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The New Map of Europe

Following the end of World War I, known then as the Great War, the leaders of the nations which had participated in that massive conflict met to hammer out a peace settlement. The Peace Conference of Paris opened on January 18, 1919, just two months after the signing of the armistice (November 11, 1918), which ended hostilities.

The war resulted in the deaths of millions of people, both military and civilian. Twice as many men died in World War I than the number who died in all the major European wars from 1790 until the beginning of the Great War. At least ten million soldiers were killed and another twenty million suffered wounds. Approximately five million civilians lost their lives during the war, as well. Such numbers amounted to staggering losses.

With the war having just ended weeks before the beginning of the peace conference, many of the allied world leaders went to the peace negotiations prepared to make the losing side pay. Others, however, went to the meetings ready to create a new world, one better than its predecessor.

One of the optimistic men who attended the conference was Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States from 1913 to 1921. Although the U.S. had entered the war late (the war began in 1914 and America did not join the Allies until the spring of 1917), Wilson traveled to the conference, held at the old French palace at Versailles, with a plan for Europe's future.

Known popularly as the Fourteen Points, Wilson envisioned a world different from the one which had gone to war in 1914. He first presented his ideas for a new Europe in a speech to Congress in January of 1918. In summary, his 14 points or proposals included all the following: (1) the making of open, not secret, treaties, (2) freedom of the seas, even during wartime, (3) removal of trade barriers between nations, and (4) reduction of military weapons. Points 5 through 13 were concerned with reestablishing order to Europe, as well as the establishing of independence for several European nations from imperial control, such as Poland, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Turkey, as well as independence for Belgium. Such things had been promised to the people living under the rulers of both the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of thousands of leaflets were dropped from airplanes into the hands of the peoples living in regions controlled by these empires.

But Wilson's final point—point 14—was the most important of them all. It called for

Woodrow Wilson

the establishment of a League of Nations, an international body whose main purpose would be to enforce the various treaties created at the Versailles Conference. The League was designed to help maintain peace in the future and to provide a forum where disputing nations could discuss their grievances.

Not all of Wilson's Fourteen Points were accepted by his fellow negotiators. The leaders of the victorious Allied powers of France (Georges Clemenceau), Great Britain (David Lloyd George), and Italy (Vittorio Orlando) blocked several of Wilson's ideas and did not cooperate with him on issues important to Wilson.

When the peace treaty was finally hammered out, the Versailles Treaty placed the responsibility for the war squarely on Germany's shoulders. As a result, Germany was punished severely under the treaty. Germany not only lost important territory, it was also saddled with high war damages amounting to 132 billion gold marks, including shipments of German coal and merchant ships to the Allied powers.

In addition, Germany was forced to disarm. The German army was reduced to 100,000 men. The German navy was limited to six primary warships, with no submarines. The defeated nation was denied any air force. Finally, Germany was forced to accept full responsibility for having caused the war.

This treaty proved to be very unpopular with the German people at home. Such harsh conditions caused much suffering in Germany and helped to set the stage for later war.
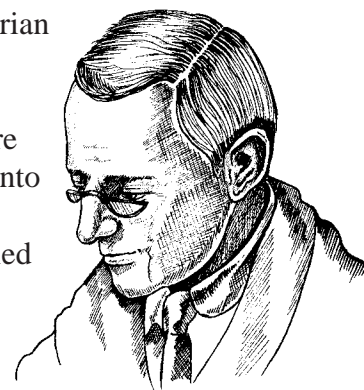
Europe 1919: A Map Study

World War I pitted the nations of the Central Powers (Germany, Bulgaria, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire) in a massive struggle against the armies of the Allied Powers (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and, later, the United States).

When the war ended, the negotiations at Versailles brought about important changes in the political map of the European continent. In fact, five treaties were signed at Versailles, as the Allies negotiated separate treaties with Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, and Turkey.

Among the casualties of the Great War were the empires of Austria-Hungary and of the Ottoman Turks. Both these imperial powers were dismantled and their former lands were divided into new nation-states to provide national homelands for several of the recognized ethnic groups of eastern Europe. (Strong nationalism among such peoples had helped to bring about World War I in the first place.) Another state to lose large amounts of territory was Russia, which had negotiated a separate peace with Germany before the end of the war.

Europe During World War I

Map Exercise I

The map at the left shows Europe before and during the Great War. Identify each of the following states: Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, Russia, and Serbia. Also, locate the cities of Berlin and Sarajevo.

Europe Following World War I

Map Exercise II

The map at the right shows Europe following World War I. Locate each of the following states on the map: Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, and Bulgaria.

Then, identify each of the following newly created states: Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Postwar Britain

World War I brought much destruction and death to the people of Europe. After the defeat of the Central Powers, led by Germany, the victorious nations tried to return to a normal way of life. But the war brought great change to some countries, and even created some new states. Nevertheless, Great Britain and France, two of Europe's leading democratic states, attempted to maintain their democratic systems.

Britain, following the war, found itself in a state of psychic shock. Nearly one million British troops had been killed during the war and twice as many wounded. Despite the war, much of British life continued on as it had before the great conflict. But there were differences. Taxes remained high, many of which had been created during the war. Nearly a generation of British youth had been destroyed through their service and sacrifice. The decade following World War I was one of cynicism and frustration.

But democracy continued without serious question and was even expanded. In 1918, by an act of Parliament, British women over the age of 30 gained the right to vote (the voting age was lowered to 21 a decade later). Women had been campaigning for decades for voting privileges. In 1919, British voters elected the first woman member of the Parliamentary House of Commons, Viscountess Astor (1879–1964).

Economically, Britain struggled with postwar problems. The national debt mushroomed during the war to ten times its prewar level. British factories and mines awkwardly regeared to a peacetime level of production. Britain faced serious nationalist movements within its empire from Ireland, Egypt, and India. One of the most serious independence movements was centered in Ireland. The Irish nationalist movement, (known as *Sinn Fein*, which, in Irish, means "We Ourselves") campaigned and fought for separation from Great Britain. Led by Eamon de Valera (1882–1975), Sinn Fein supporters attempted to declare Ireland an independent republic in 1919.

Eamon de Valera

Civil war soon broke out between members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), led by an Irish radical named Michael Collins (1890–1922), and the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the Irish police force. The British sent to Ireland additional police known as the Black and Tans (after the colors of their uniforms), which further clashed with the IRA.

A 1920 parliamentary act separated Northern Ireland (which was largely Protestant) from southern Ireland (largely Catholic), creating two Irelands. This Government of Ireland Act was accepted by the north, thus creating Northern Ireland. The south continued to fight for complete independence until 1923. (Collins was killed in 1922.) By 1949, through continuing political efforts, Ireland gained its complete independence from Great Britain.
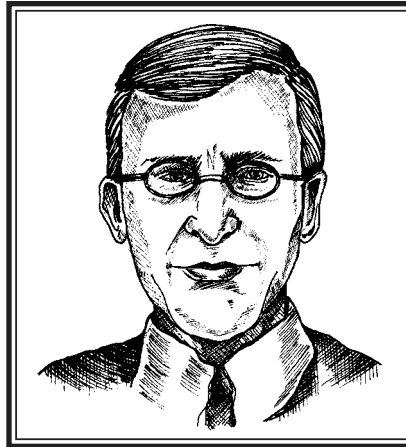
Nationalist pressures elsewhere in the British Empire brought autonomy to Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Such nations made their own laws and were only tied to Britain by allegiance.

Despite such political problems, it was the economy of postwar Britain which caused the greatest concerns at home. Strikes marred the workplace, especially in the coal industry. The government, led by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, tried to answer some of the economic problems by raising unemployment insurance benefits and establishing a higher postwar tariff on foreign imports.

Despite such moves by the government, postwar Britain still suffered with one million men unemployed. Manufacturing and mining did not expand their production bases during these years, due in part to foreign competition. As a result, such significant industries as iron, coal, shipbuilding, and textiles did not expand in scope.

Through these years—especially from 1921 until 1939—the British government did little to solve the basic economic problems which perplexed its leaders. In a country of 40 million people, these years witnessed between one and three million unemployed each year.