



INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

Course: SELECTED CHAPTERS OF CZECH AND WORLD HISTORY

T5 Interwar Period 1918 to 1939

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INTERWAR PERIOD 1918 TO 1939

The years that followed after First World War are called Interwar Period. Those are 21 years that are “stuck” between two world cataclysms. Despite the fact that politician in 1919 tried to receive measurements to prevent outbreak of war (League of Nations, disarmament conferences etc.) the opposite had happened. It was due to fact that world order in 1918 and 1939 suffered of lack of instruments to punish the aggressor. Moreover relations between powers were influenced by tendency to separate victorious from defeated countries. But among defeated countries were in fact not only former allies of Germany, but also vast territory of Soviet Union. The unspoken tendency of some politician in both sides to re-arrange so called Versailles System ended up in outbreak of Second World War.

Paris Peace Conference

On 18 January 1919 talks of representatives of victorious states on **Paris Peace Conference** took place. Together there were 27 independent states and five British dominions, i.e.

- powers, **United Kingdom, France, United States, Italy**, and **Japan**;
- **Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania**, and others, and for dominions:
- **Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Newfoundland**, and **Union of South Africa**.
- Soviet Russia, as in fact victorious state since Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty was repealed, was not invited.

To co-ordinate talks **Highest Council** (Council of ten, i.e. two representatives for all powers including Japan), but in following weeks key position of four victorious powers (Council of Four, Great Four); those were the most distinguished representatives:

- **United Kingdom** represented by Prime Minister Lloyd George,
- **France** by Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau,
- **United States** by president Woodrow Wilson and
- **Italy** by Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando.
- **Czechoslovakia** was represented by Karel Kramář and Edvard Beneš.

Soon disputes over text of treaty appeared. France demanded to weaken the Germany as much as possible while United Kingdom and United States claimed to

preserve Germany because of necessity for stabilization of Europe as kind of “counterweight” against Soviet Union.

Peace Treaty

Despite huge disputed in 1919 to 1920 all five peace treaties were signed with defeated countries. Each treaty was signed in different chateaux around Paris.

- With **Germany** the Peace Treaty of **Versailles** was signed on 28 July 1919.
 - Germany lost part of its territory (see below), including colonies, i.e. Togo, Cameroon, Namibia (German Western Africa), Tanzania (German Eastern Africa) etc.,
 - its army was forced to be reduced both in number, among others maximal number of active men in service was set on 100 000 men, and in quality, i.e. a lot of types of weaponry were forbidden,
 - Germany was than blamed for triggering the war, and
 - forced to agree with payment of reparations whose height was not settled (!).
- With **Austria** the Peace Treaty of **Saint-Germain-en-Ley** was signed on 10 September 1919.
 - Austria lost majority of its territory, among others Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia on behalf of Czechoslovakia,
 - its army was reduced to maximum of 30 000 men, and
 - Austria was forbid to join with Germany (Anschluss).
- With **Bulgaria** the Peace Treaty of **Neilly** was signed on 27 November 1919.
 - Bulgaria lost part of its territory on behalf of Serbia and Greece and also its army was reduced.
- With **Hungary** the Peace Treaty of **(Great) Trianon** was signed on 4 June 1920.
 - Hungary suffered hugged territorial losses, among other there was Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia that was joined to Czechoslovakia, and its army was reduced on 35 000 men. Unintended but very problematic was the fact that due to territorial losses huge number of Hungarians became minorities in neighbouring states (Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania).
- With **Turkey** the Peace Treaty was signed in **Sévres** on 10 August 1920.

- The enclosing the peace treaty was the most complicated case due to fact that in Turkey Young-Turkish movement win the revolutions and Greece-Turkey war began.

Changes of Borders in Europe

The end of First World War and wave of revolution that spread through the Europe had significant impact on forming new states and new-states borders. Three European powers were disintegrated, **Germany**, **Austria-Hungary**, and **Russia**, and on their territory new states originated:

- **Czechoslovakia**, state of Czechs and Slovaks with number of minorities and together with ca. 13 million inhabitants was established in former Austrian, Hungarian, and partly of Germany territory.
- **Poland**, state of Poles and Ukrainians, Belarusians, and of Germans, and together with ca. 27 million inhabitants was created in territory of four empires, of Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary.
- **Yugoslavia**, that represents mixture of number of ethnicities, among them of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians, was established in territory of former Austria-Hungary.
- In the western territory of Tsar's Russia **Finland**, **Lithuania**, **Latvia**, and **Estonia** with together some 10 million inhabitants were established, and in south-western Russia short-existing independent **Ukraine** (till 1920) was declared.

Also territory of existing states had changed.

- **France** gained Germany territory of Alsace and Lorraine,
- **Italy** gained Tirol and coast of Adriatic Sea that belonged to Austria,
- **Belgium** gained small territory around towns Eupen and Malmedy,
- **Denmark**, neutral state, gained on ground of referendum part of Schleswig,
- **Romania** gain vast territory of Transylvania, of Pannonia, and Bukovina, former Austria-Hungarian lands, and Bessarabia (present day Moldova) and Dobrudja from Russia and Bulgaria, respectively, and
- **Greece** gained of part of Aegean shores, while Bulgaria lost direct connection with Aegean Sea.

Versailles-Washington System

According to peace treaties new world order was created. Its fundamentals were:

- **Versailles Peace Treaty** (see above) and results of
- **Washington Conference.**

During Washington Conference talks about situation in Pacific and China took place from 12 November 1921 to 6 February 1922. In conference there were representatives of:

- **United States,**
- **United Kingdom,**
- **France,**
- **Japan,** and others.

According to the agreements status quo of number of ship tonnages of powers was settled. Also **sovereignty and integrity of China** was declared, including of principle of opened door. But results of conference were for the first time revised by:

- **London Open Sea Conference** of 1930.

In Pacific, the same as in Europe, the settlement of Washington Conference were broken in 1930s (see below).

League of Nations

According to the Versailles Peace Treaty the League of Nations, predecessor of present day United Nations, was established on 18 June 1919. Originally organisation comprised 26 states, later on its number increased to 54 states.

Establishing of League of Nation was one of the most significant results of the Paris Peace Conference. Its aim was to grant international co-operation of its members in way preserve to peace by principle of collective security. But in fact this ambition to prevent war was limited by fact that League of Nation did not have any disposable armed forced and the only instrument was to induce economic sanction towards aggressor.

The Pact of League of Nations was signed in 1920. Its main bodies were:

- **Assembly of Members** where representatives of all members of the League had their chairs,
- **Council of League of Nations,** and
- **Permanent Secretary,** that was established in Geneva and which was responsible for preparing the agenda for the Council and the Assembly.

But out of League of Nations there were still number of powers. That fact meant that after its beginning the organisation had lack of authority. The members were not:

- **United States**, despite the fact that U.S. president Woodrow Wilson initiated its formation, because Senate of U.S.A. refused to ratify Treaty of Versailles,
- **Germany** became member only shortly from 1926 to 1933,
- **Russia/U.S.S.R.** was member after the Germany left in 1934, but were expelled due to aggression towards Finland in 1939,
- **Japan** (till 1933), and
- **Italy** (till 1937)

League could not enforce of observance of principles of international law during Italo-Abyssinian War, since 1939 did not made any real activity, and formally was dissolved in 1946 when lost its raison d'être because of United Nations were established.

Spread of Communism

Communism is **political ideology and political movement** that originated in radicalization of political thoughts of Karl Marx by Russian professional revolutionist Vladimir Lenin. That is why ideology of Communism is called Marxism and Marxism-Leninism, respectively.

- Thesis of general crisis of capitalism and international workmen revolution.
- The goal is the development of a state into a socialist republic and full realization of communist.
- Single-party state.
- Worldview promotes atheism as a fundamental tenet.
- Organizational basis = radical wings of social democratic parties, first established in Social Democratic Party of Russia (as wing disposing of majority, i.e. **Bolsheviks**). For the first time Bolsheviks became active during Russian revolution from 1905 to 1907, but their time came after February Revolution of 1917.

Great October Revolution broke up and overthrown of Russian Provisional Government on 7. November 1917. Soon after that system of one political party was established and Lenin, head of Soviet Russia, tried to "export the revolution".

- **Polish-Soviet War** (1919 to 1921) = soviet army near Warsaw, so called Miracle on Vistula on 13 to 15 August 1920, Polish army stops Soviet advancement into Central Europe, Peace of Riga – dividing the disputed territories between Poland and Soviet Russia
- **Comintern** = union of all Communist parties, est. in March 1919, in fact Soviet control member parties; seven World Congresses between 1919 and 1935; officially dissolved during 1943

Reception in Europe:

- Creation of left-wing (bolshivist) in social democratic parties and attempts of revolution
- November Revolution in Germany, declaration of Communist Republic of **Alsace** (November 1919), of **Bremen** (January 1919), of **Bayern** (Spring 1919)
- **Hungarian** and **Slovakian** Soviet Republic (from March to June 1919)
- Baltic lands: declaration of Soviet republic in **Finland**, **Lithuania**, **Latvia**, and **Estonia** (1918 to 1920)

Reception in World:

- Origin of Communist parties in Asia: China (1921)
- **Iranian** Soviet Socialist Republic (1920)

During 1920 wave of Communist revolts and revolutions in world had stopped. Despite the fact that majority of attempts to establish Communist regime failed, Communism became integral part of political system of all countries and became one of the highest danger for democracy.

Spread of Fascism and Nazism

Fascism and Nazism are both political ideologies and movements that were formulated after First World War in reaction of spread of Communism. Both ideologies are very different, but their common feature is fact that those are ideology of radical nationalism, or more correctly of chauvinism.

Beginnings of Fascism were set in 1919 in Italy during period of so called **Biennio Rosso**, i.e. Two Red Years. That was period of civil disorder, revolts and spread of Communism.

- **Fasci di combattimento**, Fight Units, were established in March 1919 as the first Fascist organizations. The term “Fascism” derives both from the facts that

began in those “Fasci” and from the Romanic symbol of rule, i.e. bundle of twigs (fasces).

- **Partito Nazionale Fascista**, Fascist National Party, was created in 1921 with its “leader” (duce) Benito Mussolini.
- The Fascist undertook so called March on Rome on 28 October 1922 that ended in successful coup d’état. In power in Italy became Fascist party and as reaction the Fascism had spread over Europe. But except intelligentsia Fascism had only small impact in political system. Due to economic conjuncture that started in 1924 in Europe there was no ground for demanding radical postulates.

At the same time and independently (!) on Fascism **National Socialist Movement** was established in Germany 1919. The core of its movement was rigid racism and anti-Semitism. Its spread stopped in 1923 when unsuccessful coup d’état took place and National Socialist Party, i.e.

- Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) was dissolved.

After this attempt of Putsch (see below) economic in Germany began to grow and Nazism lost its support.

Great Depression

The economic situation in Europe had deteriorated badly after so called **Black Thursday** on New York bourse (Wall Street) that occurred on 24 October 1929. During that day assets of companies lost its value and economic suffered shortage of finance. The bank segment and international businesses collapsed. Contrary to other crisis and depression, Great Depression of 1930s was:

- **general crisis** that affected all economic branches; the same as finance sector sectors of industry, business, or services were affected.
- Parallel to **agrarian crisis** broke out.
- Great Depression was **long-lasting depression** and did not (!) changed for conjuncture before Second World War; in 1937 new crisis started.

The Great Depression achieved **its peak in 1932**. That year:

- all-over world production decreased about 38 % of 1929 production and world business about 34 %.
- The height of unemployment reached to 25 %. For example Germany that had some 60 million inhabitants had 6 million of unemployed man.

The depression was the most disastrous in **United States** (nearly 20 million of unemployed) and in countries financially depending on American capital. Those countries were **Germany** (repayments of the war reparations were suspended in 1932) and **Austria**. Both countries got under Nazi rule in 1933 and 1938, respectively.

- After 1930 once again began period of social and political disorder that led to spread of radical political ideology, i.e. especially of Communism and Fascism.

Attempts to cope with depression had started. In United States president Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared the programme **New Deal**. This response to the Great Depression was series of programmes (laws and presidential executive orders) to recovery of economy and to reform financial system lasted in 1933 to 1938. But New Deal ended in new economic depression of 1937.

Crisis of Democracy in Europe

Economic and social disorder in Europe brought political disorders. Crisis of democracy was long-term process that had two main waves.

First wave of crisis of democracy took place in early 1920s due to post-war economic and social crisis:

- In 1917 to 1921 civil war in **Russia** ended up in victory of Communists (Bolsheviks) led by Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin and of proclamation of Soviet Union in 1922.
- In 1922 Fascists took over rule in **Italy**.

Second wave of crisis of democracy took place in 1930 due to Great Depression:

- After election victory of Nazi Party in 1929 to 1932 representatives of Nazis made use of fact that became members of government and Parliament and overtook the supreme power in **Germany**.
- Situation in post-revolutionary **Spain** led at first in victory of Communist and then in civil war in 1936 to 1939 in victory of conservative movement (Caudillo General Franco).

Crisis of Versailles-Washington System

The same as crisis of democracy dissolution of Versailles-Washington system had occurred before 1939. Its dissolution enabled absence of enforce mechanism and

disputes among powers. The only Western power interested in preservation of existing world order is France that suffered of but political turmoil and of economic and demographic fall. Despite the fact that crisis of world order is from its definition gradual process two main waves could be defined:

In the first half of 1920s important changes in system were implemented:

- **Greco-Turkish War**, 1920 to 1923, first revision of system, i.e. of peace treaty with Turkey: Treaty of Lausanne (1923) = Turkey gave back part of its territory.
- **Ruhr Crisis**, failure of the German Weimar Republic to pay reparations, occupation of Ruhr between 1923–1925 by troops from France and Belgium, passive resistance, hyperinflation, Germans won the world's sympathy, Dawes plan of April 1924 which lowered German reparations payments.

Another wave of crisis in world order started in the middle of 1930s and ended-up in outbreak of Second World War.

- **Italo-Abyssinian War**, 1935 to 1936 conflict between the Kingdom of Italy and the Empire of Ethiopia, undermine the credibility of the League of Nations.
- **Appeasement**: policy of concession towards German revisionism in order to avoid conflict, the term is often applied to the foreign policy of the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.
- **Munich Agreement**, September 1938, annexation of portions of Czechoslovakia,
- **Occupation of rest of Czechoslovakia**, 1939 = final decline of system.

Establishing of Totalitarian Regimes

In 1930s in Soviet Union and in National Socialist Germany totalitarian regimes were established. The term totalitarian derives from the word "total"; it means that main effort of these regimes is total (complete) control of the whole society. There are five main characteristics of totalitarian regime:

- **political party as the power centre of state;**
- **existence of ideology and subordination of politics to ideology;**
- **terror, especially preventive terror, as the mean of control;**
- **control of armed forces;**
- **control of all media.**

Soviet Russia and Soviet Union

In 1922 Soviet Union as federative country of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus was formed. Later on the other countries joined Soviet Union, Transcaucasian, Kazakhstan and others. Bolshevik Party disposed all political power. During 1920s important changes in supreme leadership had occurred. First leader of Communists, Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin, died in 1924 and fight over his successorship started. The winner was **Joseph Stalin** who made use of its position of General Secretary of the Communist Party to gain control over all party and state.

The ideology shifted from Marxism-Leninism to **Leninism-Stalinism**. The grounds were:

- **Centrally planned economy**, i.e. situation when all economy including private life is under control of central institution. Economic development is according to
- **Five Year Plan**. The first such plan entered into force in 1928, but during its existence was changed. Accompanying phenomenon became
- **collectivization**, i.e. liquidation of all autonomous land properties (farms).

In Soviet Union the level of terror reached its peak in 1930s. The pretext for the terror became the assassination of high functionary Sergey Kirov on 1 December 1934. Despite the fact he was killed by solitary shooter Joseph Stalin accused the opposition and started the wave of judicial murders whose victims were both previous opposition and members of Communist Party.

During so called **Great Terror** (Great Purge) there were arrested more than 1.5 million people, nearly 700 000 out of them were sentenced to death and executed.

Weimar Republic and National Socialist Germany

In Germany the revolution had begun on 9 November 1918. The Emperor William II was forced to resign and left for exile in Netherlands. Germany became republic, but its official name was still Germany Empire (Deutsches Reich). From 1919, when new constitution was declared, until the Nazis took the supreme power in 1933, the period of German history is called Weimar Republic due to fact that legislative body and constitutional assembly that prepared constitution moved from German Capital, Berlin, to Weimar.

The Weimar Republic was far to be stable democracy. German government was under attack of radical parties in whole period of 1919 to 1933.

- **Communist revolts** broke out in January 1919,
- **Bavarian Soviet Republic** was declared in May 1919,
- so called **Kapp-Lutwitz Putsch** of right-wing radicals took place in March 1920, and finally
- so called **Bier Putsch** of Adolf Hitler took place in Munich in 9 to 10 November 1923.

Except these complications Germany was in international isolation. That is why that Germany signed **Treaty of Rapallo in 1922**.

After the Great Depression struck Germany ideas of Nazis start to spread rapidly over all country. In 1932 in parliamentary elections Nazi Party became the victorious party and in January 1933 President Paul Hindenburg **appointed Adolf Hitler**, fuehrer of Nazis, to be **Chancellor** (Prime Minister) of Germany. Soon after that Nazi Party began to eliminate political opposition.

- National referendum in August 1934 confirmed Hitler as leader (Führer) of Germany,
- Nazis restored economic stability using heavy military spending, while
- Anti-Semitism and
- Territorial demands (Austria, Czechoslovakia) misled attention out of the true nature of Nazi-Regime.

Occupation of Czechoslovakia

Czechoslovakia was established in 1918 and in 1919 became member of League of Nations. Czechoslovak state was after its beginnings key element of Versailles-Washington System and of so called **Sanitary Cordon**, i.e. system of countries of Eastern and Central Europe against **Germany** and **Russia/USSR**. That is why that state very sensitively reacted on changes in world orders. During 1918 to 1935 Edvard Beneš, Minister of Foreign Affairs, closed number of ally-treaties:

- With **Yugoslavia** and **Romani** in 1920 and set the ground for so called **Little Entente**,
- With **France** in 1924

- With **Soviet Union** in 1935. But the last treaty with Soviet Union had strongly negative reception in whole world Czechoslovakia was supposed to be subsidiary of Communist power.

Despite the fact Czechoslovakia had ally treaty with four countries the decisive moment was fact that with no of its allies had Czechoslovakia common borders. On the contrary. Czechoslovakia **had frontiers with countries that were supposed to be its enemies**. With Poland and Hungary Czechoslovakia led a war in 1919 and after 1933 the new enemy emerged – Nazi Germany. Adolf Hitler gradually destroyed Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939:

- **May mobilization 1938**
 - Fear of German attack, but negative reception in world: Czechoslovakia blamed to be aggressor (!), because Germany did not marched its army to Czechoslovakia borders.
- **Czechoslovak crisis (November 1937 to October 1938)**
 - Czechoslovakia without international support
- **Munich Agreement, 30 September 1938**, the agreement was signed by Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy; the military alliance Czechoslovakia with France proved useless
- **Occupation of Czechoslovakia, 15 March 1939**, on 16 March 1939 Hitler proclaimed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia

Summary

Interwar Europe was era in European history that was strongly affected by results and aftermath of First World War. In fact newly restored world order, so called Versailles-Washington System could not cope with two complementary connected problems:

- **Economic crisis** and
- **political radicalisation.**

Despite the world order was set on international cooperation under norms of League of Nations, there was absence of enforcement mechanism. And, moreover, out of the Versailles-Washington System were two most powerful European countries, Germany and Soviet Union, and also United States.

As a result of this situation, democratic regimes failed and at the end of 1930s the only democracy existed in countries of Western and Northern Europe and in limited form also in Czechoslovakia.

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