

1

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

The legacies of the First World War

During the First World War, Britain and Germany were bitter enemies. British wartime propaganda even went as far as depicting German soldiers eating babies in Belgium. When the war ended in 1918, antagonism against German militarism still remained powerful among the British public and in the popular press.

The British reaction to victory

Though Britain emerged victorious from the ‘Great War’, the economic costs had been crippling. The world export trade, on which British prosperity depended, collapsed. The British government was also saddled with a glut of war debts. Unemployment was rising in the industrial regions, while rural areas were suffering from a severe fall in agricultural prices.

In such a gloomy atmosphere, the popular press cry of ‘Make Germany pay’ accurately reflected British public opinion. Public demands for retribution against Germany were also voiced in France, Italy and Belgium. It was very difficult to imagine that Germany would be treated leniently when the leading powers assembled in Versailles in the early months of 1919 to hammer out a peace settlement.

The German reaction to defeat

In Germany, meanwhile, there was very little appreciation of the scale of the German military debacle. Most of the population believed that because the German government had signed an armistice at the end of the war, this entitled Germany to a lenient peace settlement. Many ex-soldiers, egged on by the nationalist right, put out a myth that the German army had not been defeated in battle by the superior military prowess of its opponents, but had been ‘stabbed in the back’ by socialists and liberals, who had undermined the war effort. It was possible to believe in this myth because the war had not been fought on German soil, and Germany had not been invaded or occupied by enemy troops.

The major aims of British foreign policy after the war

The major aim of British foreign policy in the aftermath of the First World War was to promote European co-operation. In July 1921, Winston Churchill, then colonial secretary, claimed the chief aim of British foreign policy was the

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

‘appeasement of the fearful hatreds and antagonisms which exist in Europe’. However, the British government realised that Europe would be secure only when Germany became fully reconciled to its new diminished role in the new international order. As a result, foreign-policy makers thought that Britain should adopt a conciliatory middle position in post-war European affairs, attempting to arbitrate between the powerful French desire to obtain security against a possible German military revival and the German desire to be treated with fairness.

A large number of leading economic experts in Britain, most notably John Maynard Keynes, the brilliant young Cambridge economist, argued that German economic revival was extremely important to the recovery of Britain’s export trade in Europe, as Germany had been the largest European market for British goods before the First World War.

The Paris peace conference

The British attitude towards the ‘German problem’ at the Paris peace conference

The British delegation at the Paris peace conference, led by David Lloyd George, the prime minister, took a balanced view of the ‘German problem’. Lloyd George did want military restrictions to be placed on German armed forces and financial compensation to be levied against Germany to defray the costs of the war. He did not, though, favour a totally punitive and vindictive territorial and financial settlement. In fact, he believed a vengeful peace settlement, which left the German economy crippled, would only encourage the emergence of a German government hell bent on revenge, thereby opening up the very real prospect of a Second World War taking place.

There were several reasons why Britain could afford to adopt a lenient attitude towards Germany. The defeat of Germany had achieved Britain’s chief wartime objective, namely the destruction of German military power. More importantly, the German threat to Britain’s mastery of the seas had ended. Germany no longer posed a major threat to the sea lanes and the trade of the British empire. In such circumstances, the British government wanted to retreat from direct involvement in sorting out difficult problems on the European continent.

The French desire for security

The vexed issue of German military power, viewed as the chief cause of the First World War, became the dominant issue in the deliberations of the peacemakers. The French delegation, led by Georges Clemenceau, the French prime minister, laid emphasis on how close Germany had come to victory on the battlefield and suggested that Germany had the economic potential to engineer a military revival at a future date. To prevent this, the French wanted watertight restrictions on the German armed forces, combined with substantial financial compensation for the extensive devastation caused by the German armed forces on French territory.

The demand for national self-determination

The smaller states of eastern Europe demanded national self-determination. To placate these demands, the Paris peace settlement created two new states, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, composed of a wide variety of ethnic groups, and restored the independence of Poland for the first time in over 150 years. These changes were made possible by means of the division of the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires and by allocating land from the former German empire. Eastern Europe, however, became even more unstable and ethnically divided than ever before. As Lloyd George commented: 'I cannot imagine any greater cause of future war than that the German people, who have proved themselves one of the most powerful and vigorous races in the world, should be surrounded by a number of small states, many of them consisting of peoples who have never previously set up a stable government for themselves'. The British government was very firmly opposed to any commitment to uphold the security of the newly created small states of eastern Europe. It was left to France (a nation which could not defend them) to support these small states by signing a number of diplomatic pacts of mutual assistance with Poland (1921), Czechoslovakia (1924), Romania (1926) and Yugoslavia (1927).

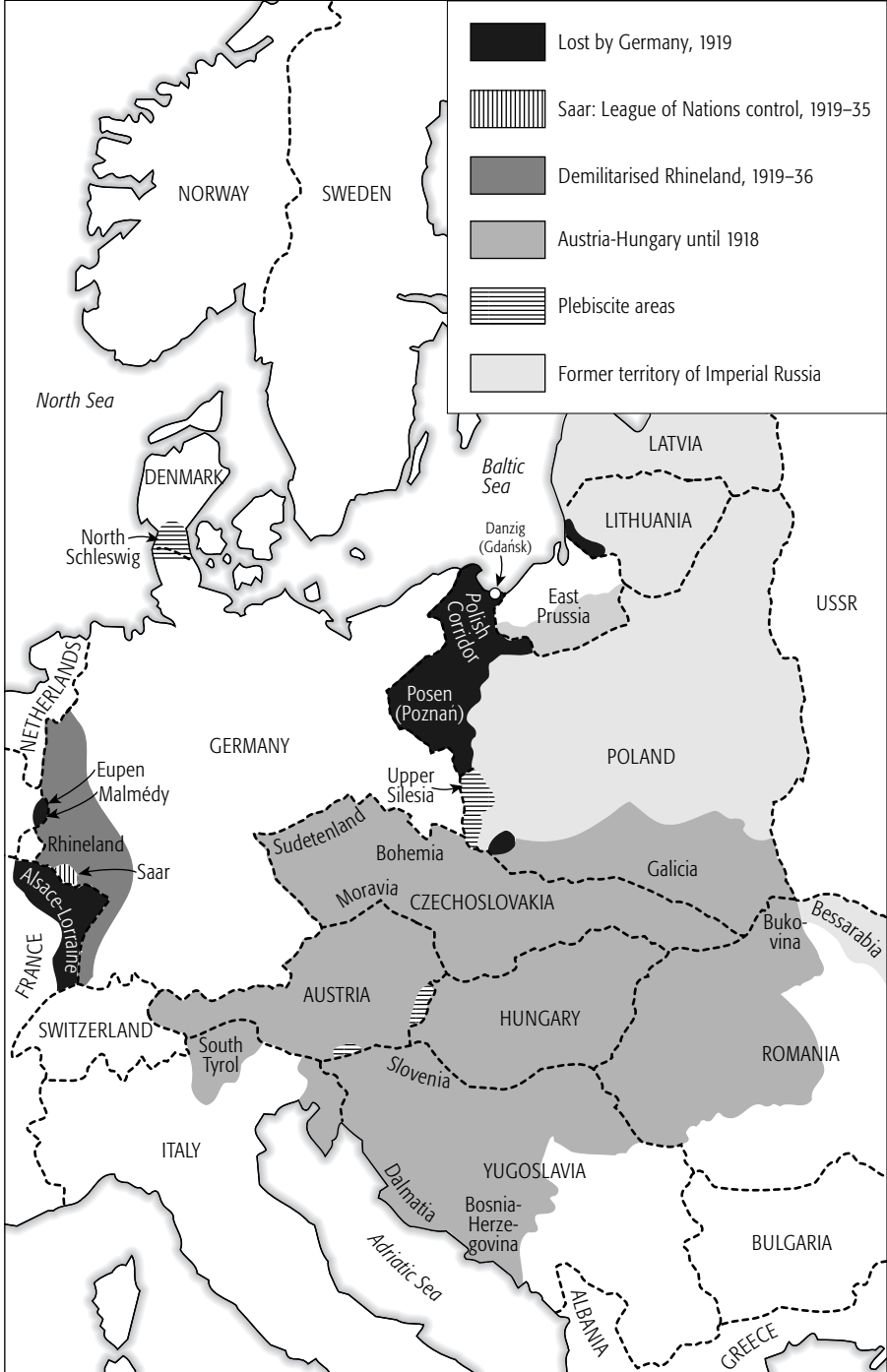
A further doubt over the security of eastern Europe revolved around the communist Soviet Union (modern-day Russia). Russia had been a close ally of France before 1914, but the Soviet Union remained in political and diplomatic isolation for most of the inter-war period. There was great uncertainty about what the foreign-policy aims of the new communist regime would be. Many British policy makers feared a spread of communist ideas in Europe, which would threaten British trading interests and the stability of eastern Europe.

One of the major problems with the peace settlement was its failure to create a viable balance of power in eastern Europe. As a result, if Germany could regain its military and economic strength, it was in a much stronger position to pose a potent threat to eastern Europe than it had been in before 1914. In such circumstances, it was quite clear that German nationalists looked to eastern Europe as an arena for future German expansion. However, the determined French effort to point out the consequences of a possible German revival was not listened to very seriously by either the British or the US government.

The Treaty of Versailles

The Treaty of Versailles, agreed after six months of discussion, was designed to solve the 'German problem' once and for all. The German delegation, under protest, signed the treaty on 28 June 1919. Under the terms of Versailles, the German army, previously the strongest and most well equipped in Europe, was reduced to a mere 100,000 troops, with conscription prohibited. The German navy, the second largest in Europe before 1914, was slimmed down to a coastal defence force, composed of 36 vessels. In addition, the German armed forces were not allowed to possess tanks, submarines, battleships or aircraft.

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33



Europe after the Paris peace settlement, 1919.

Germany also lost 13 per cent of its former national territory under the terms of the treaty. In western Europe, Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, the Rhineland was designated a demilitarised zone and the Saar coalmining region was placed under the control of the newly formed League of Nations. In central Europe, Germany lost the Baltic port of Danzig (modern-day Gdańsk), which was turned into a 'free city', nominally under League of Nations jurisdiction but linked by a customs union to the new independent Polish state, which was also awarded Upper Silesia, a former major German industrial centre. Of all these territorial losses, the most greatly disliked throughout Germany were the loss of Danzig and especially the creation of the so-called 'Polish Corridor', because it separated historic East Prussia, the birthplace of German nationalism, from the remainder of German territory.

To further restrict the spread of German nationalism, any union between Austria and Germany was strictly forbidden even though many economic experts – and nationalists – in both countries agreed that the only viable way for a severely weakened Austria to prosper in the post-war world was through its incorporation within Germany. Outside Europe, every former German colony was confiscated and placed under the supervisory 'mandate' of Britain, France or Italy. On the financial side, all German foreign assets were seized. Even worse, the German government was required to pay compensation (known as reparations) to the victorious Allies for the damage, death and disability caused by the war. The final figure (agreed in 1921) was put at the then enormous figure of £6.6 billion (at 1919 values). This was to be paid in annual instalments by the German government until 1983. Under Article 231 (dubbed 'the war guilt clause'), Germany was obliged to accept full responsibility for starting the First World War. Finally, the Allies insisted that Germany uphold a democratic constitution and free elections.

Not surprisingly, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were greeted with utter disbelief and anger throughout Germany. The German leaders who signed the so-called 'slave treaty' were branded by nationalists as 'the criminals of 1919'. It is, of course, quite legitimate to point out that the loss of 13 per cent of the nation's territory was less harsh than the loss the French government had suffered at the Congress of Vienna in 1814–15, which had followed the French defeat in the Napoleonic Wars. It is also worth adding that the territorial losses inflicted on Germany were much less punitive than those Germany itself imposed on Russia under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918).

Even the compensation demanded of Germany in the form of reparations payments was affordable, if the Germans had shown any willingness to pay them. It can even be suggested that reparations were quite a legitimate demand. After all, most German territory and industrial machinery lay undamaged, while most of the productive areas of France had suffered severe damage or destruction in the unprovoked German assault on that nation at the outset of the conflict.

However, this sober analysis of the Treaty of Versailles is of less significance than the psychological impact of the treaty on the German people. Versailles

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

became the most hated word in Germany after 1919. The issue of whether the nation had the capacity to pay reparations (which it did) was hardly ever discussed in a rational manner. In fact, the strong reaction against Versailles both foretold the future and explained a current reality. The great majority of Germans refused to accept the result of the First World War. As a consequence, the Treaty of Versailles was not a final settlement of that conflict. At some future date, a German government, of a nationalist tinge, would definitely seek to revise the treaty. It is, indeed, extremely unlikely that the German government and people would ever have accepted any peace treaty that was put before them by the Allies, except the most lenient one imaginable.

The real problem with the Treaty of Versailles was twofold. Firstly, it was not an effective diplomatic agreement, because its enforcement relied heavily on continuing German compliance, which was not guaranteed. Secondly, it was not a sufficiently secure deterrent against a German military revival. In the absence of any real machinery and willingness to enforce its terms, the treaty was just a piece of paper, capable of being challenged and revised by Germany.

The League of Nations

The Paris peace conference also gave birth to the League of Nations, based in Geneva, which was designed to establish a completely new framework for conducting relations between nations. The League had the power (on paper) to impose economic sanctions and to threaten an invading power with the prospect of all League members acting collectively (known as collective security) to remove the aggressor by military force. The burden of maintaining peace in the world was to be the shared responsibility of all nations.

There was great initial faith among the British public in the ability of the League to prevent a future war. It was not fully appreciated that the League could act as an effective peacekeeper only if it retained the support of the majority of world powers.

The Allies' different approaches to the Treaty of Versailles

In the early 1920s, the French government did attempt to uphold the Treaty of Versailles. However, the British government showed a willingness to revise it in Germany's favour. Indeed, the powerful German belief in the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles was soon generally accepted by British policy makers. The US Senate further strengthened the German case for revision by refusing to ratify the treaty because of its alleged harshness.

In fact, the more energetically the French government attempted to enforce the terms of the treaty, the less support it received from the British. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the British government became concerned that France, now the most dominant military power in Europe, might attempt to bully Germany. As a result, it was unwilling to underwrite French military power in Europe and refused to renew its wartime alliance with France. The Foreign Office quite optimistically predicted (in 1926) that a German military revival was extremely unlikely, at least until the 1960s or 1970s. The key aim of British policy

after the First World War was to avoid encouraging a spirit of revenge to develop in Germany, but instead to offer the hand of friendship towards a former defeated enemy.

The German desire to revise Versailles

It was, in fact, widely accepted in Britain that the German government would strive to revise the Treaty of Versailles and, provided legitimate German grievances were being appeased, the British government would not oppose such revision. Hence, the British policy of appeasing German grievances was already a factor in British policy on the 'German problem' in the 1920s. Lloyd George believed that appeasement was a vital antidote to French antagonism towards Germany. Yet this type of appeasement was designed to persuade the German government to accept its new diminished military position in Europe. It was also undertaken from a position of military strength.

The reparations problem

The first major issue of dispute between the Allies and Germany over the Treaty of Versailles was the payment of financial compensation (reparations). Germany had emerged from the war with a new democratic government (which was not popular among large sections of the population) and quite staggering problems. The German Weimar Republic was born in a climate of defeat, humiliation and disorder. Instability, with no single party commanding a majority in parliament (the Reichstag), was a permanent feature of political life. There was bitter fighting between left-wing and right-wing groups out on the streets. To make matters worse, Germany was beset by deep economic problems. Most Germans were inclined to blame these on the demands made by the Allies for reparations. From 1918 to 1923, the German mark fell dramatically in value in relation to the other major currencies (the pound, the dollar and the franc), pushing inflation (the price of goods) ever upwards. In 1923, for example, one pre-1914 gold mark was worth 2,500 marks. The German government blamed the 'great inflation' on the demand made by the Allies for the payment of reparations.

The German battle to resist the full payment of reparations became the most dominant and bitter issue in European relations during the 1920s. The French government viewed reparations payments as vital to the recovery of the French economy. The German government, supported by all sides of the political spectrum, was opposed to repayment. A bitter clash between France and Germany over the payment of reparations was inevitable. The British government decided to adopt a middle position in this dispute, but sympathised with, and generally came to support, the German demand for a reduction in payments. The result was constant Anglo-French disharmony over how to deal with Germany. As Lord Curzon, the foreign secretary, put it: 'If the French and ourselves permanently fall out, I see no prospect of the recovery of Europe or the pacification of the world'.

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

On 9 January 1923, the French government, led by Raymond Poincaré, frustrated with the continual default on reparations payments by the German government and ignoring British calls for restraint, decided to occupy the Ruhr in a last desperate attempt to force the German government to pay up. The German government adopted a policy of 'passive resistance' to the occupation.

The Dawes Plan

The occupation of the Ruhr (which lasted for the first nine months of 1923) was a failure but also a turning point in European relations. The whole sorry episode showed that the French government, acting without British support, could not force Germany to pay reparations. At the same time, the German government, fully aware of its current, unfamiliar, military weakness, accepted, albeit reluctantly, that continual non-payment was unlikely to gain a reduction in reparations payments.

In order to find a workable solution, Germany and France agreed to US mediation over the problem. In April 1924, an Allied committee on reparations, chaired by Charles G. Dawes, a leading US banker, examined Germany's ability to meet its payments. The 'Dawes Plan', ratified at the London reparations conference in August 1924, was, in fact, a major act of appeasement towards German grievances over the Treaty of Versailles. The agreement was extremely favourable towards Germany. It offered the German government a very substantial US bank loan to meet its repayments, and further substantial financial aid (in the form of loans) to support the introduction of a new German mark (the Rentenmark), based on land and industrial property. These measures helped to end the era of hyperinflation in Germany. The French government, in a further act of reconciliation, promised not to use military force to get Germany to pay reparations ever again.

The Dawes Plan took the heat out of the reparations issue. Its major flaw, however, was its dependence on US financial support. In fact, the German government agreed to pay the reduced annual repayments of reparations decided under the Dawes Plan only with the help of borrowed money from US banks. In essence, Germany was borrowing from one former enemy (the USA) to pay four other former enemies (France, Britain, Italy and Belgium). As a result, the Dawes Plan provided only a breathing space in the reparations battle, not a permanent solution. The recovery of the German economy was dependent on the continued ability of US banks to provide short-term loans to Germany.

The Locarno treaties

The conciliatory diplomatic stance of the German government during the negotiation of the Dawes Plan was greatly influenced by Gustav Stresemann, the German foreign minister (1923–29). Stresemann believed the best way for Germany to gain concessions from the Allies while Germany remained in a severely weakened militarily position was to adopt a policy of co-operation. The most significant achievement of Stresemann's conciliatory approach to European

relations was the Locarno treaties, signed by Germany, Britain, Belgium, France and Italy in October 1925. These agreements were viewed by the British government as a vital means of easing Franco-German antagonism. Sir Austen Chamberlain, the British foreign secretary, though opposed to signing a formal alliance with France, was prepared to commit Britain to guarantee France and Belgium against possible German aggression in western Europe.

Under the terms of Locarno, Germany accepted the territorial arrangements outlined in the Treaty of Versailles in relation to western Europe, most notably the demilitarisation of the Rhineland and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. In return, the western Allies (France, Britain and Italy) agreed to end their military occupation of the Rhineland (which took place in 1930) and curtailed their inspection of the German armed forces. In response, Germany agreed to join the League of Nations. The three leading signatories of the Locarno treaties – Stresemann, Chamberlain and Aristide Briand (the French foreign minister) – were all subsequently awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their efforts.

To most contemporary observers, the Locarno treaties, which treated Germany as an equal partner in European affairs, laid the basis for a lasting peace in Europe. The acrimonious Franco-German quarrel which had blighted post-war European relations appeared to have been resolved. The new mood of optimism which followed Locarno (dubbed ‘the Locarno honeymoon’) greatly encouraged the signing of the Kellogg–Briand pact of August 1928 (Frank Kellogg was the US secretary of state). Under the Kellogg–Briand pact, 15 nations (including Germany, Britain, France and the USA) renounced war as a legitimate weapon for a nation state (and they had been joined by many more nations by the end of the 1920s).

What were the aims of Stresemann’s foreign policy?

The sudden change in German foreign policy in the mid-1920s from confrontation towards conciliation has been the subject of much discussion among historians. Most of this debate has centred on the aims of German foreign policy under Stresemann. It is certainly true that Stresemann did seek peaceful relations with the victorious Allies and he supported the integration of Germany into the system of security in western Europe laid out in the Locarno treaties. However, the German government gave no promise that it accepted its eastern borders. On the contrary, Stresemann made no secret of his deep hostility towards these territorial settlements. As a result, the Locarno treaties left open the possibility of Germany pursuing claims to territory in eastern Europe at a later date. A further glaring weakness of the Locarno security system was that it completely ignored the Soviet Union, the most powerful country in eastern Europe. As a result, there was no real security system for that region, which was left in a state of uncertainty.

In recent studies, historians have cast doubt over whether Stresemann’s conciliatory diplomacy was genuine at all. In public, Stresemann was a ‘good European’ and a peacekeeper, but in private he remained a staunch German nationalist, who wanted to end reparations, remove all occupied troops from

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

Germany and obtain a revision of the eastern European territorial arrangements set out in the Treaty of Versailles at a more convenient future date.

On the other hand, it must be emphasised that Stresemann believed Germany could revise the Treaty of Versailles by means of peaceful negotiation and skilful diplomacy, not the use of military force. As a result, the death of Stresemann in 1929 was an important turning point for European relations, because his balanced approach to German foreign policy died with him.

The impact of the Great Depression

At the time of Stresemann's death, the system of European security established by Locarno remained intact. Germany still had no large army, navy or air force, the Rhineland was demilitarised and the authority of the League of Nations had not been challenged.

The event which enormously damaged European stability was the Wall Street stock market crash of October 1929 in the USA, which set in motion the greatest world economic crisis of the twentieth century. The world economy had become dependent for its stability, after the trauma of the First World War, on the prosperity of the US economy, especially the US banking sector, which had provided loans to European business. After the Wall Street collapse, US loans to Europe ceased. The result was widespread economic misery. In Britain, there was a financial crisis in 1931, which led to the formation of a 'National' government led by Ramsay MacDonald, the former Labour Party leader. The British government also introduced protective tariffs on foreign goods, thus abandoning its seemingly passionate adherence to free trade. Elsewhere in Europe, agricultural prices fell, trade collapsed, unemployment increased and many banks failed, most notably the Credit-Anstalt bank in Austria.

In the Asian Pacific region there were also severe economic problems. In Japan, unemployment rose, farm prices crashed and exports shrank. During 1930, a political crisis gripped Japan, leading inexorably to the collapse of democracy. In September 1931, the Japanese army occupied Manchuria (a province of China), triggering a major test of the credibility of the League of Nations. The Chinese government asked League members to invoke collective action against Japan's military aggression. A League of Nations commission, headed by the British peer Lord Lytton, was dispatched to Manchuria in order to resolve the dispute. The Lytton commission rebuked the Japanese government, but concluded that as Japanese claims to the region were convincing there was no need for military action or economic sanctions. Accordingly, Japan stayed in Manchuria but soon left the League of Nations. The Manchurian crisis was the first major test of the peacekeeping abilities of the League of Nations, which were shown to be somewhat more ineffective in action than they had appeared in theory.

The most acute effects of the Great Depression were felt in Germany. Between 1924 and 1929, Germany had paid £5 billion in reparations to the western Allies, but had received £9 billion in loans from the USA in return. Once these loans ended, in the months following the US stock market crash, the German economy

descended into a deeply damaging depression. The number of unemployed, which stood at 1.4 million in 1928, soared to 6 million by 1932.

The political fall-out of the Great Depression in Germany proved equally devastating. Democratic government, always a fragile organism, very quickly collapsed. Article 48 of the Weimar constitution allowed the president to suspend parliament and rule under an ‘emergency decree’. From 1930 to 1933, Germany was ruled by the whim of the nationalistic and undemocratic president, Paul von Hindenburg, a popular First World War army hero, who appointed several unpopular right-wing coalitions at a time when there was a quite remarkable surge of support for the extreme right-wing Nazi Party led by Adolf Hitler. This party had grown from relative obscurity in 1928 to become the largest political party in Germany by 1932. On 30 January 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed German chancellor, after Hindenburg had exhausted his supply of other right-wing contenders.

It is very important to recognise the depth of the problems and the strains which the Great Depression placed on democratic governments in the 1930s. The widespread optimism of the Locarno period gave way to the self-preservation of the ‘hungry Thirties’. Most countries abandoned free trade and turned away from schemes of international co-operation in trade and disarmament and towards trying to solve internal social and economic problems. Suddenly, totalitarian regimes, led by dynamic leaders, most notably Hitler, Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and Benito Mussolini in Italy, appeared to offer a way out of the misery of economic depression. The era of peaceful co-operation, ignited by Locarno in the 1920s, had been extinguished by the flood tide of depression even before Hitler came to power.

German foreign policy, 1929–33

It is often argued that Germany’s dynamic and aggressive foreign policy which unfolded during the 1930s was the exclusive work of Adolf Hitler. However, such a view ignores the sharp change which took place in German foreign policy after the death of Stresemann and during the era of the Great Depression. As we have already seen, Stresemann’s foreign policy worked in a peaceful and constructive manner to circumvent German obligations under the Treaty of Versailles. After Stresemann’s death, there was a change in the tone and conduct of German foreign policy, which became much more openly aggressive, less co-operative with the other major European powers and more openly self-interested and unpredictable.

In March 1931, for example, the German government proposed a customs union between Germany and Austria, which was blocked only by very strong Allied pressure. That same year, the German government called for the return of Danzig from Poland (which was rejected) and also announced it would no longer be able to pay the reduced reparations payments outlined in the Young Plan (1929), which had reduced payments even further than the earlier Dawes Plan had done. At the Lausanne conference (1932) the Allies agreed to suspend

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

German reparations payments (which were never resumed). An even more ominous sign of the shape of things to come came in July 1932, when chancellor Franz von Papen gave the go-ahead to an accelerated programme of secret German rearmament. At the first meeting of the World Disarmament Conference in 1932, the German delegation walked out, refusing to return unless they were allowed to develop armed forces of a similar size to those of all the other major European powers. All of these provocative actions, which took place before Hitler came to power, show that German foreign policy was already moving in the direction of rapid rearmament to regain former military strength, and was already set firmly on a course to revise the Treaty of Versailles by unilateral action.

Document case study

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

1.1 Reparations against Germany: the view of Winston Churchill

The economic clauses of the treaty [of Versailles] were malignant and silly to an extent that made them obviously futile. Germany was condemned to pay reparations on a fabulous scale. These dictates gave expression to the anger of the victors, and to the failure of their peoples to understand that no defeated nation or community can ever pay tribute [compensation] on a scale which would meet the cost of a modern war . . . No one in great authority had the wit, ascendancy, or detachment from public folly to declare these fundamental, brutal facts to the electorate; nor would anyone have been believed if he had. The triumphant allies continued to assert that they would squeeze Germany 'till the pips squeaked'. All this had a potent bearing on the prosperity of the world and the mood of the German race.

Source: W. Churchill, *The gathering storm*, London, 1948, pp. 22–24

1.2 The territorial losses of Germany under the Treaty of Versailles: the view of Lloyd George

You may strip Germany of her colonies, reduce her armaments to a mere police force and her navy to that of a fifth rate power, all the same, in the end, if she feels she has been unjustly treated in the peace of 1919, she will find means of exacting retribution of her conquerors . . . I cannot imagine any greater cause of future war than that the German people, who have proved themselves one of the most powerful and vigorous races in the world, should be surrounded by a number of small states, many of them consisting of peoples who have never previously set up a stable government for themselves, but each of them containing large masses of Germans clamouring for reunion with their native land.

Source: M. Gilbert, *The roots of appeasement*, London, 1966, pp. 189–90

1.3 The Treaty of Versailles: the view of Hitler, 1925

When in the year 1919 the German people was burdened with the peace treaty, we should have been justified in hoping that precisely through this instrument of boundless repression the cry for German freedom would have been immensely promoted. Peace treaties whose demands are a scourge to nations not seldom strike the first roll of drums for the uprising to come . . . We need to form a front against this treaty and engrave ourselves forever in the minds of men as an enemy of this treaty, so that later, when the harsh reality of this treacherous frippery would be revealed in its naked hate, the recollection of our attitude at that time would win us confidence.

Source: I. Lederer (ed.), *The Versailles settlement: Was it foredoomed to failure? The truth about the treaty*, London, 1960, pp. 86–90

1.4 The 'German problem' in the 1920s: a British view

I have to keep my eyes fixed on a date like 1960 or 1970, when Germany will be in a position, through one cause or another, to attack again if she wants to, and by that time there must have grown up in Germany a new generation who, whatever their feelings of resentment about the Treaty of Versailles, of the pain at the situation which the Treaty brought upon Germany, will yet say, after all, things must have an end . . . But if you are to have any chance of getting that kind of generation in Germany in 1960 or 1970 you must begin the work of pacification tomorrow.

Source: Sir Austen Chamberlain, evidence to the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1926, Public Record Office (CAB 2), London

1.5 The new world order after the Paris peace settlement: the view of the British Foreign Office, 1926

We have got all we want – perhaps more. Our sole object is to keep what we want and live in peace . . . The fact is that war and rumours of war, quarrels and friction, in any corner of the world, spell loss and harm to British commercial and financial interests . . . whatever else may be the outcome of a disturbance of the peace, we shall be the losers.

Source: *Documents on British foreign policy, 1919–1939, Vol. 1*, London, 1946, p. 846

1.6 Hitler on war, 1928

The task which therefore falls to all really great legislators and statesmen is not so much to prepare for war in a narrow sense, but rather to educate and train thoroughly a people so that to all intents and purposes its future appears inherently assured. In this way even wars lose their character as isolated, more or less violent surprises, instead becoming part of a natural, indeed self-evident pattern of thorough, well secured, sustained national development.

Source: G. Weinberg (ed.), *Hitler Zweites Buch. Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928*, Stuttgart, 1978, p. 78

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-00048-2 - Hitler, Chamberlain and Appeasement
Frank McDonough
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Anglo-German relations, 1918–33

1.7 The British attitude to the Treaty of Versailles: the view of Ramsay MacDonald, the British prime minister, 1932

I do not believe that any of us can rigidly resist the German claim that the treaty of Versailles must in some respects be reconsidered. Supposing you were to continue to repeat 'No' to those claims, and Germany said 'Then as we are not to be released by agreement we shall appeal to the sense of fair play of the whole world and release ourselves reasonably'.

Source: *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932–1939, Vol. 1*, Paris, 1964, document no. 235

Document case-study questions

- 1** What is Churchill's view of the economic clauses of the Treaty of Versailles as outlined in 1.1?
- 2** According to Lloyd George in 1.2, how was the Treaty of Versailles flawed?
- 3** Explain what 1.3 tells us about the use that would be made of the Treaty of Versailles in Nazi propaganda.
- 4** Outline the British view, according to 1.4, of the likelihood of a German military revival in the mid-1920s.
- 5** What type of policy is the Foreign Office official advocating in 1.5?
- 6** Briefly discuss Hitler's attitude to war in 1.6.
- 7** What does 1.7 tell us about MacDonald's view of German grievances over Versailles?