

Introduction

President *Woodrow Wilson* began thinking about peace even before the end of World War I. He developed a program for peace called the **Fourteen Points**. He believed that if all the world's nations agreed to these points, then world peace could be maintained. The United States began dropping leaflets describing these points over Central Europe during the war. His ideas so interested Central European people that many of them stopped supporting their own leaders in Germany and Austria-Hungary. They believed that Wilson's plan offered the possibility of a lasting peace.



Ever Try It Yourself?

Courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

Fourteen Points

President Wilson intended five of the Fourteen Points to prevent the causes of any future wars. All fourteen points are on page 344. The five points that Wilson intended to end future wars were as follows:

- First, Wilson said that nations should not make secret treaties. He believed that all agreements between nations should be made public.
- Second, peace would be more likely if world powers reduced their militaries and arms. With smaller armies, nations would be less likely to declare war.
- Third, there should be freedom of the seas. No nation had the right to interfere with the shipping or trade of another nation. Wilson regretted that Germany's attacks on the American ships had contributed to the entry of the United States into World War I.
- Fourth, nations should remove or lower **tariffs**. A tariff is a tax on goods that one country or nation ships to another. Tariffs make it difficult for a nation to sell their goods to the people of another nation.
- Fifth, there would be international control over colonies in an effort to eliminate imperialism. The fight for colonies had been a major point of conflict between the nations involved in World War I.

Two other points were key to promoting peace in the world.

Wilson believed that people in Central Europe should have **self-determination**. That meant they should be free to decide in which country they wanted to live.

The new borders of countries would be drawn according to the people's wishes. In addition, nations would choose their own governments.

Although this was a peaceful proposal, it did not work. People living together often disagreed about which country they wanted their territory to join.



One of Wilson's most original and important ideas was to form an *association of nations*. He wanted the nations of the world to form a world congress. Problems between countries could then be taken to this congress. There they would be worked out by **compromise**, or agreement, and not by war. This congress was later named the **League of Nations**.



Wilson offers peace to the German emperor.

Courtesy of the J. N. "Ding" Darling Foundation

Wilson's Fourteen Points

1. An end to all secret diplomacy
2. Freedom of the seas in peace and war
3. The removal of trade barriers among nations
4. The general reduction of armaments
5. The adjustment of colonial claim is in the interest of the inhabitants as well as of the colonial power
6. The evacuation of Russian territory and the independent determination by Russia of its own national policies
7. The restoration of Belgium
8. The evacuation of all French territory and return of Alsace-Lorraine
9. The readjustment of Italian boundaries along clearly recognizable lines of nationality
10. Independence for various national groups in Austria-Hungary
11. The restoration of the Balkan nations and free access to the sea for Serbia
12. Protection for minorities in Turkey and the free passage of the ships of all nations through the Dardanelles
13. Independence for Poland, including access to the sea
14. A general association of nations to protect "mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike"

The Treaty of Versailles

In 1918 the Allies—France, Great Britain, and Italy, along with the United States—met to discuss the Fourteen Points and decide the fate of the Central Powers—Germany and Austria-Hungary—and the territories in Central Europe. A peace conference was held at the Palace of Versailles (ver-sigh) near Paris, France. The peace treaty was called the **Treaty of Versailles**. The Allied nations did not allow Germany to participate in the writing of the Treaty that was signed on June 28, 1919.

President Wilson did not want the Allies to punish Germany harshly. He felt that punishing Germany and the Central Powers could lead to a future war. The Central Powers might one day want to regain what they would

lose in the Treaty of Versailles. The other Allies disagreed. They wanted to teach Germany a lesson. The treaty punished Germany in the following ways:

1. Germany had to accept the blame for the war.
2. Germany lost its navy and air force, and its army was limited so they could not fight again.
3. Germany was forced to pay the Allies \$33 billion for war damages.
4. Germany lost all of its colonies in Africa and the Pacific; some of Germany's land was given to other countries.

The Allies made treaties with other nations, also. Austria-Hungary was divided into four new countries. They were named Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Poland was **liberated**, or freed, from Austria-Hungary's rule. Each new country would select its own type of government.

The League of Nations

The Treaty of Versailles formed the *League of Nations*. President Wilson was anxious for the United States to join this association of nations. He returned from France to urge the United States Senate to accept the Versailles treaty and join the League of Nations.

It is the constitutional duty of the United States Senate to accept or reject treaties with other nations. Some members of the Senate were against the League of Nations. The Treaty included a **covenant**, a binding agreement, between its members. They agreed to protect any member-nation's boundaries or borders. The United States Senate feared that such an agreement could one day involve the country in another European war.



President Woodrow Wilson

President Wilson tried to gain popular support for the Treaty and the League. He traveled around the United States appealing to the people. He wanted them to force the Senate to accept the treaty and join the League. The President became very ill during his travels and never regained his health.

The Senate did not sign the Treaty of Versailles. They voted against joining the League of Nations. Instead, in 1921, the United States signed separate treaties with Germany. Americans were afraid of becoming involved in Europe's problems. They were ready to return to life as they remembered it before World War I.

Summary

President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points was a plan for building a lasting peace between nations. Some of Wilson's ideas were written into the Treaty of Versailles peace treaty at the end of World War I. However, Wilson was disappointed when the Allies punished Germany. He was also disappointed that the United States Senate would neither accept the treaty nor join the League of Nations. The Senate wanted to return to its neutral position and avoid problems overseas.