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Treaty of Versailles: Different Perspectives on a Lasting Peace

Delegates from 32 countries met for the Versailles Conference (January 1919), but most decisions were made by 'the Big Three' – Georges Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France, Woodrow Wilson, President of America, and David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Britain. All three wanted to stop a war ever happening again, but they did not agree about how to do this; everybody wanted different things from the peace.



Woodrow Wilson

He was President of America.

He was a History professor. He wanted to **make the world safe**. He wanted to **end war** by making a **fair peace**.

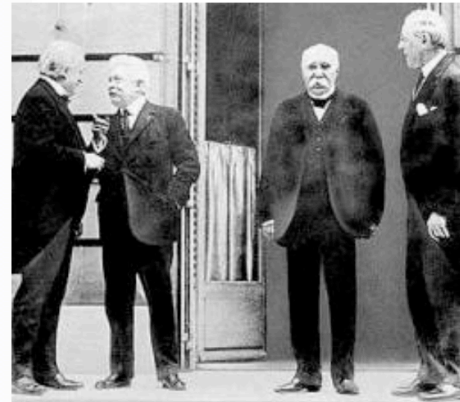
In 1918, Wilson published '**Fourteen Points**' saying what he wanted.

He said that he wanted **disarmament**, and a **League of Nations** (where countries could talk out their problems, without war).

He also promised **self-determination** for the peoples of Eastern Europe.

Many people genuinely wanted peace – they wanted the Great War to be 'the war to end

all wars'. Opening the Conference, the French President Poincaré said: 'We are here to stop it happening again'. This was the most important thing for Woodrow Wilson. He wanted to make the world safe for democracy by making a fair and permanent peace. His Fourteen Points laid out what he wanted – including disarmament, a League of Nations (where countries could talk out their problems) and self-determination.



The three most important men at the Versailles Conference - 'the Big Three' - were:

- Georges Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France (2nd right).
- Woodrow Wilson, the President of America (far right).
- David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister of Britain (far left, talking to Orlando, the Prime Minister of Italy).

What did the USA want?

The views of President Wilson of the USA were based on his Fourteen Points:

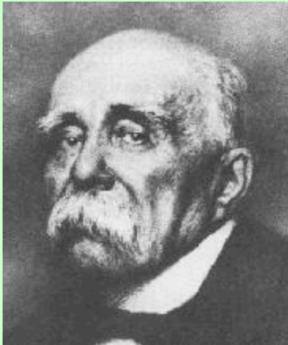
1. No secret treaties
2. Free access to the seas in peacetime or wartime
3. Free trade between countries
4. All states to disarm to a reasonable level that would not threaten other states – this would reduce tension and reduce the risk of war
5. Colonies to have a say in their own future
6. German troops to leave Russia
7. Independence for Belgium
8. France to regain Alsace-Lorraine
9. The frontier between Austria and Italy to be adjusted
10. Self-determination for the peoples of Eastern Europe (they should rule themselves)
11. Serbia to have access to the sea
12. Self-determination for the people in the Turkish Empire
13. Poland to become an independent state with access to the sea
14. League of Nations to be set up

Source: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g5/cs1/background.htm>

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At the same time, many delegates felt anger and hatred. 1 million British and 1.5 million French people had been killed, much of north-eastern France and Belgium (the 'Western Front') had been destroyed. France and Britain were bankrupt. Most delegates blamed Germany (this feeling led to Clause 231) and wanted revenge for the 'lost generation'; they wanted Germany crippled so the war could never be repeated. And if Germany was to blame for the war, then Germany should pay for the damage. So people wanted to 'Make Germany Pay' – as Sir Eric Geddes said, 'everything that you can squeeze out of a lemon, and a bit more'. Many delegates thought it unfair that the Germans had taken vast amounts of land and people from Russia at the Treaty of Brest Litovsk (1917). They said that that the Treaty of Versailles should be just as tough on Germany.



Georges Clemenceau

He was the Prime Minister of France.

He wanted **revenge**, and to **punish** the Germans for what they had done.

He wanted to **make Germany pay** for the damage done during the war.

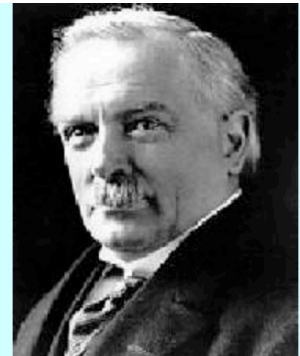
He also wanted to **weaken** Germany, so France would never be invaded again.

sought by France (which he thought would cause another war in 25 years time). Instead, he tried to get a 'halfway point' – a compromise between Wilson and Clemenceau. Like most delegates, Lloyd George wanted to use the Treaty of Versailles to get advantages for his own country. In particular, he wanted to get trade going again (this was why he did not want Germany destroyed economically).

France and Britain saw a chance to get more empire (they took over the German colonies as 'mandates'). The Italians wanted the land promised to them (in a secret treaty) when they joined the allies' side in 1915 (they were given Trentino and Trieste). Serbia wanted (and got) Bosnia.

This was what Clemenceau (nicknamed 'the Tiger') wanted – a Treaty to *punish* the Germans. He wanted to weaken Germany, so France would never be invaded again, by setting reparations high enough to destroy Germany's economy, and by splitting up Germany so that the Rhineland was an independent country (and a barrier between Germany and France).

Lloyd George, too, *said* he wanted to 'make Germany pay' – but only because he knew that was what British people wanted to hear. He wanted 'justice', but he did not want the kind of 'hard justice'



David Lloyd George

He was Prime Minister of Great Britain.

He *said* he would '**make Germany pay**' – because he knew that was what the British people wanted to hear.

He wanted '**justice**', but he **did not want revenge**. He said that the peace must **not be harsh** – that would just cause another war in a few years time. He tried to get a '**halfway point**' – a compromise between Wilson and Clemenceau.

He **ALSO** wanted to expand the British Empire, maintain British control of the seas, and increase Britain's trade

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New Words

Colonies: overseas countries ruled by a European nation

Disarmament: where countries agree to reduce their weapons.

Self-determination: the right of nations to rule themselves.

Clemenceau wanted...

- **revenge** on Germany (as a defeated enemy).
- **punish** Germany (for the death and destruction caused by the German invasion of France)
- **make Germany pay** reparations (for the damage done to France)
- **weaken** Germany militarily (so France would never be in danger again)

Lloyd George wanted...

- a **compromise** between Clemenceau and Wilson
- **justice** - but not too harsh, and certainly not revenge.
- **'make Germany pay'** - but not so much that trade would be damaged
- expand the **British Empire**
- maintain Britain's **control of the seas**
- increase British **trade**

Woodrow Wilson...

- Based on Wilson's **14 Points**
- **end war** and **make the world safe** for democracy
- A **fair peace**, including:
- **self-determination**
- **disarmament** (to take away the tools for war)
- the **League of Nations** (to provide a way to prevent war)

What did the Big Three want from Versailles - and what did they get?

Clemenceau got...

- Huge reparations
- Tiny German army
- The demilitarised zone in the Rhineland
- Alsace-Lorraine and German colonies.
- **BUT**
- He wanted the Treaty to be harsher
- He wanted Germany to be split up into smaller countries.

Lloyd George got...

- German colonies
- The small German navy
- **BUT**
- He thought that the Treaty was far too harsh and would ruin Germany
- He said it would cause another war in 25 years time

Woodrow Wilson got...

- A **League of Nations**
- **Self-determination** for the peoples of Eastern Europe (eg Lithuania, Poland etc)
- **BUT**
- Some of his '14 Points' did not get into the Treaty (eg freedom of the seas/end of Empires)
- The US Senate refused to join the League or sign the Treaty

Credit to: http://www.johndclare.net/peace_treaties3.htm