

Teaching notes

This resource is one of a sequence of eight resources, originally planned for OCR's Unit 2 Option: Democracy and Dictatorships in Germany 1919-1963 (Y221). The sequence focuses on the key topic 'The impact of war and defeat on Germany 1939-49'. Although the content of the resources is drawn from this particular specification, there is no reason why they couldn't be used to support the teaching of other similar courses, perhaps with some adaptation of the suggested activities.

The eight resources in the sequence are:

1. **The war economy and Total War (this resource)**
2. The impact of bombing (search '25207' to find it on [Teachit History](#))
3. Racial policies and the Final Solution (search '25208')
4. Morale (search '25209')
5. Opposition and resistance (search '25210')
6. Consequences of the Second World War (search '25211')
7. The Cold War and Potsdam (search '25212')
8. Bizonia and the Berlin Blockade (search '25213')

Each resource contains a section of reading followed by some suggested tasks. These could be completed in class or as independent homework tasks.

Background

When Adolf Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* in 1924, he believed that one of the reasons for Germany's defeat in the First World War was a lack of raw materials and resources. In March 1918 Germany had managed to secure huge tracts of territory in the east following the Treaty of Brest Litovsk and seemed poised to use these vast resources to win the war. Hitler believed that a German victory was dependent on a similar seizure of territory, knowing that Germany did not have sufficient quantities of food, oil, metals or chemicals to win. This became apparent during the war when Germany faced the enormous productive capacity of the USA, USSR and the British Empire combined.

In 1936 Adolf Hitler appointed Herman Goering as the Reich Plenipotentiary for the Office of the Four Year Plan. This put Goering in charge of rearmament and the war industry and in the following three years he attempted to make Germany self-sufficient. However, in the first year of the Second World War, from 1939 to 1940 it was clear that Germany had not achieved either autarky in supplying the population and the army with food and fuel, or the levels of arms output that Hitler desired. There were significant shortages, meaning Hitler had to make compromises between supplying the German army, navy and air force. These compromises and changes to Germany's military capabilities had a significant effect on Germany's ability to wage war.

Hitler's choices

Arms production by mid-1939 needed to be drastically cut back due to steel and fuel shortages and a lack of skilled engineers and designers. Each branch of the German military naturally demanded to have the lion's share of resources for their arms construction programs, but Hitler prioritised the needs of the army and the air force over the German navy. A month before the Second World War began, he prioritised demands from Goering, who was also head of the air force (Luftwaffe) and as a result navy ship building had to be cut back to build planes and ammunition. Two thirds of all munitions production throughout the war was devoted to aircraft building and ammunition but Hitler's change in priorities at the start of the war caused immense upheaval:

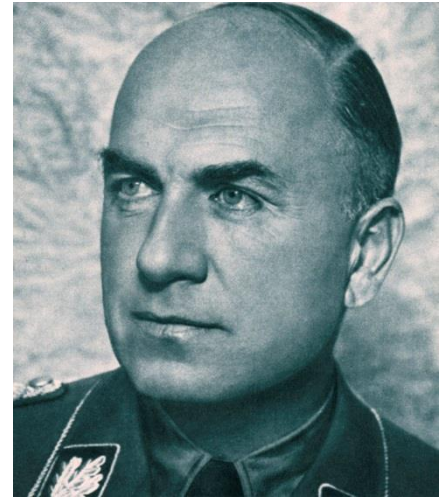
1. New plans for planes had to be drawn up.
2. New machines to build them had to be created and old ones re-designed.
3. Existing factories needed to be re-structured and new ones built.

In effect, Hitler was introducing changes to the defence industry that the British had instituted from 1936 onwards, long before the conflict had begun, which partly contributed towards the chaos in German arms production that lasted for much of the war. Arms production took nearly a year to significantly increase and Hitler criticised the army officer in charge of arms procurement, General Georg Thomas. He dismissed Thomas and instead created a new bureaucratic ministry of munitions, headed by the SS engineer Fritz Todt.

Fritz Todt

Todt had been a favourite of Hitler's since the 1930s because he had designed and built the German motorway network (the Autobahns) and had begun a long defensive system along the western border of Germany in 1938 called the West Wall. However, Todt was far less effective in producing sufficient armaments for the Third Reich, in part because he had inherited a chaotic system of arms manufacturing, and also because Hitler's faith in Todt as an organiser was greatly misplaced. He was not the efficient problem solver the Führer imagined him to be. By 1942 Todt had become pessimistic about the war and believed that Germany could not produce enough armaments or fuel to win (this was a view shared by several senior generals but ignored by Hitler and Goering). When Todt took over the role of minister of munitions, he had been ordered by Hitler to simplify arms production and organised it into five principal committees:

1. ammunition
2. weapons
3. tanks
4. engineering
5. equipment



Fritz Todt

Fritz Todt / Photo / Credit: akg-images / Universal Images Group / Copyright © akg-images / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

By 1942 he had accumulated immense power over Germany's war economy and was able to use large numbers of forced workers and slave labour to produce armaments and infrastructure. In February 1942, while visiting Hitler at his forward command at Rastenberg, Todt died in a mysterious plane crash and his armaments empire within the Third Reich was passed to one of Hitler's favourites, his personal architect Albert Speer.

Albert Speer



Albert Speer

Albert Speer / Photo / 1940 / Photo / Credit: akg-images / Universal Images Group / Copyright © akg-images / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

Speer had been at Rastenberg the night that Todt was killed and was given his entire portfolio of responsibilities the next day. Herman Goering hoped that he would inherit Todt's position and incorporate it into the Office of the Four Year Plan, but his poor preparation for the war and his many failings in creating a self-sufficient state meant that by 1942 Goering was fast losing favour with Hitler.

When Speer took on the new responsibilities he discovered widespread chaos in the German armaments industry. Too many types of tanks, armoured cars, aircraft and other vehicles were being made, many of them were complex in design (a ploy by the manufacturers to make them more expensive) meaning they took longer to make and were more likely to need repairing. Speer also found factories that were standing empty and arms factories that were fully staffed but no work was taking place. His first task was to streamline the arms industry. He:

1. Put arms manufacturers directly under his control.
2. Cut back on unnecessary bureaucracy and paperwork.
3. Brought industrialists in to the ministry for munitions and relied on their expertise instead of military men.
4. Combined small firms making specialist equipment together, so they were not duplicating each other's work.

Consequently, there were significant improvements in arms manufacture:

1. Construction times fell dramatically (a U-Boat took 16 weeks instead of 42 to build).
2. Arms manufacturing costs declined as Speer was better able to impose maximum prices on arms manufacturers.
3. Efficiency advisors were appointed to all major firms to show how to prevent the waste of valuable commodities such as steel.
4. There was a reduction in the types of vehicles being made (for example there were 151 different types of lorries being manufactured in 1939 and Speer reduced this to 23 by 1942).

By 1944 the German arms industry had become fifty percent more efficient than it had been in 1942, but this was still insufficient compared with the vast productive power of Germany's enemies. The table below gives a snapshot of allied war production compared to German output, in the field of aircraft production:

Country	1942	1943	1944
Germany	15,000	26,000	40,000
Britain	23,000	35,000	47,000
USSR	21,000	37,000	52,000
USA	48,000	86,000	114,000

Germany produced approximately 6,000 tanks a year over the three years from 1942-44, in the same period the USSR produced 19,000 tanks a year and American tank production increased from 17,000 tanks in 1942 to 29,000 in 1944.

Joseph Goebbels

In February 1943, news of an immense military catastrophe was finally made public in Germany. The German Sixth Army had been lost at Stalingrad and the Führer's dreams of conquering Russia were fast evaporating. Hitler, now increasingly unwell, had retreated from public life by this point, leaving his minister for propaganda and public enlightenment, Joseph Goebbels, to be the public face of the regime. The news that the Sixth Army, which had marched into Paris in 1940, had been annihilated by the Russians in the siege at Stalingrad led many ordinary Germans to believe that the war was lost. Goebbels wanted to use the shock of the disaster to launch a new phase of government control over the economy. He spoke to a packed audience of party members at the Berlin Sportspalast on 18 February 1943 and demanded a new policy of 'Total War'. He said:



Joseph Goebbels

Joseph Goebbels / Photo / Credit: Keystone / Hulton Archive / Getty Images / Universal Images Group / Copyright © Getty Images / For Education Use Only. This and millions of other educational images are available through Britannica Image Quest. For a free trial, please visit www.britannica.co.uk/trial

'The danger facing us is enormous. The efforts we take to meet it must be just as enormous. The time has come to remove the kid gloves and use our fists. We can no longer make only partial and careless use of the war potential at home and in the significant parts of Europe that we control. We must use our full resources, as quickly and thoroughly as it is organisationally and practically possible ...'

He claimed that there were 'slackers' in the German economy who were doing no work or fighting at the front for the country. The next few years, he announced, would be hard on the German people. He stated:

'We would rather wear worn clothing for a few years than have our people wear rags for a few centuries. What good are fashion salons today? They only use light, heat and workers. They will reappear when the war is over. What good are beauty shops that encourage a cult of beauty and take enormous time and energy? In peace they are wonderful, but a waste of time during war. Our women and girls will be able to greet our victorious returning soldiers without their peacetime finery.'

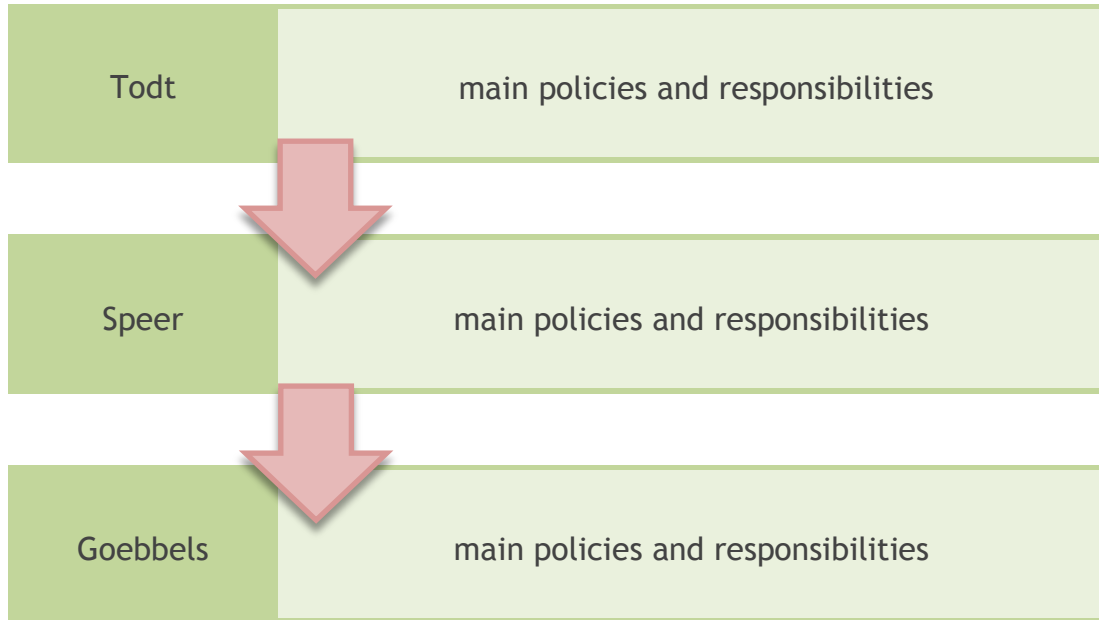
Goebbels announced the closure of:

1. all nightclubs
2. bars and restaurants
3. luxury hotels

The staff would be re-assigned for essential war work or sent to fight, but in reality these measures did little to change Germany's wartime economic crisis. Instead they provided German people with a morale boost and created the perception that the government was acting decisively to save the nation.

Tasks:

1. Create a flow chart that shows the influence of the three different ministers on the German war economy. You might want to follow the example below:



2. Which minister was most successful in resolving Germany's wartime problems? Use evidence to support your answer.