

AM HIST 2

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles

The treaty can be divided into a number of sections; territorial, military, financial and general.

Territorial

The following land was taken away from Germany :

- Alsace-Lorraine (given to France)
- Eupen and Malmedy (given to Belgium)
- Northern Schleswig (given to Denmark)
- Hultschin (given to Czechoslovakia)
- West Prussia, Posen and Upper Silesia (given to Poland)

The Saar, Danzig and Memel were put under the control of the League of Nations and the people of these regions would be allowed to vote to stay in Germany or not in a future referendum.

The League of Nations also took control of Germany's overseas colonies.

Germany had to return to Russia land taken in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Some of this land was made into new states : Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. An enlarged Poland also received some of this land.

Military

Germany's army was reduced to 100,000 men; the army was not allowed tanks
She was not allowed an airforce She was allowed only 6 capital naval ships and no submarines
The west of the Rhineland and 50 kms east of the River Rhine was made into a demilitarised zone (DMZ). No German soldier or weapon was allowed into this zone.
The Allies were to keep an army of occupation on the west bank of the Rhine for 15 years.

Financial

The loss of vital industrial territory would be a severe blow to any attempts by Germany to rebuild her economy. Coal from the Saar and Upper Silesia in particular was a vital economic loss. Combined with the financial penalties linked to reparations, it seemed clear to Germany that the Allies wanted nothing else but to bankrupt her.
Germany was also forbidden to unite with Austria to form one superstate, in an attempt to keep her economic potential to a minimum.

General

There are three vital clauses here:

- Germany had to admit full responsibility for starting the war. This was Clause 231 - the infamous "War Guilt Clause".
- Germany, as she was responsible for starting the war as stated in clause 231, was, therefore responsible for all the war damage caused by the First World War. Therefore, she had to pay reparations, the bulk of which would go to France and Belgium to pay for the damage done to the infrastructure of both countries by the war. Quite literally, reparations would be used to pay for the damage to be repaired. Payment could be in kind or cash. The figure was not set at Versailles - it was to be determined later. The Germans were told to write a blank cheque which the Allies would cash when it suited them. The figure was eventually put at £6,600 million - a huge sum of money well beyond Germany's ability to pay.
- A League of Nations was set up to keep world peace.

In fact, the first 26 clauses of the treaty dealt with the League's organization.

The German reaction to the Treaty of Versailles

After agreeing to the Armistice in November 1918, the Germans had been convinced that they would be consulted by the Allies on the contents of the Treaty. This did not happen and the Germans were in no position to continue the war as her army had all but disintegrated. Though this lack of consultation angered them, there was nothing they could do about it. Therefore, the first time that the German representatives saw the terms of the Treaty was just weeks before they were due to sign it in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles on June 28th 1919.

There was anger throughout Germany when the terms were made public. The Treaty became known as a Diktat - as it was being forced on them and the Germans had no choice but to sign it. Many in Germany did not want the Treaty signed, but the representatives there knew that they had no choice as German was incapable of restarting the war again.

In one last gesture of defiance, the captured German naval force held at Scapa Flow (north of Scotland) scuttled itself i.e. deliberately sank itself.

Germany was given two choices:

- 1) sign the Treaty or
- 2) be invaded by the Allies.

They signed the Treaty as in reality they had no choice. When the ceremony was over, Clemenceau went out into the gardens of Versailles and said "It is a beautiful day".

The consequences of Versailles

The Treaty seemed to satisfy the "Big Three" as in their eyes it was a just peace as it kept Germany weak yet strong enough to stop the spread of communism; kept the French border with Germany safe from another German attack and created the organization, the League of Nations, that would end warfare throughout the world.

However, it left a mood of anger throughout Germany as it was felt that as a nation Germany had been unfairly treated.

Above all else, Germany hated the clause blaming her for the cause of the war and the resultant financial penalties the treaty was bound to impose on Germany. Those who signed it (though effectively they had no choice) became known as the "November Criminals".

Many German citizens felt that they were being punished for the mistakes of the German government in August 1914 as it was the government that had declared war not the people.

Were the terms of the Treaty of Versailles actually carried out?

- The League of Nations was created. This did happen even if Germany was initially excluded from it.
- Land had to be handed over to Poland, France, Belgium and Denmark. This did happen - all the land Germany was required to hand over, was handed over. Territory put under League of Nations control was handed over to the League.
- All overseas colonies were to be handed over to the League. This did happen.
- All land taken from Russia had to be handed back to Russia. This did happen though land in the western area became Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in keeping with the belief in national self-determination.
- Germany's army had to be reduced to 100,000 men. On paper this happened. The fact that Germany side-stepped the rule did not mean that she literally broke it - though what she did was a deliberate attempt to break this term. German soldiers in the 1920's were signed on for a short contract of service and then put in the reserves once their time had finished. Therefore, Germany never had more than 100,000 soldiers serving at any one time though she certainly had substantial reserve soldiers which boosted Hitler when he renounced the clauses of Versailles.
- Germany's navy was reduced to 6 battleships with no submarines. This happened. Germany could not afford battleships in the aftermath of the war and most navies were now moving to smaller (by degrees), faster ships that could also carry weapons that carried a punch - such as cruisers. Aircraft carriers were also being developed with greater commitment. Submariners were trained abroad - Versailles did not cover this, so it did not break the terms of Versailles - only the spirit.

- No air force was allowed. This happened but as with submariners, potential pilots were trained abroad or using gliders in Germany to educate them in the theory of flying. This did not break Versailles.
- Western Germany was to be demilitarised. This happened.
- Germany was forbidden to unite with Austria. This happened.
- Germany had to accept the "War Guilt Clause" and pay reparations. The former happened in the sense that Germany signed the Treaty which meant that she accepted this term on paper - if not in fact. Germany did try and pay reparations when she could do so. She did not refuse to pay in 1922. She simply could not produce what was needed that year and this led to the French invasion of the Ruhr. In the 1920's it was the Allies who took the decision to reduce reparations and eased Germany's plight in so doing. The first instance of refusal to pay reparations came in 1933 when Hitler announced that Germany would not pay - and the Allies did nothing.

Therefore, throughout the 1920's, in nearly all parts of the Treaty, the terms were carried out. It was after 1933, that there was a systematic breaking of the terms when the Nazis came to power.