WW1 Essay - Treaty of Versailles

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An essay about the Treaty of Versailles (signed at the end of WW1). The question being answered is 'Was the Treaty of Versailles fair on Germany?

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The Treaty of Versailles is a peace treaty that was put into place at the end of world war one to ensure that there would be peace between the countries involved. This treaty mainly involved Germany, France, Britain and the United States (though Germany was banned from the negotiations). Although the Treaty was intended to create peace between these countries, it wasnâ t entirely fair on Germany and was, in fact, rather punitive.

Firstly, Germany was banned from the negotiations. This made the Treaty unfair from the beginning, as it meant the â Big Threeâ (France, Britain and the United States) could negotiate the conditions of the Treaty to increase their personal benefit (as a nation). French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau was mainly concerned with protecting France from future German invasion. While negotiating the terms of the Treaty, Clemenceau told British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and US President Woodrow Wilson that *â you are both sheltered; we are not.â* In this quote, he was referring to the risk of invasion he faced from Germany, as they shared a land border, whereas Britain and the US did not. Clemenceauâ s other main concern was the payment of reparations; France had suffered the heaviest loss of human life among the Allies, and insisted on reinforcing the payment of reparations. Lloyd George was also concerned with the preservation of the British Empire and the risk of future German invasion. He supported the enforcement of reparations to a lesser extent than the French, but he still succeeded in increasing the overall payment amount, and also the portion of that payment that Britain would receive as compensation for the huge number of men left unable to work because of the war. US President Woodrow Wilson was perhaps the fairest of the three on Germany; his main concern was rebuilding the European economy and he opposed harsh treatment of Germany. As the US wasnâ t largely involved in the war and wasnâ t a European power, Wilson had no prejudice against Germany, and this may have influenced his concern for the European economy. However, Clemenceau and Lloyd George were successful in overruling Wilsonâ s ideas.

The Treaty of Versailles was largely based upon penalising Germany. Article 231 (also known as the â War Guiltâ clause) states that the Allies accept *â â ¦the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage.â* This article effectively blames Germany for the war and states that Germany must accept total responsibility. By forcing Germany to accept responsibility for the war, the other countries were exempt from penalty. This act of blaming Germany essentially stops Germany from moving on and keeping the peace after the war (and this inability to move on from the war later contributed to world war two).

Not only did the Treaty of Versailles demand that Germany pay for all the reparations, it also enforced some rather harsh military restrictions. Article 160 states that *â â ¦the total number of effectives in the Armyâ ¦must not exceed one hundred thousand men.â* The following articles (168 â 170) further restrict the German army by limiting the number of arms/war materials Germany could possess; *â German arms, munitions and war materialâ ¦in excess of the quantity allowed must be surrendered to the Governments of the Allied and Associated Powers.â* (Article 169) These articles also forbid the import and export of arms to and from foreign countries; *â Importation into Germany of arms, munitions and war materials of every*

kind shall be strictly prohibited.â (Article 170) The Treaty also abolished conscription in Germany. Finally, in articles 118 â 158, it states the conditions that Germany must meet regarding land and colonies. This section was titled â German Rights and Interests Outside Germanyâ and is based upon reassigning German land/colonies to other countries. The military and tactical conditions of the Treaty were very harsh and restricted the German army greatly, while the other countries could continue to build up and expand their own military. This was rather unfair, as Germany could not be deemed as the sole aggressor in the war, which meant that these military restrictions were unjustified.

In conclusion, the Treaty of Versailles was incredibly unfair on Germany: firstly, when Germany was excluded from the negotiations; secondly, by blaming Germany for the war (and thereby forcing Germany to pay the reparations) and finally, by imposing such harsh conditions on Germany and the German military. In short, the Treaty of Versailles was a grossly unfair â peaceâ treaty that was greatly punitive and one-sided, and punished Germany severely.

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