



## Winners and losers

Some countries had the support of the victorious powers and gained their dream of independence: a new Poland; a new Czech state in alliance with the Slovaks; the new states of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Finland, freed from Russian control. This was because the victors decided that the lands taken from Russia by Germany were available to redistribute.

The southern Slavs got a federation, dominated by Serbia, called Yugoslavia, which lasted until the 1990s.

Turkey became a modernised state but lost its lands in Arabia and the Middle East.

Italy gained some of the lands it had desired and had been promised – Istria, Trentino, Trieste and the South Tyrol – but not all. Italy had to seize Fiume by force and there were still Italians living under Austrian, German and Yugoslav rule.

Austria and Hungary became independent – but instead of dominating a great empire they were now small, weak states. In Austria's case, its great capital Vienna now ruled over only German-speaking rural areas and small towns and cities.

Russia had recovered some of its lost lands, but not the Baltic territories, or Bessarabia, or eastern Poland. It found itself isolated behind a number of small independent states, a so-called *cordon sanitaire* – a barrier against plague, in this case the political 'plague' of communism. Like Germany, Russia never accepted that its post-war situation of weakness and loss was permanent.

Germany lost considerable lands in the east and the contentious provinces of Alsace and Lorraine in the west (to France). It was physically divided in the east by a strip of Polish territory. It had lost lands to Denmark and Belgium and all its overseas colonies.

Japan, which had loyally supported its ally Germany, found itself only able to rule over new territories it had gained in China as a trustee, reporting to the new League of Nations. It did not win control of the Chinese Shandong province as it had wished, and had to give up the gains it made in the east of Russia after the Russian Revolution. After the war, Japan was forced by the USA to give up its alliance with Britain and to agree to a pact guaranteeing the territorial status quo in the Far East, thus restricting its ambitions in the region. It was also forced to keep its navy smaller than those of Britain and the USA.

Thus Russia, Germany, Italy and Japan saw themselves as losing powers. Other losers were the national minorities in the newly created independent states – the Poles and Ruthenes; Germans and Slovaks in a Czech-dominated Czechoslovakia; non-Magyars in Hungary; Ukrainians in eastern Poland; Germans in the Baltic States; minority groups in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The newly dominant nationalities often discriminated against **ethnic minorities**, and as the new states came into being there was frequently a great deal of violence.

**ethnic minorities** People who belong to different racial or language groups from those who predominantly populate and run a state. For example, in Czechoslovakia there were around 3 million German speakers in a country dominated by Czechs who were of Slav racial origin and whose language was closer to Russian.

**Document case study**

**The Paris Peace Settlement**

**3.1 Clemenceau outlines the French position towards Germany at the Paris Peace Conference**

*Report of the 'Council of Four' meeting, 27 March 1919*

I said yesterday that I entirely agreed with Mr David Lloyd George and President Wilson on how Germany should be treated; we cannot take unfair advantage of our victory; we must deal tolerably with peoples for fear of provoking a surge of national feeling... Mr Lloyd George has excessive fears of possible German resistance and refusal to sign the treaty... They will dispute on every point, they will threaten to refuse to sign... they will contest or refuse everything that can be refused... President Wilson warns us against giving the Germans a sense of injustice. Agreed, but what we regard as just here in this room will not necessarily be accepted as such by the Germans... Shortly before he died Napoleon said: 'Nothing permanent is founded on force.' I am not so sure; a glance at the great nations of Europe is enough to give one pause. What is true, is that force cannot establish anything unless it is in the service of justice. Every effort must be made to be just towards the Germans; but when it comes to persuading them that we are just to them, that is another matter. We can, I believe, save the world from German aggression; but the German spirit is not going to change so fast.

Source: A. Adamthwaite, *The lost peace: international relations in Europe, 1918-39*, London, 1980, pp. 24-27

**3.2 Hitler's view of the Versailles Treaty**

*Written in Mein Kampf*

When in the year 1919 the German people was burdened with the peace treaty, we should have been justified in hoping that precisely through this instrument of boundless repression the cry for German freedom would have been immensely promoted. Peace treaties whose demands are a scourge to nations not seldom strike the first roll of drums for the uprising to come... We had to form a front against this treaty and engrave ourselves forever in the minds of men as an enemy of this treaty, so that later, when the harsh reality of this treacherous frippery would be revealed in its naked hate, the recollection of our attitude at that time would win us confidence.

Source: A. Hitler, 'The diatribe of Versailles', in I. Lederer (ed.), *The Versailles settlement: was it doomed to failure? The truth about the treaty*, London, 1960, pp. 86-90

**3.3 The economic consequences of the peace: a British view**

*John Maynard Keynes' view*

The treaty is no treaty, because it is now generally recognised that in truth it settles nothing... If you pledge a man to perform the impossible, you are no nearer a decision as to what in fact he has to do: for his pledge is, necessarily a dead letter. The reparations clauses of this treaty are its most important economic feature. But being composed of foolish, idle words, having no relation to real facts, they are without

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practical effect, and they leave the prospects of the future undetermined . . . This treaty ignores the economic solidarity of Europe, and by aiming at the economic life of Germany it threatens the health and prosperity of the Allies themselves . . . by making demands the execution of which is in the literal sense impossible, it stultifies itself and leaves Europe more unsettled than it found it.

Source: J. M. Keynes, *The economic consequences of the peace*, London, 1920

### 3.4 Reparations against Germany: an American view

#### *The opinion of an American delegate at the Paris Peace Conference*

The magnitude of the reparations demanded of Germany under the treaty . . . placed great strain upon credit. Largely on this account there was a widespread collapse of the entire pre-war system of goods and services and investments. The pre-war gold system has collapsed and a large part of the world functions in terms of closed international dealings restricted to barter . . . The reparations clauses contributed largely toward a German psychology which has changed the political complexion of much of the world.

Source: J. F. Dulles, 'Foreword', in P. Burnett, *Reparations at the Paris Peace Conference*, New York, 1940

### 3.5 The Paris Peace Settlement: a communist view

#### *From a contemporary communist pamphlet*

The imperialist war of 1914 demonstrated with the greatest clarity to all enslaved nations and oppressed classes of the entire world the falseness of bourgeois-democratic phraseology. Both sides used the phrases of national liberation and the right of national self-determination to make good their case, but the treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest on one side, and the treaties of Versailles and St Germain on the other, showed that the victorious bourgeoisie quite ruthlessly determine 'national' frontiers in accordance with their economic interests . . . The so-called League of Nations is nothing but the insurance contract by which the victors of war mutually guarantee each other's spoils . . . The League of Nations and the entire post-war policy of the imperialist states discloses this truth even more sharply and clearly, everywhere intensifying the struggle of the proletariat of the advanced countries and of the labouring classes in the colonies, accelerating the destruction of petty-bourgeois national illusions about the possibility of peaceful coexistence and of the equality of nations under capitalism.

Source: A. Adamthwaite, *The lost peace: international relations in Europe, 1918-39*, London, 1980, pp. 39-41

### 3.6 The Paris Peace Settlement: a British assessment

#### *The view of a British delegate at the Paris Peace Conference*

The historian, with every justification, will come to the conclusion that we were very stupid men. I think we were . . . We came to Paris confident that the new world order was about to be established; we left it convinced the new order had fouled the old . . . We arrived determined that a peace of justice and wisdom should be negotiated: we left it conscious that the treaties imposed were neither just nor wise . . . It is impossible to

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