

Origins of World War II

Class 3

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Key Events on the Path to War in Europe

The Night of the Long Knives

The Purge, which took place on 30 June 1934, in which over a 100 people were murdered (including General von Schleicher, Ernst Rohm, and Gregor Strasser) was the result of the following

- Rivalry between the German Army officer corps and the leadership of the SA
- Himmler's and Goring's dislike of Rohm
- Hitler's fear that Rohm was planning a putsch against him

Significance of the purge

- Constituted Hitler's first descent into State-sanctioned murder
- Greatly enhanced the position and power of Himmler and the SS
- Greatly diminished the power of the SA – the SA's "heedless brutality" gave way to the SS's "systematic barbarism"
- By implicating the German officer corps, it gave Hitler a hold over them

Italian Conquest of Ethiopia

Violated the Covenant of the League of Nations

This outraged much of the British and French publics who demanded sanctions against Italy

British and French governments wanted Mussolini as an ally against Hitler

Result – ineffectual sanctions. These

- Discredited the League of Nations and the concept of collective security
- Made Mussolini an ally of Hitler rather than a potential enemy
- Convinced Hitler that a policy of boldness pays
- Demonstrated to Hitler that Britain and France lacked resolve

It gave Mussolini delusions of power

- Later led him into disastrous military operations against better-armed opponents
 - The Greeks
 - The British in North Africa

Remilitarization of the Rhineland

Using the French ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact, Hitler on 7 March 1936 sent a token force of 22,000 troops into the Rhineland

- Demilitarized as a result of both the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact of 1925

France had made no contingency military plans for dealing with a German remilitarization

- The French had only prepared for a general mobilization and General Gamelin, the French Army CIC, saw such a move as dangerous, too slow, and too costly

As Winston Churchill noted in *The Gathering Storm*, action now would have made the Second World War unnecessary.

- The reason for inaction was, as Conor Cruise O'Brien noted, not the military risk but the political risk

The Anschluss

Post-World War I Austria suffered because it had lost many of its markets to newly-erected tariff barriers

- The country was polarized between urban, socialist Vienna and the rest of Austria which was largely rural, Catholic, and conservative.

The Great Depression made matters even worse

- As a result, Austrian democracy broke down

What prevented Anschluss before 1938 was Mussolini's opposition

Between 1935-38, this opposition melted away

As a result, Hitler moved against Austria

Munich - 1

After Austria, Hitler's next target was Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was a successful democracy with a strong industrial base, but it was an ethnically- and linguistically-diverse country which included 3 million ethnic Sudeten Germans

- The Nazis denounced the Czechs as a “vile race of dwarfs without any culture”

Hitler's plan was to attack Czechoslovakia, penetrate its frontier defenses, and quickly conquer the whole country

- Hitler's excuse was the alleged plight of the Sudeten Germans
- To carry out his plan, Hitler ordered Konrad Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten Nazis, to make demands that the Czech government could not satisfy

Munich - 2

The Czech President, Edvard Benes, granted all of Henlein's demands even though it gave the Sudeten Germans virtual autonomy within Czechoslovakia

- He did so in response to pressure from the Western democracies who felt that by appeasing Hitler they could avoid war

As a result, Hitler became more bellicose, personally abusing Benes when they met and threatening war.

Prompted by the French, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain intervened, flying to Berchtesgaden to meet with Hitler

- Hitler convinced Chamberlain that he was willing to precipitate a major war over the Sudetenland, but that if the ethnic German areas were ceded to the Reich, there would be peace

Munich - 3

When Hitler and Chamberlain met again at Bad Godesburg, Hitler escalated his demands, saying that his forces had to occupy the Sudetenland by the end of the month

As Britain and France prepared to fight, Chamberlain made two final appeals – one to Hitler and one to Mussolini

- Mussolini, feeling that Italy was not ready for a war, told Hitler that a deal could be made that would give Hitler everything he wanted except the war he wanted

Two considerations led Hitler to opt for a negotiated settlement

- Goring, Goebbels, and the German generals opposed going to war, saying Germany was not ready for war, especially one on two fronts
- Hitler became aware that the German people did not want war

Munich - 4

The result was a 4-power conference at Munich with Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier present and both Czechoslovakia and Russia excluded

- Mussolini put forward the Bad Godesberg demands as his own which Chamberlain and Daladier accepted
 - Czechoslovakia was to surrender not only the Sudetenland but also vital industrial areas and vital fortifications
- Benes was forced to accept the settlement, leaving it defenseless

Why Munich?

The Roots of Appeasement

England's Strategic Dilemma

The British Government gave their highest policy priority to the preservation of the British Empire – an empire which they saw as the source of British power and greatness

The British (and especially the dominions) saw the major threat to this empire as coming from Japan, not Nazi Germany.

Policies aimed at stopping or defeating Japanese aggression in Asia were incompatible with policies likely to lead to war with Germany or Italy

The Military force structure needed to confront Japan was far different from the force structure needed to fight Nazi Germany

The Bombers Will Get Through

Accepting the strategic bombing theories of Generals Emilio Douhet and Billy Mitchell,

- The British Cabinet felt that the complex infrastructure and supply & water systems of a modern city would be destroyed by large-scale bombing
- They also believed the inability of governments to defend civilian populations would adversely affect public morale, forcing the government to make peace

For a British Cabinet situated in London, this was a major consideration

The fact were that cities turned out to be very durable entities that could still function despite massive bombing and that bombing civilians enraged them, making them more supportive of the war effort

Neville Chamberlain

Born in 1869; died 7 November 1940

Son of a noted British politician and MP – Joseph Chamberlain

Was apprenticed as an accountant and became a businessman

Director of National Service (1916-17) – head of the organization charged with coordinating conscription and draft deferments for essential workers

Elected to Parliament in 1919

Chancellor of the Exchequer (1931-1937)

Prime Minister (28 May 1937-10 May 1940)

Notes on Chamberlain - 1

As Director of National Service, he had responsibility for the conscripting into the military many of the young men who were to die in the trenches of the Western Front

- It is hard to think that this did not haunt him and his commitment to peace and the avoidance of war

As Chancellor of the Exchequer (our equivalent to the Secretary of the Treasury) and a former businessman, Chamberlain was committed to balanced budgets and the reduction of the debt (and interest due on same) inherited from World War I

- He thus saw rearmament as threatening balanced budgets and so rearmed much slower than did Germany

Notes on Chamberlain - 2

Chamberlain wanted no more Passchendaeles or Sommes

Chamberlain believed that peace could be purchased by righting the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles

Chamberlain could not believe that Hitler, despite his bellicose posturing and wild rants, wanted war

Chamberlain believed that a large-scale and fast defense buildup would jeopardize exports, deplete foreign exchange reserves, and create a boom that would be followed by a slump and political defeat

- This would put an incompetent Labor Party in power

Chamberlain waving the signed Munich Agreement



Consequences of Munich - 1

Hitler realized that a massive propaganda campaign was necessary to prepare the German people for war

Hitler became more determined than ever to deprive the rump Czechoslovakia of its independence

Munich, by postponing war, shaped its future course

- It led Stalin to make a deal with Hitler rather than form a united front with Great Britain and France against Hitler
- it ensured the defeat of France by enhancing German military power through its acquisition of Czech tanks and the Czech armaments industry
- It almost led to the defeat of England since Chamberlain limited expenditures on armaments due to both a desire to balance the budget and the belief that the danger of war had passed

Consequences of Munich - 2

If Hitler had gone to war over Czechoslovakia

- He would have had a war on two fronts since Russia had a treaty with Czechoslovakia and France to come to Czechoslovakia's defense provided that France also do so.
- He would not have had the 10 armored divisions that he had in 1940 in the invasion of France
- It was quite possible that the German generals, who opposed going to war over Czechoslovakia, would have overthrown him

Hitler seizes Czechoslovakia

The rump Czechoslovakia, having yielded over the Sudeten Germans, had to give autonomy to Slovakia and Ruthenia.

- It also had to yield a substantial portion of Slovakia to Hungary and territory to Poland
- Finally, it had to absorb 30,000 German and 115,000 Czech refugees who fled the German-occupied Sudetenland

In November 1938, Emil Hacha succeeded Benes as President

Hitler, intent on war against Poland after it refused German demands, decided it was time to eliminate Czechoslovakia

Hitler Seizes Czechoslovakia - 2

Hitler summoned Hacha to Berlin and told him of the coming German invasion, persuading him to order the surrender of the Czech army

On March 15th, German troops entered Bohemia and Moravia, meeting practically no resistance

On March 16th, Hitler visited Prague and declared Bohemia and Moravia to be German protectorates

- Goring started using Czech resources to reinvigorate the flagging Four Year Plan

By seizing Bohemia and Moravia, Hitler had done something he said he would never do – incorporate non-Germans into the Reich

Consequences

It provided hard evidence that Hitler was both predatory and untrustworthy – that his promises meant nothing

- Led Chamberlain to give a guarantee of Poland's independence

It prevented any possible accommodation between Hitler and Great Britain

- Hitler and von Ribbentrop never realized that what for them was a pretext was for London a real issue

Skeptical of England's and France's willingness to really stand up to Hitler's aggression, it led Stalin to engage in a dual-track negotiation with both Hitler and the Western democracies to see who would provide the best deal

Stalin & Russia

The Theoretical Bases of a Soviet Dictatorship

Marx saw Capitalism as an unstable system that would inevitably give rise to a proletarian revolution

Marx predicted that the proletarian revolution would give rise to a dictatorship of the proletariat that would smash the power of the bourgeoisie, paving the way for the classless society of Communism

Lenin, as a disciple of Marx in an autocratic society, believed that only a tightly-controlled elitist revolutionary organization that could evade the repression of the Czarist police could gain power

- This was distinct from a mass-membership political party run on democratic lines so that once in power it was prone to dictatorship

Stalin's Personality

Stalin was the son of a tyrannical and abusive father

- Thus, Stalin learned to hate and also how to suppress hostility until the opportune moment

The rigorous discipline of the seminary along with his upbringing led to a deep hatred of those in power

When he came into contact with Communist ideology, he embraced it with the fanaticism of a true believer

Life in a revolutionary underground intensified Stalin's paranoia, ruthlessness, and guile

Notes on Paranoia

Paranoids tend to be suspicious of other people

- They tend to feel that others, if not out to get you, at least have something that they want in their dealings with you
 - They have a relatively high degree of hostility but they can be good at concealing it
- They are prone to conspiracism – if something is going wrong in either their personal lives or in society as a whole, then some conspiracy is behind it
- They are prone to scapegoating – and the hatred is intensified if the scapegoat can be identified with a conspiracy
- They tend to project onto others traits or failings they have in themselves

There are degrees of paranoia – its on a continuum

Paranoids can be highly intelligent and often highly successful in many lines of endeavor

- They often win out in conspiratorial environments

They have a need for adulation

The Struggle for Power

In 1922, Stalin was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party's Central Committee

- This position had control over the composition of the various party committees, including the key Central Committee, thus enabling Stalin to fill key positions with his supporters and loyalists

After Lenin's death in 1924, there was a struggle for power in the Kremlin

Stalin, used his control of the Central Committee and influence in the Politburo to oust Trotsky and Kamanev from the Politburo in 1926

By 1929, Stalin had achieved control of the Communist Party and through it control of the Soviet state

- One thing that helped Stalin was gaining major influence over the Lenin Institute at the Party's Sverdlov University
- His *The Foundations of Leninism* in which he explained Lenin's ideology to the new Party members established Stalin as the authoritative interpreter of Lenin

Collectivization of Agriculture

As a paranoid and a Communist, Stalin felt that Capitalist powers would eventually attack Russia, taking advantage of her economic backwardness

- Unless Russia caught up with the West within a decade, it would be crushed

In order to both feed the industrial workers and have grain to export for Western technology, Russia had to either greatly increase agricultural production or decrease the rural standard of living

- Since Soviet investment was directed toward heavy industry, this meant few consumer products so the peasants had little incentive to increase production

Stalin chose to collectivize agriculture as a means of extorting grain from the peasants

Industrialization

By depressing living standards, the Soviets were able to divert a significant portion of GNP to capital investment

- Most of the investment went into heavy industrial capital goods, such as steel, construction materials, mines, and railroads. As time went on, an increasing amount of investment went into military-related production
- Unfortunately, a lot of investment was wasted since there was no market mechanisms to tie production to demand.
 - Thus, the Soviet economy did very poorly in meeting consumer demand
 - Soviet production, however, could be very efficient in areas where the demand was monopsonistic – there was only one user or consumer for the goods produced
 - Monopsonistic products are typically military-related products like tanks, aircraft, ships, guns, etc.

The Purges - 1

Given Stalin's paranoia, his penchant for seeing conspiracies against his rule, and his tendency to scapegoat

- The purges of the 1930s seem as logical consequences
- Another consequence was an expansion of the power of the OGPU (Secret Police) and the creation of networks of informers so that every factory, office, apartment building, and organization had its informers

The purges involved three major public show trials

The purges also affected large segments of the political, military, diplomatic, and intellectual leadership of Russia

The Purges - 2

3 of the 5 Army Marshals (5-stars), 13 of 15 Army Commanders (4-stars), 50 of 57 Corp Commanders, and 154 out of 186 division commanders. 4% to 8% of all Red Army officers, and 8 of 9 Admirals

10 of the 11 presidents of the non-Russian Soviet republics. Of 175 commissars in the People's Republics, 150 lost their lives. At least 44 percent of all senior diplomats were purged.

There were also other extensive purges of writers, journalists, and scientists (especially biologists and astronomers)

People with foreign connections, such as returning emigres, diplomats, secret agents, athletes who had competed abroad, volunteers who had fought in Spain, and Communists from other countries who had sought sanctuary in the Soviet Union

Up to 4 million people, possibly more were purged. Some 750,000 of these were shot. Most of the others went to the Gulag

Consequences of the Purges - 1

Economic growth fell from 12% to 2% as managers, engineers, technical experts, and workers were purged and the remaining workers were demoralized

Everyday life was disrupted

- Street and place names kept changing
- Libraries had to remove the books of those who had fallen out of favor
- School textbook had to be constantly revised
- Public posters and photos had to be changed to remove purged individuals (and this in an age before Photoshop)
- People became guarded in what they said to others
 - You never knew who might be an OGPU informer

Consequences of the Purges - 2

Discredited Russia and, to some extent Communism as an ideology, in the eyes of Western elites, intellectuals, and publics

Impoverished Soviet art, science, and intellectual life

- Stalin's support of Lysenkoism crippled genetics and the biological sciences in the Soviet Union

Created a pervasive climate of intellectual and personal mistrust

- Soviet citizens learned to avoid contact with Westerners, even those fluent in Russian

Consequences of the Purges - 3

Isolated Stalin and the Soviet leadership from what was really going on in the country

- Fearful sychophants told them what they thought Stalin and the leadership wanted to hear rather than what was true

Greatly weakened for a time the Soviet Army

- This showed up in the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland after the Nazi-Soviet Pact and Hitler's invasion of Poland
- It showed up more egregiously in the Soviet Army's performance in the Russo-Finnish War

Led both Hitler and the West to greatly underestimate the ability of the Soviet Union to withstand a German invasion