

TREATY OF VERSAILLES – JUNE 28TH 1919

- The Conference took place in Paris and it started in the palace of Versailles
- It lasted for 12 months
- Thirty-two nations were supposed to be represented but no-one from the defeated countries were invited
- There were **five treaties** drawn up at the Conference. The main one was the **Treaty of Versailles** which dealt with Germany. The other treaties dealt with Germany's allies.
- All of the important decisions on the fate of Germany were taken by the "**Big Three**": Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Wilson.
- The "**Big Three**" were supported by many diplomats and expert advisers but they often ignored their advise.
- After the **Treaty of Versailles** was signed the leading statesmen left the Conference - the other treaties were worked out by foreign ministers, diplomats and officials using the Treaty of Versailles as a model.
- The "**Big Three**" got on badly from the start and relations between them got worse throughout the Conference, especially the relationship between Wilson and Clemenceau.
- Wilson was very ill during parts of the Conference.

The **public opinion** in Great Britain and especially in France was that **Germany was going to pay for all the damage and destruction caused by the war**. They held **Germany responsible for starting the war** and therefore they should be severely punished!

The **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** (between Russia and the Central Powers in March 1918) had clearly indicated what would happen if Germany would win WWI. They forced Russia to hand over lots of land (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Ukraine...) which held around 25% of the population. This harsh treatment of Russia was used at Treaty of Versailles to justify harsh treatment of Germany.

There was not any agreement about the main aim of the Treaty of Versailles;

- Punish Germany
- Cripple Germany so that she can't start another war
- Reward the winners
- Establish a just and lasting peace

These different aims and the different personalities of the "**Big Three**" led to disagreements and compromises. In the end no-one was satisfied (make sure you know their aims and disagreements...). The Treaty of Versailles can be divided into five areas; War guilt, Germany's armed forces, Reparations, German territories and Colonies + the League of Nations.

Here is a short version of the **Treaty of Versailles**:

1. the surrender of all German colonies as League of Nations mandates;
2. the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France;
3. cession of Eupen-Malmedy to Belgium, Memel to Lithuania, the Hultschin district to Czechoslovakia,
4. Poznan, parts of East Prussia and Upper Silesia to Poland;
5. Danzig to become a free city;
6. plebiscites to be held in northern Schleswig to settle the Danish-German frontier;
7. occupation and special status for the Saar under French control; (8) demilitarization and a fifteen-year occupation of the Rhineland;
8. German reparations of £6,600 million;
9. a ban on the union of Germany and Austria;
10. an acceptance of Germany's guilt in causing the war;
11. provision for the trial of the former Kaiser and other war leaders;

12. limitation of Germany's army to 100,000 men with no conscription, no tanks, no heavy artillery, no poison-gas supplies, no aircraft and no airships;
13. the limitation of the German Navy to vessels under 100,000 tons, with no submarines

Germany lost 10 % of its land, all the overseas Colonies, 12.5% of the population, 16% of its coalfields, 50% of the iron and steel industry. The army was reduced to 100,000 men, no air force, no tanks, no submarines and only a tiny navy. On top of this Germany had to accept the blame for starting the war and they should therefore pay war reparations.

The reaction in Germany was horror and outrage. Most Germans were not aware of Germany's poor military situation - they thought that the Government had just agreed to a ceasefire. At first the new government refused to sign the Treaty and the German North Sea Navy Fleet that had been forced to sail to the British Navy Base Scapa Flow sank all their ships in protest. When President Ebert asked the army Commander Hindenburg he stated that Germany could not win a continuation of the war but as a soldier he would prefer to die fighting. Still - Germany signed the Versailles Treaty.

In USA the Congress refused to ratify the treaty which meant that they had to create new treaties with their former enemies. In France and Britain several people were angry that there was no trial of the Kaiser or the other war leaders. They were dissatisfied with the treaty. No-one was satisfied!

