What is this unit about?
This unit explores life in wartime Germany. It gives an outline of the events of the war that form the backdrop to the analysis of morale, dissent and opposition in the war years. The unit moves on to look at the war economy and how it changed in response to military developments. It explains how efficient the Nazi war economy was and what its main failings were. There is then an explanation of how the ‘Final Solution’ to the ‘Jewish Question’ came about.

Key questions
• To what extent did the war have an impact on morale in Germany and how extensive was opposition to the regime?
• How efficient was the Nazi war economy?
• Why did the Nazis undertake the ‘Final Solution’ to the ‘Jewish Question’?

Timeline

1939
November Georg Elser attempts to assassinate Hitler

1940
May France invaded

1941
April Order to remove crucifixes from walls in Catholic Bavaria meets opposition
May Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess flies to Scotland
June Invasion of the Soviet Union, Operation Barbarossa, begins
August Bishop von Galen publically challenges the T4 programme
December Germany declares war on the USA

1942
January The Wannsee Conference

1943
January German Sixth Army surrenders at Stalingrad
February Goebbels’s ‘Total War’ speech
February Executions of Hans and Sophie Scholl
March Operation Flash fails to kill Hitler
July Bombing of Hamburg creates firestorm
May Axis armies surrender in North Africa

1944
June D-Day
July Bomb Plot fails to kill Hitler

1945
February Dresden destroyed
April Dietrich Bonhöffer executed
Figure 9.1 is taken from the front cover of a book for children that had the title *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*). The propaganda was produced by Julius Streicher and was sometimes used in schools. What is the message for children?

**The events of the war**

The information in this section of the unit is given to provide you with a backdrop to the Home Front in Germany between 1939 and 1945.

**The outbreak of war**

In September 1939, Poland was invaded and quickly conquered by the German armed forces. The declaration of war had brought Germany into conflict with Britain and France. However, Hitler was to show little restraint. By the end of 1940, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway and Luxembourg had been invaded and overwhelmed. Not only had the Treaty of Versailles been avenged but European domination had been achieved. Only Britain managed to hold out. This was partly due to the defeat of the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain of 1940, but it was also because Hitler turned his attention to his main goal, the destruction of the Soviet Union. Temporarily distracted by the need to support their flagging ally Italy in the Balkans, German forces invaded Russia on 22 June 1941.

**Operation Barbarossa**

Despite the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, Hitler had always intended to invade the Soviet Union. For Hitler, Russia was not only a strategic threat to his European Empire but the birthplace of Bolshevism and international Judaism. By invading Russia Hitler intended to:

- win *Lebensraum* for German settlers
- use the large reservoir of Slav labour
- exploit oil reserves in the Caucasus and the grain supply from the Ukraine.

Operation Barbarossa began with a force of 3 million troops. They were mainly German but some were from her allies, including Italy, Hungary and Romania. The attack took place along three fronts: the northern was to capture Leningrad; the centre to capture Moscow; and the southern to overrun the Ukraine and the Crimea and drive on to the Caucasus. Hitler hoped to repeat the spectacular triumphs of his *Blitzkrieg* against Poland in 1939 and against France in 1940. The Germans made rapid advances along all three fronts. By November 1941, Leningrad and Moscow were under siege and 3 million Soviets had been taken prisoner. However, the vast distances, the poor roads, the partisan activity and the ‘*scorched earth policy*’ of the retreating armies delayed the German

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**Definition**

**Scorched earth policy**

The destruction by a retreating army of everything that might be used by an advancing army, such as food and raw materials.
advance. By December heavy snow and freezing temperatures brought the Germans to a standstill 30 miles west of Moscow. Hitler had sent his troops into Russia totally unprepared for such extreme conditions. He had also underestimated the strength and resistance of the Red Army. Even more decisive was the ability of the Soviets to uproot 1,500 key factories in 1941–42, transport them and their workforce thousands of miles east of the Urals and reassemble them to become more productive than the German economy by late 1943. On 6 December 1941 the Russians counter-attacked under General Zhukov, an action that at least halted the German advance.

**Stalingrad**

In June 1942 the Germans launched a huge summer offensive to capture the Caucasus oilfield. Hitler also ordered the Sixth Army to capture the strategically important city of Stalingrad, which guarded the river Volga. The city was besieged from September, and bitter street fighting continued throughout the autumn. Stalin was determined to hold on to the city that bore his name, and General Zhukov organised heroic resistance of the city. On 19 November, the Red Army launched a counteroffensive that trapped the Sixth Army in a giant pincer movement. Although Hitler ordered the Sixth Army’s commander General von Paulus to fight to the death, on 31 January 1943 he surrendered. The Red Army captured some 92,000 men including 24 generals. The defeat at Stalingrad was one of the most important turning points of the war. The Russians exploited their success with a crushing victory in an enormous tank battle at Kursk in July 1943. This victory paved the way for the Red Army’s liberation of Eastern Europe and entry into Germany.

**North Africa**

German troops led by General Erwin Rommel invaded North Africa in February 1941 in support of their defeated Italian allies. After a series of impressive victories, Rommel’s Afrika Korps drove towards Egypt in May 1941, besieging the important town of Tobruk. The British led by General Auchinleck counter-attacked in November and forced Rommel back to El Agheila. As British forces were weakened by the need to reinforce the Far East campaign against Japan, Rommel was able to capture Tobruk and 30,000 prisoners on 21 June. However, the German advance was halted in October 1942 when the British Eighth Army led by General Montgomery inflicted a heavy defeat on Rommel at El Alamein. In November 1942 an Anglo-American force led by General Eisenhower landed behind Rommel in Morocco in Operation Torch. In May 1943, the remains of the Axis forces in North Africa surrendered.

**Italy**

Allied troops invaded Sicily in July 1943 and crossed to mainland Italy in September. In the same month the deposed Italian dictator Benito
Mussolini was rescued by German troops led by Captain Skorzeny and was taken to Berlin. As the new Italian government surrendered to the Allies, German troops led by Field Marshall Kesselring seized many important Italian cities and strategic points. The Allied advance was slow and was held up at Salerno, Anzio and Monte Cassino. Rome was captured by the Allies as late as June 1944, and German troops fought on in Italy until May 1945.

**Defeat on the Western Front**

British and American troops invaded France on 6 June in ‘Operation Overlord’. Led by Generals Eisenhower and Montgomery, some 326,000 troops were landed along the five Normandy beaches. The Americans on Omaha beach encountered severe German resistance, but Hitler was slow to reinforce the Normandy sector. They captured Cherbourg and also broke out to the South East and cut off 50,000 crack German troops in the ‘Falaise Pocket’. British troops suffered heavy casualties as they advanced through the difficult **bocage** countryside of Normandy.

Outnumbered, the German troops fell back. Paris was liberated on 24 August, and Brussels and Antwerp in the first week of September. The Allied advance then slowed as supplies were exhausted and German troops rallied to defend German soil. In an attempt to accelerate Allied progress, General Montgomery launched the doomed ‘Operation Market Garden’ at Arnhem. Hitler hoped to repeat the victory of 1940 by launching an attack through the Ardennes Forest on 16 December 1944. In the ‘Battle of the Bulge’, the German advance was halted and the Allied advance resumed. American troops crossed the Rhine on 22 March 1945, and 320,000 German troops surrendered in the Ruhr in early April. On 25 April, American and Soviet troops met at Torgau on the River Elbe.

**War in the east**

Following the victory at the great tank battle at Kursk, Soviet forces drove the Germans back to the river Dnieper and cut off the units in the Crimea. In the north the Siege of Leningrad was finally broken in January 1944, and western Russia was liberated by July. By the end of 1944 the whole of Russia had been liberated and Germany’s allies Romania and Bulgaria had surrendered. In 1945 the Red Army drove into Germany to be met with fierce resistance. Led by Zhukov, Soviet forces crossed the River Oder in March and began the final assault on Berlin. The Battle of Berlin was the greatest in the war and cost the Russians 300,000 men as they encircled Hitler's capital. On 25 April Russian and Allied forces met at Torgau, and on 30 April, as the Red Army closed in on his underground headquarters beneath the ruined Reich Chancellery, Hitler and his wife Eva Braun committed suicide. Although some units in Bavaria and the Tyrol continued fighting, Admiral Dönitz, the new Head of the Reich, surrendered to the Allies on 8 May.
Morale on the Home Front

The continuing importance of the consumer

As was pointed out in Unit 7, very few Germans wanted war. But there was a considerable bedrock of support for the regime in 1939, and this was to continue nearly to the end of the war. One reason for this continuing support was that the regime was highly sensitive to the issues of rationing and shortages on the Home Front. Before and during the war the Nazi leadership intended to avoid a repetition of the scarcities in basic foodstuffs and clothing that caused such widespread unrest during the 1914–18 war. Despite rationing, therefore, considerable sacrifices were not made by the consumer until 1942. The rationing system introduced in late 1939 was generally fair and sufficient, although the quality of the products declined. This was less a product of a shift in resources, however, than the cutting of vitally important imports. For a predominantly meat eating nation, the ration of 500 grammes a week was perceived as difficult but as the Wehrmacht conquered vast tracts of Europe, so there was an improvement in the supply of general foodstuffs as a whole. This was especially the case after the defeat of France in the summer of 1940. The most serious reduction in rations was in April 1942 when the meat ration was cut to 300 grammes per person. This caused considerable disquiet and the meat ration was increased by 50 grammes in October 1942.

There was greater flexibility in rationing in Germany than in Britain, with extra rations for those undertaking strenuous occupations. There were also Christmas bonuses, such as that in 1942 when every citizen received extra rations, including 200 grammes of meat. These were propaganda stunts that masked difficulties, but the ability of the regime to undertake such stunts demonstrates the importance the regime placed on maintaining adequate supplies. While clothing became scarce, particularly during 1941, this can in part be put down to the panic buying in the early months of the war, which reduced stocks considerably. That there were shortages thereafter was partly due to supply problems but also to inefficiency in distribution, the economy suffering a lack of the rationalisation that became such a feature later on (see pages 210–211). By 1942 there were shortages of soap; permits were introduced for furniture on 1 August 1942; and household goods were rationed from 20 January 1943. The German population faced difficulties and shortages, but at least until the very end of the war, they did not face the hardship or the levels of inflation seen in the 1914–18 war.

Early victories

During the war Germans fought patriotically for their fatherland and, of course, celebrated spectacular early victories in 1939. After the victory in Poland most hoped for peace and blamed the British for the continuation of the war because they had not come to the negotiating table. On 8 November 1939 Georg Elser, a carpenter, attempted to assassinate Hitler by exploding a bomb when the Führer was making a
speech commemorating the Munich Putsch. The bomb exploded but not when Hitler was in the hall. Public opinion was relief, and the British were blamed for the bomb. The elation at the victory over France in June 1940 was replaced with frustration at Britain's refusal to submit. Morale was further damaged with the news in May 1941 that the Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess had flown to Scotland.

**Greater concerns**

The war against the Soviet Union launched in June 1941 provoked concern, especially when Goebbels appealed to the nation on 19 December 1941 for winter clothing for the troops. The failure to win outright victory in the east led many to question Nazi ideology for the first time. Even when German fortunes appeared bleak after Stalingrad, propaganda was still able to exploit patriotic defiance. Goebbels's ‘Total War’ speech in February 1943 rallied many but not all Germans to fight a war to the end. As German forces were defeated in North Africa, the Soviet Union, the Atlantic and Italy so there was greater contempt expressed for the leadership of the Nazi movement. Hitler's increasing isolation in his bunker in Berlin or at his headquarters in Rastenburg in eastern Prussia meant that the Führer was prone to greater criticism and jokes. The following one-liners were reported to the party chancellery in March and April 1943:

- What's the difference between the sun and Hitler? The sun rises in the east, Hitler goes down in the east.
- One can now get the book of the Germans, *Mein Kampf*, on points on the *Spinnstoffkarte* (literally means clothing ration card, but in slang it also meant the ‘talking rubbish card’).
- What is the difference between India and Germany? In India one person [Gandhi] starves for everyone, in Germany everyone starves for one person.

Of course, the reports did not necessarily mention the attitude of the silent and loyal majority, but the defeat at Stalingrad clearly marked a turning point in morale.

**Bombing**

The bombing campaign undertaken by the Royal Air Force (RAF) and United States Air Force (USAF) was partly aimed at destroying the German war industry but also at undermining morale on the Home Front. It is difficult to assess how successful it was in achieving the latter. Certainly it caused widespread death and destruction: 305,000 Germans were killed by Allied bombing, 780,000 were injured, and nearly 2 million homes were destroyed. Firestorms caused by the bombing of Hamburg in the summer of 1943 and Dresden in February 1945 killed at least 80,000 civilians between them. The state attempted to provide bomb victims with alternative accommodation and some financial compensation. But while a


‘Blitz’ spirit was sustained among many, by 1943 the population in areas such as the Rhineland, which was systematically bombed, had become demoralised. The sense of impending doom was made worse by knowledge of the advance of the Soviet armies. Goebbels more than any other Nazi leader continued to offer hope, either in the form of promises of a secret weapon that would turn the tide of war or in calls for Ausharren (perseverance), which generated a spirit of heroic resistance. Once it was clear that the Allies were not going to be thrown back into the sea and that weapons such as the V1 and V2 bombs launched at London and the south-east of England were not going to have the required impact, morale sank to a low ebb. Goebbels attempted to raise morale by commissioning blockbuster escapist films such as The Adventures of Baron Munchausen (1943) and epic tales of resistance such as Kolberg (1945), but they had minimal impact on the popular mood. As the reality of certain defeat dawned, so Nazi propaganda became ever less effective. That said, neither the bombing nor even the invasion of Germany caused a collapse of the Home Front in Germany.

**Opposition**

**Church opposition**

**Crucifix crisis**

Despite a decline in morale, especially from 1943 onwards, there were few signs of outward resistance. There were occasions when ‘loyal reluctance’ was pushed to the limit. Such an occasion involved the Bavarian Catholics. In April 1941, the Gauleiter of Munich and Upper Bavaria, Adolf Wagner, demanded that all crucifixes in Bavarian schools be removed. To committed Nazis such as Wagner, the presence of such crucifixes was a visible sign of the continuing strength of the Catholic Church in the region. Wagner’s order met with a storm of protest. Meetings, letters, petitions and even demonstrations from angry Bavarians demanding that the crucifixes be restored forced Wagner to overturn his original order. Even though this incident was one of the few in which there was clearly expressed opposition to the regime, it is still clear that most Bavarians were not expressing a dislike of the regime. They were mostly defending their distinct regional culture, without challenging the authority of the Führer.

**Bishop von Galen**

The challenge made by Bishop von Galen in August 1941 to the Nazi policy of killing asylum patients as part of the T4 programme was perhaps one of the most courageous acts of the war. Galen, like many other Catholic leaders, had welcomed the ‘crusade’ against godless Bolshevism launched in June 1941. However, the closure of local monasteries moved Galen to attack the policy of ‘so-called’ euthanasia from the pulpit. Acting pragmatically, Hitler called off the campaign to close religious institutions and ended the T4 programme. Despite the attacks on its clergy and property, any opposition from the Catholic and Protestant churches
towards the regime was motivated more by an attempt to maintain independence and integrity within the system than by a philosophical objection to Nazism. Dissent was individual, not institutional. Many individual priests such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer went against the official policy of their churches and resisted or opposed the regime. Bonhoeffer was arrested in 1943 and was executed in April 1945. The official policy of the churches as institutions remained one of pragmatic cooperation even to the extent of Cardinal Faulhaber's condemnation of the Bomb Plot in 1944. Even though the Catholic Church knew of the systematic extermination of the Jews as early as 1942, it failed to condemn it in public.

The left

Any communist opposition to the regime was completely undermined by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which lasted from August 1939 to June 1941. Thereafter, rather than as a single united movement, opposition came from individuals and underground groups. The KPD (communists) and SPD (socialists) formed small groups, published reports and maintained contact with exiled leaders. Arvid Harnack from the Reich Economic Ministry and Harro Schulze-Boysen from the Air Ministry formed Rote Kapelle (Red Orchestra). Most important for the communists were the resistance cells set up in factories and coordinated by Robert Uhrig.

- In the summer of 1941 there were 89 factory cells of opposition in Berlin alone. There were communist resistance cells in other German cities including Hamburg and Mannheim.
- They produced papers and pamphlets attacking the regime and calling for acts of resistance. In 1942, the communist resistance united under the leadership of Wilhelm Knoechel.

The main weakness of the communist resistance was that it was vulnerable to Gestapo infiltration. In 1943 the communist resistance movement was devastated and Knoechel was arrested. Others carried out individual acts of defiance. Herbert Baum led a Jewish communist group that fire-bombed an anti-Russian exhibition in Berlin in 1942. Disillusioned by the inactivity of their leadership, the socialists began to form splinter groups, including ‘Red Patrol’, ‘Socialist Front’ and ‘New Beginning’, that championed a more assertive policy and worked for cooperation with other opposition groups.

Youth

Disillusionment set in by 1939 and accelerated as Germany's fortunes in war turned by 1942. Some young people had already become alienated by the regimentation of youth groups, and this mood increased as the focus on military training intensified. The absence or loss of a father encouraged delinquency, drinking, smoking and promiscuity among young people. A minority of young people, repelled by the brutality of the dictatorship, actively opposed the regime. Various youth groups attempted to resist the
regime. Disaffected working class youths formed groups such as the Edelweiss Pirates who attacked members of the Hitler Youth. Hans and Sophie Scholl led Munich students in the White Rose group, which distributed anti-Nazi leaflets and sought to sabotage the German war effort. In 1943 the Scholls led an anti-Nazi demonstration in Munich. As a result they were arrested by the Gestapo, tried and executed in February 1943.

Conservative opposition

The early victories during the war limited the scope of action for opposition to the regime. From 1941, Carl Goerdeler had created links with the dissident General Beck and created a loose group that drew in a range of conservative and military opponents to the regime. Prominent in the group were officials in the Foreign Office such as Ulrich von Hassell and Adam von Trott. Von Hassell was a particularly senior diplomat who was disgusted by the discrimination and then systematic violence used against the Jews. Seeing the writing on the wall for Germany by early 1943, the group attempted to build diplomatic links with the Allies. Many were drawn to this circle out of conscience, and it is on this basis that most opposition to the Nazis was formed. Another significant centre of conservative opposition to the regime was the Kreisau Circle. Starting in earnest in 1941, it drew in those critical of the regime from a range of intellectual traditions and backgrounds. The leading lights of the Kreisau Circle were Helmuth Graf von Moltke and Peter Yorck von Wartenburg. Their aim was to discuss the political and social landscape after the Nazi regime had fallen. The significance of the Kreisau Circle was that it contained a range of members, from the socialist Theo Haubach to the Jesuit Augustin Rösch. The group set up contacts with other conservative and religious groups although relations with the Goerdeler circle were strained (which was as much the result of a generation gap between them). Although there were differences in the aims and aspirations of the Kreisau Circle and Goerdeler group, there was also common ground:

- All wished to see the restoration of human rights and freedoms denied by the Nazis. They wanted an end to the war and the restoration of the rule of law.
- The members of the Kreisau Circle wished to see a democratic Germany, based on the foundations of self-governing local communities and the Länder.
- Some conservative opponents of the regime did not share this view; many in the Goerdeler group rejected the idea of democracy in favour of an aristocratically governed society. The consent given to the Nazi regime in plebiscites led some to reject the rule of the masses.
- The conservatives looked for political consensus after the war, with a mixed economy of private and state ownership to ensure economic growth and social harmony, although Goerdeler wanted to see an end of state involvement in economic affairs.
• While Moltke wanted to see the emergence of a federal European Union, Goerdeler was more in favour of Germany retaining a role as an independent European power.

The Kreisau Circle was discovered by the Gestapo in 1944, and Moltke was arrested. However, both the Kreisau Circle and Goerdeler's group continued to meet throughout the year and were closely involved in Stauffenberg's plot to kill the Führer. As a result in the aftermath of the plot many were arrested, tortured and executed. Although the numbers of conservatives who opposed the regime was not great, there were individuals of great courage and conviction who were prepared to challenge the amorality of the regime.

**Army**

By 1939 the army had become a subordinate, if not fully integrated, part of the Nazi regime. The oath of allegiance continued to enforce an unquestioning loyalty to Hitler. Most of the generals were ideologically committed to the regime, and the early years of the war galvanised allegiance as it did all sections of society. The stunning victories won by **Blitzkrieg** in Poland in 1939 and in western Europe in 1940 undermined the doubters and confirmed Hitler as a military genius. It was not until 1943 that a serious nationwide opposition movement led by dissident generals emerged. For a few this was the result of a long-term opposition to a regime they had despised on moral grounds from the outset. For the majority of dissident generals, opposition was more pragmatic:

• The increasing political interference of the SS had now become intolerable.

• Some generals from the Eastern Front were shocked by atrocities committed against partisans and Jews and by their realisation of the implementation of systematic extermination.

• For most generals, however, opposition was triggered by the growing belief that Germany was losing the war. US entry into the war in December 1941, the failure to defeat Russia, Montgomery’s victory at El Alamein in 1942, and, most importantly, Germany’s catastrophic defeat at Stalingrad in December 1942–January 1943 made it evident that the war had turned decisively against Germany.

In March 1943, the attempt to kill Hitler in Operation Flash failed because the bomb placed on the Führer’s plane by Major General Henning von Tresckow failed to explode. In the autumn of 1943, those conspirators in the **Abwehr** (military intelligence), were arrested by the Gestapo.

**The Bomb Plot 1944**

**Aims**

The oath of allegiance and the 1918 myth of the ‘stab in the back’ deterred many would-be plotters from joining any conspiracy until Hitler was
assassinated. The deadlock was broken by the emergence of Count von Stauffenburg as a leading plotter in 1944. Linked to the Kreisau Circle and determined to achieve ‘internal purification’, Stauffenburg offered to assassinate Hitler by a bomb with a preset timing device. The Allied invasions in Normandy in June 1944 gave a greater sense of urgency to the conspiracy. Many generals wished to make a peace before Germany herself was invaded so that the myth of invincibility could, as in 1918, be preserved. Others, such as von Tresckow, advocated the plot because they wanted to demonstrate to posterity that not all Germans had been corrupted by Nazism. The plan to assassinate Hitler was code-named Operation Valkyrie. Its aim was to trigger a rising throughout the Reich and the occupied lands ousting the Nazi regime and replacing it by a new order with Beck as President and Carl Goerdeler as Chancellor. The new government would then make a peace with the Western Allies and end the war before the Russians invaded eastern Germany.

As Chief of Staff to General Fromm, Stauffenburg had access to the Führer's headquarters at Rastenburg. On 20 July 1944, he left his bomb in a briefcase by Hitler in a briefing room. Leaving the meeting to take a telephone call, he then left the Wolf's Lair to fly to Berlin. Hitler, though shaken, survived the bomb blast for three reasons:

- The briefcase was moved three places away from Hitler so he was no longer caught in the full blast.
- As the bomb exploded Hitler was leaning over a map on a heavy oak table that deflected much of the explosion.
- As the day was so hot the briefing took place in a wooden building, which allowed the full force of the explosion to dissipate.

In Berlin, the conspiracy was paralysed by indecision. Goebbels's broadcast that Hitler had survived undermined Stauffenburg's desperate efforts to ignite the conspiracy. By late afternoon loyalist troops led by Colonel Remer had surrounded the army headquarters in Berlin. Stauffenburg's superior, General Fromm, who had committed himself to the plot, now switched sides and arrested Stauffenburg and his fellow conspirators. In an attempt to conceal his own treachery, Fromm ordered the four to be shot in the courtyard of the Bendlerblock. General Beck, who had been unable to commit suicide, was executed in his own office.

Outcome

Hitler's revenge was severe. Hundreds of suspected conspirators were arrested, tortured and sentenced to death. Some, such as Rommel and von Tresckow, escaped by suicide. Many were executed by garroting at Plötzensee prison in north Berlin.

- The army was now emasculated. The Hitler salute became compulsory in all ranks. Political officers were appointed to root out dissent, and Himmler became commander-in-chief of the Home Army.
• But only 22 out of 2,000 generals were executed for their parts in the conspiracy. Army resistance was therefore heroic but belated. It was confined to a few individuals. Its leadership was too naive and isolated to pose a sustained threat to the regime.

• The Bomb Plot partly restored a little dignity and self-respect to the army, but its futility and its belatedness did not succeed in rehabilitating the tarnished image of the army as an institution. Total defeat in 1945 finally shattered the myths of military invincibility and the ‘stab in the back’.

The German war economy

War production

The outbreak of war in September 1939 saw the responsibility for the planning of the German war economy shared among competing agencies.

• At the Ministry of War, General Thomas led the economics section in charge of the armaments programme.

• Yet such was the overlap in the Nazi state that he had rivals for administrative supremacy of the war economy, chiefly the Ministry of Economics led by Walter Funk and the office of the Four Year Plan led by Hermann Göring.

• In March 1940, however, a Ministry of Munitions was created under Fritz Todt, and this went some way to ending the confusion in this area of production.

Early problems

Even though the first three years of war were, on the whole, successful, they created strains in the German economy. The main problem was that, until 1942, the German economy was not fully mobilised for war. Instead, it fought a series of quick wars, Blitzkrieg wars that did not place such great demands on economic production. Indeed, in the arms industry, output per head fell from 1939–40 by 12.5 per cent mainly because of the effects of conscription and the concentration on consumer industries, which in the same period saw output increase by nearly 16 per cent. However, Operation Barbarossa changed all of that. Military expenditure rose from 17.2 billion Reichsmarks in 1939 to 55.9 billion Reichsmarks in 1942. The demands of war resulted in a shift of labour, investment and priorities towards munitions; for example, the numbers working in aircraft manufacturing doubled between 1939 and 1941 but a shortage of labour became apparent even in the early days of the war.

• By May 1940 there were 3.5 million fewer workers in the workforce than one year before. This shortfall was partly made up by the use of French prisoners of war (some 800,000 by October 1940) and other nationals (mainly Poles), which made a total of around 2 million foreign workers in Germany by the end of the year. This was not enough to meet the

Discussion point

In groups discuss the following question:

To what extent was army opposition to the Nazi regime dictated by the course of the war?

After some discussion, get a member of your group to write some points down to give feedback to the rest of the class. Your points might stimulate some debate.

Biography

Fritz Sauckel

A party member from 1923, Gauleiter of Thüringia and a NSDAP member of the Reichstag, Sauckel was a committed Nazi. He was an important figure in the German war effort from 1942. As Plenipotentiary General of Labour Allocation until the end of the war, he directed the importing of foreign labour. He was executed by the Allies after the end of the war.
growing demand, with 1.7 million workers drafted into the armed forces in 1941 and a further 1.4 million called up between May 1941 and May 1942.

- Such a shortage produced urgent measures. In February 1941, General Thomas had called for the use of more rational measures of production to increase efficiency. Yet even this would not be enough. Following on from a decree in the Netherlands in February 1942, the so-called Plenipotentiary General for Labour Allocation, Fritz Sauckel, issued a compulsory labour decree for all occupied countries in August of the same year. In September, the Vichy government in France established compulsory labour for men and women between the ages of 18 and 65. Such measures brought in around 2.5 million new workers, and by the end of 1942 there were some 6.4 million foreign workers in Germany toiling for the Reich.

Speer and total war

On 3 December 1941, Hitler issued the Führer Order on the ‘Simplification and Increased Efficiency in Armaments Production’, which demanded that Todt should rationalise the armaments industry. Thereafter there was a significant change in priorities. Industry accepted responsibility for raising levels of production, with central direction coming from Todt’s ministry. In February 1942, Albert Speer was appointed Todt’s successor in the post of Minister for Weapons and Munitions. Speer developed Todt’s plans for the rationalisation of industry and the more efficient control of raw material distribution. Against the background of a more protracted struggle on the Eastern Front, a campaign of total war was launched by the regime. It was initiated in a speech by Goebbels at the Berlin Sportsplatz in February 1943 in which he called for universal labour service and the closure of all non-essential businesses. Such moves to improve production and productivity were reinforced by the appointment of Speer as Reich Minister for Armaments and Production in September 1943. This post gave Speer responsibility for all industrial output and raw materials.

Rationalisation

Almost immediately, Speer attempted to reorganise and rationalise these sectors of the economy. Many firms were still not working double shifts and production was dispersed. Speer’s aim was to introduce labour, time and space saving measures thereby boosting production. As part of this rationalisation process, the Armaments Commission was set up in 1943 to standardise production, thereby allowing greater mass production. The results were impressive.

- The promotion of better use of floor space led to production of the Me109 plane at Messerschmitt increasing from 180 per month from seven factories to 1,000 per month from three factories.
- In 1944 the numbers of tank models were reduced from 18 to 7 and the types of different vehicles from 55 to 14. The result was greater productivity.
Central control of raw materials, the reduction of handworking practices and more realistic contracts saw a rise in output per head in armaments so by 1943 the figure was 32 per cent higher than that in 1939. It must also be remembered that this was in the period when the workforce was in itself becoming less productive.

Better processes cut the amount of precious raw materials used, e.g. each gun saw a reduction of 93 per cent in the aluminium used after rationalisation had taken place.

The last years of the war saw a significant improvement in industrial production, despite Allied bombing. For example, the production of the BMW engine for planes increased by 200 per cent between 1941 and 1943 with an increase of only 12 per cent in the workforce.

Production lines were introduced, with immediate effect. For example, in the manufacturing of the Panzer III tank in 1943 they cut the time required to assemble each tank by 50 per cent.

In the manufacture of munitions, output per worker rose by 60 per cent from 1939 to 1944 despite the disruption caused by Allied bombing. Although the numbers in the industrial workforce increased by only 11 per cent between 1941 and 1943, the production of all weapons grew by 130 per cent in the same period.

Such growth was an important feature in an economy so hamstrung by labour and raw material problems. Changes in work methods, increased mechanisation, better distribution of materials, a more equitable wage structure for German workers and the introduction of mass production techniques resulted in significant increases in productivity. This was supported by a leap in military expenditure.

Continuing chaos

Despite the impressive improvement in the efficiency of the war economy under Speer’s guidance, economic performance during the war was not coherently organised. The Nazi state was too chaotic, with too many competing agencies/power blocs for any consistent policy to be formulated. Often when clear direction was given from the centre, it countered economic logic. But much of Nazism as an ideology was both irrational and illogical, the ‘Final Solution’ being the clearest case in point, as you will soon read. Until the ideology was undermined by military failure, however, its aims were supported at least implicitly by large sections of the financial and industrial world.

The looting of conquered countries was undertaken in a systematic way by sections of German business such as the chemicals giant IG Farben, which used its influence with Nazi officialdom to create a position as the largest chemical producer in Europe by 1942. (The profits of IG Farben had more than doubled from 1936 to a figure of 300 million Reichsmarks by 1940.)

Other companies, such as the state-run Reichswerke, acquired ownership of large sections of conquered enterprises, in Reichswerke’s case,
steal, mining and related industry. After the Anschluss with Austria and the takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1938, Reichswerke took over large sections of those countries' enterprises under Göring's instructions. This included companies such as Skoda and Steyr-Daimler-Puch. All acquisition of businesses in occupied lands was regulated by the state, which limited private involvement because of the desire to avoid direct competition with the state.

Following the Bomb Plot, Goebbels was appointed to the post of Reich Plenipotentiary for Total War. This gave him even greater control over production and allowed his ally Speer more scope for change. From January 1945 the German economy was in a state of collapse, partly as a consequence of invasion but also because of exhaustion and the effects of the Allied bombing programme. As it was apparent that defeat was inevitable, Hitler ordered the evacuation of all in the path of the advancing armies and a ‘scorched earth’ policy. However, this order was ignored by Speer who refused to destroy German industry in the west, understanding that it would be essential for German recovery after the end of the war.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Million marks</th>
<th>Percentage of net domestic product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>37,340</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>66,445</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>86,500</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>110,400</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>132,800</td>
<td>98.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>149,800</td>
<td>115.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Use of foreign workers

The improved figures in production are even more impressive when one considers that the German economy increasingly relied on foreign workers whose productivity was 60–80 per cent lower than that of the German worker, not surprising, given the appalling way most of the foreign workers were treated. Workers from the east, in particular, were treated with a contempt that acted to lower their productivity. From 1940 Polish workers suffered numerous restrictions, including being forced to wear a yellow badge marked with a P and not being able to use public transport. The use of foreign labour became of even greater importance once all able bodied German men were called to the front. From 1943 to the end of the war, 2.5 million extra foreign workers were employed.

• In an attempt to increase production, however, Fritz Sauckel, Plenipotentiary General for Labour Allocation, attempted to improve the
situation of all workers with regard to pay and overtime. In March 1944, all eastern workers were given the same pay and benefits as other foreign labourers.

- But attempts to improve conditions were far too little, and too late. Thousands died on projects such as the V2 rocket production at Peenemünde in the Harz Mountains for want of basic food, shelter and sanitary provision.

As a result of such poor treatment, the recruitment of millions of forced labourers failed to solve Germany's foreign labour problems.

**Raw materials**

**Iron ore**

The factor that, more than any other, shaped Nazi war aims and plans was Germany's lack of the natural resources, iron, coal, oil and the other materials, that it needed for a sustained war effort. Perhaps above all else it lacked reserves of high-quality iron ore. The attempt to compensate for this led to the attempts at the huge Reichswerke Hermann Göring to develop the production of low grade ore for manufacturing purposes. Yet this could never meet the demands of the expanding military needs, thereby making Germany in part dependent on imports, in particular from Sweden.

- During the war the amount of ore imported from neutral Sweden remained constant: in 1940 it was 5.4 million tons and in 1943 it was 5.6 million tons.
- However, the annexations of Austria, Bohemia, Poland and Alsace-Lorraine by 1940 brought with them huge quantities of high-quality iron ore.
- In 1943 these areas alone produced 6.7 million tons for the Nazi war effort.

Overall, the supplies of iron ore to the German war economy increased from 13.4 million to 20.2 million tons between 1940 and 1943. Other areas of conquered Europe yielded raw materials that were vital for the war effort too: manganese ore from the Soviet Union, nickel from Norway and bauxite from France, for example.

**Other raw materials**

The important point to note is this: Germany needed to annex or have control over the natural resources of other nations in order to fight a major war. That this policy failed was due to the failure of the military *Blitzkreig* from 1942. The invasion of the Soviet Union had ideological causes, the destruction of Bolshevism being a central theme of *Mein Kampf*. Yet there were very strong economic considerations, not least the desire to control the oil fields in the Caucasus.
• German access to oil supplies was limited, the main supplier being Romania, which exported nearly 3 million tons to its ally in 1943. However, this was not enough to supply an economy and armed forces that from 1942 were engaged in total war. Even conquest did not ensure increased supply of needed materials.

• Despite the increase in ore and the acquisition of the steel industries of the Low Countries and France, there was a chronic shortage of steel throughout the war and particularly before 1942. In 1941 it was calculated that demand for steel exceeded supply by 30 per cent.

• This was mostly due to a shortage of coal despite Germany’s large natural reserves and the acquisition of large mining reserves in the Soviet Union and Belgium. As with other industries, however, the Soviets had destroyed virtually all they had to leave behind. The extent of this destruction is clear when one considers that in 1942, the Donets Basin, which was rich in coal, only produced one-twentieth of its pre-war output. The production of German coal remained static throughout the war, output of hard coal increasing by 1.5 million tons or around 1 per cent. This was a factor that was crucial in limiting the growth of steel production. Coal from other areas such as Belgium was used to fuel indigenous industry.

The failure of the Nazis to fully exploit the raw materials of the countries they occupied was crucial in preventing the expansion of the German economy necessary to fight a major war.

Female labour

Despite the labour shortage in Germany, between 1939 and 1944 only 200,000 extra women entered the workforce. In 1939 the number of women in employment was 14.6 million, a figure that actually declined to 14.2 million in 1941 and peaked at 14.9 million in 1944. The refusal of Hitler to allow conscription of women was ideologically based, the Nazi view of the role of women revolving around ‘Kinder, Küche, Kirche’ (children, kitchen, church). Even with the move towards ‘total war’, the registration of women to work in January 1943 had little effect – in all, only some 400,000 women were recruited for work. Despite the shortfall of 4 million workers in the economy by 1944, there were still over 1,360,000 women in domestic service. Attempts by Speer to rectify this glaring anomaly in September of that year had little effect due to the number of exemptions allowed and the fact that Hitler still refused to countenance full-scale mobilisation. Yet there were other factors which prevented a greater proportion of women entering war work.

• As women had been very much encouraged to marry and raise families, so the numbers of women in such a situation had risen dramatically, nearly 1 million more children being born in Germany in 1939 than six years previously. Similarly, a far higher proportion of women were married by the eve of the war for the 25–30-year-old age group, the difference between 1933 and 1939 was 9.2 per cent. The benefits paid
to wives of soldiers were a great disincentive to work and meant that wives could resist the temptation to supplement their husband's pay. All of this made the conscription of women harder and further complicated the labour crisis.

- The proportion of women in the workforce at the start of the war was relatively high despite Nazi ideology. Of those between the ages of 15 and 60, 52 per cent of women were working and an astonishingly high 88.7 per cent of single women were in employment. This meant that there was not the slack in the employment market that was found elsewhere, especially as Germany had been approaching full employment as a consequence of the rearmament programme started in the mid-1930s.

- The nature of women’s employment also made it harder to redistribute women into essential war industry. Large numbers of women worked in agriculture – in 1939 they comprised 36.6 per cent of the workforce and their importance grew with the conscription of men into the army. By 1944, 65.5 per cent of the agricultural workforce were women (this figure applies to native-born Germans). Similarly, a high proportion of women were employed in textiles in 1939 (58.2 per cent), and these women could not be spared for other areas of war work such as munitions because of the demands on the industry and the effects of male conscription.

So Nazi ideology was not the sole reason why women were not fully mobilised into essential war work from 1939. The fact was that the proportion of women already in the workforce was significantly high.

War economy: conclusion

The German economy did not expand sufficiently to meet the demands of ‘total war’. This was due to many factors, primary among which were the shortage of raw materials and the shortage of labour. The key to economic failure was the fact that conquest did not make up the shortfall in these two essential components of any economy. Yet economic development was also influenced by factors that had a negative effect on overall productivity. In the early years of the war, the consumer goods sector of the economy shifted production to meet the demands of the military but not wholly so. The slow growth in armaments and the lack of restructuring of industry reflects the continuity with the pre-war period. This was dictated by the political priorities of a regime brought to power on the back of socio-economic turmoil and wishing to avoid its repetition at all costs. As has been shown, there was a conflict between the impulses of an ideologically destructive regime and one in need of economic growth to survive. So from 1942 the economy, and industry in particular, underwent a rationalisation process that made it more productive. However, the fundamental problem was the lack of raw materials and labour. It is the greatest irony of the Second World War that while the Nazi regime scoured Europe looking for labour, it was in the process of murdering six million Jews.

SKILLS BUILDER

In not more than 200 words, explain why the labour shortage in Germany in the war years was not solved by recruitment of women workers.

SKILLS BUILDER

Using all of the relevant information in the unit thus far, identify the strengths and weakness of the German war economy. Write down your ideas on a table in points. You may wish to work with another member of your group in the completion of this task.
The Final Solution

Introduction

The historian Joachin Fest wrote in his book about Nazi Germany *The Face of the Third Reich*, published in 1970:

At the core of National Socialism, the foundation of its own belief and superiority and at the same time the ‘state philosophy’ of the Third Reich, lay the idea of race.

The creation of a racially ‘pure’ Germany lay at the heart of Hitler’s world view and vision for a New Germany. That this ‘vision’ ultimately led to systematic mass murder on a scale hitherto unimaginable will be explained in this section of the unit. The central importance of racial policy means that it was a central theme in the process of the regime’s radicalisation and increasingly dominated Nazi domestic policy. The manner in which racial policy initiatives emerged and were implemented give us the clearest examples of how the Nazi state operated (as was explained in Unit 8).

The prophecy

Central to Hitler’s world view was the destruction of the power of International Jewry and a titanic military struggle to win the Aryan people living space. To Hitler, these themes were bound up with each other. On 30 January 1939, Hitler spoke to a packed and expectant Reichstag. In his speech he revealed the link that he made between war and racial struggle:

I want today to be a prophet again: if international finance inside and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, the result will not be the bolshevisation of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

In his speech Hitler used the word *Vernichtung*, which translates into English as ‘annihilation’. It should not be automatically assumed that, by this, Hitler had already planned the Final Solution. The conditions for the Final Solution, the circumstance of war, the invasion of Russia, the lawlessness of the conquered territories, local initiatives and population movement, did not yet exist. But the significance of this speech should not be overlooked; for Hitler the prophet, these words signalled the consequences of the ultimate struggle between International Jewry and the Aryan world. It was a struggle that he felt was inevitable and one for which he ultimately took responsibility.

However, there was never a plan, a blueprint for the annihilation of Germany’s Jews. Nor was there a coherent policy to deal with the Jewish Question at any point in the 1930s. Indeed, policy was uneven and was often made in response to events. It also was framed in response to the demands of the rank and file Nazi party and SA members who constituted a radical impetus from below. As you read in Unit 8, pages 189–195,
during the first few years of the regime, official anti-Semitism was limited by the need to ensure economic recovery and maintain the veneer of legality both at home and abroad. It is important to show how the murderous plan to wipe out the Jews of Europe emerged because the events show clearly how the Jewish policy of the Nazi state was made in an ad hoc fashion.

Persecution of Germany’s Jews

The start of the war led to a further tightening of restrictions on the Jews. On 1 September a curfew was introduced for all Jews, and on 21 September Reinhard Heydrich ordered the concentration of Jews around railway junctions. At the same time, all radio sets were confiscated from Jews in Germany. The relentless policy of separating the Jews from mainstream German society continued. In January 1940 all ration books belonging to Jews were to be stamped with a capital ‘J’. The aim was to identify Jews and ensure that they did not claim goods barred to Jews, such as leather. On 1 September 1941 all Jews were ordered to wear a Star of David badge; failure to do so would lead to immediate arrest and imprisonment. The Nazi obsession with identifying who was a Jew for purposes of persecution continued throughout the war. The persecution was relentless, often focusing on seemingly trivial issues; for example, in November 1942 a law was passed stating that Jews could no longer receive the Reich sports medal. All this was happening while mass murder had already begun in the East. The final humiliation for many German Jews was in April 1943 when they finally lost their German citizenship.

Case study: Victor Klemperer

On the outbreak of war, Victor Klemperer was a retired Jewish professor of French at the University of Dresden. Married to a non-Jew, Eva, Klemperer had been increasingly discriminated against since the Nazis took power in 1939. Victor kept a diary that, at regular intervals, he gave to a non-Jewish friend for safe keeping. These diaries have become the most vivid source of information about the day-to-day life of Jews in Nazi Germany. In 1940 Victor and Eve were forced from their home and made to share an overcrowded Jews’ House (a house specially designated for Jews to live in). For carelessly forgetting to black out his window at night, Victor was imprisoned in June 1941. In September he and his wife were forced to put on the Star of David, and the following month his typewriter was confiscated. Jews started to be deported east, but Klemperer was saved by the fact that he had been awarded the Iron Cross First Class (Germany's highest military decoration) in the First World War and by the fact that his wife was not a Jew. However, by mid-1942 he and his wife were reduced to begging because the rations for Jews were so small, and the Jews’ House in which they lived was frequently ransacked by the Gestapo.

In February 1945 Victor and Eva were told that the Jews’ House was to be evacuated, although neither of their names appeared on the list of those to
be deported. However, just before the evacuation was due to take place, Dresden was bombed. Victor Klemperer tore the Star of David off his coat and fled into the countryside where he was given shelter by a former domestic servant. After the war he and his wife returned to Dresden and he was restored to the status of Professor at the University of Dresden. Eva died in 1951 but Victor married again. He died in 1959 but it was not until the 1990s and after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the communist East Germany that his second wife published the diaries.

In May 1942 when it was clear that all Jews in Germany were threatened by deportation, Klemperer wrote in his diary:

But I shall go on writing, this is my heroism. I intend to bear witness, precise witness.

**Turning points**

**September 1939**

The advent of war in September 1939 was another crucial turning point in Nazi racial policy. Over the next four years the circumstance emerged in which the central point of Hitler's ideology – the removal of Jews from Germany and the destruction of the supposed power of International Jewry – could take place. The successful conquest of Poland in 1939 and then much of western Europe in 1940 brought millions more Jews under direct Nazi rule. The concentration of Jews in specified areas began early in the war. On 30 October 1939 Himmler ordered the deportation of Jews from the parts of Poland now incorporated into the Reich to the General Government (German-occupied Poland), which was administered by Hans Frank. In January 1940 Jews were used for slave labour and confined to ghettos in the previously Polish towns of Lodz, Warsaw, Lublin, Radom and Lvov.

**Summer 1940**

From the start of the war to the end of 1940, the Final Solution to the Jewish Question in the minds of most leading Nazis was to be a territorial one. By the summer of 1940, Richard Heydrich was suggesting that the three and a quarter million Jews under German control should be moved to a suitable territory. The response of the Jewish section of the Foreign Office was to suggest Madagascar. Hitler was openly enthusiastic about such a scheme and mentioned it to the Italian leader Benito Mussolini in June 1940. Such a plan was, in reality, a plan of annihilation; it was clear that Madagascar could not sustain the Jewish population of Europe and that most would perish during transportation or in the following months due to lack of food. The weakness of the plan was that it relied on the defeat of the British and on German control of the high seas.

**June 1941**

The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 further increased the number of Jews under Nazi control. The invasion of Russia had raised the
possibility of relocating Europe’s Jews to the other side of the Urals, but, again, the plan relied on military victory. Far from being a stage on the route to the Holocaust, the invasion of Russia was an important reason for its implementation. Nazi propaganda relentlessly insisted that war with Russia was a ‘racial war’, but this focus was intended to convince an increasingly anxious public of the justification for the invasion. It should be remembered that Hitler’s driving ambitions throughout his career were the destruction of communism and the conquest of Lebensraum (living space) in the East. The destruction of the Jews was a consequence of this policy. As in Poland two years before, the conquest of Russia brought contact with Orthodox Jews condemned as sub-human by racist extremists within the SS. In June, as Nazi troops swept across the western Soviet Union, SS Einsatzgruppen were authorised by Hitler to exterminate Jews in Russia. Eight months later 700,000 Jews had been murdered.

Autumn 1941

But even in September 1941 the Nazi regime was undecided about the fate of Europe’s Jews. Shooting Jews, which had been the preferred option up to this point, was not a realistic option for the millions more Jews of German-dominated Europe because it was messy. Deporting Jews east beyond the Urals would have to wait until after the expected victory over the Soviet Union. Up to September 1941, Hitler dithered about the fate of the Jews, seeing them as potential pawns/hostages in any future dealings with the USA. The important turning point seems to have been in mid-September when Hitler changed his attitude for two main reasons:

- In August 1941 Stalin had ordered the deportation to Siberia of 600,000 ethnic Germans whose families had lived in the Volga region for generations. A further 400,000 were to follow.
- Hitler’s fury at Stalin’s order was matched by his response to Roosevelt’s order on 11 September 1941 that the US navy should shoot on sight at any German warships considered as threatening.

Deportations

As summer turned to autumn on the eastern front the German advance slowed, and Hitler realised he could not wait until 1942 to deal with the Jewish Question. Conditions in the east, however, led to pressure for action. After its conquest, part of Poland was divided into regions known as Gau. All the Gauleiter were anxious to remove the Jews from their territories. However, as one Gauleiter deported the Jews of his Gau to the east, so another found his Gau with a greater number of Jews.

- By late 1941 the pressure came from Gauleiter in the west, including Goebbels, that they be allowed to deport their Jews. This initiative in turn triggered demands from Gauleiter in the east, such as Arthur Greiser of the Warthegau, for permission to take more radical action, i.e. extermination.
On 16 September Hitler and Himmler met for lunch to discuss deportations. In mid-September the order was given for the deportations to the east; so, for example, on 18 September Arthur Greiser received a letter from Himmler outlining the deportations of Jews from Bohemia and Moravia to the Warthegau. This measure would be followed by deportations further eastwards at a later date.

This was, according to Ian Kershaw in *Nemesis* (published in 2000) ‘the trigger to a crucial phase in the gradual emergence of a comprehensive programme for genocide’. Kershaw argues that the decision to deport to the east brought the Final Solution a massive step further.

However, Hitler’s agreement to deportation of the Jews to the east was not tantamount to a decision for the Final Solution. What it did was lead to new initiatives from numerous local and regional Nazi leaders. In some areas in Poland, the order to deport eastwards led to local initiatives; for example, in October in Lublin, the Police Chief Globocnik ordered the construction of gassing facilities at a camp at Belzec for killing Jews incapable of work. In Lodz Jews were being shot and gassed in vans in the same month. In December 1941 gas vans began their work of killing 100,000 Jews of the Warthegau at Chelmno. Central policy was partly made in response to events taking place on the ground:

- In October the Gestapo chief, Heinrich Muller, published Himmler’s order that no Jew could now emigrate from the Reich.
- On 21 November and in response to Goebbels’s prompting, the Führer demanded an ‘aggressive policy’ to rid Berlin of Jews. Goebbels-inspired propaganda stirred up anti-Jewish hatred; for example, an article in *Das Reich* entitled ‘The Jews are Guilty’ explicitly spoke about the prophecy of the ‘annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe’.
- In late November invitations were issued for a conference to discuss the Jewish Question to be held at Wannsee. Hinrich Lohse, the Commissioner for Ostland who had ordered the gassing of Jews in October concluded that by November ‘the Jewish Question has probably been clarified by verbal discussions’. However, confusion persisted into November as 5,000 German Jews were shot in Lithuania while in Lodz the Germans were worrying about the sanitary conditions in the ghetto.

**December 1941**

The final turning point was the declaration of war against the USA on 11 December 1941. This, in Hitler’s mind, had brought about the war mentioned as part of his ‘prophetic speech’ to the Reichstag of 30 January 1939. On 12 December he addressed a gathering of Reichsleiter and Gauleiter evoking his ‘prophecy’. On 18 December Hitler told Himmler that the Jews were to be ‘exterminated as partisans’. As Russian Jews were already being shot this could only mean the authorisation for the extermination of all European Jews. This meeting was critical in resolving any further doubt.
The ruthless enforcement of the Final Solution from January 1942 and the huge logistic effort required to sustain it as Germany began to lose the war suggests that by then a decisive clarification policy had been made.

**Wannsee Conference**

The next key stepping stone on the road to the Final Solution was the Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942. The conference was chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, who attempted to coordinate the various arms of the Nazi government into an agreement about the steps that were to be taken next. At Wannsee the State Secretary of the Government General, Josef Bühler, asked that his area should have its Jews ‘removed’ as quickly as possible. By the spring of 1942 work began on the construction of the extermination centres of Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka. By this point it is clear that a systematic programme for the annihilation of Europe’s Jews had been formed. In the next few months German Jews were deported to the ghettos in the east and then on to the death camps of Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and Auschwitz.

**Extermination**

As the network of concentration camps spread, there were those within the SS such as Oswald Pohl who wished to exploit fully the labour resource at hand. Pohl was in charge of the development of the WVHA, which was the economic administration section of the SS. By 1942, he had control of 20 concentration and 165 labour camps. He envisaged a role for the camps akin to the gulag in the Soviet Union. Similarly, those with the responsibility for the administration of the territories in the east, such as Gauleiter Wilhelm Kube, argued that the export of labour to the fatherland had left them with a labour shortage of their own which could only be filled by the Jews. A compromise was for the SS to employ Jewish labour in and around the concentration camps – but to work them to death. German industry systematically exploited Jewish labour throughout the war; for example, IG Farben used labour at the huge Monowitz-Buna complex near Auschwitz. But the main industry was that of death. The figures for the transportation and systematic annihilation of Europe’s Jewish population are vast. At the largest extermination camp, Auschwitz, over a million were murdered. At Treblinka, which was also in Poland, 800,000 were murdered; at Sobibor 300,000 died. What is clear is that even as late as July 1944 when resources were hard pressed, Adolf Eichmann clearly had priority to use the railways to transport Jews to their death, in this case from Hungary. The pursuit of the Final Solution clarifies the relationship between ideological considerations and the demands of the economy for labour and materials. There is little doubt that conquest in search for the latter was the means by which Hitler’s Weltanschauung (world view) could be realised. By the time Auschwitz was liberated by Soviet troops in January 1945 approximately 6 million Jews had been murdered.

**Biography**

**Adolf Eichmann**

Eichmann was head of the innocuously named Department IV B2 of the RSHA, which was the chief administrative office of the SS. Department IV was the state police (the Gestapo), and the sub-section IV B2 was devoted to Jewish affairs.

**Definition**

**Gulag**

The vast Soviet prison system that was mainly located in Siberia. Prisoners were used as slave labour although many died because of the brutality of the system.
The Final Solution: conclusion

In his diaries in March 1942, Goebbels described a ‘fairly barbaric procedure’ taking place in the east. He had been important, as had Heydrich, in the process of radicalisation of anti-Semitic policy. In the fulfilment of the Final Solution, complicity was huge, from the army to a civil service as willing as ever to ‘work towards the Führer’. Hitler's role was in authorising more than directing but also decisive and indispensable. Part of the pressure for ‘a solution’ came from below; for example, Hans Frank, the Gauleiter of the General Government, was increasingly concerned that his area of the Nazi Empire was being used by Heydrich as a dumping ground for Jews. The Final Solution was the worst example of how thousands had become trapped in ‘working towards the Führer’, even if it meant selling their soul. In his conclusion to The Third Reich: A New History (published in 2000), Michael Burleigh wrote that the Nazi leaders:

> embodied the negation of everything worthwhile about being human; their followers demeaned and shamed themselves.

Unit summary

What have you learned in this unit?

Throughout most of the Second World War, morale held up well on the German Home Front. However, it was dented by military reverses, the prospect of defeat and bombing. But the Home Front did not collapse as in the First World War. Opposition was limited despite the realisation from 1943 onwards that Germany was heading for defeat. The opposition that did exist was divided, lacked leadership and was ruthlessly suppressed. Those who were in a position to form effective opposition to the Nazis failed to act decisively until late in the war. The war economy was not fully mobilised until 1942. Reforms introduced by Albert Speer added greater efficiency, but the war economy was hampered by lack of labour and raw materials throughout. The Final Solution was the result of numerous agencies working towards a Führer who had at the very heart of his world view a desire to see the removal of Jews from Germany and the destruction of International Jewry. The process of radicalisation, which sped up in the context of wartime, led to ever more murderous initiatives from above and below.

What skills have you used in this unit?

You have come to a number of decisions that have clarified your understanding of many issues. You have prioritised the importance of factors and you have made judgements that you have had to justify.

Exam style question

This is the sort of question you will find appearing on the examination paper as a Section A question:
‘Systematic extermination emerged as the Final Solution to the Jewish Question as a result of the chaotic nature of the Nazi state.’

How far do you agree with this opinion?

**SKILLS BUILDER**

1 **Discussion point**
   In groups, discuss the following question:
   ‘Why was there so little opposition to the Nazi state in Germany during the Second World War?’

2 **Hitler’s role**
   Having studied how the Nazi state operates and the events in the evolution of the Final Solution, how would you summarise Hitler’s role and that of his leading lieutenants including Himmler, Heydrich, Goebbels and Göring?

3 **Research**
   Of Europe’s approximately 11 million Jews in 1939, 6 million were murdered as part of the Final Solution. Many people’s lives were touched by the events. Here are the names of just five of them:
   - Anne Frank
   - Petr Ginz
   - Primo Levi
   - Raoul Wallenberg.
   In order to understand the Final Solution, you should try to research as much as you can about these individuals, their lives and their deaths.