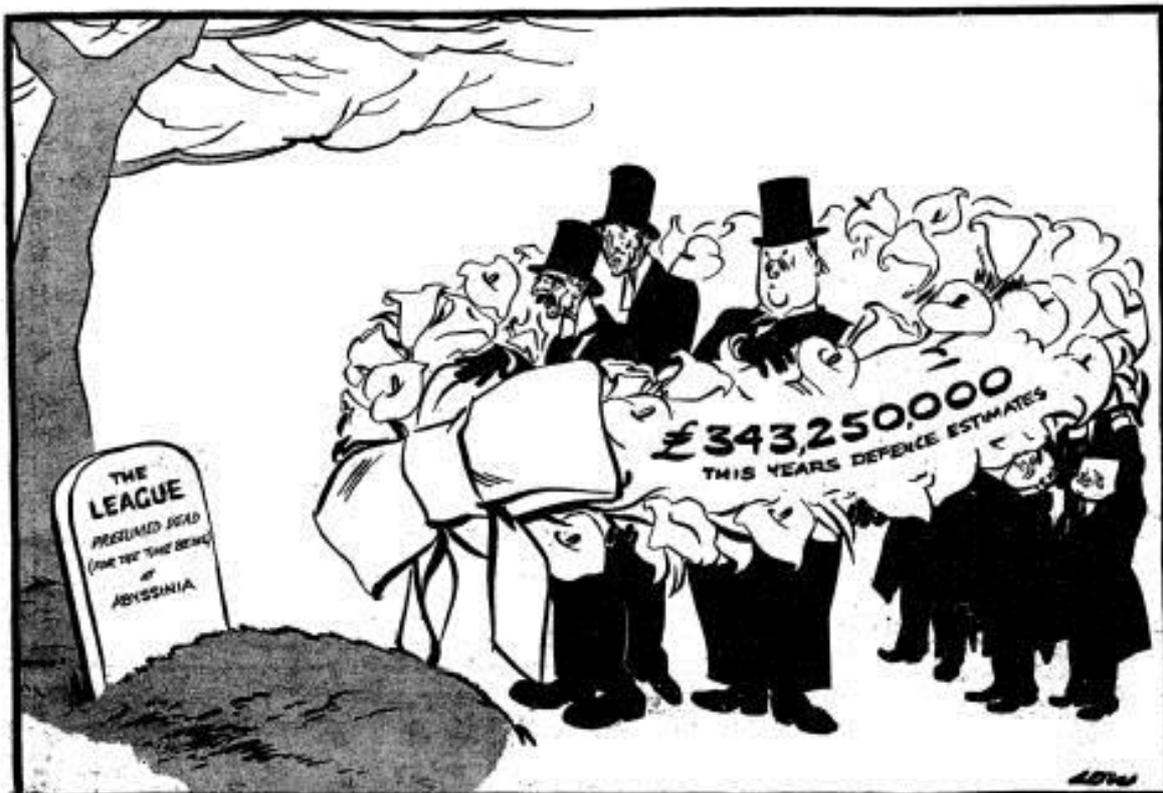




LITTLE ADOLF TRIES ON THE SPIKED MOUSTACHE.

CAUSES OF WWII



AH, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN CHEAPER HAD SHE LIVED.

CAUSES OF WWII

BACKGROUND: Tension built up during the interwar period. Several nations started to rearm and this rearmament escalated towards the end of the 1930's. Here you will find a presentation of the main causes of WWII + a few other contributing causes.

OVERVIEW OF CAUSES OF WWII:

Main causes:

1. *Hitler's desire for the expansion of Germany (page 3)*
2. *The failure of "Collective Security" (page 12)*
3. *The policy of appeasement (page 16)*

Some other important causes were:

4. *The consequences of the Paris Peace Settlement's (page 18)*
5. *The Depression 1929 (page 19)*
6. *The role of Mussolini and Italy (page 20)*
7. *The weak French foreign policy (page 21)*
8. *The Soviet Union and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact 1939 (page 22)*
9. *"Other" causes (page 24)*

1. CAUSES OF WWII - GERMAN AGGRESSION

According to most historians the biggest cause of WWII was *the ambitions and policies of Germany and especially Adolf Hitler!*

TIME-LINE 1933-1939:

- **1933** - *Jan.* Hitler became *Chancellor of Germany*
- 1933 - *Feb.* Hitler introduces a *program of rearmament*
- 1933 - *Oct.* Hitler *leaves the Disarmament Conference in Geneva / He announces Germanys intention to withdraw from the League of Nations*
- **1934** - *Jan.* Germany signs a *Non-Aggression Pact with Poland*
- **1935** - *Jan.* *Plebiscite in Saar; Germans there vote for return of the territory to Germany*
- 1935 - *Mar.* *Conscription re-introduced in Germany. Stresa Agreements between Britain, France and Italy*
- 1935 - *June.* *Anglo-American Naval Treaty*
- 1935 - *Oct.* *Italian invasion of Abyssinia*
- **1936** - *Mar.* *Germany remilitarizes the Rhineland*
- 1936 - *June.* *Hitler sends military support to Franco's Nationalists in Spain*
- 1936 - *Aug.* *Hitler's Four Year Plan drafted for war*
- 1936 - *Nov.* *Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan; Rome-Berlin Axis signed*
- **1937** - *May.* *Neville Chamberlain becomes Prime Minister in Britain*
- 1937 - *July.* *Sino-Japanese War begins*
- 1937 - *Nov.* *Hossbach Memorandum; war plans meeting*
- **1938** - *Mar.* *Anschluss declared after German troops march into Austria*
- 1938 - *Sep.* *Munich Crisis; Sudetenland Crisis*
- **1939** - *Mar.* *Germany occupies rest of Czechoslovakia; Lithuania gives up port of Memel to Germany; Anglo-French guarantee of Poland*
- 1939 - *Apr.* *Introduction of conscription in Britain*
- 1939 - *May.* *Pact of Steel signed between Germany and Italy*
- 1939 - *Aug.* *Anglo-French military mission to Moscow; Nazi-Soviet Pact signed between Germany and the USSR; Anglo-Polish treaty signed*
- **1939 - Sep. Germany invades Poland; Britain and France declare war on Germany**

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CHURCHILL ABOUT WWII: Winston Churchill claimed that *Hitler had a master plan* for the domination of Europe (outlined in Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*). The basics of this plan included:

1. *Reunite all Germans into a Great German Empire*
2. *Conquer Eastern Europe by force*

According to this -war was inevitable and therefore Hitler decided to remilitarize Germany

HITLER BEFORE 1933 - BACKGROUND:

1914-18 - Hitler fought in WWI

1918 - Germany "**won**" the war in the East (Poland + Lithuania - "*German Territories*")

1918 - The defeat of Germany on the Western Front nullified the gains above

1919 - Hitler became a member of the DAP (Member 55)

1920 - DAP changed its name to NSDAP and accepted a **25-point program** based on the mixture of **Nationalism** and **Socialism**:

National elements:

- ❖ *Revision of the Versailles Treaty*
- ❖ *The Union of all German speakers into a greater German Empire*
- ❖ *State Control of Propaganda and Press*
- ❖ *The Fuhrer Principle*
- ❖ *The exclusion of Jews from Citizenship Rights*

Socialist elements:

- ❖ *Nationalize Trusts*
- ❖ *Abolish Land Rents*
- ❖ *Restrict Interests on Loans*
- ❖ *Introduce Profit Sharing in the Industry*
- ❖ *Confiscate Profits made by the Industry during the War*
- ❖ *Create a People's Army based on the SA*

1921 - Hitler became the *Party Leader of NSDAP*

1923 - *Munich Beer Hall Putsch*

1924 - Hitler in *Landsberg Prison* - Wrote "*Mein Kampf*" and reorganized NSDAP

1925 - *Mein Kampf* is published (talked about "*Lebensraum*" - German "*living space*")

1928 - NSDAP very small in the German election. Hitler wrote his "*Secret Book*"

1929/30 - The **Great Depression** starts!

1930-32 - Huge economic crisis + mass unemployment in Germany. NSDAP grows!

1933 - Hitler became the *German Chancellor* (legally!)

HITLER'S BOOKS: Historians have discussed the importance/impact of **Mein Kampf**:

Historian Andreas Hillgruber: He suggests that the plans set down in *Mein Kampf* can be seen as a "Stufenplan" – a stage-by-stage plan:

1. *Build up the German military, terminate the Versailles Treaty and form an alliance with Great Britain and fascist Italy*
2. *War (together with Britain and Italy) against France and her East European allies (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia) if they stood up against Germany and her allies*
3. *War against the USSR*

Historian A.J.P. Taylor: He saw *Mein Kampf* as irrelevant - this was a book written with "*wishful thinking by a then-failed revolutionary*"

Hitler's "Secret book" (Zweites Buch): Hitler's second book was not published in 1928 (when it was written) because "*Mein Kampf*" did not sell well at that time and Hitler's editor told Hitler that a second book would hinder sales even more. The book was not published during Hitler's lifetime. After the war it was "forgotten" and it was not until 1961 the untitled manuscript was published in German as Hitler's Second Book. This book provides historians with more evidence of Hitler's longer-term ambitions:

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1. Expressed his admiration for Mussolini
2. Expressed his anger and disappointment with Gustav Stresemann (German Chancellor and later Foreign Minister) and his foreign policy (to "just" return to its pre-1914 borders)
3. Hitler restated his idea about **Lebensraum** and now explicitly wrote that this living space **should be taken from the USSR**
4. He suggested that the 1930's would see a **final struggle for world hegemony between the USA and the combined forces of Greater Germany and the British Empire**. Now he claims that the combination of combination of "Aryan" might, coupled with a more competent "Jewish rule" which made the U.S. dangerous

HITLER'S TAKE-OVER: To some extent it can be said that Hitler's aggressive foreign policy ideas brought him to power. In less than a year and half he had transformed Germany into a one-party dictatorship:

1. THE LEGAL REVOLUTION (January-March 1933)

- February 4th 1933 Decree against press and meetings...
- February 1933 SA leaders take over the Prussian police forces...
- ❖ **REICHSTAG FIRE** (February 27th 1933) who started it? How did Hitler use it?
- ❖ **EMERGENCY DECREE** (February 28th 1933)
 - March 1st 1933: The first law against the independence of the Federal States
 - March 5th 1933: Election.
- ❖ **DAY OF POTSDAM** (March 21st 1933)
- ❖ **ENABLING BILL** (March 23rd 1933)

2. CO-ORDINATION (GLEICHSCHALTUNG) (April-July 1933)

- ❖ **ABOLITION OF THE FEDERAL STATES** (April 1933)
 - April 7th 1933 The Law of the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service
 - April 7th 1933 The Law on the Admission to the Practice of Law
- ❖ **DESTRUCTION OF THE TRADE UNIONS** (May 1-2 1933)
- ❖ **DISSOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES** (June-July 1933)

3. THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES (June 30th 1934)

- ❖ **AIMS OF RÖHM AND THE SA**
- ❖ **AIMS OF THE ARMY**
- ❖ **THE PURGE** (June 30th 1934)

4. DEATH OF PRESIDENT HINDENBURG (August 1st 1934)

NOW Hitler had to fulfill his promises...

REVISING THE VERSAILLES TREATY: One point that Hitler (and many German politicians at that time) always came back to was the necessity to revise the Versailles Treaty. Between 1933-1939 Hitler did this:

- **1933.** Hitler announced that *Germany would not resume the reparation payments*
- **1933.** Hitler *withdrew Germany from the League of Nations*. This was not a breach of the Versailles Treaty but together with the rearmament it clearly shows the new intentions of Hitler's government.
- **1935, March:** *Hitler repudiated the military clauses of the Versailles Settlement and openly rearmed Germany*. An air force and a fleet were to be built up, and one year of compulsory military service was introduced for young men (extended August 1936 to two years). The military spending increased fivefold 1934-35 when compared to that of 1933-34.

Historian Ted Townley: Historian Ted Townley acknowledges this change in the German economy in his book **Hitler and the Road to War**: "*For whatever final purpose, Hitler worked at this time to create a German economy that would provide total industrial backing for the German military.*"

- **1935, June:** *Naval Agreement with Great Britain*. By this, Britain agreed to the Germans' having a fleet that was up to 35% the size of the British one, even though this broke the terms of the Versailles Settlement and helped end the 1935 Stresa Front, in which the governments of Italy, France and Britain had agreed to co-operate against German aggression.
- **1936, March:** *Remilitarization of the Rhineland*. German military occupation of the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Settlement. This was a response to the May 1935 Franco-Soviet Treaty of

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Mutual Assistance. This occupation revealed Hitler as being cautious. The officers had secret instructions to withdraw if they met any resistance.

- **1936, July: Spanish Civil War.** Hitler (Germany) decided (despite opposition from the German Foreign Ministry) to support Franco and the Nationalists in Spain. The war would divert European attention, so the longer the war lasted, the better. It also became a useful training ground for German forces.
- **1937, November: The Hossbach Memorandum.** A meeting in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin between Hitler, the War Minister, the Foreign Minister, three Commanders in Chief (Army, Navy and Air) and the secretary Colonel Hossbach. This very uncertain document seems to confirm Hitler's ideas about the creation of a master plan for conquest; Lebensraum, anti-Bolshevism and hostility towards France.
- **1938, Anschluss: Union with Austria** (also referred to as the "*Blumenkrieg*" - the Flower War - as many Austrians threw flowers at the Germans). In July 1934, during the Nazi revolt in Austria, Hitler had perhaps thought about an intervention but Mussolini had gathered Italian troops on the Brenner Pass in order to stop any attempt of this. The reason Mussolini did this was the close relation to the political leaders of Austria - they were pursuing an Italian inspired fascism in Austria. In 1938, the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg had, on his own initiative, visited Hitler at Berchtesgaden. Hitler, prompted by Goring, saw and seized the chance, and by veiled threats got Schuschnigg to give amnesty to the Austrian Nazis and admit them to the government. Arthur Seyss-Inquart became the Minister of the Interior. When the Austrian Nazis took the offensive and demanded a union, Schuschnigg announced a plebiscite, hoping to prove Austrian opposition to Nazism and to union with Hitler's Germany. Alarmed by this move, Hitler massed German troops on the border and presented Schuschnigg with an ultimatum that there should be no plebiscite. Schuschnigg resigned and Seyss-Inquart became Chancellor, giving in to Hitler's demand that German forces should be invited into Austria to help end the disorder (which was largely the work of the Austrian Nazis!). The British and French governments protested at the entry of German troops into Austria and the subsequent union, which broke the Treaty of Versailles, but they took no action.
- **1938, September: Munich Agreement.** This agreement provided for: German occupation of the Sudetenland in ten days from 1st of October, with an international commission from Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Czechoslovakia to supervise the operation. The Czechs had not been invited to this conference...
- **1938, October: Occupation of the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia.** Hitler had supported and stirred the Sudeten Germans led by Konrad Henlein to cause problems for the Czech government. In Czechoslovakia there were 7 million Czechs, 2 million Slovaks and 3,25 million Germans, mostly in the Sudetenland which until the First World War had been part of the Austrian Empire. Hitler promised that this was his last territorial acquisition.
- **1939, March: Hitler occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia,** despite his earlier assurances. This showed clearly that his goal was not just to unite all Germans.
- **1939, March: Hitler seized Memel from Lithuania.** Admittedly, Memel, although it had historically been Lithuanian, was predominantly German in population. It had been seized by Lithuania in 1923 from the League of Nations (as a compensation for the loss of Vilna which had been seized by Poland)!
- **1939, March: Hitler denounced the 1934 Non-Aggression Pact with Poland and made demands on Poland about the Corridor.**
- **1939, August: Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact** (or Nazi-Soviet Pact). Following a trade agreement (18th of August) Germany and the USSR made a Non-Aggression Pact (23rd of August), agreeing not to attack each other and to stay neutral if the other was at war. A secret clause, revealed only in 1945, arranged the partition of Poland.
- **1939, August: German forces seized Danzig.** Danzig was predominantly German in population and had been administrated by the League of Nations.
- **1939, September: German forces attacked Poland.** Hitler arranged matters so it looked like the Poles began the hostilities by attacking and blowing up a German radio station. It was blown up by SS men who left behind bodies in Polish uniforms. This started the Second World War, as Britain and France honored their treaty promises and went to Polish assistance (which Hitler didn't think they would).

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EUROPEAN RESPONSE/RESISTANCE TOWARDS HITLER:

ITALY: It was Mussolini and fascist Italy that took the initiative against Hitler in 1934-35. When the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss was assassinated 1934 by Nazi agents Mussolini mobilized Italian troops on the Austrian border to prevent Hitler exploiting the coup attempt by Austrian Nazis aimed at bringing “Anschluss” about. There was no Anschluss in 1934 so we can conclude that the Italian threat was one thing that hindered Hitler...

EXPLANATION DOLLFUSS MURDER: Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss was assassinated as part of a failed coup attempt by the Austrian Nazis. Why? – He had banned the Austrian Nazi Party in 1933 and created an Austrian form of fascism in 1934 (“*austrofascism*”). The Austrian fascism was a mixture of Italian fascism and Austrian political Catholicism. That was one reason why he had Mussolini’s support...

HISTORIANS: Some historians claim that *Hitler's changed mind is an evidence of his way of improvising and therefore suggest that he lacked a plan - other historians claim the he was not ready to impose his expansionist ambitions yet.*

STRESA FRONT: The Stresa Front was set up at a conference between Italy, Britain and France held in August 1935. The three powers:

- issued a protest at German rearmament contrary to the Versailles Treaty
- pledged themselves to resist any such unilateral repudiation of treaties which might endanger the peace of Europe.

This agreement looked imposing, but in practice none of the signatories was prepared to back up the pledge with action. Each power hoped that the very existence of the front would make any further action by them unnecessary. Mussolini in particular wanted the agreement in order to be safe in Europe so that he could pursue his imperial ambitions in Abyssinia (Ethiopia). However, the front quickly collapsed when Britain signed a separate Naval Agreement with Germany the month after (without consulting the other countries) and Italy began the Italo-Abyssinian War. The reaction of Britain and France to the Italian invasion drove Mussolini to join Hitler in the Rome-Berlin Axis. The failure of this, the only attempt by the other powers of Europe to combine to check Nazi German expansionism, is often cited as clear evidence of both the short-sightedness and the weakness of the foreign policies pursued by the powers in the 1930's.

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)

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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 (*the Rome-Berlin Axis*). 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.*

The 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.

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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 and Britain?

- *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.

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- **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 and Britain 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.

Resisting Hitler – Russia in 1938-1939

1. Stalin changed his stern policy against Germany after the deteriorated relations with Japan and the appeasement policy of Britain and France plus their refusal to conclude an alliance with Russia.
2. The USSR was not invited to the Munich Conference of September 1938. At this conference the British Prime Minister Chamberlain and the French Prime Minister Daladier agreed to let Germany annex the Sudetenland (and later most of Czechoslovakia). Thereby France dishonored their 1924 Treaty with the Czechs. Stalin saw it as an attempt of the Western Powers to divert Hitler’s focus towards the East. Russia had publicly announced its willingness to support the Czechs but they had gained no support.
3. After Germany seized the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 *the USSR (Litvinov) proposed a conference between the British, French, Polish, Soviet and Turkish representatives* to consider future military action. The British government rejected the proposal as “premature” and no conference followed.
4. Later in March *Hitler denounced the 1934 German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact*. This was according to Stalin another sign of Germany’s intentions in the East. *Litvinov outlined a French, British and Russian alliance with military commitments against Fascist Powers*. Britain once again refused to agree on Litvinov’s suggestion. However, in April 1939, both France and Britain guaranteed Poland, signing a Pact of Mutual Assistance with Poland. This was a bit of relief for Stalin. Now he could remain neutral and see the western powers destroy each other.
5. In *May 1939 Molotov* became the *new foreign Minister of Russia*. He set out to try to find a peaceful settlement of issues between Germany and Russia. The result was the “**Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**” signed in August 1939. This pact included a trade agreement, a non-

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aggression pact and a “*secret clause*” – which established spheres of influence in Eastern Europe, with Poland being divided between Germany and the USSR. This was a “**blank check**” for WWII - just a few weeks later the Second World War started with a German attack against Poland...

WHY DID GERMANY SIGN AN AGREEMENT WITH THE USSR?

- Hitler wanted to avoid war on two fronts
- Hitler did not believe that Britain and France would intervene to defend Poland once he had a pact with Stalin and the USSR
- The economic aid which the USSR would give Germany as a part of the pact would negate the impact of any Anglo-French blockade
- Hitler still intended to invade the USSR at a later date - this agreement gave him time to deal with the West first

WHY DID THE USSR SIGN AN AGREEMENT WITH GERMANY?

- The pact meant that the USSR would not have to get involved in a war in the West. This was important as the USSR faced a threat in the East from Japan, and the Soviet Army had been weakened through Stalin's purges
- It gave Stalin time to prepare for war, and there was always the hope that Germany and the West would weaken each other in the war and the USSR would be left as the strongest nation
- As part of the deal, Stalin got half of Poland and the opportunity to take over Finland and the Baltic States (inside Soviet "influence area")
- Germany was still the USSR's major trading partner

IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF WWII - 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.
- **January 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.
- **September 1st 1939:** German troops invade Poland.
- **September 3rd 1939:** Great Britain and France declare war on Germany.

2. CAUSES OF WWII - THE FAILURE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

Collective Security = “The principle of collective security was the idea that peace could be preserved by countries acting together – collectively – to prevent one country attacking another. Collective security was to be made practically possible by the machinery of the League of Nations. When there was a dispute between countries they would refer the issue(s) to the League’s Assembly. If that body could not find a resolution, the Council could then apply “collective security”, i.e. as a group impose moral pressure then economic sanctions, to force the country that was deemed to be in the wrong to comply with the decisions.”

- **The Covenant of the League of Nations** (Key objectives – to keep peace and avoid future conflicts by advising on and settling disputes; promote disarmament; supervise mandated territories; promote international good will, cooperation through its various organizations dedicated to social and economic development) 32 allied states + 12 neutral states from the beginning – 1926 – all ex-enemy states had joined. USSR was not admitted until 1934 – USA never joined.
- **Dealing with international disputes** (Three ways; The Permanent Court of International Justice; **Arbitration** (having a neutral person or group listening to and judging a dispute; an investigation or enquiry by the Council). If a country did not follow the recommendations of the League it could impose **economic sanctions** (this had proved to be an efficient weapon against Germany during WWI – the blockade of Germany). In theory the last resort of the League was **military action**. Since the League did not have its own military forces it would have to rely on countries voluntarily lending its forces to the League...

League of Nations – Three main bodies:

1. **Assembly:** All members states represented (all states had one vote – they met annually and decisions required unanimity)
2. **Council:** Permanent members with veto powers + non-permanent members elected by the Assembly (decision-making body)
3. **Secretariat:** Administrative body (Prepared reports and recorded decisions)

To these three bodies should be added:

4. **Permanent Court of Justice:** 15 judges based in The Hague (Court for international disputes among member states)
5. **International Labour Organization:** Advisory body on matters relating to social and economic justice
6. **Special commissions:** Mandates (administration of former colonies); Health; Traffic in drugs, drink and arms; Slavery; Refugees; Minorities; Traffic in women and children; Aid to underdeveloped states

PROBLEMS FOR THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS IN THE 1920's

- **Changing membership of the League** (Changing membership of the League reflected the shifting priorities of its leading members – after the Great Depression a more right-wing aggression which shifted the perceived threat from the USSR to the Axis powers (Germany and Italy)
- **Absence of major powers – especially the USA** (the most powerful economy in the world and outside Europe – now the League became predominantly a “European thing”... the absence of major powers was possibly the key reason why the League ultimately failed to prevent another world war)
- **Absence of the USSR** (The new Bolshevik government of the USSR was not welcome at the League (some Western Powers even joined the “white side” against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War) – the USSR therefore saw the League as a “club for capitalists”...)
- **Absence of Germany** (Germany was initially excluded from the League which then was viewed as a “victors club” by the Germans)

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SUCCESS FOR THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS IN THE 1920's

- **Peacekeeping 1920-25** (Åland islands 1920 – success; Vilna 1920-23 – failure; Upper Silesia 1921 – success; Corfu 1923 – failure; Mosul 1924 – success; Bulgaria 1925 – success)
- **Attempts to strengthen the League** (Two attempts initiated by France 1. Treaty of Mutual Assistance 1923 (required all members to come to the assistance of a victim of aggression) 2. Geneva Protocol 1924 (made arbitration compulsory in all disputes) – Britain + Scandinavia (!) rejected both these suggestions. A division on the states that wanted a “*strong League*” with military capabilities and those who wanted an “*administrative League*” who was selective in dealing with aggression)
- **Ruhr Crisis (1923)** (France and Belgium took matters into their own hands when they occupied the Ruhr Area after Germany asked for reparation payments to be suspended for four years. This weakened the League... NOTE – attempts to take the crisis to the League by Britain and Sweden(!) were blocked by the French veto)
- **Dawes Plan** (At first the Ruhr occupation increased the German hyperinflation but the collapse of the German economy led to the replacement of the old government and “passive resistance” to a new government under Gustav Stresemann who together with Hjalmar Schacht and Hans Luther came up with a plan for the German economic recovery + an end of “passive resistance”. This led to the Dawes Plan – a commission under US economist Charles Dawes that suggested private loans (mostly from the USA) to Germany to solve their economic crisis! This suggestion was accepted by France – it brought the US back to Europe...)
- **The Rapallo Treaty** (Germany and Russia started to negotiate and soon introduced diplomatic relations – as a consequence on how they were treated especially by France at the Conference of Genoa. They now fully recognized each other and denounced any reparations. Officially this was a close economic cooperation but it also had some military cooperation’s which allowed Germany to secretly rearm and train in Russia. Another effect was that Britain became determined to now cooperate with Germany so the German friendship with Russia did not become too friendly...)
- **The Locarno era** (The political situation in Europe became better after Dawes Plan and Gustav Stresemann’s work in the Weimar Republic. The Locarno Pact (1925); the Kellogg-Briand Pact (August 1928) and the Young Plan (1929) are evidence for this improvement – but note that these three parts were all done outside the League of Nations!)

Locarno Conference: Germany wanted to get rid of the occupation forces in the Rhineland and therefore suggested an international conference in Locarno Switzerland (February 1925). Germany, France, Belgium, Italy, Poland Czechoslovakia participated. Germany accepted her western borders officially (the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to France and Malmedy + Eupen to Belgium). Germany did NOT accept the borders in the south (towards Italy) and in the east (towards Poland and Czechoslovakia). Germany agreed though to not change the borders in the east with violence but it should be revised by arbitration only. Italy did not receive any such promises...

The Young Plan: This plan reduced the total sum to be repaid by Germany as war reparation; it set a date for the completion of payments – 1988; It guaranteed a continuing US involvement in European affairs. Keynes noted that the money Germany received was loans based on foreign money – mostly from the USA. He wrote in 1926 that now the reparation arrangements were “*in the hands of the American capitalists*”.

Kellogg-Briand Pact (Paris August 1928): American Secretary of State William Kellogg and French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand – this pact renounced “*war as an instrument of national policy*” – 62 of the invited 64 states signed the agreement (Brazil + Argentina declined)

WHY DID COLLECTIVE SECURITY FAIL IN THE 1930's?

- **The Depression 1929**
 - 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 (“*Every man for himself-policy*”) instead of international co-operation
- **The Manchurian Crisis 1931:** The Japanese invasion of Manchuria began on September 19, 1931, when the Kwantung Army of the Empire of Japan invaded Manchuria immediately following the Mukden Incident. The Japanese established a puppet state, called Manchukuo, and their occupation lasted until the end of World War II.

REACTION FROM THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS:

Unfortunately the League reacted slow and ineffectually - Why?

- The Chinese governments control over Manchuria had been limited since the 1911 Revolution. It was a local warlord that had control over this area.
- Japan had been present in this area since 1905
- The European powers were not sympathetic to the Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek who was actively trying to curb the European influence in China.
- The US President Hoover decided against US action against Japan. Instead USA just went for a "*non-recognition*" of the new state Manchukuo.

IMPACT OF THE MANCHURIAN CRISIS:

- A permanent member of the League of Nations successfully ignored the League and when they were criticized they left the organization
 - China had appealed to the League of Nations for help in the face of an aggressor but they received no practical support (no military aid or economic sanctions against Japan) – this was a huge failure for the League of Nations!
 - Japan's economic and strategic position improved in Asia. Manchuria had many natural resources: timber, coal, iron and land for agriculture.
 - The Manchurian Crisis may well have encouraged Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.
 - In 1937 Japan continued its expansion into China...
- **The Abyssinia Crisis 1935:** The Abyssinia Crisis was a crisis during the interwar period originating from the Walwal incident. This incident resulted from the ongoing conflict between the Kingdom of Italy and the Empire of Ethiopia (then commonly known as "*Abyssinia*" in Europe). Its effects were to undermine the credibility of the League of Nations and to encourage Fascist Italy to ally itself with Nazi Germany. The crisis brought an end to peace in Europe and it was clear by 1937 there were two defining sides on the continent.

Reaction from the League of Nations

- ❖ **October 1935.** Both the League Council and the Assembly condemned Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. 50 out of 54 nations voted in favor for economic sanctions. The 50 Assembly members also set up a Committee of 18 members to consider how to apply sanctions.
- ❖ **November 18th.** The League Committee on sanctions recommended the following sanctions: Any sale of arms, rubber and certain metals to Italy was banned; any loan to Italy was banned; most Italian imports were banned.

So why did the sanctions not work?

- The sanctions took too long to be implemented (about 6 weeks - the war started the 2nd of October and the suggestion of sanctions was not presented until November 18th).
- The sanctions excluded some of the most valuable materials Italy and Mussolini needed like oil, steel and coal.
- Great Britain kept the Suez Canal open so Italy had no problems sending supply ships to the war.

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- Countries who were not members of the League of Nations continued to trade with Italy; for example USA (observed a few of the sanctions but not all), Germany and Japan (both these countries fully ignored the sanctions).
- It took some time before the sanctions had an impact on the Italian economy (early spring 1936 - then the war was nearly over).
- Neither Britain nor France wanted to apply sufficient pressure on Mussolini and Italy since it might lead to broken diplomatic relations with Italy; Mussolini taking up closer relations with Germany (who ignored the sanctions and continued to trade with Italy) and maybe even war (which neither France nor Great Britain had any preparation for).
- Great Britain was concerned about her naval bases in the Mediterranean: Malta and Gibraltar. After the expansion of Japan Britain might need their naval resources in the Pacific.
- France would benefit from good relations with Italy. Her Mediterranean coast would be protected; France would not need to build up forces to fight in the Alps; and France could keep closer contacts with the allies in the Little Entente (through an Italian corridor).
- In early 1936 a report came from the Commission about a ban on oil sales to Italy. This ban could have significant effect within a few months but only if the US agreed to participate. The chances of that were remote according to the League so the oil embargo on Italy was never imposed.
- The League of Nations ended their sanctions on Italy in July 1936.

Results of the Abyssinia Crisis

- Italy was victorious and took Abyssinia. The Emperor Haile Selassie was forced into exile.
- A permanent member of the League of Nations AGAIN successfully ignored the League of Nations!
- This was the second time within a few years that the League of Nations failed to solve a major conflict. This shattered any hopes of the League or Collective Security as protection against aggression.
- The Stresa Front between Italy, Great Britain and France ended. Their relation now became tense.
- Hitler used the Abyssinian Crisis to advance into the Rhineland. On March 7, 1936, nineteen German infantry battalions (about 22000 men) and a handful of planes entered the Rhineland. They reached the river Rhine by 11:00 a.m. and then three battalions crossed to the west bank of the Rhine. This was an aggressive action and a clear breach of the Versailles Treaty. Most of the World attention was on the last major battles in Abyssinia so Hitler did not receive any real resistance. He now knew that his aggressive policy worked and could be applied again if the opportunity came.
- In July 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out. Italy and Germany supported the Spanish Nationalists. France supported the Republican government and Great Britain wanted a policy of no-intervention. This caused further split between the previous allies: Great Britain, France and Italy. As a consequence Mussolini now approached Hitler and in October 1936 Italy and Germany signed the Rome-Berlin Axis; a friendship and trade agreement.
- Italy left the League of Nations in 1937

● *The failure of disarmament*

- **The Washington Conference 1921-22** (A conference between USA, Great Britain, Japan, France and Italy) – success with an agreement about limiting naval armament for these countries
- **The London Naval Conference 1930** (Revised the agreement from Washington – both France and Italy refused to go along with the main agreements – still partly a successful conference)
- **The London Naval Treaty 1936** (Japan and Italy walked out of this conference – refused to limit their naval forces – some agreements between USA, Great Britain and France)
- **The Geneva Disarmament Conference 1932-34** – Total failure! Germany demanded “equality of status” when it came to general disarmament France absolutely refused – In 1933 (after Hitler came into power) Germany walked out of the conference – shortly thereafter Germany left the League of Nations... This conference did not produce any results! It was as stated – a total failure.

3. CAUSES OF WWII – APPEASEMENT

Appeasement was the policy followed primarily by Great Britain in the 1930's in attempting to settle international disputes by satisfying grievances through compromise and negotiation.

HISTORIANS: Several historians have argued that by pursuing the policy of appeasement Great Britain and France encouraged Hitler's aggression. Stalin believed that the policy was designed to allow for German expansion in the East (Lebensraum) and promote a conflict between Nazi Germany and Communist USSR. That's why Great Britain and France consistently and continuously gave in to Hitler's demands. His suspicion against the Western powers further alienated him from them and Hitler's Germany became an alternative in the 1939 agreement... Hitler had gambled that the policy of appeasement would continue – when it didn't WWII broke out!

A.J.P. Taylor: In his controversial book *“The Origins of the Second World War”* (1961) A.J.P. Taylor disagrees with the previous view that WWII was *“Hitler's War”*. He blames the contemporary European statesmen as well as Hitler for the outbreak of WWII. Hitler did not, according to A.J.P. Taylor have a *“blueprint”* plan on what he would do when he came into power and later on in the 1930's. Hitler was an opportunist who did not act on his own but he *“reacted”* to the actions of other European leaders. Hitler's success in dismantling the Versailles Treaty and expand the German territory was the fault of the other European leaders who failed to contain Hitler and Germany. A.J.P. Taylor sees a **German tradition** – Bismarck, Wilhelm II and his Chancellors + Hitler – none of them had a strict plan to follow they acted when the opportunity was given! The reason why WWII broke out according to A.J.P. Taylor was that Great Britain and France abandoned their previous appeasement policy. For this Hitler and Germany can't be blamed...

SO SHOULD WE BLAME BRITAIN AND FRANCE?: It seems like the blame should be British/French. They had through the appeasement policy encouraged Hitler and let him build up a German strong military force at the same time as they had treated the USSR with suspicion and thereby *“forcing”* Stalin to make an agreement with Nazi Germany. The question asked right after WWII was if appeasement as a policy could be justified at all?

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The Role of Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement according to Historians:

Orthodox view: Chamberlain's conduct of British foreign policy was "*diplomacy of illusion*". Chamberlain's inability to deal with Hitler and Germany made the aggressive German foreign policy possible. It also ensured that, when the war broke out, Britain and France had no major allies, and that they were also in a very weak military position (*Cato* – pseudonym for a number of British left-wing writers, John Wheeler-Bennet, Keith Middlemass, R.A.C. Parker)

Revisionist view: When the archives were opened (30-40 years after WWII) on the subject of appeasement we can see a trend of treating Chamberlain and the policy of appeasement far more sympathetically. Most revisionists avoid moral judgments on Chamberlain and instead focus on *social, economic and strategic factors*:

1. The complex set of domestic, international, military and economic factors made a policy of standing up to the dictators impractical, and a policy of finding peace preferable – that's why the focus on Chamberlain and the leading figures of the "*National Government*" is misleading
2. British foreign policy during the 1930's should be viewed within an international context, which gives due emphasis to rival ideologies, economic systems and social groupings in Europe
3. The leaders who took the decisions were prisoners of circumstances beyond their control
4. It's wrong to blame Chamberlain exclusively – he was an able and realistic politician who realized that Britain and France could not keep order in Europe, and who wanted Britain to retain its world power status, which he believed would be lost in a second major world war
5. The British economy did not contain enough skilled workers to effect a large scale rearmament program without endangering the fragile British recovery from the great economic slump of the 1930's
6. The military and naval chiefs constantly warned that Britain was not prepared for a simultaneous war against Germany, Italy and Japan, and advised the government to follow a policy of appeasement
7. Public opinion consistently opposed rapid rearmament and a strong stand being taken against the dictators (David Dilks).

Today the supporters of the revisionist interpretation are in majority. Some "*ultra-revisionists*" claims that Chamberlain could have saved the empire and prevented a post-war decline if he hadn't loss nerve and allowed appeasement to continue.

4. CAUSES OF WWII – THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PARIS PEACE SETTLEMENTS

Paris Peace Settlements

- 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*”.

Paris Peace Settlement consequences

Orthodox view: Many historians see the settlement in Paris 1919 as a *failed compromise between the idealism of Wilson* (the US President) and the *realism and selfishness of the European powers*:

- **James Joll:** The peace conference divided Europe into those who wanted the peace revised [*Germany, Italy, Japan and Hungary*], those who wanted it upheld [*France, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia*] and those who were not that interested [*USA and Great Britain*].
- **Carr:** The fundamental weakness of the settlement was that it failed to solve the “*German problem*”.
- **Anthony Lentin:** The peacemakers did not seem to realize that the collapse of the Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman empires left Germany in a potentially stronger position in Europe than ever before.

Revisionist view: Other historians see the settlement in Paris 1919 as an **achievement but the architects failed to follow through** the principles laid down at Paris and by their failure ensured a German revival:

- **Paul Birdsall:** The refusal of the USA to become involved in upholding the Paris Peace Settlement was a crucial reason for the settlement’s failure.
- **Paul Kennedy:** Huge difference between the 1920’s when the settlement worked and the 1930’s when it was crushed by the combined militarism of Germany, Japan and Italy. For Kennedy, the crucial reason for its collapse was the Great Depression of the early 1930’s (Wall Street Crash!). This destroyed the international co-operation and encouraged extreme selfishness to dominate international relations. The Depression also helped to destroy German democracy and contributed to Hitler’s rise to power, and it was his dictatorship which brought war.

5. CAUSES OF WWII – THE DEPRESSION 1929

POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE WALL STREET CRASH 1929

- Withdrawal of US capital from European investment
- General fall in prices of industrial and agricultural goods

RESULTS:

Ended the “*spirit of international cooperation*” – now it was “*Every man for himself*” (evidence: many nations abandoned the “*Gold Standard*” (so they had the opportunity to print larger quantities of paper money) - most nations built up tariff barriers - the establishment of NSDAP and Hitler in Germany)

HOW DID GERMANY "SOLVE" THE PROBLEM OF THE HUGE WAR DEBTS?

YOUNG PLAN 1928: The Young Plan was a program for settlement of German reparations debts after World War I (and after the previous Dawes Plan had expired). It set the total reparations at \$26,350,000,000 to be paid over a period of 58% years. It was adopted by the Allied Powers in January 1930. Designed to substitute a definite settlement under which Germany would know the exact extent of German obligations and to reduce the payments appreciably, the Young Plan divided the annual payment, set at about \$473 million, into two elements an unconditional part (one third of the sum) and a postponable part (the remainder). The annuities were to be raised through a transportation tax and from the budget.

Germany approached the US (President Hoover) in October 1930 and asked for a moratorium (suspension) of reparation payments. This request was approved between mid-1931 to mid-1932. It's referred to as the **HOOVER MORATORIUM**.

In December 1931 it was quite clear that it was not a short depression but one that they could not see the end of at the time. Therefore a different solution was needed. The nations involved in the Young Plan met in Basel (Switzerland) to address the problem. They made some preliminary decisions and then decided to meet again.

LAUSANNE CONFERENCE (June 1932)

- The nations decided: - Not to press Germany for immediate payments.
- To reduce indebtedness by nearly 90% and require Germany to prepare for the issuance of bonds. This provision was close to cancellation, reducing the German obligation from the original \$32.3 billion to \$713 million.
- It was also informally agreed among the delegates that these provisions would be ineffective unless the US government agreed to cancellation of war debts owed by the Allied governments. Hoover made the obligatory public statement about the lack of any connection between reparations and war debts.
- When the moratorium expired, the situation returned to the terms of the Young Plan, but the system had collapsed. Germany did not resume payments and once Hitler and the National Socialist government consolidated power, the debt was repudiated.

NOTE: After Germany's defeat in World War II, an international conference decided (1953) that Germany would pay the remaining debt only after the country was reunified. Nonetheless, West Germany paid off the principal by 1980; then in 1995, after reunification, the new German government announced it would resume payments of the interest...

6. CAUSES OF WWII – THE ROLE OF MUSSOLINI AND ITALY

Some Historians has debated the role of Mussolini and fascist Italy. Here are their different views:

Mussolini was the first European fascist dictator: he undermined the Paris Peace Settlement, aided Franco during the Spanish Civil war, played a crucial role at the Munich Conference, signed the Pact of Steel, remained neutral in September 1939, and finally joined the war on Hitler's side in 1940...

Orthodox view: Mussolini's foreign policy was ineffective, immoral, designed to grab headlines and to please Italian public opinion, and it lacked any clear objectives (*Gaetano Salvemini, Elizabeth Wiskemann, Denis Mack Smith, A.J.P. Taylor*)

Revisionist view: Mussolini might have been an opportunist but he did have a coherent set of aims in his foreign policy. Most important were to achieve "*spazio vitale*" (living space) for Italians in North Africa and the Middle East. Some historians also mention that Mussolini used the aggressive foreign policy to divert public attention from domestic problems (*MacGregor Knox, George Baer, Renzo de Felice's, Cassel*). The weak position among the European powers is also an issue the revisionists bring up...

Mussolini and Germany: Two major opinions exist in this matter;

1. The **Rome-Berlin Axis** was a typical example of Mussolini's idea of always keeping his options open (*D.C. Watt, Denis Mack Smith*)
2. The **Pact of Steel** represented the expression of parallel desires in mind of the two dictators to achieve their aims by alliance in war (*Philip Morgan*)

7. CAUSES OF WWII – THE WEAK FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY

A great many studies link British and French policy during the late 1930's. France was deeply divided and politically unstable, which stumbled from crisis to crisis, from government to government (16 different coalition governments between 1932 and 1940), and from peace to war.

French foreign policy during the 1930's was obsessed with security and defense. France had no intention of stopping Hitler by force, and therefore willingly allowed Chamberlain to march France along the road to Munich (and the appeasement policy). France did this because they feared losing British support if they didn't (*Anthony Adamthwaite, J-B Duroselle, René Girault*). Just like in Britain many of the French leaders during the 1930's has been branded "*guilty men*" due to the policy of appeasement. Contrary to Britain the French version of appeasement was negative - it was a grim realization of their past failures

Many historians highlight the lack of boldness in French planning and tactics. Robert Young shows that the French military planning was based on the defense of the Maginot Line, with **no** offensive plan!

8. CAUSES OF WWII – THE SOVIET UNION AND THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT 1939

Because of the Soviet-Nazi Pact (Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) we need to also consider the involvement of the USSR as a factor when we discuss the "Causes of WWII". What are the views of historians?

Collective-security approach: Stalin's foreign policy attempted to uphold the principles of collective security against Hitler, and reluctantly moved towards signing the Nazi-Soviet Pact because Britain and France deliberately appeased Hitler, undermined the League of Nations, and delayed signing a triple alliance in 1939 to deter Nazi Germany (*Soviet historians, A.J.P. Taylor, Jonathan Haslam, Geoffrey Roberts*). After the Munich Agreement in 1938, Stalin viewed the League of Nations as a spent force, and became deeply mistrustful of the aims of the appeasers, whom, he felt, were happy as long as Hitler moved east.

US historians: The Nazi-Soviet Pact was "*Stalin's blank check*" to Hitler, which virtually guaranteed that war would start in 1939. Stalin's support for collective security was a cynical ploy to mask an underlying desire for a Nazi-Soviet pact (*William Langer, S. Everett Gleason, Robert Tucker...this view was deeply colored by the Cold War*)

German school: This is a more recent school of historians, which uses primarily German archives. They think Stalin had significant responsibility for the outbreak of the war. Soviet foreign policy during the 1930's desired a reconstruction of the close Soviet-German relationship, established by the co-operative Soviet-German Treaty of Rapallo in 1922, and broken off by Hitler in 1933. This interpretation regard the Soviet Union as giving Hitler the "green light" for aggression in 1939 *Ernst Topitsch:*

- *The view of Hitler as being the leading character in the events which led to the Second World War has been exaggerated and requires modification*
- *Stalin was the key figure in the outbreak of war and the key victor of the war*
- *Stalin was the only leader in Europe with clear aims*
- *Stalin set out to start a European war in 1939 between what he saw as aggressive and non-aggressive capitalist states, which left the Soviet Union in a neutral position and well placed to reap a rich reward*

P.H.M. Bell does not agree... The Soviet Union's incredible lack of preparation for the German attack in June 1941 must raise doubts about whether such a plan ever existed (the plan of a Soviet attack on the Western capitalist democracies, with Hitler acting as Stalin's unwitting agent)

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The recent opening of Soviet archives supports Bell's view (the Soviet entry into the League of Nations; its offer to save Czechoslovakia in 1938; the speeches by Litvinov, the Soviet foreign minister, at the League of Nations in support of collective security; the denunciations of fascism and appeasement by Stalin; and the preference, in 1939, for an agreement with Britain and France, do all appear to have been genuine)

Soviet internal politics: There was a key division within Stalin's regime over the direction of foreign policy: on the one hand, a significant group favored a return to a close Soviet- German friendship: on the other, a larger group supported collective security. The course of events allowed the pro-German group to shift opinion... This view might be exaggerated since the major Soviet desire was to search for a foreign policy which would prevent it being involved in war. The roles of the external events were more important. The Munich Agreement 1938 left a very deep impression on Stalin; that's where the foundations of the Nazi-Soviet Pact was laid (*Hildebrand*)

9. "OTHER" CAUSES OF WWII

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, Romania, Poland, Spain, Portugal...*
- *Semi-dictatorship in Austria*
- *Only Czechoslovakia established a stable democracy among the "new" states*