

Chapter 1 sample Cambridge IGCSE questions with sample answers

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Cambridge IGCSE History 0470/13 Paper 1 Q5 a, b & c June 2010

The Reparations Commission decided that the total to be paid should be £6600 million, in yearly instalments. These might be paid in gold, or currency earned from the sale of Germany's goods abroad, or in shipments of coal, iron, timber and other materials to the allies.

From a modern history book.

- a) What were Germany's main territorial losses under the Treaty of Versailles? (4)

In Europe Germany lost territories on all but its southern frontier. In the west, Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France while Eupen, Malmédy, and Moresnet were transferred to Belgium. The Saar was lost to League of Nations control with a plebiscite to be held in 15 years to decide its long-term future. On the northern frontier North Schleswig was transferred to Denmark while on its eastern frontier West Prussia, Posen, and parts of Silesia went to Poland. With the cancellation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were taken away from Germany and set up as independent states.

Overseas Germany lost all its colonies in Africa and the Far East to the victorious powers who were to administer them as mandated territories on behalf of the League of Nations.

- b) Why did the Treaty of Versailles cause problems for Germany from 1919 to 1923? (6)

The Treaty of Versailles caused both political and economic problems for Germany between 1919 and 1923. The political problems arose from the fact that once the new government of Germany had signed the treaty it became instantly associated with one of the most unpopular and humiliating events in German history. Between 1919 and 1923 there was considerable support for communist and extreme right-wing groups that rejected the treaty. The ability of the Weimar governments to deal with this dissatisfaction was not helped by the clause in the Treaty which limited the German army to 100 000 men.

Economic problems resulted from the loss of colonies, the loss of mineral resources in Europe, and the imposition of reparations. The crisis of 1923, that is, military occupation of the Ruhr followed by hyperinflation, was directly linked to reparations since the Ruhr occupation was the French and Belgian response to Germany's claim that it was unable to pay the 1922 reparations instalment. Once the reparations issue was resolved after the 1923 crisis, there was a return to relative economic and political normality.

- c) How far did the “Big Three” achieve their aims at the Paris Peace Conference? Explain your answer. (10)

Clemenceau was probably the least satisfied among the “Big Three”. His overriding concern had been the defence and security of France but Wilson and Lloyd George had persuaded him to abandon the idea of an independent Rhineland state in favour of an occupied and demilitarised Rhineland. Clemenceau had expected the additional assurance of an Anglo-American Treaty of Guarantee against German aggression but this came to nothing when American Congress failed to approve the peace settlement. While Clemenceau welcomed the return of Alsace-Lorraine, German disarmament, and the acquisition of former German colonies he still felt that his country was dangerously exposed on its eastern frontier.

Wilson clearly achieved some of his aims: the inclusion of the Covenant of the League of Nations in all the peace treaties, the establishment of new nation states in Europe such as Poland, the movement towards disarmament, the abandoning of France’s wish for an independent Rhineland state and the naming of a very high reparations figure in the Versailles Treaty. But Wilson was less than happy with Britain’s insistence on disregarding the principle of free navigation of the seas. Neither did he wholeheartedly approve of the arrangements for Germany’s former colonies. He would also have questioned the denial of self-determination for the peoples of Austria and Danzig. Wilson’s greatest disappointment, however, was his failure to persuade American Congress to approve the treaties.

Lloyd George had wanted a moderate peace to allow the European economy to revive and that is largely what he got. There were some features of the peace settlement that he did not like, such as the placing of German-speaking peoples under French or Polish rule, but on the whole he got his way. He successfully persuaded Clemenceau to adopt a less extreme approach over the Saar Basin, the Rhineland, and Danzig and promoted his national interests by substantially adding to the British Empire. He felt that the Versailles Treaty punished Germany without destroying its economy or ability to contribute to the future prosperity of Europe.

It would have been impossible for each of the ‘Big Three’ to have achieved all their aims as the interests of France, the USA and Britain did not coincide on all the issues raised at the Paris Peace Conference. Nevertheless each one of the ‘Big Three’ could be satisfied with at least some aspect of the settlement. Few would dispute the view that Clemenceau and Lloyd George were the least and most satisfied respectively.