

**The Failure of Versailles**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Treaty of Versailles, signed June 28, 1919, has often been a scapegoat for global crises faced in the 90 years since its completion. Some saw arguably the worst of these, Hitler's rise and the eruption of World War II, as a direct result of the failure of the treaty. George Kennan, an American diplomat, felt World War II was the product of "the very silly and humiliating punitive peace imposed on Germany after World War I".<sup>1</sup> Indeed the treaty was a failure; twice. Initially, the Treaty of Versailles failed before its execution because humans created it, not gods; men with motives, desires, and faults. It failed again during the interwar years when its authors' successors chose passivity instead of resolve in executing many key points of the treaty.<sup>2</sup> It certainly served Hitler well as a propaganda tool to further his aim of global domination, but the treaty itself was not the cause of Hitler's terror and the war. Twenty years of decision making after the treaty's signing aided Hitler in his conquests.<sup>3</sup>

Before discussing the treaty's construction it is important to set the European stage prior to 1914. Several factors proved Europe's position tenuous, including demographic, economic, military, and political conditions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Demographically, central Europe's population grew 158 percent between 1870 and 1914; during the late 1800s Germany, Austria-Hungary, and European Russia's populations totaled approximately 170

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<sup>1</sup> Manfred F. Boemeke, et al., ed., *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>2</sup> David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, vol. 2 (New York: H. Fertig, 1972), 907.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, c2001), 493.

million. By 1914, they accounted for over 270 million of Europe's people.<sup>4</sup> This booming center of population and the rest of Europe depended on its ability to maintain the continent's current, complicated organization to run smoothly. Europe operated on the easy flow of trade and capitalism with few tariffs and trading frontiers. Citizens felt sure in property and individual security, order, and uniformity. This design gave birth to Europe as a machine of transport, foreign trade, and coal distribution. Germany was pivotal in Europe's stability; a major coal producer, Germany turned out 30 million tons of coal in 1871. By 1913, the nation was producing 190 million tons. Germany's lucrative coal industry made it an outlet for products from other European nations and enabled the selling of German products to neighboring countries at lower prices. Germany also supplied other countries with capital, aiding in their development. The prosperity of Europe at the turn of the century depended on the prosperity of Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Economically, Europe's capitalist system, though integral to its society and progress, increased the continent's pre-war instability. European society was interested in securing as much capital as possible; this psychology promoted an unstable relationship. Through hard work and no wealth to show for it, the lower labor classes built capitalism in Europe. The elite class took that wealth and invested it, more interested in building capital than spending; society took comfort in Europe's growing affluence. This unusual system of inequitable wealth distribution operated uncontested before the war.<sup>6</sup> Another economic factor in Europe's pre-war instability was the New World. For over a century Europe claimed food supplies from the Americas, depending on them heavily. As the New World's population grew, Europe's hold on their

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<sup>4</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 12-14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

products became unreliable. In 1914 they still imported much from the Americas to feed their masses but that avenue was beginning to narrow.<sup>7</sup>

These demographic and economic factors forced European commercial expansion outside its states, including endeavors in Africa and the Balkans. Individual states' desire for success led to a sense of heightened competition, realized in the form of an arms race between Germany and Great Britain to achieve naval dominance as well as military expansion.<sup>8</sup> Critical to that expansion were the railroads for transportation of equipment, weapons, and ammunition; to maintain continuity of military goods, governments created elaborate mobilization schedules in response to the heightened inter-state tensions. As a result of the importance of early military mobilization, the schedules necessitated punctuality and invariability to avoid collapse of the entire system. Such a substantial military demand on the railroads disrupted civilian and economic use of the railways, virtually halting the civilian economy.<sup>9</sup>

Europe's economic circumstances quickly affected its citizens and did nothing to ease tensions; increasingly, the people of Europe were unhappy and unwilling to be quiet about it any longer. The unrest gave rise to trade unions and radical nationalist movements in France, Germany, and Italy where many spoke out in support of patriotism and revolution. Demonstrations and strikes took place across the continent, and various ethnic groups clashed repeatedly in Germany and Austria-Hungary.<sup>10</sup> Anger regarding Europe's circumstances was not exclusive to nationalist movements; growing dissension regarding state government and economic conditions, and a push for solidarity and unification within their homelands spurred

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent: Tirpitz and the Birth of the German Battle Fleet* (New York, Macmillan, 1966), 20.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Streich, "Alliances and Mobilization in 1914 Europe" (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, Suite101.com Media Inc., 2009) [http://weuropeanhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/alliances\\_and\\_mobilization\\_in\\_1914\\_europe](http://weuropeanhistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/alliances_and_mobilization_in_1914_europe) (accessed September 12, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> David G. Williamson, *The Age of the Dictators* (New York: Pearson, Longman, 2007), 11,12,18,19.

many people of the labor class to political action. Between 1880-1914 European socialist movements gained ground; in Bohemia (Austrian Empire) the German Worker's Party began in 1904, while Italian journalist and politician Enrico Corradini called for a new, unified Italy through 'National Socialism' and Russia's experienced its first socialist revolution in 1905. By 1912 the German Social Democratic Party emerged as the largest party in the *Reichtstag* elections, and Mussolini evolved as a pivotal figure of the Italian Socialist Party.<sup>11</sup> Feelings of dissatisfaction and social injustice began to reveal the precariousness of Europe's position.

Despite the unwavering tension among European states, alliances existed as an escape from isolation in the face of a hostile threat. At the onset of World War I Europe had two main alliance systems: the Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy; and the Entente Powers: Great Britain, France, and Russia.<sup>12</sup> Undeniably, each allied state faced the potential for danger on a continent overcome by tension and military expansion in anticipation of conflict. One state's actions could be enough to pull the members of its alliance into war.

For decades Europe remained the global powerhouse while living on this organizational structure rich in precarious demographic, economic, military, and political circumstances; its excessive population depended on it. In 1914 World War I would shake the entire system to its core.

## **BODY**

### THE PLATFORM OF PEACE

After the war ended in 1918, the task of rebuilding not only Europe but parts of the Middle East and Africa, remained. Over 30 countries sat in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles during the Paris

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7,11,12.

<sup>12</sup> Jehuda L. Wallach, *Uneasy Coalition: the Entente Experience in World War I* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 7-11.

Peace Conference; originally the core authors included representatives from Great Britain, Italy, Japan, the United States, and France. Japan left in March 1919; Italy's Prime Minister (PM) Vittorio Emanuele Orlando left in April, two months before the treaty's signing.<sup>13</sup> Orlando joined the Entente (Great Britain, France, United States) to boost Italy's international standing and in hopes of imperial rewards, but his obsession with these rewards reduced his role at the Conference. Unsatisfied with the recognition given to Italy's aims, he returned home.<sup>14</sup> This left the Big Three (Great Britain, France, United States) to finish drafting the Treaty of Versailles. PM David Lloyd George of Great Britain, PM Georges Clemenceau of France, and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States would be its authors.

None of the three men had undertaken a continental reconstruction like the one necessary at the Paris Peace Conference. The only example to study was the Congress of Vienna, the treaty ending the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As each man was soon to see, the circumstances surrounding Paris in 1918 were very different from those in Vienna 114 years before. First, the staff surrounding the Congress of Vienna numbered at just 14 people for Great Britain; in Paris, Great Britain's staff numbered almost 400 men. Second, at Vienna the peacemakers had the leisure of time and could settle matters quietly; at the Paris Peace Conference, delegates were under intense public scrutiny. Third, instead of drawing new map lines in Europe, as was done in Vienna, the Paris peacemakers had to draw lines for Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In addition, everyone in Paris felt the pressure of time. Even while members at the Conference discussed the Treaty of Versailles, half of Europe was starving and as many as 23 boundary wars broke out across the continent.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, while during the Congress of Vienna leaders paid little to no attention to non-European nations, at Versailles that

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<sup>13</sup> Lord Riddell, et al., *The Treaty of Versailles and After* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), 14.

<sup>14</sup> David Sinclair, introduction to *The Hall of Mirrors* (London: Century, 2001), x.

<sup>15</sup> Riddell, et al., 28

was impossible as more than 30 countries attended the Conference. Three more factors further made matters in Paris very different from Vienna. In Vienna, Europe had ample time to absorb the effects of the French Revolution of 1789; in Paris, the Russian Revolution was just two years old and no one knew its lasting effects. Furthermore, the men of the Big Three, Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau, came from democratic countries; as elected officials, considering public opinion was imperative, especially if one hoped for reelection.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the impact of four years of total war had devastated Europe, reducing countries to rubble and leaving many homeless. Death totals for World War I are often (low) estimates; France lost over ten percent of its working population: brutal warfare cost 1,400,000 Frenchmen their lives, and an additional 3,000,000 wounded, 750,000 of those to remain permanent invalids.<sup>17</sup> Estimates report the absolute death total of the Great War (civilians and non European countries included) at 14,663,000; European losses totaled approximately 4.1 percent of its total population.<sup>18</sup> The Big Three had to account for all of these factors when attempting to draft a treaty for world peace.

The Paris Peace Conference commenced in the fall of 1918 under heavy public scrutiny and pressure, and huge expectations from around the world. Of the Big Three, each man came to Paris with the same vision: to reconstruct Europe and build peace. The details of each vision differed immensely.

## THE AUTHORS OF THE TREATY

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<sup>16</sup> MacMillan, introduction to *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, c2001), xxviii, xxix.

<sup>17</sup> J.F. V. Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 241. <http://www.netlibrary.com/Reader/> (accessed September 12, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig, *Decisions for War, 1914-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

Lloyd George came from a middle class background; an intellectual, he was intuitive to human nature and skilled at manipulating political forces.<sup>19</sup> While he felt Germany should pay, Lloyd George didn't want entanglement in European affairs any longer than necessary; he wanted off the continent, back to Great Britain. His goal was establishing security for Europe; he hoped for future friendship with Germany; crushing them and leaving France in charge was disadvantageous for Great Britain.<sup>20</sup> Lloyd George won reelection in December 1918, putting added pressures on him from Great Britain. The elected Parliament consisted of men wanting a vindictive peace against Germany; the people of Great Britain also had expectations.<sup>21</sup> They expected the Kaiser would face serious punishment or death, and that Germany would be financially responsible for all war debt. The burden of election promises and pressure from all sides haunted Lloyd George throughout the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>22</sup>

Personally, Lloyd George wanted to maintain the British Empire as the world's first superpower. (Like his European counterpart, Lloyd George had yet to realize the world could never go back to pre-war conditions. World War I had altered everything, and Britain would never regain its former glory.)<sup>23</sup> Making sure Germany could not rise up against Great Britain was a top priority. Great Britain advocated the hanging of the Kaiser; they also aimed to eliminate the German fleet and the merchant marine. By making Germany responsible for the war debt, they could effectively remove them as a competitor in the world markets for the foreseeable future. In addition, Lloyd George wanted to confiscate Germany's colonies and redistribute them amongst the Allied powers. Lloyd George did not want the colonies given to

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Lansing, *The Big Four and Others of the Peace Conference* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 100.

<sup>20</sup> MacMillan, 198.

<sup>21</sup> Riddell, et al, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Ferdinand Czernin, *Versailles, 1919: the Forces, Events, and Personalities that Shaped the Treaty* (New York: Putnam, 1964), 51, 52, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair, ix.

neutral nations, and he did not believe in freedom of the seas. Great Britain had ruled the seas for centuries, and saw no reason to stop.<sup>24</sup>

Lloyd George respected both Clemenceau and Wilson; yet he knew if unchecked, France's hatred for Germany would control the negotiations. At the same time, he recognized Wilson's disadvantage: lack of experience in a situation such as the Paris Peace Conference. As a clever politician, Lloyd George wasn't above using his counterparts' weaknesses to his advantage. However, Lloyd George's negotiation methods didn't always work for him. During his time in the British government, he perfected the art of often changing his position; he would use it to encourage his opponents, thus dividing and weakening them. This tactic did not work as well on an international level inhabiting cultural and procedural differences. To his counterparts Lloyd George seemed erratic and unsure at times, never staying one course for the duration.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, Georges Clemenceau of France was of one mind and never wavered. His goal was to crush Germany, with France victorious; compromising international stability to achieve those aims seemed an acceptable consequence.<sup>26</sup> Clemenceau was a man of strong character and forcefulness; persistent, patient, and very skilled in the political arena. A fierce nationalist, he framed every decision he made at Versailles by how he thought it would affect his country. Clemenceau's devotion and service to France was absolute.<sup>27</sup>

He certainly had more experience with Germany than Wilson, and even Lloyd George. During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Clemenceau was 28 years old. He witnessed the starvation of Paris and the collapse of the French government.<sup>28</sup> He felt the fear in Paris when the Germans bombed the city for three straight weeks; the anger of Germany's occupation of France,

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<sup>24</sup> Czernin, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Lansing, 77, 78, 100.

<sup>26</sup> Sinclair, ix, x.

<sup>27</sup> Lansing, 32.

<sup>28</sup> MacMillan, 27, 28.

and the humiliation of the proclamation of the German Reich in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. Neither had the people of France forgotten; with the end of World War I, France had survived German occupation for another four years. Clemenceau's memories of the Franco-Prussian War and the terms of its treaty fueled his hatred for the Germans. Germany had been harsh, forcing France to give up the area of Alsace-Lorraine, a major coal and iron producing region. France also paid five billion francs to Germany within five years and funded the German occupation of France during that war.<sup>29</sup> Clemenceau felt he could not afford to forget; yet his experiences with Germany left him a man with one foot in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when the world maintained balance through intricate alliances backed by military force.<sup>30</sup> Though the depth of his feelings is unclear, it is clear Clemenceau had distinct opinions about the Germans as a result of his experiences. He felt one could not negotiate with Germans; they only understood intimidation without generosity or remorse. In all other manners of dealing they would take advantage and show no respect; he felt Germans incapable of showing mercy, possessing neither pride nor honor.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps untruthful in their foundations and certainly biased, Clemenceau's opinions nonetheless affected his negotiations in Paris; each man in the Big Three brought personal prejudices, feelings, and motives to the table.

Georges Clemenceau's goal during the Paris Peace Conference was acquiring security for France at any cost, and he was the only member to bring a written plan of action to the table. Clemenceau wanted to keep Germany's economy at a subsistence level for at least one generation. To accomplish this, he demanded Germany return the territory of Alsace-Lorraine to France. This would significantly reduce Germany's coal and iron output. He demanded the

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<sup>29</sup> Sheldon R. Anderson, *Condemned to Repeat it: "Lessons of History" and the Making of U.S. Cold War Containment Policy* (Maryland: Lexington Books, c2008), 36.

<sup>30</sup> Sinclair, ix, x.

<sup>31</sup> Keynes, 32, 33.

drastic reduction or confiscation of German territories and natural resources in the East. Clemenceau also counted Germany responsible for assuming the total cost of the war, no matter how long the payback. As one final measure of French security, he insisted on permanent occupation of the Rhineland to deter Germany from invading France again.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the conference Clemenceau remained stubborn, yielding only slightly when necessary. He viewed the Treaty of Versailles as a 'Germany versus France' issue, not as an issue for all European civilization and humanity. The experiences of his past clouded his ability to see the future.<sup>33</sup>

Paris welcomed the last of the Big Three, Woodrow Wilson, with a joyful reception. Many Europeans saw him as a hero and more, able to solve all their problems. Those on the winning side saw him as a symbol of justice; Germany saw him as a mitigating force to ensure a fair peace amidst the determination of Lloyd George and vengeance of Clemenceau.<sup>34</sup> It remains unclear whether Wilson understood those underlying expectations, but he came to Versailles with his own thoughts and ideals. A man of admirable spirit and purpose, Wilson's line of thought and temperament were more theological, bound by his sense of right and wrong. He had good intentions for the treaty, but was an amateur to the European game of face to face councils. Unlike his European counterparts, he lacked in war experience and didn't possess the Old World skills of intellectual domination through dangerous subtleties, and quick, clever toughness. Wilson brought no written plan but his Fourteen Points, a program he felt capable of establishing world peace. Each point detailed a United States' war aim: frank and public dealings in lieu of secret treaties, freedom of navigation on the seas, removal of economic barriers and institution of equal trade conditions, a call for international disarmament, the revision of colonial possessions, opportunity for self determination in Russia and evacuation of all its occupied territory, the

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<sup>32</sup> Czernin, 45, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Keynes, 36.

<sup>34</sup> MacMillan, 461.

evacuation and restoration of Belgium, evacuation and restoration of invaded French territory and a return to the French of Alsace-Lorraine, readjustment of Italy's borders based on nationality, a call for multi-ethnic Austria-Hungary to allow autonomous development for its people, evacuation and independence of the Balkan states to operate within borders determined by nationality, granting of autonomous development for all people within the Ottoman Empire and open access to the Dardanelles for international commerce, the creation of an independent Polish state, and the establishment of the League of Nations.<sup>35</sup> Though the November, 1918 armistice recognized Wilson's Fourteen Points as the basis for peace, during the subsequent months of negotiating peace at Versailles, the Points would prove vague and without concrete applications.<sup>36</sup>

A combination of several characteristics and choices made Wilson's contributions to the Treaty of Versailles far less than were initially possible. Unfortunately for the President, he was the only delegate at the Hall of Mirrors without the full backing of his country; the post-war costs weren't as high for the American people as for the British and French. This lack of support would prove disastrous later.<sup>37</sup> And while the President was an excellent speaker and writer, very courteous and an attentive listener, he did not think as quickly on his feet as his counterparts. Furthermore, he was more effective at writing his resolutions instead of voicing them. For whatever reason, he didn't utilize this writing skill to its full potential, instead often deflecting decisions to Clemenceau or Lloyd George. This opened wide the door for them to create their own resolutions, which they did with political savvy, perfected after years of use.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, jr., ed., *The Election of 1912 and the Administration of Woodrow Wilson* (Philadelphia: Mason Crest Publishers, 2003), 114-117.

<sup>36</sup> Keynes, 39, 42, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Czernin, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Riddell, et al., 13, 14.

A team of capable advisors accompanied Wilson to Paris, ready to assist him in any way. Yet the President rarely conferred with them, preferring to go it alone. If he had a question he met with the specific advisor he needed, in private. Perhaps this was a personality flaw of Wilson's, or he didn't like to confer in front of others. Whatever the reason, his lack of counsel left him secluded and isolated in his negotiations over the treaty.<sup>39</sup> It also further paved the way for Lloyd George and Clemenceau to use their political skills to chip away at Wilson until he found himself agreeing with them on several points he had initially opposed or wished to see revised. The conference wasn't without argument; Wilson often felt his French counterpart obstructive, and said of him, "After arguing with Clemenceau for two hours and pushing him along, he practically agreed to everything, and just as he was leaving he swung back to where we had began".<sup>40</sup>

Wilson nearly left Versailles in the midst of discussions, but felt the final peace would be more just if he stayed.<sup>41</sup> Had Wilson been more insistent on important points instead of deflecting to Clemenceau and Lloyd George, the treaty may have succeeded; the United States stood in a fantastic position to get many of Wilson's ideas through.

First, the enemy countries trusted the United States. At the initial meeting of the Supreme War Council (Allied powers) in November 1918, they drew up a Pre-Armistice agreement accepted by the Big Three and Germany. It stated Wilson's Fourteen Points as the basis for the treaty with exception to point number two, dealing with freedom of the seas (discussion on this point would take place at the Paris Peace Conference).<sup>42</sup> The Germans trusted Wilson to follow through.

Second, the United States' Army was stronger in numbers and financial resources than any in

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<sup>39</sup> Lansing, 45, 48.

<sup>40</sup> MacMillan, 198.

<sup>41</sup> Keynes, 45, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Czernin, 30, 31.

Europe after the war. Third, Europe was truly at the mercy of the United States, depending on them for food and financial assistance; the continent owed their ally money from four years of war and still needed further assistance. All Wilson had to do was take full advantage of this position, yet his ideals would not allow it; he felt it was blackmail.<sup>43</sup>

A final blunder by Wilson would go hand in hand with lack of support from the American people as proving disastrous for the Treaty of Versailles. Among his team of advisors accompanying the President to Paris, Wilson neglected to invite any of his Republican political opponents.<sup>44</sup> The American Senate would reject the treaty after its signing in June 1919, beginning the downward spiral of United States' involvement in European peacemaking.<sup>45</sup>

#### REACTIONS TO THE TREATY

Six months after the end of World War I, the Treaty of Versailles was finished. Publicized May 7, 1919, the treaty came under fire. Not surprisingly, the French felt the treaty was too lenient. Delegates in Great Britain felt it did not establish a new world order. South African foreign minister Jan Smuts, American relief administrator Herbert Hoover, British Chief Treasury advisor John Keynes, American expert on Russia William Bullitt, and American Secretary of State Robert Lansing all felt many parts of the treaty would bring destruction, and did not see it as a treaty of peace. Smuts stated too many French demands filled the treaty; the terms would produce political and economical chaos for years and the British Empire would pay in the end. Bullitt especially felt the treaty sacrificed Wilson's principles and ideals to serve the

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<sup>43</sup> Keynes, 38, 50.

<sup>44</sup> Riddell, et al, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe, 1918-1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 24.

interests of the greedy Europeans.<sup>46</sup> Keynes went on to say the treaty did not allow for a viable construction of Europe or promote healing; the Allies had secured a German surrender based on the Fourteen Points and instead did away with them and imposed a peace on Germany that would foster animosity, ruin economic life, and left zero prospect of reconciliation.<sup>47</sup> Both Bullitt and Keynes resigned shortly after the publication of the treaty.

Regarding the Germans, the original plan was for the Allies to come up with a preliminary treaty and invite Germany to Versailles for discussion. Instead, the Big Three summoned the Germans to Versailles in May 1919 to view a final treaty. This treatment went against diplomatic precedent and angered the Germans. Upon their arrival in Paris, Clemenceau took care to treat them badly. He slowed down their trains past areas devastated by the war; the buses took the Germans to Versailles under heavy escort where their luggage was dumped in the hotel courtyard and they were told to carry it themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Once in the Hall of Mirrors, the terms of the treaty outraged the Germans. They had expected disarmament, demilitarization, reparations and the like.<sup>49</sup> Yet the Germans couldn't find Wilson's Fourteen Points, the intended base of the treaty, anywhere in the final draft; the Allies hadn't been willing to make the sacrifices involved in a full acceptance of them.<sup>50</sup> In the end, only the League of Nations survived for a time. The Allies never secured freedom of the seas, and free trade in Europe was not established. Tariff walls were erected, higher and more numerous than before. Though originally a main idea, self determination was not to be. Several German colonies and lands of Austria-Hungary and the former Ottoman Empire went to the

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<sup>46</sup> MacMillan, 467-469.

<sup>47</sup> Keynes, x-xii.

<sup>48</sup> MacMillan, 459.

<sup>49</sup> MacMillan, 465, 466.

<sup>50</sup> Riddell, et al., 27, 28.

victors.<sup>51</sup> Yet two clauses, one solidifying German responsibility for all war costs and the other allowing the Allies two years to define the repayment amount, particularly angered the Germans. They felt other nations also held responsibility for the war, and an undetermined amount of reparations was like cutting the Allies a blank check.<sup>52</sup> The German representative, Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau spoke at the meeting and expressed the German consensus: the treaty's basis of the Fourteen Points was binding, based on the Pre-Armistice agreement. They felt any Allied demands beyond the Fourteen Points had no legal foundation. He went on to say the treaty departed in decisive points from the agreed upon foundation of the legal peace and for any country that valued its honor, the treaty was intolerable and virtually impossible to meet. According to Boemeke in *The Treaty of Versailles: A Reassessment After 75 Years*, research shows this speech and uncompromising conduct by Brockdorff-Rantzau damaged Germany's chances of mitigating the conditions of the treaty with the Allies.<sup>53</sup> However, just as much research shows the Allies, namely Clemenceau, never had any intentions of negotiating with Germany. As the Allies handed the 80,000-word treaty to the German delegation at the first meeting, Clemenceau let them know, "There will be no verbal discussion...observations must be submitted in writing...Germany will be given fifteen days to put into French and English their written observations on the entire Treaty...."<sup>54</sup>

Humiliated and angry, the German delegates returned home, a copy of the treaty in hand. Shortly after, they submitted their counterproposals in writing based on Wilson's Fourteen Points. The French press, exceedingly harsh, called the Germans "indecent and without conscience". This led Winston Churchill to remark "the hatred of France for Germany was

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<sup>51</sup> David Andelman, *A Shattered Peace: Versailles 1919 and the Price We Pay Today* (New Jersey: J. Wiley, c2008), 284, 285.

<sup>52</sup> MacMillan, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Boemeke, et al, 536, 537.

<sup>54</sup> Czermin, 332, 333.

something more than human.” Germany’s plan impressed both the United States and Great Britain. Lloyd George shared many reservations with the Germans regarding the Rhineland’s occupation. He felt it wasn’t in Great Britain’s best interest to have a weak and potentially revolutionary Germany. Though he tried to sway his counterparts’ thinking towards the Fourteen Points, Clemenceau and Wilson saw him as weak; Lloyd George’s efforts went nowhere.<sup>55</sup>

Though Germany gained a few concessions, they were few and marginal in value. Brockdorff-Rantzau’s visions of membership in the League of Nations and a revived Germany uniting with Great Britain, the United States, and maybe France to stop Bolshevism would not come to fruition.<sup>56</sup> The bigger problem in Germany was getting the new republic to sign the Treaty of Versailles. Neither Brockdorff-Rantzau nor the delegation felt inclined to sign. The only advocate of signing was Matthias Erzberger, the German armistice commissioner in 1919. Having a knack for saying the unthinkable, Erzberger made many enemies in the German government. He contended Germany could not afford another war, that Bolshevism would prevail, breaking Germany apart and resulting in control by a right wing dictatorship. Whether his arguments had merit or not, Germany and its citizens were not prepared to sign a “peace of shame”.<sup>57</sup> Unable to reconcile to Erzberger’s suggestions, the German cabinet and Brockdorff-Rantzau resigned. Suddenly, the new Weimar republic was without a government. More concerned with unifying his people and restoring a sense of order, President Friedrich Ebert cared less about the details of the treaty. He haphazardly managed to throw a government together and get the treaty accepted by the June 23<sup>rd</sup> deadline.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> MacMillan, 468, 470.

<sup>56</sup> MacMillan, 461, 466.

<sup>57</sup> MacMillan, 472, 478.

<sup>58</sup> Sinclair, 305.

In the Hall of Mirrors in Paris on June 28, 1919 the tension filled the room as Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles. Theatrics and drama surrounded the ceremony and the Germans once again felt humiliated, likely Clemenceau's intended effect. The German delegation returned home to an angry, broken country. Volunteer fighters combating Bolshevism in the East felt abandoned by their nation; nationalists blamed traitors back home and government coalitions. The new Weimar republic felt the crushing blows.<sup>59</sup>

### REPRUCUSSIONS OF THE TREATY

The Big Three and many other political players knew flaws filled the Treaty of Versailles before it was finished. Yet rarely did any of its architects want to concede on points important to them. An unconscious failure of long term vision, courage, and common sense doomed the treaty to failure before the ink dried. The politicians' horizons and principles were only as broad and high as their limited national and personal interests that kept them in power.<sup>60</sup> Prior to the treaty's completion, American Secretary of State Robert Lansing had seen the situation developing for months. He wrote, "As I see it, the dominant spirit in the Peace Conference is selfish materialism tinged with a cynical disregard of manifest rights. What will be the outcome? Will American idealism have to succumb to this evil spirit of a past era? Will principle or expediency control the work of the Conference?"<sup>61</sup> The answer: expediency; what could the world expect of such a huge undertaking by three men, none faultless?

The initial failure of the treaty stained the careers of Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George. This failure would bleed over into the successors of these men. In the United States the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles twice, in 1919 and 1920, and the country never joined

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<sup>59</sup> MacMillan, 477, 478.

<sup>60</sup> Sinclair, xi.

<sup>61</sup> Andelman, 286, 287.

the League of Nations. The refusal to sign ended all American obligations to fulfill clauses in the treaty and all American participation in upholding the treaty or peacemaking efforts.<sup>62</sup> Instead they signed separate treaties with Austria, Hungary, and Germany. With America's failed ratification and the abandonment of the League, the only impartial player had left the game. This drastically changed the balance of the treaty and left it in the hands of victors with animosities traced back centuries and revived by the tragedies of World War I.

Feelings of mistrust, resentment, and frustration hindered Great Britain and France's enforcement of the treaty. Great Britain was the closest delegation resembling a fair party, but resentment at losing thousands of ships sunk by the Germans still brewed. In addition, fear of France regaining its former power through a rebuilding of military and diplomatic supremacy coupled with territorial annexation lingered.<sup>63</sup> Great Britain wished to maintain relationships with France and Germany but didn't want to be surpassed in power or excluded from any future entente. In the early 1920s when it looked as though Germany and France might attempt a joint effort for economic reasons, Great Britain sabotaged the possibility repeatedly.<sup>64</sup> In 1922 Poincaré returned to power in France; understanding the German economic situation, he traded his initial hard-line tactics with Germany for more moderate thinking in hopes for a collaboration regarding reparations. Instead of enforcing the treaty's provision for French occupation of the Ruhr in event of non-payment of reparations, Poincaré wished to examine Germany's finances, determine its capacity to pay, and arrive at a fixed repayment amount, handled through loans regulated by Allied control of Germany's finances.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Marks, 24.

<sup>63</sup> J.F.V. Keiger, *Raymond Poincaré* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 292,293.

<sup>64</sup> John Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945-1955: the Germans and French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12.

<http://libproxy.ngcsu.edu:2679/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls:cc=acls:idno=heb00247.0001.001:view=toc> (accessed September 12, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 276,285, 294.

In truth, France's post-war success depended heavily upon the support of its Allies and receipt of Germany's payments; without Germany, France could not survive. Unfortunately, two facts stood in the way of Poincaré's goals. First, Great Britain had already expressed mistrust in France and an unwillingness to force Germany into anything; on the other side of the Atlantic, the United States' refusal to sign the treaty and subsequent exit from the situation left France alone. Secondly, Germany made no moves to cement a financial collaboration with France after Poincaré voiced his plans. Germany refused to pay reparations until Europe was free of Allied occupation and France admitted blame for its part in the war. Aiding Germany in their refusal was Briton John Keynes, who encouraged Germany to take a hard line with France by refusing to pay, essentially calling France's bluff to reoccupy the Ruhr per the treaty.<sup>66</sup>

For France, occupying the Ruhr harbored risks: lack of support from other ally leaders and no guarantee Germany's government and economy wouldn't fall into complete ruin, resulting in zero reparations and a possible dictatorship for Germany. However after six months of attempted negotiations with Germany, Poincaré committed to occupying the Ruhr in July 1922; by January 1923 it was done, cutting off the Ruhr's steel and coal supply from Germany. The results proved disastrous, for both Germany and France. Within a year the occupation had virtually paralyzed Germany's economy, resulting in extreme inflation; the German 'mark' was so depreciated it essentially ceased to be a currency. France, weighed down by enormous public debt, felt the effects while simultaneously paying out more money to operate the Ruhr than it brought in. By the end of 1923, the country seemed on the verge of total financial collapse.<sup>67</sup>

Two events would change the course of Europe's crumbling economy. In 1924, the United States reluctantly stepped in, an attempt to alleviate the overwhelming economic

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 283,284.

<sup>67</sup> George P. Auld, *The Dawes Plan and the New Economics* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1927), 31,32,116,117.

problems of Europe. American delegates arrived in Europe with a plan to stabilize the 'mark' and Europe; the result was the Dawes Plan. The main component of the plan was a five-year schedule of payments with amounts to increase annually according to Germany's income and gold value of the 'mark'. Additionally, an international loan helped to stabilize Germany's currency the first year. The Dawes Plan became larger than life, and between 1925 and 1929 the United States poured 2.5 billion dollars into Germany; politically and economically, the plan was successful.<sup>68</sup>

At approximately the same time, Gustav Stresemenn, German foreign minister, realized that attempts to overthrow the Treaty of Versailles would end poorly. He aided in drafting the Locarno Agreement, a compilation of five treaties; most importantly, the Locarno definitively established Germany's western border and recognized Germany's permanent loss of Alsace-Lorraine to France. Additionally, France agreed to evacuate the northern half of the Rhineland and remove all remaining presence from the region by 1933. It also paved the way for a more cooperative approach to the coal and steel industry for Europe, which could only aid in economic recovery.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The economic lessons learned in the 1920s by France and Great Britain proved hard to forget and affected business in the 1930s. Through the coal industry Great Britain, France, and Germany reached an uneasy peace; yet as the decade wore on Germany pulled back on its imports from France, trapping them economically. France found itself yet again tied to Germany

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<sup>68</sup> John Gillingham, *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945-1955: the Germans and French from Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16,17.  
<http://libproxy.ngcsu.edu:2679/cgi/t/text/text-id.x?c=acsls;cc=acsls;idno=heb00247.0001.001;view=toc> (accessed September 12, 2009).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 17,18,19.

financially, the Germans with the advantage. At the same time, British coal exports waned as Germany's increased; like France, it was in Great Britain's best interest to appease Germany and maintain open relations. By 1938 France and Great Britain, allies, found themselves competing for Germany's business.<sup>70</sup> The tangled web of coal and money weaved in the 1930s backed Great Britain and France into a corner of appeasement where Germany was concerned, and prevented them from enforcing the Treaty of Versailles.

It is true the nations charged with enforcing the treaty failed in key areas such as disarmament for themselves (after Germany), coming to the aid of weaker nations to check aggression, and upholding the rights of minorities. Blame for the treaty's failure fell on all democratic countries in their lack of resolve behind its execution.<sup>71</sup> In 1939, David Lloyd George wrote in his memoirs, "We should all be equally shocked at the spectacle of the great democratic countries... now shivering and begging for peace on the door-steps of two European dictators."<sup>72</sup> However, as evidenced, the enforcement of the Versailles Treaty in the two decades following the war did not prove as simple as negotiators in 1919 had hoped.

While it is evident the Treaty of Versailles failed, perhaps those looking at it from 90 years out cannot be too harsh on its authors. The task was monumental; did enough experience in the world exist to equip them for such a task? After all, politicians are no different from the rest of the world. They're unreliable, fallible, uncertain, selfish, fearful, ambitious, vain, and prejudiced. "All too often... the course of the world's history is set by men who are merely deluded, and encouraged by the rest of us, into believing that they are great."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 36-41.

<sup>71</sup> Lloyd George, 907, 910.

<sup>72</sup> Lloyd George, 907.

<sup>73</sup> Sinclair, xi.

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