

# The Treaty of Versailles—Its Defects and Merits

## Italy, Britain and France Forced to Accept Less Than Leaders Demanded

By Frank H. Simonds

IN THE six months which have followed the signing of the treaty of Versailles and the publication of the terms, political disputes in America and political events in Europe have so served to turn attention and discussion from the document itself that it is perhaps worth while to return afresh to the basis of settlement, which is more often discussed now in detail than viewed with any historical perspective as a whole.

Thus in the United States the entire discussion has centered about the league of nations a circumstance of the peace settlement which, for the great nations of Europe, for France, Britain and Italy, was relatively minor, while in Great Britain the attack has been made upon provisions affecting Britain's allies which, to say the least, are not more open to criticism than other sections extremely profitable to the British themselves.

We may say, with fair accuracy, that the treaty was a disappointment to all the nations who fought together against Germany, but for diverse reasons. For the French, it seems a small return for their great losses and sacrifices; for the British, something far short of the settlement which would enable them to return to a measure of their old isolation, having disposed of the main question at issue—namely, the German challenge and the German menace. For the Italians the treaty is an even greater disappointment, because, with the subordinate settlements with Austria and in the Near East, it fails to recognize Italian aspirations or honor Italian claims.

### Treaty Is Defended

With the American debate over the league of nations I shall not deal in this article. What I mean to try to set forth is the extent to which the treaty may be regarded, with all its limitations, as the best world settlement yet known, superior to the agreements of Westphalia, of Utrecht and of Vienna, and to emphasize something of the merits which are still discoverable in a document which at the present moment is the target of world-wide execration.

To begin at the beginning it seems to me that the great virtue of the treaty of Versailles is the degree to which it has recognized the rights of peoples to dispose of their own allegiance. Roughly speaking, there were in Central Europe at the moment when the world war broke, forty odd millions of people, living in a condition of political and intellectual slavery. Among these were 20,000,000 of Jugoslavs, 4,000,000 of Rumanians, 1,500,000 Alsace-Lorrainers and 1,000,000 Italians in the Trentino and Trieste districts.

Without exception, these 40,000,000, a population much greater than that of the North and South in the Civil War, longed for liberation, had striven vainly against military and bureaucratic tyranny, in the case of the Poles had fought against their oppressors and never, in a century and a half, given up the hope of future deliverance. The last century, which saw the liberation of Italy, the unification of Germany, the partial deliverance of the Balkans, had given a vital impulse to the race consciousness of the tribes and peoples still held in political slavery.

### Real Cause of War

The world war itself was an inevitable consequence of this stirring of subject races. The success of the Balkan states in their war against Turkey had carried with it a fatal menace to the Hapsburg empire, within whose frontiers 25,000,000 of enslaved Slavs lived.

The whole hope for survival for the Hapsburg empire was a successful attack upon the Serbs, which might postpone, if it did not abolish, the day when Austrian and Hungarian Slavs would seek liberty

and seek it with a strength beyond the power of German and Magyar in the Dual Monarchy to constrain.

Looking back over two generations of European history from the Crimean to the world war, it is manifest that the condition which existed as a consequence of the enslavement of various races was an unstable one. The Italian people demonstrated this in their noble struggle for liberty and union. The little Balkan states proved it again in a series of wars, which only narrowly missed setting all Europe on fire. The concert of Europe, the great powers, selfishly anxious to preserve their own peace and prosperity, whatever it cost the subject races, were never able to compel the subject races to submit contentedly to their condition of servitude.

One may assume it to be axiomatic that peace in Europe, in the world, was not possible so long as it was predicated upon injustice, upon the sacrifice of the right of millions of men and women to liberty. The use of their own tongues and the observance of their own customs. The proof of all this is to be found alike in the long series of alarms which preceded the coming of the world war and in the circumstances of its arrival.

### Forty Millions Liberated

The Treaty of Versailles, of St. Germain and the associated documents have liberated these forty-odd millions. There is a Polish state by virtue of the treaty which includes most, if not all, of the Poles; there is a Czecho-Slovak state, which includes most of the Czechs and the Slovaks; the Slovenians, the Croats and the Hapsburg Serbs have been set free and have joined hands with their Serb brethren beyond the Danube and the Save; Alsace-Lorraine is French. Roughly speaking, we have set free some forty millions of men and women, we have created new nations and we have aided in the extension of the frontiers of old states to include their brothers, lately held in servitude.

To me this is the great human fact about the peace settlement, the enduring fact. But it is at once argued that this liberation has not resulted in peace, and does not promise immediate peace. Possibly, this may be true, but peace founded upon slavery was at once unjust and impermanent. Again, it is argued that while justice has been done, injustice also has been similarly done, that we have enslaved as well as liberated, that we have abolished old slavery to create new.

The basis for this contention may be found in the fact that in many cases there have been included within the frontiers of new states fractions of the races which were lately masters. Danzig, which is not included within Polish frontiers, but created a free city, the German population in districts assigned to the Poles, the Austrian-German minorities in Bohemia, the Tyrolean Germans south of the Alps, in new Italian districts, and with ever-growing insistence, the case of the Saar Basin, are presented as examples.

### Power Being Abused

Further than this, it is argued, with no small justice, that the races newly liberated are displaying an eagerness to enslave their neighbors wholly comparable with the spirit displayed by their own masters of yesterday. Out of this situation have grown innumerable disputes, the Poles seek to extend their frontiers south and east at the expense of Lithuanians, White Russians and Ruthenians; the Czecho-Slovaks seek territories inhabited by Poles and by Ruthenians, in Teschen and at the southwestern end of the Carpathians. Thus we have abolished one set of war-causing disputes, only to find that we have sown a new crop, the first harvest from which is now being gathered. Yet recognizing the measure of

## The Travel of Peace—As Seen in Italy



—From L'Asino, Italy

truth in all these arguments, two things are still manifest—first, that it was not less necessary to liberate the forty millions, whether the result would lead to general peace or to new rivalries; and, second, if injustice has been done the aggregate injustice is far less considerable than that which has been abolished. Measured by human beings, the gain for freedom is still enormous.

To take the case of Germany alone, we have liberated within her old frontiers between 5,000,000 and 6,000,000 of Poles, Alsace-Lorrainers and Danes. By contrast we have at most given half a million Germans to Poland, or placed them outside the German frontiers and under the control of the league of nations. In the same way we have placed an equal number of Germans under the temporary control of France, subject to the supervision of the league of nations with the right to vote to return to Germany fifteen years hence. And if we have thus put Germans under alien rule against their will, we have left almost an equal number of Poles under German rule.

**Polish Mistake Cited**  
In liberating twenty millions of Poles we have temporarily failed to separate from the new Poland Galician districts which were Polish before the partitions and contain a Polish minority, along with a Ruthenian majority, but there has been no settlement of this issue, and these same Ruthenians were under alien Austrian rule before the war, and they have changed masters but not their conditions—that is all.

We have given Italy, along with some million of Italian-speaking people in the Trentino and Trieste a quarter of a million of Tyrolean Ger-

mans in the Upper Adige Valley and an equal number of Slovenians back of Trieste, but as to the Slovenians they were subjects of German Austria before the war, and have thus neither gained nor lost so far as national aspiration is concerned. The Tyrolean decision seems to me a gross and indefensible blunder, explicable solely as a military measure to permit Italy to hold her side of the Alps from Switzerland to the Adriatic, but against the quarter of a million enslaved there is to be set the million liberated and the final possession by the Italians of the sally port into the Po Valley held by the Austrians for so long and constituting so grave a peril to Italian safety.

As to the southern Slavs, we have

given them something less than they were entitled to; we have placed to alien people under their rule, and the new gain to liberty is upward of eight million. As to Rumania, the question is complicated by one of the most indescribable tangles of races to be found in the world. No boundary line that could be drawn which did anything like justice to Rumania could fail to include hundreds of thousands of Magyars, who have pushed into Latin territory during a thousand years and exercised the rights of a conquering race. Yet in Bessarabia and in Transylvania we have freed some four millions of Rumanians, transferred something like half a million Germans from Magyar to Rumanian rule, both equally alien, and at most placed a

million Magyars under Rumanian control.

Much is said now about the German minority in Czecho-Slovakia. It numbers 3,500,000, but lives wholly within the only frontiers which could possibly protect the new state and is to a considerable extent mingled with the ten million Slav majority, which it has dominated and oppressed ever since the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War.

### Majorities Still Rule

Now, in all the cases which I have examined it is plain that, despite incidental mistakes and injustices, in the main substantial justice has been done; a minority which ruled has been placed under the control of the majority where the intermingling of races or the character of the frontiers made absolute separation impossible. And in the case of all three Slav states and of Rumania what has been done has been done not with the idea of aggrandizing one of the great powers; there has been no repetition of the division of the spoils at Vienna, but solely with the idea of giving a small state, newly liberated or recently enriched by the addition of fractions of its own flesh, the chance to live in safety and prosperity.

The two exceptions to this rule are in the case of Italy in the Upper Adige and France on the Lower Saar. As to the Italian case, I have said that it seems to me a gross injustice. As to the French, it is necessary also to say something. The territory affected has an area of approximately 750 square miles and a population of between five and six hundred thousand. There is no French element, and the French claim does not have

## 40,000,000 Liberated From Cruel Domination by the Central Powers

the slightest basis when examined in the light of the principle of self-determination.

French claim, so far as it exists, must rest upon two things; as to approximately half the area, it was once French, contentedly French; it was French not by right of conquest, but by peaceful acquisition as a result of a bargain with Austria a century and a half ago. It was taken by Prussia at the end of the Napoleonic era purely and simply as a prize of conquest without regard to the will of the people, who have been, after a century, absorbed into the German world. But this is a mighty poor claim.

The second claim rests upon the fact that in the recent war the Germans wilfully and with the direct purpose to paralyze French industry destroyed all the coal districts in Northern France, which they had occupied. The thing was done methodically, according to plan, and the documents outlining the method and the purpose are a matter of official record. Unless France were assured of some other coal supply Germany would realize the gain she sought and French industry would be crippled and German industry able to replace it.

### French Right to Saar

It seems to me this warrants French possession of the Saar coal properties and French occupation of the district, since in no other way could the exploitation of the mines be assured. But it certainly does not warrant permanent annexation, and the treaty of Versailles provides that the people shall be allowed to decide their allegiance fifteen years hence. This is the sole survival of the old French ambition to rebuild the Rhine barrier against German aggression. The French and some Germans believe that after fifteen years the people of the district will prefer to remain French, as the people of Alsace after less than a century of union with France became loyal French subjects.

There is an obvious danger that unfair methods will be pursued by the French to insure a favorable plebiscite, but it seems to me the real decision will rest upon two factors—the course of the United States in the matter of the treaty insuring our aid to France if Germany attacks her and the attitude of the new Germany which will presently emerge.

It remains to say a final word about a third ground of criticism of the Treaty of Versailles, namely, the matter of Danzig. Danzig is unquestionably a German city, measured by its present population, although it was once almost as completely Polish. The people in it would vote almost unanimously to be German, but this would mean that Poland, a state of thirty millions, would be deprived of any window on the sea and commercially be at the mercy of the German.

### The Danzig Compromise

The real argument against the Danzig settlement, it seems to me, is that it is a compromise. Poland claimed all of Prussia east of the frontier of the province of West Prussia. Such a claim, if honored, would have placed some three million Germans under Polish rule, but it would have enabled Poland to develop as a really great nation and would have abolished the situation which existed when Frederick the Great engineered the First Partition, the situation which led him to plan that crime. As it is, we have restored the situation and thrust a narrow neck of territory, mainly inhabited by Poles, straight between two blocks of German territory.

Had East Prussia been ceded to Poland it would at no distant time have been Slavified, since it is occupied by great Junker estates and would have been broken up by the Poles into peasant properties and divided among Poles, who in recent decades have made great progress

in reclaiming this land, which was once Polish, even against German official effort. But against giving Danzig to Poland and against any considerable corridor Lloyd George set his face, contrary to the advice of American and British experts, alike and in his opposition President Wilson presently, but not at the outset, joined.

Failing this, it seems to me it would have been far better to have abandoned all idea of giving Poland access to the sea, rather than to have had recourse to a weak compromise which gives Poland only a shadow of what she claimed and holds out to the Germans forever the temptation to regain the districts once annexed by Frederick the Great, districts which the Poles alone cannot defend, and France and Great Britain, with the United States, can only keep Polish at the price of preserving German hostility and precluding any tolerable adjustment, tolerable to both Germany and her recent enemies, such as must come, if world peace is to be preserved.

### Expects Trouble in China

Such, in brief, are the territorial aspects of the recent peace settlement in Europe, and it is to the European phase that I am addressing the present comment. As to Shanghai, whatever criticism may be made of it, one may say that it did not change the condition of the people affected. We failed to liberate some 30,000,000 of Chinese, we shall have all the old troubles again, until this justice is achieved, but this does not in the least change the fact that we did succeed in freeing some 40,000,000 of Europeans, mainly Slavs.

In achieving this liberation we made mistakes, we did incidental wrongs, but since fallible human beings made the peace, what could one expect? What we did do, we the nations allied against Germany, was to take a long step in the direction of abolishing human slavery, political and intellectual slavery, military and bureaucratic despotism, the longest step, in all human history, in my judgment.

The real trouble lies not in the treaty itself but in the things men claimed for it, and expected of it, in advance. Above all it was believed that it would create a condition making war impossible. But nothing was more certain than that the effort to redraw the map of the continent of Europe would stimulate old race rivalries and create new causes for conflict. Let any one take an ethnographic map of Europe and study the regions south of the old German frontier and east of the Oder River. He will see there the hopeless intermingling of races, the inevitable necessity of including people of different tribes under a single rule.

### Nations Still Quarrel

The inevitable has happened, the Poles, the Rumanians, the Jugoslavs and the Czecho-Slovaks are quarrelling to-day over frontiers and provinces, as the Great Powers quarreled before them; we have a dozen controversies where we had two or three, because we have multiplied the number of states. The disputes may lead to new wars, and they certainly do not promise to make world peace secure for many, many years. But world peace was not assured before, and meantime we have the solid gain, the long step toward it, which the liberation of forty millions of men and women constitutes. While they were enslaved war was inevitable. Now that they are free something great and permanent has been gained.

Compare the present peace with that of Vienna, wherein provinces were tossed back and forth, Poland repartitioned, Italy turned back to its old tyrants, Belgium bestowed upon Holland, every national aspiration, every democratic and moral consideration outraged, and it reveals a gain in a century which is almost incalculable. And this is the single fair comparison. To measure it beside the impossible aspirations, hopes, dreams of those who saw the approach of the millennium one brief year ago is to subject it to an unreasonable test.

## Rheims Cathedral Lives!

PARIS, Nov. 1 (By the Associated Press).—After all the Rheims Cathedral has not suffered from German bombardments and fire so much as was at first supposed, Cardinal Luçon has told a representative of the Paris "Intransigent." The Cardinal announced that divine service would be resumed in the cathedral from November 1, but the holy office will be restricted to the altar of the Virgin and the ambulatory around it. These will accommodate only about 1,500 persons.

The interviewer tells of meeting the Cardinal at Rheims in a simply furnished apartment of the archiepiscopal palace, with a shell hole in the wall. Cardinal Luçon, despite his seventy-seven years, is still hale and alert, and is an optimist.

"Destroyed, my cathedral? Why, no," he said. "The damage is much more easily repairable than is generally believed. A few ancient parts, it is true, cannot be replaced; but the beauty of the cathedral lay, first, in its stained

glass; secondly, in its sculptures, and thirdly, in its statuary.

"Of the stained glass, nine-tenths has been saved and brought to Paris. The remaining tenth can be restored by specialists, with the aid of such patience and a great number of colored photographs we have. As regards the sculptures, we shall use the numerous moldings we have of them. Many have had to be restored, anyway, in the course of centuries, such as for instance, the large piece representing the Assumption. That was restored in 1875.

"As for the statuary, we have so many moldings that it will be easy to reproduce the damaged parts. The pillars, with their ornamented capitals, have suffered little; only the two side doorways have been badly damaged by fire."

"Was there not some talk of leaving the cathedral as it was?" the reporter asked.

"If the evidence of Teutonic barbarity have to be preserved let them be kept in a private museum," replied the Cardinal gravely.

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