

HOME FRONTS - WWI

What was the American home front like during World War 1?

Spartacus:

At the beginning of the 20th century the United States was the most powerful country in the world. The world leader in coal and steel production, the USA was also a major producer of raw materials. The most important of these being wheat, cotton and oil, which accounted for more than a third of all the USA's exports. With a population of over 100,000,000, the USA had the potential to decide the outcome of the First World War. However, in 1914, the country had no overseas alliances and on 19th August, President Woodrow Wilson declared a policy of strict neutrality.

Although the USA had strong ties with Britain, Wilson was concerned about the large number of people in the country who had been born in Germany and Austria. Other influential political leaders argued strongly in favor of the USA maintaining its isolationist policy. This included the pacifist pressure group, the American Union Against Militarism.

Some people in the USA argued that the country should expand the size of its armed forces in case of war. General Leonard Wood, the former US Army Chief of Staff, formed the National Security League in December, 1914. Wood and his organization called for universal military training and the introduction of conscription as a means of increasing the size of the US Army.

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On April 6 1917 war was called in U.S.A. with the permission of congress.

To some people this was a natural progression as it was thought that the U.S.A. were backing up Britain and that they weren't neutral in any case. Others say that as German threatened to conquer Britain, the U.S.A wanted to help out so that was another involvement in the war. When the United States joined the war this did not just mean more ships, troops, supplies etc, but also it opened up the scene of even greater economic and business support to the run down similar nations.

Government was unwilling to load money off other countries so they increased taxes to raise \$9 billion. The purchase of 'Liberty Bonds' by American citizens raised another \$15 billion. Woodrow Wilson counted on Allies financial dependence as a weapon to use in achieving the goals of his postwar diplomacy. Lever Act- established food Administration. Persuaded America to save food for the shipment over seas. 'War Gardens' were created by women and children as a contribution to the war; they provided extra fruit and vegetables.

The Prohibition was set up to restrict the sale and use as scarce grain supplies were reserved for soldiers abroad. In December 1917 the 18th Amendment banned production, sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Bernard Baroch was in charge of taking care of the needless waste in production. He standardized products, established priorities for shipment of important goods, set prices to encourage factories to turn out goods quickly.

Altering bike designs saved the War Industries Bond 2,000 tons of steel for war goods.

Practical hysteria towards Germans and traces of German influence were repressed in American society. Sauerkraut was changed to 'Liberty cabbage' and hamburgers were renamed 'Salisbury Steak'. The speaking of German language in public was banned in half the States by 1918. German literary works disappeared from libraries, streets were renamed and the careers of German musicians suffered. When some Germans refused to buy war bonds they met violence.

There were more jobs for women and African Americans. 1 million women proceeded to enter the workforce and the Women's Bureau was set up. There was a great migration of African Americans from South to North. As Immigration had been cut off there were more job opportunities for all.

United States Department of Labor: Compensation from before World War I through the Great

Depression - by Robert VanGiezen and Albert E. Schwenk Bureau of Labor Statistics. This article was originally printed in the Fall 2001 issue of *Compensation and Working Conditions*.

World War I and prosperity

The first major attempt at government control of the economy occurred during World War I, as the Nation quickly shifted more than 20 percent of national production to wartime needs.⁹ During these hostilities, the War Industries Board determined industrial priorities, fixed prices, and converted plants to meet Federal Government needs. Many government functions that would be taken for granted a half-century later had their origins at this time.¹⁰

The War Labor Board, established to settle industrial disputes, became the model for a national system of labor-management relations in the 1930s. For the emergency period during the War, union representatives on that board won the right of workers to join unions and not be discharged for union activity.¹¹ The U.S. Housing Corporation built housing for defense personnel, beginning the Federal involvement in the Nation's housing market. The U.S. Railroad Commission took control of the Nation's railroads. The Food Administration and Fuel Administration coordinated food and fuel distributions, respectively.¹²

Trade union membership almost doubled from 1915 to 1920—years of war and postwar economic boom. During this time, the Federal Government, for the first time, treated the labor movement as a legitimate representative group.¹³ From a high point of 5 million members in 1920, however, there was an almost continual decline in union membership until the bottom was reached in 1933.¹⁴ After major strikes in 1921-23 (including an unsuccessful attempt to organize the steel industry), trade unions were unable to exercise direct pressure on employers for almost a decade, until the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, which promoted unionization and collective bargaining.¹⁵

As had been the case earlier, the compensation studies conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics during World War I were authorized by Congress, to address specific needs. The War Industries Board had been created to increase production, mobilize the labor force, maintain peaceful labor-management relations, and stabilize prices and wages. At this time, the Bureau worked closely with the War Board's Central Bureau of Planning and Statistics.¹⁶ In addition, wartime demands from various other agencies for information on wages and hours, strikes and lockouts, and labor placed additional requirements on the Bureau.

Not until the war was nearly over in late 1918, however, was funding allocated for the Bureau to undertake wage surveys for use in the solution of labor problems in a number of industries and to provide a record of industrial conditions at the height of the war effort.¹⁷ Continuing to use procedures begun in 1913, agents specialized in certain industries and became "...more familiar with the nature of the work in the various occupations."¹⁸ The Bureau's regular, pre-war program had included only 10 industries surveyed at 2-year intervals. In May 1920, results of wages and hours surveys during 1918 and 1919 were published for fully 780 occupations in 28 industries.¹⁹

Germany WWI

The Effect of War Back Home

During the fighting in the west and the east the people of Germany were mostly in support of the war. The belief was widespread that even though the war was forced upon the German people, it was for the "*Greater Germany*" that it could become. When the war started turning against Germany, there was still the general belief that at least they should gain something from their

effort. The German people were mostly willing to have peace as long they did not have to give up any land.

The government did not want peace because they thought it would be seen as a loss and the liberal party would lose popularity, and perhaps there would be a revolution. This situation can be compared to the conflict between Israel and the PLO, where Israel wants peace but does not want to lose land. Germany, in general, wanted peace, but not at the expense of the land they had taken.

When the war was beginning, it had the support from a coalition of the SPD, the Progressives, and the Kaiser's conservative government.

As the war continued and was becoming more and more a war of attrition, the SPD, who were already opposed to an offensive war, split into three groups: the Independent Socialists, the SPD and the International Socialists.

The international socialists (Spartacists) were opposed to any war of any kind while the other two groups were still in support of a defensive war. The leaders of the Spartacists, Liebknecht and Luxemburg, held a demonstration against the war on May 1, 1916. They were arrested, and in response to this the workers rose up for their first strike of the war. From this, there can be seen the first seeds of discontent among the people.

The German economy was also going through more and more strain as the war went on. In 1914 the German economy was almost completely reliant on outside trade and therefore not ready for a protracted war. They had absolutely no large stocks of guns or ammunition and were forced to employ chemists to find replacements for substances that were made scarce by the war. They discovered things like a replacement for gunpowder ingredients, synthetic rubber, and the use of oil instead of coal in machinery.⁵

There was such a shortage that riots had already begun in 1916. The armed forces took all the hired labor out of the economy. The immediate consequences of the war on the economy were more government control of goods and production, army control of what determined economic policy, and an increase in scientific pursuit.

Wikipedia:

Germans responded to the beginning of war during 1914 with the same general enthusiasm as did many people of other countries of Europe; this enthusiasm is known as the Spirit of 1914. The German government, dominated by the Junkers, thought of the war as a way to end Germany's disputes with neighbors and rivals like France, the United Kingdom, and Russia. The beginning of war was thus presented in authoritarian Germany as the chance for the nation to secure "our place under the sun" as the Kaiser Wilhelm II put it, which was readily supported by prevalent nationalism among the public. The Kaiser and the German establishment hoped the war would unite the public behind the monarchy, and lessen the threat posed by the dramatic growth of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, which had been the most vocal critic of the Kaiser in the Reichstag before the war. Despite its membership in the Second International, the Social Democratic Party of Germany ended its differences with the Imperial government and abandoned its principles of internationalism to support the war effort.

It soon became apparent that Germany was not prepared for a war lasting more than a few months. At first, little was done to regulate the economy for a wartime footing, and the German war economy would remain badly organized throughout the war. Germany depended on imports of food and raw materials, which were stopped by the British blockade of Germany. Food prices were first limited, then rationing was introduced. The winter of 1916/17 was called "turnip winter". During the war, about 750,000 German civilians died from malnutrition. Even more died after the war, as the Allied blockade was not ended until the summer of 1919.

Enthusiasm began to decrease as the enormous numbers of casualties began returning from the first battles. As the human cost increased during battles at the Marne, Verdun, the Somme, and at Ypres in the west, and in Poland and Galicia in the East, a grimmer and grimmer attitude began to prevail amongst the general population. Morale was helped by victories against Serbia, Greece, Italy, and Russia which made great gains for the Central Powers. Morale was at its greatest since 1914 at the

end of 1917 and beginning of 1918 with the defeat of Russia following her rise into revolution, and the German people braced for what Ludendorff said would be the "Peace Offensive" in the west. In one of the bloodiest series of battles in history from March to August, Ludendorff's plans were thwarted by the combined Allied efforts and Germany's last chance to win the war was lost.

By September 1918, the Central Powers were exhausted from fighting, and the Allies had won the support of American forces. Even though the eastern front was hundreds of miles away from the borders of the *Reich*, an invasion of the Rhineland on the western front was possible. The hunger and popular dissatisfaction with the war precipitated uprisings and an attempted revolution throughout Germany, deposing the Kaiser and creating the historical motive for far-right German nationalists to later develop the Dolchstoßlegende. By the end of 1918, Germany had signed the Armistice, the Kaiser had abdicated, and the Empire had been replaced by the Weimar Republic.

FRANCE

Wikipedia:

World War I (1914–1918) brought great losses of troops and resources. Fought in large part on French soil, it led to approximately 1.4 million French dead including civilians (see World War I casualties), and four times as many casualties. The stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) were severe: Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France; Germany was required to take full responsibility for the war and to pay war reparations; the German industrial Saarland, a coal and steel region, was occupied by France.

The First World War -- the "Great War" -- however produced an economic outcome disastrous for all parties, not just for the German losers. As predicted by Keynes in his bitter post-Versailles Conference book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, the heavy war reparations imposed upon Germany not only were insufficient to fuel French economic recovery, they greatly damaged a Germany which might have become France's leading trade and industrial development partner, thereby seriously damaging France as well.

And their very heavy loss of life, in the "Great War", robbed France of a generation of its youth, and of some of the youthful imagination necessary for facing Germany again, only 25 years later, in the Second World War, when a by-then aged French general staff was ill-prepared and entirely-defensive up against an even more militant German economy and army. Damaged by the Great Depression, the older leaders left in France were reluctant to assume a "war-footing" economy yet again, and France was overrun and occupied by Nazi Germany, and its wartime economy turned entirely to supporting Germany and the German war effort.

Following WWI, France remained a parliamentary democracy known as the Third Republic (La Troisième République). The Third Republic began in 1870, and lasted until the German invasion in 1940.