Postwar Conditions Leading to the Rise of Fascism

Repercussions of the War...and the Peace

- Numbers of killed and wounded and the impact on the soldiers and their families
- War debts to be paid off; demand for pensions for veterans, widows, disability payments to maimed soldiers (a part of economic dislocation as well)
- Destruction of family farms, homes, heirlooms and history
- Insecurity of countries who felt vulnerable to a possibly resurgent Germany
- “Dissatisfied” powers—like Italy—who get less from the peace than had been promised and question the human and economic costs of having waged the war
- Humiliated powers—like Germany and Austria—forced to take the blame, pay the costs of the war, and suffer specific humiliating penalties (loss of territory, arms, etc.)
- Instability of countries created by the Paris Peace Conference without recognition of potentially destructive nationalities issues or economic or political factors (Czechoslovakia was the only nation created that managed to remain a democracy.)
- Lethargy and isolationism of democratic countries and their populations as a result of the enormity of the losses in the war

Economic Dislocation and Insecurity

- Transition from a wartime full economy (high demand for war materials, high demand for workers) to a peacetime economy (lower demand for workers, insufficient demand for goods)
- Insufficient supply of civilian goods leading to higher prices and inflation
- Problem of re-integrating demobilized soldiers into the civilian workplace
- Cost of repair and reconstruction of infrastructure in battle zones (roads, bridges, railroads, communication lines, farms, factories, public buildings)
- Reparations payments by the loser countries (this along with bad government policy in Germany leads to hyperinflation)
- Need and demand for pensions by veterans, widows, disability payments to maimed soldiers—nearly all of which were not affordable by the governments

Fear of communism

- A real possibility in light of the successful revolution in Russia in 1917 and a number of Communist-led uprisings in Europe (Hungary, Bavaria, Sparticists in Germany)
- Creation of organized Communist Parties separate from the Socialist Parties (France, Italy)

Social disorder (most of this is in reaction to the realization of mortality caused by the war)

- Cultural and artistic movements incomprehensible to older, more conservative or more traditional populations (Dada, surrealism, expressionism, Bauhaus)
- Loosened social and sexual mores (women’s dress, public drinking, cabaret society, more open homosexuality, a new level of sexual activity)
- Decreased automatic respect for age, office or authority

Failure of leadership and moral bankruptcy

- Postwar leaders are largely those who were in power before and during the war (who were perceived as having demonstrated their incompetence)
- Postwar leaders in many countries were old and unable to provide innovative solutions to the immense problems facing their countries
- **The total loss of faith in liberalism and the belief in reason upon which European thought had been based; a widespread acceptance of the belief that man was not at base rational and civilized.**