

SOURCE A

Herr Schneidemann, speaking in the German National Assembly

The Allies are driving the knife into the living body of the German people. The proposed peace means the miserable enslavement of children.

SOURCE C

From A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 1969

Germany remained by far the greatest power on the continent of Europe. It was greatest in population – 65 million against 40 million in France, the only other major power. German superiority was greater still in the economic resources of coal and steel. Nothing could prevent Germany from overshadowing Europe, even if they did not plan to do so.

Question

What point is the cartoonist trying to make in Source B?

Activity

You are a journalist for a neutral country reporting on German reactions to the Treaty of Versailles and deciding whether it was fair. Using the information above write your article. You should include:

- A headline on German reactions.
- Why Germany resented the terms of the Treaty.
- Was it a fair treaty?

German reactions

Germans were horrified when they discovered the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

They called the Treaty the 'Diktat', or 'dictated peace'. They were upset for several reasons:

- 1 The territorial losses. Germans complained that the loss of seven million subjects and 13.5% of her territory was too harsh. In particular they resented the losses to Poland in the east. Germany was now split in two by the Polish Corridor.
- 2 The Germans claimed that the Allies were trying to bankrupt Germany with their high reparations claims.
- 3 The terms were worked out in secret and forced upon the Germans.
- 4 All of Germany's colonies were taken away from her but the Allies kept theirs.
- 5 The Germans hated having to accept full blame for the war.
- 6 Above all, Germans hated having to disarm because this left the country defenceless against neighbouring states.

SOURCE B

A German cartoon, 1919. The Allies are shown as devils preparing to make Germany sign the Treaty.



Was the Treaty fair?

On the other hand people at the time and historians since have argued that the Treaty was fair on Germany:

- 1 The Treaty did not weaken Germany anywhere near as much as the Germans complained. By 1925 German steel production was twice that of Britain.
- 2 Germany had forced an even worse treaty on Russia in March 1918 (see pp. 420–21).

Changes 1921–29

The Turks hated the Treaty of Sèvres, especially the occupation of Turkey by foreign troops and the amount of land they had been forced to give to the Greeks. In 1921 a nationalist leader, Mustapha Kemal, overthrew the Sultan, the ruler of Turkey. He then led an army which drove the Greeks out of Smyrna. In 1922 the Allies agreed to renegotiate the peace settlement. This led to the Treaty of Lausanne, in 1923. This treaty:

- Returned lands that Turkey had lost to Greece.
- Gave Turkey control of the Straits again.
- Ordered all foreign troops to leave.

Reparations

In 1922 Germany paid a small amount and then asked for a two-year delay before the next instalment. The Allies refused and in 1923 the French invaded the Ruhr (see p. 340). This worsened Germany's economic problems and led to hyperinflation. Eventually the French and Germans agreed to the Dawes Plan (see p. 344) and the French withdrew their troops from the Ruhr. The Dawes Plan scaled down the payments to 2500 million marks per year, which was to be paid over a longer period. The USA would provide 800 million marks in gold in loans to Germany to help stabilise its economy and develop its industry and trade.

Over the next five years, 1924–9, Germany began to prosper. Resentment against the Treaty died down. In 1929 the Young Plan (p. 344) further reduced the reparation payments to 2000 million marks a year, extending them to 1969.

Questions

- 1 Which of the peace treaties do you think was the most severe? Why?
- 2 Why was the Dawes Plan brought in?
- 3 What changes did the Dawes and Young Plans make to reparation payments?
- 4 What do the changes of 1921–29 show us about the attitudes to the Treaties of 1919–20? Were people beginning to accept that they were too harsh?

Assessment of the Peace Treaties

There has been much disagreement then and since as to the effects of the peace treaties. Some believe they led to the Second World War. Others argue that the positive effects were greater than the weaknesses.

Criticisms

- 1 The Treaties failed in Central Europe because:
 - they created too many new states, such as Yugoslavia, which contained unhappy minority nationalities.
 - these new countries were not strong enough against powerful neighbours such as Germany and Russia.

SOURCE A

Lloyd George

In many respects terrible terms to force upon a country. We shall have to fight another war all over again in twenty-five years at three times the cost.

SOURCE B

The editor of the *Daily Graphic*,
5 July 1919

Nobody involved is completely satisfied – not those who wish to punish the evil-doers and least of all, of course, the evil-doers. The Germans may even treat the Peace Treaty as another Scrap of Paper.

- 2 Turkey was treated very unfairly in order to satisfy the aims of France, Britain and Greece.
- 3 Many of the terms of the treaties did not work and did not last. The Treaty of Sèvres only lasted three years. Reparation payments were changed on two occasions.
- 4 The treaties left the defeated countries very bitter and determined to get revenge or overturn the terms of the treaties. This was particularly true in Germany where extremists such as Hitler got support because of the 'stab in the back' theory (p. 337) and by promising to overthrow the Treaty.

Achievements

SOURCE C

Perceval Landon, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 June 1919

The Treaty is signed. Militarism, with all its disciplined brutality and lust for conquest, is at an end. At an end, too, is the German Empire. The world looks forward from today to a full generation of peace.

SOURCE D

From J. Traynor and I. Dawson, *The Struggle for Peace*, 1997

The Treaties were a reasonable attempt to solve an impossible problem. It was impossible because the atmosphere of 1919 meant the Allies could not be lenient towards the defeated countries. It would have been difficult to do better.

SOURCE F

N. De Marco, *The World This Century*, 1987

Wilson had tried hard to make sure that the various peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were given self-determination. The Serbs, Croats and Slovenes now had their own state – Yugoslavia. The Czechs and Slovaks had their own nation too.

SOURCE E

Ruth Henig, *Versailles and After*, 1995

The settlement that emerged from the months of deliberation at Paris was a real achievement. The fact that it did not survive the 1920s intact was due not so much to the terms of the treaties themselves. It was due to the reluctance of the political leaders of the time to enforce them.

Questions

- 1 How useful is Source A as evidence of the effects of the Treaty of Versailles?
- 2 Read Sources C, D, E and F. In your own words, explain their views on the peace treaties.
- 3 Overall, do you think the peace treaties were a failure?