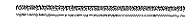


In early 1918, nine months after the United States entered World War I, President Wilson issued the Fourteen Points, a blueprint for the postwar world. Among the key principles were national self-determination, freedom of the seas, worldwide free trade, redrawing of the map of the colonial world with colonized people being given "equal weight" in deciding their own futures, and the establishment of a League of Nations to preserve peace. After the war ended with the victory of the United States and its allies, Wilson traveled to Versailles, France, to take part in drafting the peace treaty.

Unfortunately, the final result violated many of the principles Wilson had enunciated. He was outmaneuvered by his Allied counterparts—David Lloyd George of England, Georges Clemenceau of France, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Makino Nobuaki of Japan—all of whom coveted former German colonies and spheres of influence. In the end, the principle of self-determination was applied to eastern Europe, where new nations were carved out of the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian empire, but not Asia or Africa. Asian and African nationalists, who had taken Wilson's rhetoric seriously, were bitterly disappointed. Mao Zedong—then a young student activist and later the leader of the revolution that would bring communists to power in China—penned two short pieces that reflected the widespread disappointment in the Treaty of Versailles.



SO MUCH FOR NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION!

Poland and Czechoslovakia, in reestablishing their national existence, have presided over the death of Germany. The Allies did their utmost to help them in this, in the name of "national self-determination." The Arabs benefit from the splitting up of Turkey, and therefore were allowed to become semi-independent. The desire of the Jews to restore their nation in Palestine will not succeed because it is of no great concern to the Allied powers. . . . Korea bewails the loss of its independence; so many of its people have died, and so much of its land has been devastated, but it was simply ignored by the Peace Conference. So much for national self-determination! I think it is really shameless!

123. A Critique of the Versailles Peace Conference (1919)

Source: Mao Zedong: "So much for national self-determination!" From Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912–1949, Volume 1: The Pre-Marxist Period, 1912–1920, ed. Stuart R. Schram (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), p. 337. Translation copyright © 1992 by The John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research. Reprinted with permission of M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

POOR WILSON

Wilson in Paris was like an ant on a hot skillet. He didn't know what to do. He was surrounded by thieves like Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Makino, and Orlando. He heard nothing except accounts of receiving certain amounts of territory and of reparations worth so much in gold. He did nothing except to attend various kinds of meetings where he could not speak his mind. One day a . . . telegram read, "President Wilson has finally agreed with Clemenceau's view that Germany not be admitted to the League of Nations." When I saw the words "finally agreed," I felt very sorry for him for a long time. Poor Wilson!

Questions

1. According to Mao, in what parts of the world was the principle of national self-determination adhered to, and where was it violated?
 2. Why does Mao feel sorry for President Wilson?
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