



THE RECKONING.  
 LANGMUIR: "MONSIEUR, I CABLE TO YOU, IT'S BETTER A QUARTER OF WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE MADE THEM PAY. IT'S A WON'."

The Reckoning. *Punch* Cartoon, 23 April 1919.

Government had little option but to accept the Treaty, although it made very clear that it was acting under duress:

Surrendering to superior force but without retracting its opinion regarding the unheard of injustice of the peace conditions, the Government of the German Republic therefore declares its readiness to accept and sign the peace conditions imposed by the Allied and Associated Governments.

### g) The Signature of the Treaty

On 28 June 1919 the Treaty was signed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, where in 1871 the German Empire had been proclaimed. By January 1920 it had been ratified by all the signatory powers with the important exception of America. In Washington crucial amendments had been put forward by a coalition of isolationists, led by senators Lodge and Borah, rejecting the Shantung settlement and seriously modifying the Covenant of the League. The isolationists

objected to the right of the British Dominions to vote as separate members of the League and were determined to subject America's obligation to defend the independence of fellow League members from aggression to strict control by Congress. They also proposed that Congress should be empowered to veto American participation in any League initiative that clashed with America's traditional policy, laid down in 1823 in the Monroe Doctrine, of excluding foreign intervention from both north and south America. Wilson felt that these amendments would paralyse the League and so refused to accept them. He failed twice to secure the necessary two-thirds majority in the Senate. It was a major defeat for Wilson, and the consequences for Europe were serious. Without American ratification the Anglo-American military guarantee of France lapsed and the burden of carrying out the Treaty of Versailles was mainly to fall upon Britain and France (see Chapter 3).

## 8 The South Eastern European Settlements

**KEY ISSUES** What were the main terms of the Treaties of St Germain, Neuilly and the Trianon? How effectively did they create new nation states?

After the ceremony at Versailles the Allied leaders returned home, leaving their officials to draft the treaties with Germany's former allies. The outlines of a settlement in eastern Europe and the Balkans were already clear: Austria-Hungary and the Tsarist Russian empire had collapsed, the Poles and Czechs had declared their independence and the South Slavs had decided to federate with Serbia to form what was later to be called Yugoslavia. The bewildering diversity of races in the Balkans, which were in no way concentrated in easily definable areas, would ensure that however the great powers drew the frontiers the final settlement would be full of contradictions. The three defeated powers, Austria and Hungary (both treated as the heirs to the former Habsburg Empire) and Bulgaria, all had to pay reparations, disarm and submit to the humiliation of a war guilt clause. The basis of the settlement in south central Europe and the Balkans was the creation of the new Czecho-Slovak state and Serbo-Croat-Slovene state, or Yugoslavia.

### a) The Treaty of St Germain, 10 September 1919

The Treaty of St Germain split up the diverse territories, which before the war had been part of Austria:

- Italy was awarded South Tyrol, despite the existence there of some 230,000 ethnic Germans.

- Bohemia and Moravia were ceded to Czechoslovakia. Any second thoughts that the British or Americans had about handing over to the Czechs the 3 million Germans who made up nearly a third of the population of these provinces, were quickly stifled by French opposition. The French wanted a potential ally against Germany to be strengthened by a defensible frontier and the possession of the Skoda munitions works in Pilsen, both of which entailed the forcible integration of large German minorities into Czechoslovakia. The British and Americans were also reassured by the promises of Eduard Benes, the Czech representative at Paris, that his government would make Czechoslovakia a racially harmonious federal republic like Switzerland.
- Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia were handed over to Yugoslavia.
- Galicia and Bukovina were ceded respectively to Poland and Romania.
- Only in Carinthia, where the population consisted of German-speaking Slovenes who did not want to join Yugoslavia, did the great powers consent to a plebiscite. This resulted in 1920 in that area remaining Austrian.
- To avoid the dangers of an Austrian union with Germany, Article 88 (which was identical with Article 80 in the Treaty of Versailles) stated that only the Council of the League of Nations was empowered to sanction a change in Austria's status as an independent state. Effectively this meant that France, as a permanent member of the Council, could veto any proposed change.

#### b) The Treaty of Trianon, 4 June 1920

Of all the defeated powers in 1919 it is arguable that Hungary suffered the most severely. By the Treaty of Trianon it lost over two-thirds of its territory and 41.6% of its population. In an age of nationalism it was particularly vulnerable to partition, as essentially only the heartlands of Hungary, the great Central Plain, were Magyar (ethnic Hungarian). Its fate was sealed, when, in November 1918 Serb, Czech and Romanian troops all occupied the regions they claimed. The completion of the treaty was delayed by Bela Kun's coup in March (see page 21). He succeeded in driving out the Czechs from eastern Slovakia, but was himself defeated by Romanian troops in August. Negotiations with the new Hungarian government were resumed in January 1920 and concluded in June. Most of the German-speaking area in the west of the former Hungarian state was ceded to Austria, the Slovakian and Ruthenian regions in the north went to Czechoslovakia, the east to Romania and the south to Yugoslavia. The Treaty of Trianon was justified by the Allies according to the principle of self-determination, but in the context of Hungary this was a principle almost impossible to realise. C.A. Macartney, an expert on Hungary and the successor states, observed in 1937:

1 ... the ethical line was practically nowhere clear cut... long centuries of interpenetration, assimilation, migration and internal colonisation had left in many places a belt of mixed and often indeterminate population where each national group merged into the next, while there were 5 innumerable islands of one nationality set in seas of another, ranging in size from the half-million of Magyar speaking Szekely in Transylvania through many inter-determinate groups of fifty or a hundred thousand down to communities of a single village or less... No frontier could be drawn which did not leave national minorities on at least one side of it. Wherever there was a clash of interests between Hungary and the successor states or Romania, the Allies ensured that the decision went against Hungary.

#### c) The Treaty of Neuilly, 27 November 1919

This same principle operated in the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Neuilly with Bulgaria, which was signed on November 1919. Essentially Britain and France regarded Bulgaria as the 'Balkan Prussia' which needed to be restrained. They were determined, despite reservations from Italy and America, to reward their allies, Romania, Greece and Serbia (now part of Yugoslavia) at its expense. Thus southern Dobruja, with a mere 7000 Romanians out of a total population of 250,000, was ceded to Romania and western Thrace was given to Greece.

#### d) Fiume, Istria and Dalmatia and the Treaty of Rapallo, November 1920

These postwar settlements were accompanied by bitter quarrels between the Allied powers and Associated powers. The most serious clash of opinions took place between Italy and America over Italian claims to Fiume, Istria and Dalmatia which Britain and France had recognised in the Treaty of London of 1915. Orlando and Sonnino were desperate to prove to their electorate that Italy was not a 'proletarian nation' which could be dictated to by the great powers, and insisted on their right to annex both Albania and the port of Fiume in which, it could be argued, there was a bare majority of ethnic Italians if the Croat suburb of Susak was conveniently left out of the picture. The Italian annexation of Fiume would have the added bonus of denying Yugoslavia its only effective port in the Adriatic, thereby strengthening Italy's economic grip on the region. Agreement could have been achieved, especially as Orlando was ready in April 1919 to accept Fiume as a compromise for giving up Italian claims on Dalmatia; but Wilson made the major political mistake of vetoing this option publicly in a statement in the French press. After compromising over the Saar and Shantung (see pages 30, 32–3), Wilson was stubbornly determined to make a stand on the

Fourteen Points in the Adriatic. Orlando and Sonnino walked out of the Peace Conference in protest and did not return until 9 May.

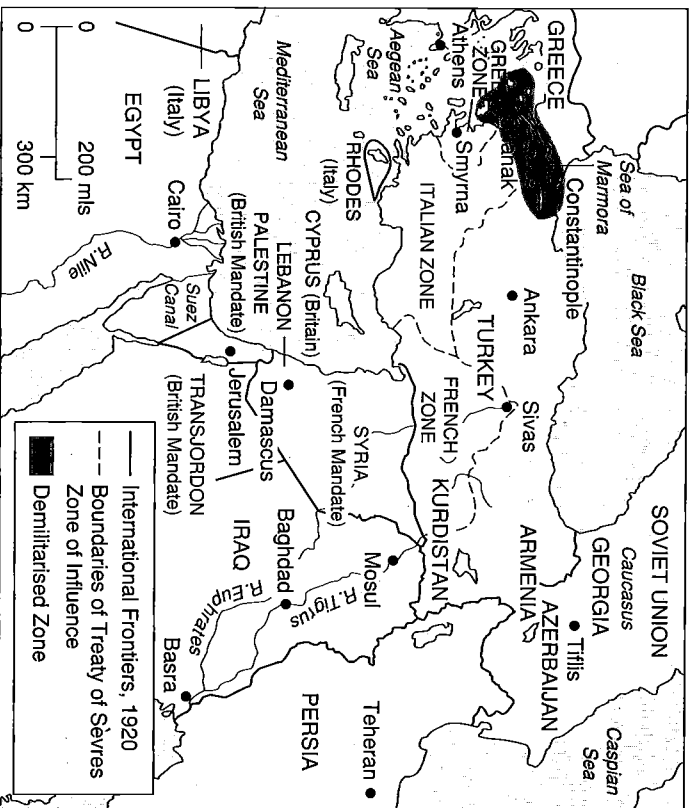
Orlando's resignation and his replacement by Nitti in June opened the way up for secret negotiations in Paris, but the lynching of nine French troops in Fiume by an Italian mob in July and then the seizure of the city in September by the Italian nationalist poet d'Annunzio merely prolonged the crisis. An agreement was reached in 1920 once the Yugoslavs realised that Wilson lacked the domestic support to interfere in the details of the Balkan settlements and when the Italian government, which was anxious to concentrate on Italy's pressing social and economic problems, showed its willingness to compromise by ending its wartime occupation of southern Albania. In November 1920 Yugoslavia and Italy signed the Treaty of Rapallo. Istria was partitioned between the two powers, Fiume became a self-governing free city and the rest of Dalmatia went to Yugoslavia. In December Italian troops cleared d'Annunzio out of Fiume, although in late 1923 Mussolini reoccupied it.

### 9 The Settlement with Turkey, 1919–23

**KEY ISSUES** What were the main terms of the Treaty? To what extent was it so harsh that it was bound to provoke a backlash?

The Treaty of Sèvres was another Anglo-French compromise. Lloyd George hoped drastically to weaken Turkey by depriving it not only of Constantinople and of the control of the Straits, but also by forcing it to surrender all territories where arguably there was no ethnic Turkish majority. He now envisaged Greece rather than Italy (see page 59) as filling the vacuum left by the collapse of Turkish power and, in effect, becoming the agent of the British Empire in the eastern Mediterranean. The French, on the other hand, concerned to protect their prewar investments in Turkey, wished to preserve a viable Turkish state. Above all, they wanted the Turkish government to remain in Constantinople where it would be more vulnerable to French pressure.

The end product of this Anglo-French compromise was a harsh and humiliating treaty. Constantinople remained Turkish, but Thrace and most of the European coastline of the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles were to go to Greece (see maps, pages 32 and 39). In the Smyrna region the Greeks were also given responsibility for internal administration and defence, while an Armenian state was to be set up with access across Turkish territory to the Black Sea. The Straits were to be controlled by an international commission, and an Allied financial committee was to have the right to inspect Turkey's finances. By a separate agreement zones were also awarded to France and Italy in southern Turkey.



The Near and Middle East after the Treaty of Sèvres.

### 10 Assessment

**KEY ISSUES** Can the peace settlements of 1919–20 be defended? To what extent did they contain the seeds of their own destruction?

The peace treaties of 1919–20 were seen by some contemporaries as a triumph of democracy, the rule of law, self-determination and collective security against militarism, and yet by others as a hypocritical act of vengeance and economic ignorance. The treaties contained a unique combination of idealism and morality with old-fashioned power politics. At past peace conferences there had been the assumption by both victors and the defeated that eventually the territorial settlement would be modified in a new war. In the First World War the slaughter had been so terrible that public opinion in Europe wanted future conflict prevented, whether by a severe peace permanently weakening the Central Powers or by more liberal measures overseen by the League of Nations. Consequently the treaties of 1919–20 were judged by almost impossibly high standards.

Increasingly, as a result of the devastating criticisms in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which was a brilliant analysis of the Versailles Treaty written in 1919 by John Maynard Keynes, an economist, who had been a member of the British delegation in Paris, public opinion in Britain and America began to turn against the peace. Keynes summarised his arguments as follows:

- 1 ... the treaty ignores the economic solidarity of Europe and by aiming at the destruction of the economic life of Germany it threatens the health and prosperity of the Allies themselves.
- 2 ... the German economic system as it existed before depended on ...
  - i) Overseas commerce as represented by her Mercantile marine [most of which had to be handed over to the Allies], her colonies, her foreign investments, her exports ...
  - ii) The exploitation of her coal and iron and the industries built upon them ...
 The Treaty aims at the systematic destruction of [this system].

To the Germans Keynes' arguments seemed to provide the final proof that the Allies led by Clemenceau were out to destroy their country, yet viewed from the perspective of 1945 the Treaty of Versailles does not appear as harsh as it did in 1919. Germany was still potentially a great power. It is arguable, too, that it was as much the hostility of the German industrialists to reparations, and the refusal of the American government to assist France financially, as the greed of the Allies that rendered the payment of reparations so difficult to achieve.

Unlike the Vienna settlement, the peace treaties failed to create a new balance of power in Europe. The Habsburg Empire was replaced by several small unstable states. Italy felt cheated by the Peace and was to remain a revisionist power in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. Even Britain and France, which gained most from Versailles, in fact secured only short-term advantages as they were too divided by mutual suspicions to implement the treaties in the crucial postwar years. Essentially the real weakness of the settlements of 1919-20 was that America, which had played such a part in negotiating them, was prevented by the vote in the Senate from helping to carry them out. One American historian, Paul Birdsall, argued that

- 1 the defection of the United States destroyed the Anglo-American preponderance which above all could have stabilised Europe. It impaired the authority and prestige of the League at its birth and it precipitated an Anglo-French duel which reduced Europe to the chaos from which
- 5 Hitler emerged to produce new chaos ...

**References**

- 1 M. Beloff, *Britain's Liberal Empire, 1897-1921* (London, Methuen, 1969), p. 279.
- 2 Quoted from Article 227 of the Treaty of Versailles.
- 3 Quoted in M. Trachtenberg, *Reparation in World Politics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 48.

- 4 General Smuts quoted in L. Jaffe, *The Decision to Disarm Germany* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 189.
- 5 Quoted in E. Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London, Routledge, 2nd edition, 1990), p. 30.
- 6 Quoted in D. Williamson, *The British in Germany* (Oxford, Berg, 1991), p. 23.

**Summary Diagram**

**The Peace Settlements, 1919-23**

<p><b>Problems</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Revolutionary condition of Europe</li> <li>2 Russian civil war</li> <li>3 Diverging Allied aims</li> <li>4 Competing nationalisms</li> <li>5 Desire for revenge</li> <li>6 Hunger, disease, economic chaos</li> <li>7 Allied lack of military strength as a result of demobilisation</li> </ol>	<p><b>Principles</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Independence for subject nations</li> <li>2 International rule of law through the League of Nations</li> <li>3 Disarmament and reparation from defeated powers</li> <li>4 Determination to prove German war guilt</li> <li>5 Selective (?) application of 14 points</li> </ol>
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**The Versailles Settlement, June 1919**

<p><b>Territorial changes</b></p> <p>Independent Poland</p> <p>Plebiscites in Upper Silesia, Schleswig and West Prussia</p> <p>Alsace-Lorraine to France</p> <p>Saar administered by League of Nations</p> <p>Germany loses colonies and foreign investments</p>	<p><b>Reparations</b></p> <p>Reparation Commission fixes amount of 132 milliard gold marks in May 1921</p> <p>Prolonged struggle to force Germany to pay, 1921-3</p> <p>France occupies Ruhr in Jan 1923</p> <p>France occupies Dawes Commission Jan 1924</p>	<p><b>Disarmament</b></p> <p>Abolition of conscription</p> <p>Regular German army of 100,000</p> <p>Very small fleet</p> <p>Allied Control Commissions in Germany until 1927</p> <p>Rhineland occupied for 15 years</p>	<p><b>League of Nations</b></p> <p>Collective security</p> <p>New principle of mandates</p> <p>Weakened by absence of USA</p> <p>Germany and defeated powers initially excluded</p>
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**The Eastern European, Balkan and Near East Peace Settlements**

<p><b>St Germain</b></p> <p>Czechoslovakia set up</p> <p>Slovenia, Bosnia, Dalmatia to Yugoslavia</p> <p>Istria, Trieste and S. Tyrol to Italy</p> <p>Gallia to Poland</p> <p>Austria not to integrate with Germany</p>	<p><b>Trianon</b></p> <p>Hungary loses 2/3 of its pre-war territory to Austria, Czechoslovakia and Romania</p>	<p><b>Neuilly</b></p> <p>Bulgaria loses territory to Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia</p>	<p><b>Sèvres</b></p> <p>Turks cede Middle East empire; Greeks gain Thrace; Straits controlled by Allies</p> <p>Revised at Lausanne, 1923; Greeks expelled, Constantinople back to Turkey</p>	<p><b>Riga</b></p> <p>Russia defeated by Poland, August 1920</p> <p>Poland's eastern frontiers fixed by Treaty of Riga, March 1921</p>
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