

Chapter 29: Dictatorships and the Second World War

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Additional Resources:

<http://www.raleighcharterhs.org/faculty/bnewmark/EUROQuizzes.html>

1. Authoritarian states

a. Conservative authoritarianism (absolutism)

- i. Conservative authoritarianism had deep roots in European history and led to an antidemocratic form of government that believed in avoiding change but was limited in its power and objectives.
 1. Demands were limited to taxes, army recruits, and passive acceptance.
- ii. Conservative authoritarianism revived after the First World War in eastern Europe, Spain, and Portugal.
 1. These countries lacked a strong tradition of selfgovernment.
 2. Many were torn by ethnic conflicts.
 3. Large landowners and the church looked to dictators to save them from land reform.
- iii. The new authoritarian governments were more concerned with maintaining the status quo than with forcing society into rapid change.

b. Radical totalitarian dictatorships

- i. Radical dictatorships emerged in the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy.
- ii. These dictatorships rejected parliamentary and liberal values (including rationality, peaceful progress, economic freedom, and a strong middle class), and sought full control over the masses--of whom they sought to mobilize for action.
- iii. Lenin, in the Soviet Union, provided a model for single-party dictatorship.
- iv. Totalitarian leaders believed in will power, conflict, the worship of violence--and the idea that the individual was less valuable than the state and there are no lasting rights.
- v. Totalitarianism was a permanent revolution.
- vi. The USSR was totalitarianism of the left, while Nazi Germany was totalitarianism of the right.
- vii. Some historians describe the totalitarian regimes of Mussolini and Hitler as *fascism* which grew out of capitalism.
- viii. **Fascism** was expansionist nationalism, anti-socialism and anti-working class movements, and the glorification of war.
- ix. More recently, historians have emphasized the uniqueness of totalitarian rule in each country.

2. **Mussolini** and fascism in Italy

- a. Mussolini hated liberalism; his movement was the first fascist movement--a halfway house between conservative authoritarianism and modern totalitarianism.
- b. The fascist seizure of power
 - i. Prior to 1914, Italy was moving toward democracy but with problems: Catholics, conservatives, and landowners hated liberalism and the country was divided.
 1. Furthermore, most Italians were still poor and were more attached to their villages and local interests than the national state.
 2. Only in Italy did the Socialist party gain leadership prior to 1914.
 - ii. The First World War and postwar problems ended the move toward democracy in Italy.

1. Workers and peasants felt cheated because wartime promises of reform were not carried out.
 2. Nationalists felt cheated by the war settlement.
 3. The Russian Revolution energized Italy's socialists into occupying factories and farms.
 - a. These actions scared and mobilized the property-owning classes. Soon, a strong Catholic party emerged opposing the liberal parliamentary government.
 - iii. By 1921 most Italians were opposed to liberal, parliamentary government.
 - iv. Mussolini's Fascists opposed the "Socialist threat" with physical force (the **Black Shirts**) and pushed the Socialists out of the city governments of northern Italy.
 - v. Mussolini marched on Rome in 1922 and forced King Victor Emmanuel III to name him head of the government.
- c. The regime in action
- i. Mussolini's Fascists killed the Socialist leader **Matteotti**.
 - ii. After Mateeotti's murder, Mussolini decided to "make the nation Fascist." He abolished freedom of the press, fixed elections, ruled completely by decree, arrested political opponents, disbanded all independent labor unions and put dedicated Fascists in control of Italy's schools.
 - iii. Between 1924 and 1926, Mussolini built a one-party Fascist dictatorship but did not establish a fully totalitarian state.
 1. Much of the old power structure remained, particularly the conservatives, who controlled the army, economy, and state.
 2. The Catholic church supported Mussolini because he recognized the Vatican as an independent state (**Lateran Agreement of 1929**) and gave the church heavy financial support.
 3. Women were repressed, but Jews were not persecuted until late in the Second World War.
 - a. He placed a tax on bachelors and placed a limit on the number of women allowed in the better-paying jobs, showing his unwillingness to mobilize the women workforce.
 4. Overall, Mussolini's fascist Italy was never really totalitarian, because it did not gain complete and utter power.
3. Hitler and Nazism in Germany
- a. The roots of Nazism
 - i. German Nazism was a product of Hitler, of Germany's social and political crisis, and the general attack on liberalism and rationality.
 - ii. Hitler was born in Austria, was a school dropout, and was rejected by the Imperial art school.
 - iii. Hitler became a fanatical nationalist while in Vienna, where he absorbed anti-Semitic and racist ideas.
 - iv. He adopted the ideas of some fanatical Christians (e.g., **Lueger**) that capitalism and liberalism resulted in excessive individualism.
 - v. He became obsessed with anti-Semitism and racism, and believed that Jews and Marxists lost the First World War for Germany.
 1. He believed in a Jewish-Marxist plot to destroy German culture using finance capitalism and Marxian socialism.
 - vi. By 1921, he had reshaped the tiny extremist German Workers' group into the Nazi party, using the mass rally as a particularly effective tool of propaganda.

1. The German Workers' Party denounced Jews, Marxists, and democrats and promised unity under a uniquely German "national socialism" that would abolish the injustices of capitalism and create a mighty "people's community."
 2. The party grew rapidly.
 3. Hitler and the party attempted to overthrow the Weimar government, but he was defeated and sent to jail (1923).
- b. Hitler's road to power
- i. The trial after Hitler's attempted coup brought him much publicity, but the Nazi party remained small until 1929.
 - ii. Written in jail, his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, was an outline of his desire to achieve German racial supremacy and domination of Europe, under the leadership of a dictator (Führer).
 - iii. The depression made the Nazi party attractive to the lower middle class, who were seized by panic as unemployment soared and Communists made election gains.
 1. By late 1932, some 43 percent of the labor force was unemployed.
 2. Hitler favored government programs to bring about economic recovery.
 - iv. By 1932, the Nazi party was the largest in the Reichstag--having 38 percent of the total.
 - v. Hitler wisely stressed the economic issue rather than the anti-Jewish and racist nationalism issues.
 - vi. He stressed simple slogans tied to national rebirth to arouse hysterical fanaticism in the masses.
 - vii. He appealed to the youth. Almost 40 percent of the Nazi party were under 30 years of age.
 1. "Make way, you old ones!"
 2. "National Socialism is the organized will of the youth."
 - viii. One reason for his rise to power is that Chancellor Brüning and President Hindenburg had already turned to rule by way of emergency decree.
 1. Brüning tried to revitalize the economy but only succeeded in exacerbating the problem.
 - ix. Another reason Hitler won is that the communists welcomed Hitler as the last breath of monopoly capitalism.
 - x. Key people in the army and big business along with conservative and nationalistic politicians believed that they could use Hitler; Hitler was legally appointed chancellor in 1933.
- c. The Nazi state and society
- i. The Enabling Act of March 1933 gave Hitler absolute dictatorial power.
 - ii. Germany became a one-party state--only the Nazi party was legal.
 1. The Nazi government was full of rivalries and inefficiencies, leaving Hitler to act as he wished.
 2. Strikes were forbidden and labor unions were replaced by the Nazi Labor Front.
 3. The Nazis took over the government bureaucracy.
 4. The Nazis took control of universities, writers, publishing houses; democratic, socialist, and Jewish literature was blacklisted.
 - iii. Hitler gained control of the military by using the SA to crush his own storm troopers, the SA, thus ending the "second revolution" against capitalism.
 - iv. The SA, led by **Heinrich Himmler**, joined forces with the Gestapo
 - v. The Gestapo, or secret police, used terror and purges to strengthen Hitler's hold on

power.

- vi. Hitler set out to eliminate the Jews.
 - 1. The Nuremberg Laws (1935) deprived Jews of their citizenship.
 - 2. By 1938, 150,000 of Germany's 500,000 Jews had left Germany.
 - 3. **Kristallnacht** was a wave of violence directed at Jews and their synagogues and businesses.
 - 4. Few people publically opposed these outrages.

d. Hitler's popularity

- i. Hitler promised and delivered economic recovery through public works projects and military spending.
 - 1. Hitler appointed as Germany's central banker **Hjalmar Schacht**, who skillfully restored credit and business. Then, Hitler broke with Schacht and Germany started to prepare for war again.
 - 2. Unemployment dropped. The standard of living rose moderately--but business profits rose sharply.
 - 3. Those who were not Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, communists, or homosexuals experienced greater opportunities and equality.
- ii. Hitler reduced Germany's traditional class distinctions by relaxing educational requirements; the old ruling elites had to give way to lower middleclass people in Hitler's train.
 - 1. Yet few historians believe that Hitler brought on a real social revolution: the well educated classes held on to their advantaged position, and women remained largely housewives and mothers.
- iii. Since the wars against Napoleon, many Germans believed in a special mission for a superior German nation. These Germans hopped on Hitler's dictatorship as he brought Germany within reach of a great German empire.
- iv. Communists, trade unionists, and some Christians opposed Hitler; many who opposed him were executed or imprisoned.

4. Nazi expansion and the Second World War

- a. The chief concepts of Nazism were space (physical space) and race (genetic) --which demanded territorial expansion.
- b. Aggression and appeasement (1933-1939)
 - i. When he was in a weak position, Hitler voiced his intention to overturn an unjust system; when strong, he kept increasing his demands.
 - ii. He lied, proclaiming his peaceful intentions to the world; he withdrew from the League of Nations in order to rearm Germany.
 - iii. Germany worked to add Austria to a greater Germany, established a military draft, and declared the Treaty of Versailles null and void. (Again, to expand Germany's military.)
 - 1. An AngloGerman naval agreement in 1935 broke Germany's isolation.
 - 2. In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler occupied the demilitarized Rhineland in 1936.
 - a. Britain felt that there was nothing wrong with the presence of German armies on German soil.
 - b. Without British support, France did not move.
 - iv. The British policy of appeasement, motivated by guilt, fear of communism (believed that Hitler could be used to defeat Soviet communism), and pacifism (after WWI), lasted far into 1939. British policy dictated French policy as well.
 - v. Mussolini attacked Ethiopia in 1935 and joined Germany in supporting the fascists in

Spain (the Rome-Berlin Axis alliance).

1. They aided General **Francisco Franco**'s fascist movement to defeat republican Spain.
- vi. Germany, Italy, and Japan formed an alliance.
- vii. By threatening Austria with invasion, Hitler forced the Austrian chancellor to put local Nazis in control of the government.
- viii. In 1938, Hitler demanded that western Czechoslovakia (the Sudetenland) be turned over to Germany.
 1. Democratic Czechoslovakia was prepared to defend itself.
 2. France had been Czechoslovakia's ally, and if France fought, then the Soviet Union was pledged to help.
 3. British prime minister **Chamberlain** flew to Munich to appease Hitler and agree to his territorial demands, forcing Czechoslovakia to give in.
- ix. Hitler accelerated his aggression and occupied all of Czechoslovakia in 1939. This time, he had no possible rationale for aggression.
- x. In 1939, Hitler and Stalin signed a public nonaggression pact and a secret pact that divided eastern Europe into German and Russian zones.
- xi. Germany attacked Poland, and Britain and France declared war on Germany (1939), finally true to their word.
- c. Hitler's empire (1939-1942)
 - i. The key to Hitler's military success was speed and force. This tactic was named **blitzkrieg** or lightning war.
 - ii. He crushed Poland quickly and then France; by July 1940, the Nazis ruled nearly all of Europe except Britain.
 1. Aging marshal **Henri Philippe Pétain** formed a Vichy government.
 - iii. Hitler sought to take over Britain in the Battle of Britain.
 1. He began by attacking British airfields and key factories, but soon started to bomb Britain indiscriminately, allowing the British to increase production and anti-aircraft defense.
 - iv. In 1941, Hitler's forces invaded Russia and conquered the Ukraine and got as far as Leningrad and Moscow until stopped by the severe winter weather.
 1. Hitler's decision was unwise militarily; Instead he should have taken Egypt and the Suez Canal to pinch off Britain's supply of oil.
 - v. After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor (1941), Hitler also declared war on the United States.
 - vi. Hitler began building a New Order based on racial imperialism.
 1. Nordic peoples were treated with preference; the French were heavily taxed; the Slavs were treated as "subhumans."
 2. The SS evacuated Polish peasants to create a German "settlement space."
 3. Polish workers and Russian prisoners of war were sent to Germany to work as slave laborers. Most did not survive.
 4. Jews, Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, and communists were condemned to death.
 5. Hitler's ultimate goal was to have all but German peasants die out, so that the Germans could resettle there.
 - vii. Six million Jews from all over Europe were murdered by killing squads, in ghettos, or in concentration camps.
 1. At the extermination camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau the victims were forced into gas chambers.

2. Recent research suggests that many Germans knew of and participated in these killings.
 3. Some scholars believe that the key reason so many Germans (and non-Germans) did not protest the murders is that they felt no personal responsibility for Jews.
- d. The Grand Alliance
- i. The Allies had three policies that led them to victory.
 1. The United States concentrated on European victory first, then Japan.
 2. The Americans and British put military needs before political questions, thus avoiding conflict over postwar settlements.
 3. The Allies adopted the principle of "unconditional surrender" of Germany and Japan, denying Hitler the possibility of dividing his foes. (By adopting a specific, common goal, they would know to deny any promises of compromise.)
 - ii. American aid to Britain and the Soviets, along with the heroic support of the British and Soviet peoples and the assistance of resistance groups throughout Europe, contributed to the eventual victory.
- e. The tide of battle
- i. The Germans were defeated at **Stalingrad** at the end of 1942, and from there on the Soviets took the offensive.
 - ii. At the same time, American, British, and Australian victories in the Pacific put Japan on the defensive.
 1. The Battle of the Coral Sea (1942) stopped the Japanese advance.
 2. The Battle of Midway Island (1942) established American naval superiority in the Pacific.
 - iii. The British defeat of Rommel at the Battle of El Alamein (1942) helped drive the Axis powers from North Africa in 1943.
 - iv. Italy surrendered in 1943, but fighting continued as the Germans seized Rome and northern Italy.
 - v. Bombing of Germany and Hitler's brutal elimination of opposition caused the Germans to fight on.
 - vi. The British and Americans invaded German held France in June 1944 but did not cross into Germany until March 1945. (Battle of Normandy)
 1. The Soviets pushed from the east, crossing the Elbe and meeting the Americans on the other side on April 26, 1945; Hitler committed suicide, and Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945.
 2. The United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in August 1945, and it too surrendered.