

World History MAP Mini-Debate: Total War

"You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and male-dictions a people can pour out."

—William Tecumseh Sherman

The Parliament of England is one of the oldest and most treasured institutions of Democracy in the world. Parliament is led by a Prime Minister who maintains a grouping (can be one political party or an alliance of smaller parties called a coalition) which make up over half of the members of parliament. The PM (as the leader of the majority party) is selected by the reigning monarch.

The government (party or group political parties in alliance) decides on all legislation brought before the House of Commons (and Lords). The government maintains power until legislation which it proposes comes to a vote in which it loses its majority in a general election. Thus, critical issues which may bring strife or discord within the government rarely reach the floor for vote unless the issue is of urgent national importance or is a centerpiece of the parties legislation (usually governments seem to fall on trivial votes when party members leave for lunch early or fail to vote).

However, it is January 1917 and an issue of critical importance has reached the floor. The combined Liberal-Labor coalition government has called for debate and a vote on the issue of Total War (all of society involved in the war process). Although the government approves of the way in which commoners in England are helping the war effort (by conservation, enlistment [one million volunteers], increasing factory production, the rate that women are joining the factories [9,500 at the war's start to a peak of 64,000]), it is resolved to **end the blockade against Germany because of the death it is bringing to innocent civilians in Germany and Austria, cease all raids on civilian targets, and cease using gas warfare on the front if the German Government will end its own gas warfare and unrestricted submarine warfare program.**

The British, when the Germans invaded Belgium (August 1914), had only a small force to send across the Channel to assist the Belgians and French. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was a small but effective force which played an important role as did the Belgian Army, but if the Germans were to be stopped it would have to be done by the French Army. What the British did have was the Royal Navy. The Government ordered the Royal Navy to immediately cut the flow of raw materials and foodstuffs to Germany. The blockade would not effect the German offensive, but it was the launch of a war of attrition which would ultimately play a key role for the Allies. The Royal Navy was issued contraband lists. The Royal Navy patrolled the North Sea and intercepted cargo vessels suspected of carrying cargo destined for Germany. The British also laid minefields to sink German ships and force neutrals to comply with the terms of the blockade. The British subsequently declared the North Sea a British 'military area' (November 3, 1914). Neutral shipping thus had to enter British ports for inspection. Ships without contraband were then escorted through the North Sea minefields.

The British blockade crippled the German economy. Food shortages in Germany became severe as early as 1916. The German Government never introduced an effective rationing system ensure that the privations were equitably shared. Also, the German conscription program did not take into account the need to maintain agricultural production. The diversion of fertilizer production to producing munitions reduced crop yields in Germany. Germany could not feed itself even before the war and the British blockade made it impossible to import food. This and the declining food production because of the war severely affected the availability of food. German and even more so Austrian families were affected by

severe food shortages in 1916. Civilians had to turn to less nutritious turnips. This led to the so called Turnip Winter.

Though the entire populace was hurt by the lack of food, German newborns suffered the most. Their mothers, were unable to obtain enough food to meet their own basic bodily functions, which resulted in both less milk, and diminishing nutritional quality of what little milk they were producing. Thus German citizens were being starved because the blockade cut most avenues for Germany to obtain food from abroad, which caused dwindling supplies to increase in price, and become out of reach for millions of citizens.

Germans turned to a variety of ersatz products. This ranged from 'war bread' (Kriegsbrot) to powdered milk. Life for all but the rich became a time of eating meals never entirely filling, living in unheated homes, wearing clothing that proved difficult to replace and walking with leaky shoes. It meant starting and ending the day with substitutes for nearly everything." [Moyer, p. 164.] The poor were the most severely impacted. The bread winners in many families were at the front leaving their families destitute. State allowances were provided, but were inadequate and brought less and less food as the War progressed. [Wall and Winter , p. 117.] By the end of the War food shortages were at crisis levels. Malnutrition affected many and real starvation loomed. Some sources believe that as many as 800,000 German civilians may have died due to malnutrition. Many were children.

Points to Consider

- 1.) Can Britain win the war without the blockade? Is it helping win the war?
- 2.) Do *morals* count in warfare? What are the moral ramifications of involving non-combatants in war?
- 3.) Are the Germans trustworthy? Will they stop their attacks if we do?
- 4.) Does following the Hague Convention Rules of 1899 & 1907 make neutral nations more likely to side with Britain *whether or not* Germany agrees to the treaty?

Hague Convention of 1899

The peace conference was proposed on August 29, 1898 by Russian Tsar Nicholas II Nicholas and his foreign minister were instrumental in initiating the conference. The main effect of the Convention was to ban the use of certain types of modern technology in war: bombing from the air, chemical warfare, and hollow point bullets.

Hague Convention of 1907

The second conference, in 1907, was generally a failure, with few major decisions.

Arguments to End Total War	Arguments to Continue Total War	Verdict & Reasoning