Section 1

THE SEARCH FOR PEACE

FOCUS

- **Why did the United States pursue an isolationist foreign policy after World War I?**
- **How did the United States try to promote world peace in the 1920s and 1930s?**
- **How did war debts and reparations affect European countries after World War I?**

Profoundly disillusioned by the Great War, the United States sought to promote world peace during the 1920s. Fear of becoming involved in another war caused Americans to try to avoid conflict at any cost. As the world slipped into an economic depression and dictators rose to power in Europe in the 1930s, however, the United States found it increasingly difficult to remain isolated from the world's problems.

Peace activists, 1940

LEGACIES OF WORLD WAR I

Over 8 million people, including more than 112,000 Americans, had died fighting in the Great War. Yet, because of the postwar chaos in Europe and the founding of a Communist government in the Soviet Union, Americans did not believe that the war had made the world "safe for democracy." The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom summed up the nation's doubts: "War to end war has proved a failure. The war is won, yet nowhere is there peace, security or happiness."

Americans worried about being dragged into another foreign conflict. "We ask only to live our own life in our own way, in friendship and sympathy with all, in alliance with none," declared Senator Hiram W. Johnson in 1922. Such sentiments led the United States to follow a policy of partial **isolationism**, or withdrawal from world affairs, in the 1920s and 1930s.

Isolationists did not want to cut off the United States completely from the affairs of the rest of the world. They merely wanted to avoid what Thomas Jefferson had called "entangling alliances" that could drag the United States into another war. Isolationists also supported U.S. **unilateralism**, that is, one-sided or independent action in foreign affairs.

Isolationism and unilateralism led the United States to shun membership in international organizations set up after the war, such as the League of Nations and the Permanent Court of International Justice (the World Court).

Presidents Coolidge, Hoover, and Roosevelt all proposed that the United States join the World Court, created to solve international disputes. Public opinion, however, ran strongly against membership. The Senate set strict terms for joining in order to guard its right to make treaties. The nations that already belonged to the World Court rejected the Senate's terms, and the matter was dropped.

To avoid being drawn into European wars, the United States pursued an isolationist foreign policy after World War I.

PROMOTING PEACE

Instead of joining international peacekeeping organizations, the United States used diplomacy to promote world peace. American peace groups urged the U.S. government to bring world leaders together to negotiate **disarmament**, or limiting their weapons. Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Jeannette Rankin, and other leaders of the women's movement played important roles in these peace efforts. For their organizing efforts in the United States and abroad, both Addams (in 1931) and Balch (in 1946) received the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Washington Conference. In Washington, D.C., beginning in November 1921, the United States hosted an international conference on naval disarmament and Pacific security. U.S. secretary of state Charles Evans Hughes surprised the other delegates with his bold proposal that the major powers scrap 78 large warships amounting to almost 1.9 million tons. He also called for a 10-year "naval holiday" during which no battleships or battle cruisers would be built.

Hughes proposed that the United States, Great Britain, and Japan scrap enough large warships to bring their naval strength into a ratio of 5:5:3. That is, Great Britain and the United States would be equal in naval strength, with a large-warship tonnage of roughly 525,000 each, while Japan would have some 315,000 tons. Italy and France would both be limited to some 175,000 tons. This plan became known as the **Five Power Agreement**. Marveled one observer: "Secretary Hughes sank in 35 minutes more ships than all the admirals of the world have sunk in . . . centuries."

The Washington Conference produced other important agreements as well. In the **Four Power Treaty**, Japan, Great Britain, France, and the United States pledged to respect one another's territory in the Pacific. The **Nine Power Treaty**, which included the nations that signed the Five Power agreement as well as the Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium, and China, guaranteed China's territorial integrity and promised to uphold the Open Door policy.

Japan's navy minister, Admiral Kato Tomosaburo, declared that the conference had created "a new order of seapower." He explained Japan's support for disarmament:

> "Japan is ready for the new order of thought—the spirit of international friendship and cooperation for the greater good of humanity—which the Conference has brought about."

For a time the Washington Conference agreements eased tensions in Asia. Japan withdrew, at least partially, from the Shandong (Shantung) Peninsula it had invaded in 1914 and from parts of Siberia it had occupied during the Russian Revolution. In 1930 Japan's agreement to extend

▼ **Delegates from Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, China, Japan, and the United States attended the Washington Conference. The Four Power Treaty with the representatives' signatures is shown at right.**

the holiday on warship construction marked the high point of postwar international cooperation.

Unsuccessful efforts. On April 6, 1927, the 10th anniversary of America's entry into World War I, the French foreign minister, Aristide Briand (ah-ree-steed bree-ahn), proposed that France and the United States enter into an agreement to outlaw war as a means of resolving their differences. The U.S. secretary of state, Frank Kellogg, made a counter-proposal that the pact include all nations. Sixty-two countries eventually signed the **Kellogg-Briand Pact**, which outlawed war "as an instrument of national policy" but allowed countries to go to war in self-defense. Unfortunately, the treaty lacked provisions for enforcement. One U.S. senator remarked that the treaty was "as effective to keep down war as a carpet would be to smother an earthquake."

Through diplomatic conferences and international agreements the United States worked for world peace.

The pact's weaknesses became clear in September 1931. Japan, whose military leaders were gaining influence, violated all the international agreements and invaded the Chinese territory of Manchuria (see map on page 395). This invasion launched a bloody war between Japan and China. Although many Americans called for

▲ Suffragist and peace activist Carrie Chapman Catt praised the Kellogg-Briand Pact and lobbied Congress for its passage.

▲ These Japanese cavalrymen were photographed in Manchuria in December 1931, some three months after the war between China and Japan had begun.

an economic boycott of Japan, U.S. leaders refused to support sanctions against the Japanese. The failure of diplomacy to prevent Japanese aggression marked the end of attempts at international agreements. Preoccupied by the Japanese invasion and the worldwide economic depression, delegates of the League of Nations' 1932 World Disarmament Conference went home without agreeing to reduce weapons.

War debts and reparations

The issue of war debts also weakened peace efforts. In the late 1800s European investors had financed U.S. industrial growth, making the United States a **debtor nation** with respect to Europe. After 1914, however, the United States became a **creditor nation**. At the start of World War I, U.S. banks lent money to Great Britain and France so that they could buy armaments in the United States. The U.S. government granted billions more in credit to the Allies. By 1920 the Allies owed more than $10 billion to the United States.

The debtor nations argued that their debts to the United States should be wiped out. David Lloyd George, who had been the British prime minister when the United States entered the war, said:

> "The United States did not from first to last make any sacrifice or contribution remotely comparable to those of her European Associates, in life, limb, money, material or trade, towards the victory which she shared with them."

U.S. officials rejected appeals from Great Britain, France, and Italy to cancel all their war debts. However, the U.S. government reduced the interest rates on the loans and canceled part of the debts. Still, the only way the Allies could pay their war debts to the United States was to collect reparations, or damages, from defeated Germany. In 1921 a reparations commission had set total German reparations at 132 billion gold marks ($32 billion). The Germans bitterly condemned the reparations as too harsh. Chancellor Joseph Wirth paid part of the reparations by borrowing money from Great Britain. The German government also printed paper money, causing massive inflation as the value of the German mark plunged.

▲ During the 1920s rapid inflation in Germany made most currency worthless. This woman used several million-mark notes to start a breakfast fire.

In 1931, as the worldwide depression deepened, President Herbert Hoover declared a year's **moratorium**, or halt, on reparation and war-debt payments. The moratorium, however, only prolonged the crisis. Most of the war debts remained unpaid. By 1934 none of the debtor nations except Finland could make even a token payment.

America's efforts to collect the war debts sowed resentment in Europe. In Germany the economic hardships created by the reparations made people especially bitter. With his country near financial collapse, Adolf Hitler, a young German politician, hatched a plot to overthrow the German government in 1923. The plot failed, and Hitler was sent to jail. The next year, an international plan temporarily eased Germany's economic crisis by providing loans and extending German debt payments. Continuing German anger over reparations, however, would help bring Hitler to power 10 years later.

Europeans resented America's efforts to collect war debts. German anger over reparations helped Adolf Hitler gain support.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

IDENTIFY and explain the significance of the following: isolationism, unilateralism, disarmament, Emily Greene Balch, Charles Evans Hughes, Five Power Agreement, Four Power Treaty, Nine Power Treaty, Kato Tomosaburo, Kellogg-Briand Pact, debtor nation, creditor nation, moratorium.

LOCATE and explain the importance of the following: Manchuria.

1. **MAIN IDEA** Why did the United States partially withdraw from world affairs after World War I?
2. **MAIN IDEA** What steps did the United States take to work for world peace?
3. **ASSESSING CONSEQUENCES** How did war debts and reparations affect Germany and other European countries?
4. **WRITING TO INFORM** Imagine you are a delegate to the Washington Conference in 1921. Write an essay outlining the goals and accomplishments of the conference.
5. **ANALYZING** Why was the Kellogg-Briand Pact unsuccessful in resolving the conflict in Manchuria?