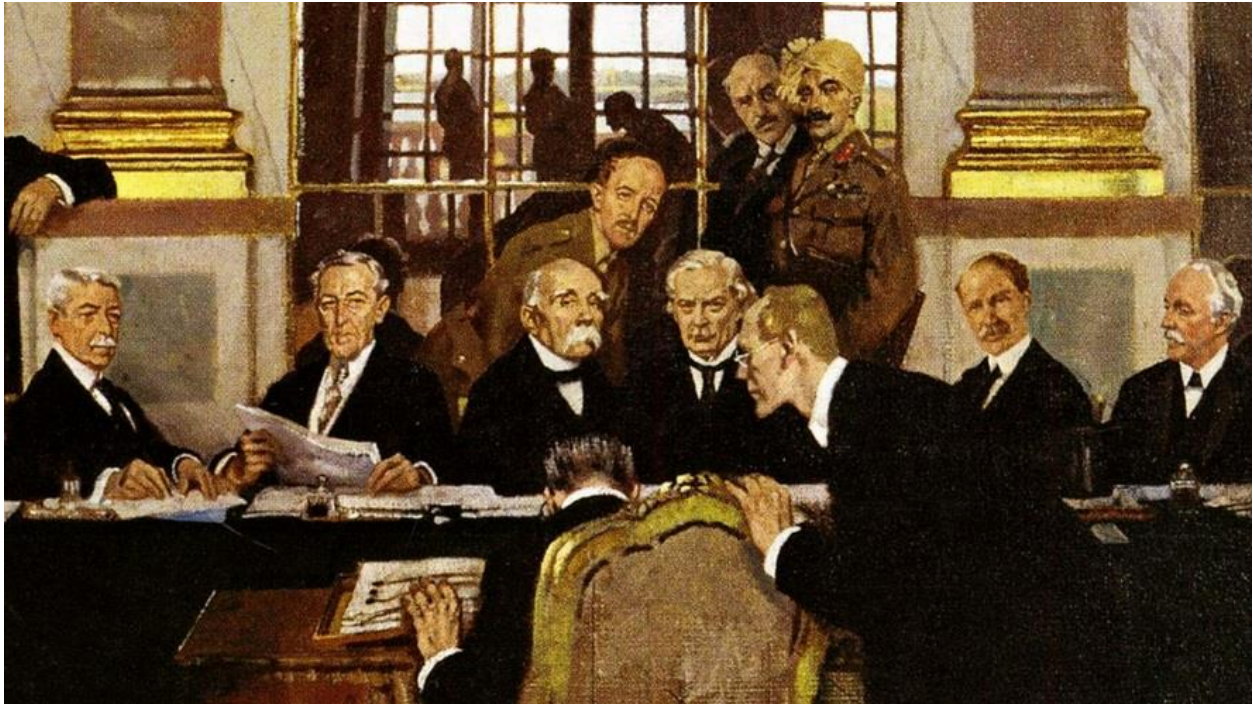# After World War I, Nations Were Changed Forever

World War I was larger than any war that came before it. It was fought between two sides. The winners were Britain, France, Russia, Italy and the United States. The powers that lost were Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was based in today's Turkey, while the Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied the center of Europe.

The war was fought 100 years ago and caused the deaths of millions of people. It left Europe and the world greatly changed. It also set the stage for World War II and many of the horrors that came with it.

A new great power

THE GAP IN THE BRIDGE.

Cartoon showing how the United States did not help the League of Nations. This was a world organization of countries that was made after the war. The League aimed to keep the peace. Image from public domain.

World War I changed the United States in two important ways. First, it turned the U.S. army into a large, modern fighting force. For the first time, the United States became a match for even the greatest European power.

Second, the war made the United States a much greater economic force, too. Many of the countries in Europe were broken and tired because of the war. This allowed the United States to control much more of the world's trade and business. The country quickly grew richer than it had ever been.

The rise of communism and socialism

World War I greatly weakened Russia. Before the war ended, communist revolutionaries took over the government, and Russia's king, the czar, was killed. This was called the Russian Revolution. Communists, led by Vladimir Lenin, did not want a few people to

own all the factories and land as property. They had the government take over those lands instead.

Germany also formed a new government. It was called the Weimar Republic, and it mixed democracy with socialism. Germans could now vote for their leaders in the government. Socialism was less extreme than communism because it did not get rid of private property. But Germany's new government soon came under great pressure. In the end, it was toppled by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party. With Hitler in power, the stage for World War II was set.

Nationalism transforms Europe

Map of Europe in 1923. Map: based on work by Fluteflute/Wikimedia.

The German, Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires fell apart. New countries were formed in Europe, in part due to nationalism.

Nationalism is the idea that people with the same culture have the right to their own separate country. After the war, many people wanted to break from the old empires and form their own nations. But nationalism also caused many problems, especially in Eastern Europe. Many countries had more than one culture and race. Nationalism led to hatred and fighting between these various groups.

The myths of victory and failure

German war leaders Paul von Hindenburg (left) and Erich Ludendorff in a painting by professor Hugo Vogel in 1917. Image from public domain. [click to enlarge]

At the end of World War I, the German General Erich Ludendorff wanted Germany to refuse the peace treaty. This treaty, or deal, was written by the winners of the war, and Germany saw it as very unfair. Ludendorff said the army could still fight on. But the new German government wanted peace, so it declared the war over.

This decision gave Ludendorff and other German military leaders someone to blame for Germany's defeat. This started the idea that the German army could have won, but was "stabbed in the back" by socialists and the government. This idea weakened the power of the Weimar Republic. In the end, it allowed Adolf Hitler to rise to power.

Britain was also greatly changed by the war. Its suffering was so great that it wanted to avoid another war at all costs. That made it give in to Hitler when he wanted to grab new territories for Germany. This was called appeasement. But as this went on, World War II became more and more certain.

A "lost generation"

The horrors of war left scars across Europe and the rest of the world. Image from public domain. [click to enlarge]

Eight million people died during World War I. Many others were so badly hurt by the war that they took their own lives. In much of Europe, it was hard to find someone who had not lost a loved one to the war.