

## SECTION II: HITLER'S EXPANSIONIST POLICY

### Aims:

1. A Greater Germany
  - Hitler saw the way to achieve more land for Germany was to acquire lands such as Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland
  - Hitler knew he could exploit the fact that there were ethnic Germans living in these area and hence use as an excuse for annexation
2. *Lebensraum* (Living space)
  - Eastern Europe was seen as potential territories for Hitler to conquer and thereby creating more land for Germans
3. Establishing the superior Aryan race
  - In order to do this, Hitler will first have to annex the whole of Europe and then carry out extermination of 'inferior races'
  - Eg Holocaust

### Step 1: Withdrawal from LON

- At Geneva Disarmament Conference, Hitler proposed that French disarm to level of Germans or allow Germans to rearm to that of the French
- France naturally objected
- Hitler used it as an excuse to withdraw from LON
- Once out of LON, Hitler began to systematically tear down the restrictions imposed on Germany

### Step 2: Conscription and Rearmament

- One of the first steps was to rearm Germany
- Hitler stepped up rearmament and conscription policies
  - Under terms of TOV, Germany was not allowed to have an air force nor a large army
  - But by 1935, Germany's Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) had 2500 planes and an army of 300,000 soldiers
- Policies aimed to achieving an army of 550,000 strong
- Allies took on a pacifist in response, not wanting to anger Hitler lest it turns into war

- Britain even signed the Anglo - German Naval Agreement with Germany in June 1935
  - Allowed Germany to have limited build up of its navy
- Hitler grew bolder due to such responses
- Began to transform Germany into a formidable and dangerous military power
- Large amounts of money spent on military production

### Step 3: Remilitarisation of Rhineland

- On 7 March 1936, Hitler ordered German troops to reoccupy Rhineland
  - Under terms of TOV, Rhineland was to be a demilitarized zone
  - Hitler blatantly defying the TOV by ordering troops into Rhineland
- Hitler used France - Soviet Alliance as an excuse
  - Claimed Germany was under threat from both France and USSR, and that Germany should be allowed to defend its frontiers
- Hitler knew he was testing his luck
  - Orders were for troops to retreat if attacked
- However, French did not respond
  - France was going through elections at the time
  - No French position wanted to be seen as a warmonger (Aftermath of WWI)
- LON responded by only condemning Hitler
  - Busy handling Abyssinian Crisis
- Significance of Remilitarising the Rhineland:
  - Hitler grew more bold to test the boundaries
  - Popularity with the Germans increased even more as they finally saw a leader willing to defend their rights
  - Army increased in numbers in grew in confidence, and became significantly bolder in military ventures
- Hitler's gamble paid off

### Step 4: German's involvement in the Spanish Civil War

- The Spanish Civil War

- Fought between Nationalists and Communists
- Hitler was very strongly anti-Communism
  - He sent military aid to support the Spanish Nationalists forces
    - Eg Soldiers, equipment and warplanes
- Britain and France adopted a non-intervention policy
  - But did support Hitler as they were also anti-communist
  - Did not stop Hitler from involving Germany military
- Reasons for German involvement
  - Hitler knew that he would gain the support of both Britain and France
  - LoN would also not take any action against him
  - Good opportunity for his newly emerged *Luftwaffe* and army to gain battle experiences
- Hitler portrayed himself as the Defender of Civilisation Against Communism
  - Signed anti-Communism Pact with Japan to show his hatred for communism to the world

### Step 5: Unification with Austria

- Britain and France's non-intervention towards Spanish Civil War contributed even further to Hitler's view towards them as weak
- Decided to exploit further as he planned to annex Austria next
- Many Austria born Germans living in Austria and many wanted a union with Germany
  - Prevented due to terms of ToV
- Hitler encouraged Austrian Nazis to create trouble and start to push for Anschluss (political union) with Germany from within
- Demonstrations and riots started in Austria
- Hitler pressured Austrian Chancellor to agree to unifying with Germany for the riots to stop
  - Also sent German troops in Austria to 'maintain order'
- Chancellor called for a plebiscite (a vote by which the people express an opinion for or against the government's proposal)

- 99.75% voted for unification
- Austria annexed to Germany on 13 March 1938
- Clear violation of ToV, but nothing was done against Hitler
  - Hitler defended himself saying it was 'Austria's decision'
- This unification gave Hitler crucial resources, such as gold and iron ore to further his rearmament programme
  - Austria troops were quite well-developed and modern was Hitler's to command

#### Step 6: Annexation of Sudetenland

- Large numbers of Czech Germans lived in Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia
  - Greatly influenced by Nazi leaders
  - Demanded for Sudetenland to be a part of Germany
- Hitler rode on this and threatened to go to war if demands of Czech Germans were not met
- In response Czechs were ready to go to war against Germany
  - Had a modern army
  - Leader Edvard Benes willing to fight
- Britain, France and USSR were Czechoslovakia's allies
  - Britain and France wanted to avoid war
- Struck a deal with Hitler and signed the Munich Agreement (1938)
  - Did so without consulting the Czechs and Soviets
  - Later added to Stalin's distrust of western allies
- Sudetenland to be ceded to Germany
- Hitler promised not to take over any more land
- On 1 October 1938, Hitler marched his troops into Sudetenland without meeting any resistance; Edvard Benes stepped down in protest
- Both Britain and France realised Hitler could not be trusted
  - Warned Hitler they would go to war if he tries to invade Poland

#### Step 7: Nazi-Soviet Union

- Also known as the Iron and Steel Pact (Non-aggression Pact)

- Stalin decided to throw his weight with Hitler for the way Brit and France treated Czechs and Soviets at Munich agreement
  - Opportunity too good to waste when Hitler went to Stalin with a proposal
- Hitler wanted to take over Poland, but was afraid of a two front war
- Signed Nazi-Soviet Pact (23 August 1939)
  - Lasting for 10 years
  - Both promised to not attack each other and resolve any conflict in a friendly manner
  - To divide Poland equally between Germany and USSR
  - Germany not to interfere in USSR activities in Baltic States
- West reacted in anger and shock, condemned Germany and Soviet Union for "union of evil"
- Iron was that Stalin did not trust Germans, and Hitler was strongly anti-communist
- Once Hitler knew Soviets would not defend Poland, he went on with his plans
  - Demanded for Danzig which consisted of mostly Germans to be a part of Germany
  - Wanted to build a railroad linking east Prussia to Germany but Polish leaders did not trust Hitler and negotiations broke down
- Hitler still furthered his demands for Polish Corridor
- Brit and France responded with further negotiations
  - Convinced Hitler that Brit and France would not declare war on Germany
- He invaded Poland on 1st September 1939
  - Polish troops no match to Hitler's advanced and well developed army
- Ended up in war from Brit and France on 3rd September 1939