

HOMEWORK HELPSHEET / REVISION FILE

BACKGROUND

When Britain went to war in 1914, the government realized that it would be important to keep the country united and determined to defeat the enemy. To do this it would be necessary to make sure that the government's wartime policies and regulations were supported by the public. Early in 1915 a secret **WAR PROPAGANDA BUREAU** was set up to produce posters, leaflets etc to provide everyone with a constant reminder of their duties in wartime.

In August 1914, the British expeditionary force of 100,000 men was sent to Belgium to resist the German invaders. Compared to European countries this was a tiny force and it soon became clear that the British army would have to become bigger than it had ever been before. Until 1916, the government relied on volunteers and most propaganda was designed to persuade men to enlist and to stir up anti-German feeling. As the war progressed propaganda was used for many other purposes which the government considered important to the war effort. Not all propaganda came from the government, newspapers magazines and commercial advertisements usually helped to reinforce government propaganda messages.

- Propaganda and recruiting posters encouraged many men to join up the main themes used were patriotism, fighting to defend families, not letting down your friends who had joined, feelings of shame for those who did not enlist etc.
- Recruiting propaganda was also aimed at women to persuade them to get their sons/boyfriends/husbands to join up and to be ashamed of them if they refused. Employers were also asked to put pressure on men to enlist.
- The government put out stories of German atrocities in Belgium. Popular newspapers usually accompanied by illustrations of evil Germans bayoneting babies or torturing nuns carried these stories. This type of propaganda continued throughout the war.
- Companies advertising their products often used illustrations of the war and soldiers to promote their products. Usually they showed smiling soldiers in grassy fields sharing cigarettes and chatting. This was a completely false picture of the trenches.
- After 1916 with the introduction of conscription for men, more and more propaganda targeted women. Millions of women were needed for war work. This type of propaganda usually stressed the importance of war work to the men at the front but in some cases women were enticed by the high wages and other benefits that were promised.
- The increasing shortages caused by the German U-Boat campaign began to cause serious problems. The government used propaganda to persuade people not to waste food, petrol etc. To do so would put sailors lives at risk and help the Germans
- When rationing was introduced in 1917, it was accompanied by a big propaganda campaign explaining how the system would work, why it was necessary and how it would be fairer to everyone. The Ministry of Food also published the names and sentences of those who broke the regulations
- Other uses of propaganda during the war were to sell government War Bonds, inform people of new regulations on alcohol sales and to persuade them not to drink too much. To encourage workers and remind them how important their work was to the war effort.