

## **Wilson and the League of Nations**

*Why did the United States reject the Treaty of Versailles?*

Fighting in World War I stopped on November 11, 1918. On that date, the Allies and Germany signed a ceasefire agreement. Two months later, Allied leaders met at Versailles, near Paris. This was the site of the Paris Peace Conference. Many world leaders were present, including Prime Minister David Lloyd George from Great Britain, Premier Georges Clemenceau from France, and Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando from Italy. President Wilson spoke for the United States.

Wilson's discussed his plans for the postwar world. During the war, the president said the "world must be made safe for democracy." He hoped for what he called "peace without victory." This meant the world would be safer for everyone. The losers of the war would not be unfairly punished. Wilson also revealed a set of foreign policy goals called the Fourteen Points. The Fourteen Points supported free trade, freedom of the seas, the end of foreign colonies, and national borders that respected different groups of people.

Germany agreed to end the war, and it also accepted Wilson's Fourteen Points. However, not everyone at the Paris Peace Conference agreed with the Fourteen Points. British and French citizens had suffered greatly during the war. They wanted Germany to pay them back. Lloyd George and Clemenceau wanted a peace agreement that helped their own countries. They demanded that Germany not only pay their war costs but also pay huge fines and accept blame for starting the war. The peace treaty, known as the Treaty of Versailles, did not end foreign colonies or create "peace without victory." The treaty did create a new League of Nations to settle disagreements between countries. The League of Nations would also work to preserve peace between countries. The League of Nations was a part of Wilson's Fourteen Points.

Wilson returned to the United States to ask Congress to approve the treaty. However, Republicans had won control of Congress during the 1918 elections. Many Republicans opposed the treaty because they did not support the League of Nations. They thought the League of Nations would cause the U.S. to lose sovereignty. This means that it would lose its authority to make decisions as an independent nation. Senate Majority Leader Henry Cabot Lodge wanted many changes to the treaty. Lodge wanted the League of Nations to have less power over the U.S. military. Some senators were less willing than Lodge to accept the peace treaty.

Wilson still wanted the treaty and the League of Nations to succeed. He traveled around the country giving speeches to increase public support. But his trip was cut short when he suffered a stroke. In November 1919, while Wilson was ill, the Senate voted on the treaty. Every single version of the treaty was voted down. Soon, the United States made separate peace treaties with the countries involved in the war. The League of Nations did become a reality, but it did not include the United States. Because the League lacked U.S. support, it was not a strong group