

In early 1918, Germany was expected to win World War I after three and a half years of fighting. However, by late 1918, Germany's advantage had disappeared and its navy was on strike. With the United States pouring fresh resources into the war effort, Germany faced insurmountable odds. On November 11, 1918, Germany surrendered and signed the armistice that ended the fighting. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and American President Woodrow Wilson were appointed to write a peace treaty that would officially end World War I. After six months and 145 sessions, the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919. However, the terms of the treaty caused tremendous turmoil in Germany for many years and led to the rise of Hitler and eventually to World War II. In retrospect, the Treaty of Versailles should have been revised to prevent this from happening.

Due to its severe terms, the Treaty of Versailles caused great resentment among the German people. One of the treaty terms that the German people resented was the seizure of 25,000 square miles of German land. This was done because France feared another German military invasion and desired to put more distance between France and Germany. While this was understandable since, among the Allies, France bore most of the economic and human loss of World War I, the German people never really gave this land up in their hearts and minds. The German people also detested the requirement to accept the blame for World War I. As a result of this, Germany was required to pay thirty-three million US dollars in reparations. The German people were angry at this imposition and their government who had accepted it. While the Treaty of Versailles effectively weakened Germany, it also produced a resentful and potentially dangerous populace.

The stipulations in the Treaty of Versailles, intended to limit the growth of Germany's power, ultimately caused the collapse of the German economy. Before World War I, Germany's economy was heavily dependent on iron ore and coal. However, a majority of the iron-ore fields and coalfields were located in the land that was seized due to the Treaty of Versailles. Germany lost a major energy source and a significant job source. While this was a major blow to the German economy, the stipulation that created the most damage was the required reparations which saddled Germany with thirty-three billion dollars of debt. In an attempt to pay these reparations quickly, Germany purposely inflated their currency to such extreme levels that it resulted in an economic collapse and widespread poverty. The collapse of the economy weakened the German government and left Germany susceptible to significant political upheaval.

Adolf Hitler rose to the most powerful position in Germany riding the wave of unrest that led to the tsunami of German resentment. Beginning in 1920, Nazi Party leader Hitler criticized the Treaty of Versailles and the German government that signed it with exceptional oratory skill. As a result, Hitler became extremely popular among the German people who shared his resentment. In 1932, during his political campaigns, Hitler promised to restore Germany to its former borders and power. Most of the German people supported Hitler and the Nazi party when they managed to take control of the German government by questionable political maneuvering. However, when Hitler seized complete control by murdering many of the leaders who opposed him, many Germans wondered where Hitler was leading them to. While Hitler did restore Germany to its former position among world powers, he also led them to the beginning of a world war.

Referring to the Treaty of Versailles, French General Marshal Ferdinand Foch said, "That is not peace. It is an armistice for twenty years." South African statesman Jan Christian Smuts said, "This treaty breathes a poisonous spirit of revenge, which may yet scorch the fair face-not of a corner of France, but of Europe." And British Colonial Secretary Alfred Lord Milner referred to the treaty as "the peace to end

peace.” These men correctly predicted the impending doom that the Treaty of Versailles would cause. Due to the impractical terms of the treaty, the German people resented their government for signing it and the countries who forced them to sign it. The high reparations, required by the terms of the treaty, caused the collapse of the German economy and forced the German people to look for a solution to their desperate problems. When Adolf Hitler came into the scene, many German people believed they had found the answer. These people did not realize that he would eventually lead them to another devastating defeat in World War II.