

# The West Between the Wars, 1919-1939

## THE STORY MATTERS...

Bitterness over the Treaty of Versailles and severe economic problems helped the rise of Adolf Hitler's Nazi movement in Germany. The Hitler Youth (*Hitlerjugend*) organization was created in 1926 to win over young people to the Nazi cause. When Hitler took power in 1933, the Hitler Youth had about 100,000 members. Boys and girls in the Hitler Youth were indoctrinated to be race-conscious, obedient, and to put the needs of the nation above their own. By the early years of World War II, about 90 percent of the country's young people belonged to the Hitler Youth.

## Lesson 28-2

# The Rise of Dictatorial Regimes

### READING HELPDESK

#### Academic Vocabulary

media attitudes

#### Content Vocabulary

totalitarian state fascism

collectivization authoritarian

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What can cause economic instability?
- How might political change impact Society?

### IT MATTERS BECAUSE

After World War I, Europe's young democracies were under threat. A new kind of dictatorship emerged with Mussolini's fascist state in Italy and Stalin's totalitarian rule in the Soviet Union. Other Western states such as Spain maintained authoritarian regimes.

## The Rise of Dictators

**GUIDING QUESTION** *How did Mussolini create a dictatorial state in Italy?*

By 1939, only two major European states – France and Great Britain – remained democratic. Italy, the Soviet Union, Germany, and many other European states adopted dictatorial regimes. These regimes took both old and new forms.

A new form of dictatorship was the modern totalitarian state. In a totalitarian state, the government aims to control the political, economic, social, intellectual, and cultural lives of its citizens. Totalitarian regimes pushed the central state's power far beyond what it had been in the past. These regimes wanted more than passive obedience; they wanted to conquer the minds and hearts of their subjects. They achieved this goal through mass propaganda techniques and modern communications.

The totalitarian states were led by a single leader and a single party. They rejected the ideal of limited government power and the guarantee of individual freedoms. Instead, individual freedom was subordinated to the collective will of the masses as determined by the leader. The masses were expected to be actively involved in achieving the state's goals.

### Fascism in Italy

In the 1920s, Benito Mussolini (MOO • suh • LEE• nee) set up the first European fascist movement in Italy. Mussolini began his political career as a Socialist. In 1919, he created a new political group, the *Fascia di Combattimento*, or League of Combat. Fascism comes from that name.

As a political philosophy, fascism (FA • SHIH • zuhm) glorifies the state above the individual by emphasizing the need for a strong central government led by a dictatorial ruler. In a fascist state, the government controls the people and stifles any opposition.

By 1922, Mussolini's movement was growing quickly. The middleclass fear of socialism, communism, and disorder made the Fascists increasingly attractive to many people. Mussolini knew that many Italians were still angry over the failure to receive more land from the peace treaty. He knew nationalism was a powerful force and demanded more land for Italy. Mussolini converted thousands to the Fascist Party with his nationalistic appeals.

In 1922, Mussolini and the Fascists threatened to march on Rome if they were not given power. Victor Emmanuel III, the king of Italy, gave in and made Mussolini prime minister. Mussolini used his position as prime minister to create a Fascist dictatorship. He was made head of the government with the power to make laws by decree. The police were given unrestricted authority to arrest and jail anyone for either political or nonpolitical crimes. In 1926, the Fascists outlawed all other political parties in Italy and set up a secret police, known as the OVRA. By the end of the year, Mussolini ruled Italy as *Il Duce* (eel DOO • chay), "The Leader."

### The Fascist State

Believing that the Fascist state should be totalitarian, Mussolini used various means to establish complete control over the Italian people. The OVRA watched citizens' political activities and enforced government policies. The Italian Fascists also tried to exercise control over the mass media, including newspapers, radio, and film. The media was used to spread propaganda. Simple slogans like

“Mussolini Is Always Right” were used to mold Italians into a single-minded Fascist community.

The Fascists also used organizations to promote the ideals of fascism. For example, by 1939, about 66 percent of the population between the ages of 8 and 18 were members of Fascist youth groups. These youth groups particularly focused on military activities and values.

With these organizations, the Fascists hoped to create a nation of new Italians who were fit, disciplined, and war-loving. In practice, however, the Fascists largely maintained traditional social attitudes. This was especially evident in their policies on women. The Fascists portrayed the family as the pillar of the state. Seen as the foundation of the family, women were to be homemakers and mothers. According to Mussolini, these roles were “their natural and fundamental mission in life.”

In spite of his attempts, Mussolini never achieved the degree of totalitarian control seen in Hitler’s Germany or Stalin’s Soviet Union. The Italian Fascist Party did not completely destroy the country’s old power structure. Mussolini’s compromise with the traditional institutions of Italy was evident in his dealings with the Catholic Church. In the Lateran Accords of February 1929, Mussolini’s regime recognized the sovereign independence of a small area of 109 acres (about 44 hectares) within Rome known as Vatican City. The Church had claimed this area since Italian unification in 1870. Mussolini’s regime also recognized Catholicism as the “sole religion of the State.” In return, the Catholic Church urged Italians to support the Fascist regime.

### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Analyzing** Why did many Italian people find fascism acceptable?

## From Russia to the USSR

**GUIDING QUESTION** How did Stalin gain and maintain power in the USSR?

During the civil war in Russia, Lenin had followed a policy of war communism. The government controlled most industries and seized grain from peasants to ensure supplies for the army. When the war was over, peasants began to sabotage the Communist program by hoarding food. Moreover, drought caused a terrible famine between 1920 and 1922. As many as 5 million died. With agricultural disaster came industrial collapse. By 1921, industrial output was only 20 percent of its 1913 level. Russia was exhausted. A peasant banner proclaimed, “Down with Lenin and horseflesh. Bring back the czar and pork.” As Leon Trotsky said, “The country, and the government with it, were at the very edge of the abyss.”

### Lenin’s New Economic Policy

In March 1921, Lenin pulled Russia back from the abyss. He abandoned war communism in favor of his New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP was a modified version of the old capitalist system. Peasants were allowed to sell their produce openly. Retail stores, as well as small

industries that employed fewer than 20 workers, could be privately owned and operated. Heavy industry, banking, and mines, however, remained in the hands of the government.

### The Soviet Union

In 1922, Lenin and the Communists formally created a new state called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The state was also known as the USSR (its initials) or as the Soviet Union (its shortened form). By that time, a revived market and a good harvest had ended the famine. Soviet agricultural production climbed to 75 percent of its prewar level.

Overall, the NEP saved the Soviet Union from complete economic disaster. Lenin, however, intended the NEP to be only a temporary retreat from the goals of communism.

Lenin died in 1924. A struggle for power began at once among the seven members of the Politburo (PAH • luht • BYUR • OH} – the Communist Party’s main policy-making body. The Politburo was severely divided over the future direction of the Soviet Union.

One group, led by Leon Trotsky, wanted to end the NEP and to launch Russia on a path of rapid industrialization, chiefly at the expense of the peasants. This group also wanted to spread communism abroad. It believed that the revolution in Russia would survive only with new communist states.

Another group in the Politburo rejected the idea of worldwide communist revolution. Instead, it wanted to focus on building a socialist state in Russia and to continue Lenin’s NEP. This group believed that rapid industrialization would harm the living standards of the peasants.

### Stalin and His Five-Year Plans

These divisions were further strained by an intense personal rivalry between Leon Trotsky and another Politburo member, Joseph Stalin. By 1927 Stalin had the upper hand. By this time he had removed Trotsky and several other Bolsheviks from the Communist Party and the government. Trotsky fled the country and was murdered years later, most likely on Stalin’s orders, in Mexico. With Trotsky and most of the old Bolsheviks out of the way, Stalin was free to establish a powerful dictatorship. He seized all power for himself and curtailed the freedom of the press. Now literally no one could oppose him or speak out against his policies.

Stalin made a significant shift in economic policy in 1928 when he ended the NEP. That year he launched his First Five-Year Plan. The Five-Year Plans set economic goals for five-year periods. Their purpose was to transform Russia virtually overnight from an agricultural into an industrial country. The First Five-Year Plan focused on production of military and capital goods (goods devoted to the production of other goods such as heavy machines). The plan quadrupled the production of heavy machinery and doubled oil production. Between 1928 and 1937,

during the first two Five-Year Plans, steel production in Russia increased from 4 million to 18 million tons (3.6 to 16.3 million t) per year.

### Costs of Stalin's Programs

The social and political costs of industrialization were enormous. The number of workers increased by millions between 1932 and 1940, but investment in housing actually declined after 1929. The result was that millions of workers and their families lived in miserable conditions. Real wages of industrial workers declined by 43 percent between 1928 and 1940.

With rapid industrialization came an equally rapid collectivization of agriculture – a system in which private farms were eliminated. Instead, the government owned all the land, and the peasants worked it. The peasants resisted by hoarding crops and killing livestock. In response, Stalin stepped up the program. By 1934, 26 million family farms had been collectivized into 250,000 units.

Collectivization was done at tremendous cost. Hoarding food and slaughtering livestock led to widespread famine. The Ukraine region was the center of this famine. Estimates range from 2.4 to 7.5 million Ukrainian deaths out of 10 million total in the Soviet Union. Some scholars consider the famine a deliberate move by Stalin. This “Terror Famine” was meant to cripple the movement for Ukrainian independence.

Stalin's programs had other costs as well. To achieve his goals, Stalin strengthened his control over the party. Those who resisted were sent into forced labor camps in Siberia. During the time known as the Great Purge, Stalin expelled army officers, diplomats, union officials, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens. About 8 million were arrested and sent to labor camps; they never returned. Others were executed.

The Stalin era also overturned permissive social legislation enacted in the early 1920s. To promote equal rights for women, the Communists had made the divorce process easier. After Stalin came to power, the family was praised as a small collective. Parents were responsible for teaching the values of hard work, duty, and discipline to their children.

#### READING PROGRESS CHECK

**Stating** Explain how Joseph Stalin used his position in the Communist Party and other means to gain control over the USSR.

### Authoritarian States in the West

**GUIDING QUESTION** What was the goal of authoritarian governments in the West?

A number of governments in the Western world were not totalitarian but were authoritarian. These states adopted some of the features of totalitarian states, in particular, their use of police powers. However, these authoritarian governments did not want to create a new kind of mass society. Instead, they wanted to preserve the existing social order.

## Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

### Stalin's Purge

Poet Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, who wrote under the pseudonym Anna Akhmatova, was silenced during the Great Purge and watched as loved ones and fellow writers were imprisoned and disappeared. In 1942, her poem “Courage” appeared:

“We know that our fate in the balance is cast  
And we are the history makers. The hour for courage has sounded  
at last  
And courage has never forsaken us. We do not fear  
death where the wild bullets screech,  
Nor weep over homes that are gutted,  
For we shall preserve you our own Russian  
speech,  
The glorious language of Russia!  
Your free and pure utterance  
we shall convey  
To new generations, unshackled  
you'll stay Forever!”

– quoted in *Anna Akhmatova and Her Circle*

#### DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

According to this poem, what may be lost in the Great Purge that “we” must save?

### Eastern Europe

At first, it seemed that political democracy would become well established in eastern Europe after World War 1. Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia (known as the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes until 1929), Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary all adopted parliamentary systems. However, authoritarian regimes soon replaced most of these systems.

Parliamentary systems failed in most eastern European states for several reasons. These states had little tradition of political democracy. In addition, they were mostly rural and agrarian. Large landowners still dominated most of the land. Powerful landowners, the churches, and even some members of the small middle class feared land reform. They also feared communist upheaval and ethnic conflict. These groups looked to authoritarian governments to maintain the old system. Only Czechoslovakia, which had a large middle class, a liberal tradition, and a strong industrial base, maintained its political democracy.

### Spain

In Spain, too, political democracy failed to survive. Led by General Francisco Franco, Spanish military forces revolted against the democratic government in 1936. A brutal and bloody civil war began.

Foreign intervention complicated the Spanish Civil War. The fascist regimes of Italy and Germany aided Franco's forces with arms, money, and soldiers. Hitler used the Spanish Civil War as an opportunity to test the new weapons of his revived air force. German bombers destroyed the city of Guernica in April 1937. The Spanish republican government was aided by 40,000 foreign volunteers. The Soviet Union sent in trucks, planes, tanks, and military advisers.

The Spanish Civil War came to an end when Franco's forces captured Madrid in 1939. Franco established a

dictatorship that lasted until his death in 1975. Because Franco's dictatorship favored traditional groups and did not try to control every aspect of people's lives, it is an example of an authoritarian rather than a totalitarian regime. Nevertheless, his rule was harsh. He relied on special police

forces, and opponents to the regime who had not fled into exile were imprisoned.

**READING PROGRESS CHECK**

**Describing** In what ways did Franco's government preserve the existing social order?

**REVIEWING VOCABULARY**

- totalitarian state** a government that aims to control the political, economic, social, intellectual, and cultural lives of its citizens
- fascism** a political philosophy that glorifies the state above the individual by emphasizing the need for a strong central government led by a dictatorial ruler
- collectivization** a system in which private farms are eliminated and peasants work land owned by the government
- authoritarian** favoring or enforcing strict obedience to authority, especially that of the government, at the expense of personal freedom