Economic Depression and Dictators: Crash Course European History #37

Crash Course: European History
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Hi I'm John Green and this is Crash Course European History.

So, despite improvement in living conditions across much of Europe after 1925, wartime resentments and disruption lingered. and then a momentous event in 1929 gradually turned into a wide-ranging disaster: in that year, the U. S. stock market crashed.

What came after is known as the Great Depression, and today, we're gonna talk about how that impacted. Europe, and how it coincided with the rise of dictators in Europe. [Intro] the stock market crash came after several years of citizens enthusiastically playing the market with borrowed money, and commentators had fueled the rise in stock prices by saying that the stock market was on a permanently high plateau, implying that prices could never fall so borrowing funds to buy on margin was a sure thing. Listen, I'm not a financial advisor, so take this with a grain of salt, but when people start saying that buying stocks is a sure thing, it ain't!

You can't time the market, and there are no sure things! Except for death...even taxes are not a sure thing. Just ask Amazon.

Anyaway, having made a ton of money while Europeans were bankrupting themselves in World. War I, the United States had become a huge source of loans for financing postwar recovery in Europe and elsewhere, as well as agricultural and industrial modernization, and the creation of new businesses. But as the stock market dropped, bankers began demanding payment for loans that had been used to buy stocks or invest in major projects, including international ones.

And in many cases, these loans couldn't be paid back, causing banks to fail; businesses also failed as consumers had less money to make purchases, and workers lost jobs by the millions. When the economy is working, its virtuous cycles seem endless; and when the economy stops working, its vicious cycles also seem endless. And by 1933, six million Germans were unemployed, that was one-third of the total workforce.

In terms of keeping their jobs, women were actually sometimes better off than men--but only because they received drastically lower wages, and so single women at least were less likely to be laid off. It was men who came to epitomize the unemployed. Unemployed women could pick up bits of outwork such as laundering and childcare, but men had few such opportunities.

And so the ideology of men as the main breadwinner was threatened; some men pretended to go to work even after they had lost jobs. Adolf Hitler, like Benito Mussolini, said he wanted to restore not just the reputation of his country but the war-shattered masculinity of the individual man. Hard times further undermined that sense of strong and secure manhood, but Stormtroopers felt they were reviving German masculinity by marching through neighborhoods and beating people up Communists and Jewish People.

Their violence also discredited the democratically run Weimar Republic, which couldn't keep order. And Nazis did employ men via this paramilitary organization, the kind of jobs that the Weimar. Republic seemed unable to create.

Of course, this is ultimately an example of only solving problems that you yourself have created...a long-standing tradition in authoritarian regimes. Meanwhile in the Soviet Union, youth were flocking to Joseph Stalin as they did in Germany to Hitler. By 1929 Stalin had consolidated his power in part by bringing thousands of new people to serve in the post-Lenin government, at the local, regional, and national level.

But the Soviets had big problems, beginning with food scarcity, even though it contained huge amounts of fertile land. Stalin put the blame on kulaks, or well-to-do peasants, which was an extension of Lenin's demonization of Kulaks. Lenin once ordered, Hang (absolutely hang, in full view of the people) no fewer than one hundred known kulaks. Lenin ordered many such killings, actually, and believed ongoing violence was essential to revolution, a practice that Stalin dramatically expanded.

So, in Russian kulak means â€œfistâ€• and for Communists the property-owning kulaks held communism in their greedy grip, by hiding surplus crops from the government. So Stalin roused Soviet youth to a war on kulaks, calling them enemies wedded to individualism and personal wealth. However, as with Nazism, neighbors often denounced anyone whose property they coveted.

In Germany, Hitler built unity among his followers by pointing to the false worldwide Jewish conspiracy that supposedly had one goalâ€"the annihilation of the Aryan race. and likewise, Stalin continued the Bolshevik trend of slaughtering supposed enemies of the people, in this case the bloodsuckers, cattle, swine, loathsome, repulsive [kulaks]; they had no souls, they stank as one Soviet citizen recalled in his memoirs. In both cases, the dehumanization of the Other was profound--I mean, you can see it in that quote, actually, as people are not called people but "cattle" and "swine", But Stalin's goal was not only to fortify communism through the murder of enemies. He also wanted to reorganize the agricultural economy by seizing individual farms and converting them into collective farms that would replace private ownership. and Ukraine was one of the major agricultural regions of the USSR, which made Ukrainians especially vulnerable to the widespread violence of the Stalin regime.

Rebelling against the murder and oppression of their friends and neighbors, individual farmers sometimes even slaughtered livestock and destroyed crops. But the execution and persecution of kulaks, friends of kulaks, and anyone else against whom there were grudges did nothing to increase agricultural productivity. In fact, the communalization of farms lowered yields and caused a famine.

In total, Stalin's purges and the resulting famine likely resulted in at least 10 million deaths by the mid-1930s. and then Stalin turned to other elements in the population to purge. As famine unfolded, Communist leaders found more enemies, this time Bolsheviks themselves both high and low as well as the military, many of whom confessed in their show trials (after having been tortured for days). Some faithful friends of Stalin even admitted to having disloyal thoughts if not deeds, which was adequate sin to justify execution. On the eve of his death, one old Bolshevik thanked Stalin for devising the great and bold political idea behind the general purge. Which speaks to how deeply propaganda can work on humans.

Rapid industrialization in a series of five-year plans accompanied the purges. Stalin especially admired the United States and aimed to match their modernization. He had entire cities built around new factories and mining operations.

For instance, with the assistance of U. S. and German consultants, the city of Magnitogorsk became the center of Soviet steel production. The government summoned workers, both men and women, from across the vast Soviet lands to work there and in other factories.

The living conditions were often terrible. The working conditions difficult or even lethal. Yet, as one woman lathe operator explained proudly, We mastered this new profession ”completely new to us”with great pleasure. And to many both inside the was utopia in the making.

Idealists from all over the world flocked to what promised to be a

wonderland of egalitarian achievement. And its important to note that Hitler also attracted admirers from outside of Germany, such as industrialist Henry Ford and aviator Charles Lindbergh in the United States. Which brings us back to Germany.

In the fall of 1932, elections in Germany saw the communists and the Nazis receive similarly strong support, although the Nazis actually lost a few seats in the election. But afterwards, conservative leaders persuaded President Hindenberg--for whom, incidentally, history's most disastrous airship was named--to appoint Hitler chancellor. The theory was that he would be easier to control than the Communists, but with the backing of his passionate supporters, Hitler began to dismantle Germany's democratic system--which at that point had only really existed for a bit more than a decade.

Through intimidation and brutal treatment of elected representatives, Hitler soon passed an Enabling Act that allowed him virtually unchecked power. I mean, rarely has an act been more aptly named than the enabling act. He then moved in many directions in order to create a â€œpeople's community or Volksgemeinschaft.

He had a protection squad created ”the SS (Schutzstaffel)”that rounded up dissenters or anyone not seen as meeting Nazi standards of proper German-ness. Ways of not being properly German' included being Jewish, being gay, being a Communist, or being of Roma ancestry, among many others. The SS had vast powers to imprison so-called enemies in concentration camps or to execute them.

In the night of the long knives in 1934 Hitler's forces massacred hundreds of Nazis who had called for a restoration of Nazi purity by ending alliances with businessmen and military elite. That massacre purged the so-called socialist or anti-elitist element in the original Party in order to emphasize German nationalism alone. Nazis held massive book burnings; Nazi youth groups built loyalty from an early age; and it became common for young Nazis to turn in anyone who uttered criticism of the regime, including their own parents and other relatives.

Alongside arrests and purges, Nazi policy turned to deficit financing to build infrastructure such as modern highways that would put men back to work; by 1936, fewer than 1.6 million men were still unemployed. Hitler justified deficits by saying he would pay for them via future conquests. The Nazis were also concerned with reversing population decline, and so they instituted loans for couples giving birth to babies that were deemed pure Aryans, with the wife agreeing to surrender her employment as part of the deal.

Birth control and abortion were forbidden to German women, but they were readily available for those the Nazis considered inferior. And then, in the 1930s, foreshadowing broader policies, the government began to murder physically or mentally disabled people in mobile gas chambers that traveled to hospitals and other institutions. The aim was the creation of a master race, purged of purportedly inferior types such as Roma, Slavs, and above all, Jewish people, whose supposed inferiority, in Hitler's word, was documented by the greatest of scientific knowledge. We've talked before about negative integration and positive integration techniques for building a community--positive integration techniques involve celebrating shared values and finding a definition for what we are.

Negative integration techniques involve defining a community by what we aren't--especially by finding enemies or targeting outsiders to unify a community. In Hitler's Germany, the population coalesced into a volksgemeinschaft by a shared dehumanization and shared hatred of outsiders, especially Jewish people. German feelings of worth, and even superiority, were restored and strengthened by hating others.

And this was a long term, and very public practice that people both inside of Germany and outside of it knew about. For instance, The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 removed Jewish peoples' German citizenship and barred them from most jobs and from marriage to Aryans. The government moved Jews from their housing, reduced the food they were allowed, and forced them to work at lowly jobs for virtually no pay.

Officials and neighbors then stole Jewish housing and personal property, showing that. Nazi claims to high ideals masked outright theft and greed. Jewish people first suffered what historians call a â€œsocial deathâ€• as their lives were degraded by the Nazis, making any harm that might come to them appear natural.

Indeed, so-called Social Death often precedes widespread murder. In 1938, the son of a harassed Jewish couple killed an official, which the Nazis used an excuse for a rampage against synagogues, businesses, homes, and individuals ”a horrific event that came to be known as The Night of Broken Glass or Kristallnacht. Let's go to the Thought Bubble. 1.

The Nazi regime rampaged and plundered internationally as well. 2. In 1935, Germany began openly boosting military power, 3. which had been curtailed by the Versailles treaty. 4. In 1936, German troops occupied the Rhineland 5. ”an area in western Germany bordering France. 6.

In 1938, Germany occupied Austria to cheering crowds, and then absorbed Austria into the. Reich 7. (which was forbidden by the Peace of Paris), 8. and proceeded to seize Austria's large supply of gold 9. â€”an act that would be repeated across Europe alongside the seizure of Jewish wealth. 10. Later that year, Hitler claimed the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia 11. because of its large German population 12. and secured that claim with a meeting in Munich 13. that included British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, French Premier Edouard Daladier, and Mussolini. 14.

Crowds rejoiced at the peace Hitler promised in exchange for this appeasement of his demands, 15. but as future Prime Minister Winston Churchill commented Those poor people. They little know what they will have to face.16. In March 1939, Germany annexed all of Czechoslovakia. 17.

In addition to making deals with the French and British, Hitler made deals with Stalin, 18. trading Soviet grain for German machinery and other industrial goods. 19. And it should be noted that Hitler was not alone in authoritarian conquest at the time. 20. Mussolini joined in, sending the Italian army to Ethiopia in 1936 21. and announcing â€œthe Roman legions are on the march againâ€• as fascism thrived.

Thanks Thought Bubble. So, meanwhile, in Japan, military officers saw the need to expand. They had already built an effective modern army, defeating China in 1894 and 1895 and.

Russia in 1904 and 1905. In 1931, they blew up a train in Manchuria and used that event to justify taking over. Manchuria, as part of a plan to free Asia (and eventually the world) from western imperialism...and then, you know, replace it with Japanese imperialism.

In 1937, Japan invaded China, which from a non-Eurocentric perspective was probably the real beginning World War II--unless it began in 1931, with the invasion of Manchuria. all of which is a reminder that in some ways, violence was everywhere even before World. War II was said to have begun: Like, the Spanish had

overthrown dictatorial rule in 1931 and set up a republic in a burst of democratic enthusiasm, but amid trouble setting up a government that could maintain public order, many different political groups began to jostle for power, including. liberals, and constitutionalists, and socialists, and communists, and Trotskyites, anarchists. And this fractured and frail democracy created an opening for an authoritarian military uprising in 1936 led by Francisco Franco.

That was war...and in some ways it was world war, because the ensuing Spanish Civil War involved many of the European powers, with German and Italian bombers practicing the strafing of civilians from airplanes, a tactic the British had used in their colonies and that would be deployed throughout the battlefields of World War II. So, when we look back on history, it is easy to forget that dictators like Franco, and. Stalin, and Hitler, and Mussolini had enthusiastic supporters.

Teenage girls painted their fingernails with swastikas a Buddhist symbol that was appropriated by the Nazis ”while parents gave children toy SS men to play with and other adults listened enraptured to Hitler's (or Mussolini's) speeches. As we've discussed before, even tyrants require support from at least some institutions and individuals to survive. And what makes such evil so terrifying is not that tyrants can rise to power--but that they often do so with broad swaths of support.

History isn't just something that happens. It's something each of us helps make, a responsibility we all need to take seriously. Thanks for watching.

I'll see you next time.