

The Rise of Dictators

READING FOCUS

- How did Stalin change the government and the economy of the Soviet Union?
- What were the origins and goals of Italy's fascist government?
- How did Hitler rise to power in Germany and Europe in the 1930s?
- What were the causes and results of the Spanish Civil War?

MAIN IDEA

Dictators in the Soviet Union, Italy, Germany, and Spain formed brutal, repressive governments in the 1920s and 1930s. They were motivated by their political beliefs and a desire for power.

KEY TERMS

totalitarian
fascism
purge
Nazism
Axis Powers
appeasement

TAKING NOTES

As you read, complete this chart listing the actions of dictators in the Soviet Union, Italy, and Germany in the 1930s.

Country	Actions Taken
Soviet Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined farms into collectives • Sent millions to labor camps in Siberia
Germany	
Italy	



Adolf Hitler presided over massive party rallies, including this one at Nuremberg.

Setting the Scene In September 1936, German dictator Adolf Hitler called hundreds of thousands of his followers to a week-long rally in the German city of Nuremberg. Included with political meetings and parades was a nighttime ceremony: the Oath under the Cathedral of Light. A Nazi Party booklet described the beginning of the ceremony.

“180,000 people look to the heavens. 150 blue spotlights surge upward hundreds of meters, forming overhead the most powerful cathedral that mortals have ever seen.

There, at the entrance, we see [Hitler]. He too stands for several moments looking upward, then turns and walks, followed by his aides, past the long, long columns, 20 deep, of the fighters for his idea. An ocean of Heil-shouts and jubilation surrounds him.”

—The Party Rally of Honor

Amid waving red banners and circling searchlights, Hitler led the audience of 180,000 in a “holy oath” to Germany.

Grand spectacles like the Nuremberg Party Rally were essential to Hitler's **totalitarian** rule. A totalitarian government exerts total control over a nation. It dominates every aspect of life, using terror to suppress individual rights and silence all forms of opposition. The pride and unity of the Nuremberg rally hid the fact that people who disagreed with Hitler were silenced, beaten, or killed. Hitler's power rested on the destruction of the individual.

Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini governed by a philosophy called **fascism**. Fascism emphasizes the importance of the nation or an ethnic group and the supreme authority of the leader. In the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin based his totalitarian government on a vicious form of communism. Like fascism, communism relies upon a strong, dictatorial government that does not respect individual rights and freedoms. Historically, however, Communists and Fascists have been fierce enemies.

Stalin's Soviet Union

While Lenin led the Soviet Union, the worldwide Communist revolution he sought never materialized. Even in his own country, economic failure threatened Communist control of the government. Lenin eased up on the drive to convert all property to public ownership. His New Economic Policy (NEP) allowed some private business to continue. Stalin took over after Lenin's death in 1924. Stalin decided to abandon the NEP and take "one great leap forward" to communism. He launched the first of a series of five-year plans to modernize agriculture and build new industries from the ground up.

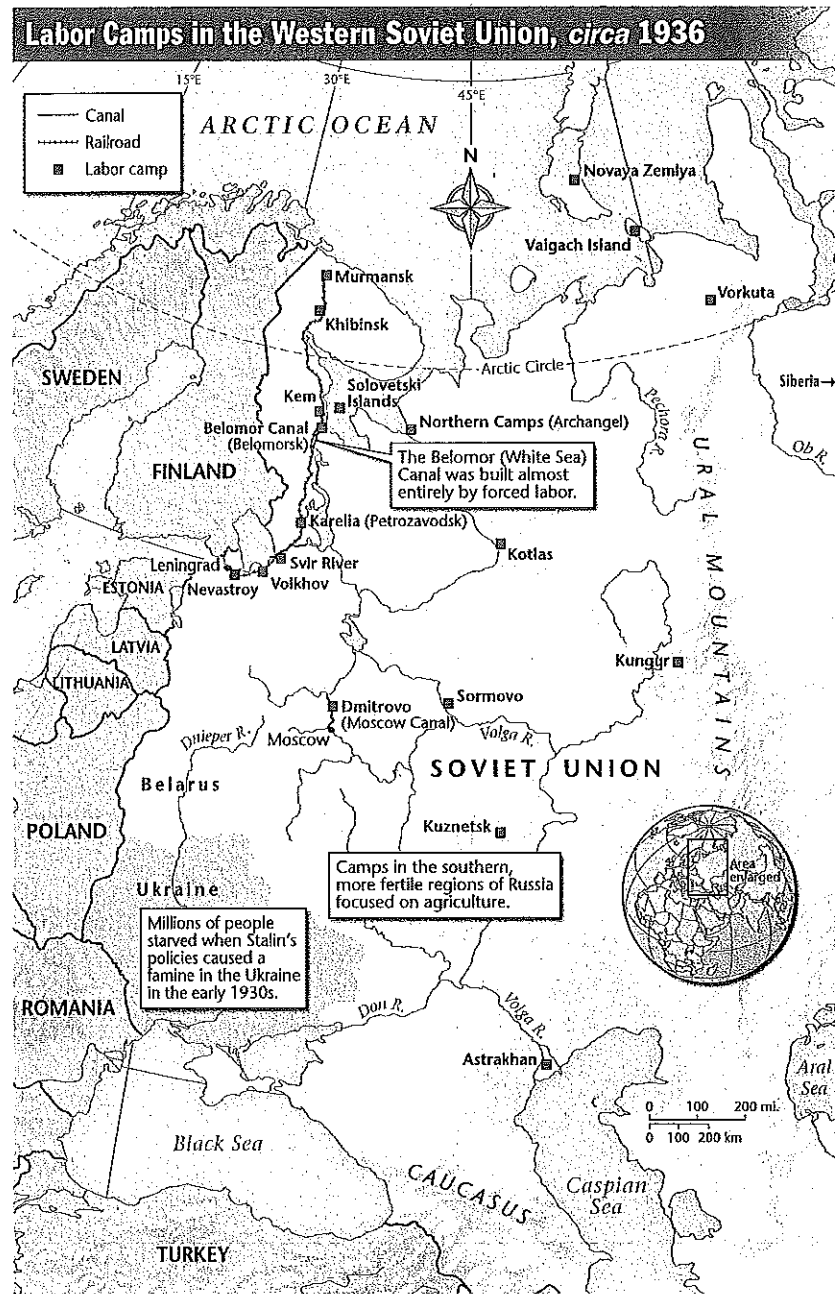
Stalin's Economic Plans To modernize agriculture, Stalin encouraged Soviet farmers to combine their small family farms into huge collective farms owned and run by the state. Facing widespread resistance, Stalin began forcing peasants off their land in the late 1920s.

The state takeover of farming was completed within a few years, but with terrible consequences. In the Ukraine and other agricultural regions, Stalin punished resistant farmers by confiscating much or all of the food they produced. Millions of people died from starvation, and millions more fled to the cities. Stalin also sent approximately 5 million peasants to labor camps in Siberia and northern Russia.

In addition to the human cost, the collectivization campaign caused agricultural production to fall dramatically. Food shortages forced Stalin to introduce rationing throughout the country.

Stalin pursued rapid industrialization with more success. He assigned millions of laborers from rural areas to build and run new industrial centers where iron, steel, oil, and coal were produced. Because Stalin poured money and labor into these basic industries rather than housing, clothing, and consumer goods, the Soviet people endured severe shortages of essential products, and their standard of living fell sharply. Still, by 1940 Stalin had achieved his goal of turning the Soviet Union into a modern industrial power.

Stalin's Reign of Terror During the economic upheaval, Stalin completed his political domination of the Soviet Union through a series of **purges**. In political terms, a purge is the process of removing enemies and undesirable



MAP SKILLS Stalin presided over a vast expansion of the Soviet Union's system of labor camps. **Place** What hardships did prisoners experience in the northernmost camps?

READING CHECK

How did Stalin establish total control of the Soviet Union?

individuals from power. Stalin “purified” the Communist Party by getting rid of his opponents and anyone else he believed to be a threat to his power or to his ideas. The Great Purge began in 1934 with a series of “show trials,” in which the only possible verdict was “guilty.” Stalin’s reign of terror did not stop there, however. He and his followers purged local party offices, collective farms, the secret police, and the army of anyone whom he considered a threat.

By 1939, his agents had arrested more than 7 million people from all levels of society. A million were executed, and millions more ended up in forced labor camps. Nearly all of the people were innocent victims of Stalin’s paranoia. But the purges successfully eliminated all threats to Stalin’s power, real or imagined.

Fascism in Italy

As in the Soviet Union, Italy’s totalitarian government arose from the failures of World War I. Benito Mussolini had fought and been wounded in the war. He believed strongly that the Versailles Treaty should have granted Italy more territory. A talented speaker, Mussolini began to attract followers, including other dissatisfied war veterans, opponents of the monarchy, Socialists, and anarchists. In 1919, Mussolini and his supporters formed the revolutionary Fascist Party.

Calling himself *Il Duce* (“the leader”), Mussolini organized Fascist groups throughout Italy. He relied on gangs of Fascist thugs, called Blackshirts because of the way they dressed, to terrorize and bring under control those who opposed him. By 1922, Mussolini had become such a powerful figure that when he threatened to march on Rome, the king panicked and appointed him prime minister.

Strikes and riots had plagued Italy since World War I. Mussolini and the Fascists vowed to end Italy’s economic problems. In the name of efficiency and order, they suspended elections, outlawed all other political parties, and established a dictatorship.

Italy’s ailing economy improved under *Il Duce*’s firm command. Other European nations noted his success with the Italian economy and applauded him as a miracle worker. They would soon choke on their words of praise, however, for Mussolini had dreams of forging a new Roman Empire. A Fascist slogan summed up Mussolini’s expansionist goals: “The Country Is Nothing Without Conquest.”

In October 1935, Mussolini put those words into practice by invading the independent African kingdom of Ethiopia. The Ethiopians resisted fiercely, but the large Italian army, using warplanes and poison gas, overpowered the Ethiopian forces. By May 1936, Ethiopia’s emperor had fled to England and the capital, Addis Ababa, was in Italian hands.

Hitler’s Rise to Power

While Mussolini was gaining control in Italy, a discontented Austrian painter was rising to prominence in Germany. Like Mussolini, Adolf Hitler had been wounded while serving in World War I. He, too, felt enraged by the terms of the peace settlement, which stripped Germany of land and colonies and imposed a huge burden of debt to pay for the damage done to France, Belgium, and Britain. He especially hated the war-guilt clause—the section of the Versailles Treaty that forced Germany to accept the blame for starting the war.



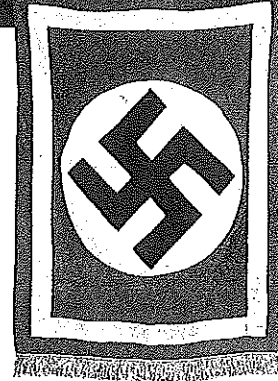
VIEWING HISTORY This poster announced, “Italy finally has its empire,” after the conquest of Ethiopia. The letters A.O. are the Italian abbreviation for East Africa—the site of Mussolini’s empire. **Drawing Inferences** How does this poster glorify Mussolini?

The Nazi Party In 1919, Hitler joined a small political group that became the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party. The philosophy and policies of this party came to be called **Nazism**. Nazism was a form of fascism shaped by Hitler's fanatical ideas about German nationalism and racial superiority.

Hitler's powerful public-speaking abilities quickly made him a leader of his party. The Nazis held mass meetings at which Hitler spoke passionately against Germany's national humiliation. One such meeting in 1921 drew more than 8,000 people. Nazi posters helped to boost attendance:

“White collar and manual workers of our people, you alone have to suffer the consequences of this unheard-of treaty. Come and protest against Germany being burdened with the war guilt. Protest against the peace treaty of Versailles which has been forced upon us. . . .”

—Nazi poster, Munich, Germany, March 1921



Adolf Hitler spoke with a charismatic passion that helped him expand the reach of the Nazi Party. The party's symbol, the swastika, is shown here.

In November 1923, with some 3,000 followers, Hitler tried to overthrow the German government. Authorities easily crushed the uprising. Although a German court sentenced Hitler to five years in prison, he spent only nine months in confinement.

While in prison, Hitler began writing an autobiography, *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle”). In it Hitler outlined the Nazi philosophy, his views of Germany's problems, and his plans for the nation. According to *Mein Kampf*, Germany had been weakened by certain groups that lived within its borders. In particular, Hitler bitterly criticized the nation's Jewish population, which he blamed irrationally for Germany's defeat in World War I.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler proposed, in defiance of the Versailles Treaty, strengthening Germany's military and expanding its borders to include Germans living in other countries. He also called for purifying the so-called “Aryan race” (blond, blue-eyed Germans) by removing from Germany those groups he considered undesirable. In time, removal came to mean the mass murder of millions of Jews and other peoples.

After Germany's economy recovered from an inflationary crisis in the mid-1920s, the Great Depression hit in the early 1930s. The German people, facing more poverty, looked to their political leaders for help. In response, Hitler and the Nazis promised to stabilize the country, rebuild the economy, and restore the empire that had been lost.

Hitler Becomes Chancellor Hitler's promises gradually won him a large following. In the 1932 elections, the Nazi Party became the largest group in the *Reichstag* (the lower house of the German parliament). Also in 1932, Hitler placed second to Paul von Hindenburg, a general in World War I, in the presidential election. In January 1933, the elderly President Hindenburg made Hitler chancellor, or head of the German government.

Hitler soon moved to suspend freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Thousands of Nazi thugs, called storm troopers or Brown-shirts, waged a violent campaign that silenced those opposed to Hitler's policies. In the March elections, the Nazis gained enough seats to

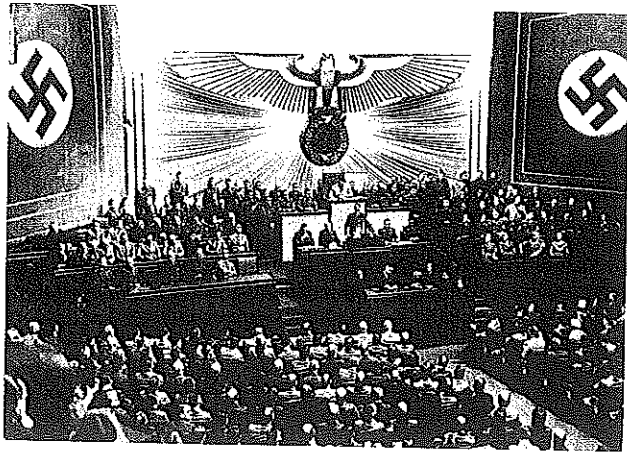
Focus on CULTURE

The Berlin Olympics Hitler used the 1936 Olympic Games, hosted by Berlin, to spotlight his theory of the racial superiority of “Aryan”

Germans. To link the Nazi regime with the heritage of ancient Greece, Hitler introduced the custom of carrying a torch from the birthplace of the Olympics to the modern games. Hitler

hoped that German athletes would sweep the competition and awe the world. Instead, an African American runner, Jesse Owens, won four gold medals, as well as the support of the crowd.





VIEWING HISTORY Germany's democratically elected assembly, the *Reichstag*, gave Hitler dictatorial powers in March 1933.

Drawing Conclusions What does this photograph indicate about the *Reichstag*'s independence from Hitler?

dominate the *Reichstag*. Less than three weeks later, the *Reichstag* building burned down in a suspicious fire. Hitler blamed the Communists and used the disaster to convince the parliament to pass an Enabling Bill which gave him dictatorial powers. When Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler became both chancellor and president. He gave himself the title *Der Führer* ("the leader").

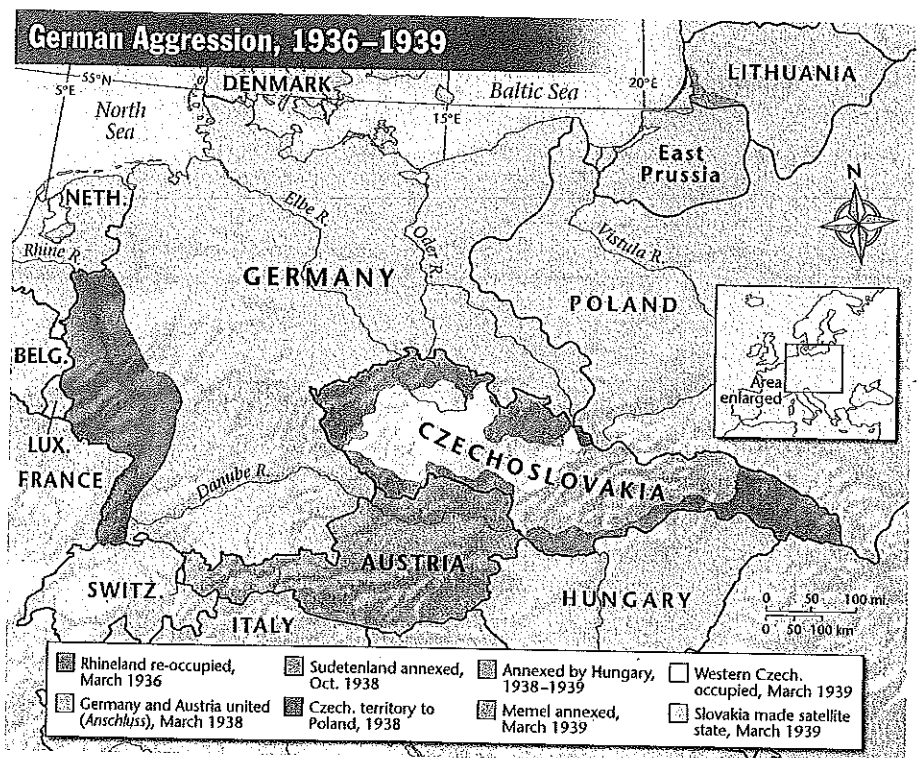
Germany Rearms Determined to put Germans to work while restoring Germany's military might, the Nazis secretly began spending money on rearming and expanding the armed forces in violation of the Versailles Treaty. They also hired unemployed workers to build

massive public buildings and a network of highways known as the *autobahn*. Unemployment fell to near zero, industry prospered, and, by 1936, the Depression had ended in Germany. In addition, the Nazis were now in a position to put Hitler's expansion plans into action.

Like Mussolini, Hitler saw expansion as a way to bolster national pride. He also longed to see Germany return to a dominant position in the world. To do this, he believed, Germans needed more territory, or what he called *lebensraum* ("living space"), to the east. Hitler's main goal, therefore, became the conquest of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. First, he needed to assert German military power within Germany's own borders.

On March 7, 1936, German troops entered the Rhineland, a region in western Germany. The Versailles Treaty had expressly banned German military forces from this region, which Germany had used as a base for the 1914 attack on France and Belgium. Since the Allies had taken no action in 1935 when Hitler revealed Germany's illegal rearmament, he had reason to believe that the Allies would not enforce the treaty.

MAP SKILLS Germany annexed Austria and dismembered Czechoslovakia without triggering a war. **Place** What advantage did Germany gain by stationing troops in the Rhineland?



Still, Hitler took an enormous gamble in remilitarizing the Rhineland. The German army was not ready for war. However, neither Britain nor France chose to react to this blatant violation of the Versailles Treaty. Many people believed that the treaty had been too harsh on Germany. The British and French had not forgotten the awful costs of World War I, and their leaders were reluctant to challenge Hitler.

Also in 1936, Hitler signed an alliance with the Italian dictator, Mussolini. Their agreement created what Mussolini called an “axis” between Rome and Berlin, the capitals of the two nations. Germany and Italy, joined later by Japan, became known as the **Axis Powers**.

Germany Expands Two years later, the German Army was much stronger. Hitler began to press his homeland of Austria for *Anschluss*, or political union with Germany. In March 1938, after Austria’s chancellor refused to surrender his country to Germany, Hitler ordered German troops into the country. Most Austrians warmly welcomed the Nazis, who were often presented with flowers by cheering crowds. When Britain and France protested the German actions, Hitler replied that the affair concerned only the German people.

Several months later, Hitler demanded the Sudetenland, an industrial region of western Czechoslovakia with a heavily German population and many fortifications crucial to Czechoslovakia’s defense. Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, met with Hitler twice to try to resolve the issue. Chamberlain pursued a policy of **appeasement**, or giving in to a competitor’s demands in order to keep the peace. Hitler kept increasing his demands, so Chamberlain and the French president, Édouard Daladier, met with Hitler and Mussolini in Munich, Germany, in September 1938.

Because Britain and France were unprepared for a conflict, they agreed to sacrifice the Sudetenland, in the hopes that Hitler’s appetite for territory would be satisfied. Although France was bound by treaty to defend Czechoslovakia, Daladier and Chamberlain agreed to let Hitler annex the Sudetenland on his own terms. No one consulted Czechoslovakia’s leaders. British crowds cheered Chamberlain upon his return home for achieving what he called “peace in our time.”

The Spanish Civil War

While Britain and France struggled to maintain peace with Germany, civil war was raging in Spain. Spain’s democratic government held what would be the country’s last free elections under the old republic in February 1936.

Numerous political parties vied for power, including small Fascist and Communist organizations. In this atmosphere, labor strikes, assassinations, and street battles became commonplace.

A group backed by liberal parties won, and five months later the military began a rebellion against the newly elected government, whose supporters were called the Republicans. General Francisco Franco led the rebels, who became known as the Nationalists. By October, the Nationalists had formed their own government, a military dictatorship under the rule of Franco.

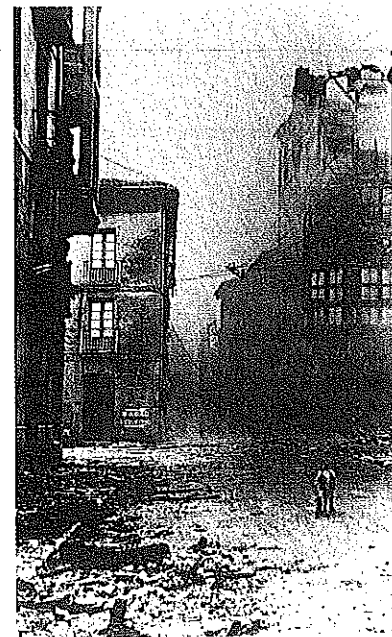
The uprising turned into a fierce civil war between the Nationalists and the Republicans. Both sides turned to foreign powers for help. Germany and Italy provided planes, tanks, and soldiers to the Nationalists. Their aid attracted international attention in 1937 when Hitler’s Condor Legion

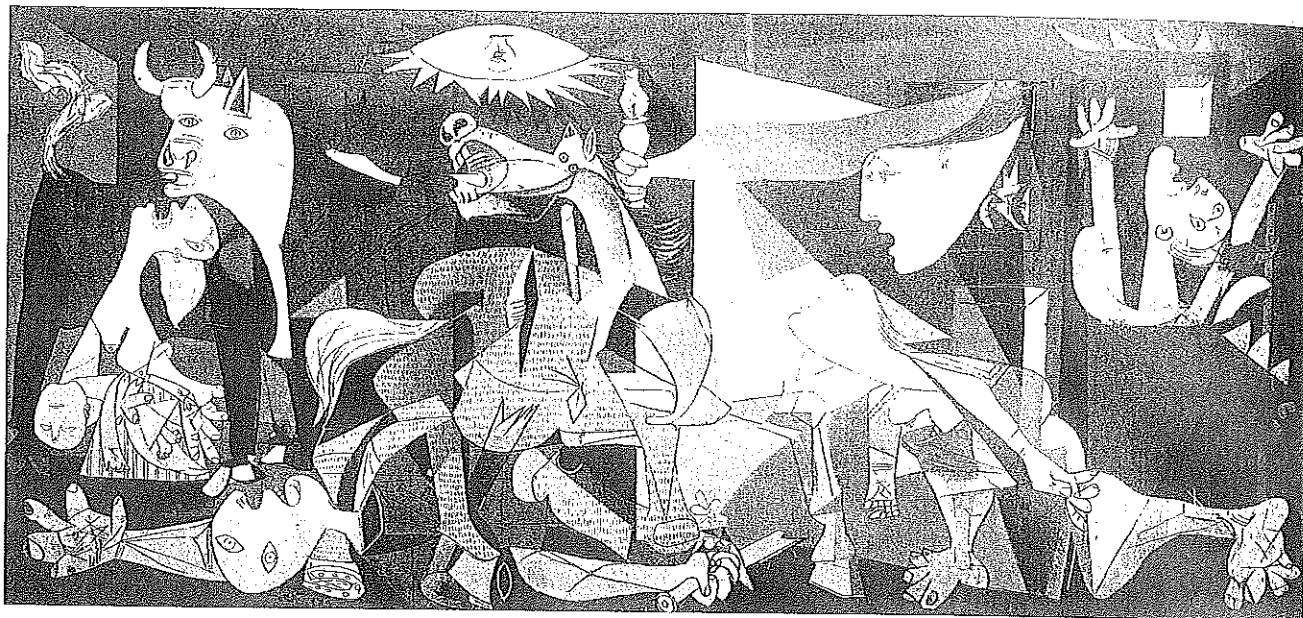


VIEWING HISTORY Upon his return to London from Munich in September 1938, Neville Chamberlain showed crowds the agreement that promised “peace in our time.”

Drawing Conclusions Why did Chamberlain sign the Munich Agreement?

German bombers left the Spanish city of Guernica in ruins.





VIEWING FINE ART Spanish artist Pablo Picasso painted *Guernica* to convey the horrors of the Spanish Civil War to a world audience. **Making Comparisons** Which do you think illustrates the raid more effectively, *Guernica* or the photograph on the previous page? Explain.

bombed the northern Spanish town of Guernica into ruins. Attacking on a market day, German pilots incinerated the town center and fired on civilians from the air. One person, watching the attack from nearby hills, described it as “a preview of the end of the world.” In fact, the attack was a preview of the destruction that would strike hundreds of cities in Britain, Germany, Poland, and other countries a few years later.

The Soviet Union sent arms and supplies to the Republicans. Although Britain, France, and the United States did not intervene, some 40,000 foreigners volunteered to fight for the Republicans as part of the International Brigades. Mostly young and many of them Communist, the soldiers of the International Brigades came from about 50 countries, including the United States.

In March 1939, the Nationalist army finally took the Spanish capital of Madrid and ended the civil war. Franco kept firm control of the government after the war and ruled Spain until his death in 1975.

Section

1

Assessment

READING COMPREHENSION

1. (a) How did Stalin change the Soviet economy? (b) How did he change the lives of the Soviet people?
2. Why did many Germans support Hitler and **Nazism** in the early 1930s?
3. Why did Britain and France pursue a policy of **appeasement** with Hitler?
4. How did the Spanish Civil War highlight divisions in Europe?

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Making Comparisons** (a) How did leaders of totalitarian states feel about using force against people and nations they considered their enemies? (b) How did that compare with how leaders of democratic countries such as Britain and France felt about using force against other nations?
6. **Creating a Time Line** Create a time line of important events in Germany in the 1930s.



Take It to the NET

Activity: Writing an Editorial

Take notes on the reaction to German aggression in Europe, particularly following the Munich Conference. Write an editorial for an American newspaper reacting to the events you've studied. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.

www.phschool.com