

1 Congress Gives Power to Wilson

Winning the war was not a job for American soldiers alone. As Secretary of War Newton Baker said, "War is no longer Samson with his shield and spear and David with his sling. It is the conflict of smokestacks now, the combat of the driving wheel and the engine." Because World War I was such an immense conflict, the entire economy had to be refocused on the war effort. The shift from producing consumer goods to producing war supplies was too complicated and important a job for private industry to handle on its own, so business and government collaborated in the effort. In the process, the power of government was greatly expanded. Congress gave President Wilson direct control over much of the economy, including the power to fix prices and to regulate—even to nationalize—certain war-related industries.

WAR INDUSTRIES BOARD The main regulatory body was the **War Industries Board (WIB)**. It was established in 1917 and reorganized in 1918 under the leadership of **Bernard M. Baruch** (bə-rōōk'), a prosperous businessman. The board encouraged companies to use mass-production techniques to increase efficiency. It also urged them to eliminate waste by standardizing products—for instance, by making only 5 colors of typewriter ribbons instead of 150. The WIB set production quotas and allocated raw materials.

Under the WIB, industrial production in the United States increased by about 20 percent. However, the WIB applied price controls only at the wholesale level. As a result, retail prices soared, and in 1918 they were almost double what they had been before the war. Corporate profits soared as well, especially in such industries as chemicals, meatpacking, oil, and steel.

The WIB was not the only federal agency to regulate the economy during the war. The Railroad Administration controlled the railroads, and the Fuel Administration monitored coal supplies and rationed gasoline and heating oil. In addition, many people adopted "gasless Sundays" and "lightless nights" to conserve fuel. In March 1918, the Fuel Administration introduced another conservation measure: daylight-saving time, which had first been proposed by Benjamin Franklin in the 1770s as a way to take advantage of the longer days of summer.

WAR ECONOMY Wages in most industries rose during the war years. Hourly wages for blue-collar workers—those in the metal trades, shipbuilding, and meatpacking, for example—rose by about 20 percent. A household's income, however, was largely undercut by rising food prices and housing costs.

By contrast, stockholders in large corporations saw enormous profits. One industrial manufacturer, the DuPont Company, saw its stock multiply in value 1,600 percent between 1914 and 1918. By that time the company was earning a \$68-million yearly profit. As a result of the uneven pay between labor and management, increasing work hours, child labor, and dangerously "sped-up" conditions, unions boomed. Union membership climbed from about 2.5 million in 1916 to more than 4 million in 1919. More than 6,000 strikes broke out during the war months.

To deal with disputes between management and labor, President Wilson established the National War Labor Board in 1918. Workers who refused to obey board decisions could lose their draft exemptions. "Work or fight," the board told them. However, the board also worked to improve factory conditions. It pushed for an eight-hour workday, promoted safety inspections, and enforced the child labor ban. Ⓜ

FOOD ADMINISTRATION To help produce and conserve food, Wilson set up the Food Administration under Herbert Hoover. Instead of rationing food, he called on people to follow the "gospel of the clean plate." He declared one day a week "meatless," another "sweetless," two days "wheatless," and two other days "porkless." Restaurants removed sugar bowls from the table and served bread only after the first course.

Homeowners planted "victory gardens" in their yards. Schoolchildren spent their after-school hours growing tomatoes and cucumbers in public parks. As a result of these and similar efforts, American food shipments to the Allies tripled. Hoover also set a high government price on wheat and other staples. Farmers responded by putting an additional 40 million acres into production. In the process, they increased their income by almost 30 percent.

Selling the War

Once the government had extended its control over the economy, it was faced with two major tasks: raising money and convincing the public to support the war.

WAR FINANCING The United States spent about \$35.5 billion on the war effort. The government raised about one-third of this amount through taxes, including a progressive income tax (which taxed high incomes at a higher rate than low incomes), a war-profits tax, and higher excise taxes on tobacco, liquor, and luxury goods. It raised the rest through public borrowing by selling "Liberty Loan" and "Victory Loan" bonds.

The government sold bonds through tens of thousands of volunteers. Movie stars spoke at rallies in factories, in schools, and on street corners. As Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo put it, only "a friend of Germany" would refuse to buy war bonds. Ⓜ

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION To popularize the war, the government set up the nation's first **propaganda** agency, the Committee on Public Information (CPI). Propaganda is a kind of biased communication designed to influence people's thoughts and actions. The head of the CPI was a former muck-raking journalist named **George Creel**.

Creel persuaded the nation's artists and advertising agencies to create thousands of paintings, posters, cartoons, and sculptures promoting the war. He recruited some 75,000 men to serve as "Four-Minute Men," who spoke about everything relating to the war: the draft, rationing, bond drives, victory gardens, and topics such as "Why We Are Fighting" and "The Meaning of America."

Nor did Creel neglect the written word. He ordered a printing of almost 25 million copies of "How the War Came to America"—which included Wilson's war message—in English and other languages. He distributed some 75 million pamphlets, booklets, and leaflets, many with the enthusiastic help of the Boy Scouts. Creel's propaganda campaign was highly effective. However, while the campaign promoted patriotism, it also inflamed hatred and violations of the civil liberties of certain ethnic groups and opponents of the war.

Attacks on Civil Liberties Increase

Early in 1917, President Wilson expressed his fears about the consequences of war hysteria.

A PERSONAL VOICE WOODROW WILSON

"Once lead this people into war and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street. Conformity would be the only virtue, and every man who refused to conform would have to pay the penalty."

—quoted in Cobb of "The World"

The president's prediction came true. As soon as war was declared, conformity indeed became the order of the day. Attacks on civil liberties, both unofficial and official, erupted.

ANTI-IMMIGRANT HYSTERIA The main targets of these attacks were Americans who had emigrated from other nations, especially those from Germany and Austria-Hungary. The most bitter attacks were directed against the nearly 2 million Americans who had been born in Germany, but other foreign-born persons and Americans of German descent suffered as well. Ⓜ

Many Americans with German names lost their jobs. Orchestras refused to play the music of Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Some towns with German names changed them. Schools stopped teaching the German language, and librarians removed books by German authors from the shelves. People even resorted to violence against German Americans, flogging them or smearing them

with tar and feathers. A mob in Collinsville, Illinois, wrapped a German flag around a German-born miner named Robert Prager and lynched him. A jury cleared the mob's leader.

Finally, in a burst of anti-German fervor, Americans changed the name of German measles to "liberty measles." Hamburger—named after the German city of Hamburg—became "Salisbury steak" or "liberty sandwich," depending on whether you were buying it in a store or eating it in a restaurant. Sauerkraut was renamed "liberty cabbage," and dachshunds turned into "liberty pups."

ESPIONAGE AND SEDITION ACTS In June 1917 Congress passed the Espionage Act, and in May 1918 it passed the Sedition Act. Under the **Espionage and Sedition Acts** a person could be fined up to \$10,000 and sentenced to 20 years in jail for interfering with the war effort or for saying anything disloyal, profane, or abusive about the government or the war effort.

Like the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, these laws clearly violated the spirit of the First Amendment. Their passage led to over 2,000 prosecutions for loosely defined antiwar activities; of these, over half resulted in convictions. Newspapers and magazines that opposed the war or criticized any of the Allies lost their mailing privileges. The House of Representatives refused to seat Victor Berger, a socialist congressman from Wisconsin, because of his antiwar views. Columbia University fired a distinguished psychologist because he opposed the war. A colleague who supported the war thereupon resigned in protest, saying, "If we have to suppress everything we don't like to hear, this country is resting on a pretty wobbly basis."

The Espionage and Sedition Acts targeted socialists and labor leaders. Eugene V. Debs was handed a ten-year prison sentence for speaking out against the war and the draft. The anarchist Emma Goldman received a two-year prison sentence and a \$10,000 fine for organizing the No Conscription League. When she left jail, the authorities deported her to Russia. "Big Bill" Haywood and other leaders of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) were accused of sabotaging the war effort because they urged workers to strike for better conditions and higher pay. Haywood was sentenced to a long prison term. (He later skipped bail and fled to Russia.) Under such federal pressure, the IWW faded away. ☹

The War Encourages Social Change 4

Wars often unleash powerful social forces. The period of World War I was no exception; important changes transformed the lives of African Americans and women.

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE WAR Black public opinion about the war was divided. On one side were people like W. E. B. Du Bois, who believed that blacks should support the war effort.

Du Bois believed that African-American support for the war would strengthen calls for racial justice. In contrast, William Monroe Trotter, founder of the *Boston Guardian*, believed that victims of racism should not support a racist government. Trotter condemned Du Bois's accommodationist approach and favored protest instead. Nevertheless, despite grievances over continued racial inequality in the United States, most African Americans backed the war.

THE GREAT MIGRATION In concrete terms, the greatest effect of the First World War on African Americans' lives was that it accelerated the **Great Migration**, the large-scale movement of hundreds of thousands of Southern blacks to cities in the North. This great population shift had already begun before the war in the late 19th century, when African Americans trickled northward to escape the Jim Crow South—but after the turn of the century, the trickle became a tidal wave.

Several factors contributed to the tremendous increase in black migration. First, many African Americans sought to escape racial discrimination in the South, which made it hard to make a living and often threatened their lives. Also, a boll weevil infestation, aided by floods and droughts, had ruined much of the South's cotton fields. In the North, there were more job opportunities. For example, Henry Ford opened his automobile assembly line to black workers in 1914. The outbreak of World War I and the drop in European immigration increased job opportunities for African Americans in steel mills, munitions plants, and stockyards. Northern manufacturers sent recruiting agents to distribute free railroad passes through the South. In addition, the publisher of the black-owned newspaper *Chicago Defender* bombarded Southern blacks with articles contrasting Dixieland lynchings with the prosperity of African Americans in the North. ☹

However, racial prejudice against African Americans also existed in the North. The press of new migrants to Northern cities caused overcrowding and intensified racial tensions.

Nevertheless, between 1910 and 1930, hundreds of thousands of African Americans migrated to such cities as Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Author Richard Wright described the great exodus.

A PERSONAL VOICE RICHARD WRIGHT

"We are bitter no more; we are leaving! We are leaving our homes, pulling up stakes to move on. We look up at the high southern sky and remember all the sunshine and all the rain and we feel a sense of loss, but we are leaving. We look out at the wide green fields which our eyes saw when we first came into the world and we feel full of regret, but we are leaving. We scan the kind black faces we have looked upon since we first saw the light of day, and, though pain is in our hearts, we are leaving. We take one last furtive look over our shoulders to the Big House—high upon a hill beyond the railroad tracks—where the Lord of the Land lives, and we feel glad, for we are leaving."

—quoted in *12 Million Black Voices*

WOMEN IN THE WAR While African Americans began new lives, women moved into jobs that had been held exclusively by men. They became railroad workers, cooks, dockworkers, and bricklayers. They mined coal and took part in shipbuilding. At the same time, women continued to fill more traditional jobs as nurses, clerks, and teachers. Many women worked as volunteers, serving at Red Cross facilities and encouraging the sale of bonds and the planting of victory gardens. Other women, such as Jane Addams, were active in the peace movement. Addams helped found the Women's Peace Party in 1915 and remained a pacifist even after the United States entered the war. ☹

President Wilson acknowledged, "The services of women during the supreme crisis have been of the most signal usefulness and distinction; it is high time that part of our debt should be acknowledged." While acknowledgment of that debt did not include equal pay for equal work, it did help bolster public support for woman suffrage. In 1919, Congress finally passed the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote. In 1920 the amendment was ratified by the states.

THE FLU EPIDEMIC In the fall of 1918, the United States suffered a home-front crisis when an international flu epidemic affected about one-quarter of the U.S. population. The effect of the epidemic on the economy was devastating. Mines shut down, telephone service was cut in half, and factories and offices staggered working hours to avoid contagion. Cities ran short of coffins, and the corpses of poor people lay unburied for as long as a week. The mysterious illness seemed to strike people who were otherwise in the best of health, and death could come in a matter of days. Doctors did not know what to do, other than to recommend cleanliness and quarantine. One epidemic survivor recalled that "so many people died from the flu they just rang the bells; they didn't dare take [corpses] into the church."

In the army, where living conditions allowed contagious illnesses to spread rapidly, more than a quarter of the soldiers caught the disease. In some AEF units, one-third of the troops died. Germans fell victim in even larger numbers than the Allies. Possibly spread around the world by soldiers, the epidemic killed about 500,000 Americans before it disappeared in 1919. Historians believe that the influenza virus killed as many as 30 million people worldwide. ☹

World War I brought death and disease to millions but, like the flu epidemic, the war also came to a sudden end. After four years of slaughter and destruction, the time had come to forge a peace settlement. Americans hoped that this "war to end all wars" would do just that. Leaders of the victorious nations gathered at Versailles outside Paris to work out the terms of peace, and President Wilson traveled to Europe to ensure it.

