

## How did Speer improve Germany's war economy?

### FOCUS ROUTE

Study Chart 21E and pages 416–17; then copy and complete the following table.

Problem (see Chart 21E)	Details of problem (from text)	How Speer tried to tackle it

Over the next three years, from 1942 to 1945, Speer revolutionised the economy's performance despite increasingly adverse circumstances. The armed forces had to submit their requirements to Speer's ministry, which possessed more accurate information on the current state of industrial production. Requirements and capacities were thus co-ordinated, and it was possible to tailor orders more closely to both.

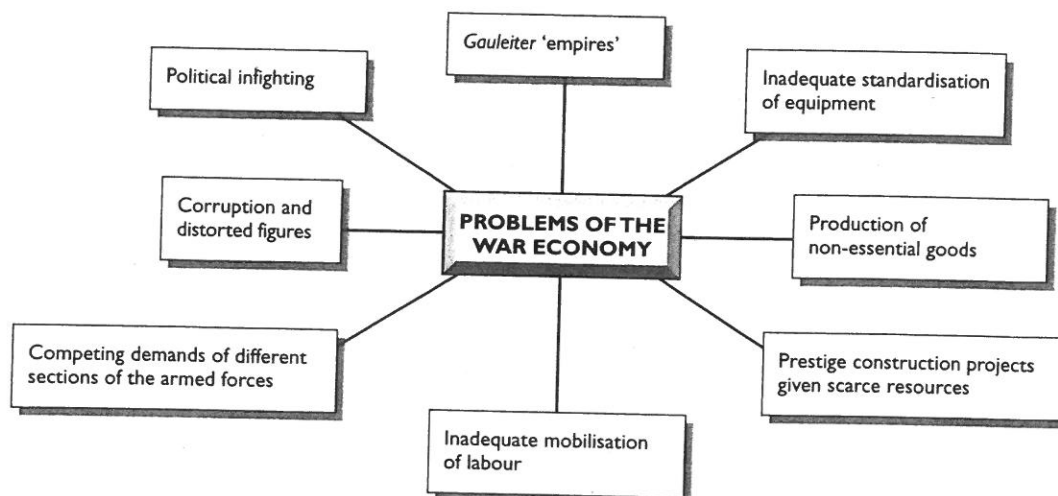
At his first Führer conference, Speer managed to issue a decree punishing arms manufacturers who made false claims for labour, parts, equipment or raw materials. Typically, there were objections from people who felt their areas of responsibility were being infringed, such as Goering and Justice Minister Otto Thierack.

Speer was concerned to prioritise more effectively. He campaigned against the allocation of vital resources to non-military uses, and placed a ban on all plans for post-war construction. He had a rubber stamp made inscribed with the words 'Return to sender – irrelevant to the war effort', which he used on orders for non-essential products. On a train trip to Hitler's headquarters in 1942, Speer detached an array of unnecessary metal fittings, such as clothes hangers and reading lamps; he ordered that such items should be stripped from trains and sent for scrap metal. He also brought in greater standardisation in the use of ammunition, and rationalised transport production, for example concentrating production on only three types of lorry. He also reduced wasteful stockpiles.

Speer tried to tackle the disruptive autonomy of the *Gauleiter*, who were the biggest obstacles to a total war effort. His position as minister in itself cut little ice with these powerful local figures, but his close links to Hitler boosted his authority. He was also prepared to use blackmail, for instance threatening a *Gauleiter* with no coal supplies if he did not help with food supply.

Speer made considerable strides in the more effective utilisation of available labour. He pressed for the increased use of three shifts a day and for the

### 21E Problems of the war economy



efficient use of foreign labour in the countries of origin rather than in Germany itself. Concentration camp labour was extended, but other Nazis still resisted his attempts to exploit female labour effectively. Speer showed how this compared unfavourably with the Allies' war effort, and eventually half a million women were taken out of domestic employment and put to more productive use.

In other areas, he had only partial success. He frequently complained that key production was being disrupted by the conscription of skilled workers. However, even when, in May 1943, he gained Hitler's promise to block military recruitment of skilled workers, this failed to have the desired effect. Speer's efforts were also hindered by perennial (constant) Nazi infighting. He had hoped his associate Hanke would be granted power as Labour Deployment Commissioner, but he was baulked by Bormann and Lammers who engineered their man into the position.

Speer's achievements in greatly increasing production were all the more remarkable considering the escalation of the Allied bombing campaign. He set up special task forces to repair bombed factories. Temporary accommodation for workers could go up in a day. To some extent, he was helped by Allied mistakes. British area bombing failed to break German morale, and the impact of American daytime bombing was reduced by their failure to follow up raids. Speer later commented that unrelenting attacks on the ball-bearing industry, especially the key factory at Schweinfurt, would have brought the Wehrmacht to a halt in four months.

**SOURCE 21.10** Production of combat aircraft

	Germany	Britain
1941	1,030	20,100
1942	14,700	23,600
1943	25,520	26,200
1944	35,950	26,500 (but 110,752 in USA)

### Effects

Within six months of Speer's appointment in 1942

- ammunition output rose by 97 per cent
- tank production rose by 25 per cent
- arms productivity went up 60 per cent.

Between 1941 and 1944

- production of tanks increased from 2,875 to 17,328
- ammunition production increased sixfold.

### Did the Nazi regime become more efficient during the war?

Although Speer gradually improved the efficiency of the war economy during 1942-5, the same improvement cannot be seen in the way the state was run. The Nazi state continued its haphazard development, with the growth of new bodies, such as the Armaments Ministry, and ongoing personal struggles, both at the centre and between the *Gauleiter* and the centre. Recent historians have stressed a process of 'cumulative radicalisation' that continued during the war, driven by Hitler's vision of conquest and racial warfare, and by the competition between Nazi leaders to 'work towards the Führer'.

The German historian Dieter Rebenitsch, in his masterly *Der Führerstaat im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (The Führer State in the Second World War), has analysed Hitler's total and arbitrary dominance of the regime, arguing that it was 'Hitler's regime, Hitler's policies, Hitler's victories and Hitler's defeat'. Formal state structures were increasingly bypassed. Meetings, such as Hitler's periodic meetings with the *Gauleiter*, were audiences for his speeches, not part of the decision-making process. The struggle between feudal chiefs, with victory going to the strongest, intensified.

The power of the SS continued to grow. Bormann, who replaced Hess as Hitler's secretary, developed his power base to become the second most powerful person in Germany, controlling as he did access to Hitler. Hitler himself became increasingly remote; he was rarely seen in public, and spent most of his time at his military headquarters, Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair), in Rastenburg, East Prussia.