

Why did Germany lose the First World War in 1918? 2. Long term factors: Internal weaknesses in Germany

Introduction

- In the last lesson you considered how the short term events of 1918 led to the collapse of the German army.
- Your task now will be to consider how long term weaknesses in Germany (political, economic and military) contributed to her defeat.

Main Task

1. Use this information to produce a mindmap on one side of A4. The main branches should be the headings highlighted here in blue; how you wish to divide other branches is up to you.
2. Provide a written answer to this question:
What was the most damaging area of weakness for Germany during World War One: military, political or economic factors?
Explain your answer carefully.

Extension Task

Complete the worksheet "The economic impact of the Allied blockade on Germany" at www.activehistory.co.uk > GCSE > World War One

Problem 1 (Military): The war lasts longer than expected



drawn-out 'total' war turned out to be surprisingly difficult.

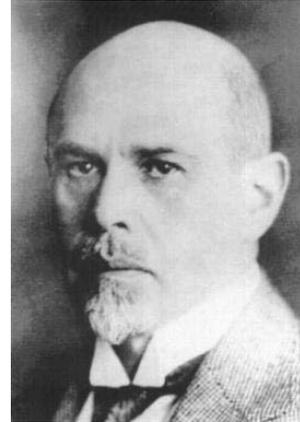
- Germany entered the Great War under Kaiser Wilhelm (left) better prepared than any other nation. Yet they did not believe the war would last very long: military plans had all been based on the assumption of a short war: one in which decisive victory would be won or lost in a matter of months, in a single battle or two. And at first it did seem as though victory would be quick, and would go to Germany and its allies, but very quickly the front line settled down into a fixed line of trenches.
- As the war settled into stalemate, generals called for greater and greater commitments of resources to the front: if battles could not be won by strategy, perhaps they could be won by the sheer weight of men, metal, and explosives committed to the front. However, mobilizing economic resources for a

Problem 2 (Political): The German government is unable to respond effectively

- At the outset of the war, there was a complete political truce (*Burgfriede*) symbolised by Wilhelm's statement that "I no longer recognise parties; I only recognise Germans". Even the SPD (the Socialist party) voted unanimously for war credits, and there was no public criticism of the government until the Peace Resolution from the Reichstag in July 1917.
- However, the Kaiser was quickly sidelined by his generals, who ran the war without any reference to the civilian politicians in the Reichstag (parliament).
- Their attempts to run a war economy therefore failed...

• **How did the government seek to control the economy and the labour force?**

- War Materials Office (KRA) was set up in 1914 by Rathenau (right). This employed certain companies to act of behalf of the government in buying, storing and manufacturing materials.
- War Ministry directed the labour force and decided which jobs exempted men from military service
- War Boards were set up to arbitrate disputes between bosses and workers



• **What flaws existed with this system?**

- Industrial workers gained a great deal from the war boards and this created social tensions.
- The Federal Constitution had never specified a national income tax, which limited revenue.
- No ceiling was imposed on war profits by business, nor were these profits even taxed before 1916
- Therefore, the government could only cover 16% of its costs through taxes, when Britain was able to cover about a third.
- They therefore printed paper money and sold bonds on the assumption that they would recover their costs in reparations after the war; created inflation as well as massive debt.

Problem 3 (economic): The Allies exacerbate the situation by imposing a crippling blockade

- From 1915, the British imposed a blockade on Germany's northern ports, which was an easy task given her coastline.
- The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) gave Germany access to the grain resources of the Ukraine, but its harshness on Russia merely steeled allied determination to punish Germany after the war.



- In 1917, with German morale nearing the point of collapse, the Kaiser decided on the now infamous policy of unrestricted submarine warfare to destroy the blockade and to cut Britain's supply lines. In so doing, he gambled that Britain and her allies would collapse before the entry of the USA into the war could make a difference. He lost the gamble.
- In March 1918 the capitulation of Romania cut German oil supplies off and it was clear that the prospects of victory were rapidly fading. Following the collapse of Ludendorff's (left) Spring Offensive the government pressed for a ceasefire.
- Even following the Armistice, however, in which the allies stated that they "contemplated relieving the famine", the blockade was maintained until Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles 6 months later.

Effects:

Raw Materials

Coal and iron ore to make steel were plentiful, but resources like magnesium, oil, rubber and cotton (all essential for the production of ammunition) could not be obtained within Germany. Artificial silk, clothes and army sandbags were manufactured from wood pulp.

Synthetic rubber was developed as were a number of other products using science to replace items Germany was unable to grow or mine.

Food

Germany had imported a third of her food in 1913. As early as the the winter of 1914, the German people began eating K-Bread (Kriegsbrot - war bread). This type of bread replaced wheat with potatoes as the main ingredient. As the war dragged on, Germany turned to science to produce foodstuffs for the people. Several food items in use today were developed during the war. One of the biggest was the production of margarine (an edible oil product) to replace butter. Artificial honey, coffee, gravy, puddings and many other items were developed to replace items sent to the front.

Food shortages thereafter rapidly pushed many civilians to the brink of starvation – especially as farmers were short of labourers to bring in the harvest. By 1918, Germany was producing only 50% of the milk it had done before the war. By the winter of 1917, the supply of potatoes had run out and the only real alternative was turnips. This is why the winter of 1916 to 1917 is known as the "**Turnip Winter**". Turnips were used as animal fodder and the thought of eating them repelled many.

Disease

Improper diet lowered resistance to or caused such diseases as tuberculosis, rickets, influenza, dysentery and scurvy. The influenza-epidemic of 1918 had, therefore, a far greater effect on German mortality, which was 250 percent greater in that year, than in England. It is thought that nearly 750,000 died of a combination of flu and starvation - this figure included mainly civilians but it also included soldiers who had survived the horror of war, returned to Germany and died of the disease. A 'flu ward is shown to the right.



Men

Also Germany had lost 2 million men in the war. These were the core of Germany's work force and Germany's industrial base could not function or recover without them. Therefore, it seemed that in December 1918, Germany was condemned to economic weakness.

Political effects

"One cannot intellectually dismiss the important possibility that blockade-induced starvation was a significant factor in the formation of the Nazi character... The ominous amalgamation of twisted emotion and physical degeneration, which was to presage considerable misery for Germany and the world, might have been prevented had it not been for the postwar policy of the Allies. The immediate centerpiece of this policy was the blockade" (Vincent)