

## Could the treaties be justified at the time?

There is no doubt that the treaties which established the peace settlement at the end of the First World War imposed very strict terms upon the defeated countries.

- Germany lost all its colonies and, in total, 13 per cent of its land. Nearly six million German citizens now found themselves living outside Germany's borders. The Germans were also forced to agree to pay huge reparations and carry out massive reductions in their armed forces.
- Austria saw its empire disbanded and was also forced to pay reparations to the Allies. It too had its armed forces reduced. Similar penalties were also imposed on Bulgaria and Hungary.
- The Turks were so angered by their territorial losses that they rose up and overthrew their own government. The Allies then agreed to less severe terms in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The view held by most historians since 1919 is that the treaties were too harsh and were likely to lead to future war. It would only be a matter of time before the Germans, in particular, set about seeking revenge. On the day that the Treaty of Versailles was signed a leading German newspaper published a criticism of the terms of what it called 'a disgraceful treaty'. It made it clear that 'There will be vengeance for the shame of 1919'.

### SOURCE I

PEACE AND FUTURE CANNON FODDER



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

### SOURCE G

Lloyd George told one of his officials that the treaty was '...all a great pity. We shall have to do the same thing all over again in twenty-five years at three times the cost'.

An extract from a book on the Treaty of Versailles, written in 1969.

### SOURCE H

This is not peace. It is an armistice for fifteen years.

The judgement of Marshall Foch on the Treaty of Versailles. Foch was the French commander-in-chief of the Allied armies in the final year of the war.

### SOURCE F

It was a peace of revenge. It sowed a thousand seeds from which new wars might spring. It was as though the Devil had sat beside Clemenceau and whispered madness into the ear of Wilson and grinned across the table at Lloyd George.

An extract from a book written by a British historian in 1929.

This cartoon by Will Dyson was published in a British newspaper in 1919. The 'Big Four' are seen leaving Versailles. Dyson shows Orlando, the Italian prime minister, as well as Lloyd George (at the back), and Wilson (far right), while Clemenceau, the prime minister of France (in front) stops as he hears a child weeping. The child represents 'the class of 1940'. Dyson thought that the terms of Versailles would lead to further war in 1940. He was wrong by only four months!



This view was shared not only by many people in Germany, but others elsewhere – even some of those involved in actually drawing up the terms of the treaty (see sources G–J).

### Was the treaty a mistake?

Although the strict terms of the Treaty of Versailles aroused much criticism, this did not mean that the treaty-makers had simply acted foolishly or were not aware of what they doing.

- The 'Big Four' met after the most terrible war in history. They were determined to make sure that war would not happen again. Consequently they wanted to weaken Germany so that it would not be able to invade France again. Although the causes of the war were complex, by 1918 many people had come to believe that German military ambition was to blame. Consequently Germany had to be weakened to ensure future peace. This was done and a new organisation to maintain peace, the League of Nations, was established.
- After the loss of so many lives there was a strong desire for revenge amongst the people of the victorious nations. This was particularly true in France, where much of the fighting had taken place. In Britain there were many people who wanted to see the Kaiser brought to trial and hanged. If the Treaty of Versailles is considered in the light of such views, it can be seen that perhaps it could have been a lot worse for the German people.
- Some of the decisions the peacemakers had to make were extremely difficult. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was breaking up, large areas of Europe had been devastated, communism was spreading and Europe's economy was in tatters. There was a need to restore stability – and quickly. This the peacemakers did.
- The terms of the treaty were strict, but they were not entirely unexpected. When the Armistice was signed in November 1918 the Germans knew they would have to pay reparations, surrender territory and have their armed forces reduced. These were the usual consequences of defeat in

SOURCE K



THE RECKONING.

PAN-GERMAN. "MONSTROUS, I CALL IT. WHY, IT'S FULLY A QUARTER OF WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE MADE THEM PAY, IF WE'D WON."

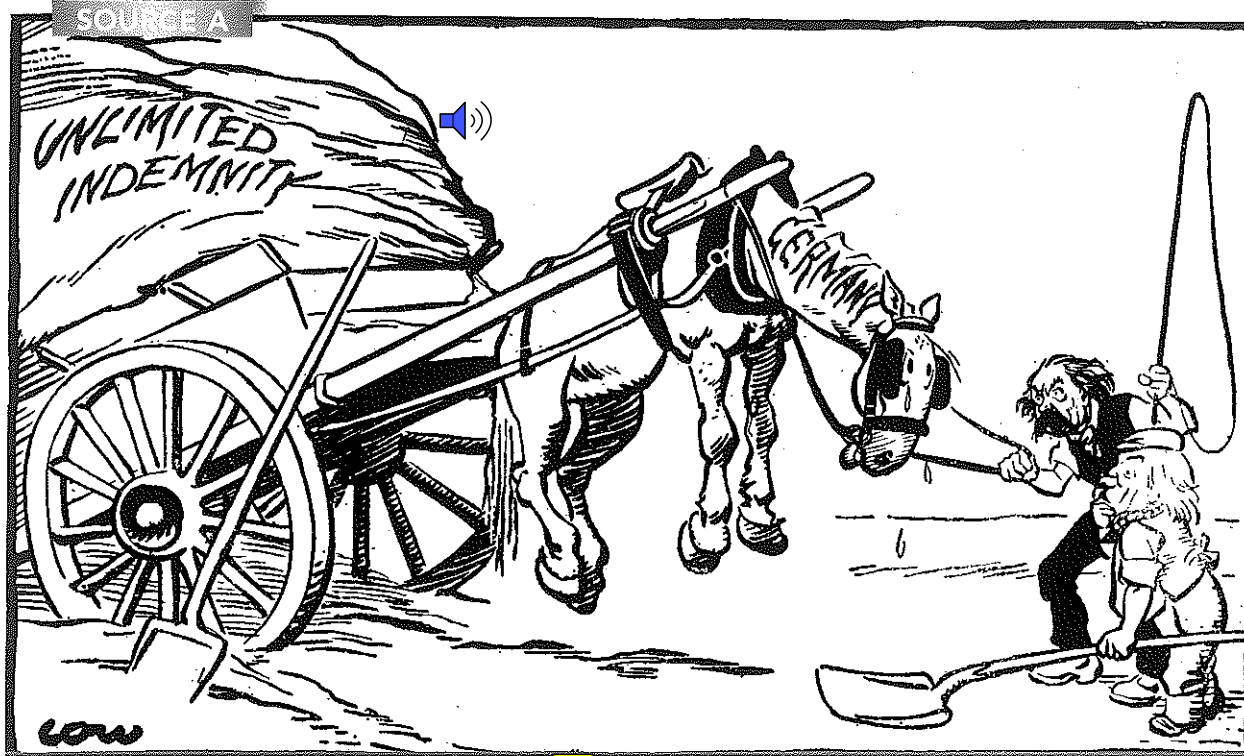
A cartoon from a British magazine published in 1919. The German in the caption is talking about the terms of the Treaty of Versailles: 'Monstrous I call it. These reparations are only a quarter of what we would have made them pay if we had won'.

war. At the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 the Germans made the French pay five billion francs and stationed troops in France until it was paid. When the Russians asked for peace terms with the Germans in March 1918 the resulting Treaty of Brest-Litovsk took away more than a quarter of Russia's farmland and population. It is for that reason that some historians think that the Germans might have imposed even harsher terms on the Allies if they had won the war (see Source K).

Perhaps, therefore, those historians who have condemned the Treaty of Versailles have been over-critical. Nowadays most historians think that the peacemakers did a reasonable job considering the problems they faced.



## Paper 1-type assessment: The Treaty of Versailles



**“PERHAPS IT WOULD GEE-UP BETTER IF WE LET IT TOUCH EARTH”**

Briand Lloyd George

A cartoon from a British newspaper, 1921. Aristide Briand of France and David Lloyd George of Britain are looking at the effects of reparation payments on Germany.

### QUESTIONS

#### Section A Questions

- 1a Study Source A. Explain the message of this cartoon. Support your answer by referring to details of the cartoon and your own knowledge. (6)
- b Explain why the Treaty of Versailles imposed such strict terms on Germany. (9)

#### Section B Questions

- 2a How did the Treaty of Versailles try to make sure there would not be another war? (4)
- b What did George Clemenceau of France hope to achieve in the Treaty? (6)
- c 'The most important factor in deciding the terms of the Treaty of Versailles was Woodrow Wilson's desire for a fair and just peace'. Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer. (10)