

30 Years War Reading A: McDougal Littell World History

Monarchy and Conflict in Central Europe

Unlike the monarchs of Russia and Western Europe, rulers in Central Europe in the 1500s and 1600s never became absolute monarchs. The Holy Roman Empire, which included most of Central Europe at that time, was headed by a single emperor, but he did not have total authority. His empire included dozens of small states, each with its own ruler, who fought vigorously against increased imperial power. Since the 1450s, all of the Holy Roman Emperors had come from a single family, the Hapsburgs. In the early 1600s, an attempt by one of the Hapsburg emperors to exert his authority launched a terrible conflict known as the Thirty Years' War. Alliances between the Hapsburgs and other European monarchs helped make the war a continent-wide affair.

The Thirty Years' War

The Thirty Years' War began as a religious dispute. In 1618 in Prague (now in the Czech Republic) an official representing Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II, who was Roman Catholic, ordered that two Protestant churches be shut down. Local Protestants were furious. They responded by throwing the emperor's representatives out of the palace windows. Although the men landed on a rubbish heap and were unhurt, their dignity was damaged.

The emperor's attempt to control people's religion sparked revolt throughout the region. Nobles in the German states of Bavaria and Austria rebelled against the emperor, and nobles from other states soon joined them. The rulers of other countries became involved in the war as well. The monarchs of Spain, who were also members of the Hapsburg family, joined the war on Ferdinand's side. In response, the king of France, Spain's rival, joined the Protestant opposition. The kings of Denmark and Sweden also joined on the Protestant side.

The Thirty Years' War dragged on until 1648, with devastating effects on Germany. Several million Germans died—in battle, from disease, or starvation because their fields were ruined. In the end, the two sides agreed to the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the war. In addition to extending religious toleration to both Catholics and Protestants, the treaty further reduced the power of the Holy Roman emperor and strengthened the rulers of the states within it.

Among the rulers who gained from the treaty were the leaders of Austria and Prussia. Austria was governed by the Hapsburg family, while Prussia's rulers came from a rival family, the Hohenzollerns.

30 Years War Reading B: Holt World History Human Legacy

SETTING THE STAGE

For a brief while, the German rulers appeared to have settled their religious differences through the Peace of Augsburg (1555). They had agreed that the faith of each prince would determine the religion of his subjects. Churches in Germany could be either Lutheran or Catholic, but not Calvinist. The peace was short-lived—soon to be replaced by a long war. After the Peace of Augsburg, the Catholic and Lutheran princes of Germany watched each other suspiciously.

The Thirty Years' War

Both the Lutheran and the Catholic princes tried to gain followers. In addition, both sides felt threatened by Calvinism, which was spreading in Germany and gaining many followers. As tension mounted, the Lutherans joined together in the Protestant Union in 1608. The following year, the Catholic princes formed the Catholic League. Now, it would take only a spark to set off a war.

Bohemian Protestants Revolt That spark came in 1618. The future Holy Roman emperor, Ferdinand II, was head of the Hapsburg family. As such, he ruled the Czech kingdom of Bohemia. The Protestants in Bohemia did not trust Ferdinand, who was a foreigner and a Catholic. When he closed some Protestant churches, the Protestants revolted. Ferdinand sent an army into Bohemia to crush the revolt. Several German Protestant princes took this chance to challenge their Catholic emperor.

Thus began the Thirty Years' War, a conflict over religion and territory and for power among European ruling families. The war can be divided into two main phases: the phase of Hapsburg triumphs and the phase of Hapsburg defeats.

Hapsburg Triumphs The Thirty Years' War lasted from 1618 to 1648. During the first 12 years, Hapsburg armies from Austria and Spain crushed the troops hired by the Protestant princes. They succeeded in putting down the Czech uprising. They also defeated the German Protestants who had supported the Czechs. Ferdinand II paid his army of 125,000 men by allowing them to plunder, or rob, German villages. This huge army destroyed everything in its path.

Hapsburg Defeats The Protestant Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and his disciplined army of 23,000 shifted the tide of war in 1630. They drove the Hapsburg armies out of northern Germany. However, Gustavus Adolphus was killed in battle in 1632. Cardinal Richelieu and Cardinal Mazarin of France dominated the remaining years of the war. Although Catholic, these two cardinals feared the Hapsburgs more than the Protestants. They did not want other European rulers to have as much power as the French king. Therefore, in 1635, Richelieu sent French troops to join the German and Swedish Protestants in their struggle against the Hapsburg armies.

Peace of Westphalia The war did great damage to Germany. Its population dropped from 20 million to about 16 million. Both trade and agriculture were disrupted, and Germany's economy was ruined. Germany had a long, difficult recovery from this devastation. That is a major reason it did not become a unified state until the 1800s.

The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended the war. The treaty had these important consequences:

- weakened the Hapsburg states of Spain and Austria;
- strengthened France by awarding it German territory;
- made German princes independent of the Holy Roman emperor;
- ended religious wars in Europe;
- introduced a new method of peace negotiation whereby all participants meet to settle the problems of a war and decide the terms of peace. This method is still used today.

Beginning of Modern States

The treaty thus abandoned the idea of a Catholic empire that would rule most of Europe. It recognized Europe as a group of equal, independent states. This marked the beginning of the modern state system and was the most important result of the Thirty Years' War.

30 Years War Reading C: Prentice Hall World History 525-527