

CHAPTER 34-THE AGE OF ANXIETY

At the end of World War I, people in Europe and the United States found themselves pessimistic and disillusioned. Western culture and technology were viewed as the causes of the horrors of the war, and both writers and scholars viewed the west as flawed and, for some, in decline. The long-held positive view of progress came under attack, as did the idea of democracy.

Adding to this was a range of scientific discoveries which also raised major questions. Einstein, Heisenberg, and Freud all challenged the established ideas about the nature of truth and the nature of man. These challenges led to experimentation in art and architecture.

The war was one of the causes of the Great Depression. There were major weaknesses in the global economy, including international lending to countries that could not repay the loans, a drop in the demand for raw materials, and depressed agricultural production in industrialized countries. Unsound lending was also a cause for the stock market crash in the United States in 1929. Production in the United States, increased by the war, had brought the general population into the stock market to take advantage of the rising stock prices. However, many people were using borrowed money to buy stocks. When the lenders began to recall the loans, there was a massive sell-off of stocks and the market crashed.

Because the United States was a major player in the world economy, problems with the U. S. economy affected the rest of the world. Markets for goods shrank, unemployment rose, and countries enacted tariffs to protect themselves (only to harm other countries). Those countries with non-democratic governments and those less involved in the world economy were affected less than the major countries.

There were other effects than simply economic ones. To keep men employed, some governments restricted women's employment. Marriage and birthrates decreased while suicide rates went up and there were intensified social divisions and class hatred. The depression caused a change in economic thinking, including what the role of government was. In the United States, President Roosevelt protected the banks, started massive public works and farm subsidies, and established the minimum wage and Social Security. Despite these measures, many economists and historians believe that World War II, and the associated production increases in the United States needed to respond to it, actually ended the Great Depression.

Not as deeply affected by this depression as other major countries, Russia still faced huge problems. The communist takeover of the government led to a civil war in which an estimated ten million people died. To deal with this, Lenin abolished private industry with disastrous results. In 1921 he introduced the NEP, a mix of communism and capitalism. When Lenin died in 1924, a political power struggle occurred that had economic consequences. By 1928, Stalin took control of Russia and introduced the Five-Year Plans, which included centralized state planning of the economy, an emphasis on heavy industry rather than consumer goods, and the state takeover of agriculture.

Another outgrowth of the Great Depression was the rise of fascism, the idea that the individual is subordinate to the state. This occurred first in Italy and then in Germany. In Italy, Benito Mussolini took over the government, banned all the other political parties, and crushed labor unions. In Germany, Adolf Hitler first attempted a coup, and then, after being imprisoned, was elected to power. Hitler's rise to power was aided by the Great Depression, a loss of faith in democracy, and increasing German nationalism.

Key Concept 6.1 Science and the Environment

- I. Researchers made rapid advances in science that spread throughout the world, assisted by the development of new technology.

Key Concept 6.2 Global Conflicts and Their Consequences

- IV. Military conflicts occurred on an unprecedented global scale.