

President Wilson's Address to Congress, January 8, 1918,
presenting his Fourteen Points:

. . . . We entered this war because violations of right had occurred which touched us to the quick and made the life of our own people impossible unless they were corrected and the world secure once for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us. The program of the world's peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this:

1. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
2. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.
3. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.
4. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.
5. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.
6. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their goodwill, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.
7. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

8. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.
9. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.
10. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.
11. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.
12. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman [Turkish] Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule [i.e., Kurds, Arab peoples, Armenians and some Greeks] should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles [namely, the straits leading from the Black Sea approaches to international waters] should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.
13. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.
14. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

Conditions of an Armistice with Germany

November 11, 1918¹

One - Cessation of operations by land and in the air six hours after the signature of the armistice.

Two - Immediate evacuation of invaded countries: Belgium, France, Alsace-Lorraine, Luxemburg, so ordered as to be completed within fourteen days from the signature of the armistice. German troops which have not left the above-mentioned territories within the period fixed will become prisoners of war....

Four - Surrender in good condition by the German armies of the following war material: Five thousand guns (2,500 heavy, and 2,500 field), 25,000 machine guns, 3,000 short-range mortars (lit., *minenwerfer*) 1,700 airplanes. ...

Five - Evacuation by the German armies of the countries on the left bank of the Rhine.... at a distance of ten kilometers, from the frontier of Holland up to the frontier of Switzerland....The occupation of these territories will be carried out by allied and United States garrisons holding the principal crossings of the Rhine (Mayence, Coblenz, Cologne), together with the bridgeheads at these points of a thirty-kilometer radius on the right bank and by garrisons similarly holding the strategic points of the regions.

Six - In all territories evacuated by the enemy there shall be no evacuation of inhabitants; no damage or harm shall be done to the persons or property of the inhabitants.... Industrial establishments shall not be impaired in any way and their personnel shall not be removed.

Seven - Five thousand locomotives and 150,000 wagons... shall be delivered to the associated powers.... There shall likewise be delivered 5,000 motor lorries (trucks) in good order....

Eight - The German command shall be responsible for revealing within the period of forty-eight hours after the signing of the armistice all mines or delayed action fuses on territory evacuated by the German troops and shall assist in their discovery and destruction....

Ten - The immediate repatriation without reciprocity, according to detailed conditions which shall be fixed, of all allied and United States prisoners of war,... The repatriation of German prisoners of war shall be regulated at the conclusion of the preliminaries of peace.

Twelve - All German troops at present in the territories which before belonged to Austria-Hungary, Rumania, Turkey, shall withdraw immediately within the frontiers of Germany as they existed on August First, Nineteen Fourteen. All German troops at present in the territories which before the war belonged to Russia shall likewise withdraw within the frontiers of Germany....

Fifteen - Renunciation of the treaties of Bucharest and Brest-Litovsk and of the supplementary treaties.

¹ For those who are interested in trivia, the eleventh hour (in Paris, at least) of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year (1918).

Seventeen - Evacuation by all German forces operating in East Africa within a period to be fixed by the Allies.

Nineteen - The following financial conditions are required: Reparation for damage done.... Immediate restitution of the cash deposit in the national bank of Belgium, and in general immediate return of all documents, specie, stocks, shares, paper money, together with plant for the issue thereof, touching or private interests in the invaded countries. Restitution of the Russian and Rumanian gold yielded to Germany or taken by that power. This gold to be delivered in trust to the Allies until the the signature of peace.

Twenty - Immediate cessation of all hostilities at sea and definite information to be given as to the location and movements of all German ships. Notification to be given to neutrals that freedom of navigation in all territorial waters is given to the naval and mercantile marines of the allied and associated powers, all questions of neutrality being waived.

Twenty-two - Surrender to the Allies and United States of all submarines (including submarine cruisers and all mine-laying submarines) now existing, with their complete armament and equipment, in ports which shall be specified by the Allies and United States....

Twenty-three - German surface warships which shall be designated by the Allies and the United States shall be immediately disarmed and thereafter interned in neutral ports or in default of them in allied ports to be designated by the Allies and the United States....

Twenty-five - Freedom of access to and from the Baltic to be given to the naval and mercantile marines of the allied and associated powers. To secure this the Allies and the United States of America shall be empowered to occupy all German forts, fortifications, batteries, and defence works of all kinds in all the entrances from the Cattegat into the Baltic....

Twenty-six - The existing blockade conditions set up by the allied and associated powers are to remain unchanged, and all German merchant ships found at sea are to remain liable to capture....

Twenty-seven - All naval aircraft are to be concentrated and immobilized in German bases to be specified by the Allies and the United States of America.

Thirty - All merchant vessels in German hands belonging to the allied and associated powers are to be restored in ports to be specified by the Allies and the United States of America without reciprocity.

Thirty-three - No transfers of German merchant shipping of any description to any neutral flag are to take place after signature of the armistice.

Thirty-four - The duration of the armistice is to be thirty days, with option to extend....

Thirty-five - This armistice to be accepted or refused by Germany within seventy-two hours of notification.

This armistice has been signed the Eleventh of November, Nineteen Eighteen, at 5 o'clock French time.

French View of the Versailles Settlement

Andre Tardieu, a French diplomat present at the Versailles negotiations (and later Prime Minister), wrote a critical response to a memo of the British minister at Paris, Lloyd George. Tardieu's response points out the fact that the British proposals mainly hurt Germany overseas, while allowing Germany to keep most of her national territory (Germany proper) intact. What Ally would benefit most from Germany giving up her colonies? What Ally would be hurt most by allowing Germany to remain strong in Europe? That response is excerpted below. Tardieu also wrote, at Prime Minister Clemenceau's urging, a short note on the question of the Rhine region in Germany.

Response to Lloyd George:

II

This Note suggests granting moderate territorial conditions to Germany in Europe in order not to leave her after the Peace with feelings of deep resentment.

This method would be of value if the last war had merely been for Germany an European war, but this is not the case.

Germany before the war was a great world power whose "future was on the water." It was in this world power that she took pride. It is this world power that she will not console herself for having lost. Now we have taken away from her---or we are going to take away from her---without being deterred by the fear of her resentment---all her Colonies, all her Navy, a great part of her merchant Marine (on account of Reparations), her foreign markets in which she was supreme.

Thus we are dealing her the blow which she will feel the worst and it is hoped to soften it by some improvement in territorial terms. This is a pure illusion, the remedy is not adequate to the ill.

If for reasons of general policy, it is desired to give certain satisfactions to Germany, it is not in Europe that they must be sought. This kind of appeasement will be vain so long as Germany is cut off from world politics.

In order to appease Germany (if such is the desire) we must offer her colonial satisfactions, naval satisfactions, satisfactions of commercial expansion. But the Note of March 26 merely contemplates giving her European territorial satisfactions.

III

Mr. Lloyd George's Note fears that if the territorial conditions imposed on Germany are too severe, it will give an impetus to Bolshevism.² Is it not to be feared that this would be precisely the result of the action suggested?

The Conference has decided to call to life a certain number of new States. Can it without committing an injustice sacrifice them out of regard for Germany by imposing upon them unacceptable frontiers? If these peoples---notably Poland and Bohemia---have so far resisted Bolshevism, they have done so by

² *Bolshevism* is another word for *communism*, taken from the Bolshevik party, the prominent communist party in Russia.

the development of national spirit. If we do violence to this sentiment, they will become the prey of Bolshevism and the only barrier now existing between Russian Bolshevism and German Bolshevism will be broken down.

The result will be either a Confederation of Central and Eastern Europe under the leadership of Bolshevist Germany or the enslavement of this same vast territory by Germany swung back to reaction after a period of general anarchy. In either case, the Allies will have lost the war.

The policy of the French Government is on the contrary to give strong support to these young nations with the help of all that is liberal in Europe and not to seek at their expense to attenuate---which besides would be useless---the colonial, naval and commercial disaster which the Peace inflicts on Germany.

If in order to give to these young nations frontiers which are essential to their national life, it is necessary to transfer to their sovereignty Germans, the sons of those who enslaved them, one may regret having to do this and do it only with measure, but it cannot be avoided.

Moreover, by depriving Germany totally and definitely of her colonies because she has ill-treated the natives, one forfeits the right to refuse to Poland or to Bohemia their natural frontiers on the ground that Germans have occupied their territory as the forerunners of Pan-Germanism.

Also included here is a memo from the French government on the question of what to do with Germany's industrial heartland, in the Rhine valley. The French were hoping to partition Germany, including this important region, if possible; barring that, they wanted at least to keep German arms out of the area.

[Memo on the Rhine region](#)

The essential aim which the Conference seeks to attain is to prevent by all just means that which has been from ever occurring again.

Now, what happened in 1914 was possible only for one reason: Germany because of her mastery over offensive preparations made by her on the left bank of the river thought herself capable of crushing the democracies, France and Belgium, before the latter could receive the aid of the Overseas Democracies, Great Britain, the Dominions, and the United States.

It was because this was possible that Germany determined to attack.

It is therefore this possibility which must be done away with by depriving Germany of the means which permitted her to believe in the success of her plan.

In a word there is no question of the aggrandizement of any of the Allied Nations; it is merely a question of placing Germany in a position where she can do no harm by imposing upon her conditions indispensable to the common security of the Western Democracies of their overseas Allies and associates, as well as to the very existence of France.

There is no question of annexing an inch of German soil; only of depriving Germany of her weapons of offense.

Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau's Letter to French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau on the Subject of Peace Terms³

Mr. President:

I have the honor to transmit to you herewith the observations of the German delegation on the draft treaty of peace. We came to Versailles in the expectation of receiving a peace proposal based on the agreed principles.⁴ We were firmly resolved to do everything in our power with a view of fulfilling the grave obligations which we had undertaken. We hoped for the peace of justice which had been promised to us. We were aghast when we read in documents the demands made upon us, the victorious violence of our enemies. The more deeply we penetrate into the spirit of this treaty, the more convinced we become of the impossibility of carrying it out. The exactions of this treaty are more than the German people can bear.

With a view to the re-establishment of the Polish State we must renounce⁵ indisputably German territory - nearly the whole of the Province of West Prussia, which is preponderantly German; of Pomerania; Danzig, which is German to the core; we must let that ancient Hanse town be transformed into a free State under Polish suzerainty. We must agree that East Prussia shall be amputated from the body of the State, condemned to a lingering death, and robbed of its northern portion, including Memel, which is purely German. We must renounce Upper Silesia for the benefit of Poland and Czecho-Slovakia, although it has been in close political connection with Germany for more than 750 years, is instinct with German life, and forms the very foundation of industrial life throughout East Germany....

Although the exaction of the cost of the war has been expressly renounced, yet Germany, thus cut in pieces and weakened, must declare herself ready in principle to bear all the war expenses of her enemies, which would exceed many times over the total amount of German State and private assets. Meanwhile her enemies demand, in excess of the agreed conditions, reparation for damage suffered by their civil population, and in this connection Germany must also go bail for her allies. The sum to be paid is to be fixed by our enemies unilaterally, and to admit of subsequent modification and increase. No limit is fixed, save the capacity of the German people for payment, determined not by their standard of life, but solely by their capacity to meet the demands of their enemies by their labor. The German people would thus be condemned to perpetual slave labor. In spite of the exorbitant demands, the reconstruction of our economic life is at the same time rendered impossible.

³ Brockdorff was the leader of the German delegation; Clemenceau was the French Prime Minister, and president of the Allied delegation. This letter was written in May 1919. Although an armistice was signed in November 1918, the British naval blockade against Germany continued (per the armistice), and the Treaty was only signed on June 28, 1919.

⁴ The principles referred to are Wilson's Fourteen Points, which were publicly promulgated almost a full year before the end of fighting, as the basis for a post-war peace.

⁵ In other words, by signing this treaty, we will have to do these things (that we shouldn't have to do)....

We must surrender our merchant fleet. We are to renounce all foreign securities.⁶ We are to hand over to our enemies our property in all German enterprises abroad, even in the countries of our allies. Even after the conclusion of peace the enemy States are to have the right of confiscating all German property. No German trader in their countries will be protected from these war measures. We must completely renounce our colonies, and not even German missionaries shall have the right to follow their calling therein. We must thus renounce the realization of all our aims in the spheres of politics, economics, and ideas. Even in internal affairs we are to give up the right to self-determination. The international Reparation Commission receives dictatorial powers over the whole life of our people in economic and cultural matters. Its authority extends far beyond that which the empire, the German Federal Council, and the Reichstag combined ever possessed within the territory of the empire. This commission has unlimited control over the economic life of the State, of communities, and of individuals.

⁶ Ownership in foreign companies.

Winston Churchill on the Versailles Settlement⁷

However keen may be the feelings excited by the distribution of tropical colonies, of compensation in money or in kind and of retributive justice; high as are the hopes centered in the League of Nations, it is by the territorial settlements in Europe that the Treaties of 1919 and 1920 will finally be judged....

It was inherent in the realities that the scheme of drawing frontiers in accordance with nationality as defined by language or with the wish of the local inhabitants could not in practice be applied without modification.....

Nevertheless all these reservations and impingements upon the fundamental principle affected only the outskirts of peoples and countries. All the disputable areas put together were but a minute fraction of Europe. They were but exceptions which proved the rule. Fierce as were and are the irritations which have arisen wherever these sensitive and doubtful fringes of nationality have been roughly clipped by frontier scissors, they do not impair the broad essence of the treaties. Probably less than 3 per cent of the European population are now living under Governments whose nationality they repudiate; and the map of Europe has for the first time been drawn in general harmony with the wishes of its people.

[Economic and Political Consequences of Versailles, for Germany](#)

... Germany issued from the war and the peace with many positive advantages. She had in fact realized all the main objectives of British Liberal⁸ policy in the Victorian era. Defeat has given the German people effective control of their own affairs. The Imperialist system has been swept away. A domestic self-determination has been achieved. A parliamentary system based on universal suffrage to which the rulers of Germany are effectively responsible may be some consolation for the loss of twenty-two kings and princes⁹. The abolition of compulsory military services has always seemed to British eyes a boon and not an injury. The restriction of armaments enforced by treaties upon Germany is today extolled as the highest goal to which all nations should aspire. The absurd and monstrous economic and financial chapters of the Treaty of Versailles have already been swept almost entirely into limbo....

Germany has lost her colonies, but she was a late-comer on the colonial scene. She possessed no territory over-seas in which the German race could live and multiply.... They were in any case hostages to a stronger sea-power. Their alienation in no way impaired the German strength and very doubtfully improved the fortunes of their new possessors.

⁷ Excerpted from the series *World Crisis*, the volume entitled *Aftermath*.

⁸ That is, *Liberal* in the traditional sense of "standing up for individual freedom," not in the modern sense of "increasing government control over our freedoms and our tax dollars."

⁹ Before the abdication of the Kaiser, there were many kings, princes, and dukes ruling various provinces in Germany. Now, all Germany was a democratic republic.

Against the argument that self-determination was denied to Austria, which tried to unite with Germany (since both nations were German):

Theoretically upon Wilsonian principles this demand—the Anschluss, as it is called—was difficult to resist. In practice it was loaded with danger. It would have meant making the new Germany larger in territory and population than the old Germany which had already proved strong enough to fight the world for four years. It would have brought the frontiers of the German realm to the summits of the Alps and made a complete barrier between Eastern and Western Europe. The future of Switzerland and the permanent existence of Czechoslovakia alike appeared to be affected.

John Maynard Keynes: The Economic Consequences of the Peace, 1920¹⁰

*John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) was an influential English economist. In his *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* he attacked the effects of Versailles Settlement for its effects on Germany. He discussed the settlement in terms of numbers, and criticized the four allies for being obsessed with revenge upon Germany, to the point of driving it to ruin. The four most powerful allies (Britain, France, the United States, and Italy) dictated the Treaty of Versailles to a Germany that was still under blockade, even though an armistice had already been signed. This document was one of the more influential pamphlets written in history, convincing a lot of its readers that the Versailles settlement was a travesty. It sold 100,000 copies (a very large printing for a political work) and was translated into 12 different languages.*

This chapter must be one of pessimism. The Treaty includes no provisions for the economic rehabilitation of Europe, - nothing to make the defeated Central Empires into good neighbors, nothing to stabilize the new States of Europe, nothing to reclaim Russia; nor does it promote in any way a compact of economic solidarity amongst the Allies themselves; no arrangement was reached at Paris for restoring the disordered finances of France and Italy, or to adjust the systems of the Old World and the New.

The Council of Four¹¹ paid no attention to these issues, being preoccupied with others, - Clemenceau [French Prime Minister] to crush the economic life of his enemy [Germany], Lloyd George [British Prime Minister] to do a deal and bring home something which would pass muster for a week, the President [Wilson] to do nothing that was not just and right. It is an extraordinary fact that the fundamental economic problems of a Europe starving and disintegrating before their eyes, was the one question in which it was impossible to arouse the interest of the Four. Reparation was their main excursion into the economic field, and they settled it as a problem of theology, of politics, of electoral chicane, from every point of view except that of the economic future of the States whose destiny they were handling....

The essential facts of the situation, as I see them, are expressed simply. Europe consists of the densest aggregation of population in the history of the world. This population is accustomed to a relatively high standard of life, in which, even now, some sections of it anticipate improvement rather than deterioration. In relation to other continents Europe is not self-sufficient; in particular it cannot feed itself. Internally the population is not evenly distributed, but much of it is crowded into a relatively small number of dense industrial centers. This population secured for itself a livelihood before the war, without much margin of surplus, by means of a delicate and immensely complicated organization, of which the foundations were supported by coal, iron, transport, and an unbroken supply of imported

¹⁰ From John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1920), pp.211-216. Excerpt taken from (c)Paul Halsall Aug 1997.

¹¹ Representatives of the four leading Allies—France, Britain, US, and Italy.

food and raw materials from other continents. By the destruction of this organization and the interruption of the stream of supplies, a part of this population is deprived of its means of livelihood. Emigration is not open to the redundant surplus. For it would take years to transport them overseas, even, which is not the case, if countries could be found which were ready to receive them. The danger confronting us, therefore, is the rapid depression of the standard of life of the European populations to a point which will mean actual starvation for some (a point already reached in Russia and approximately reached in Austria). Men will not always die quietly. For starvation, which brings to some lethargy and a helpless despair, drives other temperaments to the nervous instability of hysteria and to a mad despair. And these in their distress may overturn the remnants of organization, and submerge civilization itself in their attempts to satisfy desperately the overwhelming needs of the individual. This is the danger against which all our resources and courage and idealism must now co-operate.