

Outline: The Domestic Fronts

*World War II represented an effort at total war by all the belligerents. Each domestic effort and experience was different, but few escaped the impact of the conflict. The following is a summary of the unique experiences of the various European powers.

- I. Germany: From Apparent Victory to Defeat
 - A. During the first two years of the war, Hitler demanded few important sacrifices from the German people
 1. spending on domestic projects continued
 2. food was plentiful
 3. the economy as a whole was not on a full wartime footing
 - B. Germany's failure to quickly overwhelm the Soviet Union changed everything
 1. food could no longer be imported from the East in needed quantities
 2. Germany had to mobilize for total war and the government demanded major sacrifices from the people:
 - a. military goods were made instead of consumer goods
 - b. shortages of everyday products became serious
 - c. food rationing began in 1942
 - d. women, teenagers, and the elderly were forced to work in factories
 3. the Nazis compelled thousands of people from conquered lands to do forced labor in Germany
 - C. The war years also saw an intensification of political propaganda
 1. Nazi propaganda blamed the outbreak of the war on the British and the Jews
 2. blamed the prolongation of the war on the policies of Germany's opponents
 3. stressed the power of Germany and the inferiority of its foes
 4. Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels used both radio and films to boost the Nazi cause
 - a. movies of the collapse of Poland, Belgium, Holland, and France were shown in Germany to demonstrate German military might
 - b. throughout the conquered territories, the Nazis used the same mass media to frighten inhabitants
 - D. Allied Bombing
 1. After May of 1943, the Allies began their major bombing offensive over Germany
 2. one German city after another was devastated
 3. German morale, however, was not undermined
 - E. Totalitarianism
 1. World War II increased the power of the Nazi Party in Germany
 2. every area of the economy and society came under the direct influence or control of the party
 3. throughout the war years, there was virtually no serious opposition to Hitler or his ministers

4. in 1944, however, a small group of army officers (including Rommel) attempted to assassinate Hitler...the effort failed
- II. France: Defeat, Collaboration, and Resistance
- A. the terms of the armistice between France and Germany divided the country into two parts:
1. Occupied France
 - a. capital was Paris
 - b. controlled by the Nazis
 2. Vichy (Unoccupied) France
 - a. puppet French government (led by Marshal Petain)
 - b. followed a policy of close collaboration with the Germans
 - c. some collaborators believed that the Germans were sure to win the war and wanted to be on the victorious side
 - d. a few sympathized with the ideas and plans of the Nazis
 3. Most of the French, however, were not active collaborators but were helpless and demoralized by defeat and the evidence of German power
- B. French National Committee of Liberation (“Free French”)
1. fled to Britain after the defeat of France
 2. led by General Charles de Gaulle
 3. fought in Africa
- C. Resistance
1. Serious internal resistance to the German occupation and to the Vichy government began to develop late in 1942
 2. initially, well under 5% of the adult French population appears to have been involved
 - a. feared German punishment
 - b. appeared that the Germans would win the war
 3. by early 1944, however, resistance became stronger as the tide of battle shifted
- III. Great Britain: Organization for Victory
- A. Wartime Footing: On May 22, 1940, the British Parliament gave the government emergency powers.
1. instituted compulsory military service
 2. implemented food rationing
 3. instituted various controls over the economy
- B. Winston Churchill
1. to deal with the crisis, all British political parties (Conservative, Liberal, and Labour) joined a national government under Churchill
 2. Churchill and the war cabinet moved quickly to mobilize the nation
 - a. called on businesses and homes for all scrap metal (for planes and armaments)
 - b. factory hours were extended
 - c. women were brought into the labor force
 - d. to avoid inflation, savings were encouraged and taxes were raised
 - e. by the end of 1941, British production had already surpassed Germany’s

- C. The “Blitz”: German air attacks of the winter and spring of 1940-1941
 - 1. killed thousands of people and left many others homeless
 - 2. many families removed their children to the countryside
 - 3. gas masks were issued to thousands of city dwellers
 - 4. people were frequently compelled to take shelter from the bombs in the London subways
- D. The British Broadcasting Company (BBC)
 - 1. Britain’s own propaganda machine
 - 2. sent programs to every country in Europe in the local language to encourage resistance against the Nazis
 - 3. at home, the government used the radio to unify the nation
- IV. The Soviet Union: “The Great Patriotic War”
 - A. No nation suffered greater loss of life or more extensive physical destruction during World War II than the Soviet Union
 - 1. as many as sixteen million people were killed
 - 2. vast numbers of Soviet troops were taken prisoner
 - 3. hundreds of cities and towns and well over half of the industrial and transportation facilities of the country were devastated
 - 4. the Germans also served their own war effort with grain, mineral resources, and oil confiscated from the Soviet Union (further adding to the misery in the nation)
 - B. Stalin
 - 1. conducted the war as virtual chief of the armed forces
 - 2. he was suspicious of generals, though he had presumably eliminated officers of doubtful loyalty in the purges of the late 1930’s
 - 3. however, to keep the loyalty of Soviet citizens, he was forced to make certain concessions:
 - a. great Russian novels of the past were republished
 - b. made peace with the Russian Orthodox Church
 - C. Soviet Propaganda
 - 1. confiscated radios to prevent the people from listening to German or British propaganda (because the government distrusted the loyalty of its citizens)
 - 2. in the cities, the government broadcast to the people over loudspeakers in place of radios
 - 3. during the war, Soviet propaganda emphasized Russian patriotism rather than traditional Marxist themes that stressed class conflict
 - 4. the struggle against the Germans was called “The Great Patriotic War”