

# World War I & Its Aftermath (1914-1930)

## POLITICAL: WORLD WAR I

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Gas, machine guns, and primitive tanks and planes brought millions of deaths. Political parties put aside differences & unified behind war efforts. America entered late; Russia left early.

WESTERN FRONT: Began with **Schlieffen Plan** that skirted fortifications through neutral Belgium. Thrust toward Paris failed and Western Front extensive trench system was built. War was a stalemate for four years; battles at the Somme (1916), Verdun (1916) were indecisive

RUSSIA/EASTERN FRONT Russians lost **Battle of Tannenberg** in 1914, and by 1917 revolution was imminent. Nicholas II abdicated in March 1917. Provisional Government (Kerensky) in control. Lenin returned from exile (through Germany). Struggle ended with the October Bolshevik Revolution. Russia gained peace from Germany in March 1918 at **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**. Civil War between the Reds and Whites erupted, lasting four years. Tsar and his family were killed July 19.

AMERICANS came over: In April 1917, inspired by Wilson's speech – to "Make the World Safe for Democracy," – the United States joined the allies against Germany. War ended November 11, 1918.

OUTSIDE EUROPE: Turks massacred Armenians (1.2 mil.) while Europe distracted with war. Arabs revolted against Ottoman Empire in 1916-18 under inspiration of Lawrence of Arabia. Britain and France claimed Germany's lost colonies. In Asia, Japan moved to become the dominant industrial power.

1918-1920 Spanish Flu kills upwards of 100 million worldwide.

## POLITICAL: EUROPE IN DISSARAY

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Shock of defeat and end of war led to widespread unrest in Berlin, where the Spartacists, led by Rosa Luxemburg favored revolution. The *Freikorps*, a German paramilitary band, shot communists. Threat of communist revolts frightened countries. Peace Conference in Paris began in January with Germany signing war guilt clause and reparations: Germans said they were stabbed in the Back. Wilson proposed League of Nations, compromising on his fourteen points. Stage set for World War II.

TERRITORIAL CHANGES: Austria/Hungary dismembered. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia formed. East Prussia separated by Polish corridor. Middle East became British mandate.

## POLITICAL: TOTALITARIANISM

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ITALY: **Benito Mussolini** (1883-1945) came to power after march on Rome with his followers ("Black Shirts"). Fascism was new ideology based on old Roman ideas of domination and empire:

- fascist bands used violence to censor and stop opposition
- mass propaganda promised unity, while arts were dedicated to promoting glorified fascist state.
- Mussolini promised that "the trains would run on time," supported technology and modernization
- Society was organized into sections called corporations.
- Little personal freedom, strikes and limit on free speech

RUSSIA/SOVIET UNION: **Joseph Stalin** (1879-1953) took control. He organized the Lenin cult to bolster his image.

- Consolidated power after 1929.
- Transformed Russia with **Five-Year Plans**, central economic planning, technical and agricultural improvements.
- Demanded more grain to finance industrialization, and to liquidate *kulaks* (prosperous peasants) by starvation
- Rebellious Ukraine was subdued
- Collective Farms: result, the *Holimidor* (Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33), estimated up to 8 million die of starvation (**note**: famines were the great killers of communist regimes)

GERMANY: **Adolph Hitler** (1889-1945) organized a paramilitary group of "brown shirts." Inspired by Mussolini's March on Rome he attempted an overthrow of the Government in 1923, was jailed, and wrote *Mein Kampf*. His ideas included: complete repudiation of Versailles Treaty, Aryan superiority over Jews and inferior Slavic races, *Lebensraum* ("living space") to be found in Poland/Russia

## ECONOMIC

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Governments oversaw war economies. Profiteering and corruption abounded and cost of living surged in major cities leading to revolution in Russia and defeated Germany.

GERMANY: After the war, staggering inflation. Dawes plan reduced German reparations and restored value of currency.

SOVIET UNION: **Lenin** introduced his **New Economic Policy (NEP)** which allowed for some Capitalism. But after Lenin's death (1924), the Economic Policy focused on the **Five-Year Plans**.

## SOCIAL

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World War I saw dedication to war effort across society. Length of war led to conscription, food shortages, inflation, devastation, and malaise. Victory gardens planted to ease food supply. Black markets existed in all countries to help obtain rationed goods. The return of millions of veterans resulted in emotional turmoil and housing shortages. Society responded differently to changing roles and class breakdown. Youth flocked to jazz clubs, while loosening of sexual mores was both welcome and reviled. Modern

appliances, health, and grooming aids tempted the consumer as wages rose.

*Women* took higher paying jobs in factories. Radical changes in dress and hairstyles among urban women (Flappers in the U.S.) while dedicated housewives embraced tradition. Some criticized results, but in America, women suffragists picketed White House. Women gained the vote in 1920 in U.S. and Britain, but not France or Italy. Under the totalitarian regimes of Italy and Germany, traditional roles remained, with motherhood extolled as a way to build the state. Soviet women began to gain basics Western women expected (more equality, property rights, birth control).

## INTELLECTUAL

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War poets wrote of the terrible conditions. War posters provided propaganda, while other forms of media were censored as death tolls mounted. In the post war era, pacifist writings of Erich Remarque: *All Quiet on the Western Front* confronted the waste of war. Kafka, T.S. Eliot, and Marcel Proust also wrote works centered on impersonal present or memories of past. The totalitarian regimes of Russia, Germany and Italy would suppress free intellectual thought during the 30s and into World War II.

## ARTISTIC

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Disillusionment of war: German artists such as Kathe Kollwitz and Otto Dix depicted tragedy and corruption of war with dark, modern images. **Dada**, an art movement between 1916-22 depicted strange paintings and sculpture that embraced chaos and uncertainty. **Bauhaus**, a group of German artists, sought order out of chaos of World War I and created streamlined buildings. Culture reached the masses with movies and emerging radio. Hollywood and the Jazz Age inspired Europe. Post-war Berlin and Paris: a time of cabarets, sexual freedom, and decadence. Russian artists experimented with high art and mass culture to support Communism.