

Profile

Woodrow Wilson
(President of the USA)



Background

- ◆ Born 1856.
- ◆ Became a university professor.
- ◆ First entered politics in 1910.
- ◆ Became President in 1912 and was re-elected in 1916.
- ◆ From 1914 to 1917 he concentrated on keeping the USA out of the war.
- ◆ Once the USA had joined the war in 1917, he drew up the **Fourteen Points** as the basis for ending the war fairly, so that future wars could be avoided.

Character

- ◆ An idealist and a reformer.
- ◆ As President, he had campaigned against corruption in politics and business. However, he had a poor record with regard to the rights of African Americans.
- ◆ He was obstinate. Once he made his mind up on an issue he was almost impossible to shift.

High hopes for peace

Looking back it may seem that the peacemakers in 1919 had an impossible job. But that is not how people saw it at the time. There was great optimism. One of the main reasons for these high hopes was the American President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1918 Wilson made a speech outlining **Fourteen Points** (see Factfile), which were to be the guidelines for a just and lasting peace treaty to end conflict.

When he arrived in Europe for the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson was seen almost as a saintly figure. Newspaper reports described wounded soldiers in Italy trying to kiss the hem of his cloak and in France peasant families kneeling to pray as his train passed by.

Wilson's ideas

How did Wilson think the peacemakers could build a better and more peaceful world?

- **Don't be too harsh on Germany.** Wilson did believe Germany should be punished. But he also believed that if Germany was treated harshly, some day it would recover and want revenge. He was also concerned that extremist groups, especially communists, might exploit Germans' resentment and communists might even seize power in Germany as they had in Russia in 1917.
- **Strengthen democracy in defeated countries.** For Wilson the key to peace in Europe was to strengthen democracy in the defeated nations so that their people would not let their leaders cause another war.
- **Give self-determination to small countries that had once been part of the European empires.** He wanted the different peoples of eastern Europe (for example, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks) to rule themselves rather than be part of Austria–Hungary's empire.
- **International co-operation.** Wilson also believed that nations should co-operate to achieve world peace. This would be achieved through a 'League of Nations'. Wilson believed this was the most important of his Fourteen Points.

You can see from these principles that Wilson was an idealist. However he was not a politician who could be pushed around. For example, he refused to cancel the debts owed to the USA by Britain and its Allies so that he could put pressure on them to accept his ideas.

Focus Task

What were the motives and aims of the Big Three at Versailles?

Using the information and sources on pages 6–9, fill out a chart like the one below summarising the aims of the three leaders at the Paris Peace Conference. Leave the fifth column blank. You will need it for a later task.

Leader	Country	Attitude towards Germany	Main aim(s)	
Wilson				
Lloyd George				
Clemenceau				

Revision Tip

Your completed chart should be perfect for revision on this topic. The basic requirement is to be sure you can name:

- ◆ each of the Big Three
- ◆ one priority for each of them at the peace talks
- ◆ two issues that they disagreed about.



THE MELTING POT.

A cartoon published in 1919 in an Australian newspaper.

Source Analysis ▲

- 1 Study the main features of Source 1. Who is making the soup? Who is helping him? What are they adding to the mix? What is already in there?
- 2 Would you say Source 2 is optimistic about the prospects for peace? Make sure you can explain your answer by referring to specific features of the cartoon.

Factfile

THE FOURTEEN POINTS (a summary)

- 1 No secret treaties.
- 2 Free access to the seas in peacetime or wartime.
- 3 Free trade between countries.
- 4 All countries to work towards disarmament.
- 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 Frontier between Austria and Italy to be adjusted.
- 10 Self-determination for the peoples of eastern Europe (they should rule themselves and not be ruled by empires).
- 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.

Factfile

The Paris Peace Conference, 1919–20

- ▶ The Conference took place in the Palace of Versailles (a short distance from Paris).
- ▶ It lasted for twelve months.
- ▶ Thirty-two nations were supposed to be represented, but no one from the defeated countries was invited.
- ▶ Five treaties were drawn up at the Conference. The main one was the Treaty of Versailles, which dealt with Germany. The other treaties dealt with Germany's allies (see Factfile on page 19).
- ▶ All of the important decisions on the fate of Germany were taken by Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France), Lloyd George (Prime Minister of Britain) and Wilson (President of the USA) who together were known as 'The Big Three'.
- ▶ The Big Three were supported by a huge army of diplomats and expert advisers, but the Big Three often ignored their advice.

Profile

David Lloyd George
(Prime Minister of Britain)



Background

- ▶ Born 1863.
- ▶ First entered politics in 1890.
- ▶ He was a very able politician who became Prime Minister in 1916 and remained in power until 1922.

Character

A realist. As an experienced politician, he knew there would have to be compromise. Thus he occupied the middle ground between the views of Wilson and Clemenceau.

Did everyone share Wilson's viewpoint?

Not surprisingly, when Wilson talked about lasting peace and justice other leaders agreed with him. After all, who would want to stand up in public and say they were *against* a just and lasting peace?!

However, many were doubtful about Wilson's ideas for achieving it. For example 'self-determination': it would be very difficult to give the peoples of eastern Europe the opportunity to rule themselves because they were scattered across many countries. Some people were bound to end up being ruled by people from another group with different customs and a different language. Some historians have pointed out that while Wilson talked a great deal about eastern and central Europe, he did not actually know very much about the area.

There were other concerns as well. So let's look at the aims and views of the other leaders at the Paris Peace Conference: David Lloyd George (from Britain) and Georges Clemenceau (from France).

Did Lloyd George agree with Wilson?

In public Lloyd George praised Wilson and his ideas. However, in private he was less positive. He complained to one of his officials that Wilson came to Paris like a missionary to rescue the European savages with his little sermons and lectures.

He agreed with Wilson on many issues, particularly that Germany should be punished but not too harshly. He did not want Germany to seek revenge in the future and possibly start another war.

Like Wilson he was deeply concerned that a harsh treaty might lead to a communist revolution like the one in Russia in 1917. He also wanted Britain and Germany to begin trading with each other again. Before the war, Germany had been Britain's second largest trading partner. British people might not like it, but the fact was that trade with Germany meant jobs in Britain.

However, unlike Wilson, Lloyd George had the needs of the British empire in mind. He wanted Germany to lose its navy and its colonies because they threatened the British empire.

SOURCE 2

We want a peace which will be just, but not vindictive. We want a stern peace because the occasion demands it, but the severity must be designed, not for vengeance, but for justice. Above all, we want to protect the future against a repetition of the horrors of this war.

Lloyd George speaking to the House of Commons before the Peace Conference.

SOURCE 3

If I am elected, Germany is going to pay . . . I have personally no doubt we will get everything that you can squeeze out of a lemon, and a bit more. I propose that every bit of [German-owned] property, movable and immovable, in Allied and neutral countries, whether State property or private property, should be surrendered by the Germans.

Sir Eric Geddes, a government minister, speaking to a rally in the general election campaign, December 1918.

Source Analysis ▲

- 1 In what ways are Sources 2 and 3 different?
- 2 Are there any ways in which they are similar?

Profile

Georges Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France)



Background

- ▶ Born 1841 (he was aged 77 when the Paris Conference began).
- ▶ First entered French politics in 1871.
- ▶ Was Prime Minister of France from 1906 to 1909.
- ▶ From 1914 to 1917 he was very critical of the French war leaders. In November 1917 he was elected to lead France through the last year of the war.

Character

A hard, tough politician with a reputation for being uncompromising. He had seen his country invaded twice by the Germans, in 1870 and in 1914. He was determined not to allow such devastation ever again.

Pressures on Lloyd George

Lloyd George faced huge public pressures at home for a harsh treaty (see Source 2). People in Britain were not sympathetic to Germany in any way. They had suffered over 1 million casualties in the fighting as well as food shortages and other hardships at home. They had been fed anti-German propaganda for four years. They had also seen how Germany had treated Russia in 1918 when Russia surrendered. Under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk Germany had stripped Russia of 25 per cent of its population and huge areas of Russia's best agricultural land.

Lloyd George had just won the 1918 election in Britain by promising to 'make Germany pay', even though he realised the dangers of this course of action. So Lloyd George had to balance these pressures at home with his desire not to leave Germany wanting revenge.

Think!

One of the ideas put forward at the Paris Conference was that Germany should lose some of its key industrial areas. How would you expect Lloyd George to react to a proposal like this? You could present your answer as a short speech by Lloyd George or in a paragraph of text.

Did Clemenceau agree with Wilson?

In public, Clemenceau of course agreed with Wilson's aim for a fair and lasting peace. However, he found Wilson very hard to work with. While he did not publicly criticise the Fourteen Points, Clemenceau once pointed out that even God had only needed Ten Commandments!

The major disagreement was over Germany. Clemenceau and other French leaders saw the Treaty as an opportunity to cripple Germany so that it could not attack France again.

Pressures on Clemenceau

France had suffered enormous damage to its land, industry, people – and self-confidence. Over two-thirds of the men who had served in the French army had been killed or injured. The war affected almost an entire generation.

By comparison, Germany seemed to many French people as powerful and threatening as ever. German land and industry had not been as badly damaged as France's. France's population (around 40 million) was in decline compared to Germany's (around 75 million).

The French people wanted a treaty that would punish Germany and weaken it as much as possible. The French President (Poincaré) even wanted Germany broken up into a collection of smaller states, but Clemenceau knew that the British and Americans would not agree to this.

Clemenceau was a realist and knew he would probably be forced to compromise on some issues. However, he had to show he was aware of public opinion in France.

Think!

Here are some extracts from the demands made by France before the Peace Conference started:

- a) German armed forces to be banned from the bank of the River Rhine (which bordered France).
- b) Germany to pay compensation for damage done by German forces in lands they occupied during the war.
- c) Germany's armed forces to be severely limited.

Which of these terms do you think made it into the final Treaty? Give each term a percentage chance and keep a note of your guesses. You will find out if you were right later in the chapter.