

# The interwar years

## Between the wars

World War I ended on 11 November 1918, with the signing of an armistice between Germany and its enemies, Britain, France and the United States. Four years of bitter fighting had seen a total of almost 10 million soldiers killed and another 21 million wounded. The challenge facing the victors was how to make sure that such a catastrophe could never happen again.

## The search for peace

### The Paris Peace Conference

Leaders of the three largest victorious nations, France, Britain and the United States, met in Paris on 18 January 1919 to decide the fate of defeated Germany. Nicknamed the 'Big Three', Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of Britain and Woodrow Wilson of the United States each had different ideas about how peace should be achieved and what ought to happen to Germany. These differences led to many heated exchanges, but in the end Clemenceau won the day. This was mainly because the public mood in Paris during the Peace Conference was one of vengeance against Germany. The French had endured four years of German occupation and had suffered the highest proportion of deaths of any nation that had fought in World War I.

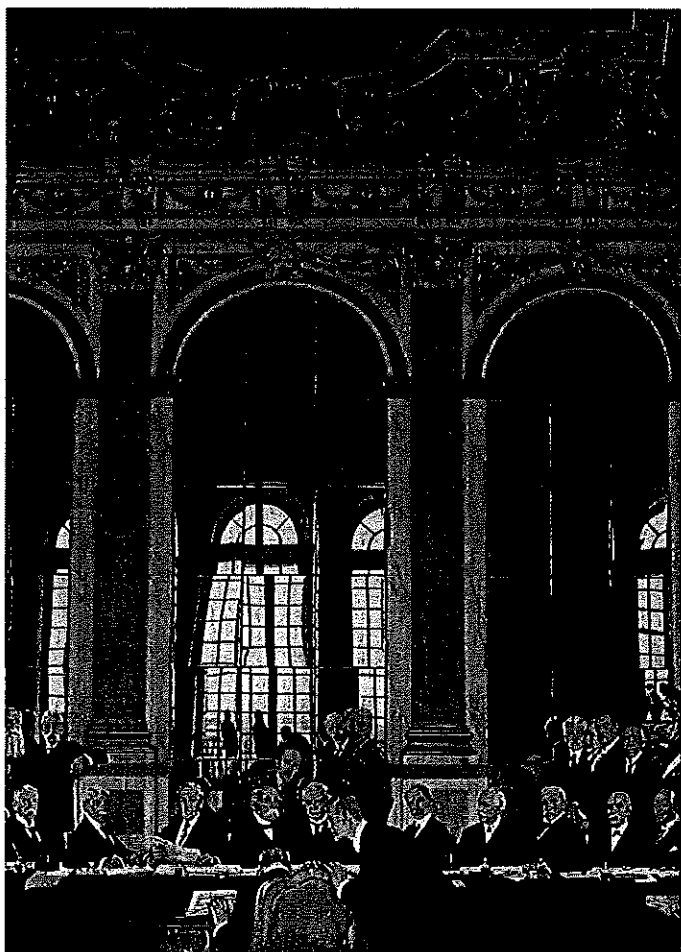
## The Treaty of Versailles

On 28 June 1919, the representatives of the German Government reluctantly signed the Treaty of Versailles. The victors, despite Germany's protests, forced the treaty upon them. In Germany, public reaction to the treaty was one of anger and bewilderment. The Treaty of Versailles was a major humiliation for Germans, who argued that nations from both sides had been responsible for starting the war. According to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to:

- pay \$32 billion for the cost of the war in reparations
- accept sole guilt for starting the war
- limit its army to only 100 000 soldiers
- hand over all tanks and heavy guns
- ban conscription
- close all of its military academies
- hand over territories to France and newly created nations such as Poland and Czechoslovakia
- hand over all of its overseas colonies.

**Source 9.1.1** Aims of the 'Big Three' at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919

	Georges Clemenceau	David Lloyd George	Woodrow Wilson
Nickname	'The Tiger'	'The Welsh Wizard'	'The Schoolmaster of Politics'
Famous quote	'My home policy: I wage war; my foreign policy: I wage war. All the time I wage war.'	'Once blood is shed in a national quarrel, reason and right are swept away by the rage of angry men.'	'Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together.'
Aims at the Paris Peace Conference	Crush Germany so that it could never again invade France. Destroy the German army. Force Germany to pay for the full cost of the war. Prohibit German soldiers from German territory close to the French border.	Restore Germany's economic strength but weaken its military. Rebuild the trade relationship between Britain and Germany. Make sure no one nation dominates Europe.	Create an international council, the League of Nations, to resolve disputes between nations before they resort to war. Give 'self-determination' to people living under foreign rule.



**Source 9.1.2** Painting showing the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles, 28 June 1919

## The League of Nations

The idea for an international forum in which the nations of the world could meet to settle their differences had been one of Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' presented at the Paris Peace Conference. While most of his other ideas had been rejected, the victors of World War I agreed to the creation of a League of Nations. By accepting the League of Nations Covenant, member nations committed themselves to:

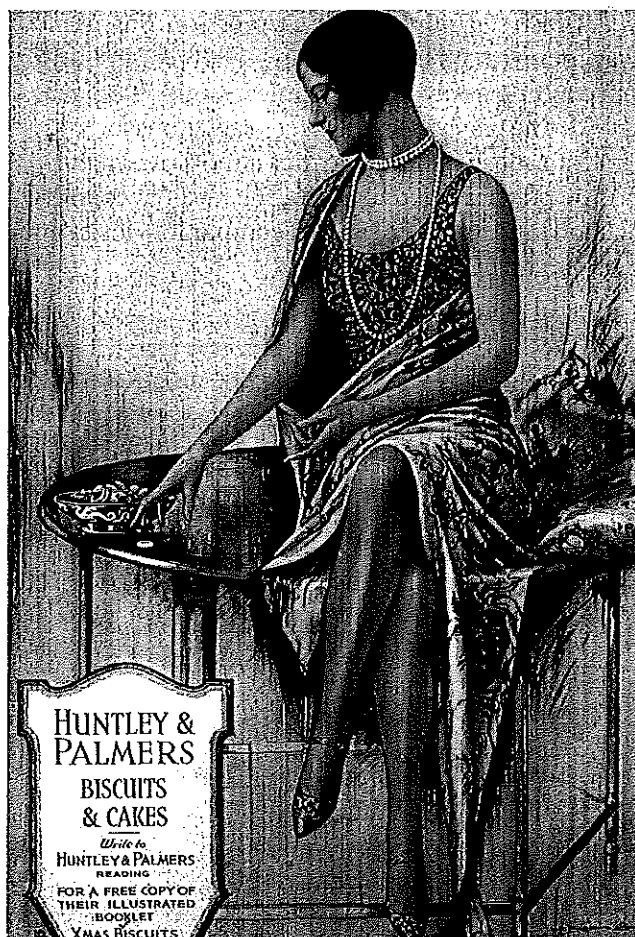
- reducing their weapons
- supporting one another economically
- respecting one another's territory
- bringing their disputes before an international court
- considering an act of war against one as an act of war against all.

## Boom and bust

### The 'Roaring Twenties'

The decade of the 1920s is often called the 'Roaring Twenties' because it was characterised by fast economic growth and rapid cultural change. After the hardship and horror of the war years, people wanted to forget the past and make the most of peacetime. A mood of optimism as well as more leisure time led to new forms of entertainment such as jazz music and films with sound.

Good economic times also allowed more women to enter the workforce. Having proved that they could do the same jobs as men during the war, and with the right to vote, many young middle-class women displayed a newly found confidence. Fashions became more daring as skirts and hair lengths shortened. Make-up became more obvious and many women flaunted their new sense of independence by smoking in public.



**Source 9.1.3** A 1920s advertisement featuring a 'flapper'. Her newly found confidence demonstrated by her clothing shows the changing attitudes of women.

## The rise of the United States

During the 1920s, the United States emerged as the world's economic leader, having been the only nation to actually profit from the war. American loans to Europe and Australia saw new industries emerge, businesses flourish and unemployment fall. This economic prosperity also allowed governments to build new infrastructure such as highways, railways, power stations and new suburbs. Cars, radio sets and other electrical goods, such as refrigerators and washing machines, became more readily available due to mass production. Attracted by new opportunities in the cities, many people moved from rural areas.

## The Wall Street Crash

The optimism of the 1920s was brought to a sudden halt on 24 October 1929. On 'Black Thursday', shares listed on the New York Stock Exchange (also known as Wall Street) drastically fell and continued to do so for several weeks. 'Black Thursday' was followed by 'Black Monday' and then 'Black Tuesday'. The Wall Street Crash started the Great Depression. Shares are a way for investors to buy part ownership of a public company and a way for companies to raise funds to expand. The crash in share prices saw thousands of investors lose their life savings almost overnight. The market continued to fall for the next few months, in which time banks collapsed, companies closed and unemployment climbed.

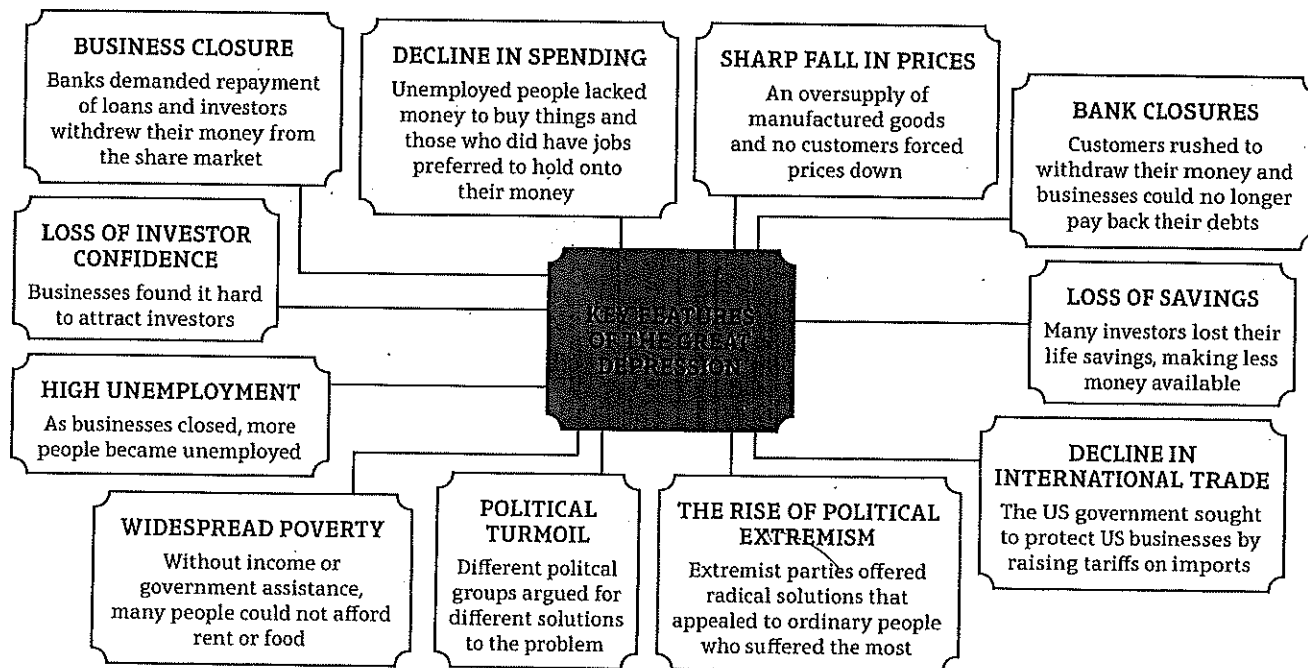
## Did you know?

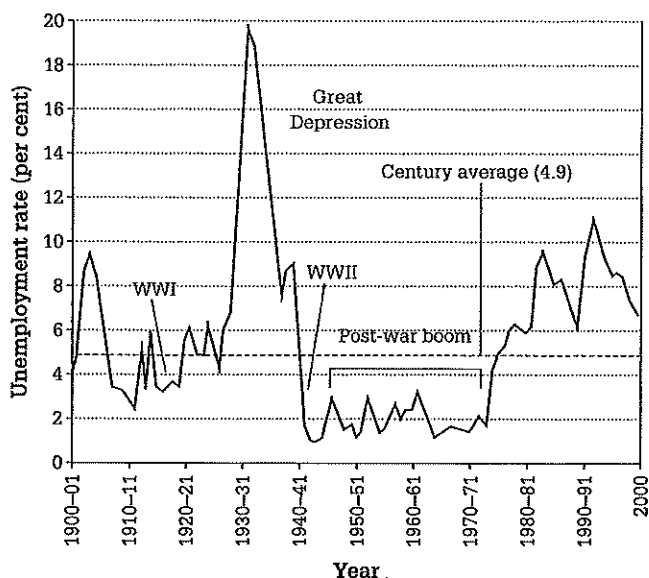
Germany made its final reparations payment required by the Treaty of Versailles on 3 October 2010. This was for \$94 million.



**Source 9.1.4** US newspaper headline on 24 October 1929, otherwise known as 'Black Thursday'

**Source 9.1.5** Key features of the Great Depression





**Source 9.1.6** Unemployment rates in Australia, 1901–2000, showing the significance of the Great Depression

While the Wall Street Crash of 1929 was the immediate cause of the Great Depression that lasted for the next decade, other longer-term causes included:

- an oversupply of manufactured goods that could not be sold
- low incomes for ordinary people, making it difficult for them to buy everyday items
- many investors hoping to make money on the stock market were in debt
- the trade policies of the US Government which discouraged foreign trade.

## The Great Depression

Known as the Great Depression due to its length and severity, the decade of the 1930s ended the peacefulness and optimism of the 1920s and plunged the world into poverty, turmoil and new fears of war. Unemployment, homelessness, starvation, crime and civil unrest increased in all countries affected by the Great Depression. Australia was one of the countries hit by the Great Depression, due to the economy's dependence on primary exports and loans from the United States.

In this context, extremist political parties became more popular, especially in Germany, where people voted in greater numbers for the Communists and the Nazis. Germany had come to rely heavily on US loans, which were no longer available. It also suffered badly because of repaying the reparations demanded by the Treaty of Versailles.



**Source 9.1.7** A makeshift dwelling in one of Sydney's shantytowns, known as 'happy valleys', during the 1930s. Here, thousands of families made homeless by unemployment struggled to survive.

## ACTIVITIES

### Remembering and understanding

- 1 Why did Germans feel humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles?
- 2 What was the main aim of the League of Nations?
- 3 Outline the key features of the 'Roaring Twenties'.
- 4 Refer to Source 9.1.5. Group each of the key features of the Great Depression into social, political or economic effects.

### Applying and analysing

- 5 Account for the different aims of the 'Big Three' at the Paris Peace Conference.
- 6 Evaluate the different ways international leaders tried to make the world more peaceful after World War I.

### Evaluating and creating

- 7 Create a flow chart showing how the Wall Street Crash of 1929 triggered the Great Depression.
- 8 Conduct your own research into what happened to the League of Nations in the 1930s. Start by developing a research question about whether or not it achieved its aims.