

2006 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Modern History

Section I (continued)

Question 2 (10 marks)

Explain why US entry into World War I proved to be the most significant of the war's turning points.

Use Sources A and B and your own knowledge to answer this question.

The US entry into the war had a number of impacts - on the morales of the Allied and German soldiers and the morales of the civilians in, particularly Britain and Germany. It proved to be the "decisive blow" (Webb) which would result in victory.

The US declared war on Germany in April 1917 after a number of incidents including the sinking of the *Lucitania* in 1915, a neutral American ship (as shown in Source A), and the Zimmerman Telegram incident in 1917. The announcement of the USA's entry into the war added to the war weariness felt by German soldiers and civilians alike, and increased the feeling of imminent victory felt by the Allies.

Although war was declared in 1917, US forces would not arrive at the Western Front until mid-1918 (as shown in Source A) and a decision

Question 2 continues on page 4

Question 2 (continued)

was made by the German military to attempt one last breakthrough in the spring of 1918 (as shown in Source A).

"The defeat of Russia in the east had allowed Germany to send massive reinforcements" (source A) to the Western Front and the German offensive, or 'Operation Michael' was underway by March 1918 (source A). Initially the Germans achieved great success (as demonstrated by Source B), as they pushed the French and British forces back and came within 30km of Paris - the original target of the Schlieffen Plan. The reserves from the Eastern Front helped achieve this as "fresh German reserves" (source B) were able to continue to attack Allied lines.

However, the entry of the US into the war had more of a psychological effect on soldiers, increasing the morale of the Allied forces (shown in source B) and adding to the seeming futility of the war for the Germans. The Allied counter-offensive began on August 8th 1918 ("the "black day" in the German army" - Ludendorff) and with fresh US troops, the feeling of 'finishing the job' reached a peak as Germany was defeated and the armistice was signed on November 11th 1918.

Although the US entered the war in mid-1918, it proved to be a major turning point as it demonstrated how the tactic of attrition warfare eventually had effects on German morale and led to Allied victory.

End of Question 2

2006 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
Modern History**Section I (continued)****Question 3 (10 marks)**

Assess how useful Sources C and D would be for an historian studying the impact of total war on the home fronts during World War I.

In your answer, consider the perspectives provided by the TWO sources and the reliability of each one.

Source C is a primary literary source from American ambassador James Gerard. It outlines the effect that the war had on the German homefront and the consequences from the naval blockade imposed by Britain. The source's perspective is that of an American who takes the role of an onlooker to the situation unfolding in Germany. His account is free from personal bias, making the source a reliable one. Although source C is not a particularly emotive-driven one, it still provides an overview of life in Germany during the war, providing details of food shortages and employment. The source does have its limitations. It provides only a picture of civilian life in Germany, which was vastly different to the conditions experienced in Britain. It also doesn't provide details of other facets of total war including the political and economic situation of Germany and measures taken to overcome these problems.

Question 3 continues on page 6

Question 3 (continued)

Source C also doesn't detail the initial reaction to war in Germany, and the factors which brought about the descent into eventual revolution, and changes in attitudes.

Source D is a primary pictorial source. It is a British propaganda poster from the Ministry of Food, printed in 1917.

The poster reflects the attitudes and lives of civilians in Britain during the war. Voluntary rationing was introduced in 1917, which this poster demonstrates.

The symbolism of the British Navy in the background of the poster and the slogan 'Defeat the U-Boat' encourage feelings of nationalism and pride, which propaganda posters hoped to achieve. The woman in the poster's foreground represents the increasing role women were playing during the war.

The perspective of Source D is a British one, allowing historians to analyse the effectiveness of propaganda which played a large role in the war. It is reliable in showing the British government's role in the lives of civilians and the measures gone to, to encourage nationalism and further support for the war. It is limited as it presents only one view, and that of the government may differ to public opinion. Because the poster is propaganda also, other sources need to be used in conjunction with Source D to provide an overall picture of conditions on the homefront.

These sources, C and D, can be used in corroboration with other sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the roles of the homefronts in terms of total war. Total war involved a number of factors and all these would have to be considered by an historian.

© Board of Studies NSW 2006 Studying Total War.