



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 20 (A-level)
Question 02 Student 1
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 20 (A-level): Specimen question paper

02 'The improvement in Germany's international position in the years 1924 – 29 could not have been achieved without the significant contribution of Gustav Stresemann.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25 marks]

Student response

When Stresemann's coalition took power in 1923, Germany was facing an economic and political crisis. The French still occupied the Ruhr, there was hyper-inflation and the government was beset with attacks from both extreme left and extreme right. Between 1923 and 1928, however, Germany experienced a period of stability; there was a decline in political extremism and improvement in the economy. Even more significant, however, was the improved international position of Germany in this years from a country that was having to deal with French aggression from a position of weakness, to a member of the League of Nations and a participant in international agreements. As this period co-incided with Stresemann's time first as Prime Minister and then as Foreign Minister, he must bear the credit for this improvement. Although other factors contributed to Germany's changed international position, Stresemann's determination to promote German interests in a pragmatic way that involved co-operation with other powers was the most significant reason for Germany's improved international position by 1929.

Germans of all political parties, including Stresemann believed that the Treaty of Versailles was an unjust and dictated peace treaty which needed to be revised. However, while some Germans believed that Germany should reject the treaty outright and build up its military strength so that it would be in a position to regain its lost territory, Stresemann followed a policy of 'fulfilment' which involved co-operation with the other western powers, and this strategy was to play a key role in improving Germany's position. In 1924, Stresemann was involved in the negotiations of the Dawes Plan which granted Germany loans in order to pay the reparations. One of the most significant factors in the negotiations which led to this Plan, however was the fact that Stresemann demanded, successfully that Germany should be accepted as an equal at the conference table and that Germany would only accept the Plan as a consequence of losing the war and not because it accepted the 'war guilt' which had been imposed on Germany in Clause 231 as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Stresemann received much criticism for the Plan from the so-called 'national opposition' who believed that he had compromised with the Allies and that Germany should refuse to pay reparations altogether. However, the result was positive for Germany, both in helping to sort out its reparation payments and in improving its international standing.

Germany's relationship with France was at an all time low when Stresemann became Foreign Minister following the French invasion of the Ruhr. His success in reassuring France, as well as Britain, of Germany's peaceful intentions at Locarno was thus a major factor in improving Germany's international position. At Locarno, Germany promised to respect the Western

borders between France and Germany as drawn up at Versailles and to keep its troops out of the Rhineland which bordered on France. Germany also agreed that any disputes should be settled by a conciliation committee. For France this was a victory in that Germany for the first time accepted the loss of Alsace Lorraine as well as Eupen-Malmedy. France also got a promise of support from the British should there be another German attack. For Germany, it meant that France would not be able to repeat its invasion of the Ruhr, while the lack of any agreement in the East still kept the possibility open for further revision of the eastern borders in Germany's favour. Indeed, Stresemann viewed the treaty as his greatest achievement. Germany's improved international position was made clear by the fact that it had worked as an equal partner with France, Britain and the USA in the Locarno discussions. Despite the fact that he was attacked again by the nationalist right for giving too much away, Stresemann had clearly raised Germany's prestige within Europe by reassuring the Allies of Germany's peaceful intentions.

The success of Locarno meant that Germany was now invited into the League of Nations. This again reinforced the point that Germany was being treated as an equal rather than as the aggressor of World War One. Stresemann was still determined to revise the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in Germany's favour and he saw the League of Nations as a place where this could be achieved peacefully. He was further able to reinforce Germany's peaceful intentions by signing the Kellogg Briand pact of 1928 which stated that all states would voluntarily renounce the use of force to solve disputes; again this shows that Germany was now being treated on an equal basis with other states.

Stresemann's final triumph was the Young Plan of 1929. This agreed a final reparations plan for Germany, but most significantly it led to an agreement for Britain and France to remove their troops from the Rhineland which was a five years earlier than the agreed schedule at Versailles. Stresemann had thus convinced the Allies that Germany's intentions were peaceful and that he was willing to co-operate with the Allies; these factors improved Germany's position regarding the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and also improved Germany's position internationally.

However, although Stresemann's role was pivotal, there were other factors that contributed to the improvement of Germany's international position. The international situation worked in favour of Germany's re-admission into the international community. Britain was keen to reach an accommodation with Germany and France, unable to deal with Germany alone and having received condemnation for its actions in the Ruhr, had little choice but to go along with Britain's actions. Indeed, all countries wanted to avoid conflict following the carnage of World War One and so were willing to accept Germany into the League of Nations and to treat Germany as an equal to ensure that any future conflict was avoided.

The economic situation also worked in favour of Germany. American's loans were key for allowing German economic recovery and for thus enabling Stresemann to act independently in his negotiations. German economic recovery also meant that Germany could start playing a role in the world economy and the other countries now saw Germany as an important trading partner which again helped raise the importance of Germany internationally.

Stresemann's work on the international stage was never appreciated by his right wing critics who continuously accused him of selling out to the Allies. However, it is clear that Stresemann was an ardent nationalist who was committed to revising the Treaty of Versailles and restoring Germany as a dominant power. What is significant is that in attempting to achieve this via his policy of fulfilment – by moderation and establishing good relations with the West, he was able

to secure important gains for Germany; American money, protection from a French invasion, a place in the League of Nations and an equal place at the negotiating table. All of these factors meant that Germany's international position had improved significantly by 1929.

Commentary – Level 5

The answer offers a convincing, detailed and comprehensive analysis of the role of Stresemann in the recovery of Germany's international position, with appropriate supporting detail. Other factors contributing to this are assessed, but some further development of these would have strengthened the answer. The answer might be seen as somewhat uncritical, in that it generally accepts the proposition in the question, but the argument advanced is persuasive and this is, therefore, a mid-Level 5 answer.