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The Versailles Treaty

January > June 28th 1919

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Notes

The treaty to end the Great War was signed between Germany and the Allies at the vast Versailles Palace near Paris – hence its title.

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Notes

The Versailles Palace was considered the most appropriate venue simply because of its size – many hundreds of people were involved in the process and the final signing ceremony in the Hall of Mirrors could accommodate hundreds of dignitaries.

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Notes

The Treaty of Versailles was negotiated between January and June 28, 1919 when the Great War officially ended with its signing.

The German government was excluded from participating in determining the terms of the treaty.

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**President Wilson's
Fourteen Points**

- 1. Open diplomacy**
- 2. Freedom of the Seas**
- 3. Removal of economic barriers**
- 4. Reduction of armaments**
- 5. Adjustment of colonial claims**
- 6. Conquered territories in Russia**
- 7. Preservation of Belgian sovereignty**
- 8. Restoration of French territory**
- 9. Redrawing of Italian frontiers**
- 10. Division of Austria-Hungary**
- 11. Redrawing of Balkan boundaries**
- 12. Limitations on Turkey**
- 13. Establishment of an independent Poland**
- 14. Creation of an Association of Nations**

When the German government asked U.S. Pres. Woodrow Wilson to arrange a general armistice in October 1918, it declared that it accepted the Fourteen Points he had formulated as the basis for a just peace.

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Notes

The Treaty of Versailles was the peace settlement signed after World War One had ended in 1918 and in the shadow of the Russian Revolution and in the middle of the Russian Civil War.

None of the defeated nations of Germany, Austria-Hungary or Turkey had any say in shaping the treaty, and even the associated Allied powers such as Australia played only a minor role. Russia was ignored.

The treaty that was drafted from the Paris Peace Conference in the spring of 1919 was dominated by the national leaders known as the "Big Four"—David Lloyd George of Britain, Georges Clemenceau of France, Woodrow Wilson of the United States, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy. The first three in particular made the important decisions.

Many in the French delegation, especially Clemenceau, wanted to make sure that Germany would never again pose a military threat to the rest of Europe.

The final treaty contained many stipulations to guarantee this aim. The German army was restricted to 100,000 men; the general staff was eliminated; the manufacture of armoured cars, tanks, submarines, airplanes, and poison gas was forbidden; and only a small number of specified factories could make weapons or munitions.

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Article 231, "war guilt clause"
Treaty of Versailles, 1919

"The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies."

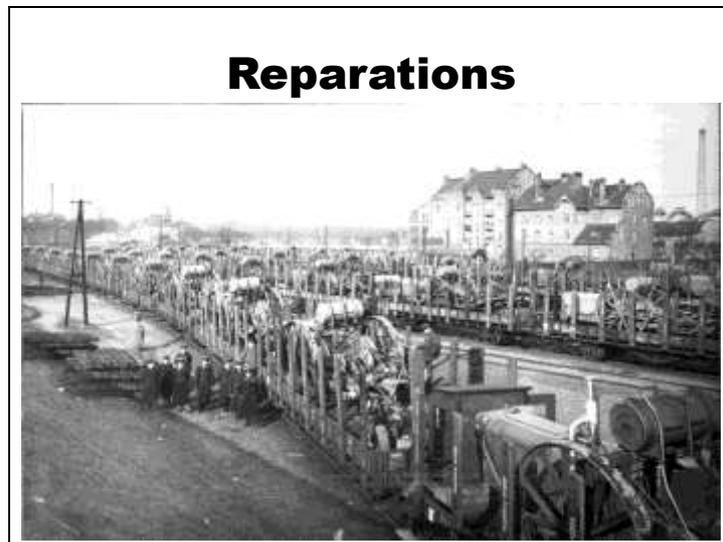
- The United States, Britain and France unanimously agreed in 1918 that Germany and her allies were responsible for deliberately starting war. This attitude persisted until the 1930s.
- In the interwar period (1919-39), nationalistic Germans interpreted Article 231 with opposition, humiliation and were determined to reverse it – Hitler exploited these sentiments.
- Was Article 231 justified?

Notes

The German delegates were presented with a fait accompli. They were shocked at the severity of the terms and protested the contradictions between the assurances of Wilson's 14 points made when the armistice was agreed and the actual treaty.

They were particularly aggrieved by the war guilt clause in the treaty that deemed Germany the aggressor in the war and consequently made Germany responsible for making reparations to the Allied nations in *"compensation by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea and from the air."*

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Notes

The above photo shows trains, loaded with machinery stripped from German factories, delivering their cargo as reparation payment in kind.

It was impossible to compute the exact sum to be paid as reparations for the damage caused by the Germans, especially in France and Belgium, at the time the treaty was being drafted, but a commission that assessed the losses incurred by the civilian population set an amount of \$33 billion in 1921.

Although economists at the time declared that such a huge sum could never be collected without upsetting international finances, the Allies insisted that Germany be made to pay, and the treaty permitted them to take punitive actions if Germany fell behind in its payments.

All of Germany west of the Rhine and up to 30 miles (50 km) east of it was to be a demilitarized zone. The forced disarmament of Germany, it was hoped, would be accompanied by voluntary disarmament in other nations.

Reflective Writing
This cartoon suggests that

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Notes

Wilson's nine points covering new territorial alterations were complicated by the secret treaties that England, France, and Italy had made with Greece, Romania, and each other (Sykes / Picot / Balfour) during the war.

As a result of the Treaty a number of regions were taken from Germany and East Prussia was separated from the remaining German nation.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was broken up so that Austria and Hungary became small and separate nations, Poland, which had disappeared at the end of the 18th century, was reconstituted. Then two new multi-national states were created: Czechoslovakia for the Northern Slavs (Czechs and Slovaks); and Yugoslavia for the Southern Slavs (Slovenians, Croats and Serbs).

Paying lip service to President Wilson's notion of 'national self-determination', as stated in his "**Fourteen Points**", the treaties created independent states for minority populations previously part of the fallen empires. In northern Europe were created Finland and the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

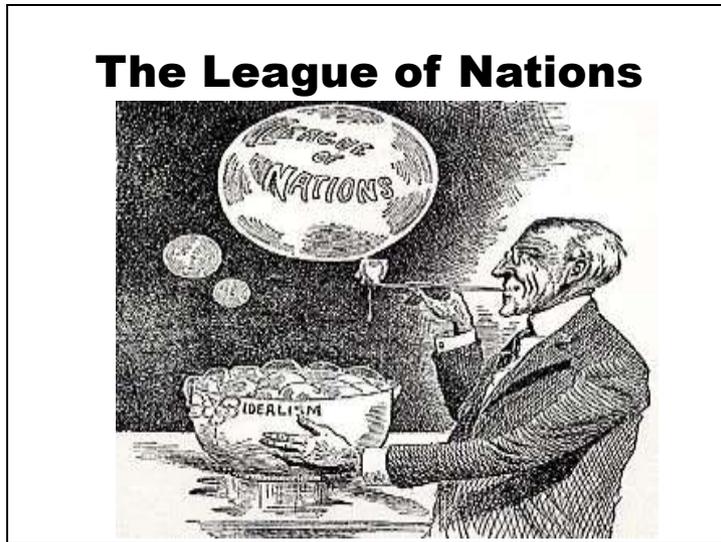
Finally, the Ottoman Empire was stripped of much of its territory and left with just a small foothold in Europe.

Among the victors, several countries increased their territory: France regained **Alsace and Lorraine**. Italy acquired **Trentino and Trieste**, Romania was given Bess Arabia and Transylvania. Denmark obtained the northern part of Schleswig, while Greece extended its frontiers to take in portions of territory that previously belonged to Bulgaria and Turkey.

The population and territory of Germany was reduced by about 10 percent by the treaty.

All Germany's overseas colonies in China, in the Pacific, and in Africa were taken over by Britain, France, Japan, and other Allied nations, including Australia which took over German possessions in Papua New Guinea, New Britain and Nauru, with the latter shared with New Zealand and Britain.

The League of Nations



Notes

The treaty of Versailles included the Covenant of the League of Nations, in which members guaranteed each other's independence and territorial integrity and economic sanctions were supposed to be applied against any member nation that resorted to war.

The league was to supervise mandated territories, the occupied Saar Basin, and Danzig and to formulate plans for reducing armaments.

Significantly the treaty also established the Permanent Court of International Justice and the International Labour Organisation, functions which would eventually pass to today's United Nations Organisation.

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Consequences of Versailles

The Treaty of Versailles

PROSPERITY

- Established new countries
- Shifted boundaries of many countries
- Punished Germany

UNPOPULARITY

- Humiliated Germany
- Ignored Russia
- Ignored self-determination

CONSEQUENCES

- Power and others considered it too harsh
- Some considered it a setback to imperialism
- Some ethnic groups objected to new boundaries



Perhaps it would get-up better if we let it touch earth.

Discussion

Reflective Writing

