

Could the treaty of  
versailles be justified  
at the time



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The Treaty of Versailles was created to ensure a lasting peace, and to reward the victors of the war; however, was it justified? The Treaty of Versailles was a peace settlement designed by the Allied leaders, the 'Big Three'- Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau of France, Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Britain and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States. Clemenceau wanted Germany to be punished. He had seen his country invaded, large parts of its industry destroyed and millions of its people killed. Clemenceau was determined to make Germany pay compensation to France.

He also wanted to weaken Germany so that she could never threaten France again. He knew that he had the French people behind him. Lloyd George was re-elected as prime minister in 1918 but to win votes he had gone along with the popular opinion in Britain that Germany should be 'squeezed till the pips squeaked'. However he really wanted peace and tried to prevent Germany from being punished too harshly. Whenever he did this he clashed with Clemenceau and was criticized back in Britain. Lloyd George ended up in a mid-way position between the aims of Clemenceau on the one hand and Wilson on the other.

Wilson did not share the anti-German passions of the Europeans. He believed that punishing Germany too harshly would simply make her want revenge and this could lead to another war. He wanted a peace that would last and though this could be achieved through self-determination (each different nation of people having their own country and governing themselves, instead of being ruled by another country). Winston Churchill said in 1919 that the negotiations did the best they could to support self determination.

This is a helpful source because it shows that they tried to respect self determination in Europe.

To reach a compromise a meeting was needed at the small palace of Versailles, not far from the French capital, Paris. Here the leaders of 'The Big Four', Orlando, Clemenceau, Wilson and George, representing Italy, France, Britain and America respectively, tried to find a lasting peace for Europe. A 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, and Wilson, while Clemenceau 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 for months! This meeting in Versailles was intended to bring stability and peace into Europe. The date set was June 28th, 1919 and the members of 32 nations met up, to agree on terms of peace for Germany, however none of the defeated nations were present at this meeting including Russia whose Government was not acknowledged by the Allies. The Treaty of Versailles had two main issues on which it focused: Germany's post war territory and also the amount of reparations Germany must pay.

In the East, Germany was literally split into two parts. The Allies decided that the nation of Poland should be given access to the sea, so they formed the "Polish Corridor." Poland gained a lot of territory from Germany, including a port on the Baltic, Danzig. This isolated the region of Germany known as Eastern Prussia. In the Western part of Germany, more changes were made. France gained her wanted region of Alsace-Lorraine. The northern part of

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Schleswig was given to Denmark and Belgium also gained the provinces of Eupen and Malmedy.

The Rhineland was to be occupied heavily by allied forces, giving them control of major cities such as Cologne, Bonn and, Frankfurt. Most importantly, the Saarland was placed under international rule, and control of its valuable Ruhr coalfields were given to France. Furthermore, Germany had to pay ? 6. 6 million in reparations. This was practically impossible to pay up as Germany was suffering terribly economically due to the war. However W. Carr, a historian said in 1972 that the negotiations for the Treaty prevented an even harsher punishment for Germany.

This is a useful source because an historian can look back at what has happened, do research and draw a conclusion. The Treaty of Versailles was a peace settlement that no one really agreed with as so many people had different opinions so it could have never worked out anyway. Harold Nicolson, a British diplomat said that the treaties were neither just nor wise. This is a reliable source because e was there at the time that saw this first hand and had an informed opinion. The treaty was really just focusing on punishing Germany unfairly for example, the ' war guilt' that Germany had to accept so.

The Treaty of Versailles was a diktat so Germany was obligated to accept sole blame for initiating the war. This term was unfair; it was wrong to blame a single nation for such a huge disaster, especially a new government that was trying to replace the old Kaiser's plans with a democratic rule.

Furthermore, several countries had shown signs of aggression during events

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leading up to 1914 so, it was unreasonable to accuse Germany for beginning the war which damaged and killed so many people's lives. Germany's disarmament was another term of the Treaty of Versailles.

Her army was limited to a mere 100 thousand and her armoured vehicles, aircraft and submarines were seized from her. Perhaps this can be justified; the Allies felt that by reducing Germany's armed forces, she would be much less of a threat, and so they felt that they were doing it to benefit Europe and ensure that there would be no aggression from the Germans. On the other hand, the army was a point of pride for Germany. She was humiliated at this loss of military therefore greatly damaged her honour and pride.

As well as a loss of armed forces, Germany lost control of the Rhineland, which was significant as it shared the border between France and Germany. The left bank of the Rhine was now occupied by the Allies, and the rest of it demilitarized. Therefore, from her point of view, this was highly unfair. Germany lost a lot so I think even though the revenge that Germany later took with her leader Hitler was completely unnecessary it is clear why the Germans would want revenge. There was so much taken from them when they had near to nothing.

In conclusion, 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, 13% of its land and nearly 6 million German citizens 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

ruined and was also forced to pay reparations to the allies. It too has its armed forces reduced. Similar penalties were also imposed on Bulgaria and Hungary.

The Turks were so angered by their territorial loses that they rose up and overthrew their own government. The Allied 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 likely to lead to future war. It would only be a matter of time before the Germans, in particular, started 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. '