

THE VERSAILLES SYSTEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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Abstract: The article investigates a system of political and economic relations between the capitalist countries, set up by Britain, the U.S and France, after the defeat of Germany and its allies in the First World War of 1914-1918. The article describes what the system meant, the causes and time of its appearance. Much attention is given to the impact of the system on international relations. It is spoken in detail about the reasons for collapse and opinions concerning the Versailles system.

Keywords: The Versailles system, the Treaty of Versailles, Liberalism, the First World War, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

The Versailles system is a system of political and economic relations between the capitalist countries, set up by Britain, the U.S and France, after the defeat of Germany and its allies in the First World War of 1914 – 1918. The basis of this system was the Treaty of Versailles and a number of other related agreements, which set the new borders of the European states. The agreement was signed by David Lloyd George, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson in 1919. This system was in effect until the Yalta-Potsdam Conference, when J. Stalin, F.Roosevelt and W.Churchill signed the agreement about the formation of a new system of international relations.¹

Impact of the system on international relations:

The treaty led to the change of the world international map due to the appearance of a number independent state, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Austria and Hungary. Also, it led to the collapse of the four empires: the German, the Russian, the Ottoman, and the Austro-Hungarian. An important achievement of the Treaty of Versailles was creation of the first international organization, the League of Nations, whose main objectives were: global security, settling disputes between countries through diplomatic negotiations and improving the quality of life on the planet. Germany was deprived of all its colonies, which were later divided between the main victorious powers and had to pay reparations. Also it was forbidden to have modern weapons, such as combat aircraft, armored vehicles. German navy was reduced to 6 battleships with no submarines. No air force was allowed. Rhenish Republic degenerated into the Rhineland demilitarized zone occupied by the Allies, and the content support of the occupants was assigned to the German budget. Saar coal mines were transferred to France. Possessions of the Ottoman Empire became the mandated territories of the League of Nations. Also during the system the first elements of liberalism² appeared in international sphere. The basic provisions of political liberalism are reflected in the 14 paragraphs of the postwar settlement, which were formulated by professor and President Woodrow Wilson. He declared such principles as: abandonment of secret diplomacy; morality of foreign policy and diplomacy; reduction of armaments to a minimum, ensuring national security. Washington conference completed the process of post-war settlement. The result was the Versailles-Washington system of international relations, which enshrined the dominance of the world three powers: the United Kingdom, France and the United States.³

¹ Улуния А.А. Всеобщая история. – М.: Просвещение, 2007. – 317с.

² Liberalism it's philosophical and socio-political movement. It comes from the Latin «liberalis» (freedom).

³ Торкунов А.В. Современные международные отношения и мировая политика.— М.: Просвещение, 2005. — 990с.

Paradox of system

The United States put forward the idea of establishing an international organization, but did not enter the League of Nations and did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Russia remained outside of the Versailles System. Having signed a separate peace treaty with the enemy on March, 3 1918, Russia became a traitor for the victorious powers. The civil war⁴ gave a formal reason not to invite any of its representatives to Paris or Washington. Besides, the Bolsheviks aroused the hostility of the Entente, which led to the intervention in Russia (1918-1922)⁵

Opinions about the Treaty

Most scientists consider the terms of the Treaty of Versailles extremely humiliating and cruel to Germany. It is believed that these terms led to extreme social instability in the country after the global economic crisis of 1929, coming to power of the Nazis (1933).⁶

*«The Treaty of Versailles - is the treaty of predators and thieves» (Vladimir Lenin, 1919.)
«This is unheard of, predatory peace that tens of millions of people, including the most civilized, put in the position of slaves. This is not the world, and the conditions dictated by the robbers with a knife in the hands of a defenseless victim». «Sooner or later the German people were to be freed from the chains of Versailles ... I repeat, a great nation like the Germans, had to break the chains of Versailles» (Joseph Stalin, 1935.) "This is not peace; it is an armistice for 20 years. (Ferdinand Foch⁷, 1919.)*

Reasons for the collapse of the system

Enormous reparations, exacted from Germany, led to inflation and the impoverishment of large masses of the population. After the Nazis came to power, restrictions imposed on Germany not adequately controlled by European powers or their violation deliberately descended from German hands. The examples are remilitarization of the Rhineland, the Anschluss of Austria, rejection of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia and subsequent occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. Despite the efforts of politicians and members of the democratic movement, disarmament, security, borders, reparations have not found a final resolution in 1920s.⁸ The system can't resolve all disputes and contradictions between the interests of a number of states. Moreover, its appearance was the way for the emergence of new conflicts. New European and Asian borders drawn on the map as a result of long diplomatic negotiations do not always take into account the will of the people. Also, the global economic crisis which struck the industrialized countries delivered a serious strike to the Versailles system. In the ruling circles of most major countries the idea that problems of foreign policy can be solved only from the position of strength established. We can say that the regime of Adolf Hitler appeared due to the Treaty of Versailles in part.

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3. Улунян А.А. Всеобщая история. – М.: Просвещение, 2007. – 317с.

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⁴ The Russian Civil War (1917-1922) -an armed struggle between the Bolsheviks and their opponents.

⁵ Торкунов А.В. Современные международные отношения и мировая политика. — М.: Просвещение, 2005. — 990с.

⁶ Цыганков, П. А. Политическая социология международных отношений. — М.: Радикс, 1994. — 319с

⁷ Ferdinand Foch- the French military leader, military theorist. French military leader during the World War II

⁸ Улунян А.А. Всеобщая история. – М.: Просвещение, 2007. – 317с.

