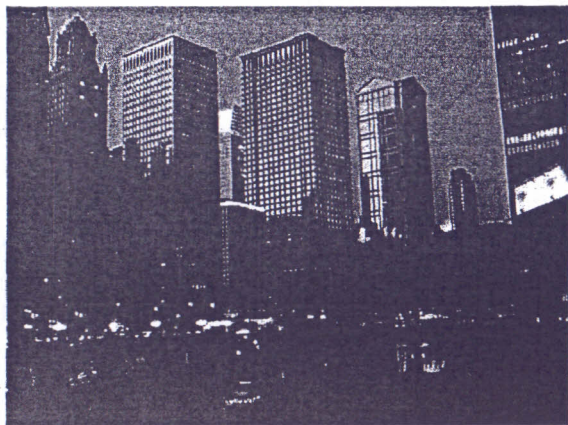


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Totalitarian Challenge And Allied Response, 1919-1939.

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Abstract

The events of the inter-war years (1919-1939) dictated the pace and structure of the international system in several ways. On the one hand, the era was one in which defeated Germany tried all it could to bounce back into the international system as a powerful nation. Under Adolf Hitler, the country pursued some policies and programmes that were revisionist in nature and consequently posed a major challenge to the international order that was put in place the aftermath of the First World War. This work assesses the emergence of totalitarianism as a fall out of the activities of Germany under Adolf Hitler, Italy under Mussolini and Japan. The work also investigates the reaction of the status quo powers, namely Britain and France, through the appeasement strategy to totalitarian challenge. The paper maintains that the policy of appeasement pursued by both Britain and France towards Germany and Italy was against the principle of the international order established at Versailles.

Introduction

The era of the inter-war years (1919-1939) was a major turning point in the development of international relations on the one hand and the issue of world peace on the other hand. After the holocaust that the First World War (1914-1918) wrought on Europe and some other parts of the world, the Versailles peace settlement was initiated by the victorious powers- Great Britain, France, Italy and the associated power, the United States- to conclude the Treaty of Versailles. The victorious powers were unanimous to put the war guilt on Germany. For instance, Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty stated that:

The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany Accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing All the loss and damage to which (the Allied and Associated Governments) will probably have to victor us p... to sept

have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies. (Craig: 1966, 545)

An American, John Foster Dulles, who later became US Secretary of States, remarked that "it was the revulsion of the German people from this article of the treaty which, above all else, laid the foundation for the Germany of Hitler." (J. Foster Dulles, cited in Craig: 1966, 546) Article 231 was intended as a concession to the British and French who insisted on some formula that would clearly state their right to ask for any reparation despite having been persuaded by the Americans not to ask for any outrageous reparations. This was to form the basis for Hitler's challenge to the principles of the Versailles settlement established in 1919. Indeed, Hitler had constantly referred to Versailles provisions as "a house of cards that would inevitably collapse one day". (Kissinger, 1994: 288)

Like Germany, Italy under Benito Mussolini was imperialistic and aggressive. The Italian leader on his own was a pretender who delighted in parroting Hitler's actions, without regards for the existing international order, which Italy, along with the other victorious powers, helped to create. In the same vein, Japan was imperialistic. The country was desirous to reduce her dependence on raw materials from the colonies controlled by European powers. Consequently, Japan wanted to create a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (Dai Toa Kyoei Ken) under its control and to put the activities of European powers in Asia under check. While all these were going on, both Britain and France reneged on their promise to keep the international order, which they had created.

The Nature of The International System Established At Versailles

In 1919 the Allied and Associated Powers (Britain, France, Italy and the US) met to deliberate on the future of the international system. At the time of the meeting, there was the problem of acceptable aims of the meeting as well as the procedures to be followed in realizing them when Germany requested for an armistice. The then US president, Woodrow

Fourteen Points agenda as the basis for future deliberations.(Craig: 1966, 540-541) The British representative at the peace settlement, Lloyd George, was too indifferent to the lessons of history with reference to the Congress of Vienna (1815).(Craig: 1966, 1-25) Collectively, the victorious powers were in a hurry to impose reparations on Germany as punishment for her role in the war.

In the pre-armistice negotiations, Germany was made to believe that the future peace of Europe would be based on the basis of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, although the Allied powers had indicated interest to retain full discretion concerning the freedom of the seas and that compensation would be made by Germany for all damage done to civilian population of the Allies and their property. Although the conference was to be global in scope, Germany was excluded from the negotiations, contrary to point one of the Fourteen Points. For instance, point one states, among others "open covenants openly arrived at."(Craig: 1966, 225-240) The allied also disregarded points two and five that talked about freedom of the seas and colonial claims respectively. As a result of this development, all Germany's former colonies, designated as mandated territories were shared among Japan, Great Britain and her dominions, and France. In addition, the allies interpreted point thirteen in such a way as to hand large numbers of Germans over to Polish control. Point thirteen actually recommended that the future independent Poland would be composed of territory inhabited by Polish population.

The Versailles provisions were a blow to the Germans. They lost Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium, the province of Posen and a strip of territory running West Prussia to Poland, among others. The German Baltic port of Danzig was transformed into an international free city. The Saar coal region was transferred to the League of Nations and placed under the economic control of France for a period of fifteen years after which plebiscite would be used to determine the future of the region.

On reparation, Germany was to pay damage to the civilian population of her enemies. Such damage was to include shipping and property losses as well as services, pensions and allowances. Germany's whole merchant fleet was also confiscated. In 1921 Germany was asked to pay thirty- two billion dollars, in addition to

five billion dollars as indemnity. This was contrary to the expectation of the Germans who were made to believe that the Allies would ask for payment only of damages to civilians and their property, and probably payment for pensions to disabled Allied soldiers and their relatives. (Ray, 1998: 15)

Equally harsh about the reparations clauses was the demand that the emperor of Germany be tried by an international court, for crime against international morality. But on November 10, 1918, the emperor, William II had left his country and taken refuge in Doorn, Holland where he lived till his death.

The penalties on armament and ammunition were equally harsh on Germany. The allies imposed heavy restrictions upon Germany's future freedom of action in military affairs. They also stipulated that the future German army be limited to a force 100,000 officers and men, without the right to possess military aircrafts, tanks or other offensive weapons. The General Staff, the war academy and the cadet schools were to be dissolved, and the future navy was to be limited to a force with no vessels exceeding 10, 000 tons and no sub-marines. The Rhineland was to be occupied by Allied troops, and to be permanently demilitarized, together a strip fifty kilometers wide to the east of the Rhine. The Allies also insisted that the future German army be made up entirely of long-term volunteers. This would mean that the officers were to serve for twenty-five years while other ranks would serve for twenty years.

From hindsight, there are some weaknesses to be pointed out from the peace settlement. First, the arrangement had some procedural weaknesses. The seizure of territories and resources did not in any way guarantee the efforts of Germany to pay the war indemnity imposed upon it by the Allies. Second, the clause which stipulated that German disarmament would be followed by general disarmament was difficult task for the Allies to fulfill and this was to work against them in the course of the inter-war years when Hitler used it as a basis for his foreign policy. Remarking on this point, Craig stressed that the "unnecessary clause was to be interpreted by Adolf Hitler and others as an Allied pledge to disarm, the non-fulfillment of which justified German violation of the treaty terms."(Craig: 1966, 542)

By June 23 1919, the Allied powers were through with the treaty and they presented same with a threat that Germany would accept it. This was the situation before regimes in Italy, Germany and Japan started off totalitarianism with a view to upsetting the international order established at Versailles.

Italy's Aggressive Policy and Totalitarianism

The aggressive policy pursued by Italy in the inter-war period inaugurated an era of totalitarianism which posed a challenge to the international order established at Versailles. The development followed the emergence of fascism in Italy. As a concept, fascism refers to an extreme right-wing political system, which favours strong central authority and absence of freedom of speech. (Hornby, 1995: 422) The emergence of fascism was due to a number of factors among which were the economic and psychological dislocations caused by the First World War, the rise of rightwing leaders, led by people who were bent on keeping the country free from Marxist infection, the resentment of returning veterans over lack of recognition for their services, the frustrated ambitions of Italian nationalists, and the failure of the Italian party system. (Craig: 1966, 594)

After the Versailles settlement was put in place, some groups that called themselves nationalists, who encouraged Italy to intervene in the war, felt that the country had received far less than it was given by the Allied powers. This category of people was unhappy with arrangements such as the one that structured a large Yugoslavia with a coastline on the Adriatic, viewing such a development as an Allied plot against Italy. They also refused to be convinced by the argument that Italy's safety was assured by the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Like the nationalists, the veterans of the war came home expecting some signs of gratitude for their service and some recognition for their sacrifices. They found neither of these, a situation that encouraged them to embrace fascism and the leadership of Mussolini.

Leadership idiosyncrasy was another factor that encouraged the emergence of totalitarianism in Italy. For Benito Mussolini, he believed in the pursuit of power for its sake. He was fluid in principle and given to frequent fundamental shifts in political

position. But he was a coward. For instance, when the coup that brought him to power was nearing execution, Mussolini stayed in the vicinity of the Swiss border "lest he find it advisable to flee."(Craig: 1966, 501)

Although Mussolini became Prime Minister of Italy in 1922 under the fascist party, it was the election of April 1934 when the fascist party won majority vote that marked the beginning of a drift toward totalitarianism. The victory was followed by the liquidation of opposition parties and the murder of opposition leaders, such as Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924. Matteotti was a leader of the moderate socialists and a critic of Mussolini's policies.

It was clear from the beginning that Mussolini was not going to honour the agreement reached at Versailles. In fact, he had insisted that Italy under fascist leadership would refuse to be bound by the terms of Versailles because they were capable of restricting the country's imperialist policies. In one of his numerous speeches, Mussolini had argued that "imperialism is the basis of life for every people which tends to expand economically and spiritually."(Craig: 1966, 545) In line with this thinking, Mussolini saw the League of Nations as a kind of "Holy Alliance of the Plutocratic nations of Franco-Anglo Saxon group, to guarantee to themselves the exploitation of the greater part of the world."(Baer, 1967: 52) On August 1923 he bombarded and occupied the Greek Island of Corfu as a result of what he regarded as a reaction to the killing of Italian personnel on the Greco-Albanian border. The League of Nations did not act decisively to check the aggression of Italy despite Greece's complaint to the League.

Although Italy remained in the international system after the Corfu incident, the conquest of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935 became the height of the country's aggression. Historically, the Abyssinian incident could be seen as an act to avenge the humiliation of an Italian force by less sophisticated Abyssinian forces at Adowa in 1886.(Craig: 1966, 346-466) Although that aggression violated the provisions of the Versailles,(Kissinger, 1994: 298) the League did nothing to check the excesses of Italy. Similarly, both Britain and France that were supposed to protect international peace and security did nothing to stop Mussolini. Britain was more interested in weighing the cost of war while

France hoped to court Mussolini's friendship for his role in checking the ambition of Hitler in the coup of July 1934 in Austria. It is to Mussolini's credit that he sent troops to the Austria-Italian frontiers and prevented the coup instigated by Hitler. It was this gesture that prompted the French premier, Pierre Laval to try to gain Italy as an ally against future German aggression. This did not materialize. Rather, Germany itself posed its own

Germany's Aggressive Policy

In 1918 when the First World War was winding up, Germany was faced with a revolution that rose partly as a result of the announcement that the military effort had collapsed and that the government was requesting an armistice. This event led to the collapse of the monarchy under William II, whose continued rule seemed to Germans to represent an obstacle to peace and progress. A republican government emerged under the new arrangement. It was this government, which drew the Weimar Constitution in August 1919.

The republicans were faced with the task of coping with the provisions of the Versailles settlement, following the declaration by the Allied powers that Germany was guilty of the war and was to pay the sum of 132 billion gold marks (about 32 billion dollars) among other provisions. (Craig: 1966, 625) In addition, Germany was to surrender thirteen percent of its pre-war territories. Upper Silesia, which was economically important, was handed over to Poland. This arrangement separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany. Besides, the tiny territory of Eupen-et-Malmedy was given to Belgium, and Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France. German colonies were managed under the mandate principle of the League of Nations.

With reference to Germany, Kissinger criticised the Versailles Treaty on several grounds. According to him, "...the victors inflicted an insult of their own (on Germany). Nor was their handiwork likely to calm the international environment. Too punitive for conciliation...." (Kissinger, 1994: 239) Unlike the settlement of the Congress of Vienna, which was built round three pillars- conciliation with France, balance of power, and legitimacy- the Versailles settlement was too hard to reconcile Germany and at

the same time appeared not strong enough to subjugate it. It can be argued that the settlement strengthened Germany geopolitically instead of weakening it physically. For instance, after the settlement, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved and in fact disappeared forever thereby removing a counterweight to Germany.

The Emergence of Hitler and the National Socialism in Germany and Impact on the International System

The signing of the Versailles Treaty by the Weimar government annoyed a lot of Germans, especially extreme conservatives and super patriots who promoted the Dolchstoß legend and myth that the invincible German armies had been defeated not by the enemy, but by a stab in the back inflicted by pacifists, socialists, and defeatists on the home front. (Craig, 1966: 619) These people were particularly against the war indemnity imposed on Germany and asked a question like "what hand would not wither that sign such a treaty?" (Craig, 1966: 619) One of such super patriots was Adolf Hitler.

The crises in Germany leading to the emergence of totalitarianism are not difficult to understand. First, the payment of reparations, which started a disastrous inflationary trend in Germany, leading to depreciation in the value of the mark on the international exchange made life unbearable for the people. For instance, by the end of 1923 the mark stood at 25 billion to the dollar! This brought about unemployment as many Germans were sacked as a result of closure of industries. It was under this condition that the radical minded in the National Socialist Party became unruly. In August 1921, Matthias Erzberger, one of the signatories to the armistice of November 1918 was murdered. Walther Rathenau, another public figure was murdered in June 1922 by young nationalists and super patriots. It was at this juncture that Hitler came into the scene. The name of the National Socialist Party was already changed to National Socialist Workers Party in 1920 and in 1921, Hitler became its leader. He used his army, the "Storm Troopers" which he created in the course of the era of totalitarianism in Germany to terrorize members of the republican government.

Despite his imprisonment at Landberg-on-the-lech from where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, the "Bible" of Nazism, Hitler carried on with his anti-republican, anti-Marxist and anti-Jewish policies and aggressive racist agenda. He believed so much in creating a Third Reich that would incorporate Germans at home and in the Diaspora. Between 1925 and 1933, the National Socialist Party grew in strength owing mainly to the economic depression in Europe as well as domestic economic crises. It should be stressed for the purpose of emphasis that the depression in Europe destroyed the internal cohesion of the government of the social democrat headed by Hermann Mueller who was forced to resign in 1930. He was succeeded by the Bruening administration which was later succeeded by Hitler as Chancellor in 1933.

Following his appointment as the new German Chancellor, Hitler made it clear his intention to upset the international status quo. In the mean time, Hitler pretended as if he was going to reconcile the Versailles system with his aims. (Craig and George, 1995: 81-83) In July 1934 Hitler tried to take over Austria with the help of local Nazis, but his effort was thwarted by Mussolini. Earlier in March Hitler had ignored the Versailles settlement by reintroducing mass conscription for a new German army. He exploited the seemingly guilty conscience of France and Britain about the provisions of the settlement. In doing this, Hitler's moves and diplomacy went through four stages. The first was the **diplomacy of concealment or obfuscation**, which was intended to convince other powers that there would be no fundamental change in German foreign policy. (Craig and George, 1995: 81-83)

The second design concerned the **diplomacy of repudiation** and started at the end of 1933. It was intended to disengage Germany from honouring all obligations entered into by previous German governments and to protect the country from any possible consequences of such an action. Under this arrangement, Hitler departed from the provisions on disarmament in 1933. The second design spanned the period 1935 to 1937 and was tagged **diplomacy of testing**. (Craig and George, 1995: 81-83) Hitler used the period to test his power and to discover how much resistance he would get from Britain and France. Under this arrangement Hitler announced in March 1935 that Germany had arranged a new

air force and openly rejected the provisions of the Versailles settlement. He also engaged in the remilitarization of the Rhineland as well as intervening in the Spanish Civil War.

The fourth and final design was the **period of aggression**. Under this arrangement, Hitler acquired the Sudetenland in September 1938. He also prepared for war with Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and in August 1939 with Poland. The Moscow Pact of August 23, 1939 was intended to guarantee Hitler an easy victory over Poland without the danger of a two front war that could arise from Soviet intervention. Kissinger described this as the greatest diplomatic victory for Hitler who never regarded diplomacy as a means of preserving peace but merely as an instrument for preparing the way for war. (Kissinger, 1994: 20) This final stage marked the climax in the reign of totalitarianism in Germany, as it was in Italy and Japan.

Japan's Challenge to the Status Quo

Japan was one of the totalitarian states that posed a challenge to the international order established in the inter-war years. As one of the victorious powers in the event of the First World War, Japan was an active player in the international system. For instance, in 1921/22, Japan signed the Washington agreement on naval disarmament with the United States and Britain and also agreed to maintain an arms equilibrium policy as well as contribute meaningfully to stabilize the Asian-Pacific region. (Iriye, 1987: 2) Besides, Japan was among the nine powers-Japan, US, Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and China-that pledged to cooperate to uphold the independence and integrity of China in international politics. In addition, Japan signed a treaty with US, Britain and France on international cooperation, a demonstration of her readiness to maintain existing international status quo. All these arrangements came under what has been described as the Washington Conference System. (Duus, 1976: 197-199)

Japan's diplomacy at the end of the First World War was characterized by a moderate policy of cooperation with the major powers in order to establish a new international order in East Asia where there would be an Open Door Policy towards all nations as

well as the respect for the territorial integrity of China as part of the arrangements of the League of Nations. Japan also agreed to recognize the commercial equality of all nations trading in the Asia. (Duus, 1976: 197-199)

However, the goal of peaceful coexistence and co-prosperity with China and other powers interested in the affairs of Asia had its limitation as far as it affected Japan's economic interest. To demonstrate this, Japan made it clear at Peking International Conference in 1925 that it would resist the return of tariff autonomy to the Chinese for fear that a rise in tariff might have an adverse effect on Japanese goods especially textiles. Also, the Japanese leader, Shidehara opposed Chinese efforts in the late 1920s to build railway lines in competitions with the South Manchurian Railway. Under Shidehara's successor, Tanaka Giichi, Japan made it clear that it had more than material stake in China and that its interest in Manchuria was separate and distinct from those in the rest of China, the focus of the League of Nations. Indeed, Tanaka warned that the Kuomintang should keep Manchuria out of its jurisdiction. (Iriye, 1987)

Totalitarianism as well as Japanese imperialism and aggression started in the army, which was not ready to abide by the Washington system that tended to limit Japan's power and influence. First, the army was not happy with the retrenchment policy recommended by the system under its disarmament agreement. Second, the army believed that if Japan was to be strong militarily and be self-supplying and self-sufficient economically and in preparation for total war in future, then it would have to keep Manchuria, an area with vast resource reserves of iron, coal and food supply as well as an outlet for Japan's excess population. In line with this thinking, in June 1928, a group of Kwantung army officers secretary engineered the assassination of the Manchurian warlord, Chang Tso-Lin with the intention of causing a Japanese military occupation of the area. The development was halted by the unwillingness of the Tanaka government to act.

Totalitarianism found fertile ground in Japan due to some other unexpected events. Even though Japan experienced good political and economic fortunes in the early 1920s, the country witnessed

domestic economic problems in 1927. The world depression that started in 1929 worsened domestic affairs in Japan like in other countries of the world connected to the global system. That of Japan was particularly bad because the country depended highly on international trade that was hit by high tariff. The army's discontent worsened when the Tanaka cabinet agreed to the Kellogg-Briand pact outlawing war among nations. The London Naval Conference of 1930 was another major problem because the Hamaguchi government in Japan agreed to new naval arms limitations against the advice of the navy. Under the arrangement the Japanese delegation agreed to a 10:6:6 ratios with Great Britain and the United States in heavy cruisers, a 10:6:6 ratios in light cruisers and other vessels, in addition to parity in submarines. (Duus, 1976: 204)

In 1930 Premier Hamaguchi was assassinated over the London Naval Treaty. His successor, Inuakai Tsuyoshi was assassinated on May 15, 1932. During this period of intense assassination, the army became increasingly interested in national politics. They were very vociferous on the Manchurian incident which happened when the Kwantung army allegedly bombed a section of the South Manchurian railway and indeed encouraged the reign of militarism in Japan's foreign policy as a response to the incident. They also ensured that the independence of the puppet state of Manchukuo under Kwantung was preserved. It is important to stress that Manchuria was very strategic to Japan because it accounted for some 40 percent of Japan's foreign trade and investment at the time. (De Conde, 1963: 526)

Totalitarianism was not limited to the army. On the part of ordinary Japanese, there was a rising "anti-Westernism" and "anti-foreignism". Some members of the public believed in Pan-Asian doctrines and even argued in favour of Japan being a champion of "Asia for the Asians" and maintained that Japan's policies on the mainland was a "Japanese Monroe Doctrine." (Duus, 1976: 214; Beasley, 1987: 175-194)

By 1935 Japan had embarked on tactics of creeping aggression, which culminated in the attack on China in 1937. In July 1940 the Konoe government joined the Axis side after Germany had defeated France in June 1940. In September, Japanese troops

moved into northern Indochina. The government thereafter signed a tripartite mutual defense pact with Germany and Italy to deter intervention by the United States in either a European war or in the Sino-Japanese conflict. This set Japan on a collision course with the US, prompting the latter to place embargo on shipments of aircrafts, arms, and other materials to Japan. In July 1939 the US abrogated its commercial treaty with Japan and in 1940 it terminated the export of scrap and iron and steel to Japan. This action annoyed Japan and in July 1941, the Konoe government moved troops into southern Indochina as a preparation for possible operations against the Dutch East Indies. The US responded by freezing Japanese assets in the United States and also by imposing an embargo on the export of oil to Japan. Japan was not deterred by this action but rather took the option of war, even if it meant facing the "ABCD (American-British-Chinese-Dutch) encirclement".

Konoe resigned under the prevailing atmosphere and was succeeded by Tojo Hideki who could not get the US to his side. The US had insisted on nothing less than the pre 1931 status quo in East Asia. The reaction of the Japanese army was to attack the US naval base at Pearl Harbour on Sunday December 7, 1941, with the intention to force them into negotiations. The counter-reaction from the US marked the famous atomic explosion on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, forcing Japan to surrender unconditionally.

Status quo powers' Response to Totalitarian Challenge

The reaction of the status quo powers to totalitarian challenge to the international order was one of appeasement. Hans Morgenthau has defined appeasement as a foreign policy that attempts to meet the threat of imperialism with methods appropriate to a policy of status quo. (Morgenthau, 1993: 76) In common usage, appeasement means the reduction of intensity of somebody's feelings, usually by satisfying his needs or demands partly or in full. (Hornby, 1995: 47)

An assessment of the activities of the inter-war years has shown that the democratic powers (Britain and France) did not protect the international order they had helped to build but rather

preferred the appeasement policy. The policy of appeasement is hinged on the accommodation strategy despite apparent provocation from the country or party that is being appeased. It feeds on guilt. The reasons for this development are not far fetched. First, the British Prime Minister, Chamberlain, was afraid of war and sought to avoid it by all means, partly because of the relative weakness of Britain's armed strength. Second, Britain was interested in tolerating German aggression provided it was targeted towards the east and that was why it did not bother about Hitler's anti-bolshevism.

On the part of France, the country was too weak to confront Hitler. Since Locarno, it had been France's cardinal principle not to risk war with Germany except in alliance with Britain. The country refused to prepare for any war because that could amount to it provoking what it feared. In any case, France was not militarily prepared for a war beyond its border. The advice of their military chiefs indicated that the French army was in no condition to fight a war outside its borders since it had put all its trust and most of its resources into its strategic plan of fortifications called the Maginot Line located along its northeastern frontier. (Wilkinson and Hughes, 1998: 310)

The Munich Agreement was the climax of the adoption of the policy of appeasement by the Allied powers in their bid to please Hitler. It was a declaration of friendship between Britain and Germany. The British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain "It seemed desirable to try to achieve some agreement with Germany on Central Europe, whatever might be Germany's aims, even if she wished to absorb some of her neighbours..." (Adamthwaite, cited in Kissinger, 1994: 309) The British leader was prepared to grant anything within his means to please Hitler and preserve the already disturbed peace in Europe. This was why his reaction to Hitler's attack on Sudetenland was to stress the issue of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans, all in bid to acquiescence to the demands of Hitler. For this reason, among others, the Munich settlement has been described as "notorious...synonymous with capitulation, appeasement, and treachery to small allies." (Wilkinson and Hughes, 1998: 311). Whatever the implication this judgement might be, the Munich Agreement was a product of its age. The

architect of the Munich settlement intended that it would make Hitler to be satisfied and would consent to live at peace with his neighbours. Reverse was the case. In any case, Hitler was not ready to abide by the provisions of the Munich settlement as he violated them less than six months after its signature when in March 1939 he annexed the Czech parts of Bohemia and Moravia. The League of Nations was weak both structurally and otherwise to response to the rapid collapse of international order in the inter-war years. No nation, including Britain and France was ready to die for the League in the name of protecting international peace and security. The League did not have both financial and military supports to checkmate the excesses of totalitarian states. Besides, Hitler's sentiment that it was proper for Germans to be under one Reich confused Britain and France, two prominent members of the League.

The failure of appeasement prepared the way for the outbreak of the Second World War. Indeed, the policy of appeasement destroyed the whole Versailles system while at the same time strengthening the power and prestige of Germany and Italy. It was a total failure.

Conclusion

The post-world war I international order was brought to an end by the activities of totalitarian states, namely Germany, Italy and Japan, which successfully challenged the international status quo. The collapse of the international system led to the outbreak of the Second World War. The reasons for the collapse can be partly sought from the unrealistic nature of the Versailles peace settlement, coupled with the totalitarian posture of Japan, Italy and Germany. The indemnity that was imposed on Germany was bound to produce a personality of Hitler's nature.

The events of the period indicated that Japan's imperialism set unfortunate precedent for the collapse of the inter-war peace settlement. The country was too ambitious and imperialistic. It can further be argued that while Italian imperialism killed the spirit of the League, the international body was finally buried by the activities of Hitler. (Ray, 1998: 23-24) On the part of Mussolini,

the Italian leader was motivated by revenge without due regard to international law and order.

The lesson for every nation is that there is need for collective security in the maintenance of global peace and security. There is also the need for equity and fairness to all and sundry in the practice of international politics. We can also add that the commitment of both minor and major powers is a sine qua non for the survival of international organizations. We think the inter-war settlement did not live up to these expectations. This could explain why Kissinger argued that "by conceding that the Versailles settlement was iniquitous the victors eroded the physiological basis for defending it. They had made a punitive peace and after having themselves created the maximum incentive for revisionism, cooperated in dismantling their own settlement. (Kissinger, 1994: 298)

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