



## Resource C

### The Allied Naval Blockade of Germany 1914-1918

#### 1914

**August 4<sup>th</sup>**- The British Government announced that Royal Navy patrols would stop and search all neutral ships to prevent them trading with Germany. British Mines were laid close to German ports making it more dangerous for neutral ships to trade with Germany.

**November 4<sup>th</sup>**- The British Government declared the North Sea a “military area”. Most neutral ships agreed to dock at British ports. There they were searched and any cargo bound for Germany that was on the British list of “illegal” or “contraband” goods was seized. Neutral ships were afterwards escorted through British-laid minefields to their final destinations.

During the autumn and winter of 1914 goods continued to reach Germany through Switzerland, Italy and Austria-Hungary despite a blockade of Austrian ports in the Mediterranean by the French Navy.

All parties in the German parliament supported the War and the government. The German Emperor declared “We are all Germans now”

#### 1915

The number of goods coming in to Germany from abroad fell by 55% compared to before the war. There were shortages of coal, vital for factory production as well as important metals. Nitrate (fertiliser) used for growing crops was in short supply and effected the amount of food German farms could produce.

**May 1915**- Italy declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary. Goods no longer reached Germany and Austria-Hungary through Italy.

**June 1915**- Bread rationing was introduced in Germany. However the American ambassador claimed “Germany has plenty of food”.

#### 1916

Further rationing was introduced by the German government. Adults were only allowed 3 pounds of potatoes a week. Meat, milk, sugar and soap were also rationed. There were big shortages of food and some types of meat such as pork virtually disappeared. Fewer fish and eggs were eaten. Germans could not get coffee at all. There were long queues at shops and some Germans had to depend on free food given out by charity food kitchens. Food prices rose very high. Poorer people could not afford some food that was not rationed.



Food supplies from the neutral Netherlands (Holland), Denmark and Switzerland fell because these countries needed them to feed their own people.

The rainy autumn of 1916 caused the number of potatoes produced to fall by half. A bitterly cold winter was made worse by a coal shortage. Germans could not heat their houses easily and there was not enough coal to run trains to get potatoes from the countryside to the towns and cities. Potatoes rotted waiting to get to markets. Instead many Germans had to rely on eating turnips, usually used for feeding animals.

The number of strikes increased. Some MP`s from the biggest party in the German parliament, the Social Democrats (who still supported the War) broke away to form a new anti-war party.

### **1917**

Coal and food shortages got worse. The size of the bread ration was cut. Many Germans could not afford to heat or light their homes properly. Food got even more expensive. People mixed sawdust with certain food to make it last longer. Troops marching to the fronts through Berlin were rarely cheered. The soldiers themselves did not often sing as they marched. The number of strikes and food protests increased. Some Germans started to listen to extremists demanding an end to the War and calling for a revolution in Germany. In July sailors mutinied at the naval port of Kiel. The harvest was better in the autumn but food prices continued to rise.

### **1918**

Victory over Russia and the spring offensives of March 1918 on the Western Front improved morale among Germans despite continued shortages and hardship. However the offensives failed. Morale fell again. More and more Germans wanted an end to the War and some were attracted to extremist politicians demanding revolution. Strikes and protests increased. By the autumn it was common to hear ordinary people calling for the German emperor to abdicate. In October, sailors in the naval port of Kiel mutinied again against their officers and in early November revolutionaries seized control of the major city of Munich. The German generals handed over power to politicians from the parliament who were forced to agree an armistice (truce) with the Allies. On November 9<sup>th</sup> the German Emperor went in to exile and a republic was set up. The new republic took the blame for German defeat. Hundreds of thousands of malnourished Germans died during the flu epidemic that swept Europe during 1918 and 1919.