

CAUSES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Versailles Settlement

- It was an uneasy compromise.
- Redrawn boundaries of Europe did not satisfy all.
- New frontiers avoided the minority problems.
- The whole idea of reparations "contained the seeds of future disputes".

Isolation of both the USA and USSR

- USA refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations.
- USSR was treated like the defeated Central Powers.
- Neither power had an interest in maintaining the peace settlements of 1919-20.

Nationalism

- New states determined by the concept of "self-determination of peoples" proved aggressive and expansionary (i.e.: Poland...)

Reorganization of Europe did not produce more democratic states:

- Dictatorships in Italy, Germany, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Spain, Portugal...
- Only Czechoslovakia established a stable democracy

The World depression

- Led to the rise of extremists to power (i.e.: Rise of the Nazi Party)
- Led to governments to focus on short-term nationalistic measures instead of international co-operation

Weakness of Britain and France

- French and British failure to support the League of Nations
- The appeasement policies
- Led other countries to see dictatorship as a stronger and more effective form of government

1919-1929: The "aftermath" of WWI

- No attempt by defeated powers to challenge the 1919-20 peace settlements
- Middle and late 1920's was marked by economic recovery (Dawes Plan...)
- Germany was reintegrated into the international system (joined the League of Nations in 1926 and signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact 1928)
- League of Nations gained in prestige (meetings in the League were taken seriously)

The stability of the post-war period was destroyed 1929-1939 by two major events:

The Great Depression

- It saw the rapid spread of economic nationalism instead of international co-operation
- Increased the isolationism of the USA (and demands of money – the war debts situation)
- Western democracies did very little rearmament (meanwhile other countries spent a lot of the budget on rearmament... i.e. Germany)
- Led to class conflicts -> which raised fear of revolution and fear of any war that could lead to a revolution -> which led to appeasement policies in order to avoid a conflict
- Reparation payments ended

Hitler comes into power

- Germany would not make any further reparations payments (June 1933)
- Withdrew Germany from the League of Nations (October 1933)
- Hitler denounced the disarmament clause of Versailles and introduced conscription and began building an air force (March 1935)
- Anglo-German Naval Treaty (June 1935) gave Germany the right to increase the size of her naval forces (and it “ruined” the Stresa Front!)

The build-up to war during the period 1936-1939

1. *Reoccupation of the Rhineland (March 1936)*
2. *Hossbach Memorandum (November 1937)*
3. *Anschluss (union) with Austria (March 1938)*
4. *Sudetenland is given to Germany (September/October 1938)*
5. *Czechoslovakia is occupied by Germany (March 1939)*
6. *The Invasion of Poland (September 1st 1939)*

Reoccupation of the Rhineland (March 1936)

- February 12th 1936. Hitler informs his Commander-in-Chief that he wants to send troops into the demilitarized Rhineland
- March 3rd 1936. Mussolini tells Germany that he has no objections.
- March 7th 1936. German troops enter the Rhineland.
- March 8th 1936. France denounced the action but no military action was taken

Why did Hitler take this action?

1. The international circumstances were in his favor:
 - France experienced internal problems
 - Italy was seeking better relations with Germany (especially after they got criticized for the invasion of Abyssinia)
 - Britain had no intention of intervening militarily all alone...
2. Hitler needed a success in foreign policy to turn aside growing criticism of his domestic policies
3. Hitler and Nazism/fascism requires action

What were the effects of the reoccupation?

Immediate:

- Austria began to seek better relations with Germany
- Marked the definite end of the “Stresa Front” (the anti-German alliance of Great Britain, France and Italy)

Long Term:

- Initiative passed to Hitler and Germany’s position was strengthened
- Allowed the construction of the Siegfried Line which meant Great Britain and France could no longer intervene militarily without risking a major conflict
- Hitler was able to plan a more aggressive policy in the East because there was little danger of French or British action against him
- It encouraged Hitler and helped convince others of the strength of the Nazi system and the weakness of democracies

...after this Hitler worked to improve Germany's diplomatic position:

- October 1936: agreements signed between Italy and Germany (“axis powers”). Both agree to support Franco in the Spanish Civil War.
- November 1937: Germany and Japan sign an anti-Comintern pact combined with the deterioration of Japanese relations with the Western democracies after its invasion of Manchuria this brought Japan increasingly into the German camp.
- Non-intervention agreement signed with Austria.
- Hitler begins a campaign of anti-communist speeches to convince Europe he was her best defense against USSR threat.
- Hitler gave diplomatic assurances to Poland that Germany had no design upon her territory.
- November 1937: Italy signed the anti-Comintern pact.

Hossbach Memorandum (November 1937)

- Memorandum for a meeting of top ranking German leaders.
- Hitler stated that Germany must expand her territory because of a growing population and inadequate resources (Lebensraum)
- This was to be achieved through war.
- War must come soon with the German advantage of having begun armament sooner than Western democracies.

Does the Hossbach Memorandum prove that Hitler planned war?

YES:

- Hitler talks as if war was inevitable in the meeting
- He talks of taking advantage of British or French weaknesses
- Talks specifically of dealing with Austria and Czechoslovakia
- Says that it is his political will

NO:

- Many of those present were not Nazis (why reveal his thoughts to such a group?)
- Hitler might only be pleasing the military
- Goering was meeting opposition in the armament program. Was this set up to remove opposition?
- Hitler showed no interest in Hossbach’s minutes (was it really his political testament?)
- The situation he describes did not develop.

It is doubtful if Hitler had a ‘timetable’ for his aggression, he was encouraged though by international developments:

- Internal division weakened France.
- Britain was unwilling to give France guarantees.
- Stalin had purged the Soviet army
- The League of Nations and the concept of collective security was weakening.

Anschluss (union) with Austria (March 1938)

- Feb 12th 1938: Hitler threatened the Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, in order for him to remove anti-Nazi measures and allow Austrian Nazis to enter the government.
- March 9th 1938: Schuschnigg declares that he will hold a referendum concerning Hitler’s measures.

- March 11th 1938: Schuschnigg orders the Austrian army not to fire on Austrian troops. Hitler hears that Mussolini would not oppose a German move into Austria.
- March 12th 1938: German Troops enter Austrian
- **March 13th 1938:** Hitler annexes Austria

The Result of the Anschluss:

- Balance of Power was now in Germany's favor.
- Ideally placed to dominate Balkans.
- Shared a common frontier with her Italian ally.
- Czechoslovakia had her defenses outflanked.
- 100,000 troops added to the German army

Gained in Economic Strength:

- Control of Austrian steel resources.
- Control of Austrian gold and foreign currency.
- France disliked the union but could not act alone.
- Britain disliked Hitler's methods but the feeling was that the original refusal to allow it had been a denial of the right of self-determination.

Sudetenland is given to Germany (September/October 1938)

- *March 1938:* Hitler meets with Sudeten Nazi leader (Konrad Henlein) and tells him to make unacceptable demands for autonomy so Hitler could intervene.
- *April 1938:* British and French (Czech allies) urge Czechoslovakia to make maximum number of concessions. France has a defense alliance with Czechoslovakia.
- *May 20th 1938:* Czech President orders partial mobilization. France warns Hitler against any invasion.
- *May 30th 1938:* Hitler orders generals to prepare for an invasion of Czechoslovakia by September if the issue had not been resolved.
- *Sept 7th 1938:* Article in the *Times* suggesting Czechoslovakia should hand over Sudetenland to Germany
- *Sept 12th 1938:* In a speech at a party rally Hitler attacks the Czechs.
- *Sept 13th 1938:* Neville Chamberlain (the British Prime Minister) suggests a meeting with Hitler.
- *Sept 15th 1938:* Chamberlain goes to Berchtesgaden in the German Bavarian Alps (Hitler's mountain residence, the Berghof, was located here. Berchtesgaden and its environs (Stanggass) were fitted to serve as an outpost of the Imperial Chancellery). Hitler agrees to wait for a peaceful settlement but orders generals to continue with invasion plans. Chamberlain agrees to the cession of the Sudetenland. Three days later, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier did the same. No Czechoslovak representative was invited to these discussions.
- *Sept 19th 1938:* French and British persuade the Czechs to accept the transfer of territory with clear German majorities (French threat of withdrawing support)
- *Sept 22nd 1938:* Chamberlain-Hitler meeting at Bad Godesberg (close to Bonn in the Rhineland) to confirm the agreements. Hitler however, aiming at using the crisis as a pretext for war, now demanded not only the annexation of the Sudetenland but the immediate military occupation of the territories, giving the Czechoslovakian army no time to adapt their defence measures to the new borders. Hitler also wants compensation for other states with claims against Czech territory. Chamberlain refuses.
- *Sept 24th 1938:* Czechoslovakia mobilizes. France calls up reserves.

- *Sept 28th 1938*: British navy on war footing. To avoid a war and achieve a solution Mussolini suggested a conference of the major powers in Munich.
- *September 29-30 1938*: Meeting in **Munich**, Agreement between Germany, Italy, France and Britain that Germany will have the entire Sudetenland = the **MUNICH AGREEMENT**.

NOTE: Czechoslovakia (and Russia) was not invited...

Why did Chamberlain follow this policy of ‘appeasement’?

- Genuine fear that another conflict on scale of WWI would be the end of European civilization.
- Guilt over the terms imposed upon Germany in 1919 (maybe Hitler’s demands were simply to right this wrong?)
- Belief that Hitler’s demands were of a limited nature.
- Fear of war in Europe while Japan was becoming increasingly aggressive.
- Knowledge of the French weakness (due to internal divisions)
- Suspicion of the USSR and thus unwillingness to enter into any form of alliance with the one power capable of checking German ambitions. (Western suspicions of communism were deeper than suspicions of Nazism)
- Desire to gain time so Britain could build up her military strength.
- Popular opposition to war in Britain.

Czechoslovakia is occupied by Germany (March 1939)

The policy proved to be mistaken because Hitler’s aims were not limited and this only encouraged further expansion.

March 1939: What was left of Czechoslovakia came under German influence (the president, when trying to restore authority, was ordered by Hitler to request German help to end disturbances. German troops occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia except the parts granted to Poland and Hungary)

- Both the British and the French became determined to resist any further move by Hitler.

The Invasion of Poland, Sept 1st 1939:

- *October 1938*: Ribbentrop (German foreign minister) asks for the return of Danzig and the creation of an extra territorial corridor to link Danzig with the rest of Germany. Poland refuses.
- *Jan 5th 1938*: Hitler offered the Ukraine (then Soviet territory) in return for Danzig and the Polish Corridor!
- *March 1939*: Britain offers to guarantee Polish territory. Hitler decides to deal with Poland not as a possible ally but as a state to be attacked.
- *April 3rd 1939*: Hitler orders the army to prepare for plans to attack Poland.
- *April 28th 1939*: Hitler denounces the non-aggression pact made with Poland in 1934.
- *May 22nd 1939*: **Pact of Steel** between Germany and Italy. USSR makes offers of an agreement with France and Britain but negotiations are so slow the USSR becomes suspicious of their motives.
- *August 24th 1939*: **Non-Aggression Pact (Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact)** between Germany and the USSR contains a “Secret Protocol” whereby they agreed on the division of Poland.
- *1st Sept 1939*: German troops invade Poland.
- *3rd Sept 1939*: Great Britain and France declare war on Germany.