

1. THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

At the beginning of 1918, the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, presented a fourteen-point plan to overcome the effects of the First World War and achieve a lasting peace. Among its proposals was the creation of a supranational organisation, the League of Nations, which would possess broad powers to promote and regulate frank, open and balanced international relations.

After the Great War, two **political ideologies** triumphed:

Democracy, which spread to all European countries and extended suffrage to women.

Nationalism, which was very intense, enabled the creation of new European countries and served as a basis for the rise of colonial independence movements.

The first years in **post-war Europe** (1919-1924) were marked by a great **economic crisis**. The financial destruction and chaos that were legacies of the war persisted, causing low production rates, monetary devaluation, unemployment and serious social problems.

On the other side of the ocean, the United States came out of the Great War stronger and became the largest political and economic power in the world. Its prosperity was due to the payback of loans made to Europe, an increase in exports and the development of modern industry. During the 'Roaring Twenties', as the decade was called there, US families could for the first time acquire consumer products such as home appliances and automobiles according to the so-called 'American way of life'. This consumer behaviour would not spread to Europe until after the Second World War.

2. THE CRISIS OF 1929 AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In 1929, the era of prosperity was interrupted by a severe crisis that began with the **crash of the New York Stock Exchange**. Firms abruptly lost their value and a large part of their capital. Unable to collect the loans that had been granted, **most banks went bankrupt** and those that overcame the crisis drastically reduced the financing of firms. As a consequence, many firms had to close down and dismiss their workers.

Before long, **industrial production drastically declined. Unemployment** affected almost all social classes.

This generalization of the crisis is known as the **Great Depression**. Because of its intensity, duration and reach, this was the worst crisis the capitalist system had ever endured.

In **Europe**, the **most affected countries** were **Great Britain, Austria and Germany**, which suffered consequences similar to those endured by the US economy, such as:

- Reduction in the value of stock markets.
- Decline of industrial production.

- Bankruptcy of small and medium firms.
- Fall of prices and salaries.
- Alarming increase in unemployment.

3. DEMOCRATIC REGIMES

The principles of democracy initially triumphed at the end of the First World War. The new states that arose from the fragmentation of defeated empires incorporated these principles as the foundation of their political stability.

In **Germany**, with the support of the left, the **Weimar Republic (1919-1933)** was established. Its Constitution included universal suffrage, the effective equality between men and women and a broad declaration of rights. In the economy, it tried to alleviate the effects of the crisis by means of a deflationist policy, that is, a general lowering of the price of goods and services and of salaries.

In the 1920s, **the democratic parliamentary system underwent a crisis**. There were several causes of the crisis:

- **Economic crisis of the capitalist system**, which in Europe was seen in the post-war crisis (1919-1923) as well as in the depression that started in 1929. A direct consequence was the rise of unemployment and poverty.
- **Strengthening of labour unions**, which frightened the middle classes and led them to support totalitarian alternatives.
- **Political instability** of the new countries. Much of this instability was caused by workers' uprisings and the influence of workers' movements in the different Communist parties of each country.

Rupture of confidence in human reason, science and progress resulting from the trauma of the war.

4. TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

ITALIAN FASCISM

In 1921, **Benito Mussolini founded the National Fascist Party (PNF) and established himself as its leader or chief, called *Il Duce***. The fascist movement captured the support of a broad range of social sectors, calling on the need to renew Italy. In 1922, the Blackshirts - the name by which the paramilitary militias of the fascist movement were known - undertook the March on Rome. **In the face of Mussolini's promises and threats**, King Victor Emmanuel III entrusted him with the formation of a new government.

The crisis of 1929 affected Italy, causing production to fall and increasing unemployment. The response of the fascist state was a policy of **public works** and, beyond its frontiers, the beginning of **imperialist expansion** in Ethiopia. Thanks to this,

the propaganda apparatus spread an image of Italy as a great power prepared for a future world confrontation.

GERMAN NAZISM

The year 1923 was critical for Germany. The enormous inflation led the country to a **dead-end** situation. Members of the Nazi Party took advantage of the crisis to carry out the Munich Putsch, a failed attempt at a coup d'état. Hitler, who led the uprising, was tried and imprisoned.

To prevent Germany's collapse, the victors of the war conceived an **aid plan that succeeded in reactivating the economy** and restoring international confidence. As such, the reconciliation between Germany and France was possible, so Germany was admitted to the League of Nations in 1926.

The crisis of 1929 had an immediate impact in Germany, because its economy was far more affected by it than the economy of the USA. The collapse of banks and industries again drove **Germany to poverty**; unemployment skyrocketed and social tension fueled the rise of Nazism.

The crisis weakened the Weimar Republic. In the parliamentary elections, no party won a majority because, in **1933**, the President of the Republic, Hindenburg, appointed Hitler as Prime Minister of a coalition government. Once he was in power, Nazism began to **dismantle the democratic system** and impose a dictatorship. Nazi ideology was based on a series of principles:

- Backing of an indisputable leader, the Führer (guide).
- Superiority of the Aryan race over others.
- Necessity of Germany's expansion ('living space') towards the east of Europe. In this way, according to the propaganda of the time, the resources and space the population needed would be guaranteed.
- Anti-semitism, which stripped Jews of the right to possess German nationality and hold public office or work in the liberal professions.
- Revanchism against France and rejection of the 'diktat' of Versailles.

In June 1934, the SS, an elite Nazi corps, carried out an attack against the SA, a Nazi organisation led by Ernst Röhm, who fought for power within the organisation. Most of the SA leaders were assassinated in what is known as '**The Night of the Long Knives**'. Founded in 1936, the Gestapo functioned as political police with full powers to persecute dissidents and intern them in **concentration camps**, the first of which were created that same year.

Hitler's **expansionist policy** led him to systematically claim and invade European territories that bordered Germany, such as Austria and the Sudetenland, actions tolerated by France and Great Britain. In the end, these countries could not accept Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939, which ignited the Second World War.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Anti-Semitism, which was already present in society, was one of the ideological foundations of the Nazi regime. It was expressed in the **Nuremberg Laws**, approved during the Nazi Party congress in 1935. After they were published, the Nazis began a campaign of propaganda and slander against Jews so that the German people would view them as enemies.

In addition to Jews, the Nazis persecuted other groups and ethnicities, who also suffered repression and death. Gypsies, political dissidents, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and disabled people were also massacred in Nazi concentration camps.

5. SECOND WORLD WAR

Causes of the war

- **The Great Depression.** A recession followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929. European nations looked for their own solutions to the crisis. Most applied protectionist measures and competed for markets.
- **Totalitarian regimes.** As soon as they came to power, the Nazis implemented an aggressive foreign policy to make up for the 'humiliation' that Germany had been subjected to by the Treaty of Versailles.
- **Militarism and rearmament.** Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles by rearming. In this period of economic crisis and totalitarian regimes, aggressive discourse.
- **Territorial conflicts and expansionism.** Old conflicts restarted in the territories that had passed into the hands of other nations after the First World War.
- German dominance in Europe (1939-1941)

In less than a month, Poland surrendered and its territory was divided between Germany and the USSR. The war front was contained for several months, but in spring 1940, Germany launched an unstoppable assault on Western Europe.

In spring 1940, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway to secure supplies of Swedish steel and to try to isolate the British Isles. At the same time, Germany launched a rapid offensive called the blitzkrieg or 'lightning war' on France and invaded two neutral countries: Belgium and the Netherlands. The French army was defeated. In June 1940, German troops occupied Paris.

- The Allied counter-offensive (1942-1944)

In June 1942, the Battle of Stalingrad began. This is considered one of the **bloodiest** battles in history, and marked the start of Germany's defeat in Russia.

The German-Italian army was defeated in North Africa, at the Battle of El Alamein (1942). In 1943, the British and US armies landed in Sicily and toppled the Mussolini regime.

DEFEAT OF THE AXIS (1944-1945)

After the **Normandy landings**, the German army began to retreat and suffered a series of defeats. On 24 August 1944, Allied troops liberated Paris and the offensive moved towards Germany. In the autumn, the Allies reached the Rhine and intensified air raids on German cities, many of which were destroyed. Hitler, meanwhile, was confident that his army could contain the Allies and started to use new weapons.

After its defeats on the Western Front, the German army concentrated its efforts on stopping the advance of Soviet troops in the east.

In April 1945, **Hitler committed suicide** in his bunker in Berlin. A few hours later, the Soviets entered the city.

DEFEAT OF JAPAN (1945)

In 1944, US troops led by General Douglas MacArthur gradually gained ground, forcing the Japanese out of the Marshall Islands, Burma, New Guinea and the Philippines.

In spring 1945, the US army captured some islands, such as Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Meanwhile, air raids on Japanese cities such as Tokyo intensified.

After Germany surrendered, Japan continued to fight despite the unstoppable advance of the US. In August, US President Harry S. Truman ordered atomic bombs to be dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing more than 240 000 people.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

Human and material losses. About 60 million people died during the Second World War. More than 30 million were civilians. More than 30 million people were injured and three million disappeared.

Political, socioeconomic and territorial changes. One of the most significant effects of the war was Europe's political and economic decline.

The United States became the superpower of the capitalist world. The country also benefited from the fact that no battles had taken place in its territory, so its industry and infrastructure remained intact.