

CH. 9 - SOCIETY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Chapter 9 - Society During the Second World War

Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand:

- The Home Front in Germany and Britain.
- The role of collaboration and resistance

*H*ITLERS EUROPE – NAZI-OCCUPIED EUROPE

Introduction

By the end of 1941, Germany and her allies extended their control over most of the continent of Europe - from the Atlantic seaboard to central Russia. Germany had to organise and mobilise all the resources at her disposal. This meant that all the conquered lands were forced to support the German war machine. The war had become a **total war**.



The Home Front in Germany

Germany had to gear herself entirely for the war. Civilians were as much a part of the war as soldiers. Many had to work in war industries producing weapons and ammunition for the front. As the war went on these included many **women**, even though the Nazis did not approve of women workers. They also included foreign workers who were mostly **forced labour** from the occupied countries. By 1944, these amounted to 7,500,000. Added to these were 2 million **prisoners of war** who were forced to work in factories, mines or farms.

Germany suffered from **food shortages** so food had to be rationed, but some could get supplies on the black market. Civilians experienced the direct effects of war, especially from 1942 onwards. The Allies began to bomb German cities by day and by night. Thousands of civilians were killed as cities and towns were wrecked. These bombings and the food shortages made life in Germany very difficult by the end of the war.

KEY CONCEPT LEBENSRAUM

Hitler believed that having additional living space would strengthen Germany by making it self-sufficient in food and raw materials. He wanted the living space in Eastern Europe, particularly Russia.

Economic Control

The Germans exploited the lands they took over by a variety of means:

- The cost of supporting the occupying troops was borne by the conquered people e.g. France.
- Almost all exports from the occupied lands were sent to Germany. This included most of the food. In Denmark and Holland, for example, all the dairy and poultry produce went to Germany.
- Consequently, food was **rationed** and this resulted in **inflation** (price rises).
- **Compulsory Labour Service** (forced labour) was used in local projects or sent to Germany 600,000 were sent from France alone.



Repression

Germany imposed a harsh rule on its own people as well as those of the occupied lands. German rule in the east, in Poland and Russia, was brutal from the start. In the west, in France and Holland, for example, it became as brutal when the war turned against Germany and when the resistance became more active. Most of the repression was carried out by **Himmler's Gestapo** and the **SS**. Hostages were taken, and there were shootings or mass deportations to **concentration camps**. By 1944, there were **20 main camps** and **165 subsidiary camps** holding anybody the Nazis believed was opposed to their regime.

Sometimes there were **extreme reprisals**. In Czechoslovakia, the men of the village of **Lidice** were shot and the women sent to concentration camps when Czech guerrilla fighters (partisans) ambushed and killed **Reinhard Heydrich**, the Nazi Protector of Czechoslovakia, in May 1942. Similar action was taken against the village of **Oradour-sur-Glane** in France in 1944, when the SS killed 642 people.



The Jews in the Holocaust

Some groups of people were subjected to even more repression, in particular the Jews. This was driven by **anti-Semitism**. Hitler and the Nazis believed in the superiority of the **Aryan** race, and the need to protect it from **inferior races**, especially the Jews. The Nazis believed this could only be done by **extermination**.

The organisation given the task of eliminating the Jews was the **SS**. Its leader, Himmler, was a firm believer in Nazi **racial ideas**.

As Germany conquered more countries, the Germans took over more Jewish communities. To the 3 million Jews in Poland were added about 4 million more in other parts of Eastern Europe, particularly the Soviet Union. The Nazis first proposed to expel the Jews from Europe after the war to the island of **Madagascar** off the coast of Africa. But planning for this was dropped after a while.

At the same time, the Nazis were herding Jews into **ghettos**, the most notorious of which was the **Warsaw ghetto**. They were walled into the ghettos in crowded conditions which got worse as the war progressed. In Russia, **Special Action Units** following the German army carried out **mass executions** of the Jews, such as the 33,000 killed in the Ukraine.



The Jews in the Holocaust

KEY CONCEPT HOLOCAUST

This is the word used to describe the Nazi's attempt to exterminate the Jews during the Second World War. It resulted in the death of about 6 million Jews.

KEY CONCEPT ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-semitism is the hatred for, and persecution of, the Jews. This hatred was based on religious and economic factors. Anti- Semitism became an important part of Nazi racial views which saw the Jews as an inferior race. It led to the Nuremberg Laws against the Jews, and later the Holocaust during the Second World War.

KEY CONCEPT HERRENVOLK

This was the Nazi idea of the Germans as a master race, superior to all other races.

The Final Solution

In early 1942, Hitler and the Nazis decided to exterminate the Jews. The organisation of the **Final Solution** was planned at the **Wannsee Conference**, chaired by **Reinhard Heydrich**. The extermination was conducted in concentration camps in Poland, especially in **Auschwitz-Birkenau**. After various experiments to get the most efficient method of killing, the SS decided on **gas chambers**, camouflaged as shower rooms, using **Zyklon-B**, a poisonous gas.

Jews were rounded up from all over Europe, including France and Holland, and sent to the camps in Poland. Some feared, or even knew, what was going to happen to them, but most went to their deaths still not realising what was happening. Once they got to the camps, the weak were separated from the able-bodied. The latter were worked until they too were weak. The weak were gassed, and their bodies were buried in mass graves or incinerated in ovens.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was total war?
2. How did Germany gear up for total war?
3. How did Germany deal with occupied countries?
4. What plans did the Nazis have for the Jews?
5. What was the Final Solution?

EXAM QUESTION

How did anti-Semitism and the Holocaust affect Europe, 1920-45?



Resistance

In the first years of the war, resistance was scattered. Very often it was just passive resistance such as deliberately misunderstanding orders. The German army had come so quickly and with such force that it took time for resistance to be organised. After that, resistance grew because of:

- **National pride** - doing something for their country.
- The **brutality of the German invader**, particularly the use of forced labour.
- The involvement of **Communists** after Hitler's invasion of Russia.

Resistance took many forms; publishing an underground press, sheltering and smuggling allied airmen, ambushing, passing on intelligence and in some cases open warfare.

Results: Resistance was more effective in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. In the west it was no more than a **nuisance value** rather than a barrier to German operations. It was weak when it was not backed by Allied troops.

In the **east**, however, resistance had a definite impact on German operations. In **Yugoslavia**, for instance, **Tito's partisans** created considerable difficulties for German forces. In **Russia**, it is estimated that 150,000 partisans (or guerrilla fighters) were active behind German lines by 1942, cutting communications and holding down German troops. But even here resistance forces had their greatest effect when they were working with Allied forces, especially when Germany was weakening.

KEY CONCEPT RESISTANCE

This was the act of resisting when enemy troops have taken over the country. The Resistance was usually a secret or underground organisation involved in sabotage against the occupying forces and collaborators.

German Resistance

There was also resistance in **Germany**, particularly after 1941. Those such as **student groups** like the **White Rose** in Munich favoured **passive resistance**. But the most dangerous resistance came from within the German army. Here senior officers planned to overthrow Hitler's regime. A number of efforts were made to assassinate Hitler but the most serious was the **July Plot** in 1944. **Count von Stauffenberg** placed a bomb in Hitler's headquarters but Hitler escaped with minor injuries. The leaders of the plot were hanged with piano wire.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did resistance to Hitler grow?
2. How effective was resistance to Hitler?
3. Who resisted in Germany?

Collaboration

Collaboration (or active help) was needed by the Nazis to ensure control of the occupied countries or satellite states. There was active collaboration in many countries under Nazi control, though very little in Poland or Russia.

Sometimes collaborators were members of **minority German communities** in countries such as Slovakia or Romania. In other countries they were members of **pre-war Fascist parties** who now believed that victory would gain them a share of the spoils. In Norway, Quisling held power briefly. In France these groups were active in the German- controlled area as well as in Vichy France. There was also **official collaboration**, as in Vichy France, and in Denmark where local or native governments collaborated with the Germans.



Why Did People Collaborate?

Collaborators had many **reasons** for working with the Nazis. Some admired the German **New Order**; others liked the Nazi control of trade unions and the protection of private property. Some traded with the Germans to make a living. Young women became friendly with German soldiers. These might supply cigarettes or stockings, or the women were attracted to them. Others had more specific reasons. In France, criminal gangs helped the Germans in the hope that their own crimes would be ignored. Still others in France used hatred of the English as an excuse.

Hitler was quite sure that he wanted collaborators and their countries for the benefit of Germany. He used collaborators to do **police work** or to send **recruits** to fight Bolshevik (Communist) Russia. In the latter case a number of countries contributed, including French and Dutch volunteers.

After the war was over, the collaborators were **punished severely**: by death, shaving of the hair in the case of women, or imprisonment. Collaboration became a shame on the country so the punishment of the collaborator was a way of regaining self-respect for the country.

KEY CONCEPT COLLABORATION

This is co-operating with the enemy especially when they have taken over your own country.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who collaborated with the Nazis?
2. Why did people collaborate with the Nazis?
3. What happened to collaborators after the war?

t H E **THE HOME FRONT IN BRITAIN** *t n*

The Home Front in Britain

Conscription (compulsory military service) was introduced in Britain before the war so that by the end of 1940 there were 2 million men in the armed forces. Only men in **reserved occupations** - those which were vital to the war effort were excused. These included working on farms or in the mines. After December 1941, single women could be conscripted into the **WRNS** (navy) and the **WAAF** (air force), the police or factory work.

Shortages and Rationing

Britain did not produce enough food to feed its people before the war. It depended on imports and these were now threatened by the German U-boat campaign.

Food rationing was introduced early in 1940 to ensure enough food for people. Ration books were issued to people to allow them to buy a weekly supply of food. Even the royal family had ration books to show that everyone was doing their part.

The government gave advice on recipes for healthy food, and people were encouraged to grow their own food. Many public parks were turned into **allotments** where people could grow vegetables. Families were also encouraged to keep animals such as pigs. But some people were able to pay the high prices of the black market.

People were encouraged to contribute raw materials. Very often this was a **propaganda exercise**. People were asked to give up aluminium pans to make aircraft, even though many were thrown away because this was an expensive method of manufacture. Wartime shortages also affected clothes - men's trousers had no turn-ups and women's skirts and dresses were made shorter.

Home Defence

Britain's preparations for war included air raid shelters in back gardens, blacking out windows and the issuing of gas masks. The fear of the Luftwaffe also led to the **evacuation** of children, disabled people and pregnant women to the countryside where they were kept in local houses. Many were often unhappy there and returned to their homes in spite of the danger.

Apart from the regular army, navy and air force, Britain had the **Local Defence Volunteers** or **Home Guard** (Dad's Army). These were volunteers ranging from the age of 17 to 65, some of whom had served in the First World War. They often trained with very few weapons.

To further protect against invasion, road signs were removed, beaches were covered in barbed wire and church bells were prevented from ringing, only to signal an invasion.



War Industries

Industry geared itself to the war. People worked longer hours and even during holidays. Factories making aeroplanes, tanks and ammunition boomed, and unemployment disappeared. Seven million women came into the workforce to replace men who were fighting. Some women joined the Land Army to work on farms to increase food production. Others worked in munitions or textile factories, on the buses or as mechanics. Even though women were only paid about half men's wages, hundreds of thousands experienced the independence of earning for themselves and were no longer dependent on their husbands' wages.

Civilian Deaths

In spite of the fear of German bombers, the first civilian deaths did not occur until the war was seven months old. However, during the Blitz from September 1940, German bombers raided London and other cities (e.g. Coventry, Manchester, Liverpool) and civilian casualties grew rapidly. **Anti-aircraft guns** defended the cities but by the end of 1940, 22,000 civilians were killed. Even though 1 million people left London, two-thirds of the population stayed in the city, sheltering in cellars and underground stations at night. A few years later in 1944, London faced a second Blitz when Germany attacked the city with the **V1 flying bombs** and the **V2 rockets**.



Propaganda

Government propaganda was vital for the war effort to encourage people to contribute to the war and to keep up morale (spirits). During the Battle of Britain, for example, Luftwaffe plane losses were exaggerated. While the press still ran, the radio was an even more important means of propaganda. Churchill's speeches in his fine booming voice were very effective. The government also used **censorship** to control the **bad** news. One example of this was the banning of all photographs which showed the effects of air raids.

KEY CONCEPT PROPAGANDA

Propaganda is spreading information to convince people of your point of view. Governments and politicians use propaganda to achieve or retain power.



Churchill in the Home Front

Churchill played a very important role in keeping up the **morale** of the British people. As one historian wrote, *'His inspiring speeches encouraged the British people to be courageous and hopeful.'* He kept up morale by walking and meeting people in the ruins of London and other British cities, and he encouraged the soldiers and pilots by visiting them in their camps. He was easily **recognisable** with his bowler hat, heavy overcoat and cigar. He kept Parliament open during the war and faced criticism when things were not going well. All these aspects endeared him to the British people and ensured that his leadership helped them survive the Battle of Britain, the Blitz and defeats abroad.

Churchill was able to exploit **the propaganda value of key events**, such as the victory at the Battle of El Alamein (October 1942). He ensured that on his way to *'the Lord Mayor's luncheon [in the Mansion House, London], the PM and Mrs. Churchill drove into the City in an open car... loudspeaker vans had announced his coming and we made a triumphal progress along the Strand and Fleet Street, up Ludgate Hill and past St. Paul's. There were huge and enthusiastic crowds, with scarcely enough police to control them, and at the last stage we had difficulty in getting through.'*

Entertainment

Entertainment also played an important role in the war. Again, the **radio** had a key role in providing entertainment especially through music. **Cinemas** and some **theatres** remained open, though they had been closed for a short time at the beginning of the war. This entertainment and occasional short holidays, for those who could take them, were needed to relieve the stress of war. **Vera Lynn**, 'the forces' sweetheart', sang for the troops in live concerts in Britain and in war fronts around the world. Her songs, such as 'We'll Meet Again' and 'The White Cliffs of Dover', were very popular with everybody. She did a weekly radio programme, Sincerely Yours, where she read messages for the soldiers.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Who was conscripted in Britain?
2. How did Britain cope with shortages?
3. What was the Home Defence?
4. How did industry help the war effort?
5. What role did Churchill play in the home front?
6. What use was made of propaganda in Britain?
7. What use was entertainment in the war?

EXAM QUESTION

What was the impact of World War II on the civilian population of Britain? (2015)

