

## **WORLD WAR II**

### **The Rise of Dictators**

In the 1930's, the rise of dictators threatened the peace of the world. A **dictator** is a ruler who has complete control over a country. Economic troubles, anger over the Treaty of Versailles, and appeals to extreme **nationalism** (pride in one's country) helped dictators win popular support in Italy and Germany.

**Benito Mussolini.** Italy was disappointed with the outcome of World War I. It did not receive all the lands it wanted in the peace treaties. Also, economic problems led to riots and fears of revolution. In 1919, Benito Mussolini organized the **Fascist Party**. He called on Italians to unite behind him and restore the country to the grandeur of ancient Rome. By 1922, Mussolini was strong enough to seize power in Italy.

In the next few years, Mussolini tightened his control. He outlawed all political parties except his own. He controlled the press and banned criticism of the government. In schools, children recited the motto "Mussolini is always right." They learned discipline and total obedience to Mussolini.

When the Great Depression hit, Mussolini tried to distract Italians from the economic crisis by starting a foreign war. In 1935, he sent his army into Ethiopia in North Africa. The Ethiopians fought bravely. But their cavalry and old-fashioned rifles were no match for the modern Italian tanks and airplanes.

Emperor Haile Selassie (Hi lee suh las ee) of Ethiopia asked the League of Nations for help. The league took little action. Nations were distracted by their own economic problems. Also, they did not want to anger Mussolini. So the world stood by as Italy took over Ethiopia.

**Adolf Hitler.** Another dictator, Adolf Hitler, watched Mussolini's actions with interest. Like Mussolini, Hitler won power in Germany by organizing his own political party - the National Socialist Workers Party, or **Nazis**.

Hitler believed Germans belonged to a superior "Aryan" race. He preached hatred of Jews and blamed them for Germany's troubles. He savagely attacked the Versailles Treaty as unfair to Germany. Germany, he claimed had not even lost the war. Rather, Jews and traitors had "stabbed Germany in the back" in 1918.

In the 1920's, Hitler built up Nazi strength. He was a powerful speaker and skillful leader. Many Germans came to believe in his ideas. When the Great Depression brought hard times to Germans, they turned to him as a strong leader.

Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933. In the next two years, he ended democratic government and created a totalitarian state. In a **totalitarian state**, a single party controls the government and every aspect of the lives of the people. Citizens must obey the government without question. The government silences any critics.

**Fascism** - A dictatorship that is nationalist and racist.

**Naziism** - The German form of fascism in the 1930's and '40's.

Under Hitler, the Nazis controlled the press, schools, and religion. Nazis passed laws against Jews. In 1938, thousands of Jews were sent to **concentration** or prison camps. Persecution of Jews would increase in the years ahead.

Hitler built up the German armed forces and claimed that Germany had the right to expand to the east. The League of Nations condemned Hitler's actions. Hitler ignored the league and moved ahead with his plans to expand.

**Joseph Stalin.** Stalin took part in the Bolshevik Revolution that led to the beginning of the Soviet Union and communism. He assumed power in 1925 upon the death of Nikolai Lenin. He had Leon Trotsky, his main opposition, exiled in 1927. (Stalin had Trotsky assassinated in 1940.) Stalin became the supreme ruler. In 1928, he started the first of many 5 year plans in an effort to industrialize and modernize the Soviet Union.

During the 1930's, Stalin ordered the government takeover of farms. The well-to-do farmer especially resisted. As a result, in 1932-33, Stalin created a famine that led to the deaths of 3 million farmers by starvation. Those that didn't die of starvation were sent to prison and/or killed.

Later, in 1936, Stalin went even further to solidify his place as dictator. He had many old Bolsheviks killed for plotting against the state. Many were people who helped during the revolution of 1917.

Hitler's plans worried Stalin. During the depression years of the 1930's, he continued his series of 5 year plans to build up industry and farming. Stalin urged the Russian people to make superhuman efforts to produce more goods. Whenever people resisted the government, they were punished harshly.

Despite the harsh conditions under which most Russians lived, the Soviet economy expanded. Steel and oil production increased sharply. These materials, as Stalin knew, would be needed to fight any German aggression.

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on your own paper.

1. How did Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin become dictators? Answer each separately and provide specific facts to support each answer.
2. How did each maintain his power during the Great Depression of the 1930's? Support your answers with facts from the reading.

**Concentration Camps** - Camps where political opponents or other enemies of the state are confined.

**Aggression** - Any warlike act by one country against another without just cause.