

REVIEW GUIDE FOR EUROPE FROM 1919-1939

In general only the period 1924-30 could be considered stable and during this time France had to deal with the inflation menace and Great Britain experienced the only general strike in its history. Spain was in fairly constant turmoil from 1919 to 1939.

GREAT BRITAIN

Economically the First World War had cost \$40 billion, 1/3 of Britain's shipping, over 15% of its foreign investments many of its overseas markets. Prime Minister David Lloyd George gave women over the age of 30 the right to vote and was also blamed for the poor handling of Irish Rebellion. While great blame has been laid on the government for not doing more for the economy it is known that by 1937 industrial production was 20% higher than it had been in 1929. Real wages for those employed had been rising and most Englishmen were actually paid higher than ever before and spent more money on recreation than ever before.

The Irish Home Rule Bill passed in 1914 was suspended for the duration of WWI. Ireland was dominated by the "Sinn Fein" (Ourselves Alone) and representatives from this group refused to sit in parliament. PM David Lloyd George launched a full repression of the Sinn Fein movement that led to major violence involving the IRA (Irish Republican Army) using murder, arson, and bombs against British authority.

In 1921 an agreement was reached by which most of Ireland was given self-governing status and titled the Irish Free State. The six northern counties, which were Protestant and partly industrialized were dubbed Northern Ireland and members given seats in parliament. All this agreement did was allow new riots to break out.

THE STATUTE OF WESTMINSTER, established in 1931 created the framework for independence within the empire. It stated that the overseas dominions were now fully sovereign. This included the territories of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Irish Free State.

FRANCE

Nearly 10% of adult male population between 18 and 50 had been killed in the war and industrial production was about 60% of pre war levels. The Franc had lost 90% of its pre-war value. The election of Raymond Poincare, a conservative leader restored financial confidence and the Franc was stabilized at 5 cents, which was 20% of its pre-war value. The return of Alsace and Lorraine and the iron and textile industries were a plus to the economy. French industry was narrow in scope and individual factories were small when compared with those of other countries.

The Depression caused several petty riots and rumors of radical party collusion and a financial fraud (The Stavisky Affair), which provided ammunition for the communists. Efforts to restore order lead to a major riot in 1934 which forced the government to resign and the bloodiest riots since 1871 and the Commune. Pierre Laval was elected foreign minister and then in a vote of confidence was made prime minister. He was conservative and offered only a policy of deflation. The more he lowered salaries the tighter France held to the gold standard and the deeper the economy fell.

The Popular Front won an overwhelming victory in 1936 and a new prime minister Leon Blum a socialist leader was in office. His first task was to deal with a sit-down strike by one million industrial workers to demanded better conditions. Blum quickly negotiated a settlement that provided for a 40 hour week, a minimum wage and paid vacations. The government went on to nationalize the Bank of France and a number of armament industries and to provide a marketing service for grain farmers

SPAIN

Spain had been neutral during WWI and had made a great profit from the sale of raw materials, textiles and metals to Britain and France during the war. After the war the bottom fell out of the economy resulting in wholesale riots and serious depression in industry. Catalonia was the center of 4 years of bloody labor riots. The army had been the major source of power but it proved to be inadequate in 1921 during Moroccan riots when 9,000 Spaniards were lost King Alfonso received most of the blame due to his poor handling of the crisis. To save the Crown Miguel Primo de Rivera established martial law in 1923. The Government was solely military and had no political or ideological basis. The Spanish monarchy fell in 1931 due to general lack of trust and support. A democratic republic was proclaimed but it alienated the Catholics (majority of population) by denying right to a Catholic education for all children. In 1934 the Socialists and Communists launched a revolution in north Spain.

GERMANY

At the conclusion of World War I The German Emperor (William II) was forced to abdicate and the Social Democrats became the dominant political power. In spite of the fact that the Social Democrats (SPD) created freedom of speech and the eight hour work day they remained unpopular. After a attempted overthrow by the Spartacists (a Marxist Left party) an election (allowed for universal suffrage) was called to create a Constituent Assembly from a coalition of Social and Liberal Democrats. This group drafted a constitution that created the Weimar Republic. The major detractor to the success of the republic was the runaway inflation that was tied to the government's attempts to meet its reparation payment from World War I. These events culminated in A 1923 invasion of the Ruhr by the French and the German failure to meet their international payment schedule. During the period of the 1920's the United States offered two plans to aid the beleaguered Germans. The 1924 Dawes Plan provided loans and the 1929 Young Plan set limits on the reparations.

PEACE VENTURES

The 1920's saw several moves toward attempting to maintain peace in Europe. The Washington Conference of 1921 provided a plan to reduce naval arms while the Locarno Treaty, signed in 1925, formalized the border between France and Germany while limiting German territory in the east as well. Finally, the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 officially ended war as an instrument of national policy.

FASCISM

Fascism was a dominant force in politics from 1918 to 1945. It was also an international movement. Although it was stronger in some countries than in others there was not a single country that was not infected with it.

The Fascists identified four enemies of mankind. In order, they were: the Jews, International Communism (ideas of Marx and Lenin lead to the degradation of the individual), Capitalism (Fascist were the voice of the little man), Democracy and Liberalism (These were detestable because the Fascist world view was diametrically opposed to their concept of a ordered hierarchy).

Fascist leaders were the inheritors of the cultural pessimism that was rampant in the late 19th century. They gave political form to a widespread revolt against the modern world, against decadence of the city, immorality, liberalism and free thought. Hitler and Mussolini stepped onto the stage of history (they were actors) at a time when violence, social unrest and instability were the order of the day. It was their goal to not only be men of destiny but to set the stage for the centuries of future fascist leaders who were to follow. Mussolini was essentially a man of action. Ideology was of secondary importance to him. This was not developed until after he was in power. Hitler was just the opposite. Ideology determined his every action. His central thought was on world Jewry. For Hitler, propaganda, terror and violence were always a means to an end.