

Dictators and Militarists Rise to Power

Hitler's violation of the Treaty of Versailles boosted his popularity in Germany. Germans hated paying war reparations, as the treaty required. They also objected to the war-guilt clause, which blamed them for World War I. The nationalistic feelings aroused by the treaty allowed Hitler to seize control and turn Germany into a dictatorship. Nationalism also helped strong leaders take power in Italy and Japan. In the Soviet Union, however, dictatorship emerged from a different source-communism.

Stalin Creates a Totalitarian Dictatorship in the Soviet Union In 1917, the Russian Revolution overthrew Czar Nicholas II. Soon afterward, the Communist Party, led by Vladimir Lenin, established itself as the sole authority in the country. In 1922, the communists formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), commonly known as the Soviet Union. After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin plotted his way to power. By the early 1930s, Stalin had established a totalitarian dictatorship. **Totalitarianism** is a system in which the government totally controls all aspects of a society, including the economy.

Stalin set two main economic goals for the Soviet Union. He wanted to raise agricultural production and to modernize industry. The two goals were linked, in that increased exports of food would bring in cash to finance industrialization.

In 1928, Stalin established a Five-Year Plan to reach his goals. This plan called for taking private land from farmers and forcing them to move onto huge collective farms. Many farmers did not want to resettle on these cooperative, state-owned farms. But those who resisted were shot or forced to do hard labor in prisonlike concentration camps. Millions of others died in the famine that followed the shift to collective farms. Stalin could have diverted food to starving farmers, but instead he sold it abroad to earn cash. The industrial part of Stalin's plan was a success. By the early 1930s, modernized factories were churning out machinery, iron and steel, and consumer goods.

Stalin also used brutal methods to strengthen his control of the Communist Party. In 1934, he started to purge party officials by having them arrested, put on trial, and executed. By 1936, the Soviet secret police were rounding up and killing enormous numbers of party leaders, military officers, industrial managers, and others. This Great Purge, which claimed millions of lives, ensured that remaining officials would be loyal to Stalin.

Mussolini Establishes a Fascist Dictatorship in Italy. Serious problems plagued Italy after the First World War. Inflation and labor strikes hurt the Italian economy, and communists threatened to take over the democratic government. In addition, Italians felt insulted by the Versailles Treaty, because its grant of territory to Italy fell far short of their expectations. Benito Mussolini, a veteran of the war, took advantage of conditions in Italy to emerge as a national figure and eventually form a dictatorship.

In 1919, Mussolini founded the first fascist political movement. **Fascism** is based on an extreme nationalism in which the state comes first and individual liberty is secondary. Fascists are strongly opposed to communism and democracy. They favor military values, the use of violence, and a leader who is strong and ruthless. One fascist slogan in Italy called on youth to "believe, obey, fight." Another claimed, "A minute on the battlefield is worth a lifetime of peace." Fascism often arises during a time of crisis, promising to revive an earlier era of glory. In Italy's case, that era was ancient Rome.

Mussolini used his extraordinary skill at public speaking to promote fascism. He did not speak with the calm, soothing voice of Franklin Roosevelt in a fireside chat. Instead, Mussolini agitated crowds with emotional outbursts and dramatic gestures. At these rallies, tough young men wearing black shirts provided security. These supporters also formed violent Blackshirt squads that broke up political meetings and labor strikes, assaulted socialists and communists, and terrorized local populations.

By 1922, fascists dominated several areas of Italy, and Mussolini prepared to take control of the whole country. In October, he and thousands of Blackshirts threatened to march on Rome. Influential business and army leaders persuaded Italy's king, Emmanuel III, that Mussolini might be able to solve the nation's problems. The king asked Mussolini to form a government. As prime minister, Mussolini quickly took charge, taking the name *Il Duce*, Italian for "the leader." Within a few years, he turned Italy into a fascist dictatorship. He banned labor unions, outlawed opposing political parties, and censored the press. He also employed spies and secret police to keep an eye on the people.

Mussolini wanted to build Italy's economy, and his industrial development and public works programs had some success. He also hoped to turn Italy into a great European power, using the Roman

Empire as a model. Like the ancient Romans, he sought glory through military conquest.

Hitler Leads the Rise of Nazism in Germany. Like Italy, Germany also turned to fascism after World War I. In 1919, Adolf Hitler-Germany's future leader-joined a small political party that later became known as the Nazi Party. Under his leadership, this party would direct a mass movement based on a form of fascism known as **Nazism**. Nazis believed that Germans and other Nordic peoples Hitler called them Aryans- were physically and morally superior to other races. Nazis wanted to purify Germany by removing other races, especially Jews.

Hitler laid out the Nazi philosophy in his book *Mein Kampf*, or "My Struggle." He started the book in 1924, while spending a year in prison for trying to overthrow the government of the German state of Bavaria. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said that the superior Aryan race was locked in a struggle with other races. He introduced the idea of *Lebensraum*, or "living space," declaring that Germany needed land on which Aryan settlers could raise large families. Those families, in turn, would conquer more territory, expanding the German empire. Eventually, Germany and the Aryan race would rule the world.

Germany's economic depression gave Hitler the opportunity to spread his ideas. The country's parliamentary government could not cope with the crisis. Hungry, unemployed Germans began looking for a leader who could save the nation from ruin. Hitler addressed large crowds, blaming the Jews for nearly every German problem, from the world war to the depression. He promised to restore Germany's economy and empire. At these Nazi rallies, bodyguards protected Hitler.

Hitler's extreme nationalism appealed to many voters. In the 1932 elections, the Nazi Party won more seats in the parliament than any other political party in Germany. As a result, Hitler was named chancellor, or prime minister. He moved quickly to dissolve the republic, replacing German democracy with a totalitarian government.

The Nazis called this government the Third Reich-the successor to two earlier German empires. They passed new laws targeting Jews, barring them from certain jobs and exposing them to persecution. Jews and other "undesirables" were shipped off to concentration camps. Hitler also centralized the government, placing Nazis in the main positions of authority. In 1934, he became both president and chancellor, giving himself the title *der Fuhrer*, or "the leader." Hitler now had complete command of Germany. He set about building Germany's military into a powerful war machine.

The Military Takes Control of the Government in Japan. Like Germany, Japan had a mixed history of military rule and democracy. Before World War I, Japan had begun to industrialize. Lacking raw materials for industry, it relied on a strong military to obtain natural resources from other countries. After the war, however, Japan became less aggressive. It helped form the League of Nations in 1920. It also signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact, joining 14 other nations in a pledge to resolve disagreements peacefully. Civilians gained more power in the government, although Japan's emperor continued to play a strong role.

In the 1930s, however, the worldwide economic depression undermined civilian rule and caused Japan to move toward a policy of **militarism**. The Japanese military began to increase its power and to play a greater role in politics.

Japan's growing militarism was combined with an extreme form of nationalism. Many Japanese turned away from Western influences and embraced traditional values and culture. Radical nationalists also called for more aggressive military action abroad to acquire territory and raw materials. Like Hitler, they wanted to expand Japan's "living space" and acquire oil and other vital resources.

Some nationalists joined with a group of army officers in efforts to overthrow the civilian government. In 1932, they assassinated the prime minister. More assassinations and upheaval followed in 1936. The government put down these rebellions and executed the rebels. Nevertheless, civilian politicians, fearing for their lives, gave up more power to the military.

Japanese militarism got another boost in 1941, when General Hideki Tojo became prime minister, replacing a civilian leader. Tojo, an aggressive militarist, continued to develop the military and prepare the nation for war.