

# THE VERSAILLES PEACE TREATY

## Introduction

The First World War finally ended at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day in the 11<sup>th</sup> month. It was after a spokesman of the central powers (Germany and her allies) conceded defeat and agreed to an armistice with Marshall Forhe, the commander of the allied forces. This left the leading statesmen with the task of settling the problems created by the war and maintaining world peace. After the surrender of Germany and her allies, the victorious powers met in a conference at Versailles in Paris between January and June 1919. They came out with the Versailles peace treaty; The Versailles treaty was an elaborate document of 800 words that contained 440 articles. It was a peace agreement signed between the victorious powers (who were 27 by then) and the defeated powers between 1919- 1923. The main treaty was signed in the hall of mirrors at Versailles. Other treaties imposed on the defeated powers were included in its final version, such were;

- i) The treaty of St. German with Austria in September 1919.
- ii) The treaty of Trianon with Hungary in June 1920.
- iii) The treaty of Neuilly with Bulgaria in November 1919
  
- iv) The two treaties with Turkey i.e. the treaty of Serves (1920) and the treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (after another government coming to power).

Although a number of states were represented at the Paris conference, the terms of the peace treaty was exclusively decided by three countries i.e. Britain represented by Premier Lloyd George, France led by Premier George Clemenceau, USA represented by President Woodrow Wilson and to a small extent Orlando of Italy. Of the big three statesmen, Woodrow Wilson of USA was more realistic in Comparison to his colleagues. He was an idealist professor with little experience in European politics.

However, the role played by USA in the war convinced him that he had more solutions for European problems than any of the other statesmen. Nevertheless, his inexperience in European affairs made him to be overshadowed by Lloyd George and Clemenceau who were hard headed/ tough minded debaters.

No wonder that they were able to get things done from him, which he would not have voluntarily approved of.

### WOODROW WILSON'S 14 POINTS

Woodrow Wilson wanted justice and impartiality to be extended to the defeated powers. He believed that injustice/unfairness on any of the belligerents (countries that fought) would take Europe and indeed the world back to the bad old days of war. It was against this background that he came out with 14 points, which was the basis upon which peace was concluded with Germany and her allies. The points were the outcome of his critical analysis of the causes of World War I and he made sure that they were accepted at the Paris peace conference.

It must be emphasized that Germany surrendered on condition that the 14 points and other statements made by Woodrow Wilson would be the basis of the Versailles peace treaty. Besides the 14 points, Wilson had announced that there shall be no annexations, no reparations, no punitive damages and that free acceptance by the people concerned would be the basis of any settlement. However, these principles were totally violated when the treaty was drafted. Germany and her allies were not invited but called upon to answer charges at the conference.

The treaty of Versailles was not negotiated (as Wilson wanted) but dictated by the victors upon the vanquished (defeated) powers. It was simply presented to Germany and she was asked either to accept it in five days or face an invasion. Germany had no better choice than to sign what she called "dictated peace".

**NB.** Even at the time of signing the treaty, the German delegates led by its foreign minister were humiliated. They were kept in a hotel behind barbed wires and were not allowed to communicate to anybody. They were escorted in and out of the hall of mirrors where the treaty was signed like criminals escorted to and from the dock by prison warders/policemen.

### **ASSESSMENT OF WILSON'S 14 POINTS**

To understand the composition of the Versailles treaty, it's imperative to examine Wilson's 14 points.

We need to assess the extent to which Wilson succeeded in implementing his good ideas considering that his colleagues had bad intentions upon the defeated nations. We therefore analyze whether the 14 points settled the post-war problems and avoided future conflicts or not. Thus;

1. All diplomacy and negotiations between states was to be carried out "Openly, frankly and in public view". He stood for mutual trust and confidence between nations through consultations and settling of disputes openly. This was to avoid secret treaties and alliances that had caused war in 1914. However, this was never implemented since the victor and defeated nations of Europe had very high nostalgia for revenge.

2. Wilson stressed "Absolute freedom of navigation on the seas in peace and war except in territorial water". This was partly due to the fact that naval rivalry and the determination of Germany and Britain to dominate the sea had caused naval race and led to World War I. On this sensitive issue, Wilson was out rightly opposed by Lloyd George of Britain. Britain could easily welcome the destruction and limitation of the German navy but not equality at sea. He argued that a strong navy was a luxury to Germany but a necessity to Britain.

3. He proposed the removal of trade barriers between states in international trade. This is because colonial economic rivalry and the policy of protectionism had partly contributed to the First World War.

This point worked to suit America whose industries and trade were not significantly ruined by the war.

However, other powers were so much devastated by the war that their industries and trade needed tariffs and other protective measures. They therefore rejected the idea after recovering in the long run.

4. Aware that arms race had contributed to World War I, Wilson's 4<sup>th</sup> point emphasized that nations should give guarantees that they would "disarm to the lowest level consistent with domestic safety".

While this provision was fully applied to Germany and her allies, other powers did not reduce the level of their arms. This gave Hitler an excuse to rearm Germany which resurrected the arms race in the inter war period.

5. Emphasizes impartial adjustment to all colonial claims in the interest of the colonized. Here, the interests and sentiments of the colonized were to be considered equal to those of the governments given to mandate or control. This went without any opposition from Britain, France, Belgium and Japan. This could be explained from the fact that they all wanted to gain from Germany's empire than gain from the colonized people.

6. Germany was to evacuate Russian territories because the Brest-Litovsk treaty of 1917 was forced on Russia by Germany (because Russia was defeated). Russia was to be assisted in every way that she may need and herself desire" for the free determination of her future. This idea went unopposed.

However, the principle of free determination of her future accelerated the success of the 1917 revolution, which upset democratic governance that Wilson and his associates had projected.

7. Evacuation and restoration of Belgium's independence. Belgium was the nucleus of World War I.

Germany and her allies had to withdraw all their forces from Belgium. This was accepted by both Britain and Germany since it was a primary factor why Britain declared war on Germany.

8. Provides for evacuation and restoration of French territory and the righting of the wrongs done to France in 1871 as far as Alsace and Lorraine were concerned. On this point, Wilson was successful since France recovered the two territories and even redressed the wrongs done to her by Prussia at Sedan in 1866. Britain also saw it right and fitting.

9. Provides for re-adjustment of the borders of Italy "along clearly recognizable lines of authority".

She was a member of the triple alliance but entered the war on the side of triple entente. However, she lost some territories during the war. She had to be rewarded and compensated with some other territories. Wilson did not encounter any opposition since this was in accordance to the principle of nationality and a way of rewarding an ally against the enemy.

**10.** Point ten States that "all peoples of Austria-Hungary were to be offered the opportunity of independent development". Austria-Hungary was hit her to (until then) made up of about 13 different races. This was a success since Britain and France could not deny democratic governments or obstruct the principle of nationality in Europe. Better still, the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the new independent states posed no security problem in Europe.

Stresses the evacuation and restoration of Serbia, Montenegro, Rumania and an outlet to the sea for Serbia. Political and economic independence was to be granted to even other Balkan states. The allies adopted this point with the hope of settling the historical and contentious issues that had destabilized Europe. This was finally affected in the treaty of St. German with Austria on Sept 1919.

**11.** Suggested the readjustment of Turkish territories and breaking up of the Ottoman Empire. Various nationalities under Turkey were to be granted self-governance (independence) while the Turkish population was to form an independent Turkey. The Dardanelles was to be open to ships and merchants of all nations. Wilson was not opposed by Britain or France who stood to benefit from the freedom of navigation and trade with the newly created states. This was later concretized by the treaty of Serves in 1920.

**12.** States that an independent Poland be created in those areas solely or "indisputably Polish" and the Polish state had to be granted a free and secure access to the sea (Adriatic sea). Although this was not 344 % opposed by the allied powers, the reissufficient evidence to justify that the created Poland of 1919 was neither "indisputably" Polish in population nor her access to the sea was without territorial dispute.

Both decisions incorporated and violated Germany's territory. This explains why Germany invaded Poland in 1939 to begin the Second World War.

**13.** Provides that an international organization be formed to guarantee the independence of all states both great and small. This gave rise to the League of Nations whose role was very instrumental in maintaining World peace up to 1939.

If the 14 points were followed, Europe would have had peace after 1918. But as noted above, these points were violated. George Clemenceau the ageing premier who was nearly 80 years dismissed the 14 points cynically calling it "The fourteen (14) commandments" adding a contrast that "The good Lord had only ten," he emphasized the fact that "God gave us Ten

Commandments, we broke them, Wilson gave us 14, we shall see",

George Clemenceau had excessive hatred for Germany and the Germans. He had twice seen German invasion of France during his life time and never wished to see France attacked for the third time by Germany. He therefore prayed for the destruction of Germany in order to avoid humiliation of France by Germany like in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 - 1871. Although Lloyd George admired and valued Wilson's 14 points, he could not support him (Wilson) since the English people had a lot of negative feelings towards Germany. George himself had just won an election with a promise to 'Hang the Kaiser and make Germany pay'. These influenced him to support George Clemenceau during the conference. Thus, the difference in opinion between Woodrow Wilson on one hand, George Lloyd and Clemenceau on the other hand had a lot of influence on the final terms of the Versailles treaty of 1919. In other words, Lloyd George and Clemenceau out competed Woodrow Wilson which made the Versailles treaty very unrealistic in resolving the post-war problems.

### THE TERMS/PROVISIONS OF THE VERSAILLES TREATY

The terms of the treaty of Versailles was written in a document that consisted of 15 parts with 440 articles and other annexes. The most significant terms of the treaty were;

1) The war guilt clause (article 231), entirely blamed Germany for the outbreak of the World war one. By this provision, Germany was forced to accept her own responsibility and those of her allies for all the losses and damages incurred by the allied and associated governments plus their nationals in the war.

2) The reparation clause (article 232), subjected Germany to the heaviest war indemnity in the history of the world. A reparation commission was established to fix the final sum that Germany was to pay to compensate the allied and associated powers for the direct and indirect losses incurred in the war. Indirect losses included pensions for war widows and orphans. After a lot of arguments and negotiations with Germany, the commission on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1921 dictated 6,600 million pounds or 34533,000 million dollars as the final reparations and drafted a schedule of repayments. Payments was also to be paid in cash and in tangible commodities like coal, chemicals, dyes, cattle, ships, timber etc. It was also provided that Germany loses the Coal mine of the Saar valley to France to compensate the

destroyed Coal mines in the North of France.

3) The disarmament clause reduced the German army to 100,000 men and the navy to 15,000 men armed with only 6 battleships, 6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers and 12 torpedo boats. She was to destroy her tanks, submarines and heavy artilleries. Germany was not to have any military, naval or air forces. Imports and exports of war materials were banned in Germany. Naval training and conscription were also prohibited. The allies were duty bound to appoint commissioners to ensure that Germany faithfully implements the disarmament clause. Article 160 of the Versailles treaty stated that; by a date not later than 31<sup>st</sup> march 1920, the German army must not consist of more than 7(seven) divisions of infantry and 3(three) of Cavalry i.e. not more than 100,000men.

The Rhineland was demilitarized and no military force was to be maintained in that area. The Hitherto (until then) existing fortifications and harbors in the Rhine lands, Helgoland island and Dune was to be demolished. Germany was warned against having military bases on the Southwest, East and Rhineland since such would jeopardize the security of her neighbours, e.g. Poland, France and Czechoslovakia.



4) The territorial clause made a lot of adjustments on the territorial alignments (boundaries) of Europe in favour of other powers against Germany. Alsace and Lorraine were given back to France, Eupen, Moresnet and Malmedy to Belgium, Schleswig to Denmark, Saar Coalfield to France until the 1935 referendum overturned the decision, Mammel to Lithuania, West Prussia and Posen (to Poland to provide her access to the sea via a corridor of land that passed through Germany), Danzig; a predominantly German town and the main port of West Prussia was made a free city under the administration of the League of Nations, Germany agreed to cancel the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest and surrender control over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania that were given independence.

5) The decolonization clause dispossessed Germany of all her overseas colonies. Her colonies were taken over by the League of Nations. Article 119 of the Versailles treaty stated that; Germany renounces in favour of the principle allied and associated powers all her rights and titles over her overseas possessions. Consequently, Tanganyika and Cameroon were given to Britain, German South West Africa (Namibia) to the Republic of South Africa, Togo to France, Rwanda to Belgium etc. Germany was also forced to recognize the complete independence and full sovereignty of Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Austria. The victorious powers reserved the right to retain and liquidate all property, rights and interests of German national or companies abroad and the German government was required to pay compensation to them, it was through this arrangement that Germany forfeited her property and investments in Bulgaria, Turkey, Morocco, Liberia, Egypt etc.

6) Germany was ordered to return the flags, works of art and trophies that were looted from France in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871. She was also to compensate the University of Louvan for her documents and manuscripts that were vandalized/ destroyed in 1871. Sultan Mkwawa's skull was also to be given to England.

7) International waters such as the Elba, Danube, River Niemen, Baltic Sea, Med. Sea etc were declared neutral and free to all ships of all nations. The Kiel canal was also opened to all nations.

Goods from allied nations were to be given favourable treatment on the German railway lines.

Kaiser William U, the German emperor was to be tried by a tribunal and was to be punished accordingly which most likely was to be death sentence.

However, this was impossible because the Netherlands government refused to hand him over to the allies for the trial

To ensure that the above clauses were implemented the German territory west of the Rhine, together with the bridge heads were to be occupied by the allied troops for a period of 15 years. This occupation was to be prolonged in case of any defiance / misbehavior from Germany. It should be noted that Germany's behavior was good and all the troops were eventually withdrawn by 1930.

## VERSAILLES PEACE TREATY WITH GERMANY 1919

Versailles peace treaty was signed between Germany and the allied and associated powers after the end of World war 1 on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1919. It was signed at the Palace of Versailles in the Hall of Mirrors in France under the chairmanship of the French president George Clemenceau. Other major decision makers were Woodrow Wilson of USA, Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Orland of Italy. It was the most important of all the treaties signed with defeated powers and greatly affected European affairs in the inter war period. To the vast Germans, the Versailles treaty was the most vicious document in the history of mankind.

The terms of the treaty included

- The surrender of all German colonies as League of Nations mandates i.e. the mandate system allowed Britain to take over Tanganyika, parts of Togoland, Cameroons, France to take over most of Togoland, and the Cameroons and South Africa to acquire Namibia, New Zealand took control of Western Samoa.
- Germany lost territory in Europe e.g. Alsace and Lorraine to France, Eupen, Moresnet and Malmedy to Belgium, Memel to Lithuania, Northern Schleswig to Denmark, West Prussia to Poland, and Upper Silesia with its heavy industry initially lost to Poland, Hutchins to Czechoslovakia.
- Germany was disarmed i.e. it was allowed to have a small army of 100,000 soldiers, 6 naval ships, no tanks, no air force, no submarines, the Germany General staff was abolished.
- Rhineland was demilitarized. No military force was to be maintained in that area and military activities were forbidden. No German soldiers or weapons were allowed there, no German troops were allowed within 50 kilometers of the River Rhine.
- The union/Anschluss of Austria and Germany into a single German speaking nation, was forbidden in an attempt to keep Germany's economic potential to a minimum. Germany was compelled to acknowledge and respect the independence of Austria.
- Even though the origins of the war could hardly be laid at feet of only the state, Germany was assigned blame for the war and was

compelled to accept explicit responsibility for Allied losses in the war. Germany was forced to accept completed blame/ full responsibility for starting World War 1 (war guilt clause)

- Germany had to pay 6,600 million pounds for damages caused by World War 1 (reparations) especially to France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg and other allied powers.
- The first 26 clauses of the treaty dealt with the establishment of the League of Nations as a body to keep world peace. However, Germany was forbidden to join the League of Nations.
- Allied army of occupation on West bank of Rhine for 15 years.
- There was provision of the trial of the former Kaiser and other war leaders by a tribunal for offence.
- Germany had to return to Russia land taken in the Treaty of Brest –Litovsk. Some of this land was made into new independent states like Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia.
- Danzig was taken away from Germany and set up as a free city under the League of Nations. Poland was given special rights in the city of Danzig.
- Germany was required to return the flags, trophies and works of art taken from France in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71
- Navigation on Elbe, Danube, Oder and Niemen rivers was internationalized. River Rhine was put under control of an international commission and Kel canal was opened to all nations.

### **TREATY OF ST. GERMAIN WITH AUSTRIA 1919**

This was signed between Austria and the Allied powers on 10 September 1919.

- Austria recognized the complete independence of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia.
- Austria lost most of the non-German population especially the slaves to the new states.
- Austria lost Bohemia and Moravia (rich industrial provinces with 10 million people) to the new state of Czechoslovakia.

- Austria was separated from Hungary and left as a tiny republic in Europe.
- Austria lost Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dalmatia to Serbia which Montenegro formed a new state of Yugoslavia.
- Austria lost South Tyrol, Trenton, Trieste to Italy
- Austria had to reduce its military capability through disarmament i.e. its army was reduced to 30,000 men.
- The union of Austria and Germany was forbidden
- Austria had to pay reparations to the allied powers for the damages caused during World War 1 although it became bankrupt before paying even one installment
- The treaty left Austria with serious economic problems e.g. Austria lost most of its industrial wealth to Czechoslovakia and Poland, its population reduced from 22 million to 6.5 million people.
- The resultant economic hardships provided an excellent economic case to support a union between Austria and Germany.

### **TREATY OF NEUILLY WITH BULGARIA 1919**

This treaty was signed between Bulgaria and the allied powers on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1919

- Bulgaria lost territory to Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania hence about a million Bulgars came under foreign governments.
- Bulgaria's military capability was reduced.
- It had to pay reparations to the allied powers for the damages caused during the war.

### **TREATY OF TRIANON WITH HUNGARY 1920**

The treaty was signed between Hungary and the allied powers on 4<sup>th</sup> June 1920.

- Hungary lost its non-Magyar population.
- Hungary lost Slovakia and Ruthenia to a new state of

Czechoslovakia.

- Hungary lost Croatia and Slovenia to Yugoslavia.
- Hungary's military capability was reduced i.e its army was reduced to 35,000 men
- Hungary had to pay war reparations to allied powers although the amount was never set.
- The treaty left Hungary with serious economic problems. Hungary's population reduced from 21 million to 7.5 million and some of her richest agricultural land was lost to Romania.

### **TREATY OF SEVES WITH TURKEY 1920**

The treaty of Sevres was signed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1920 between Turkey and the allied powers.

- Turkey lost most of her land in Europe such as Aegean islands, Smyrna to Greece, Adalia and Rhodes to Italy.
- Syria, Lebanon became French mandates, Palestine, Iraq, Transjordan became British mandates.
- Navigation on Dardenelles and Bosphorus was internationalized.
- However, the loss of so much territory to Greece led to rise of Turkish nationalism led by Mustafa Kemal and rejected the treaty. The treaty was revised by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE VERSAILLES PEACE MAKERS**

1. To re-organize Europe for the purpose of maintaining world peace, security and stability.
2. To redraw the map of Europe and restore the balance of power. This was because German aggression had destroyed the balance of power to her advantage.
3. To map out strategies that would preserve the territorial integrity and independence of countries in Europe. This was because violation of

territorial integrity and independence of states had led to poor diplomatic relations and the outbreak of World War I.

4. To reconcile the warring powers of World War I most especially Germany although her aggression was to be checked for some time.

5. To free the different races dominated by the central powers (Germany and her allies).

6. Disarm both the victor and defeated powers since arms race had partly caused the disaster of 1914to1918.

7. To recognize the principle of nationalism and self-determination by giving independence to the oppressed nations. This was because nationalism had primarily been responsible for the outbreak of the First World War.

8. The victorious powers most especially France, wanted to permanently destroy Germany plus her allies in order to safeguard themselves against German aggression that had caused the 1870 -1871 war and the 1914 - 1918war.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE VERSAILLES PEACE TREATY OF 1919**

1. The treaty concluded the First World War and created some relative peace in Europe. At Versailles,

Germany and her cohorts (allies) were forced to denounce war and accept defeat. The terms of the treaty e.g. disarmament and reparations weakened Germany and her allies which safeguarded Europe and mankind from war. This is why there was a period of relative peace up to the outbreak of WorldWar11 in 1939.

2. It brought diplomatic understanding that had failed in Europe before and during the First World War.

Collective decisions were made on international issues as opposed to the pre-1914 idea of every nation for itself and God for us all. Although the treaty was un-realistic to the defeated powers, it nevertheless brought together the formerly divided Europe before 1914 to a roundtable settlement as a step towards global co-operation.

3. The neutrality of all important water bodies was guaranteed. For instance, the Dardanelles (mouth of the Bosphorus) that was an area of economic conflict was open to all ships of all nations to ensure free navigation. The treaty also removed trade barriers, which boosted international trade. Although countries pursued the policy of protectionism which undermined free international trade, the treaty has to be commended for ushering peaceful trade which renewed economic co-operation in Europe.

4. The treaty restored the balance of power that had favoured Germany and Turkey before 1914. The sizes of Germany and Turkey were reduced by giving independence to some states they had conquered prior to 1914. These included Poland, Rhine lands, and Saar coal field that were detached from German control. Re-union between Germany and Austria was forbidden as a strategy of weakening Germany and making it hard for her to dominate other powers.

5. The Versailles settlement made some territorial readjustments. France regained Alsace and Lorraine that were mainly inhabited by Frenchmen but forcefully annexed by Germany in 1871. Denmark also recovered Schleswig, which she had lost in the 1864 war with Prussia. Germany lost her colonies in Europe and Africa, which were given to mainly Britain and France. This weakened Germany and made her unable to revenge in the short run while it was fair to France that was unfairly treated by Germany in the 1871 Frankfurt treaty.

6. Independence was given to smaller states that were mainly under Turkish and Austrian empire. These included Poland, Iraq, Kuwait, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. This was the actual collapse of the Turkish and Austrian empires. The great powers evacuated Serbia, Rumania and Montenegro which were hitherto (until then) under foreign rule. This meant that the treaty upheld the principle of nationalism and self-determination. Although nationalities like the Germans, Hungarians and Austrians were subjected to foreign rule, the degree of nationalism ignored was not greater than that of the Vienna settlement of 1815.

7. The treaty observed the democratic rights of the smaller nations. They were given freedom to determine their political destiny. For instance, a referendum was held in Upper Silesia that had a mixture of Germans and Poles. 60% voted for a union with Germany and 40% favoured Poland. They were eventually made to unite with Germany.



8. The treaty was fair to the land locked countries of Serbia and Poland. Serbia was given free access to the sea which made her to profitably engage in trade. The newly created Poland was provided with a corridor of land that passed through Germany to the port of Danzig in the Baltic Sea. This enabled her to participate in trade and gain economic stability.

9. The Versailles settlement came up with Disarmament policy which although applied only to the defeated powers, helped in maintaining world peace for some time. The disarmament clause; limited German army to 100,000, Austria to 30,000, Hungary to 35,000 and Bulgaria to 20,000.

Germany and her allies were forbidden from having submarines, war planes and compulsory military service. The disarmament of Germany and her allies safeguarded Europe and the world from German aggression for some time. Germany in particular would have brought greater chaos than she did by 1939 if she had not been disarmed. Besides, the settlement is also credited for creating awareness, in European history of the dangers of weapons of mass destruction.

10. The Versailles peacemakers adopted Woodrow Wilson's 14 point, which advocated for the formation of an international organisation to maintain peace. This gave rise to the League of Nations that made significant political, social and economic contributions to world affairs.

11. The settlement made arrangements for the exchange of prisoners of war and resettlement of displaced persons. Consequently, Germany released the allied war prisoners and likewise the allied powers

12. The treaty led to the formation of the League of Nations with its headquarters at Geneva in Switzerland, the league maintained peace for over 20 years, settled disputes and it tried to solve problems in Europe the league stated that all countries were held responsible for protecting the independence of another country. So this helped countries to avoid war and preserve peace until the outbreak of World War II.

13. The treaty also contained the aggression of Germany for some time. It used strict measures towards Germany like disarmament policy, Germany was only left with 100,000 soldiers, 6 naval ships, no tanks, no air force, no submarines and the Rhine lands were also demilitarized and this shaped Germany and stopped her from her militaristic behaviors.

14. The treaty contained regulations on the treatment of the minority groups which the ruling power was required to observe. This mainly applied to new states that contained foreign nationalities like 3million Germans living in Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia were among the best treated minorities in Europe.

#### **WEAKNESSES AND FAILURES OF THE VERSAILLES TREATY**

The idea that World War I was fought to end all wars was rendered null and void by the unrealistic terms of the Versailles settlement. The unfairness of the treaty to the defeated powers created great need for revenge against the signatories of the settlement. This brought tension in Europe, which climaxed in the outbreak of yet another World War in 1939 justifying the view that the 1919 statesmen had made

peace without peace. The foregoing are the weaknesses and failures of the Versailles peace treaty;

1. The treaty was imposed on Germany and her allies since there was no open and frank discussion. It was not negotiated but dictated by the victorious powers against the defeated nations making it unrealistic in an attempt to bring about reconciliation in Europe. The treaty was dominated by France, Britain and USA, who worked hard to see that the defeated powers were permanently disabled. It therefore failed to capture European public opinion.
2. Apart from Germany and her allies, the Versailles Treaty also left Italy and Japan dissatisfied. Italy and Japan were poorly compensated for the role they played in the First World War. Orlando of Italy complained of poor rewards and left the conference in protest. Japan also lost interest and pulled out by April 1920 due to poor compensation. These made Italy and Japan to join Germany and form the axis alliance. The alliance strengthened their quest for revenge and led to a series of aggression and instability in Europe.
3. Similarly, the Versailles settlement led to the rise of dictators in Europe. Mussolini of Italy, Hirohito of Japan and Hitler of Germany used the unfairness of the Versailles Treaty as a stepping stone to rise to power. They blamed their respective governments for accepting the unfair terms of the settlement and promised a militaristic approach to reverse the terms of the settlement. This undermined people's confidence in their governments and made them to accept their dictatorship.
4. The Versailles settlement sowed seeds for the outbreak of the Second World War, The terms of the treaty were too severe and harsh to the defeated powers. The war guilt, reparations, disarmament and territorial clauses were manipulated to punish Germany and thus left her longing for a war of revenge. Japan and Italy were poorly compensated and that is why they joined Germany to form the axis alliance. The need to revenge against the Versailles settlement was responsible for a series of aggressions by the axis powers, which culminated into the German invasion of Poland and the Second World War.
5. The Treaty of Lausanne ignored the plight of Armenian Christians

who had for long suffered from Turkey's oppression, exploitation and persecution. During the course of World War I, Britain promised to liberate Armenia from Turkey's rule. However, this was not included in the treaty of Lausanne of 1923 with Turkey. The Armenians were left at the mercy of the Turks who continued to oppress, exploit and persecute them more than before the settlement.

6. The Versailles settlement fragmented Europe by creating weak states that became vulnerable to aggression. It created 7 more states out of 19 that had existed in Europe prior to 1919. These included smaller states like Poland, Serbia, Czechoslovakia and Slovenia that were so weak economically and militarily. They could not sustain their economies and defend themselves from axis aggressions. The vulnerability of these states partly gave Hitler morale to conquer them one after the other, which created tension and instability in Europe.
7. Article 231 of the war guilt clause was very unrealistic as it entirely blamed Germany for causing the First World War. It says;

The allied and associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the losses and damages to which the allied and associated governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

It's true that Germany was the most notorious trouble causer who contributed to the First World War, yet it's even more true that all those who participated in the war share some degree of responsibility. Blaming and condemning Germany alone was unrealistic which left Germany on a look out for revenge. Actually, Hitler's determination to destroy the war guilt clause contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War.

8. Although the Versailles settlement imposed a heavy war indemnity on Germany, it failed to ensure effective payments of the reparations. By article 232, Germany was to pay a staggering sum of £6, 600 million as war reparations. This was a huge chunk of money that could not be paid by any single nation. Worst of all, Germany was denied the means as well as the resources from her industries and colonies, which were "looted" by the Versailles "big shots". Consequently it became impossible for Germany to pay the whole reparations and

Germany repudiated (refused to pay) from 1920's. Even when Germany repudiated, there was no attempt by the peace makers to force Germany to complete the payments.

9. The Versailles peacemakers failed to enforce general disarmament as suggested by President Woodrow Wilson in his 14 points. Germany was properly disarmed and left with only 100,000 soldiers just to maintain law and order". As Germany was being disarmed, the victorious powers were arming themselves to the teeth. This was exploited by Hitler to re-arm Germany which resurrected the arms race and led to World War II.

The territorial arrangement of the settlement ignored the principle of nationalism just like the Vienna settlement of 1815. 2.5 million Germans were dished out to Poland, 3 million to Czechoslovakia and 2 million to Yugoslavia. This is what later forced Hitler to invade Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland in order to liberate the Germans who were subjected to foreign rule by the Versailles settlement. This led to the German invasion of Poland that sparked off the Second World War in 1939 justifying how unrealistic the treaty was in bringing about a lasting peace in Europe.

8. The Versailles settlement sowed seeds for the outbreak of the Second World War, The terms of the treaty were too severe and harsh to the defeated powers. The war guilt, reparations, disarmament and territorial clauses were manipulated to punish Germany and thus left her longing for a war of revenge. Japan and Italy were poorly compensated and that is why they joined Germany to form the axis alliance. The need to revenge against the Versailles settlement was responsible for a series of aggressions by the axis powers, which culminated into the German invasion of Poland and the Second World War.

9. The Treaty of Lausanne ignored the plight of Armenian Christians who had for long suffered from Turkey's oppression, exploitation and persecution. During the course of World War I, Britain promised to liberate Armenia from Turkey's rule. However, this was not included in the treaty of Lausanne of 1923 with Turkey. The Armenians were left at the mercy of the Turks who continued to oppress, exploit and persecute them more than before the settlement.

10. The Versailles settlement fragmented Europe by creating weak states that became vulnerable to aggression. It created 7 more states out of 19 that had existed in Europe prior to 1919. These included smaller states like Poland, Serbia, Czechoslovakia and

Slovenia that were so weak economically and militarily. They could not sustain their economies and defend themselves from axis aggressions. The vulnerability of these states partly gave Hitler morale to conquer them one after the other, which created tension and instability in Europe.

11. Article 231 of the war guilt clause was very unrealistic as it entirely blamed Germany for causing the First World War. It says;

The allied and associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the losses and damages to which the allied and associated governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

It's true that Germany was the most notorious trouble causer who contributed to the First World War, yet it's even more true that all those who participated in the war share some degree of responsibility. Blaming and condemning Germany alone was unrealistic which left Germany on a look out for revenge. Actually, Hitler's determination to destroy the war guilt clause contributed to the outbreak of the Second World War.

10. Although the Versailles settlement imposed a heavy war indemnity on Germany, it failed to ensure effective payments of the reparations. By article 232, Germany was to pay a staggering sum of £6, 600 million as war reparations. This was a huge chunk of money that could not be paid by any single nation. Worst of all, Germany was denied the means as well as the resources from her industries and colonies, which were "looted" by the Versailles "big shots". Consequently it became impossible for Germany to pay the whole reparations and Germany repudiated (refused to pay) from 1920's. Even when Germany repudiated, there was no attempt by the peace makers to force Germany to complete the payments.

11. The Versailles peacemakers failed to enforce general disarmament as suggested by President Woodrow Wilson in his 14 points. Germany was properly disarmed and left with only 100,000 soldiers just to maintain law and order". As Germany was being disarmed, the victorious powers were arming themselves to the teeth. This was exploited by Hitler to re-arm Germany which resurrected the arms race and led to World War II.

The territorial arrangement of the settlement ignored the principle of nationalism just like the Vienna settlement of 1815. 2.5 million Germans were dished out to Poland, 3 million to Czechoslovakia and 2 million to Yugoslavia. This is what later forced Hitler to invade Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland in order to liberate the Germans who were subjected to foreign rule by the Versailles settlement. This led to the German invasion of Poland that sparked off the Second World War in 1939 justifying how unrealistic the treaty was in bringing about a lasting peace in Europe.

12. By subjecting German colonies to be controlled by the victorious powers, the Versailles peacemakers were too severe and unrealistic. The allies took advantage of the defeat of Germany and her allies to take over their colonies and expand their territories. For instance, Britain expanded from Uganda and Kenya to Tanzania that was formerly a German territory before 1919. This was also to cripple Germany militarily, economically and diplomatically. By this arrangement, the allied powers exhibited a high degree of self-aggrandizement.

13. The contrasting ideas of the leading statesmen were a serious weakness that made the Versailles treaty unrealistic. Clemenceau wanted to permanently weaken Germany so that she does not tamper with France's peace and security any more, Lloyd George was bent on annexing German colonies to strengthen British overseas influence and trade. General Orlando wanted to get the promises that made him to assist the triple entente against the triple alliance. Woodrow Wilson wanted justice extended to the defeated powers in order to bring reconciliation and promote world trade. This self interest led to several disagreements that made the Versailles conference to take four years just like the war itself. The Versailles peace makers wasted a lot of time due to disagreements over the fate of the defeated powers. The first treaty of the Versailles settlement was signed on 28 June 1919 with Germany but the last treaty was signed as late as August 1923. This was equivalent to the four years in which the war was fought.

14. Although the Versailles settlement gave rise to the League of Nations, it nevertheless laid a very weak foundation for the league as a peace making body. The league was dominated by the allied powers from the beginning to the end. Besides, the settlement never considered and hence provided the League of Nations with an army.

This made the League of Nations to rely on sanctions which proved useless against Nazis and Fascist aggressions of the 1930's.

The settlement also neglected the defeated and neutral powers. Russia was excluded simply because she had adopted communism during the 1917 revolution. Germany and her allies were also not part of it, although these powers were later admitted in the league, they attached little importance to it and by 1939 most of them had withdrawn their membership leaving it weak.

15. The time in which the treaty with Germany was signed (1919) coincided with, the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of the Sarajevo assassination. It was on 28th June 1919 exactly 5 years from the murder of Franz Ferdinand and his wife. This made Germany very bitter because it gave an impression that she was being held responsible for the assassination. Secondly, it was hurriedly concluded without a proper assessment of the real causes and causers of the war. Thirdly, 1919 was when emotions and the quest for revenge were too high to guarantee justice in favour of the defeated powers.

16. The venue of the settlement meant that justice could not be extended to the defeated nations most especially Germany. Germany was forced to sign the dictated treaty in the **hall of mirrors** at Versailles which was the very hall where the German empire was proclaimed in 1871. The hall portrayed the existence of a united German empire. It was therefore a great humiliation and a psychological torture to Germany for the allies to force her to sign the dictated treaty in the **hall of mirrors**.

17. The venue of the settlement made the French Premier, George Clemenceau to become the chairman of the conference. This gave him an opportunity to have a lot of influence on the final verdict of the settlement. This was very unfortunate because France was a historical enemy of Germany.

Clemenceau himself had witnessed the German invasion of France in 1871 and 1914. He therefore used his position to totally destroy Germany's military might in order to avoid yet another invasion from Germany.

18. The Versailles peacemakers failed to implement the clause that demanded for the trial (by tribunal) of German ex-emperor Kaiser William 11 and other war criminals. This was not affected because the government of Netherlands refused to hand over Kaiser William to the



allies for trial. Only a dozen of insignificant war criminals were tried and punished lightly. The most wanted ones were nowhere to be seen.

19. The settlement created a weak league of nations, it failed to effectively handle international issues and problems. It had no source of funds from where to get the money to run different issues. It had no provision for the formation of a joint navy and army to deal with aggressors hence becoming a failure.

20. The chairmanship of George Clemenceau was also unfair, he was coming from France which was an enemy country to Germany ever since Franco-Prussian war ,he influenced the delegates to impose very harsh punishments to Germany and this was intended to weaken her financially and militarily he influenced all the outcomes of the peace treaty which were unfair.

21. The treaty also seemed to have been an Anglo –French affair, since it was dominated by the French and the British, this explains why Italy, Japan, Germany and other nations opposed the treaty leading to its failure.

22. It left USA isolated which made the treaty unfair USA refused to ratify, guarantee the peace settlement and support it.USA isolated itself from the super powers and European affairs and refused to put in its resources to guarantee peace in Europe

### **IN WHAT WAYS DID GERMANY VIOLATE THE VERSAILLES PEACE TREATY**

The harshness of the treaty caused a lot of resentment and hatred in Germany that made another war more likely. Hitler and the Nazi party made it absolutely clear throughout the 1920's that they would smash the hated Diktat of Versailles if they ever gained power. From 1933, when they attained power, they begun bit by bit to break the conditions and restrictions of the treaty imposed at Versailles.

- In 1933, German ceased paying the reparations imposed by the Versailles treaty. The German acceptance of full responsibility for the outbreak of World War 1 made them liable to pay reparations to the allied powers. However, after Hitler's rise to power, German stopped paying the reparations.

- Germany's interference in the internal affairs of Austria was a violation of the Versailles treaty. In 1934, Hitler inspired a coup against the Austrian chancellor Dollfus who was murdered by the Austrian Nazis.
- The Versailles treaty said that the great German general staff should be abolished. However, it was never disbanded as German maintained it in a disguised fashion.
- Germany violated the military naval and air clauses of the Versailles treaty. The German armed forces engaged in secret rearmament even before the Nazi takeover of power. From 1935, German started to build an air force and massive rearmament programs. By the end of 1934, the Germans had 21 large ship (including battle ships, cruiser and destroyers), 47 U-boats (sub marrines), a large airforce of over 2000 aircrafts.
- In June 1935, Hitler entered into a naval agreement with Britain by which German was to limit the size of her navy to 35% of the strength of the British navy. This agreement was against the provisions of the treaty of Versailles which required German to maintain a much smaller navy force than that allowed by the Anglo-German agreement.
- Hitler increased the size of the German armed forces which was a major breach of the Versailles treaty. By the end of 1938, German had an army of 15 divisions with about 800,000 soldiers in total. This was in defiance of the treaty of Versailles which had reduced the German soldiers to only 100,000 soldiers.
- Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland contrary to the terms of the treaty. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 1936, in defiance of the treaty, German troops marched into the Rhineland. Demilitarization of Rhine lands in 1919 was considered essential for the safety and security of France and Britain

## CONSEQUENCES/EFFECTS OF THE VERSAILLES TREATY ON

## GERMANY

The Versailles treaty of 1919 that Germany was forced to sign is one of the most unrealistic treaties that have ever existed in the history of mankind. The terms were carefully and skillfully manipulated to punish Germany plus her allies and reward the victorious powers. It therefore had negative impact on the social, economical and political developments of Germany. This is what made Germany to reject the Versailles treaty in the later years which objection was justified basing on the unrealistic terms of the settlement.

i) The Versailles framers/makers forced Germany to renounce war and accept defeat. This was done by the Weimer Republic that was hurriedly set up after the abdication of the troublesome Kaiser William II. However, this made the Weimer Republic unpopular to the majority of the Germans led by Hitler who blamed the government for accepting the Versailles settlement.

ii) The reparations which Germany was forced to pay crippled Germany's economy and led to the great economic depression of 1929 - 1933 in Europe. It left Germany too poor to fight unemployment, inflation and poverty. This is why Germany had the worst inflation in the history of the world between 1929-1933.

iii) Germany was weakened militarily by the settlement. She was disarmed and allowed to maintain an army of 100,000 just to maintain law and order. This left the Weimer Republic weak since even the 100,000 troops could not maintain law and order in time of political disturbance. The 100,000 soldiers could not even defend the territorial integrity and independence of the government.

iv) Germany was deprived of her colonies in Africa and Europe. They were given to Britain, France, Belgium, Austria, Japan and South Africa as mandate slates. This undermined Germany's external trade opportunities which would have strengthened Germany's economy.

v) Germany was forced to hand back Schleswig to Denmark which she had forcefully annexed (from Denmark) in 1864. She was also forced to give back to France the mineralized provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. This seriously affected Germany's economic recovery since these territories were the richest in minerals e.g. iron and coal deposits.

The settlement scattered the Germans under the newly created states. For example, 2.5 million Germans were given to Poland, 3 million to

Czechoslovakia and 2 million to Yugoslavia. The new state of Poland was provided with a corridor that passed through Germany to the port of Danzig in the Baltic Sea. This created restlessness in the Germans who were only liberated by Hitler's aggressive foreign policy.

vi) The treaty demilitarized the Rhine lands. Germany was forbidden from maintaining an army and constructing forts on the banks of the Rhine. The fortifications that Germany had done were destroyed. This made it very hard for the Germans to maneuver and invade her neighbors in her quest for revenge.

NB. The allied troops were to occupy the Rhine lands for 15 years.

vii) Germany was forced to cancel the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest signed with Russia and Rumania respectively. By the treaty of Brest Litovsk, Russia had surrendered to Germany western part of her territory that included Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. These were the wealthiest part of Russia that Germany was forced to hand back to her.

viii) The Versailles treaty of 1919 contributed to political instability in Germany. The Weimer Republican leaders who accepted it were denounced by the Germans for signing the unrealistic treaty. This created internal opposition to the government, which made it unstable up to when it collapsed in 1934.

Hitler and Nazism exploited these circumstances to rise to power by 1934.

### **REASONS WHY THE GERMANS REJECTED THE VERSAILES SETTLEMENT**

#### **Hints**

NB. For details refer to the earlier notes most especially on weaknesses or failures of the treaty as far as Germany was concerned or else look in the previous notes on the negative consequences of the treaty on Germany

i.e. why they rejected it with time.

i) The treaty was dictated and Germany was forced to sign. There was no discussion which could have given the Germans the chance to air their views.

ii) Germany totally opposed the war guilt clause, which put the whole

blame for the outbreak of the war on her (Article 231). This was injustice of the highest magnitude since all those powers that fought in the war were guilty hence Germany had to reject the treaty.

iii) The reparation of £6,600 million was impossible to pay since no single country could pay for the destructions caused by the war. The British economic advisor J.N.K's argument that it should be £2,000 millions fell on deaf ears. Later in the 1920's the Germans defaulted, refused to continue paying the reparation and no one followed it up.

iv) Disarmament was restricted to only Germany yet disarmament was to be general. Worst of all, other powers were busy arming themselves. Germany was therefore left helpless amidst hostile and aggressive neighbors. This was why Hitler started re-arming Germany hence rejecting the disarmament clause of the treaty.

v) Loss of territories in Europe and Africa was resented by Germany. For instance, the mineral rich provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France, Tanzania to Britain and Namibia to South Africa. She lost her markets, sources of raw materials and areas for investment to her foes (bitter enemies) which she could not swallow (accept).

vi) The settlement scattered German nationals by ignoring the principle of nationalism. For instance 2.5 million Germans were given to Poland, 3 million to Czechoslovakia and 2 million to Yugoslavia. This explains why Hitler later invaded such countries to liberate those Germans hence rejecting the terms of the Versailles treaty.

vii) The Germans complained that they were tricked to surrender based on President Wilson's 14 points.

They claimed that the 14 points was a swindle since many of the terms of the treaty violated it.

However, this was not justifiable because the 14 points of Wilson had never been officially accepted by the peace makers and the Germans had even ignored it early in 1918 when there were still chances of success. Moreover, Wilson had even added that Germany should pay for all the damages and should be completely disarmed. Thus it was not totally justifiable for the Germans to object to the reparations and disarmament clauses.

Viii) The Versailles settlement was monopolized by only 3 leading statesmen i.e. president Woodrow Wilson of USA, Gorge Lloyd of Britain and George Clemenceau of France. It was chaired by

Clemenceau who was totally biased and a bitter enemy of Germany. This is why the Germans had to reject the treaty later.

The treaty led to loss of territories in Europe Germany lost her territory to Poland in West Prussia so as to give Poland access to the sea port of Danzig, this separated the East Prussia from the rest of Germany. The Rhine lands were also demilitarized which left Germany's western frontier unprotected and occupied by the allies

The chairmanship of George Clemenceau was unfair he was determined to destroy Germany and ensure that it never rises again to invade France hence most Germans felt the treaty was indeed unfair.

The treaty was also signed at Versailles in the hall of mirrors, the very place where the German empire had been proclaimed after the famous Franco- Prussian war of 1871. This was so humiliating to Germans and so they rejected the treaty.

The treaty was negotiated in the spirit of revenge advocated by public opinion in their countries for example in Britain there were cries of "hang Keizer" and make Germans accept and this made Germans to refuse.

The signing of the treaty by the Weimar delegates showed that the Germans had been defeated militarily so the German nationalists felt the Weimar politicians had surrendered and betrayed Germany despite having no choice in the matter.

The treaty also forbade the union of Austria and Germany to form one super German state which annoyed Germany.

The treaty also led to economic hardships in Germany due to loss of vital industrial territory especially coal from Saar and Upper Silesia, loss of 48 percent of its iron resources 10 percent of its coal, 15 percent of its agricultural. This caused massive unemployment, inflation which made Germany to reject the treaty.

The League of Nations which was created also excluded Germany and was dominated by Britain and France