

WAR GUILT CLAUSE

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.

—Treaty of Versailles, Article 231

demilitarized zone (DMZ)

a defined area in which it is prohibited to station military troops or build military installations

Weimar Republic

Democratic federal republic in Germany with nineteen states; included popular elections for president and Reichstag (parliament) with universal suffrage

sovereign

the right to rule a territory and its people without outside interference

of the German Empire in which ethnic Czechs outnumbered ethnic Germans two to one, was carved out and given to the newly created Czechoslovakia. Finally, Germany was expressly forbidden to reunite in any way with Austria.

Militarily, the German army was limited to 100,000 men. Germany could not produce nor own any form of heavy artillery, chemical or gas weapons, tanks or airplanes. The navy was restricted to six ships and absolutely no U-boats. A **demilitarized zone (DMZ)** was created in German territory to separate it from France and Belgium. The DMZ was occupied by Allied troops for ten years, and the German military was not allowed to enter the zone.

One of the hardest parts of the treaty for the German people to accept was Article 231, the *War Guilt Clause*, which required that Germany take full responsibility for starting the war. Given that, it only made sense to the Allies that Germany should pay for the entire cost of the war. These war reparations were paid primarily to France and Belgium to rebuild the infrastructure destroyed by the surprise assault

and drawn-out trench warfare on the western front; the reparations included payment for replacing all the military equipment France and Belgium used during the war. The specific dollar amount of war reparations was not included in the treaty when Germany was forced to sign it. In April 1921, Germany received a bill for \$33 billion to be paid in cash or commodities (coal and steel), an amount far beyond its means to pay. An initial payment of \$250 million was made in September 1921, but that was all the German government could ever come up with before a serious economic crisis developed in Germany.

The German government during this era, the **Weimar Republic**, was created by constitution in August 1919, two months after the acting government accepted the Treaty of Versailles. It was a parliamentary republic led by the Social Democrats, a liberal political party representing the interests of the working class. During the early years of the republic, there were frequent communist uprisings attempting to establish a soviet republic, as well as violent right-wing revolutions intended to return authoritarianism to Germany. Devastated by the loss of the war, the Versailles restrictions and the economic devastation that followed, the German people never really supported the government, and political violence became the norm in Germany.

The League of Nations

Integral to President Wilson's vision of a peaceful world was the creation of a League of Nations—a body of **sovereign** countries that agreed to pursue common policies and cooperate with one another in the common interest of preventing war. Articles one through twenty-six of the Treaty of Versailles established the League of Nations and its structure, goals and operating principles. The Treaty also specifically named the original signatories and who was eligible to be considered for membership. Only democratic governments could be trusted in an endeavor requiring collective security, so Lenin's Russia would not be invited to participate. Neither would the Weimar Republic of Germany initially; although it was democratic, it was not historically cooperative with others. The limited parameters for membership meant that only forty-five countries qualified to be members (and only forty-two of them actually joined), which was not exactly what Wilson had in mind.

Truly the worst part for Wilson was that the United States Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, thereby preventing the United States from joining the League of Nations. Although politics certainly played a part (Republicans held the Senate majority and were led by Wilson's political enemy Henry Cabot Lodge), the heart of the disagreement was Article 10, which stated:

The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League.

In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled.

Lodge interpreted Article 10 as *requiring* the United States to commit economic or military aid to any nation in the League. He was concerned that it would pull the United States into wars around the world that it neither needed nor desired to be involved in. Wilson, who had actually written Article 10 himself, insisted that it did not necessarily require the United States to do anything because the United States enjoyed veto power in the League Council. To Wilson, though, the United States would be morally obligated to help other nations, and that was much more important than any legal requirement. Because Wilson considered it "a very grave and solemn obligation," he refused to negotiate with Lodge. The Senate refused to ratify the treaty, and the United States never joined the League of Nations.

So the League of Nations was created, but it suffered from some pretty serious handicaps. First was the heavy focus on moral obligations, which are interpreted differently by all people everywhere, rather than dealing with specific issues in a practical manner. Another problem stemmed from the League's consequences for violating world peace—economic sanctions would end up hurting everyone because they slowed down trade, and any credible military threat would have to include the United States, which wasn't a member. This left the League of Nations with little power to enforce anything.

But that does not mean that the spirit of **internationalism** wasn't present in the world, or that the United States was prepared to let the world make political decisions without its input. Because the League of Nations was so weak, the real work in international relations in the postwar period came from conferences dealing with specific issues rather than the general goal of maintaining peace. In 1921, the United States held the Washington Naval Conference to determine the balance of power in the Pacific. The conference resulted in an agreement to set the ratio for large naval vessels to 5:5:3 for Britain, the United States and Japan. To get Japan to agree to this second-best position, Great Britain and the United States allowed Japan to keep control of Manchuria so long as Japan promised not to go farther into China.

To settle problems created by the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Versailles, the Treaty of Rapallo was made between Germany and Russia in 1922. The Treaty of Rapallo basically restored diplomatic relations between the two countries and settled territorial disputes on Germany's eastern border. Both of these countries had been excluded from the postwar negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference, and the Treaty of Rapallo was a sign that they fully intended to participate in world affairs whether the West wanted to include them or not.

In Europe, the Treaty of Locarno in 1925 was an agreement between Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain and Italy that settled the territorial disputes along Germany's western border created by the Treaty of Versailles. The treaty was designed to reduce the high tension and *occasional outright aggression that marked postwar relations in Europe*. Germany agreed to respect the DMZ in the Rhineland, so the Allies agreed to remove their troops (completed by 1930). Everyone agreed not to use military force against the others, and Germany was allowed to join the League of Nations in 1926.

Despite these agreements, France was still nervous about Germany and worried that the United States would not be of any help because it had not joined the League of Nations. French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand approached U.S. Secretary of State Frank Kellogg with a bilateral proposal of peace; the proposal basically promised that the two countries would not go to war against one another. The U.S. government was worried that this would essentially form an alliance that might require the United States to get involved in Europe again, so Kellogg suggested that this proposal be extended to all nations of the world. The Kellogg-Briand Pact (sometimes called the Pact of Paris) of 1928 declared wars of aggression to be illegal under international law and required that signatories settle their disputes by peaceful means. It was a very popular idea in a world still recovering from the devastation of the Great War, and the fifteen original signatories were soon joined by another forty-seven countries. That so many governments were willing to participate in this idealistic hope for world peace demonstrated that **pacifism** was a much more powerful influence after the war than the **militarism** that preceded it. While the Kellogg-Briand Pact didn't actually prevent

internationalism
a policy of cooperation
among nations

pacifism
the moral opposition to
war or violence as a
means of settling disputes

militarism
the policy of aggressive
military preparedness

future wars of aggression, it did form an important foundation for international law that has carried through to the present, and it happened outside the realm of the League of Nations.

The Direct Consequences

The Treaty of Versailles is one of the most controversial treaties in modern history. In retrospect, many historians claim that it was too tough on Germany and created the conditions that led directly to the rise of Adolf Hitler. Others believe that it was too easy on Germany because the treaty didn't prevent Germany from rebuilding into a powerful state. Still others say the treaty was fine; it just was never enforced well, and that is why World War II (WWII) developed.

ANALYSIS

Was the Treaty of Versailles too harsh on Germany? Based on Document 3.2 and your understanding of the treaty, which elements do you think impacted Germany the most? Why?

One thing is clear—the Treaty of Versailles was unsatisfactory in several important ways. The Treaty of Versailles did not end imperialism; in fact, instead of decolonization, the Allies gained more territory as they divvied up Germany's colonies and the former Ottoman lands. The postwar world certainly was not “peace without victors” as Wilson imagined, because the resulting peace treaties made it painfully clear who the losers were. And, although new countries were indeed created, the process by which this happened totally violated the principles of self-determination, reigniting nationalist movements rather than stopping them. That nationalism spilled over into China, Turkey and other countries around the world—these countries thought they would gain freedom and self-determination from the Treaty of Versailles, but they did not. One of the most glaring problems was the refusal to let Russia or Germany participate in the postwar negotiations. Like it or not, these two countries did play, and would continue to play, a major role in European politics, so they really should have been allowed to participate in the postwar restructuring. The effects on Germany were devastating and absolutely led to what came next for them: the Weimar government was unstable, the German people were completely stripped of their nationalist pride, and the reparations and provisions of the treaty left Germany basically unable to defend or even feed itself.

Even the victors were dissatisfied with the outcome of the Treaty of Versailles. Wilson's *Fourteen Points* were largely ignored, some even ridiculed, and he could not participate in his own League of Nations. Clemenceau was concerned that Germany was left with more territory and, therefore, potential power than it should have been. And Lloyd George remarked, “We shall have to fight another war again in twenty-five years time.”

Imperial Demise and Restructuring

At the end of the Great War, territorial empires were all but gone physically, and the concept itself had really been discredited. The Great War had just proven that technological advancements dramatically changed the way countries could gain (or lose) territory. Traditional ground troops spent almost the entire war stalemated. U-boats played an enormous role in the outcome of naval battles,



The Unarmed Cop, 1930.

