

The World Between the Wars: Revolutions, Depression, and Authoritarian Response

The “Roaring Twenties”

- Europe faced massive economic problems after the First World War, yet an optimistic attitude prevailed. In the arts, Pablo Picasso led the **cubist movement**, while writers and composers forged new styles. Albert Einstein’s work challenged traditional physics. Mass consumption was a powerful force, changing as women became important consumers. Yet signs of economic troubles worried some.
- Canada, Australia, and New Zealand won independence and became equal members in the British Commonwealth of Nations. In the United States, the pace of industrialization continued, with attendant changes. Production was improved by the innovations of Henry Ford and others. The United States exported its own culture for the first time, in the form of jazz music and Hollywood films. The nation withdrew into isolation after a period of involvement in world affairs. Japan continued to industrialize, relying on exports. Internal strains increased in Japan between the military and the government.
- In 1919, Benito Mussolini founded the *fascio di combattimento*, which gave fascism its name. Reliant on aggressive nationalism, the movement called for a corporate state. The roots of nationalism lay in the post-Enlightenment disenchantment with liberalism. Postwar Italy was a land ripe for an ideology that rejected liberal ideals in favor of action. In 1927, the king of Italy invited Mussolini to form a government. Mussolini suspended elections in 1926.
- New nations in Eastern Europe were born in a climate of intense nationalism. Rivalries weakened them from the outset. The fall of agricultural prices in the 1920s and the Great Depression led to social tensions that paved the way for authoritarian governments.
- Political developments in the 1920s defy broad generalizations. The advance of democracy in some nations was paralleled by challenges to democracy in others, or even in the same country.

Revolution: The First Waves

- In Latin America, industrialization brought social conflict. Some political change had taken place. **Syndicalism** tapped labor unrest, while in Mexico, outright revolution occurred.

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- The **Mexican Revolution** was in part a response to the outbreak of World War I. During the Great War, Latin American countries lost important markets and became more economically independent. By the end of the war, however, U.S. influence had replaced that of Britain. The dictatorship of **Porfirio Díaz**, in place since 1876, had led the way in industrialization, but at the cost of silencing dissent. Even so, tensions persisted. The United States owned up to twenty percent of Mexican territory. In 1910, **Francisco Madero** intended to run against Díaz. When he was imprisoned and a rigged election put Díaz back in power, rebellion followed. The revolt was led in the north by **Pancho Villa**, in the south by **Emiliano Zapata**. Díaz was replaced by Madero, and then Zapata removed Madero. **Victoriano Huerta** began a dictatorship, but he too was forced out. **Alberto Obregón** finally became president in 1921. The long war had led to 1.5 million deaths. The new **Constitution of 1917** promised liberal reforms.
 - The revolution was largely fought over the issues of nationalism and *indigenism*. These also inspired such artists as **Diego Rivera** and **José Clemente Orozco**. Writers and composers also took up these themes. At the same time, the **Cristeros** fought against secularization. The war also brought renewed U.S. intervention. The Party of the Institutionalized Revolution—the PRI—dominated Mexican politics in the 1920s and 1930s.
 - Food shortages resulting from World War I led to food riots and strikes in St. Petersburg in 1917. The workers' soviet took the city, and the tsar then abdicated. **Alexander Kerensky** and other moderates sought liberal reforms. However, as the war dragged on and the revolutionary leaders failed to implement real land reform, unrest broke out. Lenin led the November Revolution of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Peace with Germany was soon made irrelevant by Germany's defeat. The Russian delegation was snubbed at Versailles. Lenin and his followers lost to the Social Revolutionary Party in parliamentary elections. In response, Lenin put in its place a Congress of Soviets, imposing Communist Party control. The United States, Britain, France, and Japan intervened, with little impact. Economic and political chaos resulted from Lenin's actions.
 - Leon Trotsky's **Red Army** imposed order. Lenin's **New Economic Policy** of 1921 helped to stabilize the economy. By 1923, a new system was in place: the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**. The **Supreme Soviet**, nominally a parliament, was made up of representatives chosen by the Communist Party.
 - The first years of communism in Russia saw a great deal of experimentation and debate. Lenin's death in 1924 led to a struggle for power. **Joseph Stalin** emerged as victor. While Lenin had hoped the Russian example would engender a global wave of communism, to be organized by the **Comintern**, Stalin emphasized nationalism. He also pushed industrialization through a program of **collectivization**.
 - In China, the Qing dynasty fell when the last emperor abdicated in 1912. The conflict that followed led to the rise of Mao Zedong. Military leaders such as **Yuan Shikai** were prominent. University students, intellectuals, and secret societies presented their own solutions, but Japan's intervention decided the issue.
 - Sun Yat-sen led a coalition of anti-Qing groups. He was elected president in 1911 by his Revolutionary Alliance, but he ceded power to Yuan Shikai in 1912. It soon became clear that Yuan wanted to be emperor. Japan entered the European war

as a British ally, quickly taking German territory in the region. Indecision vis-à-vis aggressive Japanese demands led to Yuan's fall in 1916. Japan gained control of northern China in the peace of Versailles. Chinese outrage at the concessions to Japan led to demonstrations and the **May Fourth Movement**. Calling for democracy and repudiating traditional systems, the movement had a large following. Yet with warlords in power, more was needed. The Bolshevik success in Russia prompted Chinese intellectuals to adapt Marxism to China. **Li Dazhao** postulated that in China, peasants would take the place of urban workers in the revolution. **Mao Zedong** was highly influenced by Li. A meeting of Marxists in Shanghai in 1921 formed the nucleus of the Chinese Communist Party.

- The **Guomindang**, or Nationalist party, led by Sun Yat-sen, prevailed in the south. They concentrated on international and political issues, leaving aside critical domestic issues, including land reform. An alliance with the Communists was declared in 1924. The **Whampoa Military Academy**, founded in 1924, was first headed by **Chiang Kai-shek**.
- The death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925 left an opening filled by Chiang Kai-shek. His nationalists took Shanghai and Beijing. He attacked the Communists, bringing Mao Zedong forward in opposition. The latter led the **Long March** in 1934 to create a new base in Shanxi. The Japanese invasions in the 1930s distracted Chiang from opposing Mao.

The Global Great Depression

- The **Great Depression** was caused by structural weaknesses in industrial economies. A price collapse occurred as a result of cheap agricultural imports and rising European production. Recovery in the 1920s was based partly on U.S. loans. Production from Africa and Latin America also outstripped demand, causing hardship in those areas. Responses were local: protectionism and other measures intended to protect national economies worsened the situation.
- In 1929, the New York stock market collapsed. Bank failures in Europe followed. Agricultural investment slowed, production fell, and then unemployment followed, reaching new highs. Although similar to earlier depressions, the Depression of 1929–1933 was more intense and of longer duration. Social disruptions included suicides and shantytowns. Massive unemployment led to voluble criticism of governments. The Depression also provoked disenchantment with the optimism of the postwar period. Depression in the West spread to the rest of the world.
- National responses to the Depression fed existing political and social problems. Parliamentary systems were challenged everywhere, either becoming ineffective or being eliminated. In France, new political parties emerged: socialist, communist, and the **Popular Front**. Deep divisions led to stagnation. In some countries, such as Sweden, governments grew to resemble modern welfare states.
- Elected president of the United States in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt presented the country with his **New Deal**. The Social Security system offered protection in unemployment and old age, while the government took a larger role in stimulating industry and regulating banking. While the New Deal did not end the Depression, it did promote faith in the government, sidestepping the problems of paralysis and revolt that beset so many countries.

The Authoritarian Response

- In Germany, the Depression brought to power a fascist government. A result of the Great War, fascism offered a different response than the discredited liberal program. The German National Socialist, or Nazi, Party made fascism a major international force, stopping the spread of liberal democracies. Adolph Hitler promised a return to traditional values, ridding Germany of Jewish influence, and solving Germany's economic problems. Through agreements with German leaders, Hitler then established a **totalitarian state**. He used the **gestapo** to implement control over every facet of life. Targeting Jews as the cause for most of Germany's problems, after 1940 Hitler aimed to eliminate all Jews from Germany in the Holocaust. Behind all of these goals lay intensive military preparations.
- Hitler's success in Germany led to fascist movements in Hungary, Romania, Austria, and Spain. Mussolini was emboldened, attacking Ethiopia in 1935. The League of Nations took no action, and the Italians took over the country. In Spain, the advent of fascism led to the **Spanish Civil War** in 1936. Francisco Franco was backed by the fascist Falange against forces supporting the Republic. After three years of fighting, Franco won in 1939.
- Liberalism in Latin America was foundering by the 1930s. Traditional social divisions were little changed. Intellectuals, writers, and artists looked to Latin American solutions for Latin American problems. A reform movement spread from Argentina to the rest of the continent. Socialist and communist movements arose.
- The Great Depression had its impact on Latin America. **Corporatism**, echoing some of the ideals of fascism, took hold. President **Lázaro Cárdenas** of Mexico began thorough land reform, winning broad support.
- In Brazil **Gétúlio Vargas** was elected president in 1929. His *Estado Novo* took Mussolini's Italy as its model. Joining the Western powers in World War II, Brazil benefited economically. Vargas's suicide in 1954 ironically ensured his policies would dominate subsequent regimes.
- In Argentina, in 1929, an attempt to overthrow the Radical Party regime failed. Federations of workers emerged as industrialization progressed. The military backed conservative governments in the 1930s, until in 1943 a military government took power. **Juan D. Perón** was one of many military nationalist leaders. With the support of his wife, Eva Duarte, he gained popular support, especially after failed U.S. attempts to discredit him. Perón nationalized the railways, telephone systems, and the petroleum industry. In spite of broad support, his coalition fell apart. He was forced into exile by the military, returning briefly in 1973. His death the next year opened the door to military dictatorship.
- The Depression had a deep impact on Japan, creating political schisms. In 1932, the military took control of the government. War with China broke out in 1937 and led to Japanese control of Manchuria, Korea, and Taiwan. Control turned to brutal oppression, particularly in Korea.
- Political developments in Japan eased the effects of the Depression. Industrialization resumed in the 1930s, at an accelerating pace. To boost loyalty, large companies awarded lifetime employment contracts to some.
- The Soviet Union had been somewhat immune to the Depression. Stalin continued his program of industrialization. Borrowing technology from the West, he nevertheless maintained government control of production.

- Collectivization—the establishment of state-run farms—began in 1928. It was a means of control as well as of improving production. Although peasants in general welcomed reform, the kulaks did not. Failing to cooperate, millions were killed or deported to Siberia. After intense disruption and famine in the move to collectivization, the system did work. In the industrial sector, Stalin’s **five-year plans** were very successful. Unlike the West, industrialization in the Soviet Union concentrated on heavy industry. Strict distribution of resources was used to produce remarkable results.
- As in the West, industrialization led to overcrowded cities, but with the difference that welfare systems were in place. In spite of strict control of all levels of production, workers’ issues gained more attention early on than they had in the West.
- Under Stalinism, the arts were carefully managed. **Socialist realism** celebrated the progress and camaraderie of the socialist experiment. Stalin’s methods included use of the secret police, and purges of possible opponents. The **Politburo** became just a rubber stamp for Stalin’s policies. Isolation gave way in the 1920s to some international diplomacy. Hitler’s rise was a threat to Russia, especially given his disdain for the Slavic peoples. An agreement with Hitler in 1939 gave the Soviet Union time to arm itself.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. World War I and the immediate aftermath of the Versailles Treaty
 - (A) produced in the 1920s a decade of great economic instability.
 - (B) resolved many, if not most, of the issues leading to World War I.
 - (C) led to the political polarization of European parties between left and right.
 - (D) saw a realistic appraisal that wars could be avoided.
 - (E) had little demographic or social impact on Western society.
2. All of these conditions were characteristic of the 1920s in the West EXCEPT:
 - (A) industrial production boomed.
 - (B) mass consumption standards rose.
 - (C) technology increasingly impacted the economy and daily life.
 - (D) unemployment declined.
 - (E) women joined the workforce in ever-larger numbers.
3. Which of the following statements concerning women’s suffrage in the 1920s is most accurate?
 - (A) Despite their service in World War I, women failed to win the vote everywhere but in the United States.
 - (B) Women had been briefly granted the vote during the war, but the female franchise was rapidly won when the conflict ended.
 - (C) Women’s suffrage was granted after World War I in Britain, Germany, and the United States.
 - (D) Granting women’s suffrage during the war converted many governments to feminist principles.
 - (E) Women had the vote throughout the pre-war period, but it was suspended indefinitely during the early years of the war.
4. Which of the following factors limited Japanese economic advance prior to World War II?
 - (A) continued dependence on relatively few export products
 - (B) low population growth
 - (C) the failure of the agricultural economy
 - (D) rapidly increasing wages in the workforce
 - (E) none of the above

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5. Which of the following reforms was NOT included in the Mexican Constitution of 1917?
- (A) the state takeover of property of the Catholic Church
 - (B) limited foreign ownership of key resources
 - (C) land reform
 - (D) guaranteed rights for workers
 - (E) all of the above
6. The Mexican muralist movement was indicative of
- (A) the anti-Communist spirit of the Mexican Revolution.
 - (B) the policy of indigenism that was incorporated into the post-revolutionary reforms.
 - (C) the failure of the revolution to incorporate the Indians.
 - (D) the failure of Latin America to develop a significant indigenous cultural form.
 - (E) Chilean culture, and did not originate in Mexico.
7. How did Stalin's view of Communism differ from that of Lenin?
- (A) Lenin was only interested in the Russian revolution and did not visualize any further revolutionary process.
 - (B) Lenin was more interested in including a broad swath of the Russian population in the Communist movement.
 - (C) Stalin concentrated on a strongly nationalist version of Communism.
 - (D) Stalin was not a member of the Communist Party.
 - (E) Their views did not differ.
8. Who succeeded Lenin as head of the Soviet State?
- (A) Joseph Stalin
 - (B) Nikita Khrushchev
 - (C) Leonid Brezhnev
 - (D) Leon Trotsky
 - (E) Alexander Kerensky
9. Sun Yat-sen was the
- (A) first leader of the Communist discussion group at the University of Beijing.
 - (B) most powerful regional warlord of Northern China.
 - (C) leader of the Revolutionary Alliance and the first elected president of China.
 - (D) head of the Whampoa Military Academy.
 - (E) last of the Japanese shoguns.
10. Which of these statements about post-revolutionary Mexico is a FACT?
- (A) Mexican revolutionaries attempted to assimilate Indians into national security.
 - (B) The revolution disapproved of land redistributions to peasants.
 - (C) The Roman Catholic Church was unaffected by the Revolution.
 - (D) The United States accepted the revolution and its changes largely without comment.
 - (E) Mexico nationalized foreign economic holdings throughout the country.

Free-Response Question

How did 20th-century revolutionary movements differ from those of the 19th century?

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (C) is correct.** In Europe, the postwar period polarized European politics.
- **2. (E) is correct.** Although important in the workforce during World War I, women made little progress in the realm of employment in the 1920s.
- **3. (C) is correct.** The vote was one of the real gains made by women in the 1920s.
- **4. (A) is correct.** Japan's dependence on exports to foreign markets made it vulnerable to global market forces.
- **5. (A) is correct.** The Constitution aimed to implement all but the takeover of Church property.
- **6. (B) is correct.** The muralists, such as Diego Rivera, were inspired by indigenous artistic traditions.
- **7. (C) is correct.** While Lenin hoped the Revolution would spread to other countries and made plans to oversee global communism, Stalin was interested only in Russian communism.
- **8. (A) is correct.** Joseph Stalin followed Lenin.
- **9. (C) is correct.** Sun Yat-sen came to prominence not as a military leader, but as an anti-Qing rebel.
- **10. (E) is correct.** Only E applies to the post-revolutionary period in Mexico.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

How did 20th-century revolutionary movements differ from those of the 19th century?

The 19th-century revolutions were inspired by Enlightenment philosophies, while those of the 20th century, although featuring some of the same ideals, were motivated by different aims. Ideals of the Enlightenment, along with conditions particular to France, drove the waves of revolutions up through 1949. Some of the goals were the abolition of rank and authoritarian rule. The revolutions of the 1900s, on the other hand, were largely in response to industrialization and colonial rule. Issues included worker's rights, property rights, and welfare provisions. In areas such as Latin America, revolutions also were affected by racial issues and opposition to colonial rule.

