

How effective was Germany in mobilizing its economy before and during the Second World War?



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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the effectiveness of Germany in mobilizing its economy before and during World War II. The Nazi regime initiated the "Four-Year Plan" in 1936 to prepare the economy for war, focusing on military autarky and self-sufficiency. Early investments in military production were made, and by 1939, Germany had built a strong military-industrial base. However, the economy was unprepared for the long-term demands of the war, with insufficient raw materials, poor coordination between the military and industry, and a lack of readiness in production capacities. During the war, Germany initially maintained a "peace-like war economy," focusing on civilian satisfaction in the early years. However, inefficiencies arose in mass production, and financial issues hindered military production. The shortage of essential materials and the underutilization of female labor further weakened the economy. Ultimately, Germany's economic strategies, while initially effective, were unsustainable and inadequate for the prolonged conflict, contributing to the collapse of its economy by 1945. The paper concludes that despite early successes, Germany's economic mobilization was hindered by strategic errors and inefficiencies, leading to its failure during the war.

Keywords:

Four-Year Plan; Autarky; Mass production; Raw materials; Economic mobilization

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نُشر هذا المقال في جُورِية كان التاريخية للأغراض العلمية والبحثية فقط، وغير مسموح بإعادة النسخ والنشر والتوزيع لأغراض تجارية أو ربحية.

Introduction

The Second World War was a significant war in history which lasted from 1939 to 1945. Many historians assert that World War II started on the 1st of September 1939 and that Europe was the centre of the struggle which spread around the world (Taylor, 1976: p11). In this regard, according to Harrison (2001), the economics of the second world war analyses the war experiences of six great powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy and Soviet Union. In addition, mobilization of the economy was a significant part of the war strategy for each of these powers. For example, before starting the war, the Axis powers (German, Italy and Japan) prepared their economies first, and then the Allies powers (USA, UK and Russia) mobilized their economies during the start of the war (Harrison, 2000: p22-23).

The aim of this paper is to focus on how effective Germany was in preparing its economy before and during World War II. This research will show that the economy of German was effective in some points, for example organizing a four-year plan preparing for war by the Nazi regime in 1936 and providing resources for consumption during the first two years of the war. This is supported by Overy (1995, p198) who stated that the German economy was considered as a strong source of military power in the West, and between the three Axis, Germany was the single source of economy in armament. However, this paper will suggest that the economy of Germany was not effective before and during the Second World War especially in terms of investing enormous amounts of money, problems with raw material, the high quality of mass production and encouraging Germany to be self-sufficient. It is clear that the German economy was weak during World War II particularly owing to starting war too early, a poor relationship between industry and the army, not utilizing women in the industrial factories and destroyed German cities through bombing.

How effective was Germany in mobilizing its economy before and during the Second World War?

Many historians have debated and argued about the state of Germany economy before and during the Second World War. The ways that Germany was effective in mobilising its economy are still discussed among generations of historians today. This section will discuss the economic focus of the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945 (Kershaw, 1993: p41). It is important to mention that on 30th of January 1933, Hitler came to power as a German chancellor (Hillgruber, 1981: p58), a time when Germany's economy was not stable.

Pre-war German's economy

One point that shows the German economy was not effective before the start of the war regards investment. It is believed that by Scherner (2013) from the mid-1930s, the Nazi party invested large amounts of money in preparation for the war. At this time, the Nazi regime had gained motivation for developing the capacities of military equipment and autarky industries, with increasing expenditure for military and particularly improves the ways of funding them. In addition, Overy (1995: p199-200) mentions that before starting the war in 1938, Hitler admitted their enormous war potential that would make Germany the first power of the coming war. However, after starting the war in 1939, it was hindered from being the superpower of the era as it cut short expenses and time for continuous and effective military production.

To look at this in another way, the German economy proved to be successful during the four years plan before starting the war. This is supported by Meier (2000) who stated that from 1936 Germany had organized the four-year plan for war in order to achieve the aim of improving economic autarky and mobilising its economy. Furthermore, Overy has highlighted that by the year of 1936, there were the significant investments in autarky industries from the context of four-year plan in order to encourage Germany self-sufficient and to mobilize its economy for war (Schermer, 2010).

Therefore, in the prewar period the autarky investments were increased considerably and during the war, between 1940 to 1943, it reached its height (Schermer, 2010). Hence, the Nazi regime was the master of the economy by 1936 (World Historia, 2005). However, Copeland, (1996) stated that Hitler decided to improve autarky for the war preparation by 1936, as he considered it as an essential for Germany's economic capability for long time. This decision was made during the four-year plan. Despite this, autarky could not be continued as there were limitations that could not remove. It seems that autarky did not provide enough resources for long term, and the mobilising of the economy was not suitable for a long war.

Another way that had a negative effect on Germany's economy was that the war was started too early. At that time, Hitler came to power and the economy in Germany was not ready. It is argued by Harrison (2000, p154) that the German's economy was being developed at high speed by September 1939, while the step was not still complete and industry of German was not ready for starting the war. However, Hillgruber (1981, p62) stated that in four years' time Hitler determined that before starting the war "the German army be ready for action and the German economy capable of waging war".

The economy of German during the war

On the other hand, another point that proves that the economy was mobilised was that the economy of Germany was peaceful during the first couple years of war. It is supported by Scherner (2010) during the first two years of the war; the German economy was described as a 'peace-like war economy' by some scholars. The aim of this policy was to provide resources for consumption. In addition, Scherner (2013) states that before starting the war and during the first two years proponents of the 'Blitzkrieg hypothesis' support that Hitler intentionally under-mobilized its economy, in order to prepare its resources for providing consumer

goods to satisfy of the German's civilian from the Nazi's hostile policies. It is clear that the Germany's civilian economy was quite well during the first two years of the war.

Production tactics

Another possibility that had a negative effect on Germany's economy was the independent system of mass production Nazis adopted, because of their prejudice, was the other reason which caused German to fail because of problem of timing, having expensive and high-quality products through skilled craftsman, though insufficient production in the final (Overy, 1995: p 202). According to Tooze (2006, p662) in the summer of 1939, the German armaments economy was being significantly pressed by financial problems. On the other hand, weapons production must have been much greater; a slight increase was there by industrial stagnation, for example "there was 8000 aircraft in 1939, 10000 in 1940, only 11000 in 1941". While Germany produced 425 different aircraft models and by the middle of the war there were 151 different makes of lorry and 150 motor-cycles that were equipped by the German army (Overy, 1995: p200-201)). In addition, the mobilisation of the war economy in Germany was significantly incompetent. Because of the portion of armament industries increased from 61% in 1939 to 79% in 1940, and between 1939 to 1940 it was more than double. During the first years of the war, war-related industrial investments was peaked (Schermer, 2010). Hence, due to massive rearmament the German economy was limited in 1939 (Schermer, 2013). It might be argued that mass production was difficult to continue because of financial problems and problem of timing.

In addition, Failure to prepare the biggest mass-producing industry was not the only reason for the issues in German war economy. In fact there was many other factors to this problem. It is important that a technical advancement was required for producing large quantities of standard weapons. This became reality when Hitler in December 1941 ordered German industries to simplify and increased efficiency in armament production. And

also, he planned German industry to go into mass production (Overy, 1995: p203). However, by the year 1944, only a few chosen weapons were produced, for example only five aircraft models selected from the available 42 models, for mass production only 23 lorries models were selected from the available 151. A dozen of anti-tank weapons got replaced just one. Finally, the whole range of German weaponry industry went through drastic changes to encourage the mass production of war weaponries (Overy, 1995: p204). However, according to Harrison (1998) between 1939 to 1941 Germany and Japan reached the high level of the military qualities not the quantity, but in Germany there was no strong connection with the level of economic development. Quality of armies and armament was essential for the German and Japanese strategy, but for the Allied strategy quantity was significant stage. Despite that German reached the high level of military qualities during the World War II, while there was not a strong relationship with the level of economic development. It is clear that the economy was not effective because Germany emphasized on qualities not the quantities, whereas the Second World War was a mass war and Germany had to produce huge production.

On the other way another alternative factor that led to Germany's economy to become weak was short with raw materials. When the war started in September 1939 supplies of raw materials were enough for almost one year, and expected that it also had to be imported (Hillgruber, 1981: p63). Hence, in that time Germany industry depended on foreign sources, for example 70% of its copper, 80% of its rubber, 65% of its tin (Hillgruber, p75). Despite this, Tooze (2006, p661) mentioned that in September 1939 when Germany started the war, there was no considerable material or technical superiority among more developed military power of the West. Therefore, by 1941 there was a convincing economic case for Hitler's decision to expand the war, for example Germany tried to

access some raw materials from the Soviet Union such as grain and oil (Tooze, 2006: p666).

As can be seen in this paragraph by the opening of war, the economy suddenly conscripted and it was restricted to the people, and many unnecessary businesses were shut down. Due to by 1941 more than half of industry manpower went for army (Overy, 1995: p200). In this regard, there was a poor relationship between industry and army in Germany. Hence, economy in Germany was not effective because of many issues and it never became efficiency. It is supported that by Overy (1995: 201-202) there were the poor coordination in business system of Nazism as a result of a recent feeling towards the corrupted and self-centred Nazis. The businessman did not like to involve in any benevolent and voluntary to help economy. On the other hand, were the exhausted German engineering system whose inadequacy and inefficiency were because of the niggardly and chaos of orders. Moreover, Schweitzer (1946) states that there was no power relationship between party and big business in whole process of the regime.

This point is looking of Germany's economy was weak allies economically. Before starting the war, the Axis powers prepared their economies first. Whereas when war was declared as inevitable, the western Allies powers started to organize their economies. Thus, the Allies powers prepared their economy equally and found that the qualitative benefits of the Axis powers were counteracted by only quantitative effort (Harrison, 1998). Another important point that has to be mentioned is that, surrounding, economic conflict and using political influence were the strategy that Allies had planned to separate German. From this way they started their struggling to put Germany in economic quarantine (Overy, 1998: p85).

On the other hand, the greatest number of financial resources that Germany received was from occupation costs that France had to pay for a long time. Hence, the funds were enough for Germany's aims, but by 1942 expenses increased considerably. In addition, Germany responded by rising

occupation costs France had to pay in order to decrease expenditure and inflation (Boldorf, Scherner, 2012). According to Harrison (1998) during the period war, 30-40 percent of the national products of France, the Netherlands and Norway were extracted successfully by German occupation policies. However, According to Overy (1995: p:200) the conquered supplements of coal and steel resources from France, Belgium and Luxemburg still could not fill the gap between reality and the first plan of Hitler.

However, this paragraph is looking of bombing that had a negative effect in Nazi Germany particularly in its economy. It is evident that the Nazi regime did not have plan for a long war, and the effects of a strategic bombing was a significant issue especially on damaging industrial plants (Scherner, 2010). Thus, at last, the German economy collapsed in 1945, as a result of combining of heavy bombing with a huge attack from both east and westsides (Harrison, 1998). . It is argued that the civilian economy in Germany was suffered as a result of throwing bombing from Allied powers. This is supported by Meier (2000) Allies powers destroyed the German cities by bombing in 1944.

In addition, this point shows the biggest critical mistake that effect Germany's economy was that they did not permit to utilize women in the industrial factories. It is supported that by (World Historia, 2005), during the Second World War, forbidding women to employ as a source of labour was the most enormous mistakes that made by Germans. According to Nazi party ideology, the place of German's women was at home, and it was not in factory, they failed to have advantages of this significant unused reserve for the making of war material. In addition, another point that affected German's economy was that Nazis paid married women credits if they did not continue with their job.

Conclusion

This essay has shown the Germany's economy before and during the Second World War. Therefore, it has described several arguments about how effective Germany in mobilising its economy before and during the period of Nazi regime between 1933 to 1945).

Germany mobilised its economy before starting the World War II in several strategies such as Nazi regime organised a four-year plan to be ready for preparing its economy in Germany and achieving some financial resources from the occupation during the war. However, there are some evidences that showed Germany's economy before and during the Second World War that was not effective, for example investing large amounts of money for military equipment, bombing from Allies powers that led to destroying many industrials in large cities. In addition, Germany has weak Allies economically and the government emphasized large quality not the quantity on mass production.

In addition, another alternative that can have negative effect on economy of Germany includes the regime not having enough raw materials for industries, effecting autarky on production to become poor and Nazi party did not utilize women to work in industrial factories. As a result of this, the Germany's economy had many issues and never become efficient, despite decreasing its economic production during the war.

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ما مدى فاعلية ألمانيا في تعبئة اقتصادها قبل وأثناء الحرب العالمية الثانية؟

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ملخص المقال:

لقد أظهر هذا المقال الاقتصاد الألماني قبل وأثناء الحرب العالمية الثانية، وبالتالي تم وصف العديد من النقاط حول مدى فاعلية ألمانيا في تعبئة اقتصادها قبل وأثناء فترة النظام النازي بين عامي ١٩٣٣ و١٩٤٥. قامت ألمانيا بتعبئة اقتصادها قبل بداية الحرب العالمية الثانية من خلال عدة استراتيجيات، مثل تنظيم النظام النازي لخطة الأربع سنوات استعداداً لتحضير للاقتصاد الحربي في ألمانيا وتحقيق بعض الموارد المالية من خلال احتلال عدد من الدول الأوروبية خلال الحرب. ومع ذلك، هناك بعض الأدلة التي أظهرت أن اقتصاد ألمانيا قبل وأثناء الحرب العالمية الثانية لم يكن فعالاً بما يكفي لمواجهة الحلفاء والاستمرار في الحرب لمدة تزيد عن سبعة سنوات، منها على سبيل المثال، استنزاف مبالغ طائلة من الأموال في صنع المعدات العسكرية، بالإضافة إلى القصف والدمار الذي تعرض لها ألمانيا من قبل القوات الجوية للحلفاء أثناء الحرب، مما أدى إلى تدمير العديد من الصناعات في المدن الكبرى. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، كانت ألمانيا تمتلك حلفاء اقتصاديين ضعفاء، وركزت الحكومة على الجودة الكبيرة بدلاً من الكمية في الإنتاج الضخم. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، هناك بدائل أخرى كان لها تأثير سلبي على اقتصاد ألمانيا، بما في ذلك عدم توفر المواد الخام الكافية للصناعات، وتأثير الاكتفاء الذاتي على الإنتاج الذي أصبح فقيراً، وعدم استغلال حزب النازي للنساء للعمل في المصانع الصناعية. نتيجة لذلك، واجه اقتصاد ألمانيا العديد من المشاكل ولم يصبح فعالاً، على الرغم من تقليص إنتاجه الاقتصادي خلال الحرب.