Chapter 2
The Versailles Settlement

2.1 What were the terms of the Treaty of Versailles?

On 28 June 1919, it was finally announced that the ‘Big Three’ had reached an agreement at the Paris Peace Conference. The meetings had taken place in the Palace of Versailles, just outside Paris, so the agreement with Germany was to be called the Treaty of Versailles. Germany had not been allowed to go to the peace talks and called the treaty a ‘Diktat’, or dictated peace; they were devastated by the way they were treated. How was Germany affected?

**Objectives**

- Explain what Germany lost in the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
- Consider how the treaty affected Germany.

**Build-up to the signing**

By June 1919, the discussions about what to do with Germany were over and the German government was informed of the terms. The Treaty aimed to punish Germany, to prevent them attacking France again by weakening them, and to give the winning countries compensation so that they could rebuild. Germany was told that the Allies would resume the war if the German government refused to agree to the terms. Eventually, the Germans sent a telegram confirming that a number of German politicians would arrive shortly to sign the treaty. On 28 June 1919 the peace treaty was signed. Look through the terms in the diagram carefully.

**Source A** The Treaty of Versailles, signed by leaders including Wilson and Lloyd George

The German navy was limited to 15,000 men, 1500 officers and only 6 battleships; the size and number of other ships was also limited.

Article 231 of the Treaty was the war guilt clause: Germany and their allies had to take full responsibility for starting the war; this was the term that Germany hated the most.

The Rhineland, a strip of land on the border between Germany and France, was to be demilitarised; this meant that Germany could not put an army or defences in this area.

Article 232: Germany was blamed for the war and had to pay reparations to the winners; in 1921, the figure was agreed at £6,600 million; it was estimated this would take until 1988 to pay back!
1. Summarise the terms in the diagram and then colour-code them to show what Germany lost in each term: pride, territory (land), money, or military strength. Remember, some of the terms might need to be more than one colour.

2. Why do you think the Germans hated Article 231 the most?

3. Why do you think Article 232, reparations, came after the war guilt clause?

Practice Question

‘Territorial losses were the worst punishment faced by Germany in the Treaty of Versailles.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

16 marks

SPaG: 4 marks

Study Tip

In this kind of question you need to explain not just how the loss of territory affected Germany but how other losses affected the country too. You could consider the military restrictions, economic sanctions and/or how the Treaty affected Germany.

Germany lost 10 per cent of its land, including Alsace Lorraine, which was returned to France; Eupen and Malmedy, which was given to Belgium; and North Schleswig, which was given to Denmark.
What was the reaction to the Treaty of Versailles?

The Treaty of Versailles was signed. It became international law. However, almost immediately those who had signed it began to regret some of the terms, and Germany was outraged by the harsh blow it had been dealt. How sensible were the terms of the Treaty at the time it was signed and how have historians’ opinions about the Treaty changed over time?

Germany and the settlement

Germany had arguably been the strongest country in Europe prior to the First World War. If Europe was going to function again, the ‘German problem’ had to be settled. The country was in turmoil: the Kaiser had fled to Holland and different political parties were arguing with each other. To make matters worse, people were furious about the Treaty of Versailles and how it had, they perceived, left Germany in financial ruin.

Many historians have agreed that the Treaty of Versailles affected Germany for the next two decades and that it ultimately gave Hitler the excuse to invade other countries to reclaim what had been unfairly taken from Germany. During the 1920s and 1930s the attitude towards Versailles was, largely, that it had been unjust and that Germany was right to hate it so much.

A British newspaper cartoon about the Treaty of Versailles, 1919. The Big Four (Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Wilson and Orlando of Italy) are holding the spoon. On the box it says ‘Big Four Pills worth millions a box’

A British cartoon from 1919. The cartoon was produced by the British Empire Union, a group that tried to encourage people to buy goods from Britain or the Empire

Lenin, the leader of Communist Russia, on the Treaty of Versailles in 1920:

This is no peace, but terms dictated to a defenceless victim by armed robbers.
**Looking back**

At the end of the Second World War, as the Allies once more met to decide Germany’s fate in another peace treaty, opinions about the Treaty of Versailles started to change. Historians argued that the terms weren’t unreasonable at all: the Germans had rebuilt their country and economy so that they were, again, one of the richest, most powerful countries in Europe by 1929. However, this view was obviously influenced by events that happened some time after the Treaty was signed.

**Source E** A British cartoon from 19 February 1919; the man on the floor represents Germany

![Cartoon of a man on the floor with a sign saying “Giving Him Rope?”]

**INTERPRETATION F** Margaret Macmillan, the great-granddaughter of David Lloyd George and a professor of international history at Oxford University, in a communication with a history website in 2004:

It is my own view – and a number of historians who have been working in this area for some years – that the treaty was not all that bad. Germany did lose the war after all. Reparations apparently imposed a heavy burden but Germany only paid a portion of what it owed. Perhaps the real problem was that the treaty was never really properly enforced so that Germany was able to rebuild its military and challenge the security of Europe all over again.

**Practice Question**

Source B opposes the Treaty of Versailles. How do you know? Explain your answer using Source B and your contextual knowledge.

**Study Tip**

With a question like this make sure you explain what the source is about and give specific evidence (say what you can see!) to prove that the cartoonist is against the Treaty. Then link the cartoon to your own knowledge – why did some people feel this way?

**Work**

1. Make a list of the reasons some people say that the Treaty of Versailles was a disaster.
2. Make a list of reasons some people defend the Treaty.
3. Copy and complete the table for each of the sources (A–E):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>For or against the Treaty of Versailles?</th>
<th>Evidence from the source:</th>
<th>Link to my own knowledge [what aspect of the Treaty is the source about?]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4. Look at Interpretation F. How useful is this to a historian studying the Treaty of Versailles? In your answer you should think about…
   a. What the source is about.
   b. How this links to what you know about the Treaty.

4. Any reason you might have reservations about this source. Look at the provenance to help you with this.

**Key Word**

provenance