

THE LEAGUE COVENANT

The Treaty of Versailles included the Covenant of the League of Nations. In its broadest sense, the new organization was intended to be a deliberative body, where members would consult in their common interest, especially in the event of aggression or threat of war. Members agreed to submit their differences to arbitration. If a nation refused to abide by its agreement, it was subject to sanctions, including military ones. It sounded good on paper, but in practical terms there was no way, ultimately, to enforce the decisions of the league.

The league covenant also called for the eventual independence of European colonies elsewhere in the world, but again there was no strength in this provision. The long-range effect, however, was to raise hopes in colonial areas, and thus intensify nationalistic movements.

AMERICA AND THE LEAGUE

The league had several problems but none quite so ironic or serious as the fact that the United States, whose president was almost single-handedly responsible for creating it, refused to join. Conservative Republicans, arguing that the covenant undermined American sovereignty, persuaded the Senate to place reservations on America's acceptance of the treaty. Wilson refused to accept the conditions. As a result, the United States was never a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles and never part of the League of Nations.

Germany: The Costs of Defeat

For Germany, the most difficult parts of the treaty had to do with war guilt and reparations.

GUILT BY DECREE

The treaty specifically stated that Germany was responsible for the war and accepted responsibility for all losses and damages accruing to the Allies as a result. Being forced to accept such full-scale responsibility was a heavy burden indeed, but in the dictated peace the German representatives at Versailles had no choice.

REPARATIONS

The reparations were more frustrating than the guilt clause. No fixed amount was set at the conference, but Germany was to pay \$5 billion annually until 1921, after which it would have thirty more years to pay whatever final figure was determined. The German government finally signed the treaty, but only under protest. The German people also protested, and as a result, they began to lose some confidence in the newly established government. They thought they had been betrayed.