The focus of this syllabus point is to encourage you to think about the experience of civilians in World War One.

Remember, if they ask a question on this area they expect your answer to **focus primarily on 1914-18** & certainly NOT a discussion of events beyond 1923 (the end of this topic).

In the past, they have asked questions in relation to “one country that you have studied”. This revision guide therefore offers the case study of Germany:

**1. How were German civilians impacted by the course of World War 1?**

**2. How did the role of women change in Germany during World War 1?**

If a question asks for a comparison with another country then I would avoid the question – this possibility probably does not warrant the extra revision/research that this would require.

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| **AREA OF LIFE** | **KEY FEATURES** |
| **Economy**(Look at this as impact of attempt to achieve Total War) | **Initial economic limitations:*** banks and export industries were badly disrupted by the long war and blockade
* Germany’s capacity to produce enough food to feed the population was limited
* The ability to import raw materials was severely curtailed, and things like oil, rubber and nitrates were vital for war production

**KRA: War Raw Materials Department:*** Walther Rathenau created the KRA within the War Ministry
* It oversaw a range of companies whose job it was to acquire, store and distribute the most vital raw materials needed for the war effort
* Established a chemicals section and backed the construction of new plants to produce nitrates
* Within 6 months most essential supplies were provided

**Labour Policies:*** State intervention in the labour market, setting wages etc in key industries
* War Ministry decided who should be conscripted and exempted
* Need to prevent industrial unrest
* Rationing
* Price controls on essential items
* Creation of local War Boards made of management and labour representatives to coordinate production and minimise potential tension that would limit productivity
* Worked fairly well in short term, but the budget and food provisions were problems too big to maintain – the increased demand on resources caused by the intense fighting 1915-16 overloaded the system and they caused unrest among workers on occasion

**Finance:*** Massive deficit (i.e. spending more than tax brings in) even before war – the debt would be over 90% of the GDP by 1918.
* Sale of war bonds only real attempt to narrow the gap between income and expenditure
* Idea of raising taxes, which would burden the rich most, was rejected on political grounds
* Put to one side until the end of the war, when they reckoned they could demand compensation from defeated countries
* 16% of cost was met by taxation, the rest from funding like war bonds and printing more money
* Printing more money started inflation in Germany and reduced the value of the mark internationally – this would form basis for the later inflation spiral in 1923.

E**nd of 1916 – Auxiliary Service Law:*** By the end of 1916 the economic situation was so bad the Supreme Army Command (Hindenburg and Ludendorff) wanted to intensify war effort with a clear set of targets
* The Hindenburg programme aimed to increase arms production massively by placing contracts directly with heavy industry
* Auxiliary Service Law was supposed to achieve ‘the mobilisation of the entire civilian population for war service’
* Demanded service for all able-bodied Germans and curtailed freedom of workers to change jobs
* Both ideas fell short of their objectives, causing serious opposition without making the required difference to munitions/heavy industry

**The German economy was never fully mobilised for the war due to entrenched interest groups (e.g. the land owners) – far less so than GB or France.** |
| **Society**a) Women | **- Huge conscription of men opened up opportunities for both women and youth in the German workplace.**- Death/maiming of men fighting in the war left many families without their main bread winner – by 1918 2 million women were living on small government handouts as a result.- These women were encouraged to plug the labour gap and to help themselves by joining the workplace.- By 1918, 37% of women were working, mainly in factories – 700,000 in the munitions factories alone.BUT… far from equal treatment:i) Employers and government often made it clear the positions would be gone when the men returnedii) Women were paid very low wages in order to lower their status – this meant many still could not afford to feed their families.iii) Research indicates that women received on average under 50% of male wages, while long hours meant they had little time with their children.However, women were granted the vote in 1918 by the SPD when they came to power, partly in recognition of their contribution to the war effort, following the armistice. |
| b) Youth | Youths entered the workforce at a younger age and in far greater numbers because:* With father’s gone/killed the family needed a bread winner
* As the number of available men dwindled, employers had to start employing younger workers
* Towards the end of the war, so many teachers had been called up that some schools closed anyway

By 1918, there had been a 225% increase in youth employment in Germany, mainly in the chemical and munitions industries.Provided extra money for some struggling families and introduced them to a level of freedom and independence never known before. |
| c) Living standards | **A big problem that affected Germany as the war progressed was a lack of food, which in turn affected health:*** A shortfall in food production and importation meant that Germany was required to increase its agriculture to feed both a vast army, as well as civilians.
* The food that was available to civilians was expensive too, with wages often not high enough for families to afford a proper diet. Mortality rates for children rose along with those of adults and elderly citizens, and many people died of malnutrition or diseases related to weakened bodies.
* By 1915 the food situation reached critical levels in urban areas. This resulted in resentful feelings towards those who worked in rural areas, with rumours spreading that farmers were stockpiling food for themselves. Food riots spread across the land in response to the food shortage, as basic amenities became more and more scarce.
* By 1916 soap, fat, cheese, butter and eggs were unavailable, while coal, shoes and textiles were scarce. With food prices getting higher and higher, the government implemented maximum prices on certain products, including sugar and potatoes. To combat the decrease in availability of food, the German government also established compulsory 'meatless' and 'fatless' days.
* The people left on the home front largely relied on a diet of potatoes on bread, but these also became difficult to purchase towards the end of the war. To control the supply and distribution of essential household produce, Germany established a war food office; although its limited power meant that it could not control other organisations that dealt with produce.
* There were many laws introduced to make distribution fair, but because so many new agencies were introduced during the First World War, this led to counter-productive decisions that hardly benefitted families.
* By the winter of 1916-17, declining living standards and the military situation began to affect the everyday lives of ordinary Germans
* Food and fuel shortages, partially because of the exceptionally cold winter – ‘**turnip winter’**
* Civilian deaths from starvation and hypothermia increased from 121,000 in 1916 to 293,000 in 1918
* Infant mortality increased by over 50% during the course of the war
* Flu epidemic killing more people than the war
* Inflation meant workers worked longer hours and wages rose by 50-75% while average prices doubled between 1914 and 1918
* Social discontent grew massively in the final years of the war, culminating in the abdication of the Kaiser.
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| d) Family | **So what was the impact on the family unit as a whole?** - Families had to adapt to significant changes during the First World War. Family identity was transforming, with developments from traditional Victorian ideas being challenged due to the changes brought about by the war.- Conscription took many men away from their families, leaving women and young people struggling to afford basic amenities. The absence of men and blockades by the Allied Forces resulted in food and produce shortages, so families struggled to feed themselves and mortality rates increased. It was down to those left behind to fill job openings, to support household income and provide produce for the army and for the home front. |
| **Political** | **‘The Burgfriede’ – Start of the War:*** A political truce was agreed between all political parties and the laws for necessary loans and finance were passed unanimously
* As the Kaiser said to the Reichstag, ‘I know no parties any more, only Germans’
* Even the Social Democrats promised to support a defensive war
	+ Government successfully portrayed the war as defensive
	+ Many Social Democrats were genuinely patriotic
* Failure to win by Christmas did much to undermine spirit, but it wasn’t until the second half of the war that people started to turn against it, because of propaganda

**As the war progressed:*** Kaiser exerted no real control during war
* Kept in the dark about military developments and his advice was rarely sought
* Didn’t even try to present caring image of himself in propaganda
* Bethmann (Chancellor) did not have popular backing and as his power base was built on the support of the Kaiser, he became more and more isolated and incapable of resisting the interference of the military

**The ‘Silent Dictatorship’:*** Falkenhayn (Chief of General Staff) ditched and replaced with popular hero Hindenburg
* On 29 August 1916 Hindenburg and his deputy Ludendorff became joint leaders of the Supreme Army Command
* Chancellor and Kaiser’s positions were severely weakened
* Just by threatening resignation, this new Supreme Army Command could exert massive power over economic, political and military events
* As a result many opportunities for peace were turned down, the ASL was introduced and Bethmann was forced out of office

**Abdication of Kaiser and ‘Revolution’ 1918*** As the economic situation deteriorated in 1918 and the S[ring offensive had obviously failed, the navy mutinied – at the same time protests spread throughout Germany. The military officers like Ludendorff and Hindenburg were reluctant to admit defeat and were relieved when the Reichstag, notable Ebert and the SPD, proved willing to make the peace and try to control the protesting public.
* Armistice is signed and the new democratic constitution put forward that will be the Weimar Republic.
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Herwig: “The First World War affected how families lived” – highlights significant social changes during the war, but does not see a social revolution in Germany until after the experience of WW2. A temporary revolution that perhaps lays the foundation for later change.