

World War I and the Russian Revolution

THE STORY MATTERS...

On June 28, 1914, an assassination in the Balkans created an international crisis, igniting a European powder keg created by nationalism, massive military buildups, complex alliances, and imperial rivalries. By August, Europe was at war. The widespread use of trench warfare on the Western Front in France created a destructive stalemate that lasted four years. The introduction of new weapons, including heavy artillery, tanks, machine guns, and poison gas, produced casualty levels that dwarfed those of previous wars.

Lesson 27-4

World War I Ends

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

psychological cooperation

Content Vocabulary

armistice mandate reparation

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why do politics often lead to war?
- How can technology impact war?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Governments, troops, and civilians were weary as World War I continued through 1917. Shortly after the United States entered the war, Germany made its final military gamble on the Western Front and lost. The war finally ended on November 11, 1918. New nations were formed, and a League of Nations was created to resolve future international disputes.

The Last Year of the War

GUIDING QUESTION *How did World War I come to an end?*

The year 1917 was not a good one for the Allies. Allied offensives on the Western Front had been badly defeated. The Russian Revolution, which began in November 1917, led to Russia's withdrawal from the war a few months later. On the positive side, however, the entry of the United States into the war in 1917 gave the Allies a much-needed psychological boost. The United States also provided fresh troops and supplies.

For Germany, the withdrawal of the Russians offered new hope for a successful end to the war. Germany was then free to concentrate entirely on the Western Front. Erich Ludendorff, who guided German military operations, decided to make one final military gamble – a grand offensive in the west.

The German attack was launched in March 1918. By April German troops were within about 50 miles (80 km) of Paris. However, the German advance was stopped at the Second Battle of the Marne on July 18. French, Moroccan, and American troops (140,000 fresh American troops had just arrived), supported by hundreds of tanks, pushed the

Germans back over the Marne. Ludendorff's gamble had failed.

With more than a million American troops pouring into France, Allied forces began an advance toward Germany. On September 29, 1918, General Ludendorff told German leaders that the war was lost. He demanded that the government ask for peace at once.

Collapse and Armistice

German officials soon found that the Allies were unwilling to make peace with the autocratic imperial government of Germany. Reforms for a liberal government came too late for the tired, angry German people.

On November 3, 1918, sailors in the northern German town of Kiel mutinied. Within days, councils of workers and soldiers formed throughout northern Germany and took over civilian and military offices. Emperor William II gave in to public pressure and left the country on November 9. After his departure, the Social Democrats under Friedrich Ebert announced the creation of a democratic republic. Two days later, on November 11, 1918, the new German government signed an armistice to end the fighting.

Revolutionary Forces

The war was over, but the revolutionary forces that had been set in motion in Germany were not yet exhausted. A group of radical socialists, unhappy with the Social Democrats' moderate policies, formed the German Communist Party in December 1918. A month later, the Communists tried to seize power in Berlin.

The new Social Democratic government, backed by regular army troops, crushed the rebels and murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (LEEP • KNEHKT), leaders of the German Communists. A similar attempt at Communist revolution in the city of Munich, in southern Germany, was also crushed. The new German republic had been saved. The attempt at revolution, however, left the German middle class with a deep fear of communism.

Austria-Hungary also experienced disintegration and revolution. As the empire grew war weary, ethnic groups increasingly sought to achieve their independence. By the

time World War I ended, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had ceased to exist. The empire was replaced by the independent republics of Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, along with the large monarchical state called Yugoslavia.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing What happened in Germany after its military defeat?

The Peace Settlements

GUIDING QUESTION *How was a final settlement of World War I established?*

In January 1919, representatives of 27 victorious Allied nations met in Paris to make a final settlement of World War I. Over a period of years, the reasons for fighting World War I had changed dramatically. When European nations went to war in 1914, they sought territorial gains. By the beginning of 1918, however, they also were expressing more idealistic reasons for the war.

Wilson's Proposals

No one expressed these idealistic reasons for war better than the president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. Even before the end of the war, Wilson outlined “Fourteen Points” to the U. S. Congress—his basis for a peace settlement that he believed justified the enormous military struggle being waged.

Wilson’s proposals for a truly just and lasting peace included reaching the peace agreements openly rather than through secret diplomacy. His proposals also included reducing armaments (military forces or weapons) and ensuring self-determination (the right of each people to have their own nation).

Wilson portrayed World War I as a people’s war against “absolutism and militarism.” These two enemies of liberty, he argued, could be eliminated only by creating democratic governments and a “general association of nations.” This association would guarantee “political independence and territorial integrity” to all states.

Wilson became the spokesperson for a new world order based on democracy and international cooperation. When he arrived in Europe for the peace conference, Wilson was cheered enthusiastically by many Europeans. President Wilson soon found, however, that more practical motives guided other states.

The Paris Peace Conference

Delegates met in Paris in early 1919 to determine the peace settlement. Complications soon arose at the Paris Peace Conference. For one thing, secret agreements that had been made before the war had raised the hopes of European nations for territorial gains. These hopes, however, conflicted with the principle of self-determination put forth by Wilson.

National interests also complicated the deliberations of the Paris Peace Conference. David Lloyd George, prime minister of Great Britain, had won a decisive victory in

elections in December 1918. His platform was simple: make the Germans pay for this dreadful war.

France’s approach to peace was chiefly guided by its desire for national security. To Georges Clemenceau (KLEH • muhn • SOH), the premier of France, the French people had suffered the most from German aggression. The French desired security against future German attacks. Clemenceau wanted Germany stripped of all weapons, vast German payments—reparations—to cover the costs of the war, and a separate Rhineland as a buffer state between France and Germany.

The most important decisions at the Paris Peace Conference were made by Wilson, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George, acting on behalf of the United States, France, and Great Britain (who were called the Big Three). Germany was not invited to attend, and Russia could not be present because of its civil war.

In view of the conflicting demands that arose at the Paris Peace Conference, it was no surprise that the Big Three quarreled. Wilson wanted to create a world organization, the League of Nations, to prevent future wars. Clemenceau and Lloyd George wanted to punish Germany. In the end, only compromise made it possible to achieve a peace settlement.

Wilson’s wish for the creation of an international peacekeeping organization to be the first order of business was granted. On January 25, 1919, the conference accepted the idea of a League of Nations. In return, Wilson agreed to make compromises on territorial arrangements among the countries. He did so because he believed that the League of Nations could later fix any unfair settlements.

Clemenceau also compromised to obtain some guarantees for French security. He gave up France’s wish for a separate Rhineland and instead accepted a defensive alliance with Great Britain and the United States. However, the U.S. Senate refused to ratify this agreement, which weakened the Versailles peace settlement.

The Treaty of Versailles

The final peace settlement of Paris consisted of five separate treaties with the defeated nations of Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The Treaty of Versailles with Germany was by far the most important.

The Germans considered it a harsh peace. They were especially unhappy with Article 231, the so-called War Guilt Clause, which declared that Germany (and Austria) were responsible for starting the war. The treaty ordered Germany to pay reparations (financial compensation) for all damages that the Allied governments and their people had sustained as a result of the war.

The military and territorial provisions of the Treaty of Versailles also angered the Germans. Germany had to reduce its army to 100,000 men, cut back its navy, and eliminate its air force. Alsace and Lorraine, taken by the Germans from France in 1871, were returned. Sections of eastern Germany were awarded to a new Polish state.

German land along the Rhine River became a demilitarized zone, stripped of all weapons and fortifications. This, it was hoped, would serve as a barrier to any future German moves against France. Although outraged by the “dictated peace,” Germany accepted the treaty.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

Treaty of Versailles

“The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and 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 imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.”

– Article 231 of the *Treaty of Versailles*, 1919

ANALYZING

Why do you think the Germans found Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles so objectionable?

The Legacies of the War

The war, the Treaty of Versailles, and the separate peace treaties made with the other Central Powers redrew the map of eastern Europe. Many of these changes had already taken place at the end of the war. The German and Russian empires lost considerable territory in eastern Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Empire disappeared.

New nation-states emerged from the lands of these three empires: Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary. New territorial arrangements were also made in the Balkans. Romania acquired additional lands. Serbia formed the nucleus of a new state, called Yugoslavia, which combined Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

The principle of self-determination supposedly guided the Paris Peace Conference. However, the mixtures of peoples in eastern Europe made it impossible to draw boundaries along strict ethnic lines. As a result of compromises, almost every eastern European state was left with ethnic minorities: Germans in Poland; Hungarians,

Poles, and Germans in Czechoslovakia; Hungarians in Romania; and Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Albanians in Yugoslavia. The problem of ethnic minorities within nations would lead to many conflicts later.

Yet another centuries-old empire –the Ottoman Empire –was broken up by the peace settlement. To gain Arab support against the Ottoman Turks during the war, the Western Allies had promised to recognize the independence of Arab states in the Ottoman Empire. Once World War I was over, however, the Western nations changed their minds. France controlled the territory of Syria, and Britain controlled the territories of Iraq and Palestine.

These acquisitions were officially called mandates. Woodrow Wilson opposed the outright annexation of colonial territories by the Allies. As a result, in the mandate system, a nation officially governed a territory on a temporary basis as a mandate on behalf of the League of Nations, but did not own the territory.

World War I shattered the liberal, rational society that had existed in Europe at that time. The deaths of nearly 10 million people, as well as the incredible destruction caused by the war, undermined the whole idea of progress. Entire populations had participated in a devastating slaughter.

World War I was a total war – one that involved a complete mobilization of resources and people. As a result, the power of governments over the lives of their citizens increased. Freedom of the press and speech were limited in the name of national security. World War I made the practice of strong central authority a way of life.

The turmoil created by the war also seemed to open the door to even greater insecurity. Revolutions broke up old empires and created new states, which led to new problems. The hope that Europe and the rest of the world would return to normalcy was soon dashed.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining What did Wilson hope to accomplish by creating the League of Nations?

Vocabulary

armistice

a truce or an agreement to end fighting

mandate

a territory temporarily governed by another country on behalf of the League of Nations

reparation

a payment made to the victor by the vanquished to cover the costs of war