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First World War: July 28,1914 — Nov. 11,1918

Causes : The causes of First World War are as under—

1.Militarism : This means the dangerous and burdensome mechanism of great standing armies and large navies along with an espionage system.

2.Narrow Nationalism or Competitive Patriotism : The love of one's country demanded the hatred of the other. Love of Germany demanded the hatred of France and vice-versa.

3.Economic Imperialism : It led to international rivalries. Every country tried to capture markets in every nook and corner of the world. This led to bitterness and heart-burning.

4.Anglo-German Rivalry & The charter of William II : Anglo-German rivalry proved to be the main cause of World War I. Germany had become a great industrial country and wanted to have more markets for trade. Germany was jealous of the colonial and naval greatness of England. William II, emperor of Germany was very ambitious and wanted to gain influence in Turkey by linking Berlin with Baghdad by a railway line. This gave rise to a great rivalry between England and Germany. William II was arrogant, haughty and ambitious. He wanted Germany to be the strongest power in the world. He believed in the policy of 'world power or downfall'.

5.Lack of International Organisation : There was lack of International Organisation to control international relations.

Immediate Cause : The immediate cause of the war was the murder of Archduke Ferdinand who was the heir to the Austrian throne. He and his wife Sophie were killed at Serajevo, the capital of Bosnia, an annexed territory of Austria, by a Serbian. The Austrians held Government of Serbia responsible for the murder and ultimately attacked Serbia. There was strong rivalry already between Austria-Hungary and Serbia in the Balkans.

Course of War : To begin with, Austria was in favour of local war but as time passed, the situation became more grave. Other countries jumped into the fray. Germany, Austria-Hungary Turkey & Bulgaria were on one side; they were called Central Powers. On the other side were England, France, Serbia, Belgium, Japan and Russia; they were called the Allied Powers. The Allied powers joined by Italy in 1915 and USA in 1917. The war started on July 28, 1914 and ended on Nov. 11, 1918.

Peace Settlement (1919-20) :

The Central Powers were completely defeated by the Allied Powers and an Armistice was signed on Nov. 11, 1918, followed by a Peace Conference at Paris. The defeated countries were not represented at the Peace Conference. Though the number of countries represented at the Peace Conference was 27, the terms of the peace treaties were really decided by three countries —USA, Britain and France. The three persons who played the determining role in framing the terms of the treaties were Woodrow Wilson (President of USA), Lloyed George (Prime Minister of Britain) and George Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France). After prolonged discussion, the Treaty of Versailles (Versailles — a city of France) was signed between the Allies and allies & Germany on June 28, 1919. This Treaty rearranged the boundaries of Europe, and many new states — Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Estonia, Lithuania, etc. were formed. William II, the German Emperor, abdicated and took asylum in the Netherland (Holland). The treaty also contained provisions for disarming Germany, the strength of her army was to be limited to 1,00,000 troops. Germany was to pay £ 6,50,00,000 as war-reparations for damage done to the Allies during the war. The Treaty of Versailles was followed by the Treaty of St Germaine (1919), the Treaty of Neuilly (1919), the Treaty of Trianon (1920) and the Treaty of Sevres (1920).

The peace settlement of 1919-20 has been severely criticised. The terms of the Treaty of Versailles were harsh and humiliating for Germany. The peace settlement was based on the principle : 'To the victors belong the spoils and Allies are the victors'. Meanwhile the many suggestions were made from time to time for the creation of an international organisation which could check wars in the future. At the instance of Woodrow Wilson, the President of America, the League of Nations officially came into existence of Jan. 10, 1920. Its headquarter was fixed at Geneva in Switzerland.

WWI: Central Powers Vs Allied Powers

Central Powers :

Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey (entered Nov. 1914), Bulgaria (entered Oct. 1915) etc.

The Allies or Entente Powers :

Great Britain / England / United Kingdom (UK), France, Serbia, Belgium, Japan, Russia / USSR (left Dec. 1917), Italy (entered in April 26, 1915), Romania (entered Aug. 1916), USA (entered April 6, 1917) etc.

Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points

In an address to the Congress in Jan., 1918, American President Woodrow Wilson outlined the basis of a peace settlement. His famous Fourteen Points for lasting peace in the world are : (1) There was to be no more secret diplomacy; (2) freedom of the seas; (3) removal of economic barriers of international trade; (4) reduction of armaments; (5) impartial adjustment of all colonial claims on the basis of the interests of the subject population; (6) national self-determination; (7) establishment of a league of Nations for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity of great and small states alike.

The remaining points dealt with the formation of new boundaries and new states on the basis of nationality and demanded that Germany must evacuate all lands she had forcibly occupied.

