

expected to pay something just as France had paid after it lost the Franco-Prussian War. In fact, the Germany Foreign Ministry had worked out figures and drawn up schedules for the reparations it expected to be imposed. But with a treaty that was widely seen as unjust, and this was right across the political spectrum, there was little will in Germany to pay any reparations. The arguments between Germany and its former enemies, which poisoned international relations for so much of the decade after the war, obscured the fact that Germany never paid that much in the end, probably less than a sixth of what it owed. Nevertheless, in Germany, reparations became shorthand for every economic problem, for unemployment and for the dreadful inflation of the early 1920s. The real culprit was fiscal mismanagement by the German government but that is not how it was perceived in Germany. What is true in history is sometimes less important than what people believe to be true.

Germans in the interwar years also resented the military clauses, in part because the Allies had said that there would be a more general disarmament which never in the end materialized. But was Germany's war-making capacity that seriously affected? Germany was to have an army of 100,000 but no limits were placed on the number of non-commissioned officers. The German army, after 1919, had the highest proportion of these in Europe, which meant that it had the backbone for a much larger force. The military clauses were supervised by a small Allied military commission whose members frequently complained, with little effect, that they were receiving minimal co-operation from the Germans. Germany was not meant to have an air force but it had a great many flying clubs in the 1920s. When Hitler took power in 1933, it took him two years to construct an air force.

The perception that the Treaty of Versailles was unfair and immoral played an important part in the rise to power of Hitler who took every opportunity to attack the 'Diktat' or dictated peace which bound Germany in chains. It also had an impact on the Allies, as it contributed to the appeasement of the 1930s. If the treaty were as wicked as the Germans claimed, then clearly Hitler was justified in wanting to undo it. John Maynard Keynes, in Paris as the Treasury adviser to the British delegation, set the tone early in the great polemic