

Why did Germany lose the War?

In August 1918 General Ludendorff told the Kaiser that the War was lost. Yet in a way Germany didn't lose the War. The German army was not defeated, in fact it marched back to Germany with its weapons in 1918. There had been no fighting in Germany itself during the War. But in 1918 Germany asked for the fighting to stop and for a peace treaty to be negotiated. This is called an armistice. It happened on 11th November 1918 and is why we still have Remembrance Day in November.

The German army marching home in 1918



Once the Schlieffen Plan had failed, in 1914, Germany was fighting a war on two fronts and this proved too much for German resources. Germany simply could not keep the war effort going. Germany had gained land from Russia in early 1918 at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; and had made advances against the Allies in France in 1918. But it couldn't last. The British naval blockade of German ports stopped food coming into the country. There was real starvation in Germany and the politicians were afraid of a revolution. By the summer of 1918, superior allied numbers and the use of more modern weapons, such as tanks, were beginning to push the Germans back.

So in November 1918 an armistice was arranged and the fighting stopped. French soldiers went into Germany and stayed there until the peace treaty was signed in 1919.

- 13 Why was 1917 a year of change in the First World War?
- 14 Explain why Germany asked for an armistice in 1918.

How did the War affect each country?

Britain

At first there was a feeling of victory and of punishing Germany for the horror of the War. But this did not last. People soon began to consider if the war had been worthwhile. The politicians had promised this would be 'the war to end all wars' and said that Britain afterwards would be 'a land fit for heroes.' Yet Britain was bankrupted by the War and was heavily in debt to the USA. The Government began to disarm. This means to reduce the armed forces. Ships were broken up for scrap. Aeroplanes were sold off to flying clubs, and the army was greatly reduced. This meant many men were now looking for

jobs. By the mid 1920s, Britain's armed forces were very weak indeed. But it did not seem to matter. Nobody wanted another war and nobody thought there would be one. In 1919 the League of Nations had been formed and people thought this would prevent future wars. And people now had more say. In 1918 many more men, and for the first time women, were allowed to vote. This gave ordinary people more sense of involvement and control. It also helped the growth of the Labour Party, which some people thought would be more pacifist.

Most important of all, the ruling class in Britain had been personally affected by the

war. Every senior politician in the years just after the war had lost a son or a nephew in the fighting. Thirty years later, during the 1951 General Election, the two main parties, Conservative and Labour, were led by men who had seen active service during the First World War.

France

France had suffered even more than Britain; most of the fighting had been inside France.

R

French losses in the war.

1,400,000	soldiers killed
2,500,000	soldiers wounded
23,000	factories destroyed
5,600km	of railway line wrecked
300,000	houses destroyed
2,000,000	people forced to flee from their homes
90%	of the coal and iron industries destroyed
£5,400	million spent on defence.

First World War cemetery at La Targette, France



Damage done to the French town of Albert, which was close to the front line for four years

How would you feel if so much damage had been done to your country in a war? What would you want to do to the enemy once it had been defeated? Not surprisingly, after the War the French wanted to punish Germany for the War and the French Government made heavy claims on Germany at the Treaty of Versailles (see Chapter 3). The French also wanted to weaken Germany in order to protect France from any future attack.

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We are always invaded, we are always the ones to suffer. Fifteen invasions in less than six centuries give us the right to insist upon a victor's treaty that will offer us something more realistic than temporary solutions and uncertain hopes.

A French politician speaking in 1919.

Later the French Government built a large and expensive system of forts along the border with Germany. This was called the Maginot Line.

Germany

A new liberal government was set up in 1919, called the Weimar Government. There were lots of unemployed soldiers following the War, and food was still scarce. In 1919 there was a revolution in the German capital, Berlin, led by the Communists. This was put down by the Government. The Weimar Government kept control but there were often riots, attempted revolutions and unrest, especially in 1921, 1923 and 1930-33. But the most important effect of the War upon Germany was the way it affected how people thought. Whereas in Britain people now wished to avoid war, in Germany the people felt cheated and many wanted revenge for the way Germany had been treated in the peace treaty (see Chapter 3). This was one of the reasons why the Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler, grew in popularity during the 1930s.

Italy

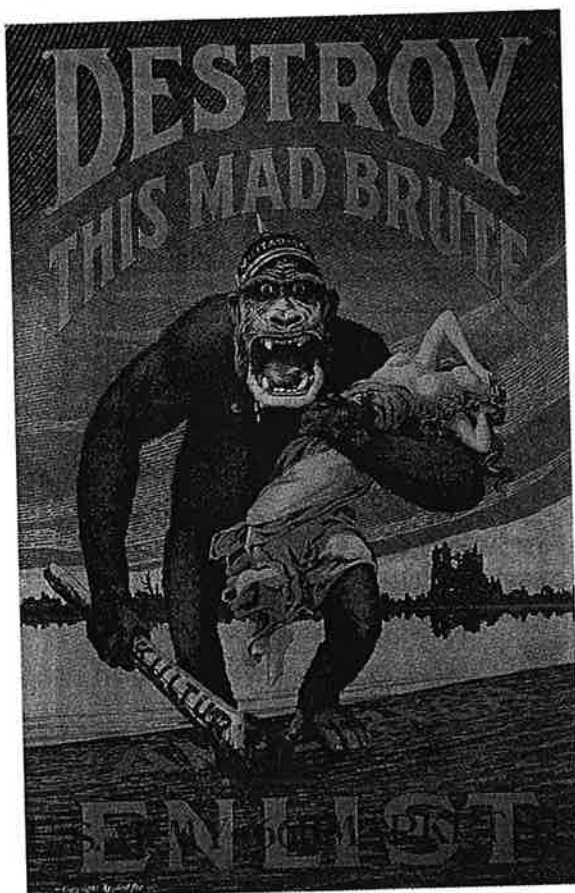
Italy had changed sides during the War. Italy ended up on the winning side, but was not rewarded in the Treaty of Versailles, although she became a member of the League of Nations. This, together with unemployment and a fear of Communism, led to Mussolini coming to power in Italy. Mussolini had seen some military service during the War, and wished to make Italy a great power with an Empire. As we shall see, this caused problems later (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Russia

In many ways Russia was affected more than any other country. From October 1917 Russia was a Communist country and became known as the USSR. The Communists ended the war in early 1918, when they signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. This broke the alliance with Britain and France, who found it difficult to forgive Russia. They sent soldiers to Russia to fight against the Communists and try to put the Tsar back

on to the throne. They did not allow Russia to join the League of Nations. The Communists never forgave them. So, the main effect on future international relations was the great distrust between the USSR and the British and French. This would surface many times in the 50 years after the end of the War.

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An American recruitment poster accusing the Germans of inhuman brutality

The United States of America

The USA did not join the fighting until 1917, but had been supplying the allies before this. Most Americans did not want their country involved in any European war. They believed that the loss of American lives in the War was a waste. Joining in the fighting had meant a change in US foreign policy. After the War the USA

wished to go back to its policy of isolation. This means keeping out of European affairs. For this reason the USA refused to join the League of Nations. But it was not entirely successful. Britain and France owed the USA billions of dollars. So, whether the Americans wanted it or not, the USA did have an interest in Europe. This became very real in 1925, when the

USA had to come to the aid of Germany. The USA made loans to Germany so that Germany could pay reparations to Britain and France, who could then pay off their debts to the USA. So after the War the USA had more influence over the main European countries than before, even though it did not really want to get involved.

How did the First World War affect international relations?

- a The League of Nations Organisation was formed. It was an international organisation which aimed to keep the peace by allowing countries to talk and sort out their problems without fighting (see Chapter 4).
 - b There were changes to the balance of power. In Europe the Austrian Empire was broken up and Germany was weakened. Many new countries were created or gained their independence. For example, Poland and Hungary became independent countries and Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were created. Russia had lost land at Brest-Litovsk and was devastated by years of war and revolution. Russia was not invited to become a member of the League of Nations.
 - c In the Middle East, the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire was broken up. The Turks had fought with Germany and paid the price for this in 1919. Much of the Turkish Empire was now controlled by Britain and France. For example, Palestine was looked after by Britain. On a world wide scale, the power of Britain was shown to be declining. Britain had relied very heavily on its Empire for troops, and was heavily in debt to the USA by the end of the War. The USA, on the other hand, was now a great power, even though it seemed reluctant to accept that responsibility.
 - d The War altered the alliance system in Europe. The Triple alliance of Austria, Germany, and Italy was broken. The Treaty of Versailles would prevent any future alliance between Austria and Germany (see Chapter 3). The Triple Entente was also broken. Russia had left this alliance in 1917. Britain and France had remained allies throughout the War. But now that the War was over, Britain became concerned at the power held by France.
 - e The USA had shown that it was prepared to join in European affairs if the situation demanded it. The USA had helped the allies to win the War and was to play an important part in the negotiations of the peace treaties. But the USA then decided to follow its previous policy of isolationism and refused to join the League of Nations (see Chapter 4).
- 15 Describe the effects of the First World War on Germany and Italy.
- 16 What were the immediate effects of the First World War on international relations?
- 17 Source T shows how the American government tried to get men to join the army in 1917. After the War, the USA returned to 'isolation' from European affairs. Explain why this change came about.