

## Chapter 7 – Geopolitical and Economic Impact of the Treaties on Europe

### 7.1 GROWING DISILLUSIONMENT WITH EUROPEAN CIVILISATION

- There was a sense that European civilisation was doomed
- Facilitated the rise of right-wing, fascist groups

### 7.2 GROWING POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN EUROPE

- Most European governments were democratic after World War I, but before World War II, most became dictatorships
  - Japan was dominated by militarism
  - Italy became a dictatorship under Benito Mussolini and the National Fascist Party
  - Germany became a dictatorship under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party
  - Spain became a dictatorship under Francisco Franco after collapsing into the Spanish Civil War in 1936
  - Poland became a dictatorship under Józef Piłsudski
  - Hungary became a communist dictatorship under Bela Kun
- Formation of new countries with no democratic traditions Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia
- Deep social divisions exposed by universal suffrage – working class v. conservative elites
- Formation of many single interest parties
- Many states were plagued with separatist regions – especially due to the breakup of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire
- An example would be the 3 000 000 Germans in Czechoslovakia – Hitler instigated them to rise up and break away
- Demands for authoritarian rule – progress and unity was hard to come by under democracy
- Idea of strict obedience and loyalty to the leader – authoritarian rule
- Nazi Germany blamed the godless communism and Jewish capitalism for their problems
- Political stability in Europe was threatened by the rise of right and left wing extremist groups
- France itself was on the brink of civil war in 1936
- Right wing extremism was fascism
  - Fascism was characterised by a desire for war and expansion for national prestige
  - Anti-democratic and advocated ultranationalism
  - An example would be Nazi Germany or Italy under Mussolini
- Left wing extremism was communism
  - An example would be the Soviet Union or Hungary under Bela Kun

### 7.3 GROWING ECONOMIC WEAKNESS IN EUROPE

- The war and the impact of the Versailles Treaty only served to worsen the economic distress in Europe
- The United Kingdom and France owed war debts to the United States of America, who wanted these debts repaid
- Russia refused to repay its war debts after turning communist
- Governments would print more money, causing inflation – investors became reluctant about investing
- Governments had encouraged people to buy more war bonds to fund the war
- After the war, the returning soldiers were unemployed
- Overproduction after World War I led to an industrial slump
- The growth of industrialisation after the war saw the dominance of mass produced goods

- Small businessmen and craftsmen began to support right wing extremist parties

#### 7.4 SOCIAL DISLOCATIONS IN EUROPE

- The power of the working class was steadily growing – threatened the conservative right wing and the “Old Money”
- Social tensions between the two were exploited by the left and right wing extremists

#### 7.5 INSTABILITY IN WEIMAR GERMANY

- Faced serious instability from the extreme left and right wing groups
- January 1919 – the communist Spartacists uprising
- 1920 – right wing Kapp putsch
- 1921 – March Action
- 1923 – Beerhall putsch led by Adolf Hitler
- Stability returned after 1924 with the Dawes Plan

#### 7.6 THE CONSTANT STATE OF FRENCH INSECURITY

##### **France's** inconsistent foreign policy

- France was concerned about the danger posed by Germany to it
- 1919 to 1924 – enforcement of the punitive clauses of the Versailles Treaty
- 1923 – France occupied the Ruhr after Germany defaulted on payments
- Tried to surround Germany through defensive alliances (see next section)

##### French defensive alliances

- France formed alliances with Poland and the Little Entente (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania)
- However all sides could not agree whether their main enemy was Germany or Russia
- The United Kingdom's main enemy was Russia while France's main enemy was Germany
- This threatened Germany with a two-front war and acted as a buffer against Russian expansionism
- France relied on weak states to ensure its security and these weak states were also rivals – Poland and Czechoslovakia fought over Teschen

#### 7.7 INSTABILITY OF EASTERN EUROPE

- The Eastern European states were politically divided
- The Eastern European states had weak industries and currencies
- The Eastern European states had high debts and had low investments
- Parliamentary democracy failed to take root – all except Czechoslovakia came under dictatorships

#### 7.8 THE THREAT FROM COMMUNIST RUSSIA

- The new government rejected all previous financial commitments to the Entente Powers
- The Soviet Union was excluded from the Versailles Peace Conference – mutual hostility
- Originally sought to export communism in Europe and took advantage of the post-war political instability – establishment of the Comintern
- After 1924, under Josef Stalin, the desire to export communism was reduced due to Stalin's policy of 'socialism in one country'