

# THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

CHAIRMAN: So ... was the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 fair?

GERMAN: No. It was a punitive peace, formed from Clemenceau's bitterness and his will for revenge.  
Look at the terms: Germany was the only world power that must disarm – and they left it only with an army of 100,000 and six warships.  
Look at the territory ... no self-determination for the Germans! – Germany lost Alsace Lorraine, its best farmland in west Prussia, the Polish corridor which split it in two, the Saar coal mines for 15 years, its colonies, half its iron and steel industry, an eighth of its people...  
And then there were reparations on top of that! – 132 BILLION gold marks!  
What said John Maynard Keynes? – that they were so huge they would ruin the world's economy.

FRENCH You have only to regard the Roaring Twenties to see that Keynes was completely mistaken. I believe that Great Britain paid more in the reimbursing war loans than Germany paid in the reparations ... thus they WEREN'T impossible, were they? And ... yes the German economy collapsed in 1923 ... but that was not the fault of the reparations – it was the fault of the German government for printing the paper money whilst they were trying not to pay the reparations.  
No, the Treaty of Versailles was very reasonable. In Alsace Lorraine, France obtained only the land which Germany had taken from her by war in 1871! And after what Germany had done in France, was it reasonable to wish for some guarantees that there would be never another Schlieffen Plan.  
If you want an example of an UNFAIR peace, go back to Germany and look at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk you imposed on Russia in 1917!

AMERICAN The Treaty of Versailles wasn't just fair, it was an absolute good. Just think what America gave the world in the Treaty of Versailles.  
**One:** the idea of self-determination – the idea that restored the nations of Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and which ended the old, evil, colonial empires.  
**Two:** the League of Nations, the precursor of the United Nations today.  
And, most of all, **three**, the principle that there is a morality to foreign policy – that's what Clause 231 was *really* about: saying that the Treaty terms were imposed on Germany *because Germany has done something wrong*. At the time, this was a REVOLUTIONARY change in foreign affairs.

GERMAN I do not know how you can say such a thing! Clause 231 was a last minute attempt to justify reparations; it is laughable to represent it as a great moral breakthrough, not least because it was an absolute lie – Germany WAS NOT *the whole cause of the damage!* No wonder the German people felt violated.  
When Germany signed the Armistice in 1918 they thought they were accepting Wilson's 14 Points. But then Wilson FAILED to stop Clemenceau setting draconian terms, he FAILED to stop Lloyd George expanding the British Empire to a fifth of the globe by taking Germany's colonies ... and he even FAILED to get the Senate to approve either the Treaty or the League, by which he condemned them both to failure.

BRITISH

To be fair, I think the Treaty failed because of Germany. They refused to pay reparations in 1921, and again in 1923. Hindenburg denounced War Guilt in 1927. And then after 1933 Hitler set about destroying the Treaty altogether. Treaties only fail because people break them – the *Treaty of Versailles* didn't break the peace.

GERMAN

But was that not the fault of the Treaty? Because it was an imposed peace. The Germans were not even to the invited to the Conference – they were *ordered* to sign it. It was an agreement made under duress, and that invalidates it. And that was the fault of the Big Three. They went to Paris originally NOT to make peace, you know – they only went there to decide what they would ask from Germany at the Peace Conference. But when they got there – everybody lobbies them, and they found they cannot even agree with each other ... and suddenly they found themselves plotting the peace – it was easier – and they IMPOSED the peace on Germany, and the Germans rejected it.

CHAIRMAN

Hmmm. VERY contentious! I wonder which of you is right? I suppose I need to go back to look at the facts ... and decide for myself what I think.