

# Italy and Germany after World War I



# Italy

- Economic- the costs of WWI had been staggering. Suffered many casualties during the war: 1/10 of its young men died. Disappointed by peace settlement. After the war, there was high unemployment, strikes, and severe inflation.
- Political- The weak and divided government of King Victor Emmanuel II was unable to provide leadership or to inspire confidence in its ability to solve the postwar crisis.
  - No strong democratic tradition in Italy;
  - Fear of communism and a communist-led revolution.

- Social- Italy was suffering from low morale.
  - As one of the victorious Allies, Italy had expected to gain territory on the Adriatic. Instead, these lands became part of the newly-created Yugoslavia.
  - Inspired in part by the Russian Revolution, peasants seized land and workers went on strike or took over factories.
  - These actions frightened the landowners and industrialists who held power.
  - Socialist and Communist parties gained membership.

# In Italy, fascism appealed to:

1. Business owners, government officials, and landowners- wanted a strong, central government to end strikes and curb working-class political power.
2. Middle class (university students, shopkeepers, and professional people)- same reason as stated above.
3. Soldiers, war veterans, nationalists, and army officers- like idea of glory and military strength. Fascists wore uniforms and held parades and rallies.



## Mussolini's Italy: "Believe! Obey! Fight!"

- Secret police spied on enemies.
- Opponents thrown in jail.
- Government took over press.
- Made it hard to leave country to ensure supply of soldiers.
- Taxed single men.
- Limited jobs available to women.



- Encouraged families to have more children.
- Banned labor unions.
- Modernized farming in order to become self-sufficient.
- Students taught to admire him and follow policies and ideas without question!
- University professors swore an oath of loyalty to him.
- Used propaganda- claimed fascism had ended crime, poverty, and labor problems.

In 1919, Benito Mussolini organized the Fascist Party (from the Latin *fasces* meaning a bundle of sticks wrapped around an ax- a symbol of authority in ancient Rome)

1. He promised to restore Italy to its former greatness.
2. End corruption.
3. Replace turmoil with order.

# In October 1922, Mussolini and his Fascist supporters marched on Rome.

- King Victor Emanuel III refused to allow the army to stop the marchers ensuring the Fascist seizure of power, without firing a shot.
- Italian cabinet resigned in protest so the King asked Mussolini to form a new cabinet and to take the position of Premier (Prime Minister)- Mussolini technically gained power legally.
- By November 1922, Fascists gained majority control of the legislature and Mussolini became dictator- Il Duce (his name for himself- “the leader”)



- Suspended the free press and disbanded individual rights.
- Restricted voting rights and prohibited rival political parties.
- “Blackshirts” (Mussolini supporters organized in combat squads that wore black) insured complete loyalty to the state with violence and intimidation. Similar to the CHEKA in Russia.

Mussolini did NOT succeed in establishing a modern totalitarian state, unlike in Russia and Germany. Instead, he created a corporate state.

CORPORATE STATE- discipline would be the substitute for economic policy allowing the government to direct Italy's economy without a formal change in ownership  
(like in Russia)

- Each sector of production would be organized into a corporation;
- Each corporation (industrial unit) had a syndicate of employers and a syndicate of workers, each headed by a government official- stopped strikes and disputes;
- 22 corporations were established by the 1930s.

## In 1929, Mussolini signed the Lateran Accord:

- Recognized the Pope as ruler of the Vatican City;
- State recognized Catholicism as the religion of Italy;
- Significance: made the Fascist government more respectable to the Catholic Italians and the international community.

In 1935, Mussolini's "Blackshirts" attacked and occupied a defenseless Ethiopia.

# Germany

Hitler's rise to power is one of the most significant events of our century. His success raised disturbing questions that we still debate today. How did Germany, which had a liberal democratic government in the 1920s, become a totalitarian dictatorship in the 1930s? Why did Hitler gain the enthusiastic support of many Germans?



# Germany after WWI

- Humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles- Provisions to permanently weaken Germany included the following:
  1. War-Guilt clause- Germany had to admit responsibility for WWI.
  2. Reparations- Germany had to pay enormous reparations for war damages (at one point, Germany fell behind in their reparation payments, so France moved in and occupied the coal-rich Ruhr Valley, Germany's chief industrial area).
  3. Limitations on German army, navy, and air power
  4. Loss of colonies and territories in Europe (Alsace-Lorraine, Danzig, and eastern land to Poland).

- Rise of Nazi Party and Hitler- stressed nationalism and racism. Germans were the “master race” descended from Aryans.
- Jews and Slavs were considered “inferior races” which weakened Germany and blamed them for Germany’s problems: defeat in war, high unemployment, and the spread of communism.
- Before and after World War I, Germany was seriously divided by region, religion, class, and politics. As in Italy and Russia, a strong democratic tradition did not exist in German history.

All of these problems led many Germans to conclude that democracy was ill-suited to their nation and that autocracy was preferable.

# In Germany, fascism appealed to:

1. German people- gave cause to fight for and enemy to hate. Hitler was a talented public speaker and very persuasive and charismatic.
2. Less wealthy people of the Middle Class (shopkeepers, small farmers, office workers, teachers, and artisans)- believed Hitler would protect them from large industrialists and communism.

- Hitler began to rebuild military. By 1935, he had a peacetime army of 550,000 men- this violated the Treaty of Versailles. In March 1936, he sent troops into the Rhineland, also violating the treaty.



# The Rise of Adolf Hitler

## 1920

Hitler became leader of the Nazi Party- promised to make Germany powerful again. Promises made by Hitler:

- Economic- condemned the Treaty of Versailles, promised to ignore it.
- Nationalism- large increase in armed forces, controlled educational and cultural institutions.
- Anti-Semitism- Nazis intensified tradition of anti-Semitism (prejudice or hatred toward Jews)
- Stamp out communism- only Nazis could do this.

# January 30, 1933

- Hitler was appointed Chancellor by the President of Germany.
- Why? Because Nazi membership at 1 million.

# February 1933

The *Reichstag* building caught fire

- The President was afraid of a socialist revolution (similar to what happened in Russia)
- Hitler was given emergency powers. Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution permitted civil liberties to be suspended in time of national emergency

# July 1933

Began to create a totalitarian state: Third Reich

- All political parties except Nazis were forbidden
- Gestapo (state secret police) was established and gained access to the government and army



**June 1934**- “Blood Purge” was the murder of all of Hitler’s rivals and enemies

**August 1934**- The President died and Hitler declared himself President and Chancellor of the Third Reich (*der Führer- the leader*)

**1935**- Hitler began to build up Germany’s military in violation of the Treaty of Versailles

**1937**- Hitler announces his plan for attaining *lebensraum* (“living space”)

# Other Parts of the World after WWI

- China- Nationalists and communists involved in struggle for control.
- Middle East- nationalism gained strength, oil discoveries led to money.

# Dawn of WWII

## APPEASEMENT- Why?!

1. After the horrors of WWI, wanted peace at any price.
2. Economic depression- cuts in military spending left France and Britain (and other countries) unprepared for war; didn't feel strong enough without support of other.
3. Some British believed that the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh on Germans.
4. Some British thought Stalin was a greater threat to West than Hitler; saw Hitler as a defender of European civilization against Soviet communism.

## Germany wanted to unite all German-speaking peoples.

- Sought *lebensraum* (“living space”) for the German people. Announced plan in 1937.
- Hitler pressured Austrian government to agree to closer ties, threatened with force. March 1938, Nazi troops entered Austria and carried out the Anschluss- union between Austria and Germany.
- Czechoslovakia- 3 million German-speaking people in Sudetenland. Threatened with war. Italy and Britain stepped in.



# September 1938 Munich Pact

- Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain (Britain), and Daladier (France) met in Munich, Germany. They agreed to let Hitler claim the Sudetenland and Hitler promised to seek no more territory. Czechoslovakia had no representative there, no support, and did not fight the decision.
- War had been avoided and people were happy.

# March 1939

- Hitler's troops marched into Prague (capital) and Czechoslovakia fell under German control.
- Polish Corridor- Hitler demanded Polish port of Danzig to be returned to German rule, given a railway, and given a highway through the Corridor. Poles refused demands. Britain and France promised to help defend Poland's independence.

# August 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact

- Friendly pact (like an alliance) between Stalin and Hitler. Soviet Union agreed to let Germany invade Poland. Stalin was given land in eastern Europe. Promised not to attack or invade the other.

- September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland.
- September 3, 1939 Britain and France declare war on Germany.

**World War II breaks out.**