

**CHAPTER
29****Section 4****HISTORYMAKERS****Georges Clemenceau**
French Tiger

"The Germans may take Paris, but that will not prevent me from going on with the war. We will fight on the Loire, we will fight on the Garonne, we will fight even on the Pyrenees. And if at last we are driven off the Pyrenees, we will continue the war at sea."—Georges Clemenceau

Active politically as a young man, Georges Clemenceau was appalled by France's defeat in the 1870 war with Prussia. He was angry that Wilhelm I used the palace at Versailles to be declared emperor of Germany and that France had to give up Alsace and Lorraine. When France called on Clemenceau to lead them against Germany in World War I, he pushed his people onto victory and then sought revenge on Germany.

Clemenceau's father had admired the French Revolution and other democratic causes. He even joined others in an untried plot to overthrow Emperor Napoleon III. As a result, Georges Clemenceau became a devoted democrat. Democracy, he said, "is the only form of government which can establish equality for all, and which can bring closer the ultimate goals: freedom and justice." In his 20s, while a medical student in Paris, he joined other students in a group called Act As You Think. He also founded two newspapers, which were closed by the French government for their democratic views. He then joined the radicals of the Paris Commune. When that movement collapsed, he won election to the new national legislature.

For the next 30 years, Clemenceau alternated between politics and writing. When his *The Free Man* was heavily censored, he changed its name to *The Chained Man*. Serving in the legislature, he verbally attacked ministers of the government. He built a long list of enemies and succeeded in casting others out of power. However, his adversaries won revenge in 1892, when a friend of Clemenceau's became involved in a financial scandal. Enemies accused Clemenceau of participating as well. He denied the charge but was defeated in a bid for re-election.

Clemenceau's next years were devoted to journalism. He won political favor by defending Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been convicted of giving state secrets to Germany. Clemenceau wrote more than 500 articles protesting the case. He also gave space to writer Emile Zola, who charged that other officers had blackmailed Dreyfus.

In 1902, Clemenceau was once again elected to the legislature, where he served for the next 18 years. Prime minister from 1906 to 1909, he took a tough line by cracking down on workers' strikes. He lost the support of socialists when he denied their cause in a major speech. "France is founded on property, property, property," he thundered.

As war with Germany loomed, Clemenceau urged that France prepare. When war broke out, he tried to win the support of the United States. In late 1917, with the war going badly, the 76-year-old Clemenceau was named to head the government. He immediately appointed himself as his own war minister. His policy was simple: "I wage war." He urged France's allies to put all the armies under one commander and was pleased that French Marshal Ferdinand Foch was given that power.

With Germany's defeat, Clemenceau strove to win the peace. He yielded to some demands but won back Alsace and Lorraine. He also forced Germany to sign the treaty at Versailles. However, other French politicians resented that he had kept all the power of negotiating to himself. The legislature thought the final peace treaty was too soft on Germany and debated for three months before approving it. Meanwhile, Clemenceau lost the election for France's presidency. He resigned in 1920 and spent the rest of his life in an active retirement. At age 80, he hunted tigers in Asia and then campaigned vigorously for the United States to join the League of Nations. He died at age 88 and was, according to his wishes, buried alongside his father.

Questions

1. **Making Inferences** Why do you think Clemenceau was called "the Tiger"?
2. **Perceiving Cause and Effect** What actions of Clemenceau later cost him support? Why?
3. **Making Generalizations** What goals drove Clemenceau?