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Europe in Crisis: The World Wars in Europe
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Lecture Notes

Europe in Crisis – Class 4 – Endgame and Aftermath of WWI

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- Social Issues
 - **Women's Difficulties:** Wives and mothers had to send the men in the family away to war. Often, these men were the main breadwinners.
 - **Life was hard:** rations could be strict.
 - Especially in the central states, there wasn't enough food because of the British embargo (which was continued until June 1919, even though the armistice was signed in 1918).
 - The infant mortality rate in Germany doubled.
 - Towards the end of the war, disease began to ravish the famished population, most notably the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919.
 - It's estimated there were 3million deaths due to war-related causes in Germany and Austria-Hungary after the war ended. About 2 million of these people were killed in the influenza pandemic.
 - **Class Tensions at Home:** unskilled workers worried that skilled workers were getting more work/money. Unskilled workers were also worried that women were taking their place in the factories.
 - Workers would strike to express their unhappiness, strikes became more frequent as the war went on.
 - **Mutinies:** On the front lines, soldiers would also "strike" sometime, especially towards the end of the war. Mutinies were much more infrequent than strikes, because the penalty was often death. But as the war gets bloodier and longer, some soldiers were willing to take the risk.

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- These are the same sort of problems we talked about when we studied the Russian Revolution. Different countries handled these problems differently – this greatly affected their success in the war.
 - **France:** From the beginning of the war, women with husbands who were fighting received stipends that supplemented lost wages.
 - **Britain:** In 1915, the British government struck deals with the strikers that included rent control and higher wages. These agreements helped preserve the peace in Britain.
 - **Austria:** Like Russia, doesn't have the economy and infrastructure to handle the war, people very unhappy.
 - The situation is exasperated by the ethnic tensions in Austria.
 - Unlike Nicholas II, Charles I **convened parliament** and made some democratic concessions, which mollified the people.
 - **Germany:** German was a constitutional monarchy, and power was shared between the Reichstag and the Kaiser. There were many political parties active in Germany. The leftist parties tended to prefer socialism and democracy, the rightist parties preferred keeping wages low and only very limited democracy. Rightist parties were also strongly nationalistic.

- As the war went on, the people grew dissatisfied with their government, and workers began to strike, demanding higher pay and more freedom. The government made some pro-democratic concessions to the workers.
 - **Reactions on the Left:** Pleased by the concessions, but felt they weren't enough.
 - Strikes continued to get worse during the war.
 - The liberal Reichstag passed a **Peace Resolution** in 1917, asking for immediate peace talks, with the aims of restoring things to the 1914 status quo, but this was ignored by the army.
 - **Reactions on the Right:** Rightist parties were angry, however.
 - They thought that the government should have resisted popular pressure for reform.
 - Their anger was exasperated by the fact the government refused to practice unrestricted submarine warfare.
 - **Unrestricted submarine warfare:** neutral countries, like the United States, that shipped goods to Britain and France would be targets. The government had not enacted unrestricted submarine warfare because they did not want to bring the US into the war on the Allies' side.
 - Eventually, the government did succumb to rightist pressure, and launched unrestricted submarine warfare. The US entered the war shortly afterwards.
 - Afraid that if Germany lost the war, the old monarchy would be discredited and Germany would become a democracy. They were counting on victory to ensure that the old system continued.
- **The Kaiser:** The Kaiser became unpopular with the left, because he continued to live an opulent lifestyle while others starved. He was unpopular with the right, because he did not support unrestricted submarine warfare, it was believed that the stress of war had twisted his mind. He was even accused of being pro-English, because his mother was English.
 - Because of this, the Kaiser's power began to decrease, and two of his generals, **Paul von Hindenburg and Eric von Ludendorff**, became more powerful. To a certain extent, Germany became a military dictatorship.

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The End of the War:

- **Military Situation:** As we talked about last week, in spring 1918, Russia has just signed the Brest-Livstok treaty with Soviet Russia, and closed the Western Front. However, the Allies are starting to get support from the US, which entered the war in 1917, but had to build up its army from almost nothing. The Germans decide to try for one final push.
 - **The German Offensive:** Germany goes for a final push with extra troops from the Eastern Front before too many Americans can come over. Ultimately fails.
 - Seen as the only way to restore legitimacy to rightist causes inside the Reich. At the time, it wasn't unreasonable to think it might succeed.
 - The troops were exhausted, though. Many, in effect, went on strike, and, in fact, referred to Eastern troops as "strike breakers." The allies, on the other hand,

had higher moral, and were receiving a few fresh troops from America that infused optimism into the Allied cause.

- **Black Day for the Germany Army:** August 8, 1918 – The Allies advance 7 miles into German territory in Belgium using tanks that can plow through the front line. General Ludendorff declares it a “Black Day for the German Army.” Shortly afterwards, as the Allies continue to advance, he realizes that the war can’t be won, and advises the Kaiser and the government to call for peace.
- **Austrian Collapse:** Meanwhile, the Austrians are about ready to collapse- their people are starving and dying. They tell the Germans they can’t last past December. The Austrian government is falling apart – during the final days of WWI, the empire disintegrates into Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Austria.
- **The Fall of the Kaiser:** In September, Wilhelm II is pressured by his generals to establish a constitutional monarchy. He does so, and on October 3, 1918, he relinquishes power to the new Parliament. The new government proposes peace to Wilson.
 - The Kaiser is also forced out by the impatient German people. In the last days of the war, the German people begin to form revolutionary councils, just like the Russians did. The German government decides to get rid of the Kaiser and establish a real democracy before Germany has a Marxist revolution.
- **The Armistice:** Hindenburg and Ludendorff take the train to France. They sit in the train car for three days and discuss armistice with the Allies. The allies demand that they pull their troops back to behind the Rhine River, while the Allies made few concessions – they wouldn’t even lift the naval blockade. The Germans, however, were in no position to argue. Armistice is declared for November 11, 1918 at 11:11 AM.

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The Treaty of Versailles:

- Now that the armistice has been declared, they need to write the peace treaty.
- Only the victors were invited to discuss the treaty: Germany and Soviet Russia were left out.
- People came to Paris from all over the world, but the most influential leaders were:
 - **President Woodrow Wilson, American:** Woodrow Wilson was the idealist American president who led the US to war in 1917. He was a former Princeton professor, and believed that reason could be applied to solve international crises.
 - **Fourteen Points:** Presented by Wilson. Among other things, they proposed that secret treaties be abolished, trade barriers eliminated, armies reduced, colonies freed and Russia left alone. While he was for German reparations, he wasn’t planning on anything nearly as strict as the French had in mind.
 - He also promoted the **League of Nations**, an international organization similar to the United Nations.
 - **Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, French:** The French had been utterly devastated by the war. Almost two million people had died, and the whole north eastern corner of the country would need to be rebuilt. France needed a huge amount of money to make this happen. They wanted Germany to pay for the mess they had made. France also wanted Germany to be permanently weakened, so that it never threatened France again, and, in fact proposed dividing Germany back into a confederacy of small states.
 - **Prime Minister David Lloyd George, British:**

- Britain wanted to maintain the balance of power on the continent: France and Germany had to both be fairly strong.
- Britain also wanted the German economy to stay strong
 - To prevent a Marxist revolution.
 - To maintain lucrative British-German trade relations.
 - Are not against reparations, but don't want to destroy Germany like the French do.
- Also, is wary of Wilson's Fourteen Points, because they promote national self-determination – not a good thing for a country built on a foreign empire.
- Other Countries Worth Mentioning
 - **Italy:** Italy had joined the war under the impression she would get parts of Austria after the war ended. Wilson refused to give Italy these regions, arguing that they were not ethnically Italian, therefore should not be part of Italy. The Italians left the peace treaty in a huff. In Italy, people felt like they had fought the war for nothing.
 - **Germany:** Germany was left out, but assumed that the treaty would be built around the ideals that Wilson presented in his Fourteen Points. They did not expect to lose much territory, and for things to generally return to the status quo.
 - **Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland:** New countries that emerged as the Austrian Empire collapsed. While they did not have the most legitimate claims to independence, they were preserved because they could serve as good checks to Germany and Austria in the event of another war.

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- The Treaty
 - **German Reparations:** Germany was to pay reparations. These reparations were designed to be impossible to pay, so to cripple the German economy.
 - **Lost Territory:** Germany lost:
 - Alsace-Lorraine, an industrial region France and Germany traditionally fought about.
 - The Saarland, a coal mining region
 - The Polish Corridor and Danzig, an ethnically Polish, wealthy industrial region. Danzig is a city on the Baltic Sea.
 - The Rhineland was demilitarized, so it could act as a buffer between France and Germany.
 - **German Disarmament:** Germany was not allowed to have a large army. Artillery, tanks and submarines were prohibited.
 - **War Guilt:** Germany was accused of starting the war, which justified the odious terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

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The League of Nations:

- The League of Nations was established shortly after the Treaty of Versailles was signed. It was an attempt to prevent war by uniting all the European nations together.
- The Idea: Countries that wanted to go to war would first go to the League, and ask the League for permission to fight. The League would have six months to decide if the countries could fight, and try to come up with a solution that was better than war. It was hoped that this six month period would give cooler heads time to prevail. If one country decided *not* to wait for the League, and attacked anyway, the League would consider that an act of war and would attack the aggressor country.

- Many Europeans were initially optimistic about the League.
- However, the League failed utterly. Why?
 - **The League never took action.** In 1920, there were about five situations that the League should have intervened in, but it did not, because it was afraid that it did not have the necessary resources, and it was afraid that it would offend member nations by rebuking them. The League never established its authority.
 - **Member states would only intervene if a war affected them.** For example, the British promised only to send soldiers to Western Europe. Eastern European wars would not affect Britain greatly, so the British did not want to waste resources on such wars.
 - **The United States never joined the League.** The League had been Wilson's pet project, but he proved unable to convince isolationist Americans. Consequentially, the League did not have the military heft it needed. This is the biggest reason the league failed.

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Reactions and Rebuilding: Europe After the War, Before the Great Depression

Art:

- People tried to understand the absurdity of the First World War, and cope with the realization that human beings were not inherently good and rational. The artists of this era tried to express this.
- **Dadaism:** an art form meant to reveal that the world made no sense. The name itself comes from the nonsense babbling babies make.
 - One Dadaist performer, Tristan Tzara, went on stage, shaved himself, and then walked off. That was the entire performance.
 - Others made collages out of random scraps of newspaper.
- **Surrealism:** aimed to express the subconscious psychological urges that are often suppressed by society. They believed that these strange urges explained the chaos of their society. Surrealists were fascinated by dreams and were inspired by Sigmund Freud, a psychologist of the era, who argued that most human suffering is caused because people are not free to act on their most instinctive desires.
 - **Salvador Dalí:** Spanish artist who tried to express his dreams through paintings, photography and other media. He is famous for painting melted clocks, which are meant to symbolize that time is a human construct that is ultimately meaningless. Famous works include *The Persistence of Memory* and *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (Premonition of Civil War)*
- **Despair for the Future:** Many artists thought that Europe's future was bleak and meaningless.
 - **Franz Kafka:** Wrote *The Trial*, a story of a man who must navigate a confusing legal bureaucracy, but does not know for what crime he is being tried. The defendant is doomed and trapped, and does not know how to escape his situation.
 - **Aldous Huxley:** Wrote *Brave New World*, in which he predicted that after a great social upheaval, society is redesigned so that people never feel unhappiness, and thus never feel the need to go to war. In his disconcerting vision, humans are drugged and brain-washed into thinking they are happy with dull, simple lives.

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Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919,

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German Reaction to the End of the War and the Treaty of Versailles

- After the war, center leftist groups, most notably the Social Democrats, established the provisional government, and eventually took power.
- In January 1919, extreme leftist groups rejected the government's call to wait for elections, and unleashed a Bolshevik-style revolution. The government turned to the "free-corps" for help. The "Free corps" were a group of ex-soldiers who had been demented by the violence of the war, and still wanted to fight. They were conservative and nationalistic, and were excited about an excuse to kill socialists. After their work was done, the free corps had nowhere to go, and unleashed their fury on local socialist leader, killing hundreds.
- However, many approved of the free corps. Many felt that socialist policies had weakened the country, and blamed them for Germany's defeat. Some even went a step further, and accused leftists of pressuring the government to surrender in autumn 1918.
 - Germany was never actually invaded by the Allies, remember. To the average German, it seemed like Germany had been winning the war, when suddenly, the Germany surrendered. Germans were even more baffled when the leftist government accepted the harsh Treaty of Versailles.
 - Socialists were accused of pressuring the government into surrendering in autumn 1918 to gain power. They were seen as anti-German. Catholics and Jews were also blamed with them.
 - **Dolchstoßlegende:** Translates to "Dagger-Stab Legend," or "Stab in the Back Legend." The belief that the leftist elements in the home front had betrayed Germany. Workers were accused of being lazy. Catholics and Jews were also blamed. Jews, in particular, were blamed for insinuating many of the mutinies that had weakened the German army late in the war.
 - In some sense this *is* true. Germany lost because its home front collapsed. However, in a war of attrition, that's *how* you lose – you stretch your country too thin, and it snaps. However, this wasn't understood at the time, and many prominent generals blamed the home front, not themselves and their government.
- **The Weimer Republic:** The democracy that ruled Germany during the interwar era, before the Nazis took power. Believed that Germany should try to stick to Versailles in the interest of peace. The Weimer Republic was liberal, and was seen as weak and traitorous by rightist German groups.
- **Reaction to the Treaty of Versailles:** Germany had not expected the treaty to be so severe. After reading Wilson's Fourteen Points, Germans thought that the Allies would want to preserve German prosperity, and return to the status quo. However, the treaty was very severe. Germans were also angry that they were blamed and punished for the war, and considered a "war-like" people. Germans on the home front had suffered greatly, too, and thought that Russian nationalism and British commercial interests had started the war.
- **Invasion of the Ruhr and Hyperinflation:** Strikes in response to the invasion of the Ruhr led to massive inflation, called **hyperflation**. The mark fell to 4.2 trillion marks to the dollar. People had buy food right after getting their paychecks to get their money's worth. Many pensioners and poor people faced near-starvation. Reparations were reduced, and Germany spent the next five years prospering, flush with foreign investments.

Eastern Europe

- In the space of five years, Eastern Europe had gone from being composed of Germany, Austria and Russia, to being composed of about ten different countries.
- This has huge economic effects: Trading partners that used to be in the same country were now divided by new borders.
 - This had hideous effects. Trade on the Danube River, which ran through Germany, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, decreased to 17% its prewar level.
- New countries that were unfamiliar with independent rule had to establish new infrastructure.
 - Poland had to figure out how to run trains on three different sets of rails: Russia, Austrian and German.
- These countries were also unfamiliar with democracy. Governments would usually only last about 6 months.
 - These problems were exasperated by ethnic minorities. The ethnic groups of Eastern Europe did not divide neatly into countries .
 - 1/3 of people living in Poland did not speak Polish.
- However, **Czechoslovakia** managed to stay function fairly well, thanks to strong leadership. They dealt diplomatically with their German minorities in the **Sudetenland**, and managed to improve their economy.

France:

- Had to rebuild. The entire northeastern corner of their country had been destroyed. France also needed to pay off all the loans it had taken out during the war, as well as pay pensions to widows and orphans.
- Desperately needs the German Reparations to pay its debts. In 1923, France invades the **Ruhr** region of Germany, where there are a lot of coal and steel mines, and demands to take revenue from these industries as payment. The German workers and government refuse, which causes massive inflation.
- Eventually, a compromise called **The Dawes Plan** is reached. The American banking community agrees to lend Germany money to rebuild, and then repay France. In turn, France agrees to reduce reparations and to leave the Ruhr region.
- Economy begins to pick up in the 1920s thanks to all the jobs created by reconstruction.
- However, these are huge class tensions in France. In response to strikes during and after the war, the government institutes makes huge concessions to labor, like an eight-hour workday, maternity leave, etc. However, this angers the middle and upper class, especially when taxes increase.

Britain

- Is in a severe recession after the war. Basically, Britain needs to learn how to deal with not being the most powerful country in the world anymore.
- Their economy has been destroyed by the war. While British factories were making guns, America and Japan took advantage of Britain's absence to steal British markets.
- New York had also usurped Britain as the financial capital of the world during the war.
- British workers were hit hard. Fewer exports meant fewer jobs, and Britain had a 10% unemployment rate. This glut of unemployed men, many of them veterans, created social tension. Strikes were also frequent, but the stability of the British system of government prevented this discontentment from turning into a revolution.

Italy After the War

- After the war, Italy had trouble getting anything done. The government was gridlocked between the various factions and parties.
- Many peasants began to take the law into their own hands by seizing farms and factories.
- The bourgeoisie did not want to tolerate such lawlessness, and turned to the *squadristi*, or the Blackshirts, for protection. The Black Shirts were a group of ex-soldiers who had trouble readjusting to peaceful civilian life, and were still looking for a war to fight. They were strongly nationalist, and thought that Italy had been cheated at the treaty of Versailles.
- **March on Rome:** In 1920-1921, the Blackshirts, led by Benito Mussolini became very powerful. In 1922, Mussolini and 25,000 Blackshirts camped outside Rome until the king made Mussolini prime minister.
 - The Italian government had initially thought they could control Mussolini, and just use him as a tool to prevent a Marxist revolution. However, Mussolini installed fascist leaders in government positions, and had his Blackshirts violently root out antifascist elements in Italy.
- Mussolini's reforms did indeed produce a better economy, and aimed to make Italy economically self-sufficient. Through nationalization of industries and public works projects, he managed to help Italy avoid the Great Depression.
- Mussolini thought that the Italian people had become weak. He saw them as lazy bourgeois who only valued comfort and security. He wanted to instill greatness and strength in them, and thought a strong, fascist leader would help achieve this.
 - **Fascism:** A system of government in which an authoritarian government focuses on reversing cultural decline and restoring purity and unity to a particular ethnic group or nation. Believes in sacrificing the individual for the sake of the state. Usually, a fascist system is run by a strong leader who is supposed to know instinctively what is best for the state.
- Characteristics of Italian Fascism:
 - **Cult of Personality:** Mussolini encouraged people to worship him, and place their trust in him as a strong leader. Children were taught in school that Mussolini was "always right."
 - **Militarism:** Mussolini also wanted an empire, and would try to take parts of Africa during his rule. He inspired the people through nationalism, and dreamed of returning to the days of the glorious Roman Empire.
 - "War alone brings all human energies to their highest state of tension and stamps with the seal of nobility the nations which dare to face it."
 - In 1936, Mussolini attacks Ethiopia, the League of Nations does not stop him.