The World between the Wars

The United States was not the only country to suffer from the Great Depression. The war-torn countries of Europe knew nothing but hunger and poverty as they worked to rebuild their cities after World War I.

It is only natural that people would want to pull themselves out of the hard times they were experiencing. Unfortunately, the people of Russia, Germany, and Italy began listening to men who wanted to become more powerful, even if it was through war. Eager to see better times, many people believed the promises of these men to make their country powerful.

New forms of government came to power. Germany and Italy were taken over by dictators.

Japan, which had been ruled by an emperor for years, began to be ruled more and more by its military forces.

Let's take a look at the changes that took place in Russia, Italy, Germany, and Japan. Then perhaps you will see why there was another world war.

Russia—Communism

Just before the end of World War I, the Communist party took over control of Russia. In a free country such as ours, people can own their own businesses, homes, and land. When **communism** takes over a country, the government steals these things from the people and claims to own them. The people *must* work for the communist government or suffer great losses. Although the people in Russia can vote, their vote does not affect the government. Usually they have only one candidate to vote for—the Communist candidate!

In Russia, the Communist party allows no freedom of speech, press, or religion. It is a Communist goal to control other countries. The Communists believe that when communism takes control of the world, Christianity will disappear. By 1924, **Joseph Stalin** had become the Communist dictator in Russia. In 1939, he made an agreement with Adolph Hitler, who was then the dictator of Germany. He promised to help Germany if there was another war.

Benito Mussolini (left) was the Fascist dictator of Italy; Adolph Hitler (right) was the Nazi dictator of Germany.

Italy—Fascism

After World War I, Russia's Communist party said Russia would gain control of other countries. The people of Italy feared that communists would take over Italy. A man named **Benito Mussolini** promised the Italians he would save them from communism. The people believed him and let him become their leader.

It was true that Mussolini hated communism, but Mussolini himself became a harsh dictator. He allowed no other government party in Italy but his, which was called **the Fascist party.**

Although the people owned their own property, they could not do with their property as they thought best, and thus they lost their freedoms. Anyone who dared to disobey Mussolini was killed or put into prison. *The people who had feared communism found themselves trapped by something that was almost as bad.*

The Italians listened as Mussolini told them that Italy would become powerful. He began building one of the strongest armies in Europe.

Germany—National Socialism

After World War I, the German people were poor and discouraged from war. They wanted a leader who could lead them out from under their problems. The **National Socialist,** or **Nazi** form of government promised to make Germany a powerful nation, free from problems. Hearing these promises, many German people became eager to follow the National Socialist leader, **Adolph Hitler.** In doing so, *they gave up their freedom and came under the rule of one of the cruelest dictators the world has ever known.*

Like communism, National Socialism is against freedom. Nazism teaches (l) that the leader and the government of a country are all-powerful and are more important than the people of that

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country; (2) that all people are *not* equal in worth, but some groups of people (such as Jews) are inferior; and (3) that the leader can do no wrong. Everyone in Germany was forced to obey the harsh National Socialist laws. No one could even disagree. Those who complained were put into jails or killed.

The Nazi leader, Adolph Hitler, expected everyone to be loyal to him. He hated anyone that was loyal to someone else. Hitler hated Jewish people and blamed the problems of Germany on them. One of the most horrible things that Hitler did was to kill millions of people, including several million Jews, God's special people.

Hitler tried to make the German people think that Germans were superior to other peoples of the world.

"The Germans should conquer and rule the world," Hitler told his people. With this in mind, Hitler built a powerful army, navy, and air force.

Japan—Militarism

Before and during World War II, **Hirohito** was the emperor or the ruler of Japan. Japan had a very powerful army and navy. The *military* leaders— especially a general named **Tojo**— became more powerful than the emperor. The emperor had no choice but to go along with the military leaders' wishes.

The plan of Japan's military leaders was to conquer and rule Asia. As early as 1931, Japan began attacking China.

The Attacks Begin

The government leaders of Russia, Italy, Germany, and Japan each gained powerful control over the people of their country. Although each ruler represented a different kind of government, each was the same in its selfish desires to gain control of other countries, thus becoming powerful in the world's eyes.

Germany began attacking the small, weak countries of Europe. Italy attacked the tiny country of Ethiopia on the continent of Africa. Japan attacked China. Russia watched and waited. With all this happening, could there possibly not be another world war?
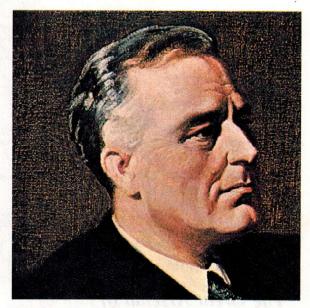
What was the reaction of the rest of the world? They criticized these countries for attacking others, but they did nothing to stop them. They told themselves that Germany would stop soon on her own. And China and Ethiopia seemed so far away that the people of Europe were not concerned. Everyone else was tired of fighting, and they had no wish to begin another war.

This delighted Hitler. With each new country he conquered, he told the world, "I am satisfied now. I will

stop." Then suddenly his army would conquer another country.

With the coming of the 1940's, there were German people who did not trust Hitler; there were Russians who hated communism; there were Italians who disagreed with Mussolini; and there were Japanese who disliked the idea of war. Yet each group of people was powerless to stop the plans of its government.

Once again, the lights were beginning to go out all over Europe.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was President during the Great Depression and World War II.