

THE 14 POINTS CONTINUED

PROBLEMS W/ 14 POINTS. →
* WHY DIDN'T BRITAIN & FRANCE LIKE THEM?

There was no mention of any indemnities, reparations, loss of colonies by the losers, admission of war guilt or exclusion of any of the 'losers' from the peace settlement.

There were excellent ideas in the Fourteen Points, and in an ideal world they could have been adopted and been the basis of a Europe without future war. Wilson's allies had different views on the subject, however, and they had not been consulted about Wilson's plans. Some of their motivations were based on historical enmity and national advancement:

Key figure

Robert Lansing (1864-1928)

Robert Lansing was the US secretary of state from 1915 to 1920. Lansing was anti-German and supported the declaration of war against Germany. His relationship with Wilson broke down as he felt the Fourteen Points were too vague, and that Wilson should not personally go to Paris as a peacemaker. Although he supported the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, he was sacked by Wilson in 1920.



diktat

A statute, penalty or settlement imposed in harsh terms upon a defeated party by the victor.

- Germany had imposed savage terms on the French in 1871, and on the Russians in 1918 at Brest-Litovsk, after defeating them in war. They felt it was now Germany's turn to be punished.
- With over 5.5 million casualties, and a huge part of northern France wrecked by the war, the French were not interested in showing Germany any leniency. They wanted to be sure that Germany would never again be strong enough to invade France.
- The British were hardly likely to be sympathetic to any attempt to reduce their naval dominance or colonial pre-eminence. Defending these things had been factors in their decision to go to war, and nearly 1 million British had died in the war.
- The Italians, who had also entered the war on the Allied side, had suffered badly in the fighting and were determined to revenge themselves on the Austrians.

The post-war peace talks were held in Paris, recently shelled by the Germans and, as one commentator put it, 'full of grieving widows and mothers'. Wilson's idealism stood little chance here.

The British and the French wanted to punish the Germans and, understandably, to secure their countries against future German aggression.

In addition to these issues, Wilson lacked negotiating skills and his own advisors were divided. Colonel E. M. House was in favour of scrapping the Fourteen Points, while the secretary of state **Robert Lansing** argued strongly for letting Germany play a key role in the negotiating process rather than just presenting them with a **diktat**.

There were weaknesses in Wilson's draft for the Covenant of League of Nations. There was no system of arbitration built into his system; it was unclear whether it was a moral or a legal document. There was an inevitable conflict between the more detached idealist, Wilson, and the cynical and war-weary European leaders. Ultimately, now the war was over, Wilson had no means of putting pressure on the French and British to agree to his terms. The Treaty of Versailles went through with all its flaws. However, Wilson must be given real credit for what he did achieve, including:

- his constructive guiding principle that peace treaties should remove the causes of future wars
- his conception of the League of Nations

WILSON SHOULD GET SOME CREDIT.

- his support for self-determination, which played a major part in resolving the situation in Eastern Europe and the Balkans
- his sound ideas on making Poland a viable independent state – for instance, giving it access to the sea.

Upon his return to the USA, Wilson had to persuade the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. The midterm elections of 1918 had led to a swing to the Republicans, and the key figure in the Senate was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Henry Cabot Lodge. He was the most influential figure on the committee, and the Senate as a whole tended to support the decisions of its committees. By and large, Lodge supported both the peace treaty and the League and just wanted some revisions – his 'Fourteen Reservations'. These were not profound changes; they were acceptable to Europe and they would have ensured passage through the Senate.

But Wilson would not compromise in any way. It had to be exactly the deal he had brokered in Paris. The result was that the Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. Lodge was portrayed by Wilson as the real villain of this decision.

The debate on President Wilson and the First World War

Wilson was only partially successful in the post-war peacemaking process, as the memories of the war were too bitter for the other victors. Popular demands on elected leaders naturally favoured the idea of revenge, and the treaties that were finally signed played a part in causing the next war. The US Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles, and refused to join the organisation that Wilson had intended to be the 'war preventer', the League of Nations.

In one sense Wilson could be seen as a failure, as he:

- failed to prevent war
- failed to keep the USA out of the war
- failed to attain the 'just and lasting peace' he had hoped for.

WILSON AS A FAILURE

However, Wilson did:

- give sympathetic help to many nations wanting help to achieve self-determination
- stop the total break-up of Germany and Russia
- prevent too barbaric a peace settlement being imposed on Germany
- work very hard for peaceful settlement of disputes between nations
- provide a possible model and mechanism for the resolution of conflicts
- get the United States to play a major and often positive role in world affairs.

WILSON AS SUCCESSFUL

Note:

The Germans argued that they had only agreed to an armistice in November 1918 on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points. They had assumed they would only have to return Alsace-Lorraine and not suffer the admission of war guilt, the loss of colonies, the loss of land to Poland, the reparations and the exclusion from the peace negotiations and the League of Nations.

Note:

Wilson's claims of Lodge's villainy can be seen as unfair. Lodge did have some reservations about the Covenant of the League of Nations, as did many others. He also questioned the viability of the suggested peacekeeping methods. Later events were to prove him right.

US foreign policy 1920–1940

isolationism
A national policy of avoiding political or economic commitments to other countries.

DAWES PLAN

YOUNG PLAN

KELLOGG-BRIAND PACT

* FDR WAS ISOLATIONIST AT FIRST

It has been argued that once the First World War was over, the United States 'retreated' from the rest of the world and entered a period of **isolationism**. This did happen after 1933, but certainly was not the case during the presidencies of Harding, Coolidge and Hoover. There were three major events in the 1920s that showed the United States' willingness to involve itself in international affairs: the Dawes Plan of 1924, the Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928 and the Young Plan of 1929.

The Dawes Plan constituted an effort by the USA, Britain, Italy, Belgium and France to aid the recovery of the German economy crippled by the effects of war and the reparations payments to the victorious Allied nations. The plan was led by, and named after, the American banker and politician Charles Dawes. The Dawes Plan was followed in 1929 by the Young Plan which was again largely American-led. This plan reduced the reparations payments that Germany had to make, and attempted to find a long-term solution that would have a less damaging effect on the German economy. Both the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan helped Germany and were factors in the reduced tension in international affairs during this period.

The Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928 was an international agreement not to use war to resolve disputes or conflicts between nations. It was named after its authors, the US secretary of state Frank B. Kellogg and the French foreign minister Aristide Briand. Many nations, including the USA and the major European powers, signed the pact. It was a fine ideal, but failed in practice. Many of the states that signed were at war by 1941.

US foreign policy changed fundamentally under Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was not involved at all with the World Economic Conference in 1933, and under him the USA avoided international commitments and pursued a policy of isolationism. The Neutrality Acts, passed by Congress in 1935, 1936 and 1937, forbade the USA from supporting any side in a foreign conflict. The USA remained detached from the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, and from the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). It was not until early 1941, when the United States became concerned that Britain would not be able to defeat Nazi Germany, that Roosevelt was prepared to support the Allied side in the Second World War. In December 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by Germany's declaration of war on the United States, finally ended the USA's period of isolationism.

Questions

- 1 Why did the United States finally go to war in 1917?
- 2 'The great peacemaker'. To what extent does Woodrow Wilson deserve this title?