

Perspective: Society and Economy

The Challenges facing Great Britain: 1920-1939

1. Introduction

To many contemporary observers, **Great Britain** in 1919 did not seem like a country that had just triumphed in war. The country emerged physically and psychologically exhausted from World War One. During the inter-war period a series of political, economic and social crises drove home Britain's dramatically changed circumstances.

2. Political changes

At the outbreak of World War One, Britain stood at the centre of an enormous empire. However, four years of war left Britain weakened at the very time movements demanding independence began to surge up throughout their colonies. The establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 encouraged others, notably **Mahatma Gandhi** in India, to emulate Ireland's achievement.

Before World War One, the British political landscape was dominated by two main parties: the **Liberals** and the **Conservatives**. A Liberal government led Britain into war. The **Labour Party** played only a minor role at that time. However, by the war's end this had changed. After the 1918 general election, Labour emerged as the main opposition party. The Conservatives and Liberals formed a coalition government led by **Lloyd George** until 1922.

The Liberals entered a prolonged period of decline from which they never recovered. In future, the British electorate were offered a clear left/right choice: to vote either Labour or Conservative.

Britain's involvement in World War One triggered major social changes. The election results of 1918 demonstrated that British society had become more **democratic**:

- Previously under-represented groups such as **women in general and working class men in particular** became better organised and more powerful during the war.
- Full employment had also meant that the distribution of income had shifted in favour of the poor. So, in relative terms, the status of the aristocracy was diminished.

All this encouraged the growth of less deferential social attitudes. The strict class hierarchy of pre-war Britain disappeared for good in the immediate post-war years.

Yet, while the working class became a more powerful political force in British society, it shrank as a proportion of the employed population. Increasing numbers of men and women in inter-war Britain found work in '**white collar**' (i.e. administrative) jobs and began to swell the ranks of the middle class.

3. The economic challenge

In 1914, Britain was the world's leading creditor nation and the world's largest provider of banking, insurance and shipping services. However, the cost of waging four years of total war was **£35 billion** (approximately **136% of GDP**). This massive expenditure was funded by (a) consuming the country's entire revenue base and (b) becoming heavily indebted to the United States. Further, Britain's war debts forced its government to take the pound off the gold standard in 1919. As a result of these developments, the world's financial centre shifted from the City of London to Wall Street in New York, and the USA emerged as the world's leading economy.

Worse still, foreign trade, a key part of the British economy, was badly affected by the war. Countries

cut off from regular supplies of British manufactured goods had decided to set up their own industries. Instead of being reliant on Britain, these nations (especially the USA and Japan) began to directly compete with her. Britain never recovered its former share of world trade.

Another significant factor in Britain's economic decline (relative to her competitors) had been looming even before World War One began: the failure of key British industries to keep pace with their overseas rivals. The British were once *the* pioneers in the fields of engineering and textiles. However, complacency saw successive British governments fail to match the investment in technical education made by their leading rivals, Germany and the USA. Both produced a far greater supply of engineers than Britain.

4. The General Strike

In the 1918 election, **Lloyd George** promised to create '*a land fit for heroes*.' An ambitious plan for national reconstruction was drawn up by **Christopher Addison**. It included a massive program to build houses and expand the health services. However, there was a severe economic downturn in 1920. Unemployment reached 11 per cent. In response, the British government abandoned its planned reforms. This caused great disappointment.

The promise of a better tomorrow had caused **demobilisation** to go relatively smoothly.



KEY IDEA

Demobilisation involves members of the armed forces returning to civilian life.

However, after the sacrifices they had endured, the British people's expectations had been raised. Most workers were not willing to go back to the way things had been before the war:

- Many working women were angry at having to cede their jobs to returning soldiers.
- Britain experienced more days lost to strike action in 1919 than Germany.

The advent of oil reduced demand for coal. Ever-decreasing profits led mine owners to cut wages to remain competitive. Miners went on strike for three months in 1921 before being forced back to work. This left many miners bitter and resentful.

In April 1925, the mine owners announced another wage cut. On 1st May 1926 the miners went on strike. The miners' leader, AJ Cook, called for a general strike.



KEY IDEA

A general strike is one where all the workers in a country refuse to work until their demands have been met.

The **Trade Unions Council (TUC)** agreed. On 3rd May 1926 over two million transport workers and dockers went on strike too.

However, the **Conservative** government of **Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin** had been preparing for just such a scenario. Expecting large-scale strikes, it put its contingency plan into effect. The armed forces, police and student-volunteers were used to replace the strikers. They drove buses, unloaded ships and distributed supplies. The strikers were unable to exert the pressure needed to force the government to concede. The general strike began to collapse. After nine days the TUC agreed to call off the strike and entered talks with the government.

Feeling betrayed, the miners continued their strike for another six months. Eventually, they were forced to return on terms set by the mine owners: less pay and longer hours.

5. The impact of the Wall Street Crash

The **Wall Street Crash** (October 1929) triggered the **Great Depression** that devastated the US economy. This had severe knock-on effects. Cash-starved US banks could not extend any further credit and demanded the swift repayment of outstanding loans. As credit dried up and worldwide trade fell by a third, Britain slid into a deep recession. Unemployment rose and government tax revenues declined.

The Labour Party led by **Ramsay MacDonald** won the 1929 election. Its members were inexperienced and could not agree on how to tackle the crisis. Internal dissent led MacDonald to resign the premiership in August 1931. However, he immediately returned as prime minister of a **National** (i.e. coalition) **Government**, consisting of Conservatives, some Labour and some Liberal MPs. This grouping won an overwhelming majority in the election of October 1931.

The new Chancellor of the Exchequer, **Neville Chamberlain**, pursued a policy of **economic retrenchment**.



REMEMBER!

Economic retrenchment in Britain meant that:

- Taxes were increased to make up for the loss of revenue due to the drop in trade.
- Public expenditure was cut.
- Unemployment benefits were cut by 10 per cent.
- Interest rates were lowered.
- Britain abandoned the gold standard. The UK Pound Sterling lost a quarter of its value relative to the US Dollar.
- Britain abandoned free trade and raised tariffs on imported goods.

In 1932, unemployment reached three million. The places worst hit by the Great Depression were the north of England and south Wales, areas which had been facing economic problems already due to outdated industries. Successive British governments had refused to accept that traditional labour-intensive industries such as coal-mining, shipbuilding and textiles were in terminal decline. No attempt was made to encourage alternatives in these areas.

Even when national unemployment fell to 1.6 million in 1936, the situation in places like **Jarrow** (with 80 per cent unemployment) was appalling. After the closure of Palmer's shipyard, 200 local volunteers marched the 300 miles south to London to petition parliament to provide them with work. Sadly, their efforts had little impact on public opinion.

6. Responses to poverty

In the immediate post-war period, some modest though significant improvements were made to the provision of education, housing and social welfare:

- **The Fisher Education Act (1918)** made education compulsory until age 14. This benefitted working class children. However, second level education remained inaccessible to most.
- **The Addison Housing Act (1919)** provided funds to build over 200,000 new homes.
- **The Unemployment Insurance Act (1920)** increased so called '**dole**' payments from 5 to 7 shillings a week. From 1934 onwards, this was available to anyone over the age of 14.
- **The Greenwood Housing Act (1930)** funded slum clearance. However, funding for local authority housing was cut during the Great Depression.

Although there were some real improvements in social conditions, far too many working class Britons

were still caught in the poverty trap and working in poorly paid employment. An inability to access higher education greatly restricted social mobility.

7. Economic prosperity

Not all of Britain suffered economic decline in the inter-war period:

- Although the north of England continued to suffer, by 1936 the south of England had recovered. This area became quite prosperous, as new industries, such as aircraft and car manufacturing, electronics and pharmaceuticals, were set up there. However, British unemployment levels stayed at about one million until the outbreak of World War Two.
- Between 1932 and 1937 British national income rose by 20 per cent, while the cost of living fell by almost a third.
- Cheaper mortgages became more widely available to the growing middle class.
- The middle class could afford annual holidays leading to a boom in domestic tourism to holiday camps (e.g. Butlins) and seaside resorts (e.g. Blackpool).

Clearly, Britain during the inter-war period was an economically and socially divided land. The south of England did not suffer as severely as the rest of the United Kingdom.

8. Concluding remarks

Britain faced serious economic and social challenges during the inter-war period. Some of these were structural: the loss of key markets to competitors and too great a dependence on outdated industries. Also, governments had to deal with these issues against a backdrop of servicing massive debts incurred fighting World War One and the economic and social effects of the Great Depression. Little wonder that Britain's inter-war years are remembered as a bleak period in that nation's history.

We have seen, however, that while some parts of Britain wasted away, other parts thrived. Though successive British governments failed to build a '*land fit for heroes*', there were some significant, though localised improvements in living standards during the inter-war period.

Some historians believe that Britain's loss of its former status as a great economic power, coupled with increasing agitation for independence in its colonies, led to a growing sense of impending failure among many Britons. This undermined their national self-confidence. This may have been one reason why Chamberlain's foreign policy of **appeasement** proved so popular in Britain until 1939.

The Jarrow March: Causes and Consequences

1. Introduction

During the 1930s, many parts of Britain suffered the social effects of the world-wide economic depression. However, areas of heavy industry, such as **Jarrow** on Tyneside, were hit the hardest. The hardships working class people endured and the lack of any plan to end their plight led to the **Jarrow March**.



REMEMBER!

The **Jarrow March**, also known as the **Jarrow Crusade**, was a peaceful public protest held by unemployed men from the north of England in October 1936. It was a march that began in the town of Jarrow and ended 26 days later at Westminster in London.

2. The impact of unemployment

One of the principal causes of the Jarrow March was the very high level of **unemployment** in the area.

In her book *The Town that was Murdered*, local Labour MP **Ellen Wilkinson** states that, by 1936, **80%** of the town's working population was unemployed. This led to a severe decrease in economic activity. Bank branches and shops were closed, while bus and rail services were reduced.

This high level of unemployment was due to Jarrow being a classic example of a one-industry town. Most manufacturing jobs were provided by **Palmer's shipbuilders** and the companies that serviced it. When world trade fell by half between 1929 and 1933, there was a sharp fall-off in the demand for new ships. After two years without a single order for a new vessel, Palmer's was forced to close in 1934.

3. Impact of benefit policy

The impact of **inadequate benefits** for the unemployed also contributed to the Jarrow March.

Seasonal unemployment had always been a factor in the lives of Jarrow's working class. However, the Great Depression shifted the problem of unemployment from one where a minority suffered temporary unemployment to one where virtually the whole community was out of work.

The **Treasury** (i.e. Britain's ministry of finance in London) which funded the unemployment relief schemes, did not appreciate this fact. Successive **chancellors** (i.e. British ministers for finance) in the 1930s focused solely on reducing the overall cost of social welfare payments to the taxpayer. Also, central government delegated the running of welfare schemes to local authorities.

At the same time, central government cut the length of time that people could claim the top rates of benefit. Unemployment benefit only lasted for 26 weeks. When this time was up, people were given transitional payments, subject to the resented **Household Means Test**.



REMEMBER!

The **Household Means Test** was supposed to encourage self-sufficiency. The wages of all family members, and any household assets, were taken into account by the local authority when deciding whether or not benefits should be paid.

However, the central government's policy of regional autonomy created anomalies in the benefit system. For example, in Edinburgh, the last £500 of an unemployed man's goods was not counted for means testing. However, in Jarrow, a man had to have literally no possessions he could sell to pay for food and rent before being eligible for benefits. This meant that redundant men were dependant on their wives or daughters, a situation that did not fit well with **the mores** (i.e. social attitudes) of the time. This caused great anger in Jarrow.

An **Unemployment Assistance Board** was set up by the central government in 1934 to aid the long-term unemployed. However, it too proved inadequate. It also created divisions in neighbourhoods where neighbours were encouraged to inform the authorities if they were aware of anyone attempting to cheat the system.

4. The Impact of poverty

Another significant cause of the Jarrow March was the ever-worsening **poverty**. Contemporary medical reports show that the poor were not recovering from even the most routine illnesses because of the long-term degradation of their health due to **malnutrition**. Indeed, during the 1930s, the death rate due to **Tuberculosis** in Jarrow was more than **twice** the national average.

5. Impact of national government policy

Aside from the provision of unemployment benefits, the other key area of government responsibility was to create the conditions in which industry could thrive and provide employment. However, during the inter-war period, successive British governments pursued a traditional, orthodox, *laissez-faire* economic policy.



REMEMBER!

A **laissez-faire economic policy** sought to achieve: a balanced budget, deflation, and a reduction in public spending. Laissez-faire means free from government interference.

There was a brief ray of hope when the philanthropist, **Sir John Jarvis** proposed funding a steelworks at Jarrow. When the government showed no interest and the scheme didn't materialise, there was great disappointment. Many saw this as yet another example of the ruling class' indifference to the plight of the poor.

The final seal was set on the anger of Jarrow's unemployed when **Lord Runcorn**, the President of the Board of Trade, declared that "*Jarrow must work for its own salvation*". This led to a demand for the strongest public protest possible, within the boundaries of the law. This is why the men finally decided to march to London: It was seen as the best way to draw public attention to their situation and force the government to help their community.

6. Cross-community support

On 20th July 1936, **Jarrow Borough Council** decided to present a petition to the British parliament at Westminster. It would be delivered by men who had marched the 300 miles to London.

They called the march a '*crusade*', in order to: (a) emphasise the seriousness of Jarrow's plight and (b) distinguish this march from so called '*hunger marches*' organised by the **National Unemployed Workers' Movement (NUWM)**, which were associated with the Communist Party. In contrast, the Jarrow '*crusade*' attracted political support from *both* main parties, Conservatives and Labour.

7. Role of Ellen Wilkinson

Ellen Wilkinson (1891-1947) was elected MP for Jarrow in 1935. Some historians claim that she was the main instigator of the Jarrow March. However, she was not in Jarrow when it began. She was attending the annual Labour Party conference, where she tried to gain support for it. However, there the topic on most people's minds was the issue of intervention in the Spanish Civil War – not the Jarrow March. However, most historians agree that she was a gifted orator whose ability to raise money at public meetings during the march was the main reason it was completed.

8. The march to London

In October 1936, a group of 200 physically fit men (women were not invited) set out from Jarrow and marched the 300 miles to London. They wanted the general public to understand that they were orderly, responsible citizens who only wanted the means to earn a living.

A second-hand bus was bought to carry cooking equipment, and ground sheets were provided for outside rests. An advance guard was sent ahead to arrange overnight stops and public meetings. Finally, a religious service was held on the eve of their departure to bless and set the tone for their march.

Bearing blue-and-white banners, the Jarrow men paraded at 8.45 each morning of their 25-day march. Many marched army style - 50 minutes to the hour with 10 minutes' rest. A petition, signed by 11,000 Jarrow people, was carried in an oak box with gold lettering. A further petition was collected en route.

9. Impact

The Jarrow marchers successfully reached London, but despite considerable public sympathy their protest made little real impact. A demonstration at Hyde Park Corner on 1st November drew little support. Ellen Wilkinson presented the Jarrow petition to parliament on 4th November and made an eloquent speech describing Jarrow's plight. However, the Conservative Prime Minister, **Stanley Baldwin**, refused to meet with a delegation of the marchers, saying that he was "too busy."

Despite the publicity the march attracted, it initially achieved little. High unemployment, dire poverty and government indifference continued as before. The marchers only returned by train thanks to the charitable donations of well-wishers. The British government refused to change its economic policies. The situation in Jarrow only began to improve when World War Two loomed and Britain began to rearm. A ship-breaking yard and an engineering works were established in 1938 and the Consett Iron Company started a steelworks in 1939. It is still not clear whether the march helped this to happen.

10. Concluding remarks

The Jarrow March has been characterised as a '*heroic failure*.' Due to its uniquely non-political character and peaceful nature, it remains significant because it symbolises local protest against both an indifferent, even callous government and a ruling elite that had no sense of social solidarity. This is why it still resonates with those on the left of Britain's political spectrum.

The USSR under Stalin: Economic Transformation: 1928-1941

1. Introduction

V.I. Lenin's death led to a power struggle between **Leon Trotsky** and **Joseph Stalin** for the leadership of the USSR. Each proposed a very different path for the country to take:

- Trotsky advocated '*permanent world revolution*', i.e. the Communist Party should focus all its energy on spreading socialism worldwide by fomenting proletarian (i.e. worker) revolutions elsewhere.
- Stalin advocated '*socialism in one country*', i.e. the Communist Party should concentrate on consolidating its regime at home first, by building up its agricultural, industrial and military strength, before encouraging revolutions abroad.

Stalin won the majority of the Communist Party over to his point of view. By 1928, he had emerged victorious and Trotsky was forced into exile. With his main opposition gone, Stalin now consolidated his own position by showing that he alone had the power to determine the USSR's future.

2. Growing dissatisfaction

Stalin believed that Lenin's **NEP** (i.e. **New Economic Policy**) had failed. Unemployment rates were steadily rising and there were growing food shortages. Also, the so-called '*war scare*' of 1928, brought the USSR's economic vulnerability into sharp focus.

There was a growing sense within the Communist Party that the USSR was on the wrong track. Sensitive to the prevailing mood, Stalin decided that the time had come to steer the Soviet Union back towards the party's original goal of creating a truly socialist society.

3. The Great Turn

Stalin's change of course has been called the '**Great Turn**'. It marked the most significant shift – economically, politically and culturally – in the history of the Soviet Union.

The Great Turn consisted of a three-pronged campaign that involved:

- The **transformation** of the USSR into a great industrial power.
- The **collectivisation** of agriculture in order to support the populations of the new industrial cities.
- The **purgation** of all '**disloyal**' elements within the Communist Party.

Stalin believed that it was necessary to revive the Communist Party's revolutionary spirit before initiating his three-part plan. So, he purged it of its **moderate wing** (i.e. those led by **Bukharin** who still wanted to continue Lenin's NEP).

Stalin's first victims included those middle class bureaucrats and technicians that Lenin had relied upon to keep the USSR's economy working. While this was a popular move among the Communist Party's **radical wing**, it deprived Stalin of the very people he would later need to achieve his vision of a **communist utopia**.



REMEMBER!

A **communist utopia** consists of a perfect, government-free, classless society with common ownership of all the means of production (i.e. the different means of generating wealth).

The word '**utopia**' was coined by **Thomas More** in 1516, from the Greek words for '**no**' and '**place**'. Thus, a utopian is one who lives for the creation of a fantastic and unreal world, to live in **no place**, i.e. to remove oneself from reality.

More warned that all utopian schemes must inevitably end in squalid failure, because they dream of impossible advances while ignoring the reality of human nature.

4. Motivation for rapid change

Stalin's reasons for pursuing a dramatic shift in economic policy were:

- Even in 1928, the USSR was still largely a semi-feudal society with a predominately agricultural economy. The NEP was not delivering either the economic performance or the type of society that Communists had envisaged. Rapid industrialisation was believed to be an essential pre-condition for building a truly socialist society.
- Stalin wanted the USSR to become the 'Soviet America', i.e. for the Soviets to beat the western capitalists at their own game and so become a force to be reckoned with in international affairs.
- Stalin was also aware that: "***We (the USSR) are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this difference in ten years. Either we do it or we shall be crushed.***" Whether it was a product of his paranoia or due to his shrewd grasp of international relations, Stalin was convinced that the USSR would soon have to fight for its very survival. Thus, he presented the need to industrialise as a life and death struggle. The only way for this industrial drive to succeed was through increased centralisation and ruthless implementation.

5. Centralisation

The key to Stalin's economic program was **centralisation**.

**KEY IDEA**

Centralisation meant state control over (a) all sectors of the economy – agriculture, banking, industry, the retail trade, transport and (b) all public institutions – education, health, media, police and courts.

All small-scale industry and services were **nationalised**, i.e. taken into state ownership. Trade unions were converted into mere mechanisms for increasing worker productivity.

This model of a centrally planned economy and society had been temporarily applied by Lenin during the **War Communism** years. Stalin intended to make it a permanent feature of government in the USSR.

6. Revolution from above

Stalin referred to his program for change as “*revolution from above*.” He set up **Gosplan** (i.e. ‘*the State Planning Committee*’) to work out the details. It proposed a series of **Five-Year Plans**.

**KEY IDEA**

A Five-Year Plan consisted of a series of production targets that were to be met and the means by which these were to be achieved. These targets were set by the government for each sector of the economy. The aim was to achieve intense economic growth quickly by optimising the use of resources.

There were **three** Five-Year Plans: **1928-1932**, **1933-1938** and **1939-1941**. The last plan was interrupted by Hitler’s invasion of the USSR.

7. The First Five-Year Plan

The **First Five-Year Plan** called for rapid industrialisation, with particular emphasis on **heavy industry**.

**KEY IDEA**

Heavy industry refers to labour intensive activities such as (a) the **manufacture** of large machines and (b) the **extraction** of raw materials.

The scale of industrial change achieved during the First Five Year Plan was remarkable:

- The average annual growth rate was 18 per cent.
- There was a three-fold increase in oil output.
- There was a four-fold increase in steel manufacture.
- There was a five-fold increase in coal extraction.
- New industries were developed, such as aircraft and automobiles.
- New industrial centres (e.g. **Magnitogorsk**) were established, with 1,500 new industrial plants built.
- By 1933, a skilled workforce, twice that of 1928, had been created.

This level of economic development is remarkable given the fact that the rest of the world was in the grip of the **Great Depression**.

Much of this success can be attributed to:

- The patriotic zeal with which many workers approached their tasks. They were willing to accept **deprivation** (i.e. lower standards of living) as a sacrifice necessary for building a better future.
- The most productive workers, such as the miner **Alexis Stakhanov**, were honoured in a propaganda campaign to encourage others to increase productivity during the Second Five-Year Plan.

- There were harsh penalties for officials failing to meet their quotas.
- Wage differentials were greatly increased to incentivise skilled workers.
- Coercion was widespread: harsh penalties discouraged absenteeism.
- Forced labour provided by **the Gulags**.

**REMEMBER!**

The **Gulags** were prison camps that were numbered in the thousands. They spanned the length and breadth of the USSR, and held approximately two million forced labourers. Often these prisoners were people who had been arrested at random and forced to confess to a crime they did not commit.

In the four decades of their existence, an estimated eighteen million Soviet citizens passed through the Gulags. These prisoners were used to build canals, factories and hydroelectric dams or to mine coal and uranium.

Though significant steps forward were taken, the First Five Year Plan suffered many setbacks:

- Stalin demanded impossibly high production figures for factories to stir up workers' zeal. Realistic state planning was impossible. Some production targets (e.g. in oil refining) were not reached until 1953! Gosplan economists who questioned Stalin's wisdom lost their lives in the purges.
- The impressive increases in output do not take into account the poor quality of the goods produced. Stalin created a system in which poor quality work done quickly was seen as preferable to producing high quality products at a slower rate.
- Human and material resources were not adequately figured into the plan. This caused constant confusion and lengthy work stoppages.
- The ever-present spectre of the NKVD (i.e. the secret police) hovering over the country, ready to accuse anyone of treason for pointing out that some targets were impossible, resulted in a failure to identify problems or co-ordinate actions. This led to enormous waste and inefficiency. For example: The largest iron and steel complex in Europe was built at **Magnitogorsk**. It was found to be uneconomic when finished because trains used 40% of the coal they carried on the 1,500 mile journey east.
- There was also the problem created by an entire workforce learning the skills needed to build and run factories all at once. Many of the workers were uneducated peasants. Countless workers were maimed and killed, costly equipment ruined and huge sums of money wasted.
- The waste and inefficiency that plagued the struggle to make heavy industry work left few resources for light industry. There were severe shortages of consumer goods.
- As inflation grew, real wages in 1932 were only about half of what they had been in 1928. Living conditions remained poor. As workers poured into the cities a serious housing shortage emerged.

8. Collectivisation

To satisfy the USSR's need for increased food supplies, the First Five-Year Plan called for the **collectivisation** of agriculture, in order to produce enough food to support an expanded urban population.

**KEY IDEA**

Collectivisation meant the end of private ownership of the land and the replacement of individual farms with giant, government-owned and run farms. Peasants were employed as if in a factory and their movements were strictly controlled.

The trigger for Stalin's swift implementation of collectivisation was the crisis affecting the Soviet food supply. Grain procurement in 1929 fell by 20% per cent on the previous year, resulting in the kind of bread rationing that had helped topple the Tsar. Stalin thought collectivisation was the only way to feed people and sustain his rule.

However, the policy of collectivisation was seriously flawed:

- The scheme demanded a level of mechanisation far beyond the Soviet Union's capacity. In 1929, less than 3 per cent of Soviet agriculture was mechanised.
- Stalin refused to recognise that people tend to work harder if they are working for themselves instead of a state landlord.
- Collectivisation effectively restored **serfdom** to the USSR. As a result, it was met with widespread resistance and many angry farmers pursued a '**scorched earth**' policy in protest.

Typically, Stalin responded by killing rebels or deporting them to Siberia. He made a special example of the **kulaks** (i.e. the wealthier peasants) to intimidate others.

By 1933, collectivisation had clearly failed. That year's real grain harvest was 25 per cent less than the official figures. Famine was widespread. **Robert Conquest** estimates that around seven million Soviet citizens died from starvation.

In desperation, Stalin allowed some flexibility. The largest state farms were broken up and peasants were once more allowed to farm private plots of land, rear their own animals and earn a profit. This led to a gradual improvement in agricultural output.

9. The Second and Third Five-Year Plans

By 1932, Stalin realised that the Soviet Union's people were under serious strain. He responded by setting more realistic goals. Under **the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-37)**, more attention was given to manufacturing consumer goods. However, in response to rising international tensions, **the Third Five-Year Plan (begun in 1938)** shifted emphasis towards the manufacture of armaments.

10. The impact of the Five-Year Plans

By the outbreak of **the Second World War** in 1939, the USSR had been transformed:

- Whole new cities had been built. Many peasants had fled the countryside into the cities to escape collectivisation. Between 1926 and 1932 alone, the urban population grew from 26 million to 39 million.
- Women joined the workforce in large numbers. By 1939, they made up forty percent of the industrial employees. However, women were still discriminated against, as they received less pay and found it as difficult as ever to gain advancement.
- Oil production had trebled, while coal and steel production had increased by 400 per cent.
- Free second and third-level education produced an 85 per cent literacy rate, and provided all the engineers and scientists needed to sustain a modern industrial economy.
- The USSR became the third largest industrial power in the world, after the United States of America and Nazi Germany.

11. The cost to the people of the USSR

Between 1928 and 1941, both Soviet agriculture and industry underwent a vast, brutal, unprecedented transformation under a rigid centralised control that was imposed through the terrorisation of an entire society. Due to unrealistic targets and a lack of critical scrutiny, the Five Year Plans produced some successes but also many failures.

Stalin reacted to legitimate criticism by launching **the Purges**. He destroyed countless lives to conceal his own errors. Those imprisoned in his Gulags were used as slave labour until they died of exhaustion or disease. Millions of Soviet citizens died to achieve Stalin's vision of a modern, industrialised USSR.

Although collectivisation had failed in terms of food production, it succeeded in breaking the will of the peasant class. As a result of the collectivisation process, Stalin ruled the countryside more completely than the Tsars could have ever dreamed.

However, despite their serious failings, the Five Year Plans did narrow the gap between the USSR and its rival, Germany. It is doubtful if anything short of this kind of mass mobilisation of an entire society could have provided the Soviet Union with the means to withstand **Operation Barbarossa** (i.e. the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941).

An Aspect of the Second World War: Collaboration/Resistance



KEY IDEA

Collaboration means co-operating with or assisting your nation's enemies, especially when they are occupying your homeland.

1. Examples of collaboration

Collaboration refers to the actions of both individual men and women, as well as whole regimes (e.g. **Vichy France**). Collaborators were regarded as traitors who actively assisted in the oppression of their fellow countrymen/women. Among the most notorious collaborators were **Pierre Laval** in France and **Vidkun Quisling** in Norway.

2. Reasons for collaboration

Some people collaborated to alleviate their own situation, i.e. to save their own skins. Others did so because a loved one was threatened. However, it is easy to underestimate how clever some regimes were in manipulating people so that they preyed upon one another. Collaboration ranged from something as minor as doing enemy soldiers' laundry to spying on your neighbours to earn a better food ration.

3. Collaboration by the police

Police forces within occupied Europe were particularly vulnerable to collaboration. Initially, they were asked to deal only with crime, just as they had done prior to occupation. Gradually, however, police responsibilities extended to guarding prison camps, then to loading Jews on trains to those camps, to finally taking part in massacres of people who had been forced to dig their own graves. Failure to obey would result in their own death. Others, however, preferred the dangerous path of **resistance** to that of collaboration.

4. The rise of resistance movements

The brutality of Nazi rule encouraged the growth of resistance movements across occupied Europe.

**REMEMBER!**

The **resistance** refers to a secret, illegal organisation within a conquered country. Its members spy upon and attack the occupying force, as well as anyone who collaborates with it.

By 1944, resistance groups were relentlessly waging **guerrilla warfare**.

**KEY IDEA**

Guerrilla warfare consists of hit and run attacks by small, mobile forces upon the larger garrison forces of an occupying power. Resistance fighters shelter within the community and only emerge to strike suddenly and violently where their enemy least expects it.

Resistance movements adopted ruthless methods to instil fear in their enemies: prisoners were rarely taken, as they had no facilities to hold them.

Some areas were more geographically suited to such irregular warfare. For example: the marshes of Byelorussia, the Bocage region of France, the mountains of Greece and Yugoslavia, the forests of Poland and the Ukraine. Training and equipment were provided at first by the British **Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.)** and later by the American **Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S. – the forerunner of the C.I.A.)**.

5. The role of resistance movements

Resistance groups engaged in a wide variety of activities:

- Ambushing troop convoys
- Assassinating Nazi officials (most notably **Reinhard Heydrich**, the chief architect of the Holocaust, in Prague, on 4th June 1942)
- Assisting escaped Allied POWs
- Cutting telephone lines
- Destroying ammunition and fuel depots
- Disrupting railways
- Gathering information about German military operations and passing it on to the Allies
- Organising escape routes for downed Allied aircrew
- Publishing and distributing underground newspapers
- Sabotaging factories and shipyards.

The risks involved in these activities were great. If captured, resistance fighters were usually tortured and either sent to a concentration camp or summarily executed.

6. Reprisals and counter-reprisals

Resistance movements could not have succeeded without the willingness of many locals to offer them shelter and warning of danger. The Nazis realised this too. As they did not have the manpower needed to trawl the entire countryside, the Nazis opted to use **terror** to dissuade people from aiding the resistance.

Whenever the resistance attacked troops or installations, the Nazis carried out reprisals such as executing randomly chosen civilians and burning whole towns and villages to the ground. For example: **Oradur sur-Glane** (France), **Lidice** (Czech Republic) and **Marzabotto** (Italy).

Such **atrocities** were intended to dissuade locals from supporting the resistance and to encourage people to inform on them. However, they only led to counter-reprisals and perpetuated an ever-more vicious cycle of violence.

7. The contribution of the resistance

Resistance movements played an important role in achieving Allied victory in World War Two:

- They disrupted German communications and supply lines.
- They tied down large numbers of German troops that were badly needed on the frontline against the Allied armies.
- They destroyed installations involved in the Nazi atomic bomb programme, such as the heavy water plant at **Telemark**, Norway, in 1943.
- They helped pinpoint the German **V1** rocket installations that rained destruction on London in 1944.
- They gathered vital information about the German defences that made possible the successful Allied landings on **D-Day**, 6th June 1944.

8. The significance of resistance movements

Resistance movements helped to restore their nations' self-respect after the humiliation of their initial defeat. Also, they made socially respectable the idea that each individual has the right to fight against the laws and forms of government that he/she regards as morally wrong. During World War Two, resistance movements championed the idea that ordinary people can play a meaningful role in shaping and defining their own society.

Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust

1. The Nazi worldview



KEY IDEA

A worldview is your general understanding of the meaning and purpose of life.

At the very heart of the Nazi worldview was a virulent **racism**.



KEY IDEA

Racism is the belief that one's own national or racial group is the superior one, and that all other are intrinsically inferior.

The Nazis believed that the German people were the **Herrenvolk**.



KEY IDEA

Herrenvolk translates as '**master race**'. The Nazis claimed that the Germans were better than all other races because they were a superior biological breed.

The Nazis claimed that Germans were a master race because they were the descendants of the '**Aryans**'.



REMEMBER!

Hitler claimed that the Aryans were an ancient race of super humans. They were said to have been tall, blonde-haired and blue-eyed. This was pure invention on his part.

The Nazis called all non-Aryans **Untermenschen** (meaning: ‘*subhuman*’). They claimed that this applied to the **Slavic** peoples of Eastern Europe (i.e. the Poles, Russians and Ukrainians). During World War Two they used this racist classification as justification for mass murder. However, above all others, the Nazis hated the **Jews**.

2. Anti-Semitism

As **Ian Kershaw** notes, one of the few things that can be said for certain about **Adolf Hitler** was that, from the start of his career to its bitter end, he was a rabid **anti-Semite**.



KEY IDEA

An anti-Semite is someone who is prejudiced against, and hostile towards, the Jews.

Anti-Semitism was a prominent theme in **Mein Kampf (1925)**. In it, Hitler claimed that the entire Jewish race was involved in a vast plot to take over the world. He attributed all of Germany’s ills down through history to Jewish conspiracies. Unfortunately, most members of the Nazi Party (and others further afield) were only too willing to accept this ridiculous, paranoid fantasy.

Indeed, Hitler’s hatred of Communism was driven by his belief that Communist parties everywhere were led by Jews. He saw it as his mission to ‘save’ Europe from the threat posed by what he called ‘**Jewish Bolshevism**’.

3. The persecution begins

The Jewish community in Germany accounted for less than one per cent of the country’s population (about 600,000 people). However, in Hitler’s mind they constituted an ‘enemy within’. So, soon after taking power in 1933, the Nazis launched a slow but methodical campaign directed against Germany’s Jews.

In April 1933:

- The Jews were sacked from all civil service posts.
- Jews were prohibited from enrolling in any university.
- Severe restrictions were imposed on Jewish doctors and lawyers.
- A nationwide boycott was launched against all Jewish shops and businesses owned by Jews.

4. The Nuremberg Laws

Once the Jews were successfully isolated, the campaign against them was intensified. The next step was the adoption of the **Nuremberg Laws** in 1935.



REMEMBER!

The **Nuremberg Laws** were a series of legal measures that deprived Jews of their rights as German citizens, e.g. Jews were prohibited from marrying non-Jews.

These laws defined a ‘Jew’ as anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent. This meant that some two and a half million Germans in addition to the 600,000 who regarded themselves Jews were affected by these laws.

The Nazi government soon began to confiscate Jewish property. It distributed these spoils among the leading Nazis and members of the military. Those Jews who could afford to, emigrated.

5. The Night of the Broken Glass

In 1938, a young Jewish radical assassinated a German diplomat in Paris. In response, the Nazis organised a campaign of violence known as **Kristallnacht** (meaning: *'The Night of the Broken Glass'*). It got its name from the damage inflicted on Jewish synagogues and business premises. From this point on, Jews were forced to wear a yellow **Magen David** (i.e. *'Star of David'*) when in public. The Jewish community was also forced to pay a large sum of money to the government to cover the damage inflicted by Nazi thugs.

6. Planning the Final Solution

Until 1941, the Nazi treatment of the Jews had been brutal but not exterminatory. However, once the Nazis gained control of Eastern Europe and the western USSR, they realised that they finally had most of Europe's Jewish population at their mercy. Hitler and his closest followers believed that they now had a historic opportunity to: (a) eliminate the Jews and (b) create a *'racially pure society'* that would, Hitler promised, *"last a thousand years."*

In **Mein Kampf**, Hitler had openly declared his intention to *'remove'* the Jews from Europe. However, he never specified how this would be done. Once in power, Hitler seems to have toyed with the idea of re-locating Europe's Jews to Madagascar. However, when the impracticality of that became clear during the Second World War, Hitler turned his mind to achieving a *'Final Solution'* to the so-called *'Jewish problem'*.



KEY IDEAS

The **'Final Solution'** was a Nazi euphemism for **genocide**.

Genocide is the deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, cultural or religious group.

The Nazis' perpetration of the Final Solution is now universally recognised as a prime example of a **crime against humanity**.



KEY IDEA

A crime against humanity involves mass terror, mass repression, mass deportation and genocide.

No copy of an explicit order by Hitler authorising the Final Solution survives, if ever such a document existed. As **Alan Bullock** has shown, this was not the way Hitler operated. He did not like to leave a paper trail. He wanted to be remembered as a creative genius, not as a mass murderer.

One thing is certain. Mass murder could not have occurred within Hitler's empire without his explicit authorisation. So the order was, most likely, a verbal one; probably given to his two key henchmen, **Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler**.

In July 1941, Göring appointed **Reichsführer-SS Reinhard Heydrich** to implement the Final Solution. Himmler provided him with the personnel to carry it out.

7. The Apparatus of Mass Murder

In the words of **Anne Applebaum**, the Nazis killed people *"not for what they had done but for who they were."* This killing took three main forms:

(a) Generalised maltreatment

The maltreatment of the Jews in **ghettos** (i.e. walled off slum areas) in German-occupied Poland was not initially intended to kill them. It was a by-product of a temporary scheme to segregate them from the population at large. Overcrowding, disease and starvation killed tens of thousands of Jews.

(b) Shooting

In early 1941, a decision was made to speed up the killing and systematise it. Shooting Jews was the responsibility of **Einsatzgruppen** (i.e. Waffen SS execution squads). It was carried out in the Baltic States, Poland, Ukraine, and Byelorussia. Captive Jews were forced to strip, lined in rows on the edge of a mass grave and then mown down by machine-guns. Up to one million people were murdered in this way.

(c) Gassing

The Nazis opened their first **concentration camp** at Dachau, Germany, in 1934.



KEY IDEA

A concentration camp was a penal work camp of the harshest regime, from which, as a rule, there was no release. Inmates died from beatings, disease, exhaustion and starvation.

These camps were surrounded by electrified fences and were run by units of the **SS Death's Head**.

Among the most notorious was **Auschwitz** in Poland. Over 40,000 inmates were shot for minor infringements. Thousands more were forced to undergo cruel medical experimentation. In all, over one million people were killed there.

However, such methods were taking too long to reach Hitler's target of a Europe without Jews. So, **Heydrich** called a conference at **Wansee**, in a suburb of Berlin on 24th January 1942. Using his mandate from Hitler and Göring to complete the Final Solution, Heydrich forced all the rival state agencies to co-operate in an ambitious plan to exterminate all Jews in as short a time frame as possible. His chief of logistics was **SS-Colonel Adolf Eichmann**. He arranged the wholesale transportation of Jews to new, purpose-built **death camps**.



KEY IDEA

A death camp made no provision for work or housing. Its facilities were limited to a railway station, and a complex of gas chambers and crematoria. E.g. **Sobibor** and **Treblinka**.

Hundreds of people were now killed at the same time using **Zyklon B gas**. Existing concentration camps were also provided with gas chambers and crematoria. Within a year of the **Wansee Conference**, the majority of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe had been eliminated.

8. Concluding remarks

The Nazi leadership was deadly serious about its 'Final Solution'. Indeed, they pursued their plan with an ever-increasing commitment. Even in September 1944, when the Third Reich stood on the brink of defeat, Himmler was obsessed with completing the program of mass murder. Bizarrely, it seems that in the Nazi mindset, defeat in the military war was less significant than victory in the 'racial war'.

Yet, despite the vast effort expended, the Final Solution was not completed. The Third Reich collapsed in May 1945.