

Effects of WW1

Even after the official end of World War I, its far-reaching effects resounded in the world for decades in the forms of changing politics, economics and public opinion. Many countries began to adopt more liberal forms of government, and a hostile Germany was forced to pay for a large deal of war reparations, which ultimately led to the start of World War II. As Europe fell in debt from war costs, inflation plagued the continent. Additionally, the optimism of previous decades was abandoned and a bleak, pessimistic outlook on life was adopted after people had experienced the brutality of warfare.

Governmental Changes

As a result of World War I, socialistic ideas experienced a boom as they spread not only in Germany and the Austrian empire but also made advances in Britain (1923) and France (1924). However, the most popular type of government to gain influence after World War I was the republic. Before the war, Europe contained 19 monarchies and 3 republics, yet only a few years afterward, had 13 monarchies, 14 republics and 2 regencies. Evidently, revolution was in the air and people began to more ardently express their desires for a better way of life.

Effects of a harsh Peace

A second political effect of World War I centres solely on the treatment of Germany in the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. The Germans were forced to sign a humiliating treaty accepting responsibility for causing the war, as well as dole out large sums of money in order to compensate for war costs. In addition, the size of the German state was reduced, while that of Italy and France was enlarged. The Weimar government set up in Germany in 1918 was ill-liked by most of the citizens and maintained little power in controlling the German state. Rising hostilities toward the rest of Europe grew, and many German soldiers refused to give up fighting, even though Germany's military was ordered to be drastically reduced. Given such orders, numerous German ex-soldiers joined the Freikorps, an establishment of mercenaries available for street-fighting. The open hostility and simmering feelings of revenge exhibited by Germany foreshadowed the start of World War II.

Economic Change

Technology experienced a great boost after the war, as the production of automobiles, aeroplanes, radios and even certain chemicals, skyrocketed. The advantages of mass production and the use of machinery to perform former human labour tasks, along with the implementation of the eight hour work day, proved to stimulate the economy, the United States' in particular. However, much of Europe suffered devastating losses of physical property and landscape as well as finances. By 1914, Europe had won the respect of the world as a reliable money-lender, yet just four years later was greatly in debt to her allies for their generous financial contributions toward the war effort, owing them as much as \$10 billion. In an effort to pay back their allies, the governments of many European countries began to rapidly print more and more money, only to subject their countries to a period of inflation. Members of the middle class who had been living reasonably comfortably on investments began to experience

a rocky financial period. Germany was hit the hardest in terms of struggling with war reparations, and inflation drastically lowered the value of the German mark. In a period of no more than three months in 1923, the German mark jumped from 4.6 million marks to the dollar to 4.2 trillion marks to the dollar. It appeared that inflation knew no bounds.

Disillusionment

Psychologically, World War I had effects similar to those of a revolution. A growing sense of distrust of political leaders and government officials pervaded the minds of people who had witnessed the horror and destruction that the war brought about. Many citizens were angered that peacemakers had not expressed their ideals fervently enough, and people began to wonder why the war was fought at all. A feeling of disillusionment spread across the world as people bitterly decided that their governments in no way knew how to serve the best interests of the people. The loss of loved ones on the battlefield was especially disturbing, for in some parts of Western Europe, one of four young men had lost his life in battle. Altogether, the war killed 10 to 13 million people, with nearly a third of them civilians. The future certainly did not look bright for the families of those killed in the war, and a grim acceptance of reality replaced the optimistic dreams of those in decades past.

Summary

World War I did not completely end with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, for its political, economic and psychological effects influenced the lives of people long after the last shot was fired. Two main political changes rocked the world after the war: a greater number of countries began to adopt more liberal forms of government, and an angered Germany tried to cope with the punishments doled out to them by the victors, as its hostilities rose to the point where it provoked the second world war two decades later. Despite the advantages brought forth by developing technologies, the war mainly had a damaging effect on the economies of European countries. People's hopes and spirits also floundered, as they grew distrustful of the government and tried to cope with the enormous death toll of the war. The turbulent period after World War I called for a major readjustment of politics, economic policies, and views on the world.