

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

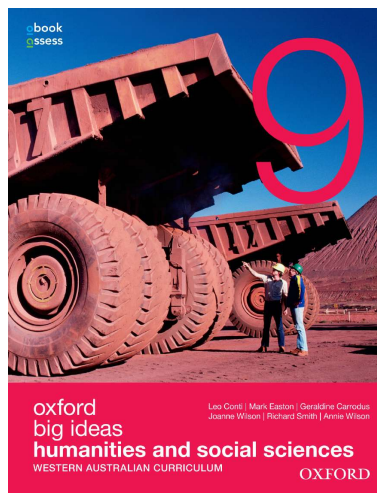
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9.12 The impact of war on Australian society

World War I had a significant impact on Australian society. A young nation with a population of less than five million in 1914 lost over 60 000 young men as a result of the war. Many of these men were the fittest and most able of the male population. As a percentage of total troops sent to war, Australia's losses were the highest of any of the Commonwealth nations (see Source 2). A summary of the numbers of those who served and of the numbers of deaths and other casualties makes it clear that Australia made a major sacrifice for the Allied war effort.

The initial enthusiasm with which most Australians greeted the outbreak of war did not last. By the middle of 1915, the reality of war began to dawn. Following the landing at Gallipoli, Australians received the news of more than 2000 deaths. As a result, many in the nation took a more sober view or became disillusioned. There was still strong support for the war and the soldiers, but any excitement had evaporated.

By late 1916, Australia was a bitterly divided country. Not only was there a growing dissatisfaction with the war, but a real sense that there was 'inequality of sacrifice'. Many working-class Australians felt that they had contributed the most in terms of enlisting soldiers, and that they were also being exploited at home. There was a perception that middle- and upper-class people were less affected by the war. Some were even seen to be profiting from lucrative government war contracts. These perceptions were not always accurate, but they still had an impact on the growing divisions in the nation.

The War Precautions Act

In 1914, the federal government passed the War Precautions Act, which gave the government increased powers for the duration of the war. This Act gave the federal government the legal right to, among other things, monitor and **intern** German-Australians, impose a direct income tax, censor letters and publications, and set fixed prices for certain goods.



Source 1 An Australian poster from 1917 encouraging Australians to enlist. After heavy casualties on the Western Front, Britain pressured Australia to make a bigger contribution to the war effort.

Source 2 A comparison of British Commonwealth casualties, World War I

Country	Total soldiers sent to war	Total casualties (captured, missing, wounded or killed)	% of casualties
Britain	5 000 000	2 535 424	50.71
Canada	422 405	210 100	49.74
Australia	331 781	215 585	64.98
New Zealand	98 950	58 526	59.01
India	1 096 013	140 015	12.77

Statistics from *Australian Campaigns in the Great War*, Lt The Hon. Stanisforth Smith

Impact on the Australian economy

World War I had a major economic impact on Australia and other nations. The cost of providing weapons, ammunition and supplies to the forces at home and overseas was vast. To meet these expenses, the federal government introduced income tax. It was also necessary to borrow funds from overseas. Australia borrowed heavily from Britain to build vital wartime infrastructure, such as expanded railways. Australia would take over 20 years to pay back loans taken out during the war.

The redirection of raw materials to the war effort and the needs of wartime industries caused **inflation**. As a result, the cost of living in Australia rose by up to 50 per cent during the war years. The war also disrupted international trade. Naval blockades and the use of shipping for military purposes meant fewer ships were available to move trade goods to overseas markets. The Australian government had introduced tariffs (taxes) on imported goods to protect its local wartime supplies. Many countries looked elsewhere for trade and discovered new sources in Japan and the USA.

On the positive side, however, Australia developed new industries. The fact that fewer goods could be brought in from overseas meant that inventive Australians began to develop alternatives that were made here. By the end of the war, 400 new products were being manufactured in Australia. The Newcastle steelworks, opened in 1915, was flourishing, the Australian National Shipping Line had been established and the role of the Commonwealth Bank expanded considerably.

One new product, developed as a direct result of the war, was a medication called Aspro (see Source 3). Before the war, aspirin (which at the time was a trademarked German-made pain reliever called Aspirin) had been widely used for pain relief in Australia. After the outbreak of war, the use of Aspirin became unpopular and unpatriotic because it was made by the German company Bayer. Two Australian pharmacists, George Nicholas and Henry Smith, analysed Aspirin and came up with an Australian version, which they called Aspro. Aspro became one of the most widely used over-the-counter medicines available in Australia.

There were people who profited from supplying goods needed for the war effort. These included farmers who supplied wheat, dairy products and meat to feed the soldiers here and overseas. Wool was in great demand for soldiers' uniforms (see Source 4) and munitions factories were working overtime to support the war effort.



Source 3 Aspro was developed in Australia as a direct result of the war.



Source 4 Wool, used to make soldiers' uniforms, was a valued commodity during the war.

However, many workers felt that they were not sharing in the wartime profits. Wages fell but the cost of living rose. This led to some resentment and even strike action in the coal industry, and on the railways and the wharves. These strikes drew much criticism. The strikers were described as unpatriotic and selfish, and they were largely unsuccessful.

Check your learning 9.12

Remember and understand

- 1 How many Australian men died in World War I? How does this figure compare with the losses suffered by other Commonwealth nations?
- 2 What were some of the factors causing division in Australian society by 1916?
- 3 What did the Australian federal government do in order to cover the great cost of the war effort?

Apply and analyse

- 4 Explain how the war influenced Australian manufacturing.

Evaluate and create

- 5 Aspro was developed because Bayer Aspirin was no longer imported from Germany. Research other products that were imported from Germany and Austria before the war to see if the bans placed on them led to the development of Australian alternatives.

9.13 The impact of war on Australian women

Historians often describe World War I as the first ‘total war’, because it was the first time that nations had mobilised all of their industries, resources and citizens for the war effort. Before World War I, most people’s involvement in wars was usually limited to paying taxes and worrying about friends and family members engaged in fighting overseas. By comparison, ‘total war’ placed many new pressures on those left at home.

With so many men away at war, there was an expectation that women would take on many duties that had previously been the responsibility of men. Women did a great deal of voluntary work, including fundraising and assisting with recruiting. They also moved into previously male domains in the workforce, such as working in munitions factories. In Britain, women were also able to join the armed forces, but only for home defence.

Most women were supportive of involvement at the start of the war and more than 2000 served, generally as nurses. While these women faced dangerous conditions overseas, the women on the home front also found their lives changing.



Source 1 This photograph, taken in 1915, shows women making uniforms at the Commonwealth Clothing Factory in Melbourne. Women were offered better working conditions and wages here than those offered by private employers, but they were also expected to work extremely hard for the war effort.

Women in the paid workforce

Before the war, most women had been homemakers, with a small number working in traditionally female roles such as teaching, nursing, dressmaking or domestic work. However, with around 500 000 young men off at war, women wanted to support the war effort at home. There was some resistance by trade unions to hiring women in traditionally male jobs, as it was thought that this might lower wages. However, women were able to take on some traditionally male roles, such as store clerks and bank tellers. The government controlled war-related work and women were rarely able to gain jobs in these areas.

The Australian Women’s Service Corps was formed with the aim of training women to take over male jobs in the services at home, to free more men to fight overseas. However, women were told that their services were not necessary.

Source 2

The Australian Women’s Service Corps, which has a membership of 1000, and which was formed recently with the object of training women to undertake the duties of motor-drivers, orderlies, clerks, and kitchen hands, in order to release men for fighting purposes, a few weeks ago made an offer to the Defence authorities to provide 700 women for such duties. A reply has been received from Mr T. Trumble, secretary of the Defence department, thanking the corps for its patriotic offer, but intimating that there are no positions available wherein the services of women could be utilised.

The Argus, Melbourne, 4 January 1917

By the end of the war, the percentage of women working outside the home had risen by about 13 per cent. However, there was an expectation after the war had finished that women who had taken on the traditional roles and jobs of men would return to the home, making way for returned soldiers.

Women's voluntary work during the war

During World War I, women were strongly encouraged to help the war effort by joining voluntary organisations. Vast numbers of women and girls sewed and knitted to ensure that the troops had warm clothing, and raised money to help those affected by the war.

Women who took on voluntary work developed skills and confidence. For many women, especially younger ones, these opportunities helped to shape their lives as the nation moved into the 1920s.

Australian Red Cross

After it was founded in Melbourne in 1914, the Australian Red Cross grew to have branches in every state of Australia. Women volunteering for the Red Cross attended working bees where they made packages for the men serving overseas. These packages included things like soap, toiletries, food, clothing and medical supplies. The Red Cross also raised money to assist soldiers' families, and established homes for wounded soldiers to recover in.



Source 3 Australian Red Cross poster, 1914–18

Australian Comforts Fund

The Australian Comforts Fund was established in 1916. Their main goal was to raise money, which they used to provide 'comfort boxes' for the soldiers. These boxes contained things like knitted socks, pyjamas and cigarettes.

Women and recruitment

Women were also active in influencing and encouraging men to enlist. Some women refused to speak to men who had not enlisted. Other women sent white feathers, a symbol of cowardice, to men who had not enlisted.

Images of women were regularly used in posters published by the government to encourage recruitment. Women were portrayed as 'helpless and vulnerable victims', in need of Australian soldiers to protect them from the 'evil Germans'.

Other women encouraged men not to enlist. Vida Goldstein, for example, was a Melbourne woman who actively promoted pacifism (opposition to war) and formed the Women's Peace Army in 1915.

Check your learning 9.13

Remember and understand

- 1 What roles were open to Australian women during World War I?
- 2 Describe some of the main activities of the volunteer organisations that existed to help the war effort.

Apply and analyse

- 3 Why do you think the offer of the Australian Women's Service Corps was rejected?

Evaluate and create

- 4 Put yourself in the role of a business operator during World War I. When one of your male employees enlisted, you employed a young woman who has proved to be excellent. You have spent time and

money developing her skills and knowledge. When your former employee returns from the war, he expects to be re-employed. He has lost a leg and is suffering from shell shock. You have to decide what to do. You cannot afford to employ them both.

- a On a sheet of paper, write all the arguments for sacking the woman and re-employing the man. On the other side, list the reasons in favour of keeping the young woman and telling the man to look for work elsewhere.
- b Decide which candidate you should employ to fill the position. Write a letter to the unsuccessful candidate explaining your decision and outlining the reasons for it.