Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Conflict and tension, 1918–1939

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The peace treaties

- At the Paris Peace Conference (1919), the 'Big Three' had different aims. Clemenceau (France) wanted Germany punished and weakened. Wilson (USA) wanted a fair peace based on his **Fourteen Points**, including **self-determination** and a **League of Nations**. Lloyd George (Britain) wanted Germany punished, but able to recover and trade.
- The Treaty of Versailles (June 1919): Germany accepted the blame for the war (Article 231, the war guilt clause) and had to pay **reparations** (set at £6.6 billion in 1921). Its army was limited to 100,000 men, with no air force, tanks or submarines, and only 6 battleships. The Rhineland was demilitarised.
- Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine to France, land to Poland (the Polish Corridor) and all its colonies. The Saar was run by the **League of Nations** for 15 years, and union with Austria (**Anschluss**) was forbidden.
- Separate treaties dealt with Germany's allies: Saint-Germain (Austria), Trianon (Hungary), Neuilly (Bulgaria) and Sèvres (Turkey).

The League of Nations

- The League was set up in 1920, based in Geneva, to keep the peace through **collective security**. It could use moral pressure and economic **sanctions**, and in theory military force.
- Weaknesses: the USA never joined; Germany (until 1926) and the USSR (until 1934) were kept out at first; decisions had to be unanimous; it had no army of its own; and Britain and France were weakened by the war.
- In the 1920s it had successes, such as the Åland Islands (1921), Upper Silesia (1921) and the Greek–Bulgarian dispute (1925), and did valuable work helping refugees and fighting disease. But it failed over Vilna (1920) and Corfu (1923), where Mussolini got his way.

- The Depression weakened it further. In Manchuria (1931), Japan invaded; the Lytton Report condemned Japan, which simply left the League (1933). In Abyssinia (1935–36), Mussolini invaded; **sanctions** didn't include oil, Britain and France kept the Suez Canal open, and the secret Hoare–Laval Pact offered Italy much of Abyssinia. The League was discredited.

Your notes

Hitler's foreign policy

- Hitler aimed to overturn the Treaty of Versailles, unite all German-speaking people and win **Lebensraum** (living space) in the east.
- He left the League (1933). The Saar voted to rejoin Germany (January 1935). He announced rearmament and conscription (1935), and signed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement (1935). He remilitarised the Rhineland (March 1936) and united Germany with Austria, the **Anschluss** (March 1938).
- In the Munich Agreement (September 1938), Britain, France and Italy let Germany take the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, and Chamberlain claimed 'peace for our time'. In March 1939, Germany took the rest of Czechoslovakia.
- The Nazi-Soviet Pact (August 1939) secretly agreed to divide Poland. Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, and Britain and France declared war on 3 September 1939.

Appeasement

- **Appeasement** meant giving in to Hitler's demands to avoid war. It was the policy of Neville Chamberlain, Britain's Prime Minister.
- Arguments for it: memories of the horror of the First World War; Britain wasn't ready for war and needed time to rearm; many thought Versailles had been unfair to Germany; some saw Germany as a barrier against communism; and the Empire's Dominions didn't want war.
- Arguments against it: it encouraged Hitler to demand more; it abandoned Czechoslovakia, with its army and factories; and it made Stalin distrust Britain and France, leading to the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Key terms

Reparations	Payments for war damage, which Germany had to make after 1919.
Fourteen Points	President Wilson's plan for a fair and lasting peace.
Self-determination	The right of a people to rule themselves.
League of Nations	The international organisation set up in 1920 to keep the peace.
Collective security	Countries acting together to stop an aggressor.
Sanctions	Penalties such as stopping trade, used to pressure a country.

Lebensraum	'Living space': Hitler's aim of gaining land in eastern Europe.
Remilitarisation	Moving troops back into an area, such as the Rhineland in 1936.
Anschluss	The union of Germany and Austria in 1938.
Appeasement	Giving in to an aggressor's demands to avoid war.

Your notes

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which leader wanted to punish Germany most harshly at the peace conference?
2. What was President Wilson's peace plan called?
3. What was Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles?
4. Which major power never joined the League of Nations?
5. What were economic sanctions?
6. Which crisis did Japan cause in 1931?
7. Why did the sanctions against Italy over Abyssinia fail?
8. When did Hitler remilitarise the Rhineland?

Answers

1. Clemenceau
2. The Fourteen Points
3. The war guilt clause
4. The USA
5. Stopping trade with an aggressive country
6. The invasion of Manchuria
7. They didn't include oil, and the Suez Canal stayed open
8. March 1936

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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