

1.2 The peace treaties and the League of Nations

On 11 November 1918 the German government accepted an **armistice**, which ended all fighting in World War I. German troops were exhausted and their morale was broken. The army had run out of reserves, many German people were starving and food supplies were low. The Allies had won the war but they now had the task of creating peace. Would they make treaties that took revenge for Allied losses and suffering or would they seek a peace that would last?

The terrible cost of war

Five million Allied troops had died to achieve victory in World War I. Another 13 million had been wounded, many of them permanently disabled. The cost in money was also enormous, and France had suffered the destruction of farmland and entire towns and villages. Germany and the other Central Powers had also suffered terribly. They had lost 3.5 million troops and another 8 million were wounded. However, as many people on the Allied side saw it, the Central Powers, especially Germany, had caused the war and should be made to pay.

Did you know?



Almost 60 000 Australian troops were killed in World War I (almost one in five of those who served overseas). At the Peace Conferences, the Australian delegation, led by Prime Minister 'Billy' Hughes, was among those who wanted to make Germany pay heavily.

Source 1 The ruins of the Cloth Hall in Ypres, Belgium, in 1917. This structure was devastated by artillery fire during World War I.



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Source 2

A map showing how Europe was changed by the peace treaties



The Treaty of Versailles

On 28 June 1919, after five months of negotiations, delegates from the Allied countries and Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles. Germany's National Assembly regarded many of the terms set out in the treaty's 440 articles as so harsh that at first they had refused to sign. Penalties imposed on Germany included restrictions on the size of its military forces as well as **reparations** payments to the **Allies** and loss of territory.

Main military terms

Germany was permitted to maintain a volunteer army of no more than 100 000. But it was not allowed to use conscription or to possess an air force or submarines. Its navy was to be reduced in size and it was barred from manufacturing or trading in war materials.

Territorial losses

All German overseas colonies were seized. The provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France. German territory in the east was given to Poland, and **plebiscites** were to be held in German East Prussia and Silesia to enable their people to choose between remaining part of Germany or being absorbed into

Poland. The German Rhineland was to be occupied for 15 years.

Economic terms

Germany's rich Saar coalfields were to be controlled by France for 15 years. German railway stock and large ships were to be handed over and Germany was to build a further million tonnes of ships for the Allies. Huge quantities of coal, steel and other raw materials were also to be given to the Allies. And Germany was required to pay for all civilian damage suffered by the Allies. Under Clause 231, Germany had to accept blame for causing the war.

The other peace treaties

Each of the other defeated powers was also made to sign a treaty.

- *The Treaty of Saint-Germain* dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Empire and required Austria to pay reparations. The south-western parts of the empire were united with Serbia and Montenegro to form the new nation-state of Yugoslavia.
- *The Treaty of Trianon* took more than 70 per cent of Hungary's territory to create the new nation-state of Czechoslovakia.
- *The Treaty of Neuilly* transferred parts of Bulgaria's territory to Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia.
- *The Treaty of Sevres* took away Turkey's Middle East territories. These states were divided between Britain and France to administer as League of Nations **mandates**.

The League of Nations

Germany's Kaiser had been overthrown in a revolution in November 1918. US president Woodrow Wilson had wanted a more lenient treaty that would have strengthened democracy in Germany and created conditions more likely to preserve peace. France and Britain, however, wanted to weaken Germany and make her pay for their losses. The Treaty of Versailles created

Source 3 Some Articles from the Covenant of the League of Nations

Article 8

The Members recognise the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety.

Article 10

The Members of the League undertake to respect, and preserve against external aggression, the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League...

Article 11

Any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the members or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the Whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations.

intense bitterness in Germany, but one hope for lasting peace was the formation of the League of Nations. It was Wilson's idea and when it was formed it held promise as a guardian of world peace. Had it worked, it might have made up for the weaknesses of the rest of the peace settlement.

The League's main task was to prevent wars. The Covenant of the League was approved at the Versailles Conference in 1919. At first the League had 42 member states, including Australia. It was made up of a General Assembly (of all member states) and a Council. The Assembly met once a year but the Council met more frequently to deal with urgent problems. It consisted of Permanent Members and Non-Permanent Members. The major powers (Britain, France, Italy and Japan) were the Permanent Members. The Non-Permanent Members were elected from the other member states.

The League also had several special organisations. For example, the Permanent Court of Justice was set up to resolve international legal disputes, the Health Organization was formed to combat epidemics and the International Labour Organization was concerned with industrial and economic problems. The peace treaties had given Allied countries, mainly Britain and France, mandates to administer Turkey's Middle Eastern territories and Germany's overseas colonies. As these territories were not considered to be colonies that belonged to those countries, the League's Mandates Commission was set up to ensure that the administering powers carried out their responsibilities.

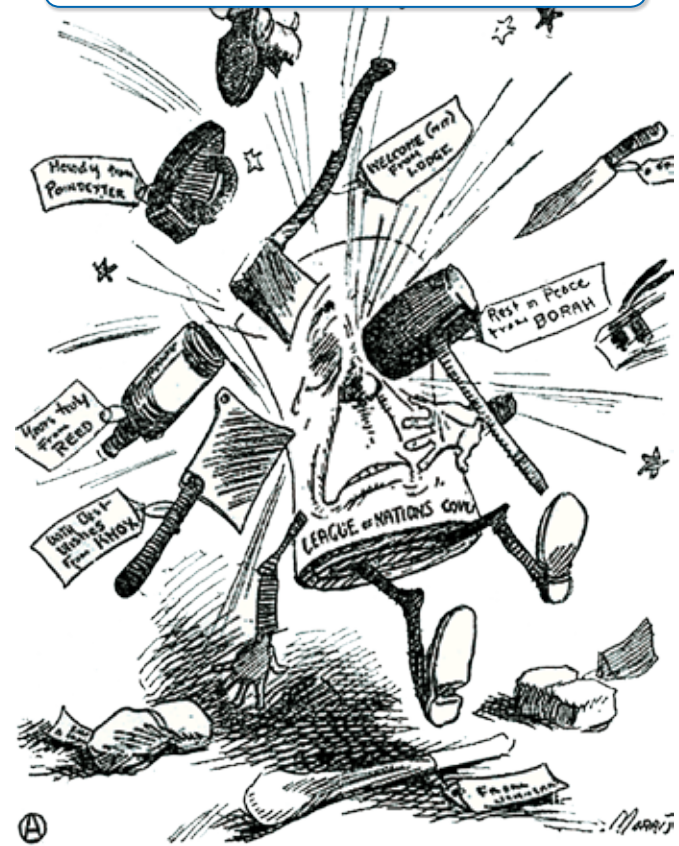
Weaknesses of the League

The League never had the power to achieve its aim of preventing major wars. It could order parties in a conflict to negotiate in the Assembly, where aggressors could be

warned. If that failed, the League could take steps such as ordering a trade embargo to hurt the aggressor nation's economy. The League could threaten military action against an aggressor. But it had no military force of its own and could not compel its members to provide forces. In any case, under the League's rules, any decision of the Council or Assembly had to be unanimous. So any country could prevent the League taking action to solve a crisis.

A further major weakness was that some important nations were not League members. The US Congress refused to endorse the Treaty of Versailles so the United States did not join the League. Germany was not allowed to join until 1926 and Russia did not join until 1934. Germany and Japan both left in 1933 and Italy quit in 1937. Despite its failure, the League was an important first attempt to design a world organisation to prevent war.

Source 4 A political cartoon about The League of Nations from *Literary Digest* at the time, titled 'Can it survive?'

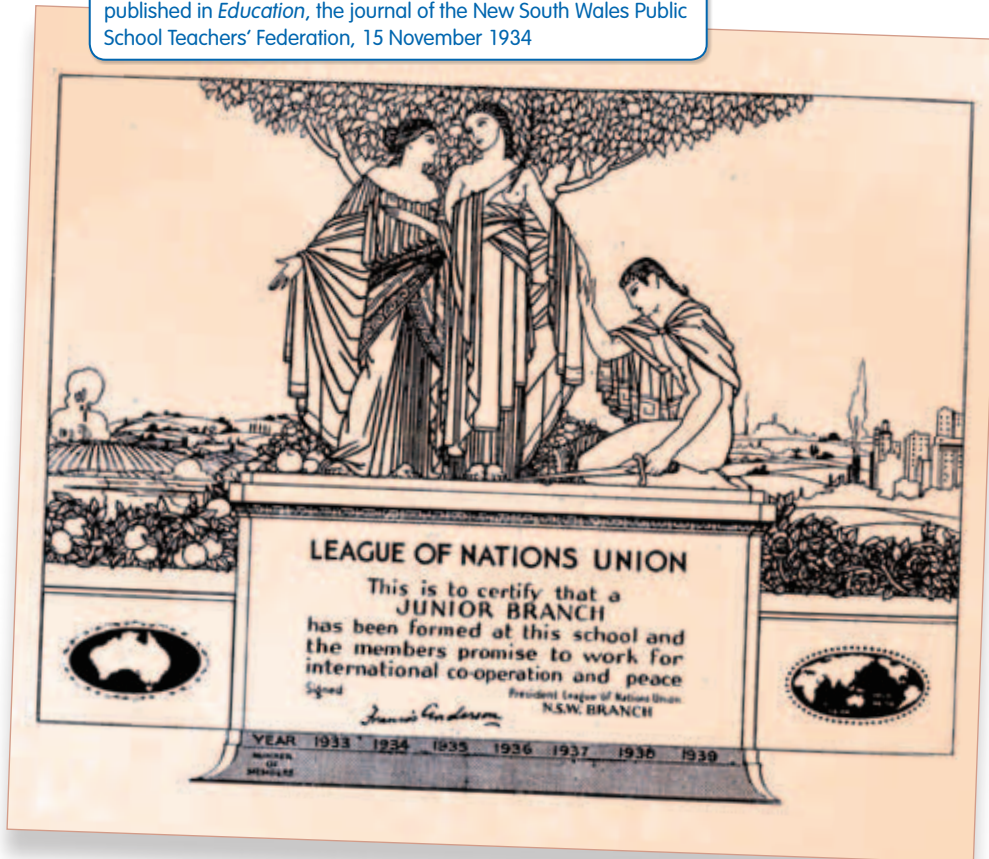


Faith in the League of Nations

After the great suffering caused by World War I, there was worldwide public support for the idealistic aims of the League. A League of Nations Union was formed to encourage people to support those aims and to counter the previously held belief that war was glorious. The League of Nations Union had branches in many countries including Australia where its members included politicians from the major political parties. With such

Source 5

A League of Nations Union Junior Branch certificate, published in *Education*, the journal of the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Federation, 15 November 1934



support, the organisation was able to have League of Nations ceremonies and ideas introduced into public schools and junior branches formed in those schools. A special League of Nations Day was first observed in Australian schools in 1930. Such activities encouraged great hope that there would never be another world war.

Allies Britain, France and the other states on the winning side in World War I

armistice agreement to end fighting
mandate commission to act on behalf of the League of Nations to govern a people considered not ready to govern themselves

plebiscite direct vote in which electors give their opinion on an issue

reparations payments as compensation for damage caused



Jacaranda World History Atlas

Post-world war peace
pp. 190–1

Activities



Student workbook
1.1

CHRONOLOGY, TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- What do the following terms mean:
 - reparations
 - plebiscite
 - mandate?

EXPLANATION AND COMMUNICATION

- Name the four treaties between the Allies and the defeated Central Powers.
- Which countries were the Permanent Members of the Council of the League of Nations?

ANALYSIS AND USE OF SOURCES

- How does **Source 1** help you to understand why there was strong support for a harsh treaty with Germany?
- Using **Source 2**, explain which European territories were lost by:
 - Germany
 - Austria–Hungary
 - The USSR (the former Russian Empire).
- Using the information in this spread and **Source 3**:
 - Describe the main aim of the League of Nations.
 - Outline three reasons why the League of Nations had little real power to prevent wars.
- Look closely at **Source 4**.
 - Describe the way the League of Nations is depicted in this cartoon.
 - Explain the message of the cartoon.

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH

- The three leaders who had the most influence on the peace treaties were US President Woodrow Wilson, French Premier Georges Clemenceau and British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. In small groups:
 - use the internet and other resources to find out the aims of each of these leaders at the Paris Peace Conference and the extent to which the Treaty of Versailles reflected these aims
 - conduct a roleplay of a discussion between these three leaders in which each student represents the perspective of one of them.

PERSPECTIVES AND INTERPRETATIONS

- Supporters of the Treaty of Versailles have argued that it was less harsh than the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which Germany imposed on the Russians when they withdrew from the war. Do you think this fact justified a harsh treaty and how fair and realistic do you think it was to expect Germany to pay huge compensation?
- Imagine that you are a school student in 1934. Your school has been awarded the certificate (see **Source 5**) for forming a junior branch of the League of Nations Union. You have been asked to give a short speech explaining why you and your fellow students are proud to be members and why your generation supports the work of the League of Nations for world peace. Write the speech you would give.