

THE RISE OF FASCISM - GERMANY, ITALY, AND JAPAN

Looking back on the 20th century, many historians trace the causes of World War II, including the rise of fascism, to factors created by World War I and by treaties signed at the end of the "Great War" (as World War I originally was called). After World War I, many countries faced severe money problems. Germany was particularly hard hit. According to the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, Germany was required to pay large sums of money, called **reparations**, to the countries that had won the conflict.

By 1930, mass **unemployment** and economic **depression** led to bitter poverty in Germany, Britain, Japan, Italy, and the United States, as well as other countries around the world. In Germany and Italy, the economic depression weakened the existing governments. A political movement that believed in an extremely strong, national government, called **fascism**, became popular in these countries. Fascism included a sense of **nationalism** (a powerful sense of patriotism) that led to the belief that foreigners and minorities were inferior.

Beginning in the 1930s, many Germans supported the **Nazi Party**, a violently nationalistic organization. The Nazi Party declared that Germany had been unfairly treated after World War I, and that the Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919, caused the economic depression. In 1933, Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazis, became chancellor of Germany. Known as *der Fuhrer* (the Leader), Hitler turned Germany into a military dictatorship. He preached that the Germans were a superior race, and that many minorities, including Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, and communists, should be oppressed, exiled, or worse. A persuasive speaker, he convinced his followers that Jews and other minorities were inferior, and the root of Germany's problems. Hitler built up the military forces in Germany, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Most, but not all, Germans believed that Hitler brought strength and courage back to their country, as well as prosperity. They were proud to be Germans, and proud to be Nazis. The humiliation and poverty of the post World War I era was ending, but at a high price. The efficient ruthlessness and brutality of Hitler and his devoted followers, combined with *der Fuhrer's* spell-binding effect as a speaker to the crowds, created a horrifyingly powerful government, dedicated to the superiority of the

Aryan race (white, northern Europeans) and the establishment of a new German empire. In 1936, Hitler sent troops to the Rhineland, an old section of Germany along the Rhine River, where they were not allowed, according to the Treaty of Versailles. Many Germans and Austrians were proud of this violation of the hated treaty, and other countries did nothing to stop it.

In Italy, the economic problems after World War I led to riots and strikes that severely disrupted the country. Many people began to support the Fascist Party, believing it would bring stability and prosperity back to the country. Benito Mussolini, leader of the Fascist Party in Italy, promised to restore Italy to its days of glory under the Roman Empire. Bowing to pressure from the growing Fascist Party, the king of Italy appointed Mussolini premier in 1922. Known as *el Duce* ("El Doo-chay," the Leader), Mussolini soon established a dictatorship. To establish the greatness of Italy and create an empire, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1936. The Italians, fighting with modern weapons against poorly equipped Ethiopians, conquered this African nation that same year.

Like Germany and Italy, Japan was intent on creating an empire. This small island nation resented the way western countries and heads of state determined that Japan should not expand. Military leaders gained increasing power over the Japanese government. Japan still had an emperor, named Hirohito (Hiro-he-tow), whom the people revered as a god, but it was primarily the military leaders who took charge of the country's operation. Like the Germans, the Japanese shared a strong military tradition. The army, navy, and air force grew in size and strength, and serving in the armed forces became an even more desirable and honorable goal for young men than it had been previously. Japan was the first of the fascist countries to successfully expand its empire, by invading Manchuria (in northern China) in 1931. Japan occupied most of eastern China by 1938, eventually seeking to bring all of Asia and the Pacific Ocean under its control

QUESTIONS

1. What does **fascism** mean?
2. Why were German fascists were called **Nazis**?
3. Much of the world was undergoing a severe economic **Depression**, beginning in 1929.

How might poverty and unemployment have contributed to the rise of fascism in the 1930s?

4. Many people don't realize that Hitler came to power legally. He did not overthrow an existing government or seize power through the military. Hitler was elected by the German people.

Do you think that people in the United States would ever elect someone like that?

Why or why not?

5. How did Mussolini come to power?

How was this different from Hitler?

What were the similarities?

6. Describe the government of Japan.

7. What were the differences of Japan and Germany's government?

How were they similar?