

Knowledge Organiser : What was life like under dictators in the 20th century?

Topic Summary:

This small unit will introduce you to the concept of a dictator and dictatorships. **You will explore what it means to live under a dictatorship.** You will learn about some of the most famous 20th-century dictators, including **Mussolini, Stalin, and Hitler.** You'll find out how they rose to power, how they controlled people's lives, and the devastating impact they had on their countries and the world. By the end of this unit, you'll be able to think more deeply about **freedom, leadership, and human rights**, and understand why learning about dictatorships is still important today.

Feb and October 1917:

Revolution in Russia leads to the collapse of the Tsar (monarchy) and then Communism



1922: Mussolini March on Rome brings Italy under the control of his Fascist party

1924 : Death of Lenin leads to a power struggle of which Stalin emerges as the new leader of the Soviet Union



1933 : Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany – this gives him power of Parliament in Germany (Reichstag)



1919: Hitler begins to emerge in post war Germany as a critic of the new Weimar Government



1923: Munich Putsch Hitler's attempt to take control through force fails and he is imprisoned



1936 - 1938 : Purges in USSR see 1 million people executed











1934 : Death of President Hindenburg in Germany allows Hitler to assume his title of Fuhrer and he is able to establish his dictatorship

Key People:

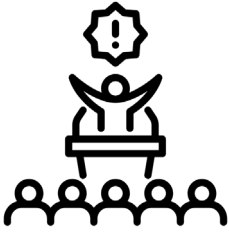
Vocabulary:

<p>Lenin 1917 – 1924</p> 	<p>The leader of the Bolsheviks (communists) in Russia. Started the October Revolution which brought Communism to Russia. In 1924 after his death he did not leave a successor and therefore a power struggle began between Stalin and Trotsky</p>
<p>Stalin 1924 – 1953</p> 	<p>Dictator of the Soviet Union between 1924 until his death in 1953. He ruled through a system of fear and oppression along side his cult of personality.</p>
<p>Mussolini 1922 – 1943</p> 	<p>Mussolini was able to take power through revolution which saw his fascist party overthrow the Italian monarchy. He ruled using both fear, religion and propaganda.</p>
<p>Hitler 1933 – 1945</p> 	<p>Hitler was able to take power democratically by using the German political system to his advantage. Once made chancellor he was able to use fear and incentives to follow his fascist regime.</p>

<p>Dictatorship</p> 	<p>A form of government where a persona or group holds absolute power with few or no checks on their authority</p>
<p>Communism</p> 	<p>A political and economic ideology of the far left which believes in the Common ownership of land, and equal distribution of wealth.</p>
<p>Fascism</p> 	<p>far right political groups who are often characterised by their totalitarian leadership, oppression and the importance of nation and race.</p>
<p>Putsch</p> 	<p>An attempt to overthrow the government (German word)</p>
<p>Cult of Personality</p> 	<p>The process of making the leader of the country into a hero figure. Usually done through propaganda.</p>
<p>Political Spectrum</p> 	<p>The different political ideologies (ideas) people have is represented on a spectrum. Dates back to the French Revolution</p>
<p>Gulag</p> 	<p>Soviet labour camp where people were sentenced as punishments</p>
<p>Soviet Union (USSR)</p> 	<p>The communist country of Russia and other republics between 1922 – 1991</p>

Core Knowledge:

Lesson 1: What is a dictator?



In this lesson, you explored what it means to be a dictator. A dictator is a leader who takes total control of a country, often using fear, violence, and propaganda to stay in power. You looked at the key characteristics many dictators share – such as banning elections, controlling the media, using secret police, and punishing anyone who disagrees with them. You also began to learn about the political spectrum – the range of political ideas from far-left to far-right. This helped you understand that dictators can come from different backgrounds (like communism or fascism), but they often use similar methods of control once in power. This lesson helps you start thinking critically about power, freedom, and how different ideologies can lead to dictatorship.

Lesson 2: How did Stalin maintain his power?



After Lenin died in **1924**, Stalin outmanoeuvred rivals like **Trotsky**, **Zinoviev**, and **Bukharin** by controlling the **Communist Party** and gaining support from loyal members. By **1928**, Stalin had full control of the Soviet Union. He ruled through **terror and propaganda**. Between **1936 and 1938**, he carried out the **Great Purge**, arresting and executing thousands of party members, army officers, and ordinary citizens. During the **Show Trials**, former Bolsheviks were forced to confess to crimes they didn't commit and were executed. Stalin created a **cult of personality**, with statues, posters, and schoolbooks presenting him as a genius and hero. His secret police, the **NKVD**, spied on citizens and sent millions to **gulags** (labour camps).

Lesson 3: How did Mussolini maintain power?

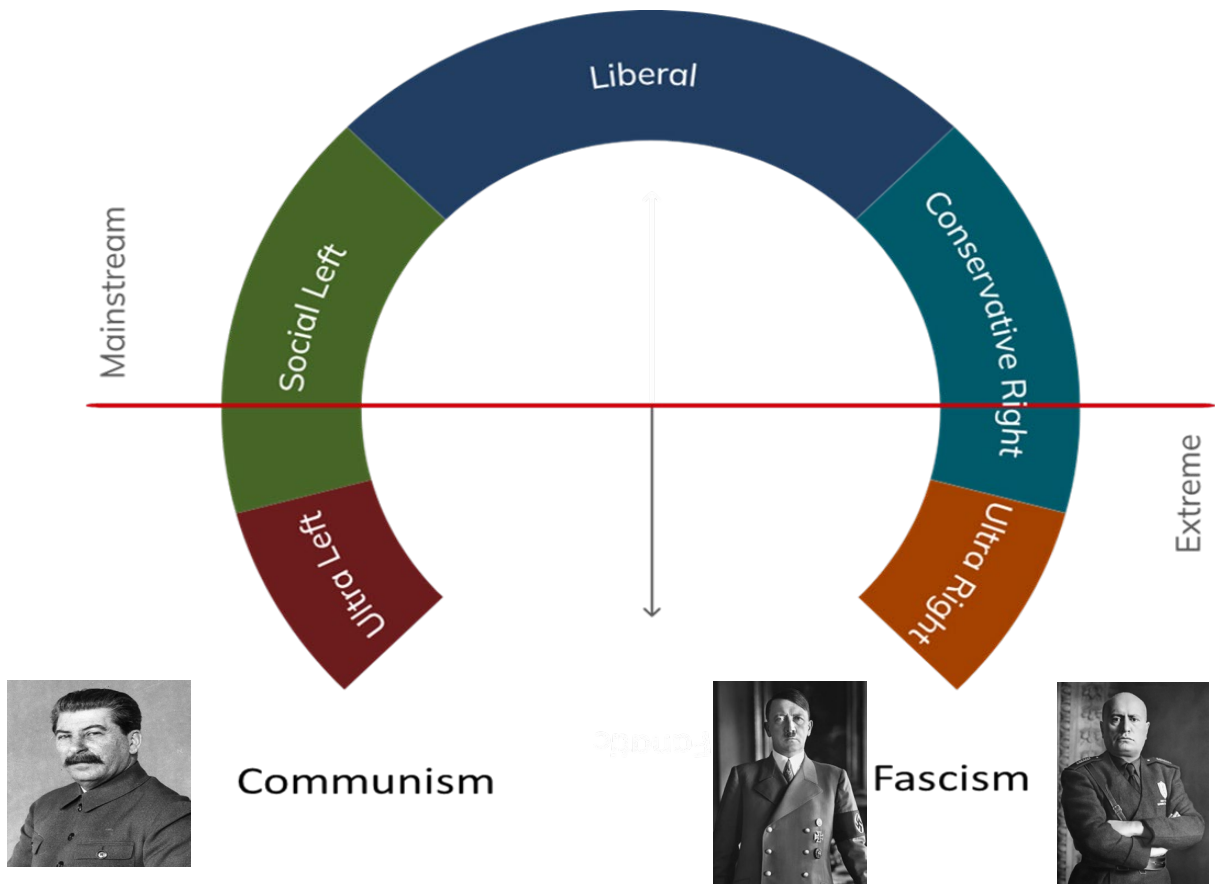


Mussolini became dictator of Italy by taking advantage of chaos after World War I – including high unemployment, strikes, and fear of communism. He formed the **Fascist Party** in 1919 and created a private army called the **Blackshirts**, who attacked socialist meetings and intimidated political opponents. In **October 1922**, Mussolini led the **March on Rome** with 30,000 Fascists. The King, afraid of civil war, made him **Prime Minister**. Once in power, Mussolini banned other political parties, censored newspapers, and used secret police (OVRA) to crush opposition. By **1925**, he declared himself **Il Duce** (the leader) and ruled Italy as a dictato

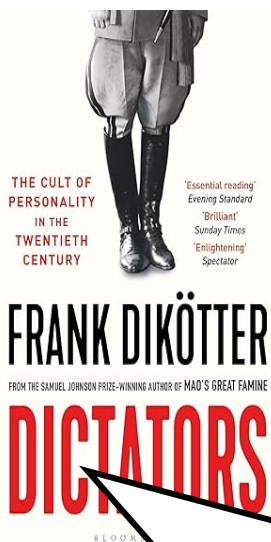
Lesson 4: How did Hitler maintain power?



Hitler gained power by using people's anger over the **Treaty of Versailles**, fear of communism, and the suffering caused by the **Great Depression**. In **1933**, he was appointed **Chancellor** of Germany. A few weeks later, the **Reichstag Fire** was blamed on a communist, allowing Hitler to arrest 4,000 communists and pass the **Reichstag Fire Decree**, removing basic freedoms. Soon after, the **Enabling Act** gave him power to pass laws without parliament. In **1934**, he launched the **Night of the Long Knives**, killing over 80 people, including **Ernst Röhm**, leader of the SA. This removed threats and won the army's loyalty. Hitler used the **Gestapo** (secret police), **SS**, and propaganda from **Goebbels** to control Germany and silence opposition.



What do Historians say?:



“A dictator must rely on ... secret police, a praetorian guard, spies, informants, interrogators, torturers. But it is best to pretend that coercion is actually consent. A dictator must instil fear in his people, but if he can compel them to acclaim him he will probably survive longer. The paradox of the modern dictator, in short, is that he must create the illusion of popular support”

How can I find out more?



Nazi creation of a dictatorship BBC bitesize