

# Unit 4

## SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN THE AGE OF WORLD WARS 1914-1945

### 4.1 The First World War: Causes, Course, and Consequences

#### Causes:

- **Mutual Defense Alliances:** Europe's complex web of alliances meant that a conflict between two nations could easily draw in others, leading to a large-scale war.
- **Imperialism:** European powers competed for colonies, intensifying national rivalries.
- **Militarism:** An arms race, particularly between Germany and Britain, increased tensions.
- **Nationalism:** Strong nationalist sentiments, especially in France and the Balkans, fueled conflict.
- **Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand:** The immediate spark that set off the war.

#### Course:

- The war began with Germany's invasion of Belgium and quickly escalated into a stalemate, marked by trench warfare on the Western Front.
- The conflict expanded globally, involving colonies and nations beyond Europe.
- The Eastern Front saw more movement, with Russia suffering heavy losses leading to internal unrest.

#### Consequences:

- The war caused massive human and material losses and led to significant political changes, including the collapse of empires and the Russian Revolution.
- The Treaty of Versailles imposed harsh penalties on Germany and established the League of Nations.

## 4.2 The October 1917 Russian Revolution: Causes, Course, and Results

### Causes:

- **Autocratic Rule:** The Romanov dynasty's resistance to reforms led to widespread dissatisfaction.
- **Economic Hardships:** Poor conditions for peasants and workers fueled unrest.
- **Impact of WWI:** Military failures and shortages exacerbated public discontent.
- **February Revolution:** The abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the weak Provisional Government set the stage for the Bolshevik takeover.

### Course:

- The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, gained control of key Soviets and seized power in October 1917, establishing a socialist government and withdrawing Russia from WWI.

### Results:

- The revolution led to a civil war, the creation of the Soviet Union, and significant global political impacts, including the spread of communist ideology.
- The Bolsheviks implemented radical reforms, transforming Russia's economy and society.

## Conclusion

The period between 1914 and 1945 was marked by transformative global events, including two world wars and revolutions that reshaped national boundaries, ideologies, and global power dynamics.

## 4.3 The League of Nations

The League of Nations was founded on January 10, 1920, following the end of World War I, with its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. It was the first international organization with the primary mission of maintaining world peace. The League aimed to prevent wars through collective security, disarmament, and peaceful resolution of disputes via negotiation and arbitration.

The idea of the League was proposed by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, but the U.S. Congress refused to join due to concerns about being legally bound to intervene in European conflicts. Consequently, the U.S. never became a member. The League's structure included a General Assembly with representatives from all member states, a permanent secretariat for administrative functions, and an Executive Council with four permanent

members (Great Britain, France, Japan, and Italy) and four non-permanent members.

The League had early successes, such as resolving the conflict between Iraq and Turkey over Mosul in 1926 and mediating a border dispute between Colombia and Peru in the early 1930s. However, it failed to prevent the outbreak of World War II and struggled to intervene in conflicts like the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, and the Second Sino-Japanese War. The League continued to function until 1946, when it was replaced by the United Nations.

#### **4.4 The Worldwide Economic Crisis (The Great Depression)**

The worldwide economic crisis, known as the Great Depression, was the most severe economic downturn in the history of the industrialized world. It began in October 1929 with the New York Wall Street stock market crash and had devastating effects globally.

The Great Depression led to a significant decline in personal income, tax revenue, profits, and prices. International trade dropped by more than 50%, and unemployment rates soared, reaching 25% in the U.S. and up to 33% in some countries. Urban and rural areas alike were hit hard, with many cities dependent on heavy industry, while farming communities suffered due to a 60% drop in crop prices.

Consumer spending and investment plummeted, leading to steep declines in industrial output and employment. By 1933, 15 million Americans were unemployed, and nearly half of the country's banks had failed.

#### **4.5 The Rise of Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, and Militarism in Japan**

**Fascism in Italy:** Fascism, a far-right authoritarian political ideology, emerged in Italy in the early 20th century, with Benito Mussolini forming the Fascist party in 1919. Fascists believed in the obsolescence of liberal democracy and advocated for a totalitarian one-party state led by a dictator.

The Treaty of Versailles and the socio-economic conditions in post-war Italy fueled the rise of Fascism. Italians were disappointed by the lack of territorial gains promised by the Allies, and the economic collapse and political instability made Mussolini's promises of a strong, unified Italy appealing. Mussolini's Fascist regime eventually led to the establishment of a totalitarian state, territorial expansion, and aggressive foreign policies, contributing to the outbreak of World War II.

**Nazism in Germany:** Nazism, led by Adolf Hitler, emerged in Germany as a reaction to the Treaty of Versailles and the economic hardships following World War I. Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (the Nazis) gained support by exploiting discontent with the Weimar Republic and blaming Jews for Germany's problems. Hitler attempted to seize power in 1923 but failed and was imprisoned, during which he wrote "Mein Kampf."

The rise of Nazism was driven by the war's aftermath, the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and the economic depression of the 1930s. Hitler's ideology centered on extreme nationalism, anti-Semitism, and the belief in Aryan racial superiority, which ultimately led to the Holocaust and World War II.

**Militarism in Japan:** Militarism in Japan began during the late Meiji dynasty and peaked between 1931 and 1945. Japanese militarists believed that the military should dominate political and social life, leading to aggressive expansionist policies. Japan's militarism contributed to its involvement in World War II as it sought to establish itself as a dominant power in Asia.

## 4.6 The Second World War: 1939-1945

### Introduction

The Second World War, fought between 1939 and 1945, was a global conflict that involved two major military blocs: the Allied Powers and the Axis Powers. The war had devastating effects on nations and reshaped global politics, economics, and society.

### Causes of the Second World War

The roots of the Second World War can be traced back to the aftermath of the First World War and the interwar period (1918-1939). Several factors contributed to the outbreak of the war:

#### Rise of Fascism:

- **Germany:** The Treaty of Versailles, which ended WWI, imposed heavy reparations and territorial losses on Germany. The harsh terms of the treaty fueled resentment and a desire for revenge among Germans. The Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler, capitalized on this discontent, promising to restore Germany's former glory through military aggression.
- **Italy:** Under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, the Fascist Party in Italy sought to build a new Roman Empire. Mussolini's ambition was to expand Italy's influence, particularly in Africa.

- **Japan:** Japan, governed by a militaristic regime, aimed to dominate East Asia and the Pacific. The Japanese military sought to expand its empire by conquering neighboring territories.

**The Great Depression:** The global economic crisis of the 1930s led to widespread unemployment, poverty, and political instability. In countries like Germany, Italy, and Japan, leaders promised economic recovery through aggressive expansion, which contributed to the war.

**Failure of the League of Nations:** The League of Nations, established after WWI to prevent future conflicts, was ineffective in curbing the aggression of Fascist states. The League's inability to enforce its decisions and the absence of major powers like the USA led to its failure.

**Appeasement Policy:** Britain and France, to avoid another war, followed a policy of appeasement, allowing Fascist powers to expand their territories unchecked. This policy emboldened aggressive nations like Germany, Italy, and Japan.

### **Specific Aggressions:**

- **Japan** invaded Manchuria in 1931 and later launched the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 to subjugate China.
- **Germany** defied the Versailles Treaty by rearming, reoccupying the Rhineland, and annexing Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia.
- **Italy** invaded Ethiopia in 1935, showcasing its imperial ambitions.

## **The Course of the War**

### **Outbreak of War:**

- **Germany Invades Poland (1939):** The war officially began when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France declared war on Germany two days later.
- **Blitzkrieg:** Germany used a new military tactic called Blitzkrieg, or "lightning war," characterized by rapid and overwhelming attacks. Poland quickly fell to German forces.

### **Expansion of the Conflict:**

- **Western Europe:** In 1940, Germany invaded France, bypassing its defensive Maginot Line through Belgium and Holland. France was quickly defeated, and Germany occupied much of Western Europe.
- **Battle of Britain:** In 1940, Germany launched air attacks on Britain, but the British resistance, particularly the Royal Air Force, successfully repelled the attacks.

## Global Spread:

- **Invasion of the Soviet Union:** Despite the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. The Soviets, although initially retreating, mounted a fierce resistance.
- **Pearl Harbor:** Japan attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, leading to the United States entering the war. This expanded the conflict to the Pacific and made it truly global.

## Turning Points:

- **Stalingrad (1942-1943):** The Soviet victory at Stalingrad marked the beginning of the German retreat on the Eastern Front.
- **North Africa (1943):** The Allies defeated Axis forces in North Africa, leading to the invasion of Italy and the eventual overthrow of Mussolini.

## End of the War:

- **D-Day (1944):** Allied forces launched a massive invasion of Nazi-occupied France on June 6, 1944. This marked the beginning of the liberation of Western Europe.
- **Fall of Berlin:** The war in Europe ended when Soviet forces captured Berlin in May 1945. Hitler committed suicide, and Germany surrendered unconditionally.
- **Atomic Bombs:** In August 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945, bringing the war to an end.

## Effects of the Second World War

The Second World War had profound and far-reaching consequences:

**Human and Material Losses:** The war caused the death of approximately 50 million people, including soldiers and civilians. Infrastructure, cities, and economies were devastated, particularly in Europe and Asia.

**Decolonization:** The war hastened the process of decolonization in Asia and Africa as European powers weakened and nationalist movements gained momentum.

**Emergence of Superpowers:** The USA and the USSR emerged as the world's superpowers, leading to the Cold War—a period of political and ideological rivalry between the two.

**Formation of the United Nations:** The United Nations (UNO) was established in 1945 to promote international peace and security, replacing the ineffective League of Nations.

The Second World War reshaped the global order, leading to the emergence of new nations, the decline of European colonial empires, and the beginning of the Cold War era.