Economic Effects of World War One and the Great Depression

- The Treaty of Versailles unrealistically addressed war reparations, causing a debt spiral between Germany, the Western Allies, and the United States. The German nation felt humiliated by the Treaty's terms.
- This contributed significantly to the collapse of the world financial markets and led to an economic catastrophe that spawned a political vacuum which allowed new, more radical-than-traditional politicians to emerge on the world scene. These included such men as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt, Hideki Tojo, and Chiang Kai-shek.

Conflict in Europe

In 1933, former German chancellor Paul von Hindenberg handed over power to Adolf Hitler who disbanded the Weimar Republic and then began the rise of the "Third Reich", which was also known as "Großdeutsches Reich". Hitler's plan was to exterminate people of the Jewish religion because he believed that they were responsible for the harsh defeat of Germany during World War I.

Following World War I, Germany suffered many difficult problems resulting from their defeat in World War I. They were damaged economically and morally. The only "reasonable" explanation in Hitler's mind was that the Jews were to blame for all of the problems.

Hitler contended that Germans belonged to a race superior to other races, thus, in the minds of many German people, justifying the extermination of Jews (the "Holocaust" or "Shoah"), and the elimination of homosexuals, the mentally ill, and other "undesirable" elements of German society. Hitler also used this opinion regarding German superiority, as well as the viewpoint that Germans were unfairly treated after World War I, to justify the attempt to terminate the Treaty of Versailles.

Hitler began a buildup of the German military. In 1936, he tested German might by supporting a rebellion in Spain. Then, Hitler and Benito Mussolini, the Fascist Dictator of Italy, as well as Japan, began to create a coalition between their three countries. The coalition later came to be known as the Axis.

In 1938, Hitler annexed Austria. Other nations were reluctant to interfere because of Hitler's claim that the relation between Germany and Austria was an internal German concern that had little or nothing to do with the rest of Europe. Then, Hitler took control of a part of Czechoslovakia. This time, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain did interfere, signing an agreement with Hitler that ensured that Germany would keep any territory already conquered, but would not attempt to take any further Czechoslovakian territory. The policy which sought to prevent another World War at almost any cost, including the cost of allowing the tyrant Hitler to gain more power, was known as appeasement.

Hitler had no intention of keeping his agreement. In 1939, he took over the remainder of Czechoslovakia and turned his sights to Poland, demanding the Polish Corridor. France and the United Kingdom agreed to come to Poland's aid, but Germany signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which ensured the neutrality of the Soviet Union (formerly Russia). Hitler also signed a Non Agression Pact with the Soviets. This would prevent Germany to have to fight the all so dreaded two front war. Both countries agreed to take parts of Poland, Russia like the idea of gaining control of the Baltic Sea ports. Germany on the otherhand was just on one of its small steps in taking over Europe. A few years after the treay was signed Hitler discarded the treaty, therfore making the soviets an allied force.
The Beginning of the War

On the first day of September in 1939, Germany declared war on Poland; the British and French responded by declaring war on Germany two days later.

The Germans used the tactic of blitzkrieg (lightning war) in Poland, defeating the Polish Army at lightning speed. By the end of the first week of October, the Germans had gained control of half of Poland. The British and French had done little to aid Poland, fearing a repeat of the First World War. Meanwhile, the Soviets invaded from the east ending any hope for Poland. The last troops surrendered in early October. This new method of fighting known as the Blitzkrieg method has never been seen before, unlike the previous World War, soldiers didn’t dig deep into the trenches and fight for months trying to hold a certain position. Hitlers armored divisions and airforce attacked Poland all at once with little warning. This made it difficult for the Polish and every other country that Germany invaded, to gather up enough troops and support to defend themselves from invasion.

In the spring of 1940, Hitler continued his attempt to create a German Empire by attacking the nations of Denmark and Norway. Denmark surrendered, but British and French troops did, originally at least, come to Norway’s aid.

Meanwhile, Hitler planned to take control of France and other nations. Germany entered Belgium and the Netherlands on May 10, 1940. The Netherlands surrendered on May 15 (Zeeland held out until the 18); Belgium followed on May 28. On the same day, France recalled its troops from Norway, leaving Norway’s fate to Germany.

On June 5, the Germans began their attack on France. To make matters worse, Mussolini declared war on France and Britain on June 10. The French government, meanwhile was taken over by a new Premier, who signed an armistice with Germany on June 17. Germany gained control of the northern part of France, and the Vichy French Government (so called because of the new French capital at Vichy) retained the south. The Italians had a small zone of occupation near the Franco-Italian border.

Hitler’s Germany was the supreme power on Continental Europe. Only the United Kingdom offered resistance. The Germans intended to invade the United Kingdom, but they first had to contend with the British Royal Air Force. The German Luftwaffe (Air Force) commenced the Battle of Britain in 1940. However, the British used the new technology of radar (Radio Detection and Ranging) to combat the Germans. In September, 1940, the Germans ended the Battle of Britain by indefinitely delaying all plans for invasion. Nonetheless, German airplanes continued to bomb several British cities until the middle of the next year.

Hitler expanded the Axis in the winter of 1940-1941 with the additions of Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. In April, 1941, Germany and Italy then attacked Yugoslavia, which surrendered within one week of invasion. Then, Hitler and Mussolini turned to Greece, which collapsed by the end of April. By the end of 1942, most of Europe was under control of the Nazis or the Italians. Meanwhile, the Japanese gained control of Indochina (Southeast Asia), which had formerly belonged to Vichy France. The United States retaliated by attempting to prevent Japanese purchases of oil and steel. Tensions between Japan and the United States began to grow.

In early 1941, the United States abandoned its neutrality and began to aid the British. The Lend-Lease Act, for example, allowed the President to lend or lease weapons worth over seven billion dollars to other nations. The first two years of the war overseas saw the American public broadly divided on the issue of potential involvement. Though the danger posed by Germany and Japan was generally recognized, millions of Americans felt that a strong, armed neutrality and oceanic defense without entering the war was the safest course. President Roosevelt, on the other hand, made it quite clear to those around him that he felt the United States would have to intervene on the Allied side, and planned and acted accordingly, initiating a war industrial buildup and proposing that the US become the "arsenal of democracy." The Allied powers consisted of the Soviet Union, United States, Great Britain, France, Poland, Canada, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, and Greece. The main Axis powers consisted of Germany, Italy, and Japan. The estimated death total for the Allied powers is around 61 million people, while the Axis power casualties is estimated to be around only 12 million.
Conflict in the Pacific

On June 22, 1941, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. Originally, Germany predicted a quick victory. The Americans were very reluctant to start any conflict with Germany. Even in the fall of 1941, when shooting took place in the Atlantic between German U-boats and US ships, Roosevelt avoided escalation. Soon however, momentous events in the Pacific changed the course of the war.

The Empire of Japan was active in the Pacific. In order to secure resources and sea lanes for the Japanese islands, they intended to neutralize the American Pacific Fleet, which had been stationed at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Air Force bombed the large American naval base, destroying or severely damaging over nineteen ships and 292 aircraft. This naval base was the Pearl Harbor located in Hawaii. Fortunately for the US Navy, its aircraft carriers were at sea and survived the attack, but there was 2,403 American soldiers, sailors, and civilians that were killed by the attack. Defying the expectations of the United States, Japan also makes simultaneous strikes on Guam, Midway, and British bases. The next day, the United States Congress declared war on Japan, prompting Germany and Italy to in turn declare war on the United States.

Japan continued with its Pacific operations by taking the American territories of the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island, the British territories of Burma, Singapore, Malaya, Borneo, and the Dutch territory of the East Indies. An emboldened Japanese navy then committed a blunder by attacking Midway Island. American carrier-based planes defeated the Japanese ships at Midway Island so badly that Japan's navy never recovered from the battle. Starving and weakening by disease, they held on for another month before surrendering. Those who survived long enough to surrender faced worse horror. In June of 1942 the battle over Midway took place in the Pacific and it lasted several days. It was mainly aerial attacks on naval ships. The United States destroyed a majority of Japan's naval fleet, therefore bringing a turning point for the United States. From this point on the United States where able to island hop their way across the Pacific.

In February 1942, the War Relocation Authority began to establish centers where Japanese-Americans, including those born in the United States, were interned. Though this was clearly racial discrimination that violated constitutional due process requirements, the Supreme Court ruled that such internment was lawful in 1944, when it decided Korematsu v. United States.

Turning back the European Axis

During the summer and fall of 1941, the Germans kept up their amazing pace into the heart of Russia. By December they had reached Moscow, and Leningrad was under siege. The Soviets sent in reserve troops from Siberia, and launched a counter attack. It succeeded, and Moscow was saved.

In the spring of 1942, Hitler ordered an attack into the Caucus Mountains, and Stalingrad. As they had done before, the Germans quickly advanced, breaking through the Russian lines. In Stalingrad, there was street to street, and house to house fighting. The Germans controlled over 90% of the city, but the Russians refused to surrender. A Russian reserve division encircled the Germans into the city, and 250,000 German soldiers were captured. It was one of the bloodiest battles in history.

In 1943, the President of the United States for an unprecedented third term, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill held a Conference at Casablanca. The two nations then set up a plan of action for the next stages of the war. Meanwhile, the Russians continued to hold back the Germans, inflicting a crucial and massive defeat on Hitler's armies at the battle of Stalingrad in the winter of 1942-43. After a further major Russian victory at Kursk the following summer, the Germans were forced into retreat back towards Europe.

In Africa, Axis troops led by Erwin Rommel had pushed into Egypt, just 70 miles west of Alexandria. However, British troops led by General Montgomery decisively defeated the Italian and German troops at the Battle of El Alamein. They were pushed out of Egypt, all the way across Libya, and into Tunisia. In November 1942, the Americans launched operation Torch and drove the French troops out of Algeria and Morrocco. After a long battle
with Axis troops in Tunisia, they were driven out of Africa in May 1943.

The Allies then decided to invade Sicily, in hope of knocking Italy out of the war. In early July the invasion began. For the next month, the British and Americans led a bloody campaign in which Sicily was finally taken in early August. During the invasion Mussolini was overthrown and arrested. Hitler had him rescued and put him in charge of the new Italian Social Republic. Following the Invasion of mainland Italy in early September, the Italian government signed an armistice with the Allies. The fall of Italy signaled the beginning of the end of World War II. However, Mussolini was rescued by the Germans and had established an Italian Social Republic. Near the end of the War, Germany tries to fight for a last stand with the Allies. It became to be Germany's only hope for turning the war around. The battle took place in a 60 mile deep 40 mile wide "Bulge". Therefore giving the name of the battle, battle of the Bulge. After weeks of fighting in the cold winters the Allied forces came out victorious. Months after this battle the Allied forces had the Germans pushed all the way back into Berlin.

**Anti-Semitism and The Holocaust**

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (Russian: "Протоколы сионских мудрецов", or "Сионские протоколы", see also other titles) is an antisemitic and anti-Zionist plagiarism and literary forgery first published in 1903 in Russian, in Znamya; it alleges a Jewish and Masonic plot to achieve world domination.

"The Protocols" (the most brief title by which the text is known) is an early example of contemporary conspiracy theory literature,[1] and takes the form of a speech describing how to dominate the world, the need to control the media, finance, replace traditional social order, etc. It is one of the best known and discussed examples of literary forgery, and a hoax.

The text was popularized by those opposed to Russian revolutionary movement, and was disseminated further after the revolution of 1905, becoming known worldwide after the 1917 October Revolution. It was widely circulated in the West in 1920 and thereafter. The Great Depression and the rise of Nazism were important developments in the history of the Protocols, and the hoax continued to be published and circulated despite its debunking.

Hitler mentioned in his book Mein Kampf that the book Protocols was up to date, indicating that he saw it as justification for his deeds against the Jews.

The Holocaust is known as one of the most ghastly episodes in the modern history of mankind. In April of 1933, three months after Hitler took power, the Nazis issued a decree ordering the compulsory retirement of "non-Aryans" from the civil service. This is known as the spark of the Holocaust. Before Germany was defeated, there were some eleven million people that had been slaughtered in the name of Nazi racial purity. Although the Jews were the favored targets and are the victims we most hear about when talking about the Holocaust, they were not the only victims. There were also millions of Russians, Poles, gypsies and others that were also murdered. Although the deprivation of the Jews started in the years following 1933, the mass killings didn't begin until 1941.[2]

**Operation Overlord**

In November, 1943, Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt held another Conference at Tehran. Joseph Stalin, who held the title of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, but was actually a Dictator of the Soviet Union, joined them there. The three leaders agreed to a plan codenamed Operation Overlord, under which an attack would be launched on the northern coast of France from the English Channel. In preparation for an invasion of France, Hitler cut off all support for the German armies remaining in the Soviet Union. Thus disabled, the German Army was forced to withdraw from Russia in the winter of 1943-1944.

On June 6, 1944 ("D-Day,"' in the early morning hours, American and British paratroopers were dropped into Normandy. Hours later, American, British, French and Canadian soldiers landed at Normandy on the north coast of France. The troops landed near Caen, but Hitler wrongly felt that they would attack at a location to the north of that city. The Allies took advantage of Hitler's miscalculation; by the end of the month, the Allies had over eight hundred
thousand soldiers in Normandy.

Meanwhile, Russian troops, which had been on the defensive, began their offensive on German-controlled territories. In the middle of July, the Soviets won their first major victory by taking the territory of Belorussia. At this time, concern began to grow in the West about Soviet domination replacing German in eastern Europe, especially in Poland. Despite these worries, Roosevelt felt that he had little influence in that area over Stalin, whose armies were bearing a huge brunt of the fight.

By the end of July, the Allies expanded their base at Normandy by breaking out into the rest of France. Pushing through the nation, the Allies had gone far enough to liberate the city of Paris on August 25. On September 11, some Allied troops entered Germany, taking Antwerp, Belgium on the way. German resistance then hardened, however. British Field Marshall Montgomery attempt to "end the war by '44" with Operation Market Garden, a plan to liberate Holland and bypass the German border defenses, failed. The British and American armies would make little more progress for the rest of 1944.

Meanwhile, Russian troops pushed toward Germany, defeating Germany's Axis partners on the way. In August, Romania surrendered, followed by Bulgaria and Finland in September.

**Yalta and German Surrender**

Allied air bombing of German industries and cities had been ongoing and savage since 1943, but did not have the intended effect of crushing the German will to fight. Indeed, Hitler was able to field new advanced weapons in 1943-45, such as the world's first jet fighter aircraft, the V-1 flying bomb, the V-2 ballistic missile, and new types of tanks and submarines. The new weapons, however, proved of little use against Allied numbers and economic superiority, with American industrial production for the war effort massive and untouched by Axis attack. Germany forced millions of prisoners into slave labor, under the most brutal conditions, to keep its own war effort going.

In December 1944, Germany launched a massive counter-attack on the light defended American positions in Belgium. The Germans hoped to cut off the Allied supply lines, however, after reinforcements arrived, the "Bulge"(today it is know as the Battle of the Bulge) was flattened out. Meanwhile, the Soviets were on the verge of entering Germany from the east en masse, having taken control of Poland. Hitler's troops were exhausted, millions dead or captured, and with the fall of the Romanian oil fields, German armies were running out of gasoline. A final callup began of old men and boys for a last-ditch defense of Germany. Many German civilians fled, fearing the revenge the Russians would put on them after what the Germans had done in Russia. Thousands of German Civilians were killed and/or raped.

To plan for the end of the war, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin met at Yalta in February. When they met at the Yalta conference each different country had their own ideas of what they wanted to do with Germany. Churchill and Britain wanted to protect their colonial possessions and to also keep the Soviet Union from having to much power. The Stalin and the Soviet Union wanted Germany to pay them money in order to help them start the rebuilding of their country. The United States along with the other countries wanted to influence Germany and to also keep peace.[3] The Yalta conference suggested the division of Germany into "zones" after the war for the purpose of reconstruction. Also, the leaders decided to punish Nazis who had participated in war crimes such as the Holocaust. The Allies first attempted to reach the Rhine River in their quest to take over Germany. In March, this goal accomplished, the Americans and British opposed the Soviets in the **Race for Berlin**. The Race determined who would control Berlin, a city that would prove important in the reconstruction of Germany.

The Americans allowed the Soviets to win the Race for Berlin. Fierce fighting erupted in and around the city as motley German units made their last stand against the powerful army groups of Russian marshals Zhukov and Koniev. His capital surrounded and his loyal minions deserting him, Adolf Hitler killed himself in his Berlin command bunker on April 30, 1945, also American President Franklin Roosevelt had died on April 12, and Benito Mussolini was executed by Italian Partisans on April 28. The new leader of Germany, Karl Doenitz, agreed to surrender. On May 8, Germany formally signed an unconditional surrender, dissolving the Axis and leaving only
Japan to be defeated.

The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II

Meanwhile, the United States dramatically improved its position in the Pacific. The Japanese continued to fight, though it was in a hopeless situation. The suicidal Japanese spirit was exemplified by kamikaze, the practice of Japanese pilots who intentionally drove their own planes into American ships.

The Japanese resistance grew stronger and stronger as the Allies advanced to Japan. 1 Million American deaths and two more years of war were not uncommon predictions. President Harry Truman, the Vice President who rose to the Presidency upon Roosevelt's death, chose to use the Atomic Bomb instead of the invasion. In the 1930's, physicists began to understand the power of the fission, or splitting, of atoms. This advance of knowledge meant that nuclear power and atomic weapons were indeed possible. On October 11, 1939 the president received a letter signed by Albert Einstein explaining the developments in the nuclear chain reactions that would generate lots of power. In 1942, the US secretly created the Manhattan Project to develop a weapon which could utilize the concept of the fission of uranium atoms, which, according to the conclusions of physicists, would create a massive explosion. The very costly Manhattan Project needed a lot of help getting the bomb created. At the peak of the project more than 600,000 Americans had worked on this project, most of them not realizing what they were really working for. After America spent more than two billion dollars on this project, the first atomic bomb was created. This bomb was named "fat man." On July 16, 1945, the atomic bomb was successfully tested in New Mexico. The atomic bomb works on the principles of transmutation, accelerated nuclear decay, nuclear chain reaction, and the law of the conservation of mass. Since mass is lost in the accelerated decay of the nuclei, this mass must be accounted for. According to Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, this missing mass is converted into energy, according to the relationship, $E=mc^2$, where $E$ is the rest energy, $m$ is the missing mass, and $c$ is the speed of light in a vacuum.

On August 6, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan by a B-29 aircraft piloted by Col. Paul Tibbets. This deadly bomb was given the name "Little Boy". Still, Japan refused to give up. On August 9, another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. This deadly bomb was given the name "Fat Man". Together, the bombs killed over one hundred thousand people (though the Japanese suggested a number twice as high). Just about everybody who died was a civilian. In between the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, meanwhile, the Soviet Union joined in the war on Japan. Six days after the Nagasaki bomb was dropped, Japan surrendered. On August 14, with the Americans threatening a third atomic bomb on the way for Tokyo (though in reality the United States had no more atomic bombs at the time) Japan agreed to surrender; the formalities were completed on September 2, 1945 aboard the USS Missouri. When the A-bomb was dropped, it exploded forming a mushroom cloud. Dust and debris is shot into the sky and can be seen from miles away.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (January 30, 1882 – April 12, 1945), also known by his initials, FDR) was the 32nd President of the United States and a central figure in world events during the mid-20th century, leading the United States during a time of worldwide economic crisis and world war. The only American president elected to more than two terms, he forged a durable coalition that realigned American politics for decades. FDR defeated incumbent Republican Herbert Hoover in November 1932, at the depths of the Great Depression. FDR's combination of optimism and activism contributed to reviving the national spirit. Starting in his "first hundred days" in office, which began March 4, 1933, Roosevelt launched major legislation and a profusion of executive orders that gave form to the New Deal—a complex set of programs designed to produce relief (especially government jobs for the unemployed), recovery (of the economy), and reform (through regulation of Wall Street, banks and transportation). As World War II loomed after 1938, with the Japanese invasion of China and the aggressions of Nazi Germany, FDR gave strong diplomatic and financial support to China and Britain, while remaining officially neutral. His goal was to make America the "Arsenal of Democracy" which would supply ammunitions to the Allies. Working closely with Winston
Churchill and Joseph Stalin in leading the Allies against Germany and Japan in World War II, he died just as victory was in sight. After FDR's death Harry Truman became president. The day after Roosevelt's death Truman sought out old friends to ask for their help in this "terrible job".

Links

- National Archives [6]
- Encarta encyclopedia [7]
- Library of Congress [8]
- Scholastic, Inc. [9]

References

[1] "Don't Know Much About History" by Kenneth C. Davis
[2] "WWII" by Eric Sevareid
[3] A People and A Nation
[4] "WWII" by Eric Severeid
[5] "WWII" by Eric Sevareid
Article Sources and Contributors


Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors


License

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/