To what extent could economic factors explain the rise of totalitarianism in Germany in the 1930s?

After the defeat of WWI, the Weimar Republic was established in Germany. Yet, a republic did not necessarily mean that the livelihood of the German was better than before. After the honeymoon period between 1924-1929, when the slight economic recovery took place, Germany was again beset with a bundle of problems favourable for the rise of totalitarianism. Among the numerous factors, the economic factors played the most significant role in leading to the rise of Nazi Party in the Reichstag. So, to a large extent, the economic factors could explain the rise of totalitarianism in Germany in the 1930s.

Before 1930s, totalitarianism in Germany was not so popular due to a number of factors. In economic aspect, the Weimar Republic was so unpopular for it had made the monetary policy in chaos, luckily Stresemann saved the republic by introducing the Young Plan and the Dawes Plan, in which he successfully borrowed American loan and helped rebuilding the country. For the inflation problem, he introduced a temporary Tentenmarks to replace the original mark and helped to stabilize the economy of Germany. With Stresemann’s policy, he successfully stabilized the German economy and therefore totalitarianism was not so popular at that time. No wonder the Peer Hall Putsch held by Hitler in 1925 failed and the Nazi party remained minority in the Reichstag.

However, things changed in 1930s after the Great Depression and the death of Stresemann. As Germany was dangerously depended on borrowing American loans, the Wall Street Crash made many people in bankruptcy. As American insisted on calling back the American loans from Europe, Germany was once again in financial crisis. Inflation was intensified and there was rising number of unemployment. As a matter of fact, the unemployed people remained 1.5 million people even at the time of Stresemann, no wonder the Great Depression led to 6 million unemployed people in Germany. As the Weimar Republic was incapable to solve the great economic problems, it lost support of the people. The Germans now were now looking for strong leaders or even saviour to solve the economic problems brought by the Great Depression. As a result, it provided a favourable circumstance for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, in which the number of seats gained by the Nazi in the Reichstag rose sharply.

For unemployed people, Hitler promised them job. For businessman and industrialist, Hitler promised them the elimination of the communist influence within Germany. For common people,
Hitler promised them bread. As a result people turned their support to Hitler and the Nazi Party. However, the economic factors were not the sole factors in leading to the rise of totalitarianism in Germany; other factors should not be overlooked.

For nationalism, it was because of the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty. Not only the economic reparations and punishment made them angry, the most importantly, Germany had to accept the humiliating war guilt clause, which Germany had to bear the full responsibility of the war. This in fact made German people angry at the republic that signed the Treaty of Versailles. The hatred of the Germans led to “stab in the back myth” that made the republic difficult to rule over the country. Most importantly, even the arm officers did not support the Weimar Republic wholeheartedly. With the lack of armed force and popularity, the Weimar Republic was doomed to be replaced by the Nazis in the 1930s when opportunity came.

On the other hand, the Germans were fascinated by Hitler’s idea. In “My Struggle”, Hitler emphasized on one-man rule and the glorification of the Aryan Race and the extermination of the Jews. For Germans, Hitler was a hope to bring them satisfaction and glory. So with the use of propaganda, the Nazi Party grew in power and became the major party in the Reichstag in 1932. On the other hand, the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic itself gave Hitler a golden chance to rise to power. For the Germans, which were more familiar with the traditional monarchical rule by the Kaiser, they didn’t really trust the newly adopted democratic system by the Weimar Republic. Instead, Hitler’s autocratic rule was more appealing to the Germans.

Moreover, the constitutional system itself had tolerated the rise of totalitarianism in Germany. Although the Nazi Party was not so popular in the 1920s, the proportional representation system that the republic adopted helped the Nazi gained seats in the Reichstag. Hitler even made use of Article 48 to turn himself the dictator and ignored the Reichstag. In 1934, he used terror to boost totalitarian rule within the country. The control of mass media, the banning of other political parties and the use of secret police were some of the examples. It could be said that the weaknesses of the parliamentary system helped the rise of totalitarianism in Germany.

To conclude, the economic factors really helped the rise of totalitarianism in Germany. However, more deep-rooted problems were long been existed in Germany. The economic factors served as a favourable circumstance that accelerated the rise of Nazism in Germany.