

Truth and Consequences: Taking Advantage of the Loser

Bill Koneski

January 4, 1997

Western Civilizations

Although the costs and strain that World War I placed on the countries involved in it were unimaginable, the peace treaty Germany was forced to sign was neither fair nor just. Millions upon millions of men lost their lives or were wounded and women and children suffered from not having and positive male influence and being forced into manual labor on the homefront. The cost alone to the United States was \$27,729,000,000 and the Americans killed numbered 53,407. Illness and other causes brought the total number of deaths to about 126,000. There were 204,002 wounded which were not fatal. When Allied leaders decided that it was time to end everything, they made the right decision. After rapid troop deployment by the United States and the successful Allied counterattack, Germany was on the run. Eventually, they surrendered and were forced into a peace agreement. The leaders of the major allied powers, Clemenceau of France, George of Great Britain, Orlando of Italy, and Wilson of the United States, were supposed to draw up a document for long lasting peace based on Wilson's Fourteen Points, but the other leaders were vengeful. They wanted Germany to pay in a big way for their losses and costs incurred. Instead of choosing to aim for long lasting peace by basing their treaty on the Fourteen Points, Clemenceau, George, and Orlando drew up a treaty that would cause Germany to go into a nation-wide depression and suffer for a whole generation. This treaty became known as the Treaty of Versailles.

In looking at the treaty, one would think that the writers were completely biased against Germany... and they would be right. Because France, Great Britain, and Italy

were the three main countries involved in the creation of the Treaty of Versailles, they used every minute detail of the treaty to work to their advantage. The only positive detail of the treaty was the League of Nations. The League was planned to reduce the chances of another war. This Covenant of the League of Nations was made the first part of the Treaty of Versailles. Further on in the treaty Germany was forbidden to create any new or maintain any old fortifications on the left and right banks of the Rhineland and Germany was forced to renounce the government of the Saar in favor of the League of Nations as trustee. France went so far as to take German coal mines in the Saar Basin as compensation for destroyed French mines during battle. France also got back the territories of Alsace and Lorraine and they had any territories ceded to Germany returned. Germany was forced to go against their views and acknowledge the complete independence of Austria, the Czecho-Slovak State, and Poland. Any overseas possession belonging to Germany was renounced and the German military force was demobilized. In addition to losing much of their land and goods, it was decided on April 27, 1921 that Germany would be forced to pay in excess of 31.5 million dollars to the Allies. In 1922 Germany fell behind in its reparations deliveries of coal. In January 1923 France and Belgium occupied the Ruhr coal and iron district on the right bank of the Rhine. They did this to enforce payment of reparations by Germany. Germany immediately stopped all reparations payments. In the economic panic that followed German money became worthless, and many Germans were financially ruined.

Through all this, the Germans hoped that President Wilson's Fourteen Points would be ratified and the Treaty of Versailles would be nullified, but to no avail. The treaty was given to the German delegation to sign at Versailles on May 7, 1919. The German delegates strongly objected to its severe terms. and they stated that the terms were not consistent with President Wilson's Fourteen Points. Although the Allies made only small concessions, the German delegates signed on June 28, 1919. When Wilson was notified that his Fourteen Points had been shot down by the other power players at the peace conference, he was outraged. China, along with the United States were not at first included among those nations making peace with Germany. China objected to the cession to Japan of rights in the province of Shantung. On November 19, 1919 and again on March 19, 1920, the United States Senate rejected the act ratifying the Treaty of Versailles. They recommended strongly that that United States not enter the League of Nations. Even in the Presidential Campaign of 1920, the League was a major issue. Because President Wilson was unable to setup a long-lasting peace treaty and the United States was not in accord with the Treaty of Versailles, Republican candidate Warren G.

Harding was elected president with an overwhelming Republican majority in Congress. The citizens of the U.S. were disgusted with Democrats and their way of politics. Not

until July 2, 1921 did the United States officially end the state of war between themselves, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. The United States finally made treaties with Austria and Germany which were signed August 24 at Vienna and August 25 at Berlin.

In conclusion, Germany was not dealt a fair hand in the peace process. Although it was their fault, not all blame should have been placed on them. They too had allies in Austria-Hungary and Russia originally. The Treaty of Versailles specifically states in Article 231, "The Allied and Associate Governments affirm that Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war." In plain English, Article 231 states that Germany has to take the fall for not only its own actions, but for those of its allies. Even though Germany was the major cause of World War I, they should not have had to agree to such a harsh peace treaty. The Treaty of Versailles only proves the old saying 'In war, the loser always pays.'

Bibliography:

- 1) Bennett, Geoffrey, Naval Battles of the First World War (1969)
- 2) Clark, Alan, Aces High: the War in the Air over the Western Front (1973)
- 3) Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia (1992)
- 4) Gray, Edwyn, The Killing Time: the U-Boat War, 1914-1918 (1972)
- 5) Hayes, G. P., World War I: A Compact History (1972)
- 6) Lederer, Ivo John, ed., The Versailles Settlement (1960)
- 7) Marshall, S. L., World War I (1985).
- 8) Rimell, Raymond L., World War I in the Air (1988)
- 9) Wren, Jack, The Great Battles of World War I (1971).
- 10) Zeman, Z. A. B., The Gentleman Negotiators: A Diplomatic History of the First World War (1971)

