

French commerce was seriously affected by the war. Exports were diminished by one half, while imports increased in value by ten per cent. Strong measures were adopted in June to increase the supply of munitions. Skilled mechanics taken from the factories on mobilization were recalled with that object. By the middle of the month 650,000 persons were engaged in producing munitions.

Imports into Great Britain greatly increased, but there was a considerable reduction in exports. A Ministry of Munitions was established in June, and a great campaign inaugurated to increase the output of shells and artillery. A Munitions Bill, which placed the government in nearly as complete control of the persons employed in work shops and ammunition factories as it had over the troops in the field, was quickly enacted.

A National Registration Bill was passed in July; in November the system of recruiting was re-organized, and before the end of the year the government reluctantly decided to adopt a modified form of conscription.

OPERATIONS ON THE WESTERN FRONT, 1916.

In December, 1915, General Joffre was appointed to command all the French armies, and was succeeded by General de Castelnau in command of the French troops engaged in France. Sir Douglas Haig succeeded Sir John French in command of the British forces in France, and late in December, 1915, the Indian army corps was transferred to Mesopotamia. At the commencement of the year, the German forces were probably much outnumbered on the western front, but they held dominating positions which were not easily attacked. In the month of January, their armies on that front were heavily reinforced and resumed the offensive at several points, apparently to test the strength of the allied positions and keep them in uncertainty as to their future intentions. On the morning of February 21, a tremendous artillery preparation began in the sector of Verdun, followed by a fierce infantry attack in the afternoon, which carried several of the French first line positions. Their assaults were continued on the two following days, and by the night of the 24th they had captured the whole of the first line of the French intrenchments on the right bank of the Meuse, and taken several thousand prisoners at the cost of terrible losses. The French garrison was continually reinforced, and kept well supplied with ammunition. It is stated that four thousand motor trucks were constantly employed on this service, and two hundred thousand men brought up to hold the defences. The struggle continued with a dreadful sacrifice of life on both sides, with little intermission until March 22. The fort of Douaumont, a very commanding position, was taken by the Germans, but otherwise their gains were insignificant. A lull in the fighting occurred between the 22nd and the 28th of March, when the attacks were renewed on both banks of the river, and continued until April 25. Three fortified villages which had been converted by an intense bombardment into shapeless heaps of ruins were taken, but a great final assault utterly failed, and the assailants never succeeded in really approaching the main defences of the place.