

## CAUSES OF WORLD WAR II

- Failure of Treaty of Versailles
- Failure of the League of Nations
- Policy of Isolationism
- Policy of Appeasement

### **The Treaty of Versailles, 1919**

- After World War One, leaders of the victorious countries gathered at the Paris Peace Conference in France to sign the Treaty of Versailles - the treaty that officially ended the Great War.
- At the conference, American President Woodrow Wilson offered a peace plan called the "Fourteen Points," which was designed to prevent future wars.
- Wilson proposed the creation of a world organization called the League of Nations. The nations belonging to the League would be responsible for making decisions in order to settle disputes peacefully around the world and promote international cooperation.
- Wilson's plan also recommended that no revenge be taken on the countries that lost World War One.
- Wilson's plan was a good starting point for the final peace agreement, but not all of its recommendations were adopted in the final peace treaty.
- The people of Germany were outraged by the terms of the treaty.
  - Germany had to pay reparations (\$145 billion today);
  - Germany had to surrender all of its colonies;
  - Germany was to have no air force or submarines, only a small navy and an army of 100,000 troops;
  - Germany was to lose some of its territory (approx. 10%), along with its natural resources;
  - and most humiliating, Germany had to agree to the War Guilt Clause and accept full blame for the war.

### **The Failure of the League**

- One of the major final terms of the treaty was that the League of Nations be created. Interestingly, the United States never joined the League (or signed the Treaty of Versailles), weakening its reputation and authority.
- The American government returned to its policy of isolationism - of not wanting to be involved in the affairs, or wars, of others nations.

## *Japan*

- In 1931, the first serious test of the League's power occurred when Japan invaded the resource-rich Chinese province of Manchuria. China appealed to the League but it did nothing. Why?
  - Member nations were in the midst of the Great Depression and were preoccupied with their own economic problems;
  - China and Japan were far away and were not seen as a threat to other member nations.

## *Italy*

- In 1935, the League received its second test: Italy.
- Italy was disappointed with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Italy had expected more land as a reward for changing sides during the war (to the Allies). Italy was also experiencing a depressed economy following the war, with high unemployment. Italians turned to Benito Mussolini, who appealed to the needs and emotions of Italians. Mussolini promised jobs, prosperity, and that he would make Italy a great world power.
- Sensing that the League would do nothing to stop him, Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, Africa, in 1935. Again, appeals to the League were made and nothing was done. Why?
  - Nations were afraid of starting another major war.

## *Germany*

- Disgusted by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League in 1933.
- In 1935, Hitler violated the Versailles treaty when he introduced conscription and began to increase the size of the Germany military forces. Once again, the League did nothing.
- In 1936, Hitler ordered a small German army to march into the Rhineland - another violation of the Treaty of Versailles. And again, the League did nothing.
- It was clear that the organization that was set up to preserve world peace was unwilling and unable to take any action on aggressor nations. The League's member nations were all taking isolationist approaches and would not risk starting another world war.
- By 1936, three countries had successfully defied the League of Nations and got away with it: Japan, Italy and Germany. In 1936, these three countries joined together by signing an agreement to support each other.

## Policy of Appeasement

- Appeasement is the policy of giving in to the demands of an unfriendly power to prevent hostilities.
- British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King were big supporters of appeasement and were both fooled by Hitler. King and Chamberlain believed that war could be avoided if the democracies gave in to some of the demands of dictators.
- At the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, the Canadian team was the only sports team from the British Commonwealth to march past Hitler at the opening ceremonies and give him the Nazi salute.



- In 1938, despite Hitler's promise to respect the independence of Austria, marched troops into Austria and forced a takeover - the Anschluss.
- Next, Hitler turned his attention to Czechoslovakia and specifically, an area called the Sudetenland. Hitler demanded that it become part of Germany because of the number of German-speaking people that lived there.
- In 1938, Hitler invited Prime Minister Chamberlain to Berlin and promised he would make no more demands if Britain and France agreed to the German takeover of the Sudetenland. The Munich Conference agreed to the takeover in return for a written promise from Hitler that he would make no further territorial demands.
- Once again, the western leaders were fooled by Hitler. They now saw him for what he was and began to prepare for war. They knew that soon Hitler would make a demand that only force would be able to stop.
- Hitler now turned his attention to Poland. Hitler demanded some of its territory and Britain and France refused to even consider these new demands and guaranteed Poland's borders. Britain and France promised to go to war if Poland was attacked.
- On August 23, 1939, the world was shocked to learn of the Nazi-Soviet Pact made by Hitler and Joseph Stalin, dictator of the Soviet Union. These two ruthless dictators hated each other! Each seeing an opportunity to delay war with each other and to expand their territories created this temporary alliance. Hitler and Stalin secretly agreed to divide up Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe after the war.
- On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland.