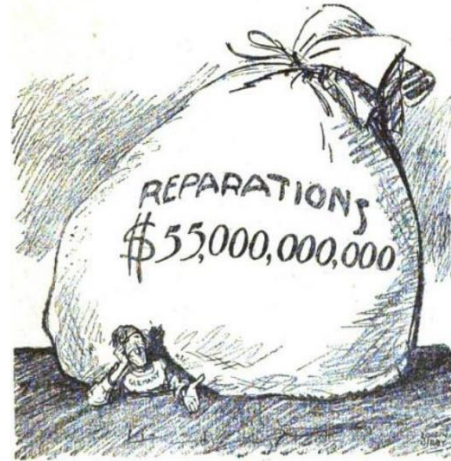
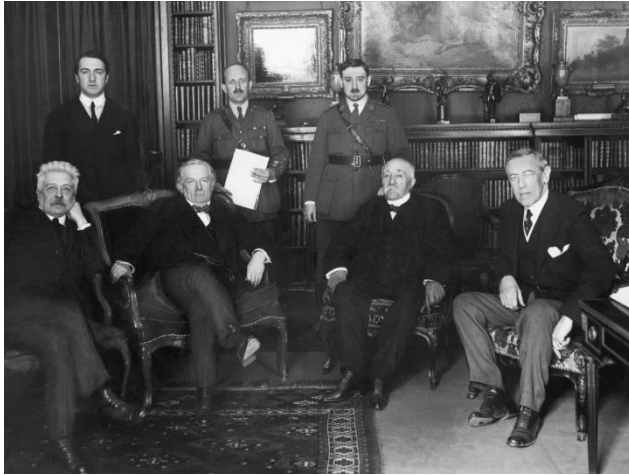


The Treaty of Versailles



When President Woodrow Wilson and the other world leaders met in France at the Paris Peace Conference, they had many important decisions to make. If they made the best possible decisions, maybe the world would stay at peace for a long time to come. If not, conflicts could begin again that might lead to another war.

President Wilson had a plan in mind, called the Fourteen Points, that he thought would lead to world peace. Other people still had their minds more on the conflicts of World War I. There were still conflicting claims to land that had to be settled. European countries needed billions of dollars to repair the damage done by the war. Countries that had been invaded by Germany wanted to be sure that it would not happen again. Some people felt that the country of Germany should be punished for starting the war.

The leaders at the peace conference discussed and argued and finally came up with some plans. They created several treaties, each one dealing with one of the defeated Central Powers. The main one was the treaty with Germany called the Treaty of Versailles.

The Treaty of Versailles blamed Germany for the war, and its provisions were very harsh for Germany. Germany was ordered to reduce its military to a small part of what it had been before the war. The size of its army would have to be reduced to 100,000 men. It was not allowed to have tanks, heavy artillery, military aircraft, or submarines. Germany was also ordered to pay huge amounts of reparations, or payments for war damages. Germany lost territory too. Parts of Germany were combined with parts of other countries to form Poland and

Czechoslovakia. The provisions of the treaty, if followed, would leave Germany a weak country. Other parts of the treaty divided Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, which would be dealt with further in later treaties.

The Treaty of Versailles also set up the League of Nations, which had been one of President Wilson's suggestions. Its purpose was to settle disputes between countries and prevent future wars. However, Germany and other Central Powers were not admitted to the League of Nations. The United States Congress voted against the League of Nations, so the United States did not join either. The League of Nations would be based in Geneva, Switzerland, a neutral nation in World War I and in many other wars. It would be authorized to call in nations when they were having a dispute and attempt to settle the problem. If the nations could not agree on a solution, the League of Nations could apply sanctions, or punishments. The smallest sanction was a warning. Next came economic sanctions, which meant that a country's trade could be cut off. The most severe sanction would be the use of military force. However, since the League of Nations did not have its own military, and no other countries were in a position to support it with their own military forces after the war, this provision could not really be used.

There were problems with the parts of the treaty regarding Germany too. German citizens were very unhappy with the treaty and felt that their country had been treated unfairly. At first, Germany did do what many of the treaty's provisions called for, but not everything. Then, with the rise of the Nazi party in the 1930s, it began to ignore the treaty altogether. Germany began to once again build up its military power, and it refused to pay reparations. Some historians say the treaty was too harsh, and that it led to the popularity of the Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler in Germany. They say that, in this way, the peace treaty of World War I became one of the causes of World War II.