

## Introduction

Between 1918 and 1940, the world experienced a severe depression. In Europe, the depression caused political unrest. People living in Europe looked to new leaders to help them solve their problems, just as people in the United States did. Sometimes, the new leaders became **dictators**, or rulers with complete power and control over their country. Many of these *dictators* believed in denying people their rights. They also led their countries in war against other countries. In the mid-1930s, the dictators in Germany, Japan, and Italy began to attack other nations to expand their own power.



*World War I battle scene*

### Europe Looks to New Political Ideas to Solve Its Problems

Europe had not recovered from World War I when the Great Depression began. There were few jobs, and many people were hungry. Europeans blamed their governments for these problems. In general, governments were unable to

end the Depression. The people wanted a change in government and were ready to try different political ideas.

## Socialism

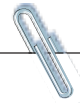
One of these ideas was **socialism**. Under *socialism*, factories and farms are owned by the government instead of by private individuals. The government gives people jobs and tries to make sure that no one is poor. Many Europeans found this idea attractive.

Some Socialists were **moderates**. This means they wanted the government to take over factories and farms in an orderly and gradual manner. *Moderate* Socialists also believed in free elections and freedom of speech.

## Communism

Other Socialists were **revolutionaries**. They wanted a radical change in their country's governments, and they demanded the changes take place immediately. Their system of beliefs was **communism**, and they wanted to take private businesses from their owners at once. These Socialists formed their own group and called themselves Communists. The Communists tried to take over governments through violent revolution.

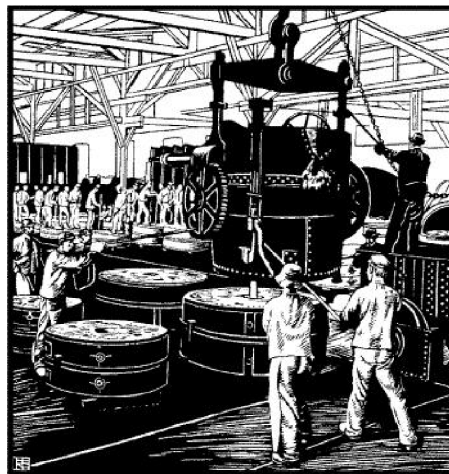
A Communist revolution took place in Russia in 1918, during World War I. The leader of the Russian revolution was a man named *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin*. He belonged to a group of Communists who called themselves **Bolsheviks**. People in Europe did not want a similar bloody revolution to take place in their countries.



### Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Lenin (1870-1924) was the Russian revolutionary who founded the Bolshevik (later Communist) Party. He became a revolutionary after his older brother was executed for participating in a plot to assassinate the tsar. Lenin was by then a follower of Karl Marx. Lenin wrote a famous pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* in which he argued that only professional revolutionaries trained to lead a proletarian-peasant rising could bring Marxist socialism to Russia. Against overwhelming odds, Lenin brought about the birth of Soviet Russia. Lenin influenced Communism more than anyone except Karl Marx. Lenin adapted Marxist theory to the realities of Russia's backward economy and dreamed of worldwide socialist revolution. Before Lenin died, he warned against Stalin's growing ambition for power.

The Communists took control of the government, industries, and farmland. They forbade religious beliefs and closed the churches in Russia. They killed many people who opposed their revolution. During Lenin's reign, the name of the country was changed from Russia to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R., until 1991, when it became known as the Commonwealth of Independent States).



*The Communists took control of industry.*

After Lenin died in 1924, the U.S.S.R's new leader was *Joseph Stalin*. Stalin was one of the first **totalitarian dictators** to gain power after World War I. Stalin used harsh methods that resulted in the death of millions of Russians. He exercised total control over the public and private lives of the Soviet citizens. He tortured those who disagreed with him or sent them to prisons in remote Siberia.



### Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin (1879-1953) was dictator of the Soviet Union from 1929 until 1953. He was the son of a shoemaker and was intended for the priesthood. Stalin joined the Georgian Social Democratic Party in 1901 and in 1917 was elected to the Bolshevik central committee.

Stalin advanced rapidly after the Russian Revolution and in 1922 was elected general secretary of the Russian Communist Party. After Lenin's death, there was a struggle for leadership, but Stalin ousted several leaders. He tried to "Russianize" the Soviet Union by getting rid of the separate identities of minorities through force. Anyone who opposed him or his tactics were met with powerful secret police, executions, informers, and show trials using forced industrialization, Stalin rapidly modernized the U.S.S.R. Stalin was ruthless at home and in foreign affairs, and his reign of terror continued until his death.

## Rise of Fascism

In 1924, *Benito Mussolini* became Italy's dictator. Like many other European countries, Italy had economic problems after World War I. Consequently, many farmers and workers wanted a revolution. Some Italians became Communists, but Mussolini was the leader of an **anti-Communist** group, the Fascist Party. This group fought against *communism*. Mussolini's followers called their system of beliefs **fascism**. *Fascism* is a system of government that places all power in the state and its leaders. It promotes an extreme form of *nationalism* (devotion to one's nation) and one-party rule. Mussolini wanted complete power, but he believed that industries and land should be privately owned. He did not attempt to control farms and factories.

Mussolini took over the government in Rome, Italy. He quickly outlawed all other political groups and ended elections. He took away freedom of speech and of the press. People who were against Mussolini were either killed or sent away.



## Benito Mussolini

Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) was dictator of Italy (1924-1943) and founder of fascism. He was the editor of the Socialist party paper, but he split with the Socialists when he advocated that Italy join the Allies in World War I.

Mussolini formed a Fascist group in 1919 which attracted many Italians because it blended nationalism and socialism. The Fascist Party was nationally organized in 1921, and in 1922 the Fascist militia threatened a march on Rome which led the king to make Mussolini premier. Mussolini eliminated opponents and began a brutal foreign policy. In 1940 he joined Hitler and declared war on the Allies in 1943. Italy suffered many defeats in the war, and Mussolini was captured by the Allies. He was rescued by the Germans and headed the Fascist puppet regime in Northern Italy, but on its collapse, Mussolini was shot. His body was hung upside down (by the feet) in a public place in a small town in Italy.

By 1925 Mussolini controlled all of Italy. He increased the size of the Italian army and navy. In 1935 Italy invaded the African country of Ethiopia. No one tried to stop Italy's expansion.

Spain also underwent a Fascist revolution. In 1936 General *Francisco Franco* led a rebellion against the Spanish **monarch**, or king. Three years of fighting took place in which Franco used troops, weapons, tanks, and fighter planes. People in the United States protested, but by 1939 Franco had become the Spanish dictator with the help of Italy's Mussolini and Germany's Hitler.



## Francisco Franco

Francisco Franco (1892-1975) was a Spanish general and the head of state of Spain from 1939 until shortly before his death. He joined the 1936 military revolt in Spain from Morocco and in 1937 became the leader of the Falange party and head of the anti-republican army. Franco became the head of state after the fall of Madrid in 1939. He was able to retain all of his power until shortly before his death in 1975, after which Prince Juan Carlos became king.



## Adolf Hitler

In Germany the Great Depression caused high unemployment and made German money worthless. The government was weak, and its leaders were unable to end political and economic unrest. The **National Socialists (Nazis)** were a Fascist party organized in the 1920s largely by *Adolf Hitler*. They became the most important political party in Germany.

Hitler promised to make Germany a strong nation again. He appealed to the unemployed and the social outcasts in his country. He hated the French and English because they had defeated Germany in World War I. Hitler planned to take back the land Germany had lost in World War I.



### Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) was the Austrian-born dictator of Germany from 1933-1945. History has judged Hitler an evil, unstable man but a political genius. Hitler grew up in Austria and left school at age 16 to make a living as an artist. He was drafted into the military during World War I and was twice awarded the Iron Cross. Hitler joined the German Workers' Party, which he turned into the *National Socialist Workers'* or Nazi Party. After a failed attack against the Bavarian government, he served nine months in prison where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, which set out his plans to restore greatness to Germany. By 1932 he was able to make the Nazi Party into the largest national party in the country. Hitler became chancellor in 1933 and prepared his country for war. He paid little attention to Germany's affairs except to intensify his persecution of the Jews.

Hitler seized much foreign land, and his invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 began World War II. His war plans were effective at first, but in 1941 he was unable to maintain two fronts. German forces lost North Africa and were pushed back on both sides after D-Day. Hitler was able to still maintain popular support but became increasingly unbalanced. He committed suicide on April 30, 1945, after realizing his cause was a failure and he was losing the war.

## Persecution Begins

Hitler was able to persuade people to obey him. For generations, Germans had been seeking a **scapegoat**, or someone to blame for their failures and frustrations. Through his deep personal hatred for Jews, Hitler brought **anti-Semitism** to the surface in Germany. Although his accusations were false, Hitler convinced many Germans that the Jews were to blame for all of Germany's economic problems. He promised to kill the Jews and create a master race.

In January of 1933, Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany. By August of 1934, Hitler had become the Führer or leader of Germany. He quickly did away with personal freedoms. A series of laws in 1935 known as the *Nuremberg Laws* were passed. This order was Hitler's first move toward creating a German "master race." This mass destruction based on racial grounds would become known as the **Holocaust**. His first targeted group was the Jews. The *Holocaust* refers to the state-sponsored, systematic **persecution** and **annihilation** of 11 million people, including six million European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

The Nuremberg Laws forbade Jews to practice law or medicine. Jews were not permitted to hold any government job. The laws called for segregation on public transportation and restricted Jews from shopping except during specified hours. They were forbidden to marry non-Jews. Thus in 1935,



Hitler reviews troops in Berlin, Germany, 1936.

Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Photo Archives

Jewish people in Germany were stripped of their citizenship, civil rights, and property. They were required to wear a yellow Star of David so they could be easily identified.

The 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany provided Hitler with a prime opportunity to show the superiority of the Aryan race, which according to the *Nazis* was a non-Jewish white race. However, the games provided Hitler only with embarrassment and humiliation as *Jesse Owens*, an African-American athlete, won four gold metals. Owens broke three world records and tied one world record. Hitler refused to take part in honoring Owens, and the world got a taste of his **bigotry**. Few people realized the extent of his hatred, but the Jews did not have to wait long to feel it.

Between 1933 and 1938, thousands of Jewish refugees came to America, including *Albert Einstein* and future United States Secretary of State *Henry Kissinger*. However, by the end of 1938, isolationist and anti-immigrant feelings were so strong that Congress and President *Franklin D. Roosevelt* refused to relax immigration laws and thus contributed to Hitler's success (see Appendix A for a list of the presidents).



The sign read: "Germans! Defend yourselves! Do not buy from Jews!"

Courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

## Kristallnacht: Night of the Broken Glass

In November of 1938, a night that became known as *Kristallnacht* (or Night of the Broken Glass) gangs of Nazi storm troopers, members of a private Nazi army, broke into Jewish homes and beat up occupants. They destroyed more than 8,000 Jewish businesses and almost 200 synagogues across Germany. Not even hospitals or schools were spared. Over a hundred Jews were killed; thousands were tortured, and 30,000 Jewish men were sent to **concentration camps**, where most of them died, leaving 20,000 children homeless and fatherless. The Nazis blamed the Jews and fined them one billion marks, 20 percent of their property.

After 1938 Jews lost their right to leave Germany. They could not hold any jobs. All Jewish shops were destroyed. All Jewish workers were fired. Jews who owned homes had their homes and possessions taken away.

## Trude Heller

Following is an account by Trude Heller, a concentration camp survivor who lives in South Carolina today. After Hitler took over her hometown in Austria in 1938, Trude was sent to a concentration camp until 1945. She, other Holocaust survivors, and liberators have shared their experiences to help teach about the consequences of **intolerance** and **apathy** in the face of *bigotry*. (See Unit 2 pages 57-61 and 64-66, Appendix B, C, D, and E for other personal Holocaust survivor, liberator, and Nazi war criminal accounts.)

Trude Heller was born in Vienna, Austria in 1922. She was 15 years old in March 1938 when Hitler took over Austria. Trude's parents were merchants, leading a comfortable, middle-class life. They lived in an area of Vienna occupied by many Jewish families. In the following account she describes how life changed for her and her parents after the Nazis gained control of her country.

### **Trude in Austria**

The first week that Hitler took over they came and got our car. An Austrian Storm Trooper carrying a rifle came to our apartment. He knocked on the door and said, "Car keys." And that was that. We handed them over.

A little while later a non-Jewish couple wanted our apartment. A uniformed official came with the people who wanted the apartment. He told us whatever is not out in six hours stays and if you're not out by then, you get killed. So my mother went to look for an apartment. My father went to get boxes and I started packing. Within six hours we were out. Of course, we had to leave almost everything behind. There were several buildings that were not so nice anymore where people like us could move. We moved to one of those places. The people there were mostly Jews who had been displaced from their homes.

Courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Education

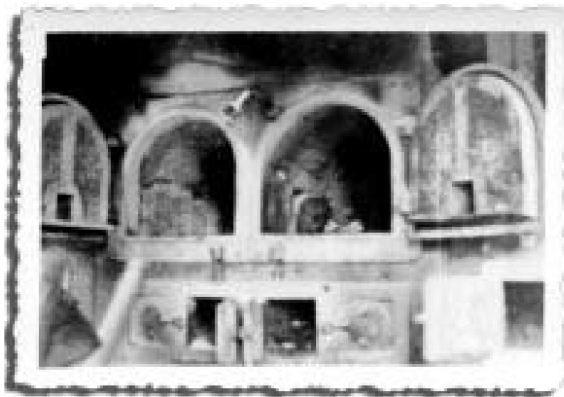
## **The Final Solution**

Finally, in 1939, Hitler announced the *Final Solution*. The Final Solution was the outright killing process and meant that Hitler intended to kill every Jewish man, woman, and child in Germany and in Europe. Although not all victims were Jews, all Jews were victims. Nazi murder squads were assigned to round up Jews and shoot them in cold blood. When shooting was found to be too slow and not psychologically desirable for the shooters, new methods were tried. After the *Einsatzgruppen*, or the commanders of the mobile killing squads from the German middle class, had tried using carbon monoxide gas piped into mobile gas vans, the death factories were started. Instead of the killers rounding up the victims, the victims were sent to the ghettos and then to the killing centers.

### SS St. Louis

On May 13, 1939, the SS *St. Louis* set sail from Hamburg, Germany for Havana, Cuba. On board were 937 passengers, of whom 930 were Jewish refugees fleeing persecution from Nazi Germany after the horror of *Kristallnacht*, the **pogrom** of burning, mass arrest, and murders in November of 1938. The SS *St. Louis* was one of the last ships to leave Nazi Germany before war began in Europe.

Upon reaching Havana, the Cuban government refused entry to the passengers. Appeals to allow passengers into Miami also failed even though the American Jewish community was willing to help with the cost of their maintenance. President Roosevelt and the legislature were not willing to lift immigration limitations in the 1930s. The ship was forced to return to Hamburg with its passengers. While en route to Europe, Great Britain, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, each agreed to grant temporary refuge until homes in other countries could be found. Following the German invasion of Europe, many of the former SS *St. Louis* passengers found themselves under Nazi rule again. They became victims of Hitler's Final Solution and did not survive the Holocaust.



*Crematorium used to burn the remains of prisoners.*

Courtesy of Tallahassee Jewish Federation

### Ghettos and Genocide

Most Jews were herded into small sections or **ghettos** which were sealed in by barbed wire or walls. They were confined in overcrowded conditions, forced into heavy labor, and provided little to eat. Jewish people were not permitted to leave without permission. Many were left to starve or die of disease. The Nazi *ghettos* for Jews became transition areas and used as collection

points for shipment to larger ghettos or to **death camps** and concentration camps. All ghettos had horrible, inhumane living conditions. Warsaw, the largest ghetto, held 400,000 people. The large ghettos were closed in by stone or bricks, wood, and barbed wire.

Jews were dragged from their homes and herded onto trucks and trains for shipment to death camps and concentration camps. Healthy Jews would be sent to labor camps to perform slave labor. The rest would be sent to extermination camps. The horrifying result of this plan was a cold-blooded and systematic **genocide**, or deliberate killing of an entire people. In 1933 approximately nine million Jews lived in the 21 countries of Europe that Germany would occupy during the war. By 1945 two out of every three or two-thirds of the European Jews had been killed.



## The Offensive Begins

Hitler's main goal was to rebuild the German military by adding many new weapons to his **arsenal**, or store of arms. Soon, Hitler was ready to retake former German land. The Germans had developed methods of combining the speed and firepower of tanks with the precise bombing of fighter planes.

The German fighting style was called **blitzkrieg**, which means "lightning war." They carried out invasions swiftly and with great force. In 1936 Hitler's army invaded the Rhineland. In 1938 he sent his troops into Austria. Next, he wanted to take Czechoslovakia.

## The Munich Pact

Three million Germans lived in western Czechoslovakia. Hitler wanted to reunite them with Germany. If Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, then Great Britain and France would have to go to war against Germany. Great Britain and France had signed an *alliance* or agreement with Czechoslovakia. Neither Great Britain nor France, however, wanted to go to war with Germany.

In September of 1938, leaders from Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany signed the **Munich Pact**. The pact said that Hitler could have an area of Czechoslovakia known as the *Sudetenland* (sudat n land), where the Germans lived. In return, Hitler agreed to take no more land. Hitler signed the pact, but on March 15, 1939, Hitler took all of Czechoslovakia.

Great Britain and France did not declare war on Germany, but they no longer trusted Adolf Hitler. Now, they feared he would take Poland. Great Britain and France also had a treaty of alliance with Poland. If Hitler invaded Poland, Great Britain and France would have to enter the war.

## The German-Soviet Treaty

Germany and the Soviet Union were enemies, and the Soviets feared the Germans would invade Russia. But in August of 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany suddenly signed a **German-Soviet treaty** or agreement: Hitler and Stalin agreed not to attack one another. They did this for several reasons. Hitler knew he would have to fight France and Great Britain soon. He did not want to have to fight the Soviet Union at the same time. Stalin knew the Soviet military was not ready to fight the Germans at this point.

## Poland Falls

On September 1, 1939, Hitler's armies invaded Poland. Two days later, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Germany's new ally, the Soviet Union, entered Poland from the east. Within two weeks, Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union. World War II had begun in Europe.

## Conditions in Asia

Meanwhile, important events were taking place in the Far East. Japan was committing **aggression**, or hostile and unprovoked action, in China. Japan wanted China's raw materials for Japanese industries. In 1931 the Japanese Army took Manchuria, a northeastern part of China.

China was too weak to stop Japan. The United States protested Japan's actions, but neither the United States nor any other country went to help China. In 1937 Japan made a move to control all of China.

The United States voiced their *protests* and *sympathized* with the Chinese but continued to remain **neutral**. Within a year, Japan controlled most of China's main cities.

## The Axis Powers

In 1940 Japan signed a military alliance with Germany and Italy, forming the **Axis Powers**. Encouraged by German success in Europe, Japan continued to expand into Asia and the Pacific.

Allies	Axis Powers
popular term for some 25 nations that opposed the Axis Powers, the major nations are listed below	countries that fought against the Allies in World War II
United States Britain U.S.S.R. China France	Italy            Bulgaria Germany       Romania Japan           Slovakia Hungary       Croatia

## United States Reacts

The United States decided to try to stop the Japanese expansion. In 1941 President Roosevelt placed an **embargo** on all trade with Japan. An *embargo* is a government order that prevents ships from entering or leaving another country's port. The embargo hurt Japan's economy. The United States demanded that Japan get out of China.

By October of 1941, Japan was planning to attack the United States. American military experts were reading secret Japanese messages and knew something was going to happen. However, they did not know where Japan would attack. They thought it might be the Philippine Islands.

## Pearl Harbor

Instead, on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, Japanese planes attacked the United States naval and air base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. That same day they attacked other American military bases in Wake Island, Midway Island, Guam, and the Philippines. On December 8, 1941, Congress declared war on Japan.



*A monument to those Americans who died at Pearl Harbor.*

Three days after the Japanese attack, the European *Axis Powers*—Germany and Italy—declared war on the United States. For the second time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States had to go to war.

## Summary

Economic and political conditions in Europe were very bad after World War I. Unrest led to the rise of new and dangerous political ideas and dictators. The Axis Powers such as Italy, Germany, and Spain began wars in Europe. The wars helped Hitler to carry out his deliberate plan to kill European Jews and others.

Japan attacked countries in Asia. The United States tried to halt Japanese expansion. In response, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the United States fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Then, on December 11, 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.



*A list of names of those Americans who died at Pearl Harbor.*