

B.A.SEMESTER IV
HISTORY PAPER II
HISTORY OF EUROPE (1848-1918)
THE ENTRY OF USA IN WORLD WAR I
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After the outbreak of World War I, the Americans discovered that on account of their strong political, economic and cultural ties with European countries, they could not afford to remain isolated. After nearly three years of neutrality the USA entered into World War I as a full belligerent.

The American President Woodrow Wilson took direct control over American foreign policy. On one hand he had strong personal sympathies for the allies- he felt that the Germans had violated the international law and so the German victory would be disastrous. On the other hand he felt that both sides had some flaws and so a lasting peace should be without a victory for either side and the United States should maintain an impartial attitude and act as a mediator.

The Americans were never neutral in the World War I. The British blockade of Germany violated several rules of international law, still American protest was worded mildly to placate indignant American traders and not to inconvenience or embarrass Britain.

The German submarine campaign began in February 1915. On March 28, one American was drowned in the sinking of the *Falaba*. On May 7, 1915 liner (meaning large ship) RMS *Lusitania* (RMS stands for Royal Mail Ship) was sunk without warning with a loss of 1198, of whom 128 were Americans. *Lusitania* was torpedoed by German U boat. Many Americans demanded immediate war but Wilson was not ready to abandon neutrality. Wilson insisted that the Americans who chose to travel on British ships were still under the protection of the American government. Germany protested that the United States was not neutral in the war as she was supplying munitions to the allies. The American government replied that such sales were not breach of the international law. The

German government ordered not to attack the passengers' ships. In March 1916, a French passenger ship *Sussex* was sunk without warning. Wilson threatened to break off diplomatic relation unless Germany promised that no ship would be sunk without warning. The German government agreed and abandoned unrestricted submarine warfare. In this way Wilson had contributed to the allied cause but now the USA was committed to enter war if the submarines should again start sinking ships without warning. In 1916, Colonel House, a friend to President Wilson, visited many European countries to explore the possibility of ending the war through American mediation but nothing materialised.

ALLIED PROPAGANDA: The pro-Ally sentiment among the American people was steadily becoming stronger. The British controlled the Atlantic cables and censored all mail coming out of Germany, they were able to ensure that American news paper reported the war mainly from the allied side- for example the stories of alleged German atrocities committed in Belgium and elsewhere being especially influential.

Germany also engaged in propaganda. Many Americans were already emotionally committed to the allied cause so the German propaganda had little effect. The German agents indulged in subversive activities like encouraging strikes and sabotage in American factories to check American assistance to the allies. In June 1915, a German agent left a brief case full of confidential documents on an elevated train in New York. Such incidents proved that Germany had no proper respect for the rights of other nations.

TRADE WITH ALLIES Trade with the allies created a war boom in the United States. The year 1914 had been a depression year but by 1916 all the branches of American economy were in a state of prosperity. Initially the allies paid for their purchases in cash, but by the summer of 1915, the

financial reserves of the allies were nearing exhaustion. Wilson, who had originally refused lending, had to give his consent to loans. The allies floated a series of loans. The House of Morgan handled the operations in return for commissions, but the mainly was contributed by some 500,000 American citizens. Thus the United States acquired strong economic interest in allied victory. If the allies had to stop buying American goods or repudiated their war debts, many Americans would suffer financial losses and the whole country would plunge into depression. So, by the spring of 1917 when the allies were finding it difficult to float loans in the United States, the economic factors alone might eventually have pushed the United States into World War I.

In 1916 Wilson was re-elected as the President. He set out to explore the possibility of a negotiated peace but his efforts were fruitless. In a speech delivered on January 22, 1917, he announced the famous "Fourteen Points" in which he called for a peace without victory for either sides, self determination for all nationalities, the freedom of the seas, limitation of armaments and abolition entangling alliances and a system of collective security (a league of nations) to make aggression impossible. This was Wilson's last opportunity to assume the role of a mediator.

On January 31, 1917, the German government announced the resumption of unlimited submarine warfare in the seas around Britain and France and that neutral as well as belligerent ships entering this war zone would be sunk. The United States Government immediately broke off diplomatic relations. In February 1917, the Zimmermann Note/Zimmermann Telegram/Zimmermann Cable, intercepted and decoded by the British, revealed that Germany was inviting Mexico to join her in an attack on the United States. (Zimmermann Note was a secret diplomatic communication issued from the German Foreign Office in

January 1917. Arthur Zimmermann, German Foreign Minister, instructed the ambassador, Count Johann von Bernstorff, to offer significant financial aid to Mexico if it agreed to enter any future U.S.-German conflict as a German ally. The telegram was sent in anticipation of resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, an act the German government expected would likely lead to war with the US. Zimmermann hoped that tensions with Mexico would slow down shipments of supplies, munitions, and troops to the Allies if US was tied on its southern frontier). The telegram helped turn the US public firmly against Germany. The resumption of unlimited submarine warfare led to the sinking of the first American ship on March 12, 1917. During the next three weeks five more ships were sunk with the loss of 25 American lives.

In March 1917, there was a revolution in Russia, which removed Wilson's indecision—Russia now had a liberal government so Wilson could argue in the Congress that the Allied powers were fighting for the restoration of the ideals of democracy and constitutionalism.

On April 2, Wilson sent a message to Congress declaring the submarine campaign, the sabotage plans of German agents in the United States, and the Zimmermann Note made war unavoidable. The war was declared on April 16. The vote being 82-6 in the senate and 373-50 in the House.

The Americans believed that they were entering the war not only to defeat the Germans but to create a new world in which war could be abolished. When these hopes were not realised, a sense of disillusionment set in that the entry of US in World War I was a mistake. This attitude influenced the American public opinion in the inter-war period (i.e. the period between the two World Wars)