

HISTORY OF HUMANITY

Scientific and Cultural Development

Volume VII
The Twentieth Century

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United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO
Publishing

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

STABILIZATION, CRISIS, AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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PROLONGING COLONIAL RULE

As before the First World War, events in Europe had a direct influence on the colonies. Imperial control was more extensive but also more precarious. The inter-war phase of European domination involved a race between reform and rebellion. Progressive Europeans hoped for gradualist co-optation of local elites in an effort to forestall real independence, but by the inter-war era, they had to deal with the growing impatience and skills of a new generation of politicized and educated indigenous leaders. Right-wing European critics of colonial reforms correctly predicted that continued concessions would only lead to increasing pressure for independence. But their only alternative was the recourse to force. Ultimately the British would recoil before the violence that would have been required, while the French accepted it (after the Second World War), only to find that their own society was brought to the edge of civil war.

As the threat of aggression from Germany, Italy, and Japan grew far more menacing by the mid-1930s, London's military resources – the ultimate coin of empire, even if rarely spent – were stretched very thin. Troops were required for security in Europe, initially in Ireland, in Palestine and the Middle East, and eventually South Asia. The duration and demands of the First World War had already made London dependent on the reserves of wealth and manpower contributed by the self-governing dominions and also on the financial support of the United States. In Britain's major possession, the Indian subcontinent, further cessions of authority to the nationalist movement were virtually inevitable. British reforms announced in 1917 and formalized in the 1919 Government of India Act began a partial movement toward self-government within the Raj. Under a notion of diarchy, education, agriculture, and health were to be devolved upon provincial legislatures elected by Indian constituencies. Revenue, law, and order were to be reserved for the vice-regal government.¹

The British were not prepared to relinquish India between the wars, and the movement for self-government in India (the National Congress) still believed caution was required. In the wake of the Amritsar massacre, Mohandas

Karamchand Gandhi, the remarkable ascetic 50-year-old leader of resistance, moved in late 1920 to transform the Congress Party into a more effective mass organization and initiate a campaign of civil disobedience – non-cooperation – for the sake of self-rule and ultimately independence (Plate 23). Social pressures added to nationalist grievances. Wartime provisioning requirements for the large Indian army had stimulated Indian textile and other industries in Bombay, Madras, Bengal and elsewhere. Overarching potential urban and rural class conflicts were the fundamental fissures of the huge articulated set of communities that constituted India: the gap between the untouchables, whom Gandhi insisted must be included in the Congress to the instinctive repugnance of upper-caste leaders, and the division between Hindus and Muslims, led in the Congress by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. The more urgent the demands for national independence, the more fissured the subcontinent appeared. British resistance to further reform after the dominion proposals of the abortive Simon Commission led to a five-year campaign of civil disobedience from 1930 to 1931, including a dramatic march to the sea to protest the salt tax, and again after 1932.

An Indian nation had to emerge, but when, and what cohesion might it possess? The final pre-war British answer was the Government of India Act of 1935, the upshot of initial Round Table Discussions with Indians in 1931–32. It envisaged a federal dominion when half of the princes (subject to the Raj but ruling a quarter of the population) might agree and, in fact, served as the basis for the post-war constitution. But until ratification by the princes, power would remain with the Viceroy. Meanwhile the British governed the congeries of princely states, crosscutting sects, occupational units, communities, and held on to decisive power.²

India was the largest of Britain's imperial possessions, but the others gave just as much trouble. The inability to reconcile Ulster Protestants to Irish autonomy led to continued violence between the uprising of 1916 and the partition treaty of 1922. Egypt saw nationalist rioting in 1930 and 1935 although Egypt was nominally an independent kingdom and received League of Nations membership. Iraq achieved independence in 1932, and the Kurd-Sunni-Shiite

divisions that have dominated headlines since 2002 took their toll in the early 1930s as well. In mandatory Palestine, Arabs revolted against Jewish migration in 1936, and only appeasement policies in Europe allowed London to deploy the needed troops to quell the uprising, although Britain acquiesced to Arab pressure to limit Jewish immigration at a time when brutal Nazi policies had made the situation of German Jews pure torment.³

Given the military and administrative expenses, was maintaining a colonial empire still worth the effort? Of course, a few left-wing protesters aside, Europeans still believed it essential and on several grounds. It testified to strategic supremacy for the metropole despite the armed forces that had to be garrisoned abroad if not actually engaged in endemic fighting. It rewarded a powerful network of elites at home. It promised safe control of vital resources, including petroleum for the British and rubber for the French. The Dutch continued to develop the oil and mineral wealth of their vast Indonesian archipelago. Secured at bargain prices, the bounty of the Third World – oil and rubber and cotton, tobacco, copper and precious metals – compensated for the wartime squandering of wealth in the First. Colonialism also reaffirmed the cultural or ‘civilizing mission’ of Europeans after the terrible lapse of the First World War. European administrators trained native civil servants, organized education, and selectively interpreted the social and cultural worlds that they sought less to penetrate than to keep under control. The transactions of everyday rule in the empire profoundly influenced the colonized country, but also the colonizers. Young men of the metropole found themselves possessors of an unsettling power that offset the dull daily tasks of rural administration; servants abounded without real cost; and youthful idealists could construct a humanitarian and ethical vocation among their subjects abroad.

It is an open question whether capitalism reinforced or finally weakened the structures of colonial domination. International economic exchange built on and helped to perpetuate the unequal relationships of metropole and colony, the latter as source of commodities or relatively cheap labour. But industrial unrest was a prevalent feature of inter-war colonialism, as indigenous labour, uprooted from a crumbling village structure (as it had been in Europe the previous century), continued to migrate to the mines of Katanga or Witwatersrand, the port of Mombasa (Kenya), the textile factories of Cairo or Bombay.⁴

Since the cause of the working class had also become a major ideological theme of European political activists, these developments created an opposition to colonialism at home. The Second International had condemned colonialism before the First World War. The communist parties took up the issue after the First World War, and it remained one of their fundamental themes until the 1980s, when Soviet armies were mired in Afghanistan. Moscow’s own control over its Central Asian, Ukrainian, or Baltic peoples never seemed to involve any of the same issues. The more overseas colonies were integrated into a world economy, the more their fate was caught up in the divisions of domestic politics.

Colonial domination could not have been preserved forever. The French, the British and the Dutch were divided among themselves as to how much self-governance they could encourage. For every far-sighted and cultivated colonial administrator who advocated expansion of

‘indigenous’ autonomy, there were conservatives whose policy, in the words of one French governor general in Viet Nam, was ‘surveillance, punishment, repression’.⁵ Still, the system broke down when it did because the colonial powers could not stabilize their own peaceful order after the First World War, and descended toward renewed and even more destructive warfare. The whole structure of inter-war European political reconstruction depended upon a fragile prosperity. Once it fell apart, and once, too, nationalist and fascist regimes came to power in Europe (and in Japan), renewed large-scale warfare would have been hard to avoid. The First World War had already created the conditions for nationalist movements to advance in the colonial world. The Second World War made their rapid success far more likely.

THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE VULNERABILITY OF DEMOCRACY

Even before the Great Depression, the more fragile democratic regimes in Europe had already collapsed. The Hungarian revolution of 1919 was suppressed by a military counter-revolution that installed an authoritarian (if nominally parliamentary) regime in that country, so reduced in size by the Treaty of Trianon. Spain and Italy abandoned liberal-democratic institutions in the 1920s; Poland’s military began to curb parliamentary power.

But the world economic crisis of the 1930s made democratic prospects far worse. The prosperity of the late 1920s, promising as it appeared, rested on a very fragile foundation and was vulnerable to key policy failures. For it was based on an effort to restore what was an oversimplified interpretation of how the international economy ran before the war. Before 1914, the major world economies had adopted the so-called gold standard, which seemed a prerequisite for membership in the civilized world. The gold standard provided that the subscribing countries’ central banks promised to redeem their national paper currency in gold. This meant in effect that no participating country could accumulate significant deficits on current account or pile up import surpluses beyond the values of what it exported or borrowed from foreign investors. If it continually spent more than it earned from abroad, holders of the country’s currency and bonds would supposedly worry about the real value of the paper assets they held and would run down the spendthrift nation’s gold reserves, supposedly forcing a hike in its interest rates and an offsetting contraction of foreign purchases. The beauty of the system was that it supposedly kept an international equilibrium automatically. In effect the Bank of England was the linch-pin of much international exchange (although the French franc and German mark played large roles in Eastern Europe), and despite vast foreign expenditures, the Bank of England kept the pound sterling at its pre-announced gold value.

The income that Britain received from foreign investment and its positive balance of trade with its colonial possessions, above all India, offset its negative balance of trade with Europe. Returns from outside Britain minimized the deflationary adjustments at home that might be required to maintain the country’s extensive foreign investments and confidence in the pound more generally. What is more, London actually could shift the real costs of monetary adjustment onto the countries that held sterling. The

First World War, however, shattered this world, which seemed to guarantee international financial equilibrium so painlessly and automatically, but which in fact was already finding it more difficult to operate without central bank intervention even in the last years of peace before 1914.⁶

The post-war years saw no easy restoration of world trade. Russia, which had been a major purchaser of Central European goods and a provider of grains, timber, and other materials, plunged into the economic misery of civil war, hyperinflation, and isolation. The successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire also became a depressed area; the former internal trade of the Habsburg Empire was now fragmented by new frontiers and hostilities. Stagnation meant that urban areas no longer could absorb the excess labour of the countryside. And whereas hard-pressed peasants of Eastern and Central Europe and southern Italy had also migrated to the Americas in record numbers from 1890 to 1914, they could no longer do so after war broke out. In 1924 the United States, caught up in a cycle of xenophobic reaction to its earlier openness, passed the Johnson Act, which virtually shut its borders to Eastern Europeans.

As wartime demand slackened, most economies underwent a short but very sharp recession in mid-1920 and 1921, triggered in some cases by a rapid cut in expenses as states sought to return to normal financial conditions. In 1922, in the United States prosperity returned and the Americans entered a vigorous seven-year expansion. But all industrial economies remained subject to business cycles: vigorous investments and demand usually declined after seven years of expansion.

The problem was even deeper, in fact, because of the war's wastage of savings and capital. During the war, countries had not renewed industrial infrastructures and had indirectly taxed national savings by cumulative price increases through two- or three-fold ablation inflation. Nations had also gone heavily into debt; some of this debt was internal and owed by one citizen or bank to another and thus would be settled by internal redistribution of wealth usually at the cost of those on pensions or rents or other fixed income. But, in addition, Britain, France, and Italy owed significant war debt payments to the United States, while Germany owed reparations to Britain, France and Belgium. Moreover, each country had lost significant foreign assets whose earnings had helped offset the cost of imports: Britain had sold off about 25 per cent of its foreign portfolio. The relatively easy burden of international exchange and debt before 1914 became far more oppressive in the 1920s.

When Britain and other countries 'returned to gold' between 1925 and 1930 (or more precisely adopted a gold-exchange standard where dollars could also serve as a reserve), most felt the need to raise prevailing interest rates in order not to lose reserves. However, the tight money policies of the late 1920s inhibited investment in Britain and exacerbated labour relations in Germany. Britain had revalued the pound at a rate that meant its products were relatively more expensive than those available in or from America, thereby producing an extra burden on its balance of payments. With the United States now a net creditor nation, any American failure to 'recycle' dollars to Europe would add to the deflationary pressures. Americans poured their savings abroad into all sorts of European loans, some for productive investments, others for public amenities. Many of these loans were short-term and had to be

frequently renewed. In addition, once the stock market began to climb rapidly at the end of the 1920s, American investors tended to borrow to buy Wall Street securities, not Central European bond issues. Once the American stock market plummeted in 1929-30, with its huge contraction of American wealth (since so many individuals and banks had tied up their credit in the market), American savings were no longer available.⁷

Democratic politics in the new countries of Central Europe was linked to prosperity, which was rapidly vanishing. Over the next three years, unemployment would rise to catastrophic proportions: perhaps over 25 per cent of the work force in the United States and Germany. The national output of countries slumped badly. In Germany and the United States – the hardest hit industrialized countries with reliable statistics – GNP descended to about 60 per cent of 1929 levels by late 1932, at which time the statistics were bottoming out in Britain and Germany. But hard times were spreading to France and Spain.

Although we think of the Depression in terms of industrial unemployment, it brought great suffering as well to rural communities. Vigorous demand and rising prices for agricultural products brought vast expansion of output and then a collapse of prices from 1920s to 1930s. Bumper years sent grain prices skidding in 1927 and 1928; they did not recover in 1929 and as grain suppliers sought to dump their stocks, prices fell to three-fifths of the 1913 level by 1932. Only by the thirties did interventionist governments, whether of the left or nationalistic, introduce national marketing boards that could control sales and pay farmers to curtail output.

The fate of agricultural producers was thus as harsh as those of industrial workers. Since the family farm could not 'fire' its old parents and numerous children, or export its excess young working adults to cities without jobs, it left them to stagnate without shoes, clothes, schooling, medicine, housing, urban manufactures, and even clean water or an adequate diet. Outside Britain and Belgium, industrial countries still retained large rural populations – up to 50 per cent living in areas defined as rural in the United States, about 25 per cent on farms in Germany. In addition, most of the rural population outside Europe, the northern United States and Canada, or coastal and Great Lakes North America was overwhelmingly composed of peasant producers, usually dependent upon costly loans from seedtime to harvest. Hard-pressed farmers switched their political allegiances – many voting Democratic instead of Republican in the United States by 1932, but in Germany defecting en masse to the National Socialists by 1930. The Democrats seemed to promise cheap money and credit, and the Nazis promised security of farm tenure and even higher tariffs and protection than already existed. They also handily blamed Jewish creditors for the woes of farmers.

Other commodities underwent the same passage from boom to bust, and as peasants suffered, political turbulence grew. Coffee bean prices declined by 75 per cent from 1927 to 1931, helping to open the way to the Brazilian dictator, Getulio Vargas. The rubber plantations that had boomed in South-East Asia (as increasing numbers of automobiles spurred the need for tires) saw prices collapse, helping to provoke nationalist resistance movements. The collapse of sugar prices brought misery to Indonesia and hardship to the Caribbean. The collapse of silk prices meant greater

poverty for two-fifths of Japan's farmers, and aggravated the discontent of many Chinese peasants, who would undermine the precarious control of the Chinese nationalist government. The prices of some crops fell dramatically even though demand remained relatively stable: the price of cotton decreased by two-thirds. The response varied: silent suffering or acceptance of wage labour, flight and migration, occasionally open rebellion. American tenant farmers in the southern states, i.e. sharecroppers, dependent for yearly credit on landlords who controlled the payback of 'settle' they finally received, remained in misery and increasingly compelled to switch their peonage into wage labour.⁸ African-Americans would eventually accelerate their migration to the industrial cities of the North once urban factories began to revive. Egyptian peasants, also dependent on a cotton monoculture, cut back their consumption of food grains by a quarter.

In South-East and East Asia, the price of rice fell 50 per cent even though consumption hardly fell. The results were rural immoderation in Japan, the rise of prostitution, a new resentment of the city and of recent trends toward liberalization, and a symbiosis of distressed peasants and a belief in the saving role of the military. If German peasants looked to the National Socialists, the Japanese put their trust in militarist values. Where white colonial authorities reinforced local landlords, peasant rebellions were a possibility. Vietnamese peasants revolted unsuccessfully as the authorities sought to collect taxes in the face of collapsing rubber prices. By the end of the 1930s, South Vietnamese landlords had largely supervised a switch from tenancy to wage labour (a trend also underway in the cotton South of the United States), whereas peasant tenancy remained more resilient and resistant in the North. In Burma, continued collection of poll tax payments as rice prices collapsed triggered a rebellion through 1931-1932, which British rulers put down only with difficulty. Whether in South-East Asia, West Africa, the Dutch Indies or the Middle East, the mid-1930s were to prove the point of inflection for European colonial rule. That is, mobilization of labour and peasants and intellectuals that achieved decolonization after the Second World War really 'took off' in terms of organization and protest during the 1930s.⁹

CONTENDING POLITICAL RESPONSES AND IDEOLOGIES

Such an economic disaster had profound effects on politics. It essentially undercut the progress toward a restoration of liberalism and in many countries undermined the coalitions needed to support democratic government. The United States was an exception. Since the Republicans were in power and persisted in deflation, the voters turned toward Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who did not campaign for radical measures, but whose New Deal still turned toward major social and economic experimentation. The Roosevelt administration profoundly altered government in the United States by enlarging the role of the federal government, which stepped in to provide emergency relief, to organize public works (the Public Works Administration and Works Progress Administration) and to prop up farm prices by instituting limits on crop planting (the Agricultural Adjustment Act). It also put young people to work in public conservation jobs, began huge new natural resource planning

and hydroelectric construction (the Tennessee Valley Association), passed a national system of old-age pensions based on compulsory business and employee contributions (Social Security) and eventually gave labour unions the right to organize workers if they won a majority in factory or plant (the Wagner Act). Roosevelt's remedies were often inconsistent, and the Congress remained more conservative. Nonetheless, despite his inconsistency and initial unilateralism, Roosevelt's buoyant politics and oratory shattered the passive helplessness that seemed to afflict the previous Hoover administration. By 1936, the Democrats became the majority party, holding the support of the southern states they had had since the Civil War, and gaining for the first time the votes of urban blacks, many farmers, labour unions, small businessmen and a critical number of patrician bankers and industrialists – a combination that kept the presidency in the hands of the Democrats for twenty years and made Roosevelt the first president to win a third and then a fourth term. Other coalitions, in Sweden or later the so-called Popular Front in France, pursued similar policies. But Roosevelt became a symbol par excellence of a popular and democratic response first to economic hardship and then to the rise of Fascism and Nazism.¹⁰

The stakes seemed very high. For in fact, the dominant trend did not seem to be that of the left, but the illiberal right. The appeal of fascism emerged out of the First World War, or even before. Nationalists stressed that military conflict was a fundamental condition of modern society; countries were locked in perpetual rivalry; politicians talked and talked, but soldiers solved problems. The notion of military saviours was not far away in the 1920s, and hard-pressed monarchs might appoint military dictators. Faced with growing civil strife between left and right and a move toward republicanism, the Spanish monarch appointed a military strongman, Primo De Rivera, in 1923, who governed for eight years by a sort of implicit social bargaining before being discredited by corruption, the continuing war in Spanish Morocco, and encroaching economic stagnation. Until his popularity ebbed, Primo was one of the first military saviours of the inter-war although they had appeared frequently in nineteenth-century Spain and Latin America. However, it was in Italy, Germany, and Austria where the most spectacular transformations occurred.

Mussolini organized his Fascio di Combattimento in 1919, on the basis of soldiers' camaraderie and their yearning for radicalism. The movement prospered in the Po Valley between 1920 and 1922, as it teamed up with landlords to smash the newly militant rural labour unions. As the parliament became paralysed between old and new parties, the King named Mussolini prime minister in late October 1922 (Plate 24). For two years, he ran an administration that hovered between dictatorship and a sort of manipulated party clientelism. By 1925-1926, however, he had opted for single-party rule and was transforming the ideology of fascism into a glorification of the all-powerful state and party, which must organize unions and businesses into government-sponsored 'corporations'. The opposition was driven into exile, sometimes imprisoned, or sentenced to a sort of village confinement in remote areas. A secret police, political tribunal, press censorship, glorification of the party, subjection of parliament, and claims to educate a new Fascist man made the Italian experiment a qualitatively new sort of

regime – one the Fascists themselves liked to call ‘totalitarian’.¹¹

By totalitarian, Mussolini meant originally that Fascism claimed the totality of political power – no other party was to exist, although in fact the other parties continued a harassed and minority existence until they were pressured to dissolve in the mid-1920s. As the regime stabilized and the term was also later applied by many European and American scholars to Hitler’s Third Reich and Stalin’s Soviet Union, it became even more encompassing, and suggested that the single party and the leader it glorified organized not just politics but society as a whole. The ruling party was intended to reshape the economy, education, and sports, to control the media, theatre and culture – in brief, not just suppress outright opposition and democratic institutions, but organize an all-controlling regime and society in which individuals found fulfilment through a regimented public sphere. It was this claim that was the real novelty of the inter-war period, and perhaps of twentieth-century politics in general. It was a fundamental rejection of the belief in the individual as the basis for government; henceforth it was to be the nation or the racial community, or the proletariat (and its agent the party). Liberalism was allegedly weak, talky, outmoded. The economic crisis supposedly confirmed that it had failed.

Mussolini’s regime was hardly totalitarian at all in comparison to Hitler’s, who required only a year to consolidate the dictatorial control that Mussolini had needed five years to build. The stability of the German Republic (known as the Weimar Republic) founded after the defeat in the First World War remained hostage to prosperity. The new regime was widely, if unfairly, blamed for the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and it also seemed totally dependent on the deals among the political parties. When adverse economic conditions made it impossible for the Social Democratic Party that represented much of the organized working class to find a common ground with the representatives of the industrial community, the parliament was paralysed, and Reichspresident Paul von Hindenburg had to resort to rule by decree. Voters defected to Hitler’s National Socialist Party, which had seemed doomed to extinction in the mid-1920s but secured 20 per cent of the vote in the September 1930 Reichstag elections. Continuing parliamentary paralysis made the party increasingly popular, and by the summer of 1932 it collected almost 40 per cent of the electorate. After growing violence in the streets and some unsuccessful efforts to find a chancellor who could alleviate unemployment and win back votes, Hindenburg was prevailed on by short-sighted conservatives and civil servants to call on Hitler as the head of a coalition cabinet on 30 January 1933. Within two months Hitler had built the first concentration camps (Plate 25), exploited the arson of the Reichstag building (probably an independent action) to arrest the Communist Party deputies and limit freedom of the press, allowed his Storm Troopers to boycott Jewish shops, introduced legislation to ‘restore’ the civil service – i.e. to fire Jews from government office including the educational system (Plate 26) – and finally to browbeat the Reichstag deputies to pass a constitutional amendment, the so-called Enabling Act, that gave him virtually absolute power for five years. Within a year, he would abolish the state legislatures, abolish all parties but the National Socialists, pull Germany out of the long drawn-out disarmament conference in Geneva, and win a resounding

plebiscitary approval for his policies. When President Hindenburg died at the end of August 1934, the army allowed Hitler to accumulate the power of chancellor and president as the self-proclaimed Führer.

The Italian Fascist regime and the German National Socialists shared much in common, but also had significant differences. Both movements stressed the role of the party in running the state. Both leaders had been spiritually reborn by war; Mussolini had broken with the Socialist Party in which he had made his pre-1915 career as a radical editor to take up the notion of the war as revolution and then to organize would-be radical soldiers into a *fascio*, or militant movement whose name suggested the unity of determined individuals bound together. Hitler had realized that war would give him his vocation. A young Austrian who saw his aspirations to be a great artist frustrated, Hitler was fulfilled, indeed exalted, by his military service in the German army. When he was gassed near the end of the war and then internalized the humiliating defeat, he understood that he must now live for politics directed against the flabby civilian governments and the socialists and Jews that had allegedly betrayed the country. Here was a key difference from his Italian counterpart. Nazism had anti-Semitism at its core even if over the next years Hitler might also scorn alternative parties, castigate the feckless republic, its parliamentary system and the craven compromises on reparations. Both leaders remained convinced that nations could remain vital only by virtue of war, that they were locked into a Darwinian struggle for survival, that politics must ultimately be based on unremitting conflict (a notion that tempted many theorists in the inter-war period), and that as leaders they had the personal mission to inspire and organize the masses. Mussolini, however, found his allies among the nationalist intelligentsia that emphasized the role of law, not liberal law, but the state. He retained his title as ‘head of government’, that is, an appointee of the monarch, and he restored the prerogatives of the Catholic Church. Hitler stressed (and found the allies to agree) that the German People, were more fluid and more encompassing than the state and its officers and that they spoke through him, so that ultimately the Führer was the source of law.¹²

SOVIET POLICIES AND POPULIST MOBILIZATION OUTSIDE EUROPE

It is little wonder that many Western intellectuals – horrified by watching a cultivated Western nation wilfully turn its back on human rights, do away with a liberal republic, and turn toward savage values – felt that liberal democracy was impotent, politically as well as economically. Some political activists and intellectuals believed that only communism could solve the crisis of liberalism and stand up to fascism by nationalizing economic resources and embarking on a thoroughgoing state planning. While many on the left remained within the parties of democratic socialism – from whom the communists had split after Lenin came to power in Russia and whom the communists denounced in the late 1920s and early 1930s as ‘objectively’ helping the fascists – others believed that only the hard discipline of the Communist Party could bring about transformation. The politics of toughness and sometimes secrecy was allegedly necessary on the left, if it was not to prevail from the right. The Communist Party had

consolidated power in Russia by progressively stifling other parties and then independent voices. Even under Lenin, the party had moved to exert total control; but the system became far more repressive by the 1930s.

Stalin managed to emerge at the top of the party by adroit alliances, first by taking sides against the Bolsheviks he denounced as too radical and impatient, then by turning against the earlier allies that he now claimed were too gradualist and complacent, even condemning Leon Trotsky – the outstanding leader along with Lenin of the revolutionary period – as a traitor to the Bolshevik project because he did not accept the idea of subordinating the project of international revolution to constructing a socialist order ‘in one country’. In the mid-1920s, Stalin had warned against over-ambitious nationalization of village lands; now in 1928, he decreed moving beyond the NEP (the New Economic Policy was a retreat from war communism that allowed the resumption of small private enterprise, foreign investment and the retention of private peasant lands) and forcing the peasants into collective farms. Peasants resisted but, over the course of a year and a half, local communists applied pressure so that they would faithfully troop to the local authorities and place their land either in the nationalized plot (the Sovkhoz or state farms) or the local cooperatives (Kolkhoz, or collective farms). Their animals were also taken, as were tractors and other implements. To orchestrate this vast renunciation of individual holdings the party started a campaign against allegedly wealthier peasants, the Kulaks, who could employ farm labourers and were supposedly dedicated to bitter counter-revolutionary resistance. The rallying calls of the hour became ‘dekulakization’, ‘the Kulak as the bitter adversary and rapacious rural creditor’. Above all in the Ukraine, where resistance to the Moscow regime remained strong, the party moved into high gear, cutting off supplies and contributing to widespread famine. Bukharin would incur Stalin’s later revenge by suggesting that peasants would produce more in response to market incentives, but the party leadership would then have remained subject to the resistance of this huge social group.¹³

No sooner was the collectivization campaign underway than Stalin introduced the first of several Five Year Plans; an ambitious and rapid effort to increase industrialization. The NEP vanished in the cities; property was taken over, vast numbers of rural workers were forced off their land and into the cities, where they laboured intensively to build factories, the Moscow subways, hydroelectric plants, the iron and steel industry of the Don Basin, new Siberian centres of industry. Gigantic projects became the order of the day. Much of this, too, was inefficient, and a great deal rested on semi-coerced labour especially of the youth organization or Komsomol.¹⁴ But at a time when Western economic output was falling sharply, and the misery of unemployment raged, the Soviet Union underwent an industrial transformation of unprecedented rapidity. Communists and left-wing intellectuals in the West could boast that while capitalism was finished, Soviet communism was transforming Russia, unemployment was unknown and the economy was leaping ahead.

Any real achievements, however, came at the cost of political freedom. The party embodied the wisdom of history, and it, in turn, depended upon the wisdom of the leader, its First Secretary, Comrade Stalin, increasingly the recipient of adulation, who guided a worldwide movement,

resisted fascism and redefined political theory and culture. And into this world of total control – so appealing to many Western intellectuals, so devoted to history and higher purpose, and potentially the only force to stop Nazism – came a fantastic series of political upheavals in which, orchestrated by Stalin, the party turned on its own vast membership, discovered and denounced plot after alleged plot, and through a series of show trials, first of alleged plotters against the Leningrad Party, then supposed wreckers from the factional fights of the 1920s (Bukharin and Trotsky), and finally against half the army command (accused of being in league with the Germans abroad). No one knows how many party members were expelled, arrested and ultimately shot. Millions were sent to the forced labour camps, the gulags, where the toll taken by cold and disease remained very high.

Faced with this phenomenon, Western interpreters took the concept that the Italians had themselves coined – totalitarianism – and applied it to those aspects of the dictatorial experience of the 1930s that Fascism, National Socialism and Stalinist Communism had in common: the role of the party, glorification of the leader, the use of terror and arbitrary arrest to destroy solidarities and ‘atomize’ the population, and planning for war. Like all typologies, ‘totalitarianism’ subordinated specific differences among the experiences to which it was applied: the extermination of the European Jews found no parallel in the Soviet Union, nor did the latter regime ever indulge in the plans for widespread conquest that motivated Hitler. Later historians, perhaps reacting against the Cold War era idea of totalitarianism – made famous in Hannah Arendt’s volume *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – would suggest that totalitarianism was less total than originally depicted, that interstices of private life, inner opposition and culture might exist, that rule was fragmented and often inefficient. These observations are correct, probably more correct for Germany than Russia, and most correct for Italy. Nonetheless, the totalitarian experience of the 1930s was one of the defining moments of the twentieth century – a moral extreme that (along perhaps with the later Cultural Revolution in China) seemed a nightmarish culmination of history.

Outside Europe, the Fascist and Soviet experiences found admirers who thought they could borrow selected elements from the new European movements. Chinese politics remained in disarray, eight years after the declaration of a republic and displacement of the Manchu Dynasty in 1911. Revolutionary authority quickly passed from the ideological leader of the revolution, Sun Yat-sen, to General Yuan Shikai, who manipulated the last vestiges of imperial authority in Beijing, as well as claiming the mandate of the new revolutionary parliament; but Yuan died in 1916. When outraged students in Beijing marched against the feebleness of their regime on 4 May 1919, the country they sought to mobilize was fragmenting under their feet. The north of China soon disintegrated into competing warlord jurisdictions, while Japanese forces retained footholds in the former German colonies in Shandong as well as railroad centres of Manchuria, and even for a while in the coastal region of a disintegrating Russia. Back in China and based in Canton (Guangzhou) in the south, Sun Yat-sen turned to Soviet advisers and reorganized the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party, KMT) along lines deeply influenced by Soviet party practice. But the KMT included diverse factions and interests. After Sun’s death, his successor, the organizer

of the new Whampoa military academy, Chiang Kai-shek, initially continued the communist collaboration and reaffirmed Sun's venerable 'Three People's Principles' that stressed nationalism, democracy and socialism. Between 1925 and 1928, Chiang Kai-shek came the closest he would ever be to transforming the KMT into a national revolutionary force, winning control in the south and central coastal China, establishing his capital at Nanjing, and finally turning on his own unprepared communist collaborators (Plate 27). By 1928, the KMT ejected the Beijing warlords and completed their takeover. The remnants of the erstwhile Chinese Communist Party (CCP), who had, as Stalin consistently urged, collaborated with Chiang until the end, remained in disarray, until finally in the mid-1930s, they migrated to a new regional stronghold in Yenan and reoriented their strategy around Mao Zedong's concept of peasant revolution.¹⁵

Nationalist and populist political mobilization was thus a far broader experience in the 1930s than just its German or Italian manifestation might suggest. Not all of it was totalitarian; even in Japan the encroachment on civil liberties and dissenters depended less on a well-formed ideology of state or party power than intimidation by zealots and the slow stifling of opposition. Nationalist strongmen embarked on heroic modernization as in Turkey. Populists, often from the military, attacked the entrenched elites of wealth and privilege in the name of the people in Latin America. Lazaro Cardenas, president of Mexico, restored the lustre of the institutionalized revolution and its party (the PRI) by listening to country folk at the grass roots and then nationalizing the British and American oil companies. In Brazil, where the federal states retained a good deal of authority, the state governor Getulio Vargas seized power in 1930, as the precarious power sharing of state magnates broke down under the impact of the disastrous fall in coffee prices. By 1938, supported by Brazilian fascist 'Integralistas', Vargas dissolved the congress and declared a 'New State', a title that the Portuguese military leader Salazar had shortly before invented to describe his own authoritarian coup. Vargas's new constitution, while never fully implemented, nonetheless entrusted him with total power as President of the Republic.

In Argentina, the developing middle classes managed to secure a decade of liberal (radical) rule through the 1920s, only to have the earlier oligarchic elements – generals, ranchers, bankers and clergy – seize power in 1930. The military took over in 1943, and the most talented of their number, Juan Peron, built a new populist movement in symbiosis with the labour unions of Buenos Aires.¹⁶ These populist leaders mobilized working classes and the poor (the *descamisados*, or shirtless ones, in Argentina), threatening liberal newspapers and the parliaments and parties traditionally controlled by entrenched and privileged elites. The Latin Americans sometimes claimed to emulate the Fascists, and they sought to distance themselves from the United States. Indeed, a similar movement led by Governor Huey Long emerged in Louisiana in the 1930s, only to be cut short by his assassination. Wherever they arose, such movements testified to the discrepancy between parliamentary forms, which remained under the control of wealthy and powerful elites, and the reality of vast social and economic deprivation. Authoritarianism allegedly on behalf of the people thus remained (and remains) a recurrent political temptation for ambitious and demagogic leaders.

ORIGINS OF ANOTHER WORLD WAR

By the late 1930s, therefore, all the bright hopes of the League of Nations, of internationalism, of tolerance and liberalism, were sputtering to an end. Only a decade and a half separated the last military echoes of the First World War in the eastern Mediterranean (1922) from the Marco Polo Bridge clash between Japan and China (1937), which opened the East-Asian theatre of the Second World War. An even briefer six years separated the treaties of Locarno (1925), which seemed to ensure peace in Europe, from the Manchurian takeover by Japan that defied the principles of the League of Nations (1931). This period (shorter than the wars in the ex-Yugoslavia) marked the brief moment, in which it appeared that 'collective security', as embodied in the League of Nations, might be feasible.

Collective security in the inter-war years did not have the same connotation as the concept later adopted from 1949 to 1989, when it referred to the NATO alliance against and the Warsaw Pact and a perceived Soviet threat. Inter-war collective security meant that all nations in the League should come together if one of their number or a country outside demonstrated aggressive behaviour. It was more fluid and ad-hoc, yet this beautiful dream also proved hard to put into practice. By the 1930s, it was clear that some countries, pre-eminently Japan, Italy, and eventually, Nazi Germany, had expansionist designs. The first breach of collective security took place in Asia, where the Japanese military, still aspiring to a hegemonic role in northern China, became alarmed by Chiang Kai-shek's advance toward Beijing. Japanese units had established their 'dominant' power in Manchuria by 1910, and they remained involved in warlord politics after 1911, and during the 1920s. As renewed claimants to power in Beijing and North China challenged Chiang Kai-shek's claims to authority, the Japanese occupiers across the wall continually intervened, finally seizing the excuse of intervening to prevent local clashes that threatened the railroads to seize control of the Manchurian provinces in 1931 and then to reorganize the vast industrialized areas into a Japanese protectorate, named Manchukuo. The Chinese Government had little choice but to accept the *fait accompli*, and while the League sent a mission to investigate and deplored the action, it took no concrete counter-measures. Japan responded to the sanction by simply withdrawing from the international organization.

The intervention had decisive influence within Tokyo as well. The Japanese Government was divided between liberal and nationalist leaders. While the liberals included cautious military officers and admirals, and there were civilians among the nationalists, increasingly it was the military establishment that formed the backbone of the nationalists. The death of the Taisho Emperor (1912–26) and elevation of the young Hirohito (known by his official name as the Showa emperor, 1926–89) marked a difficult period for Japanese liberalism (Plate 28). The second half of the decade saw a series of rival party cabinets and leaders, who were unable to effectively organize the new potential for mass democracy, which seemed primarily to generate corruption and inside deals. The collapse of rice and silk prices (perhaps two-fifths of peasant families grew cocoons) during the Depression was disastrous for the rural economy. Rural impoverishment and the rise of prostitution as a recourse for hard-pressed peasant families, many of whom also had

menfolk in the military, meant a reaction to the liberalism and democratization of the previous decade and a call for patriotic virtues. The Manchurian adventure gave the rising militarists at home a stronghold outside the jurisdiction of Tokyo, and there was always the danger of a coup at the periphery should civilians try to limit the army's role. Tension increased and right-wing officers felt justified in taking up the weapon of assassination, following the example of young Samurai officers in the turbulent transition of the 1850s and 1860s, and by the fanatic who attacked Hara in 1921. In attempted coups of May 1932 and February 1936, the prime ministers were assassinated.¹⁷

The programme of expansion was renewed in 1937, as Japanese troops exploited a clash with Chinese soldiers at the Marco Polo Bridge near the border of Manchuria to launch a rapid invasion southward. Japanese forces moved swiftly, but were only partially successful. They rapidly took the coastal strip of China, indulged in a brutal occupation, and when they arrived at Chiang Kai-Shek's southern capital of Nanjing carried out an orgy of brutal killing of Chinese prisoners and civilians – perhaps up to 300,000, while the delegates of Western powers, who as a legacy of their own special status, observed from their extra-territorial enclave. However, Chiang Kai-Shek's government retreated into the interior with a capital at Chungking and some provisioning via the 'Burma' road into British held territory. A stalemate prevailed, and the Japanese had to contemplate a more extensive war than originally conceived.

Such a war would probably entail a collision with the West. To justify expansion, the Japanese leaders recommended uniting Asians against colonialism in a Greater East Asia in a co-prosperity sphere, although the blessings of liberation they were bringing to the Chinese invalidated the concept. It was clear that the United States, with bases in the Philippines for at least another decade, sympathized with China and would resist accepting Japanese hegemony in the western Pacific. With its colonies of Hong Kong and Singapore and its role in Burma (Myanmar) and India, Great Britain was also a potential foe even if London feared a war in Asia at a time when the German menace was growing in Europe. Another possible enemy was the Soviet Union, with its long Manchurian frontier, as well as memories of Japanese occupation of its far eastern territories during the Russian civil war, and the war they had fought over Korea during 1904–05.

Faced with Chinese resistance and the hostility of the Western powers, the Japanese had to make difficult choices. At this point, international rivalries became crucially important. For the Japanese army, a collision with the Russians seemed the greater danger or the greater opportunity. Did it not make sense to take advantage of the apparent turmoil that the vast purges suggested might be underway in the Soviet Union to strike pre-emptively? Japanese probing actions against the Soviet and Mongolian border region, however, were badly pumelled in 1939 by the Russians at the large clash at Nomonhan, which suggested a large attack would not be easy. Moreover, the German-Soviet non-aggression pact of August 1939 meant that the Japanese could not count on the Soviet's having to fight a two-front war. After Hitler's attack on Russia on 22 June 1941, that situation drastically changed, but by that time the Tokyo government was also reorienting its objectives. The Tokyo government secured its own neutrality pact with Moscow in April 1941, and advocates of continued

expansion to the south urged their case. The Imperial Navy especially looked to a wider war in the south; Japan lacked the oil for its expanded fleet. It was imported from the United States and the Dutch East Indies, but if these sources were cut off, then conquest of the Indies might be the only recourse. Such a manoeuvre would involve war with the British, the Dutch and probably with the Americans as well. As of 1938–39, these alternatives were unresolved and indeed still somewhat theoretical. Americans were still far from involvement, committed largely to neutrality, enraged by the atrocities in China, but with a relative handful of primitively armed troops in the Philippines or Hawaii hardly prepared to constitute a serious threat. But the time for decision was approaching. The German-Soviet non-aggression pact, the subsequent outbreak of war in Europe and the adverse fortunes of the Allies – with the conquest of the Netherlands and France, and the siege of Britain – American rearmament and fleet expansion and its control of steel and oil supplies, were soon to make Japanese choices all the more acute. The one option that might have spared Japan an expansion of conflict – a retreat from China and return to the regional pacts of the 1920s – was, however, precisely the choice that military control of policy-making precluded.

Manchuria and the visible ineffectiveness of the League would have important ramifications in Europe. Collective security was a weak reed. Hitler decided that he would not be bound by its constraints. In *Mein Kampf*, the book he dictated during his brief imprisonment after the unsuccessful Munich coup of November 1923, Hitler had outlined a vision of a vast 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) in east-central Europe, where German settlers would rule a population of Slavic peasant subjects. Only a few non-Germans believed that a German Chancellor would actually cling to such a brutal and megalomaniac vision. Hitler's advent did not seem to radically escalate German ambitions, but in December 1933, he demonstratively withdrew from the long-standing disarmament parleys at Geneva on the pretence that the French would not agree to equality of arms. By March 1935, he announced that Germany no longer considered itself bound by the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles; the country would activate a conscript army (to fill out the cadres that had already been planned) and build a military air force.

How should the West react? The underlying dilemmas of the new order resulting from the Versailles Treaty, based as it was on keeping Germany safely disarmed, emerged with painful clarity from 1934 to 1936. To go to war over an announcement of restored German military sovereignty seemed excessive. The European left still believed in disarmament, the new generation of youth seemed deeply pacifist, still disillusioned by what seemed the pointless sacrifice of those now in their thirties and forties. If France would not disarm, why should Germany not be allowed to restore its own forces? France, Italy, and Britain convened at Stresa to declare that they would cooperate to resist any German aggression, but their response amounted to little. For a few years after 1935, the French and British would still retain a preponderance of force. Hitler had vast ambitions, but he was not mad; he understood what was feasible and what was not. If there had been a firm Anglo-French policy of deterrence, it might have restrained his behaviour or – so Germans secretly reported over the next years – led the generals to remove their Führer rather than

be forced prematurely into a disastrous war. But in fact, neither London nor Paris was willing to sustain a policy of firmness.

The precariousness of the Versailles Treaty became even more apparent, therefore, when Hitler announced in March 1936 that he would no longer observe the strictures against garrisoning the demilitarized zone that extended from 50 km (30 miles) east of the Rhine to the French border (Plate 29). Hitler assured his nervous generals that Paris and London would not act, and he was right. The British opponents of resistance argued that the territory, after all, was German, and French policy-makers, desperate to avoid war, were happy to defer to London. Each appeaser drew support from the other.¹⁸

Diplomacy and possible deterrence of Hitler became additionally hostage to paralysing conflicts between ideological systems. On 6 February 1934, right-wing squads and pro-fascists marched on the French Parliamentary Palace across from the Place de la Concorde and had to be dispersed by gunfire. Their mobilization was followed the next day by a massive demonstration of the left-wing supporters. Just six days later, the Austrian Christian Social Party – increasingly authoritarian in orientation and seeking to hold its own against the competition of a pro-fascist Fatherland Front – forcibly suppressed the Social Democrats, shelling the apartment complexes that housed the Viennese working class and imposing a quasi-dictatorial regime.

The new Spanish Republic, voted into power in 1931 with high hopes, was also torn between left and right. After a Republican victory in municipal elections, Alfonso XIII, discredited by his long reliance on the military dictator, Primo de Rivera, departed into exile. The left-wing coalition – including the Republicans, led by the newly chosen president, Manuel Azana, the socialists, and the delegates from the Catalan and Basque regions in quest of decentralization – introduced a new constitution providing for autonomy statutes for the Catalans and the Basques, and a secularized school system, which aroused the hostility of the Catholic Church. However, the coalition was unable to agree on a land reform programme. Agrarian radicalism, organized by the powerful anarcho-syndicalist trade unions (CNT), which refused political cooperation, continued to seethe. Facing mounting problems, and dissolving from within, the left-wing coalition was voted out of power in 1934. The new centre-conservative government delayed the reforms in progress and tried to undercut the concessions to the autonomous regions, helping to provoke what proved a very ill-advised revolt by the populist leader of the socialists, the northern mine workers, and Basques and Catalans who feared they would lose their newly promised autonomy. The government flew in troops from Spanish Morocco, suppressed the revolts, arrested thousands and seemed prepared to execute harsh reprisals – a policy that in turn galvanized a new left-wing re-emergence around the issue of amnesty and organized to halt what they depicted as a slide toward fascism. This new left-wing coalition – the so-called Popular Front – emerging in both Spain and France with Stalin's blessing from afar, now included, alongside socialists and the liberal left, the communists. The Popular Front thus responded to fears of fascist advance at home and (as discussed below) to the Soviets' calibration of the Nazi threat of war.

The ideological confrontation taking place in Spain was also helping to transform European international politics,

as were issues of imperialist politics. During 1934 and early 1935, Mussolini in fact still appeared to offer London and Paris a potential ally against Germany, especially since he originally feared Nazi designs on neighbouring Austria. But this divergence of the dictators was not to last. Mussolini coveted empire, and by autumn he was exploiting a border conflict between the Italian colony of Eritrea and the Ethiopian monarchy as a pretext for possible conquest. Haile Selassie, the young emperor, appealed to the League. The British and French cabinets sought to arrange a partition scheme but it aroused popular rejection at home when its details leaked out. When the Italian invasion of Ethiopia finally began, London and Paris reluctantly had to agree to the sanctions that the League voted. These remained ineffective; oil was not on the list of products prohibited to Italy, and Mussolini moved quickly with bombs and poison gas against the Ethiopians, who fought bravely but were soon subjugated. Mussolini learned that Hitler would support his aspirations, and in the autumn of 1936, the two dictators announced the Rome-Berlin Axis. In return, Mussolini accepted Germany's annexation of Austria a year and a half later.

France, Britain, and Italy might have formed a plausible counterweight to Germany until 1935. Even France and Britain alone might still have counted on their joint deterrent capacity until after the occupation of the Rhineland. Hitler had already startled his possible adversaries by removing the danger of Poland's inclusion in an anti-German alliance by signing a non-aggression pact with Warsaw in 1934. For the realistic French foreign minister, Louis Barthou (unfortunately assassinated with the King of Yugoslavia in 1934), only an alliance with Russia could effectively contain Hitler. The Soviet regime was distasteful, but so had been the Tsarist regime before 1914. Stalin, too, became preoccupied by the rise of a German regime ideologically dedicated to eradicating Bolshevism. His foreign minister, Maxim Litvinov, became the most eloquent spokesman for collective security at the League of Nations at a moment when the West was abandoning the concept.

In 1935, at the Seventh Congress of the International Communist, the Soviets announced an important change of policy: henceforth communist parties throughout the world would be encouraged to cooperate with 'progressive' elements of the bourgeoisie and the Social Democrats they had hitherto condemned as lackeys of fascism. For the elections coming up in France and Spain, a broad Popular Front coalition promised to oust the right-wing and potentially pro-fascist regimes.

Although the left as a whole did not substantially increase its vote in the two divided politics, the new coalition allowed the Popular Front to triumph in the Spanish parliamentary election of February 1936, and in the French vote in June. In both countries, the political situation seemed particularly tense and violence could easily erupt. The rallies and strikes in France following the June elections convinced many right-wing voters that the country was on the verge of revolution.

In Spain, extremists on both sides of the political spectrum were resorting to political assassination. After increasing violence in the streets between rightist and anarchist political squads, four leading Spanish generals and their confederates in numerous Spanish cities staged uprisings on 18 July, not all of which succeeded. Burgos and northern Castilla, outside the Basque Country and the

Asturian coal region, passed to the insurgents or Nationalists. In Madrid and Barcelona, Andalusia and Aragon, Loyalists initially prevailed, although a rapid ferrying of troops from Morocco quickly secured Nationalist control of Seville and southern Andalusia. In the areas controlled by the leftists, a wave of revolution broke out after the Nationalist uprising. Throughout the summer and autumn, revolutionary committees carried out rural collectivization and wildcat takeovers of factories, but the exuberance of anarchist collectives lasted for no more than a year. The communists were zealous in suppressing their would-be rivals as Trotskyites, and together with centrist Republicans and moderate socialists took over for the long task of defending republican territory. The government's appeal for international aid was largely rebuffed, except by Mexico and the Soviet Union. Russia provided assistance and helped organize the International Brigades, a major force of sympathetic volunteers, many communists in exile from Germany and Italy, others from the United States, who were sent to augment the Republic's army and fought until late 1938. The new Popular Front French Prime Minister, Léon Blum, contemplated sending assistance, but he was unwilling to act unilaterally as the British refused to intervene arguing that they did not want the war to spread. Instead, Britain took the lead of patching together a non-intervention agreement supposedly designed to preclude all outside intervention or aid. Nonetheless, Italy and Germany were willing to supply the insurgents with air power and trained pilots. Madrid became the first city to experience sustained air bombardment, in November 1936, and German squadrons destroyed the Basque town of Guernica in the following year. The civil war lasted almost three years and cost the lives of half a million (of the 25 million) Spaniards. Over the long run, the Nationalists prevailed, slowly conquering more territory, ultimately splitting Barcelona from Madrid, and forcing hundreds of thousands over the Pyrenees in early 1939. Franco took power in the name of the Falange (itself a mixture of would-be fascists and Catholic traditionalists) and the Navarre Carlists, a far-right political party and militia (Plate 30). Spain slipped into two decades of repression and stagnation, its regime surviving the defeat of the fascist powers in 1945 because Franco kept the country out of the Second World War despite Hitler's insistence.

The Spanish Popular Front perished in civil war, while in France, the movement petered out from its own contradictions. A triumphant left-wing majority came to power in June, bringing to office a Jewish Socialist prime minister, Léon Blum, who admired Roosevelt and sought to institute a programme of wage hikes, paid vacations, and reformist measures. The right-wing opposition hated the coalition, and some of Paris's fashionable young intellectuals began to dream of Fascism and Nazi activists. The ruling coalition soon succumbed to disagreements. The moderate Radical Socialist Party of the provincial middle classes had joined the coalition to win the elections, but they hardly warmed to socialist causes, and when the communists unfurled the red flag or sang the International they had second thoughts.

As the new government took office, a massive wave of sit-down strikes shook the country. Blum summoned industrialists and union officials to sign a collective-bargaining agreement that raised wages, recognized the unions and mandated a forty-hour week and paid vacations.

The government nationalized the Banque de France and indulged in a rhetorical fusillade against 'financial feudalism'. Although Blum inherited a milder version of the European depression, joblessness was nonetheless preoccupying, and he sought a Keynesian reflationary solution involving public spending. But the government – still committed long after the British and Americans had ceased to maintain the gold value of the franc – faced capital flight. Blum finally did have to devalue; he also declared a 'pause' in his legislative programme and finally sought exchange controls to halt the export of capital. Rebuffed by the upper house of the parliament, he resigned in 1937. A new cabinet, now led by a Radical Socialist politician devoid of reformist inspiration, led the majority. Blum would return briefly in the spring of 1938 as Hitler annexed Austria. Henceforth his task was to try and rally a less partisan government for the sake of rearmament. Indeed he had nationalized the fragmented aircraft industry and his energetic aviation minister encouraged new production, but conservatives refused to cooperate until the remnants of the Popular Front were dismantled. The consequences went far beyond France, as possible projects for colonial reform in Algeria and above all Indochina were placed on hold. In the metropole, another Radical Socialist, Georges Daladier, now prepared to distance his party from their earlier cooperation with the parties and unions of the working class.

By 1938, the governing coalitions in the Western democracies had in effect long abandoned the concept of collective security and were unwilling to entertain any alternative but trying to satisfy Hitler's demands and hoping that he would be satisfied by reuniting the German peoples of Central Europe into his Reich. The French would not act without the British, and under Neville Chamberlain, the British Conservative majority was committed to settling German grievances by the policy they defined as appeasement. In March of 1938 when the leader of the Austrian Christian Socialists tried to organize a plebiscite to demonstrate that his country wanted to remain independent, Hitler marched into the neighbouring nation to great acclaim and organized a vote that showed overwhelming enthusiasm for forced integration into Greater Germany (so-called Anschluss). Hitler himself was clear that at some point war would come with the Western powers and continued his 'four year plan' of military build-up. By late spring of 1938, he turned his attention to Czechoslovakia, where the country's three million German speakers (originally from the Austrian Empire) were being stirred up by local Nazi supporters who claimed that Prague was imposing intolerable restrictions on their ethnic identity. Hitler seemed to be threatening to go to war. British emissaries and the press suggested separating the ethnic German Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and allowing it to unite with Germany. The Czech Government headed by Eduard Benes could have forced France at least to honour treaty commitments and go to war with Germany if it had insisted on taking up arms, but fearful of being abandoned, the Czechs finally consented to the deal that Chamberlain insisted on negotiating with Hitler in late September and October 1938 at the conferences held in Bad Godesberg, Berchtesgaden, and Munich. Stalin himself sensed that Britain and France were deeply reluctant to confront Hitler as he withdrew the International Brigades from Spain and in the next year would consider his own arrangement with Germany.

Chamberlain presented the Munich Agreement as a great triumph. He had preserved the peace, and Hitler had assured him that he had no further claims in Europe. The Labour opposition and, just as important, the opponents of appeasement in his own party were less sure. In any case, Hitler – taking advantage now of Polish and Hungarian designs on those portions of Czechoslovakia inhabited by their irridenta as well as of Slovak demands for autonomy – moved into Prague in mid-March 1939. He annexed Bohemia and Moravia as a ‘protectorate’ within the ‘Great German Reich’ and allowed the Slovaks their own dependent state. Chamberlain reluctantly concluded that Hitler could not be trusted to keep his word, and the British extended guarantees to Poland and Romania. Chamberlain’s apologists claimed that appeasement had won the West a year to rearm, and indeed both Paris and London accelerated their rearmament. But Hitler was also arming further, and the resources of Czechoslovakia were now lost to any Western coalition.

The major question was the stance of the Soviet Union, and on this issue scholarly debate still continues. Stalin had clearly lost interest in Popular Front collective security by late 1938. Stalin could justifiably conclude that the French and British had no serious interest in an effective military alliance with Moscow. Deep into the summer of 1939, they showed no urgency in part because they discounted the efficacy of the Soviet military forces after the purge trials and probably in part because of ideological blinkers. By the spring of 1939, Stalin dropped his foreign minister Litvinov (who as a Jew was offensive to Berlin) and was exploring negotiations with Germany. He continued to pursue them even as, by the summer of 1939, the British and French – who consistently underestimated the Soviets’ military capacity – desultorily began to approach the Russians. Hitler could offer more than the Western Allies, however: one-third of Poland and perhaps a free hand elsewhere in Eastern Europe; and on that basis the Non-Aggression (Ribbentrop-Molotov) Pact of 23 August 1939 was concluded, permitting Hitler to attack Poland a week later (Plate 31). Ostensibly the friction arose over the issue of Warsaw’s ill-treatment of Germans in the Polish Corridor, but the immediate goals were the recovery of Danzig (present-day Gdansk) and the conquest of Poland. The Germans staged a border incident to justify their invasion of Poland on 1 September, and Britain and France responded with a declaration of war on 3 September.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Second World War dwarfed the First in its extent and its destructiveness. The line between civilians and soldiers, which had still been largely observed in the First World War, was virtually erased. The Nazis used the SS as well as units of the army to pursue genocidal policies in their areas of conquest, attempting to annihilate all the Jews of Europe (they managed to kill about 6 million of Europe’s 11 million Jews, several hundred thousand Roma and Sinti, large numbers of homosexuals and people with disabilities, and many Russian and Polish civilians, as well as thousands of reprisal victims in the West). The air war increased in destructiveness: German bombers had been used with increasing devastation against Madrid and Guernica in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, against Warsaw in 1939, against

Rotterdam in 1940, and then with great destruction against London, Coventry and other targets in the Battle of Britain in 1940. By the time the Anglo-American forces began their bombing offensive, they used hundreds of four-engined bombers on city targets and killed tens of thousands in Berlin and Hamburg and other German cities, culminating in 35,000 dead in Dresden (February 1945), and, in Japan, with perhaps 100,000 dead in the great Tokyo incendiary bombing. Approximately 150,000 lost their lives when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Since the war effort depended on civilian production facilities, it was believed that such civilian casualties could be justified. Wartime famine conditions killed millions in China and even in British-held Bengal.

By the time the war ended, some 60 million people had perished from war-related causes. Populous urban centres were devastated, food production was curtailed, and millions of refugees displaced to wander across Europe. The Russians paid the heaviest toll and lost perhaps 25 million soldiers and civilians. The Jewish communities of east-central Europe had been liquidated. And in a final chapter about 12–15 million Germans were driven from the recovered Czech Sudeten land and the formerly German territories of East Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia (awarded to the Poles, who had lost the eastern borderlands they had disputed with the Soviet Union since the First World War). Perhaps 3 million ethnic Germans died in these 1945 upheavals, along with about 600,000 killed in air raids on German cities, 4 million soldiers and another 2.5 million who never returned from military captivity, a heavy price for their earlier enthusiastic support for Nazi policies. In Asia, up to 15 million Chinese may have died in famine and flooding and military-related operations; the Japanese sacrificed about 2 million of their soldiers and perhaps 400,000 of their civilians to bombing, against which they had no adequate defences. Perhaps a million Indians died in the wave of refugees who poured back from conquered Burma, and at least another million in the Bengal famine. Half a million Vietnamese perished in the famine of 1944. Even when famine did not kill millions outright, the misery of cold and hunger (as in the Netherlands in the winter of 1944–45, or besieged Leningrad) carried off infants and the elderly and imposed mass misery. Major cities of Germany, Japan and western Russia, along with Warsaw, Budapest, Manila and dozens of other urban centres, lay in ruins. The railroads, bridges, ports, and factories of Italy and northern France were devastated.

The war can best be understood as four interlocking conflicts. The first was the Anglo-French war to resist German hegemony in Eastern Europe, the war that was triggered by Hitler’s invasion of Poland and, in effect, was a resumption of the conflict of 1914–18. This war ended with Hitler’s conquests of Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries (the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) in April and May 1940, and then the capitulation and occupation of France, and the removal of all British forces from the continent a month later. This was what has been described as ‘the last European war’¹⁹. Britain was left to carry on the anti-Hitler battle on the North African front and at sea on the North Atlantic.

The second conflict was the major ideological war of the Soviet Union (in coalition with the Americans and the British) against Hitler. This war was started when, after a period of uneasy neutrality in Eastern Europe, Hitler

reverted to his long-held hostility to Soviet Communism and to his old aspirations for *Lebensraum* and invaded Russia on 22 June 1941. In the number of troops engaged, the savagery of the fighting, the German disregard of traditional restraints on violence and killing, the heroic intensity of the Soviet armies and industrial effort, this struggle was unprecedented. The turning points were the Russian defence of besieged Leningrad for almost three years, the halting of the Germans before Moscow in December 1941, and the German defeat at the end of the six-month combat for Stalingrad (from July 1942 to February 1943). This was the war that saw the largest land battles along a front almost 2,000 miles long, and vast civilian casualties, including the large-scale Jewish liquidations. Until the Anglo-American forces invaded Italy in summer 1943 and then, with larger forces, occupied France in June 1944, almost all the fighting took place on the Eastern Front, although the United States provided increasing amounts of materiel to both Britain and Russia through its Lend Lease Programme.²⁰

The third conflict was the East Asian war, starting with the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 (if not Manchuria six years earlier), but expanding in scope with the Japanese decision to invade South-East Asia – including Burma, Siam, Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines – in a series of lightning attacks in December 1941 and early 1942. It was the Japanese attack on the US naval base in Hawaii (Pearl Harbor) on 7 December that finally incited President Roosevelt to overcome the divisions of American public opinion and to bring the country into war. Although American positions in the Far East were overrun and lost, in the long run the economic potential of the country and its capacity to rebuild its navy as well as a vast air force meant that the Japanese wager on a rapid conquest was fruitless.

Tokyo's calculations still remain puzzling in some respects, for the balance of material resources doomed their enterprise. Japanese policy-makers decided that American demands to withdraw from China were unacceptable, and they hoped that if they conquered the oil resources they needed and established a defensive perimeter, the United States would seek a settlement.²¹ Although they rapidly overran much of the region, the British and Americans continued to hold southern New Guinea and fought over the next few years to reconquer the islands of Micronesia and eventually the Philippines and island bases that enabled them to launch massive air bombardments of the Japanese home islands. Japan might well have surrendered without use of the atomic bomb in August 1945, but there was strong bureaucratic momentum to use this new weapon once it had been developed, and the Tokyo leadership tried to negotiate for a less drastic outcome. Moreover, the Americans were impatient for surrender; the American General Staff clung to its predictions that an invasion of the home islands would be necessary and would be very costly if Honshu and Tokyo had to be taken by ground forces. The

Japanese were divided about surrendering until the very end and responded to the final ultimatums with enough reservations to let the impatient Americans go ahead with their programme. By this time, area bombing by massed bomber fleets with great civilian casualties had long become a matter of course.²²

The fourth conflict involved what might be called 'the war of succession' in the areas occupied by Germany and Japan, that is the war of resistance movements against the occupying forces and the collaborationist governments or pro-Axis elements that collaborated with them in France, Norway, Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland and the occupied portions of the Soviet Union. Similar struggles took place in Japanese-occupied South-East Asia. This fourth conflict was thus a war of partisan armies and savage reprisals, which tended to rage in 1944–45 as it became clear that the Germans and Japanese would lose the struggle underway. Essentially it was a war to decide which elements would rule once the Germans and Japanese were forced to surrender. In France and Italy the diverse political forces within the Resistance – communists, Catholics, non-communist socialists, leftist democrats, and even traditionalist and Catholic nationalists – largely cooperated. However, in Greece, Yugoslavia, and Poland, communists and non-communists divided (and most momentarily, perhaps, in China) and often ended up in a civil war within the civil war that divided both resistance coalitions from the collaborators and occupation forces.

Stalin and Churchill conferred in November 1944 and informally agreed that the West would have pre-eminent control (90 per cent) in Greece, while Russia might determine events in Romania, with Poland and Yugoslavia being split 50-50. Whether on this basis or not, Churchill helped the pro-Royalist resistance forces disarm the communist guerrillas, while in most of Eastern Europe, the pro-Soviet groups were supported in their rise to power. Thus in Eastern Europe and China and Viet Nam the last stages of the Second World War merged into the opening phases of the Cold War and national anticolonial struggles.²³ Even as millions of soldiers and the populations of the occupied and combatant countries experienced immense relief at the end of the immense war, new political and military struggles emerged in the colonial world and Eastern Europe.

It was remarkable that dreams of national reprisal and vengeance, which had so poisoned democratic politics and international relations after the First World War, played no significant role after the Second World War. In that sense, the old exaggerated aspirations of nationalism and domination among the European powers and Japan had burnt themselves out. It was now the turn, however, for long-nurtured ambitions to nationhood to emerge among the colonial peoples. So, too, the victory allowed aspirations for ideologically motivated regional hegemony to manifest themselves among the largest post-war powers: the Soviet Union, China, and the United States. Struggles over empire had not yet ended.

NOTES

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