

### **What was the Impact of WW1 on the economy and society of Germany and/or Britain?**

The war had an enormous impact on both the economy and society in countries all over the world, during and after the war. Britain and Germany were 2 such countries perhaps most drastically affected. WW1 was called the first total war for good reason. The entire society of each of these countries was devoted towards the war. The most notable impact of the war on society was the changed role of women. The war also had the effect of bankrupting both countries. Agriculture was changed and the lack of food during the war had a big impact on society, particularly in Germany. The war also had an impact on world economics.

One of the areas hugely affected by the war was industry. Britain and Germany before the war were both huge industrial powers. Germany, whose electrical industry had grown under the encouragement of Bismarck from 1870. By 1914, employing 100,000 workers, it was the world's leading electronics manufacturer. Britain's industry was highly developed likewise. However during the war all progress stopped. A lot of men working in the factories left to fight. Despite this British industrial output was maintained as shells, boats and steel were manufactured to contribute to the war effort. The Munitions of War Act in 1915 placed all factories involved in war production under control of the government. Britain's solution to the diminishing work force was the Treasury Agreement Act of 1915. This allowed the dilution of skilled workers in factories and for inexperienced workers to take their place as they went off

to fight in France. These workers were mainly women. In Germany the problem was solved by the National Service Law, December 1916. This placed all men between the age of 18 and 60 under the control of the government and they could be sent to fill any role deemed necessary to the war effort. Therefore no money was being made from the products the factories would normally produce. This lost the countries more and more money everyday. It also affected society as unskilled workers were brought into factories, most notably women. This was a huge change in society.

Before WW1 in Britain all upper and middle class had the role of homemaker. Their job was to mind children and the house. In the lower classes many women had jobs in domestic service. However this largely changed during the war years. The women in the work force increased from 3 million in 1914 to 5 million in 1918. They worked in many different areas which were not available to them before such as the police force, as telephone operators, bus conductors, secretaries and most importantly industry. Munitions factories in both England and Germany gave women the best opportunities. Here they could earn wages never before available to them. By 1916 over 200,000 women were employed in munitions. However these factories were dangerous, for example 69 women were killed at Silvertown when a fire ignited 50 tonnes of explosives. Chemicals in the manufacture of TNT dyed their hair and skin yellow, gaining them the nickname 'canaries'. On top of this many women were made sterile by the chemicals. In Germany, where food was more scarce, women were weak and often collapsed due to the heavy work. Women could also join the Women's Auxiliary Corps, established July 1917, allowing them to serve as clerks, cooks etc. in the British army. In this way the war had both a positive and negative effect on women in Britain and Germany. While they now had more opportunities and could earn more money, working in factories greatly effected their

health. But as many saw it they were willing to die for their country, just as the men fighting on the front lines. These changes almost completely disappeared when the men returned home, disgruntled to find they had been replaced by women. Many of these jobs were returned to the men however many of the white collar jobs given to women during the war were kept. Really the women's role during the war just planted a seed which would grow into change, equalising women's role with men's in society.

Another way in which WW1 impacted both economy and society in Germany and Britain was in agriculture and the supply of food. The lack of food in Germany became an increasing problem as the war went on. In Britain up until 1916 it wasn't really an issue. However Germany's attacks in British merchant ships then began to take its toll. In July 1917 Lord Rhondda was appointed food controller. He introduced rationing on sugar, jam and meat. As well as these precautions much pasture land was converted to arable to boost production of food. By 1918 nearly 300 million further acres of land were farmed for crops. The Women's Land Army worked as farm hand, supplying the labour needed, another way in which women contributed. While food was relatively scarce in Britain conditions in Germany were much worse. The country was certainly not prepared for a long war. Before 1914 one third of Germany's food had been imported. This meant that they had problems with food shortages from 1915. The British Navy's blockade of German ports meant that they could not import. Rationing was brought into the country in 1915, very early in comparison to Britain. Food was controlled by an Exports and Exemptions office. The war also had its affect on food production as more and more men went off to fight, leaving fewer to work. This caused food production to fall to half its pre-war levels by 1917. As people began to feel the effects of the lack of food they protested, especially after the 'turnip winter' of 1916-1917. This also led to health

problems. Infant mortality rose by 50% due to malnutrition. Overall more than 763,000 people died in Germany as a result of starvation. It's obvious that the war had a huge impact in this way, during the war years. Rationing was introduced in both countries. However it clearly had a much bigger effect in Germany as over 3 quarters of a million people died due to malnutrition. A considerable amount of land had to be converted from pasture to arable. Finally women had to take the place of men working on farms which contributed to changing women's role in society.

The war had an enormous impact on the economies of both England and Germany in more ways than these. In Germany the Royal navy's blockade of German ports meant that Germany could not import raw materials such as copper, nickel, mercury and rubber. This meant that production was slowed dramatically. In 1915 Walter Rathenau, director of AEG set up a War Raw Materials department to help with this problem. Because of this fat was reduced in food as they were used in the production of explosives. In 1916 Von Hindenberg introduced the Hindenberg program to double the supply of munitions' which briefly solved the economic problems, but this was short lived. In Germany the war was paid for by people who took out war bonds which would be paid back after the war. But as Germany lost the war they were left with a debt of 156 billion marks in 1919. Britain also built up enormous debts as the war went on costing around £4 million a day. 40% of its merchant fleet were sunk by German U-boats. Britain lost a lot of its markets and failed to regain them after the war as a large amount of them had switched to the U.S. Higher taxes were imposed during the war as they increased from 4p to 72p to the pound in 1918. The impact of WW1 was clear in its devastation of both of these economies in this way, not only during but after the war, even the winning side of Britain had to pay back its debt, mainly to the US, at an interest. War bonds meant not only

the German government but the people directly lost out, creating enormous poverty in the country, especially early in the inter war years. This is generally accepted as a cause of WW2 so in this way an impact of WW1 both on economy and society was to create the conditions for a second world war. So the war had both long and short term consequences on both countries.

Another impact WW1 had socially in Britain was on the voting system. Before the war only about half of the men in Britain were entitled to vote. Under the terms of the Representation of People Act, July 1918, the vote was then given to all men over the age of 21 and women over 30. It was felt that recognition of the men who had gone off to fight in the war was required. It was then argued that the women also had to be recognized for their contributions. The war also had the effect of undermining the class system in Britain as they were all living in the same circumstances both in the trenches and on the home front. The Education Act of 1918 recognized the work the lower classes had done. The British Minister for Education, H.A.L. Fisher believed that the working class was entitled to better education. The Germany social welfare was improved as 2.7 million disabled soldiers returned from the war. The war improved relations between classes in Britain and increases equality both here and for Britain.

I think though that the wars biggest impact, in the sense of its longevity, was its impact on the role of women. It brought women out of the home to work in industry, farming and the WAAC. But men were unhappy about women's new role. They feared that they would return home to unemployment after the war. But this was not the case. Women were forced out of their jobs. There were many other instances in which women had unequal rights. For example women of higher classes could not leave home without a chaperone if they wished to remain respectable. This changed during the war. Women could also now swear and smoke in public

which was outlawed previous to the war. Another big social change for women was in clothing. For the first time women could wear shorter skirts and trousers. This was necessary for 2 reasons. There was no longer as much fabric as trade was reduced, therefore the full length dresses were no longer practical. Secondly because of the jobs women now performed sometimes trousers had to be worn. All of these factors were moves towards sex equality in these countries. Women had more and more rights, including the right to vote although they would not have equal voting rights until 1928. There were just more things which helped the movement for gender equality gain momentum. For the first time women were given a taste of independence and were not ready to go back to the old ways so easily.

These were all areas which impacted either the society or economy in England or Germany. Finally of course millions of men left never to return to their families. 9million men were killed and over 20 million injured.