

OVERVIEW: RISE OF DICTATORS

In the two decades following World War I, most of the world was swept up in economic depression. During the 1920's and 1930's, most nations attempted to cope with the problems of the post-war economy and uncertainties, with the U.S. stock market crash exacerbating the problem. The war ravaged nations of Europe had become dependent on financial help from America; however, U.S. economic policies made it increasingly difficult for European nations economies to recover after the war. The Fordney - McCumber Tariff increased the duties on foreign manufactured goods by 25%. Intending to protect American businesses, it ended up causing the Europeans to respond by imposing tariffs of their own. To facilitate European war debt repayment the U.S. created the Dawes Plan which established a cycle of payments from the U.S. to Germany and from Germany to the Allies. It allowed Germany to pay war reparations to Britain and France while attempting to help Germany rebuild its economy. After the U.S. stock market crash in 1929, the U.S. halted loans to foreign nations; the Dawes Plan collapsed and so too did the economies of Europe. This caused dissatisfaction and blame within Germany and Italy, giving rise to totalitarian dictators.

In response to the economic disaster, some nations fell prey to totalitarian dictators. A combination of postwar nationalist resentment and economic hardship allowed military dictatorships to rise in Italy, Germany, and Japan. Though dictatorships arose in other nations as well, such as Spain, the Soviet Union, and Latin America, this lesson will focus on the three main nations that went to war with America.

In Italy, Benito Mussolini led Italy's Fascist party. This party was composed of dissatisfied war veterans, nationalist and also people fearing the rise of communism and Stalin's consolidation of power. Italy's economy was weak after World War I and faced with unemployment and labor strikes which were often led by communists. Mussolini, or Il Duce, established a fascist totalitarian regime with his powerful speeches inciting nationalism among his people. Fascism is characterized by dictatorship, centralized control of private enterprise, repression of opposition and extreme nationalism. Mussolini knew how to appeal to Italy's wounded national pride, and played on their fears of economic collapse and communism. Mussolini promised order and stability and was not content to merely rule the nation,

but with his "Black Shirts" Mussolini controlled every aspect of Italian life and crushing all opposition. Mussolini's rise to power attempted to restore Italy's position as a world power and in order to prove Italy's military might, Mussolini ordered the invasion and conquering of Ethiopia.

Italy was not the only nation to lose faith in capitalism and democracy, Germany turned towards an authoritarian leader as well. The Fascist party arose to power in the 1920's as a reaction to terrible economic conditions and resentment over the Treaty of Versailles. Adolf Hitler, also a powerful speaker and organizer, rose through the ranks to become the leader of the Nazi party. Similar to Mussolini's fascism, Nazi Fascism was based on extreme nationalism. Hitler used the anger of the German workers to promote his anti-Semitic agenda and enforcement of racial "purification." Hitler also promoted national expansion and claimed that Germany needed more "living space." Hitler planned on securing land and soil for his German people and would do so by force. Though elected democratically, Hitler was similar to Mussolini, in that once established in power he suppressed all opposition and ruled with fear. To flex his power and demand for living space, Hitler invaded the Rhineland and later the Sudetenland.

In the 1920's and 1930's, nationalists and militarists in Japan were trying to take control of the imperialist government. Also plagued by a poor economy, the militarists promoted the idea of needing more living space, and convinced the Japanese Emperor Hirohito that Japan needed raw materials and the only way to get them was to invade Manchuria. Hideki Tojo moved his way up the ranks in 1940 becoming the Minister for War, and advocated closer ties with Germany and Italy. Tojo was appointed Prime Minister in 1941 where he pushed his strategy for empire and taking over the colonies of defeated European powers. It was Tojo who promoted the attack on Pearl Harbor. Tojo had direct control over the Japanese military and was now a virtual dictator and crushing his opposition whether they were more moderate Japanese generals or territories in Indochina and the South Pacific. Japanese militarists continued to expand their empire and flex its militarist muscle. Tojo was similar to the other dictators in his militarism, nationalism, quest for world domination and territorial expansion.

ITALY: BENITO MUSSOLINI



Following World War I, Italy was ruled by a constitutional monarchy. This government, however, faced many difficult problems after the war, as did the governments of many other European nations. The country's economy was weak and the Italian government was deeply in debt. High unemployment and inflation left Italians

jobless and poor. One person who offered Italy a solution to all its problems was Benito Mussolini. Mussolini's Fascist Party wore black shirts as their uniform, and so they were called Black Shirts. Mussolini's speaking ability inspired Italians to trust him and his plan to make Italy wealthy and powerful. He boldly promised to rescue Italy by reviving its economy and rebuilding its armed forces.

Some farmers and workers in Italy who suffered after World War I wanted a Communist revolution. They believed that land, factories, and industry should be owned by the state. Mussolini gained popularity by leading his Fascist Party against the Communists. Because he was anti-Communist and believed in private ownership of industry and land, many business people and landowners contributed money to his party to fight against the Communists. His promise of rebuilding a strong military also attracted the support of soldiers. In October 1922, claiming that the Italian government in Rome needed to be defended against a Communist revolution, Mussolini sent his Black Shirts to the rescue. This tactic led to the king, Victor Emmanuel III, appointing Mussolini as premier and the head of the government. The Fascist Party in Italy was now in power. Mussolini and his Fascists had gained power without a revolution.

Once he had the power, Mussolini began working so he could keep power. He quickly outlawed all other political groups and ended elections. He took away the freedom of speech and of the press. People against Mussolini were either murdered or exiled. By 1927, Mussolini and his Fascist Party had complete control in Italy. Mussolini was now *il Duce*, the leader of Italy. He ruled by decree—Mussolini's word was law. This meant that Mussolini could make or change laws whenever he wanted. Mussolini was now a true dictator. Terror and violence

were commonplace. Entire families could be arrested if one family member committed a crime. Any Italian could be arrested for any reason whatsoever. The citizens had lost all civil rights. Mussolini gained power by making Italians believe he would rid Italy of Communists and bring respect back to Italy. Mussolini held power by creating a myth. To make Italy a great nation, Mussolini claimed that every Italian must do exactly what Mussolini wanted. Fascists held parades and built monuments all over Italy; all education was controlled by the Fascists. People were told that Italy's economy was improving because Mussolini's fascist followers were getting richer. The people were actually no better off than they were before Mussolini had come to power.

During the 1930s, Mussolini set out to prove to the world just how powerful Italy and its army was. To do this, Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, a poor and almost defenseless country in east Africa. Expecting a quick victory, Mussolini was surprised to find that his army was unable to defeat their weak opponent without suffering many casualties. The Ethiopians, however, were no match for the Italian army and eventually had to surrender. The League of Nations demanded that Mussolini withdraw his soldiers, but he refused. In 1939, Mussolini also invaded and conquered Albania. In time, Mussolini gained control of much of the Mediterranean region.

Under Mussolini's leadership, Italy became the model for the rise of fascism in other countries. Using Mussolini's tactics, many Fascist leaders including Adolf Hitler in Germany and Francisco Franco in Spain rose to power in Europe in the late 1920s and 1930s. Hitler's growing strength on Germany convinced Mussolini that he should form an alliance with Germany. In October 1936, Italy and Germany formed an agreement known as the Rome-Berlin Axis. Later, Japan would also join with Italy and Germany to form the Axis Powers. The Axis Powers became the aggressors who began World War II as they tried to increase their empires. After suffering defeat in World War II and realizing that their government was weak and corrupt, The Italian people overthrew the Fascist government and joined with the Allies to defeat Germany. Mussolini was arrested. After escaping, he was shot. His body was hung upside down (by the feet) in a public place in a small town in Italy.

GERMANY: ADOLF HITLER



Hitler's popularity increased when the Great Depression hit Germany. In his speeches Hitler criticized the government for failing to solve Germany's problems. He spoke of German pride. He reminded the

German people, over and over again, that they were treated unfairly at the end of World War I. He also blamed the Jews and Communists for causing problems in Germany and the rest of Europe. By blaming the government, the Jews, and the Communists for Germany's problems, Hitler was able to bring Germans together against common enemies. Many unemployed young Germans joined Hitler's Storm Troops. Hitler promised the army leaders that when he became the leader of Germany, he would rebuild the army. He promised the industrialists that he would outlaw labor unions and put a stop to communism. The industrialists and the army believed that with Hitler as their leader they would regain the influence they held before World War I.

The Nazi Party made gains in the German parliament during 1930-1932. By 1932, the Nazis had become the country's largest political party and on January 30, 1933, Germany's President Von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as the Chancellor, or Prime Minister. Thus, Hitler came to power legally. In 1933, a mysterious fire destroyed the parliament building and Hitler and the Nazis blamed the Communists. Many people today feel that the Nazis set the fire and blamed the Communists. Hitler asked Von Hindenburg to give him power to take any action necessary to destroy the Communist **menace**. Von Hindenburg agreed. Civil liberties were taken away from the German people.

In 1934, Hitler took the title of der Fuhrer, or the leader. Violence and terror quickly swept across Germany. Hitler's Storm Troops arrested, beat, tortured, and murdered anyone opposed to Hitler. The Secret Police also worked to find any opposition to Hitler. The SS (Secret Police) had unlimited power to arrest, torture, and murder anyone. Germany had entered its darkest period. A nightmare had fallen upon Germany, then Europe, and finally the world.

The Third Reich, or third empire, had begun its brutal and merciless reign. By 1938, Hitler had created a terrifying police state in Germany. There was no real opposition to the Nazis. The army was firmly under Hitler's control. People just disappeared in the night. Many Germans tried to help Jewish people escape from Germany during Hitler's terror. However, most Germans simply "looked the other way." Hitler and his Minister of Propaganda, Dr. Goebbels, used radio, newspapers, magazines, large rallies, and movies to maintain the support of the German people or the Nazis. Hitler and Goebbels appealed to German nationalism. They used themes that were anti-Communist and anti-Jewish. They told the German people that Germans were members of an Aryan master race born to conquer the whole world. They burned books which did not meet their approval. In short, everything the German people heard was carefully controlled by Hitler and Goebbels. This included everything taught in schools.

Hitler did attract the support of many Germans. He was a spellbinding speaker who could influence his audiences. His typical speaking style was to speak louder and louder as he vented his anger at Germany's enemies. The purpose of his speeches was to arouse German patriotism. Hitler believed that the bigger the lie, the more believable it would sound. Hitler's belief in the "big lie," along with his speaking ability, moved many Germans to love him during the early years of his dictatorship. The economic and social life of some Germans did improve. Germans could afford to buy cars and take vacations. However, many Germans didn't know that Hitler was paying for these improvements by stealing from others. He forced thousands and thousands of people to work as slaves in his concentration work camps. A knock on the door in the middle of the night brought terror to the Jews of Nazi Germany. Beating Jewish school children as they walked home from school caused no reaction from onlookers. People watched as Jewish-owned shops and Jewish temples were burned, Jewish families disappeared. This was merely the beginning of a campaign that was to end with the **Holocaust**-the mass killing of six million Jews.

JAPAN: HIDEKI TOJO



Hideki Tojo was born in Tokyo, Japan, on 30th December 1884. He joined the Japanese Army and his military service included periods in Switzerland and Germany.

Promoted to major general in 1933 he became head of the Army's military police in September 1935. After becoming a lieutenant general he became chief of staff to the Army (March 1937-May 1938).

After WWI Military Nationalists Gain Power in Japan. They see aggressive nationalism and territorial expansion as a means to solve their economic problems. Japanese government did not want to rely on foreign imports. They wanted to create a colonial empire by conquering countries rich in natural resources.

By 1940 he had been appointed Japan's Minister of War. He was a strong supporter of Hitler and hoped to follow in his footsteps in regards to gaining power. Obviously, this meant that Tōjō wanted to further the alliance between Japan, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, as well as continuing the war with China. Similarly to the dictators of such European countries, the Emperor of Japan, Hirohito, was revered. Tōjō wanted to conquer European countries in an attempt to strengthen Japan, an idea shared by the current Prime Minister, however this merely resulted in him losing support throughout Europe and failing to gain any land. He also made his thoughts on the United States clear: that he thought they were lazy and incapable of being a strong, united nation.

By 1941, Tōjō had finally succeeded in being appointed to Prime Minister. At this point in time Tojo was so disillusioned with the United States, not

to mention their Pacific presence, that he judged a war both necessary and inevitable. So, as part of his new job as Prime Minister Tojo authorized the attack on Pearl Harbor. As an unexpected attack, this appeared

to show Japan as being strong and the US as being weak and so increased the local support of Tōjō's rule.

His popularity was high in the early years of the war and it seemed like Tōjō could do no wrong. However, opposition to his rule was growing within the Japanese government as it became clear that Tōjō had deliberately broken the Geneva Convention. Tōjō lost the Battle of Midway and after the fall of Saipan, his days were certainly numbered.

In July 1944, Tōjō finally resigned, with a few supporters still left intact. Then in 1945, the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed that the US were ready to retaliate to Tōjō's careless actions and unwillingness to resort to diplomacy, thus quelling almost every single remaining supporter of Tōjō.

Soon after the war ended, forty war criminals were arrested, including Tōjō who was found in his house that he had hardly left since his resignation. He attempted suicide by shooting himself four times, however the shots missed vital arteries and his heart and so, as he had nothing left to do, he pleaded guilty to the accusations of war crimes that were held against him.

Tōjō underwent emergency surgery and was moved to Sugamo Prison once he had recovered. This was in vein and 1948, Tōjō was sentenced to death and hanged. He is often held responsible for the murder of civilians in their millions and over 20,000 Prisoners of War.