

Was the treaty of versailles a carthaginian peace? assignment

[History](#)



1. The Versailles settlement quickly gained a reputation as ' a Carthaginian peace'. What was meant by this, and was it a fair and accurate assessment. The Versailles Peace Treaty was signed in June 1919 after the First World War by the victorious Allies and defeated Germany and was intended to punish Germany for what was seen as her war guilt and to prevent her from becoming powerful enough again to disturb European peace.

It was called a Carthaginian peace in the first instance by Jan Smuts (a member of the British Delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris) in a letter to Lloyd George dated 16th March 1919[1] and in 1920 by John Maynard Keynes (also a member of the British Delegation) in his book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. A Carthaginian peace is described in modern usage as referring to a peace settlement ' whose terms are overly harsh and designed to perpetuate the inferiority of the loser'. 2] The Allies, especially France, were insistent that Germany should be seen to pay for her part in the war and the terms were not as harsh as those Germany had imposed on Russia (the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, summer 1918)[3] or those that Germany intended to impose on the Western Allies had she won the war, which included the suppression of Belgium, who had been an innocent victim of German aggression in 1914. However, at the end of the war where approximately 8. million soldiers had died and 21 million wounded the victorious Allies were not in a mood to be benevolent towards a Germany they thought responsible for causing the war. Carthage and its inhabitants were almost totally annihilated by the Romans and the objective of the Treaty of Versailles was not even meant to perpetuate the inferiority of the Germans but to protect her neighbours from her ambitions of territorial

expansion through aggression. Therefore, compared to Carthage the phrase ' Carthaginian peace' would not appear to be a fair and accurate description of the Treaty of Versailles.

When the Treaty was being discussed in Paris after the war it became obvious that although countries wanted it to ensure a lasting peace in Europe differences in how best this could be achieved began to appear. France was eager to solve the problem of her territorial security against future attacks from Germany and the Prime Minister, Clemenceau, thought this problem could be resolved by inflicting stringent conditions on Germany to prevent a recurrence the precarious position France had already found herself in twice.

He also feared that if Germany recovered quickly from the war she would be free to threaten France yet again and thought the Treaty would limit her pre-war economic superiority and ability to rearm. France had also suffered devastation on home soil; a huge loss of men and industry and damage to her infrastructure and Clemenceau wanted to show the French people that Germany would pay for her actions and to the French the Treaty was never harsh enough.

The Americans did not wholly approve of the changes from the Fourteen Point Plan and although Woodrow Wilson was persuaded to sign he later refused to ratify it, leaving France, Britain and Italy, to carry out the demands of the Treaty. Woodrow Wilson had favoured reconciliation rather than revenge and after setting up the League of Nations that he thought

would mediate in any future conflict went back to America and a period of isolationism.

Lloyd George had promised the British, still smarting from their disastrous loss of men, that the Germans would be dealt with rigorously and seems to have veered between feeling Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan was too liberal and lenient or considering the Treaty was too harsh; so he was torn between his election pledges of November 1918 to the British population and a knowledge that some of the conditions of the Treaty did not comply with promises of the Armistice and were unrealistic and unworkable.

Keynes blamed the rejection of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan, which had been the basis of the Armistice in 1918 between the Allies and Germany, (which he calls a 'fair and equal ideology')[4] for the 'Carthaginian Peace' devised by the United States of America, Britain, France and Italy. Keynes, a liberal economist, who had been present at the peace conference in Paris thought Wilson's principles were 'wrongly conceived and too little regard had been given to the economic realities'[5] but he looked on them more favourably than the eventual conditions in the Treaty of Versailles.

Alan Sharp suggests that Keynes was torn between 'fascination at the speed with which Lloyd George could absorb both atmosphere and complex briefs and disgust at his lack of fixed principles. [6] The British delegation containing on the one hand Jan Smuts, who took a more liberal stance on the Treaty and Billy Hughes, the Australian Prime-minister, who became the 'most vocal exponent of a Carthaginian peace among the British delegation in

Paris'[7] shows the divisions amongst the British delegation and possibly reflects the indecision in Lloyd George's mind.

He felt Germany needed to be left with enough room to recover and take her place in Europe but was anxious in the aftermath of the carnage of war that Germany should be seen to be punished. Italy's Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, was not vociferous at the Conference but was asking for Fiume to be assigned to Italy but it had already been assigned to Yugoslavia. Wilson resisted Orlando's request and he and the Italian delegation eventually gave up and removed themselves from the Conference, having achieved very little from the promises given to them when they joined the war on the side of the Allies in 1915.

Germany's political parties were for once united in their condemnation of the Treaty and together with the other defeated powers violated some of the conditions almost from the time the Treaty was signed and Hobsbawm calls it ' a gift to German nationalism'[8]. The Germans were to refer to the Treaty as a ' searing wound to national pride'[9] but Germany had already contravened the Armistice by scuttling fifty of her warships interned by the British in Scapa Flow and this pointed to the German attitude towards pledges, promises and treaties.

Discontent with the administration's acceptance of the Diktat of the Treaty of Versailles, coupled with economic and social deprivations undermined the Weimar government and the public turned to the more authoritarian approach of the German National Socialists even though Stresemann, Chancellor of the Weimar, was declaring in 1929 ' we are again the masters

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in our house. '[10] Lentin suggests that the controls of the Treaty had been shaken off by 1930 but this did not prevent the move to right wing politics and its promises of German self-determination.

Out of the 440 articles the most controversial clause was that of Germany's War guilt whereby she was obliged to acknowledge responsibility for the war and liability for Allied losses[11]. However, it is doubtful whether psychologically Germany actually did accept war guilt and it rankled for many years when they even paid revisionist historians like Beazley and Dawson to write favourable accounts for them. [12] Mombauer asserts that it was not denial of war guilt that ' led the German people on the path to liberty but it aided the development of the National Socialist dictatorship'. [13] The Germans considered the war guilt clause one of honour and Lentin suggests they saw it as moral culpability whereas the Allies could have merely seen it as a way of assessing financial liability. [14] Another clause that caused consternation was the territorial losses of 13% of its 1914 land mass leading to 7 million people being outside the government of the Reich and left those people without the right to national self-determination, which had been promised to all European nations in Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan.

Poland, France, Belgium and Denmark did receive land from Germany; Germany's overseas empire was handed over to The League of Nations to administer (although this did not seem to rankle as much as the territorial losses involving German nationals); land taken from Russia was given back, although Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia emerged from that in keeping with national self-determination.

This loss of land would be attacked by Hitler when he talked about lebensraum (living space) for Germany in his book Mein Kampf and he was intent on retrieving the lost land and more and would begin by regaining Danzig, given to Poland, and The Ruhr which had been partitioned. From Mein Kampf in 1925 to the Hossbach Memorandum in 1937 Hitler reiterates on numerous occasions his intentions to create lebensraum for Germany by extending into Eastern Europe and so incensed is he about the loss of land he even expects his wishes to be carried out after his death as his last will and testament. 15] Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan called on all countries to disarm but Germany was forced to do so whilst the Allies were not and this caused Germans to feel vulnerable. However, Lentin points out that the prohibitions on rearmaments laid down in the Treaty were being defied by Germany who ' never disarmed, never intended to disarm, and for seven years did everything in her power to obstruct, deceive and " counter-control"[16] the Inter-Allied Military Control Commission.

The reparation payments clause also caused disquiet in Germany as the country endeavoured to recover from the cost of war and although war costs were not part of the Fourteen Point Plan it was Norman Davis, Wilson's appointed United States Treasury representative in London, who was responsible for the suggestion that ' we can write Germany is morally responsible for the war and all its consequences and that legally she is responsible for damage to property and persons according to the formula adopted[17] and Sharp asserts that out of this sprang the war guilt clause.

However, Sally Marks in the Smoke and Mirrors chapter of *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment after 75 years* points out that all belligerents were economically weak post-war but Germany and Britain 'emerged with their economies intact. ' [18] Germany did not suffer the damage to her industrial infrastructure that other countries had and her population was not as depleted as theirs. During the war she had transferred some industries from France, Belgium and Poland onto German soil. She also points out that Germany was arguing that the stronger they were the more able to pay reparation.

It would appear that if Germany had adopted the same tax rate as the victors (a condition of the Treaty) she would have been able to raise the money for reparation payments but this was another clause that she reneged on. Sally Marks calls the many aspects of the reparation clauses ' moderate in their own right'[19] and by 1921 the Allies were reducing reparation payments in return for the provisioning of Germany with food. In 1924 Charles Dawes, the American Financier headed a Committee to modify the reparation aspect of the Treaty enabling Germany to meet her obligations for a number of years.

However, Germany again defaulted in payment by the end of the decade and the Young Plan of 1929 (again headed by an American financier) reduced the reparation payments and any form of control the Allies had over the German economy were removed. It would appear that reparation payments were fairly flexible from the outset and generally in Germany's favour as she

prevaricated on payments in the hope of lesser demands and to a certain extent she succeeded in her aims.

A sum of 269 billion gold marks was set initially in reparation payments over a 42 year period, although this sum was later reduced to 132 billion. It is thought a total of around 55 billion gold marks were paid which included cash payments and payments in kind. [20] However, these figures are provisional as there are differences of opinions between Germany and the Reparation Commission and in spite of all the complaints concerning the difficulty of Germany making the payments when they ceased in 1932 the following 4-5 years saw expenditure on rearmament was much greater than the expected reparation payments. We also have to remember that if reparation payments had not been set the cost of the war would have rested on the shoulders of the Allies. Lentin maintains that the peace became a 'witches' brew' of everyone's wishes for the Versailles Treaty. [21] Wilson's liberalism and Clemenceau's narrow-mindedness created a Peace Treaty that neither contained Germany entirely or allowed her dignity to recover from the war in as fair a way as possible given the circumstances.

He also asserts that revisionism was already part of the Treaty and that 'the worm of appeasement lay dormant beneath the surface'[22]. Counter-proposals were invited from the Germans, which included a cap of 100 billion marks on reparation payments but demanded a commission to look into the responsibility of war guilt by 'inspecting the archives of belligerent countries and examining all chief actors of war. [23] Germany went on to demand a different Treaty that was 'with the co-operation of all nations.' She felt this

was the only way forward for the Treaty to bring about a union of mankind, calling it ' their historical task. ' [24] This met with a reply from Kerr, Private Secretary to Lloyd George, pointing out that ' the process of appeasement which all desire..... ' and '..... whereby the settlement of 1919 itself can be modified from time to time. [25] Although only giving way at that time on redefining a small amount of land on the Polish border this was surely paving the way for future modifications in Germany's favour and indicated a flexible approach to the Treaty. Furthermore, Lloyd George had indicated that he saw the Treaty as a temporary measure to bring immediate peace to Europe and once it was signed began to work towards undoing some of the conditions he thought were unworkable. He questioned the German War Guilt clause almost immediately and began to describe the war as an ' accident desired by no single state. [26] Although the German government's line was to blame the war on Russia (or at times on Russia and France) they were eventually forced to sign the Treaty admitting war guilt. The mood of the delegates in Paris had already begun to change from their first meetings when counter-proposals from the Germans were met with intransigence due to the proximity of war memories and Schwabe maintains Brockdorff's, (Germany's delegation leader) arguments were the beginning of Germany's ' successful campaign to undermine the conditions of the Treaty. 27] In an extract from the reply of the Allied & Associated Powers to the observations of the German Delegation on the Conditions for Peace on the 16th June 1919, the Allies are not only accusing the Germans the responsibility for the outbreak of war but of ' the savage and inhuman manner in which she proceeded'[28] including responsibility for attacks on neutral territories;

attacks on passenger ships at sea; the displacement of thousands and barbarities against prisoners of war and speak of German aggression, barbarism and justice.

Temperley sums up most of the main points of those early counter-proposals and the reply is extremely emotive[29] and calls for justice for all not just Germany. However, the letter from Jan Smuts dated 16th March 1919 to Lloyd George, three months before the eventual signing of the Treaty, shows that appeasement was creeping into the dialogue. Smuts, described as an early revisionist, calls the treaty a 'reactionary peace'[30] and expresses his misgivings about the severe stipulations being imposed on Germany.

He was worried that a failed settlement would leave the politicians 'discredited men'[31] giving communist sympathisers an opportunity to advance their cause in a weak Germany where radical politics could become popular and communism could spread. In fact, from the moment the Treaty was signed British policy was also revisionist and American revisionists Fay and Barnes began work almost immediately to disprove Germany's war guilt and eventually Barnes was to infer America had intervened on the wrong side and blamed France and Russia for the outbreak of war. 32] Lentin asserts that Britain 'backed away from commitment to The Treaty after 1919' and even during the negotiations Smuts' revisionist and appeasement arguments were influencing delegates and Lloyd George had begun arguing for a 'measure of leniency,'[33] so perhaps The Treaty was never as harsh as it was first intended to be. Lentin also maintains that when the British delegation were given copies of The Treaty they realized that when all the

clauses were seen together for the first time they ' presented a terrible and impossible aggregate'. 34] However, on the day of the signing any sympathy for the Germans was dissolved by the attitude of the leader of their delegation Count Ulrich Brockdorff-Rantzau, who chose to deny sole responsibility for the war and his demeanour was so defiant and tactless it united and inflamed the Allied delegations. On his return to Germany the Weimar Government eventually resigned over the matter and the new Government signed The Treaty, although it should be pointed out it was under protest.

During the aftermath of war the Germans saw the Treaty of Versailles as a ' dictate of shame designed to keep them permanently in punitive bondage and preventing it from becoming a European superpower'[35] whereas they had seen Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan of the Armistice ' a tolerable peace settlement'[36] They had been promised a ' peace of justice' but they felt the Treaty brought total humiliation on them and Hitler in Mein Kampf would describe it as an ' instrument of unlimited blackmail and shameful humiliation. [37] However, Roberts points out that the final terms of The Treaty were a ' diplomatic defeat for France', [38] who were hoping to stop Germany becoming a threat again by the harshest means possible, when she gave up the left bank of the Rhine for the Saar coal mines. Lentin suggests that the conditions of The Treaty were not self-enforcing and France was left alone to keep Germany to the conditions of it and Soutou pointed out that ' The Treaty depended on the will of the victors either for enforcement or appeasement[39].

Henig argues ' that what stopped the Treaty being a success was the Allies reluctance to enforce it' and points out that ' within a year of the signing, the victorious alliance had crumbled away,'[40] and Gordon Martel suggests that ' before the ink was dry the movement to tinker and renegotiate or destroy had begun. '[41] France insisted on prompt payment of reparation and put in place a system of alliances, circling Germany and eventually invaded the Ruhr for Germany's defaulting on payments but Lentin points out that ' France could not single-handedly prevent the withering away of The Treaty. The Treaty of Locarno in 1925, signed by the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Britain attempted to modify some of the more extreme requirements of the Versailles Treaty. Lentin maintains that Locarno was an ' expression of a new balance of power: a French retreat, a German advance. '[42] However, the Germans were never satisfied with any sort of compromise and the hatred of the conditions of The Versailles Treaty would give Hitler the ammunition e needed to use as propoganda. Britain thought Locarno offered the ' prospect of ongoing appeasement and was probably the beginning of the total dilution of the Treaty. [43] However, Lentin points out that Germany had ' every incentive to undermine it and every intention in doing so. '[44] So how far were the conditions of The Treaty adhered to? The German army was reduced to 100, 000 serving soldiers, although this clause was possibly flouted by Germany fast-tracking trained men into a reserve corps which were not covered under The Treaty; the German navy was reduced to six battleships, although submariners were trained abroad which broke the spirit of The Treaty; the air force was disbanded but again pilots were trained abroad or flew gliders to learn the theory of flying;

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Germany was not allowed to unite with Austria; she was demilitarised but failed to completely disarm; although she accepted the war guilt clause by signing The Treaty she never truly accepted responsibility and she did attempt to pay reparations these were reduced by the Dawes and Young Plans and she did print extra money to meet demands. [45]

It could have been that if the Treaty had been applied assiduously Germany would not have been rearming in 1932 and upheaval in Europe may have been avoided; Hitler may not have come to power and who knows if the Second World War could have been avoided. However, policing the Treaty on German soil was difficult for the Allies and eventually the conditions were largely ignored. When revisionists and liberal appeasers condemned the Treaty as too harsh they were giving German revisionists' argument more weight but we have to remember that the delegations in Paris were in unchartered waters and Germany were the defeated side. The delegates were convinced at that time that the War Guilt Clause was the right one and were eager to prevent Germany from becoming as successful as she was pre-1914 to ensure peace in Europe.

However, compared to what happened in ancient Carthage, the Versailles Treaty was relatively moderate and even if the Treaty could be called Carthaginian when it was drawn up appeasement, revisionism and fears of a Bolshevik uprising spreading from revolutionary Russia began almost immediately after it was signed with the Allies giving ground and the Germans taking advantage, resulting in a relaxation or disregard for the conditions the Treaty contained. So the words ' Carthaginian peace' were not

a fair and accurate description of the Treaty but rather a dramatic overstatement by Jan Smuts whose revisionist ways were in evidence before the Treaty was signed and by John Maynard Keynes who was piqued that his advice on reparations was largely ignored. (Words 3870) BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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