

Paris Peace Conference

Official Voices (the following passages are NOT actual quotations)

Georges Clemenceau, French Prime Minister

The French people want revenge for what Germany did to them in 1871, and continued to do in Alsace and Lorraine until the Armistice. On behalf of the French people, I want the world to recognize Germany as the sole cause of this war and all of its destruction, death, and suffering. Furthermore, the French people will not tolerate anything less than a public declaration from Germany that the war was their fault. The French people demand that Germany pay for all the damage that its military caused to our property and land. National security and freedom from any future invasion from Germany must be guaranteed. We demand that Germany's military be formally weakened such that it can never pose another military threat to Europe. We demand that the former French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine be returned to France. We demand that Germany be stripped of its overseas colonies in order to prevent further industrialization and militarization. We demand that the Rhine Valley become a buffer zone occupied by a neutral power. If our demands seem unfair that is due to the fact that the German nation considers compromise, conciliation, and negotiation as signs of weakness and must be forced into submission.

Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America

The United States fought this war against the leaders of the governments of the defeated nations, not against the people. We do not wish to punish Germany or any of our enemies in this war. We do not wish to rebuild France or Great Britain. Our primary aim is to secure peace without victors. Our aim is to create a lasting peace. We should reduce if not eliminate the colonial system of the European nations. We must provide for the self-determination of all people to participate fully and democratically in a government of their choosing. Again, the position of the United States is that we must not punish Germany for the sake of punishment.

Lloyd George, British Prime Minister

Forcing the Germans to pay war reparations for all of the damage in France will be difficult to enforce. If we cannot get an admission of guilt from the Germans that should not prevent further negotiations. We should seek reasonable payments from Germany rather than wholesale financial responsibility. Britain demands that a) the German navy never again be able to challenge Britain, b) Germany lose its colonial territory, c) the German army be formally limited in its size to prevent future conflicts. The view of Britain is that Germany should not be weakened to the point that France becomes the dominant power on the Continent. Germany should have sufficient economic and military power to preclude the spread of Bolshevism into Western Europe.

Vittorio Orlando, Italian Prime Minister

Italy must be rewarded for its role in defeating the enemies of the Allies. Italy should receive appreciation from the Allies for having contributed to the ultimate victory over Germany. Italy should be able to expand its territory and be recognized as a major power in Europe.

Alternative Voices (the following passages are NOT actual quotations)

Bolsheviks of Russia

The political developments and changes within Russia are legitimate and should be seen as the result of self-determination. France, Germany, and Great Britain should honor the sovereignty of the Russian people to decide for themselves how they wish to organize their society and government. Russia played a pivotal role in weakening Germany during the war and should not so quickly be considered an enemy of democracy. We have indeed brought democracy to Russia, much as democracy was brought to France in the 18th century through violent revolution.

Social Democrats of Germany

We agreed to the Armistice to end the war with the assurance that a treaty would reflect President Wilson's Fourteen Points, which would not give any one nation an advantage over the others. Remember that we were not defeated on the battlefield, but agreed to a cease-fire according to specific terms. Know that we fully accept and recognize the political break-up of Austria-Hungary. Know that we forced Kaiser William II to abdicate his throne. Know that we have given up our territory in Eastern Europe. Know that we resent having been forced to negotiate under duress, as the blockade of our nation continued. The German people are starving. Thousands did not survive the winter. We should not have to pay any nation for damages due to the war. We should not be forced to relinquish our colonial territory. We should not be forced to forfeit our coal reserves in the Rhine Valley. We are not to blame for this war and should not be made to accept full responsibility for its destruction. The German people acted in self-defense due to the threat of a Russian invasion.

Ho Chi Minh (Vietnamese nationalist living in Paris)

The people of Vietnam understand the principle of self-determination, the principle that President Wilson insists be the foundation upon which a lasting peace in Europe be built. The people of Vietnam desire self-determination, as well. We seek equality under the law, basic individual freedoms, and representation within the French colonial government. We seek the same political rights that motivated the American people in 1776 and the French people in 1789. Why do the Social Democrats and Communists recognize our demands, but the liberals do not?

John Maynard Keynes (British economist who participated in the Paris Peace Conference)

The Treaty of Versailles is both immoral and unworkable. It is entirely inadequate, being plagued as it is by the incompatible values, expectations, and worldviews of the leaders who negotiated it. The current "peace" will surely bring economic ruin and further war to Europe unless it is rejected. Europe should expect high inflation and slow economic growth for years to come. We will soon see what type of politics emerges from such unfortunate economic conditions.