

The Rise of Totalitarian Dictators

The Soviet Union Under Joseph Stalin

After Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin outmaneuvered his rivals to gain control of the government. Stalin was determined to transform the Soviet Union into a powerful industrial state. In 1928, therefore, he launched his first five-year plan. The plan included two goals: rapid growth of heavy industry and increased farm production through collectivization of agriculture. In a series of five-year plans, Stalin poured the nation's resources into building steel mills, electric power stations, and other industries needed in a strong modern state. He also forced millions of peasants to give up their land and work on collective farms, large, government-run enterprises. Many peasants opposed the change, and millions died in Stalin's brutal crackdown.

To achieve his goals, Stalin created a new kind of government, today called a totalitarian state. In a totalitarian state, the government is a single-party dictatorship that controls every aspect of the lives of its citizens. Individual rights count for nothing. Citizens must obey the government without question, and critics are silenced. Also, the totalitarian state supports extreme nationalism. Stalin used propaganda, censorship, and terror to force his will on the Soviet people. Government newspapers glorified work and Stalin himself. Secret police spied on citizens, and anyone who refused to praise Stalin and the state faced severe punishment, even death. Both Lenin and Stalin supported the idea of a world communist revolution and aided communists in other countries. In the 1920s, when some communist uprisings did occur in Europe, they were quickly suppressed.

Fascism in Italy Benito Mussolini

After World War 1, Italy was plagued by economic and political problems. Workers went on strike in the cities, while in the countryside; landless peasants seized the property of wealthy landlords. The unrest made the middle class fear a socialist revolution. An ambitious politician, Benito Mussolini, used the turmoil to gain power. Mussolini founded the Fascist party. Fascists glorified the state, supported aggressive nationalism, and condemned democracy because they believed rival parties divided the state. They also opposed communism and defended private property. In the early 1920s, Mussolini and his followers, known as Black Shirts, won the support of many Italians by attacking communists and socialists. Then in 1922, Mussolini led a "March on Rome" supposedly to prevent a communist revolution but in fact to frighten the government into naming him prime minister. Once in office, Mussolini increased his power by appointing Fascists to top offices, censoring the press, organizing a secret police, and banning any criticism of the government. He controlled the army and the schools, urging Italians to accept the slogan: "Everything in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state."

The Rise of Nazi Germany Adolph Hitler

After World War I, the Weimar government in Germany faced many problems as people looked for someone to blame for their defeat in the war. Extremists on the far left and on the far right threatened revolts. Also, the terrible inflation of the 1920s caused many Germans to have little faith in the government. In the 1920s, Adolf Hitler gained control of the Nazi party, a nationalistic, anti-communist, anti-Semitic organization. Hitler won popular support by blaming Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I and for its economic troubles. He claimed that the German people belonged to a superior "Aryan" race that was destined to rule the world. As the Great Depression caused unemployment to rise in the early 1930s, many desperate people found hope in the Nazi party. In 1933, Hitler used the threat of a communist uprising to gain power. He then moved against all opposition parties and set up a fascist state in Germany. Hitler used many of the methods of Stalin and Mussolini to build a totalitarian state in Germany. The Nazis preached the need for hard work, sacrifice, and service to the state. The Gestapo, or secret police, arrested anyone suspected of opposing Nazi rule. The Nazis used the press, schools, and even churches to glorify their goals. They also waged a violent campaign against Jews, sending many to concentration, or prison, camps. To end unemployment and improve the economy, Hitler launched vast building programs, banned strikes, and placed strict controls on wages and prices. He also increased the German military, a step that violated the Versailles Treaty. The League of Nations condemned German rearmament, but did little to stop Hitler as he began to realize his dream of expanding German territory.

Militarism in Japan Hideki Tojo

After World War I, Japan enjoyed a period of economic prosperity and growing democratic government. However, the Great Depression hit Japan especially hard because its prosperity depended on foreign trade. Like governments elsewhere, the government of Japan seemed unable to solve its economic crisis. Many people turned to the military, which began to take matters into its own hands. By 1932, military leaders had set up a military dictatorship in Japan. Unlike Italy and Germany, however, Japan did not have a single strong leader. Instead, a small group of military leaders dominated the government. In the 1930s, Japan had many features of a totalitarian state. The government arrested critics, imposed censorship, and employed a secret police force to hunt down and punish so-called enemies of the state. Extreme nationalists glorified war and empire. To strengthen Japan, the government was interested in gaining an overseas empire. Such an empire would give Japan much-needed raw materials such as coal and oil. Therefore, the Japanese military invaded Manchuria, a province in northeastern China. When China protested to the League of Nations, the league condemned the invasion but took no further action.

The Rise of Dictators of World War II

Dictatorship -

Totalitarianism -

Adolf Hitler, Germany	Hideki Tojo, Japan	Joseph Stalin, Soviet Union	Benito Mussolini, Italy
<i>Nazism -</i>	<i>Militarism -</i>	<i>Communism -</i>	<i>Fascism -</i> <i>Socialism -</i>