

## **Failed Promises: The Treaty of Versailles and End of World War I**

### ***Historical Context: The Versailles Conference***

The First World War (1914–1918) had been bad. 10 million people died. The part of France where there had been fighting – the ‘Western Front’ – was totally destroyed.

In November 1918, Germany had signed a cease-fire. It was called ‘the Armistice’. The Germans could not fight any longer. But they did not think they had surrendered.

In January 1919, delegates from 32 countries met at Versailles, near Paris, to make treaties to end the war. The meeting was known as the Versailles Conference.

This self-guided lesson studies what happened at the Conference, the treaties that the leaders made, and what the world thought about them.



*Source: A picture of Soissons in 1918, showing the damage done during the war.*

## Political Cartoon

**Title:** Giving Him Rope?

**Caption:** German Criminal (to Allied Police) "Here, I say. Stop! You're hurting me! [Aside] I only whine enough I may be able to wriggle out of this yet."

**Labels:** Rope wrapped around the criminal says "Armistice Terms"

What is this cartoon of 1919 saying about the Germans?



### GIVING HIM ROPE?

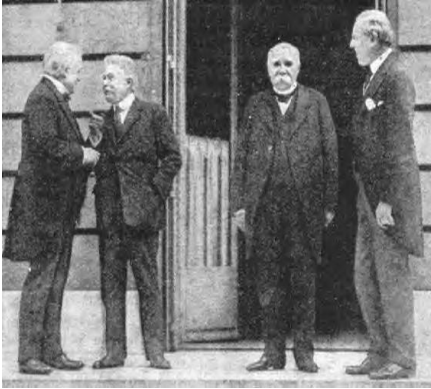
GERMAN CRIMINAL (to Allied Police). "HERE, I SAY. STOP! YOU'RE HURTING ME! [Aside] I ONLY WHINE ENOUGH I MAY BE ABLE TO WRIGGLE OUT OF THIS YET."

### Quote

"Germany is going to pay. We will get everything you can squeeze out of a lemon, and a bit more. The Germans should hand over everything they own."

*Source: From a speech in 1918 by Sir Eric Geddes, a British politician standing for election as an MP.*

## The Aims of the “Big Three”



The three most important men at the Versailles Conference – ‘the Big Three’ – were:

- Georges Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France.
- Woodrow Wilson, the president of America.
- David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister of Britain.

All three men wanted to stop a war ever happening again, but they did not agree about how to do this. They wanted different things from the peace, and they did not get on well.



### Georges Clemenceau

He was the Prime Minister of France.

He wanted **revenge**, and to **punish** the Germans for what they had done.

He wanted to **make Germany pay** for the damage done during the war.

He also wanted to **weaken** Germany, so France would never be invaded again.



### Woodrow Wilson

He was President of America.

He was a History professor. He wanted to **make the world safe**.

He wanted to **end war** by making a **fair peace**.

In 1918, Wilson published ‘**Fourteen Points**’ saying what he wanted. He wanted **disarmament**, and a **League of Nations** (where countries could talk out their problems, without going to war).

He also promised **self-determination** for the peoples of Eastern Europe.



### David Lloyd George

He was Prime Minister of England.

He *said* he would ‘**make Germany pay**’ – because he knew that was what the British people wanted to hear.

He wanted ‘**justice**’, but he **did not want revenge**. He said that the peace must **not be harsh** – that would just cause another war in a few years time.

He tried to get a ‘**halfway point**’ – a compromise between Wilson and Clemenceau.

## **How did the victorious countries intend to treat Germany in 1919?**

A million Frenchmen had died in the war; the French wanted *revenge*, to *punish* the Germans for what they had done. They wanted to *make Germany pay* for the damage done during the war. Finally, they wanted to *weaken* Germany, so France could never be invaded again.

America had not been ruined by the war, so the American president, Woodrow Wilson only wanted a '*fair peace*', which would *make the world safe*, and *end war*. Wilson also wanted *disarmament*, a *League of Nations* (where countries could talk out their problems), and *self-determination* for the peoples of Eastern Europe – the '*Fourteen Points*'.

Some British people wanted to *make Germany pay* – 'everything you can squeeze out of a lemon'. Many, however, like their Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, realized that the peace must *not be harsh*, or there would be another war in a few years time. Lloyd George said he wanted '*justice*' – a *halfway point* between Clemenceau's revenge and Wilson's ideals.

## **The Terms of the Treaty of Versailles**

After the war, the victors met at the Palace of Versailles, near Paris, to tell Germany the terms of peace.

Defeated Germany was not allowed to send any delegates, and had no choice but to accept whatever was decided.

Most of the delegates wanted revenge.

Only President Woodrow Wilson of the United States wanted a better world.

1. Germany had to accept the blame for starting the war.
2. Germany was forbidden to have submarines or an air force. She could have a navy of only six battleships, and an army of just 100,000 men. In addition, Germany was not allowed to place any troops in the Rhineland, the strip of land, 50 miles wide, next to France.
3. Germany had to pay £6,600 million, called reparations, for the damage done during the war.
4. Germany lost land in Europe (*see map, below*). Germany's colonies were given to Britain and France.
5. Germany could not join the League of Nations.
6. Germany could never unite with Austria.

## The Germans and the Treaty

When the Germans heard about the Treaty of Versailles, they felt 'pain and anger'. They felt it was unfair. They had not been allowed to take part in the talks – they had just been told to sign.

At first they refused to sign the Treaty. Some Germans wanted to start the war again.

The Germans were angry at **Clause 231**; they said they were not to blame for the war. The soldier sent to sign the Treaty refused to sign it – 'To say such a thing would be a lie,' he said.

The Germans were angry about **reparations**; they said France and Britain were trying to starve their children to death. At first they refused to pay, and only started paying after France and Britain invaded Germany (January 1921).

The Germans were angry about **their tiny army**. They said they were helpless against other countries. At first they refused to reduce the army, and the sailors sank the fleet, rather than hand it over.

The Germans also thought the **loss of territory** was unfair. Germany lost a tenth of its land. Other nations were given self-determination – but the Treaty forced Germans to live in other countries. Germans were also angry that they could not unite with the Austrian Germans.

### ***Did you know?***

- The Treaty of Versailles helped Adolf Hitler's rise to power.
- A lot of Germans supported him because he promised to destroy the Treaty.

### **Quote**

"The disgraceful Treaty is being signed today. Don't forget it! We will never stop until we win back what we deserve."

*Source: From a German newspaper of 28 June 1920.*

## Verdicts on the Treaty

Clemenceau liked the harsh things that were in the Treaty:

- Reparations (would repair the damage to France),
- The tiny German army, and the demilitarized zone in the Rhineland (would protect France),
- France got Alsace-Lorraine, and German colonies.

But he wanted the Treaty to be harsher.

Wilson got self-determination for the peoples of Eastern Europe, and a League of Nations, but he hated the Treaty:

- few of his 'Fourteen Points' got into the Treaty,
- when Wilson went back to America, the Senate refused to join the League of Nations, and even refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles!

Lloyd George hated the treaty and felt

Many British people wanted to 'make Germany pay', but Lloyd George hated the Treaty. He liked:

- the fact that Britain got some German colonies,
- the small German navy (helped British sea-power).

But he thought that the Treaty was far too harsh.

### **QUOTE**

"We shall have to fight another war again in 25 years' time."

*Source: David Lloyd George, talking about the Treaty of Versailles.*



**Title:** Peace and Future Canon Fodder

**Caption:** The Tiger: "Curious! I seem to hear a child weeping."

**Labels:** Above the head of the naked child it says "1910 Class", the newspaper at the child's feet says "Peace Treaty"

- Who do you think the three men represent?
- Why is the child weeping? What is the cartoon saying about the Treaty of Versailles?
- How old will the weeping child be in 1940?



Map 1



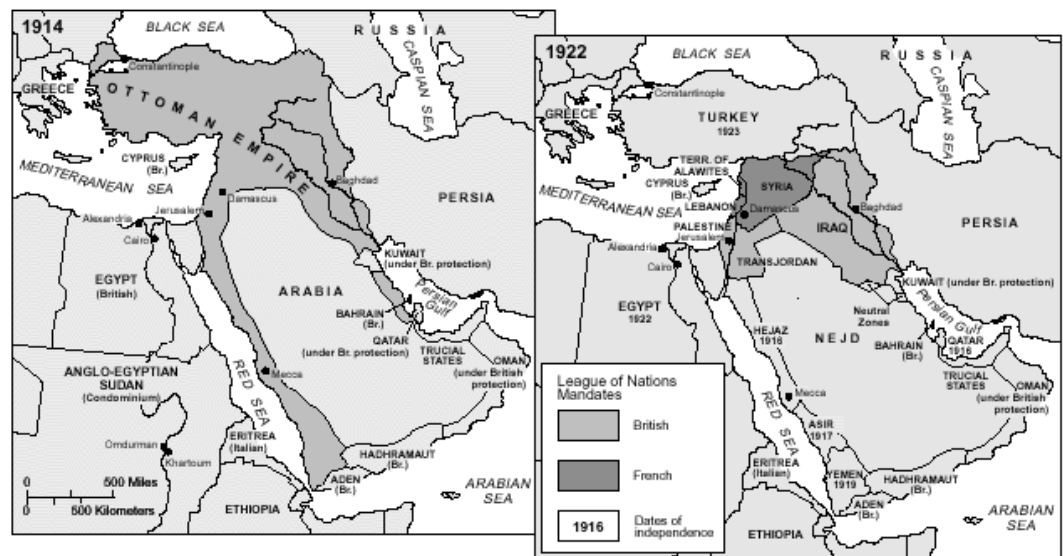
Europe Before World War I

Map 2



Europe After World War I

The Middle East Before and After World War I Settlements, 1914–1922



**Self-determination**

The treaties created new nation-states (see map above):

- **Czechs** and Slovaks in Czechoslovakia
- **Hungarians** in Hungary
- **Austrians** in Austria.
- **Poles** in Poland,
- **Slavs** in Yugoslavia,

so it seems that self-determination was a success!

**Problems with self-determination**

1. Self-determination caused small **Wars** (see map).
2. Self-determination was not allowed for **Germany**.
3. A large number of small, **Weak countries** were created, which Hitler easily conquered later.
4. All the new nation-states had racial **Minorities** living in them.