



Key Stage 3/(I)GCSE

## History Worksheet

# The Treaty of Versailles (1919) & Hyperinflation (1921–1924) in the Weimar Republic

### Background:

#### The Treaty of Versailles

At the end of World War I, German Kaiser Wilhelm II resigned, and Germany became a democratic Republic, which historians refer to as the Weimar Republic because its first constitutional assembly took place in the city of Weimar. Throughout its fragile existence, the Weimar Republic faced a lot of problems. During the 1919 peace conference in Paris which officially ended World War I, the victorious powers (France, Britain, the USA, and Italy) treated Germany very harshly. Especially France and Britain wanted to punish Germany (US President Wilson warned them that this might not be a good idea, but they did not listen to him.), so they forced the German delegation to sign a treaty in Versailles outside Paris in which Germany had to admit that it was single-handedly responsible for the outbreak of the war. The Germans also had to agree to pay reparations for all the damage caused by the war. Germany also lost a lot of its territory and was forced to reduce its army to 100,000 men.

#### Hyperinflation

Because Germany did not have the money to pay the reparations, the German government started printing more money. This led to inflation, which means the value of money decreases because there is too much of it. That is, you can buy fewer products than before for the same amount of money. When inflation gets really bad, it is called hyperinflation. Hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic lasted from June 1921 to January 1924. Money became worth so little that it was circulated in the form of anywhere from fifty thousand Mark bills up to fifty trillion Mark bills. Often you could buy not more than a loaf of bread for that amount, and sometimes the money became worthless overnight. There were so many different political parties in the German parliament that they had a hard time agreeing on anything. So, for a while the German government was able to do very little about the hyperinflation.

**Now it's your turn:**

**How do you think each of these people would have reacted to the Treaty of Versailles, hyperinflation, and the Weimar Republic in general? That is, would they have supported the Weimar Republic or not? Why or why not? If not, what sort of government do you think they would have preferred to the Weimar Republic? Why?**

**Fritz Müller (25)** fought as an ordinary soldier at the Western Front. All of his buddies died. He survived, but he is blind in one eye. He was still in a trench when the armistice took place. He had to leave the army even though he had wanted to stay in it. He had to return his gun. He is now unemployed and lives with his sick aunt.

**Gudrun Balder (26)** lost her husband in the war. During the war, she started working in a factory to support herself and her five-year-old daughter. She gets paid every day and takes the money to the store right away because she knows it might be worth nothing the next day. Like her late husband was, Gudrun is a Social Democrat and is a member of an industrial workers' union.

**Wilhelm von Haugewitz (45)** fought as major on the Western Front. The men in his aristocratic family have served as officers in the German and Prussian Armies for generations. Wilhelm was also forced to leave the army. Because he comes from Prussian nobility, he is better off than other people in Germany, but he is also suffering. Both his sons died in the war, one from friendly fire. His wife died during the flu epidemic of 1918.

**Hanna Landau (28)** lost her husband, who fought as an officer in the war. She and her husband ran a bakery in Berlin. Hanna now runs the bakery by herself with the help of two employees. However, grain is becoming more expensive every day, as money is becoming worthless. Hanna is not sure how much longer she can pay her workers, buy grain to make bread, or keep selling bread to customers whose money is becoming worthless. Since Hanna is Jewish, she is also worried about the increasing anti-Semitism in Germany, with some people blaming Jews for the German defeat and the Versailles Treaty.

**Klaus Strasser (30)** served in the war as a medic on the Eastern Front. He is a farmer, which means he and his family will not starve. He is even making a bit of a profit, because he can ask more for his grain than ever before. Still, maintaining

farming machinery and paying workers costs money. And money is worth less every day.

**Hilde Feigenwinter (52)** lost her son in the war and her husband in the flu epidemic. The heater in her house is broken, and she has no money to fix it. She used to work as a secretary, but has been laid off. Hilde now works as a cleaning lady, but she can barely survive.