



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on September 30, 2010

Germany Makes Final World War One Debt Payment

In a few days, Germany will pay off the last of its debts arising out of the Treaty of Versailles over 90 years ago. The German Federal Office of Central Services and Unresolved Property Issues will issue the bond to pay off the remaining \$97 Million on that debt on the twentieth anniversary of the re-unification of Germany.



So ends one of the most insane and ugly legacies of global statecraft: The vindictive punishment of the German people after the end of the First World War. The German people by 1918 were just as sick of the slaughter of "The Great War" as any other people. When Woodrow Wilson propounded his famous (or infamous) Fourteen Points, war-weary Germans eagerly accepted his promise in that document.

Wilson, however, was almost totally ignorant of European history. When perusing in Paris the ethnic maps of Europe, Wilson could not tell which nationalities resided in what parts of Europe. After he committed a neutral America to the course of war in a conflict without winners, leading American Doughboys to needless death and mayhem, causing an expansion of federal power and spending, and removing America from the role of an honest mediator — a role which the Vatican and neutral nations like Holland and Switzerland would have strongly supported — Wilson then presided over a Carthaginian Peace which all Europeans suspected would lead to a new general conflict.

The reparations placed on Germany after the Armistice (or cessation of warfare) and the subsequent Treaty of Versailles, dragged on as German children starved to death under their onerous weight, making every single thoughtful German quietly furious at the democratic victors. Payment of this war debt was impossible, and German leaders who tried to honor this dishonorable debt obligation were despised by their countrymen. Almost inevitably, groups like the Nazis and the Bolsheviks entered the fray and hammered well-intentioned German leaders with attacks on the Versailles Treaty (often, in fact, the National Socialist and the Communist rhetoric did not just sound similar, but practically identical.) The Weimar Republic died upon those heavy attacks.

But it might not have been. All Europeans by 1919 were sickened beyond measure at the millions of dead and maimed young men lost in the needless First World War. Germans, initially, were just as eager as Frenchmen or Britons to preserve the peace. All Weimar politicians needed was some light at the end of the tunnel. The stripping of territories seized by Imperial Germany which were not naturally German (Holstein, Lorraine, part of the Polish Corridor) could be explained, but the annexation by France of Alsace, the predominately German parts of the Polish Corridor, the Free City of Danzig, the Free City of Memel, and Austria violated Wilson's own, much ballyhooed "National Sovereignty." The more or less stated policy behind this was to keep Germany artificially weak.



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And then the reparations ensured that a generation of Germans would grow up bitter and impoverished. It forced the German government into fiscal machinations which soon led to hyperinflation and then general collapse of the German middle class. Wilson, without whose help a fair negotiated peace would have been likely, provided Hitler with the very arguments which made him appeal to otherwise decent Germans.

The contrast between the Versailles war debts and the actions of Chancellor Adenauer in the 1950s could not have been clearer. Unasked, Adenauer, the Christian Democrat leader who was imprisoned by the Nazis, approached Israel and asked to pay reparations for the Holocaust. Arrangements were reached and voluntary payments by Germany — West Germany only, the Communist East Germany never paid Jewish victims of the Holocaust a penny — helped heal wounds over the Holocaust. The fact that it was unforced was critical. How ironic that these payments were completed decades ago, while the catastrophic war-guilt payments of the Versailles Treaty are just now being marked “paid in full.” It was mankind, of course, that made the payments in blood, misery, and treasure.

Photo: Georges Clemenceau, of France, and Woodrow Wilson, of the United States in Versailles for the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended World War I, in this 1919 photo: AP Images



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