

UNIT FOUR

Society and Politics in the Age of World Wars, 1914 – 1945

World War I and Its Settlement

Overview of World War I

World War I, also known as the Great War, was a global conflict from 1914 to 1918 involving many countries and marked by unprecedented military mobilization and new warfare techniques. Key aspects include the use of chemical weapons, mass bombardments, and large-scale civilian casualties.

Alliance Systems

1. The Triple Alliance:

- **Members:** Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.
- **Purpose:** To isolate France and provide mutual support if attacked by Russia.

2. The Triple Entente:

- **Members:** France, Russia, and Britain.
- **Formation:** Resulted from various agreements to counterbalance the Triple Alliance, including the Franco-Russian Alliance (1894) and the Anglo-Russian Entente (1907).

3. The Alliance Systems Map:

- **Triple Alliance (Central Powers) vs. Triple Entente (Allied Powers).**

Crises Leading to War

1. The Bosnia-Herzegovina Crisis (1908):

- Austria-Hungary annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, causing tension with Serbia and Russia.

2. Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1914):

- The heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was assassinated by a Bosnian Serb, leading Austria-Hungary to declare war on Serbia.

3. Declaration of War:

- Austria-Hungary's declaration led to Russia's mobilization and subsequently the involvement of other nations, including Germany and Britain.

Course of the War

1. Major Fronts:

- **Western Front:** Characterized by trench warfare, involving heavy casualties in battles like Verdun and the Somme.
- **Eastern Front:** Between Germany and Russia.

2. Significant Events:

- **Schlieffen Plan:** Germany's strategy to quickly defeat France before turning to fight Russia.
- **Entry of the US (1917):** The US joined the Allies, contributing to the defeat of the Central Powers.
- **Russian Withdrawal:** The October Revolution in Russia led to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ending Russia's involvement in the war.

End of the War

1. Armistices:

- **Bulgaria:** September 29, 1918
- **Ottoman Empire:** October 30, 1918
- **Austria-Hungary:** November 4, 1918
- **Germany:** November 11, 1918

2. German Empire's Fall:

- The German Emperor abdicated, and a republic was established.

Effects of the War

1. Casualties and Costs:

- **Deaths:** About 8 million soldiers.
- **Financial Cost:** \$186 billion.

2. Political Changes:

- Collapse of empires: Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman.
- Rise of new states and ideologies, including Communism and the seeds of WWII.

Peace Settlement

1. Key Treaties:

- **Treaty of Versailles (June 28, 1919):** Redrew borders, imposed reparations on Germany, and limited its military.
- **Other Treaties:** St. Germain, Trianon, Neville, and Sevres.

2. Treaty of Versailles:

- **Territorial Losses:** Germany lost land to France, Belgium, Denmark, and Poland. The Saar region was controlled by the League of Nations.
- **Military Restrictions:** Limited to 100,000 men; no tanks, aircraft, or submarines allowed.
- **Reparations:** Germany was required to pay substantial financial compensation.

3. Criticism and Legacy:

- The treaty was viewed as harsh and contributed to the rise of National Socialism and the outbreak of WWII.

The League of Nations

1. Formation:

- **Established:** January 1920.
- **Goal:** To maintain world peace through collective security and diplomatic efforts.

2. Limitations:

- **Major Powers Excluded:** The US did not join, and the League was ineffective in stopping aggression by Axis Powers in the 1930s.
- **Failure to Prevent WWII:** The League's inability to enforce its resolutions led to its replacement by the United Nations in 1946..

The Russian Revolution of 1917

Overview

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a pivotal event that led to the end of the Russian monarchy and the rise of the Soviet Union. It occurred in two stages: the February Revolution and the October Revolution.

Causes of the Revolution

1. Political: Resentment towards Tsar Nicholas II's autocratic rule and failures in World War I. **2. Social:** Oppression of the peasant class and widespread unrest. **3. Economic:** Inflation and famine exacerbated public discontent.

The Bolsheviks

1. Faction: The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, were a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. They sought to establish a socialist government.

2. Key Figures:

- **Vladimir Lenin:** Leader of the Bolsheviks, advocating for a socialist revolution.
- **Leon Trotsky:** A prominent Bolshevik leader and organizer of the Red Army.

February Revolution

1. Events:

- Workers' strikes and demonstrations in Petrograd led to the collapse of Tsar Nicholas II's government.
- Resulted in the establishment of a Provisional Government.

2. Outcome:

- End of Tsarist autocracy, brief period of democracy.

October Revolution

1. Lenin's Return:

- Lenin returned from exile and pushed for an insurrection against the Provisional Government.

2. Bolshevik Seizure of Power:

- On October 25, 1917, the Bolsheviks led a nearly bloodless coup and established a socialist government.

3. Treaty of Brest-Litovsk:

- Signed in March 1918, this treaty ended Russia's involvement in World War I by ceding large areas of land to the Central Powers.

Impact of the Revolution

1. Global Influence:

- The Russian Revolution inspired communist movements worldwide and influenced the course of the 20th century.

2. Establishment of the Soviet Union:

- The Bolshevik government laid the foundation for the Soviet Union, which became a major world power.

Interwar Capitalist Economy and the Great Depression

Great Depression (1929-1933):

- **Definition:** A severe worldwide economic downturn that caused widespread bank failures, high unemployment, and drastic reductions in GDP and industrial production.
- **Causes:** Collapse of international trade due to restrictive trade practices and global economic instability.
- **Impact:** The Great Depression had a profound impact on economies worldwide, with non-industrial countries suffering more due to plummeting prices for raw materials and food.

Response to the Great Depression:

- **The New Deal (1933-1938):** Implemented by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the New Deal aimed to recover the economy by creating jobs, regulating financial markets, and redistributing wealth to boost purchasing power.

Fascism

Definition and Origin:

- **Fascism:** An authoritarian political ideology characterized by dictatorial power, extreme nationalism, and suppression of dissent.
- **Symbol:** The term "fascism" derives from the Latin word "fasces," a bundle of rods symbolizing authority in ancient Rome.
- **Rise:** Fascism gained traction in the post-World War I era due to widespread dissatisfaction with the old political systems, economic hardship, and social unrest.

Characteristics of Fascism:

- **Authoritarian Leadership:** Centralized power under a strong leader with total authority.
- **Nationalism:** Emphasis on aggressive nationalism and militarism, often accompanied by racism and the belief in the superiority of certain races.
- **Propaganda:** Control over media and communication to spread ideology and suppress opposition.

Fascist Leaders:

- **Benito Mussolini (Italy):** Founder of the Fascist Party; came to power in 1922 through a march on Rome and subsequent appointment as Prime Minister.
- **Adolf Hitler (Germany):** Leader of the Nazi Party; rose to power in 1933 amidst economic and political turmoil.

Nazism

Rise of the Nazis:

- **Context:** Post-World War I Germany faced severe economic distress, political instability, and national humiliation due to the Treaty of Versailles.
- **Nazi Party:** Led by Adolf Hitler, the Nazis exploited these conditions to gain support, promising national revival and appealing to various social groups, including workers, ex-soldiers, and nationalists.

Key Events:

- **Mein Kampf:** Hitler's autobiography and political manifesto, outlining his ideology of racial superiority and anti-Semitism.
- **Nazi Takeover (1933):** The Nazis established a totalitarian regime, leading to widespread persecution and the consolidation of power.

Franco's Spain and Japanese Militarism

Francisco Franco (Spain):

- **Regime:** Overthrew the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and established an authoritarian regime. Franco's regime was not strictly fascist but shared some similarities with fascist ideologies.

Japanese Militarism:

- **Characteristics:** Included authoritarian rule, aggressive nationalism, and militarism. Japan's expansionist policies and alignment with Axis Powers reflected its own version of authoritarian rule, though not always aligned with European fascism.

Conclusion

The interwar period was marked by significant economic crises and political upheavals. The Great Depression catalyzed the rise of authoritarian regimes, including fascism and Nazism, which played crucial roles in the lead-up to World War II.

