar government, using the army and the Freikorps (volunteer militia).
  - Liebknecht and Luxemburg were shot.
- New constitution – Weimar Republic coming properly into power:
  - Majority of Germans voted for parties that favoured the new democratic republic.
  - Parliament met at Weimar to draw up new constitution.
  - They hoped that a peaceful republic would mean that the Allies would go easier on them.
  - The constitution:
    - Germany would be a federal country (like US).
    - Reichstag (parliament) would be elected by both men and women over the age of 20.
    - Head of government (chancellor) would be appointed by the president.
    - President (head of state) would be elected every 7 years
      - Ebert was the first president
      - Article 48 stated that the president could declare a state of emergency and allow the chancellor to rule by decree.
  - It was impossible for one party to gain an overall majority – this led to coalition governments.
  - Parties in favour of new republic:
    - Social Democrats – most popular party until 1932.
    - German Democratic Party – strong support in middle classes.
    - German People’s Party – backed by business men.
    - Centre Party – represented Catholics.
  - Parties against new republic:
    - Communist Party (KPD) – formed from Spartacus League.
    - German National People’s Party – wanted a return of the monarchy.
    - National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nazis) – extreme nationalists, racists.
Weimar Germany – 1918-1933 GERMANY IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS

Hyperinflation – Causes

- Treaty of Versailles (called the Diktat – the dictated peace)
  - Terms:
    - Lost a lot of territory – to Poland, Belgium, Denmark, France, Lithuania.
    - Forbidden to place troops near the River Rhine (demilitarised zone).
    - Germany and Austria forbidden to unite.
    - Army reduced to 100,000 men, conscription banned, navy limited to six battleships, not allowed an air force, tanks, or submarines.
    - War Guilt Clause – had to pay £6.6 billion in reparations.
    - Colonies taken.
  - Condemned by virtually all sections of political opinion.
- Political violence:
  - Kapp led a revolution backed by the Freikorps, which the army refused to crush.
    - Government fled to Stuttgart.
    - The putsch (revolt) collapsed when trade unions called a general strike.
  - Communist revolt in the Ruhr.
  - Right-wing assassinations killed over 200.
- French Occupation of the Ruhr:
  - German government couldn’t afford to pay the reparations, and they defaulted.
  - French and Belgian troops occupied the industrial centre of Germany, the Ruhr, to seize the coal and goods produced there as compensation.
  - German government began a policy of passive resistance and called a general strike.
    - It agreed to pay workers on strike, and printed more money to do this.
- Impact of these problems:
  - Loss of production of the Ruhr led to factories all over Germany closing – unemployment rose from 2 percent to 23 percent.
  - Government printed money.
  - Hyperinflation resulted in 1923 – prices soared to 1 billion times their initial value in less than a year.

Hyperinflation – Effects

- Saved money was now worthless.
- People carried money in shopping baskets or wheelbarrows as so many banknotes were needed.
- Highest value note printed: 500 trillion – worth less than a pre-war 1,00 mark note.
- Prices changed hugely hourly.
- Germany came to a halt as the government could no longer pay employees.
- Over 90 percent of a family’s expenditure was just on food.

Everything’s great again (but only for a little while)

- New chancellor – Gustav Stresemann, his government only lasted 100 days, but he remained as foreign minister in successive coalitions until his death in 1929. He ended hyperinflation, and improved Germany’s economy drastically.
Weimar Germany – 1918-1933 GERMANY IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS

- He ceased financial support for the general strike in the Ruhr.
- He introduced a new and stable currency, the Rentenmark (soon renamed the Reichsmark) – this ended hyperinflation.
- He agreed to end reparations, in return for the Allies making the payments more reasonable under the Dawes Plan. The French also ended the occupation of the Ruhr.
- A loan of $800 million was raised in America.

Golden Era
- Economy boomed with American loans pouring into Germany.
- Germany home to some of the biggest corporations in Europe – Siemens electrical company, Deutsche Bank, Mercedes-Benz.
- Famous for writers, architects, composers, film industry (Hollywood of Europe).
- Some of the best universities in the world.
- The Young Plan reduced total cost of reparations to £2 billion over 59 years.

The Collapse of the Weimar Republic

Wall Street Crash, 1929:
- Germany depended heavily on American loans for everything (government, corporations, banks)
- Over one week, $30 billion was wiped off values of shares.
- American businesses collapsed, demand for imports fell, American banks called in their loans from Germany and wouldn’t lend any more.
- Effects on Germany:
  - Industrial production fell quickly.
  - Banks went out of business.
  - Unemployment rose – one in three workers was unemployed.
  - Tax revenues collapsed – government could no longer afford to pay benefits.
  - Crime and suicide rates rose sharply.
  - People deserted democratic parties and turned to Communists or Nazis.

Rise of the Nazis:
- Adolf Hitler became head of the NSDAP after being sent to spy on it.
  - He had a gift for oratory and he attacked Versailles, November Criminals, Jews, and Socialists.
  - The newspaper The People’s Observer spread their message.
  - The Sturmbteilung, or SA, was run by Ernst Rohm and it protected party meetings and attacked opponents. They were known as the Brownshirts.
  - The Schutzstaffel (SA), was later formed to be Hitler’s personal guard.
  - Influenced by fascism in Italy, he took the title of Der Fuhrer.
- Party aims:
  - Tear up the Treaty of Versailles.
  - Unite all German speakers in one country.
  - Destroy communism and socialism.
  - Replace democracy with a dictatorship.
  - Destroy the Jews, who they saw as enemies of the ‘master race’ (Germans).
Weimar Germany – 1918-1933 GERMANY IN THE INTER-WAR YEARS

- The Beer Hall Putsch
  - Hitler attempted to march on Berlin and take over – it seemed like a good time, because of the economic disaster in 1923.
  - Police in Munich opened fire and killed 16 Nazis.
  - Hitler sentenced to 5 years in jail – only served 9 months, in which he wrote Mein Kampf.
  - Hitler decided that he had to take power by legal means – but support for Nazis was low because of the prospering economy.

- Nazis became more popular after the Wall Street crash.

- End of democracy:
  - Government seen as failing to deal with economic situation.
  - Heinrich Bruning – such a failure he was called the Hunger Chancellor
    - Cut spending to reduce inflation and keep exports cheap.
    - Raised taxes, lowered salaries, reduced benefits.
    - This worsened the situation, and unemployment increased.
    - He relied on Article 48 to pass laws, and he ignored the parliament.
  - Franz von Papen became chancellor and called an election.
    - Goebbels was in charge of propaganda for the election campaign.
    - Mass meetings, marches, posters, Hitler flew around Germany, party’s more extreme views were toned down.
    - Election was a victory for the Nazis – they won 230 seats and were the biggest party.
    - Moderate parties were completely annihilated.
    - Political violence increased – 12 were killed on the day of the polls.

- Who voted for the Nazis?
  - People fearful of growth of communism.
  - People who lost faith in the Weimar Republic.
  - Conservative older voters who believed he would restore traditional German values, e.g. order, morality, discipline.
  - Hitler’s nationalist views appealed to the many voters who hated the Treaty of Versailles and blamed it for all of Germany’s problems.
  - Working class, though not as much.
  - The young and women. ¼ who voted for the Nazis had not voted before.
  - Stronger Protestant support than Catholic

- Some advisors to the president wanted to bypass the Reichstag and bring in a right-wing authoritarian government with the Nazis.
  - Negotiations began between President Hindenburg and Hitler – Hitler refused any coalition unless he was appointed chancellor.
  - Hindenburg disliked Hitler and talks broke down.

- At the next election, Nazi vote fell. The party also had serious financial difficulties.

- Hitler appointed chancellor:
  - Von Papen had little popular support and no support from the army.
  - General Kurt von Schleicher replaced von Papen as chancellor.
  - Von Papen plotted to get back into power – he convinced Hindenburg to let Hitler be chancellor in a coalition government. Von Papen, vice-chancellor.
Why did the Weimar Republic fail?

- It was a republic born out of defeat.
  - Many people therefore disliked it and blamed it for accepting the Treaty.
  - People felt little loyalty to it.
- It was politically chaotic, with 20 different coalitions in 14 years.
  - People lost faith in democracy.
- **Economic problems.**
  - Because of these, many Germans thought that a dictatorship was required to deal with these problems.