

Lead-up to World War 2



C. Cullen 2006

Josef Stalin: The USSR



Stalin was the ruthless totalitarian leader of the Soviet Union and imposed economic policies that led to great hardship. In the early 1930's, millions of peasants starved to death in the Ukraine, as farmers were forced to collectivize and the harvested grain was sent to feed the urban dwellers or exported for profit. The army was a victim of Stalin's Great Purge in 1936-38, as 35 000 officers were killed, including 90% of the generals and many other top-ranking colonels, marshals, and other leaders.

Benito Mussolini: Italy



Benito Mussolini was the fascist leader of Italy during the 1920's and 1930's. Known as *Il Duce* (The Leader), Mussolini came to power by enlisting the support of Italian war veterans after World War 1. He made Italy a one party state and banned all opposition. He became one of Hitler's staunch allies prior to World War 2.

Adolf Hitler: Germany



In Germany, Adolf Hitler led the Nazi (National Socialist) Party to power. He promised the German people jobs, strict law and order, and international respect.



Economic Disaster in Germany



At the height of the depression, it took a wheelbarrow of money to buy a loaf of bread.

After World War 1, Germany suffered greatly. Their economy was in ruins and many of the young men were injured from the war. They were humiliated by the oppressive terms of the Treaty of Versailles and unable to pay back the large war reparations. The Weimar government was fragile and took abuse for signing the treaty (called the November Traitors by Hitler and others). In an attempt to restore economic stability, the government printed large sums of extra money, which led to massive inflation and more hardship.

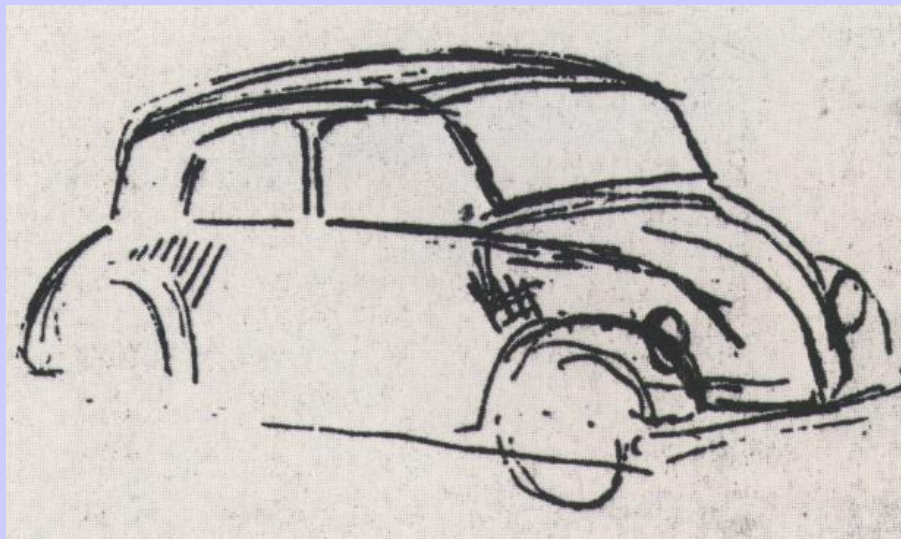
Public Works Projects



In an attempt to create jobs and rebuild the economy, Hitler supervised the building of the Autobahn (which would also serve him well as a means to transport troops and supplies during wartime) and provided money to increase the military. He also allotted money to farmers and other public works projects.



Volkswagen



Sketch that some people believe was created by Hitler in 1932.

Hitler dreamed of creating a 5 passenger “People’s Car” that would be affordable to the average German family. He commissioned the Porsche company to produce the Volkswagen. Some people claim the Hitler actually drew the original designs at a café in Munich, while others suggest that he was not directly responsible for the prototype, but just encouraged its production.

Nazi Racism and Hatred



Hitler and Nazis believed in the supremacy of the Aryan race. They persecuted many different groups of people including Jews, Communists, Roma (Gypsies), Slavs, homosexuals, physically and mentally handicapped.

Kristallnacht



Nazi racist policies became apparent to the world on November 9, 1938, when the Party sanctioned a night of violence and destruction against the Jewish population in Germany. Homes and businesses were vandalized, synagogues were burned, and people were beaten up, imprisoned, and killed. To add insult to injury, the Jews were ordered to pay for the cleanup of the broken glass and other destruction.

S.S. St. Louis



Canada's appalling record of Jewish immigration became very apparent in 1939, when Jewish passengers on the St. Louis were refused refugee status in Canada, Cuba, and the United States and were forced to return to Germany.

Tensions with Japan



In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, which was a Chinese province rich in coal, iron ore, and gold. China asked the League of Nations to intervene, but no effective action was taken. Japan withdrew from the League after official condemnation of the action. This incident created tension between Japan and the United States, as the large Chinese population in the U.S. lobbied its government to take a stand.

Italian Imperialism



In 1935, Italy invaded the independent African country of Abyssinia (later Ethiopia), hoping for more territory. The League of Nations responded in a lukewarm fashion, imposing limited sanctions on Italy. Some countries, such as Britain and France, seemed hesitant to create negative relations with Italy with a European war possibly looming.

Francisco Franco



In 1936, Francisco Franco led a military coup to overthrow the elected socialist government in Spain. The country was thrown into a bloody civil war, and over 600,000 Spaniards died in the struggle.

Foreign Involvement in Spain



Monument in honour
of the Mac-Paps

Germany and Italy supplied aircraft to support Franco's fascist army. The Soviets offered massive assistance to the left wing Republican forces. Some volunteer Canadian soldiers formed the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion (Mac-Paps) that fought on the Republican side. In 1939, Franco's fascists emerged victorious.

Guernica



One of the most publicized atrocities of the Spanish Civil War was the Luftwaffe bombing of Guernica, a small Spanish Basque village. A thousand civilians were killed in what German Air Force Commander Goring later admitted served as a useful test of terror bombing strategy.

Germany annexes Austria



Hitler announces the annexation of Austria to members of the Reichstag.

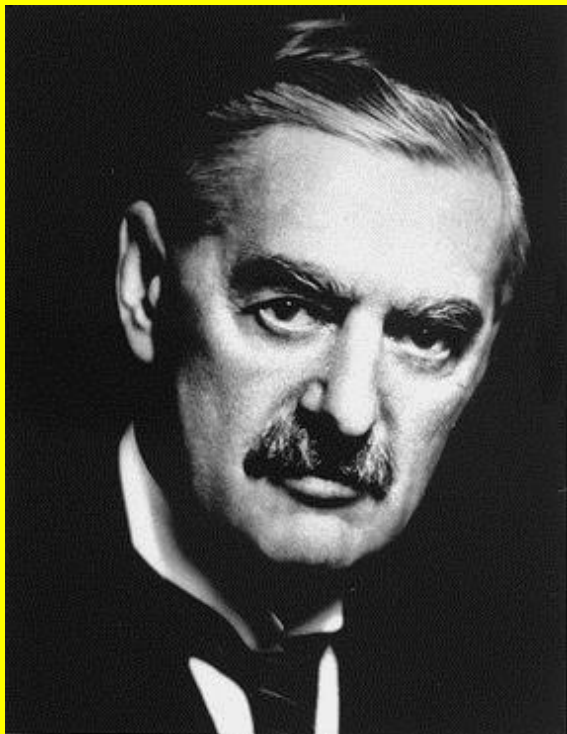
In 1938, Hitler took over Austria. He did not see this as an aggressive move: he believed that the two countries should be united as one. He named the union The Anschluss and described the joining as one people, one country, one leader.

Germany takes over the Sudetenland



In 1938, Hitler demanded that Germany be given the Sudetenland, the western region of Czechoslovakia, where 3 million (20% of the Czech population) German-speaking citizens lived. His claim was supported by the leader of the Czech Nazi Party, but opposed by the government. Czechoslovakia had a strong army at that time and might have been able to muster a reasonable defence, but France and Britain were alarmed at the prospect of war and hoped to find a diplomatic solution.

Appeasement



Neville Chamberlain met with Hitler at the Munich Conference and negotiated a deal whereby Germany could take over parts of Czechoslovakia where at least 50% of the population spoke German. The Czechs were not invited to the conference and were instructed to withdraw their armies from those regions. This was seen at the time as a positive alternative to war, but Chamberlain was later harshly criticized for appeasing Hitler and sacrificing Czechoslovakia.

Soviet-German Pact



Ribbentrop signs the official non-aggression pact as Molotov and Stalin watch.

Hitler knew that war loomed with France and Britain, and hoped to avoid a two front war. In the Soviet Union, Stalin hoped to reclaim Russian territory lost after the Treaty of Versailles. For this reason, the two leaders (who were not on good terms) agreed to a non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939. They both agreed not to attack each other. In the secret part of the deal, they also decided to split Poland between them. In addition, Germany promised not to interfere with Stalin's plan to take back Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland.

Germany Attacks Poland



After staging a fake attack on the German border (by executing prisoners and dressing them in Polish uniforms), the German army attacked Poland on Sept. 1st, 1939. Two days later, Britain and France declared war. Stalin entered eastern Poland on September 17th, claiming that his army was coming to help protect Poland from German aggression. World War 2 had officially started.