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Wilson's Fourteen Points

Written by [Brian Farmer](#)

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After the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia during the autumn of 1917, they published the texts of the secret treaties that the Allies, including the Russians, had concluded earlier in the Great War (the expression used to describe World War I at that time), presumably to discredit the czar and his regime. In response, Allied leaders felt that it was necessary to counter any unfavorable impression and to make public declarations that might reassure the Bolsheviks and encourage them to continue in the war.



The first to speak out was British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Addressing the Trades Union Congress in London on January 5, 1918, Lloyd George declared that the Allies were not fighting a war of aggression against the German people. He stated that the first aim of Britain was “the complete restoration, political, territorial, and economic, of the independence of Belgium and such reparation as can be made for the devastation of its towns and provinces.” The second aim was the restoration of Serbia, Montenegro, and the occupied parts of France, Italy, and Rumania. The third aim was the restoration of Alsace and Lorraine to France. The fourth aim was an independent Poland. He concluded:

If, then, we are asked what we are fighting for, we reply, as we have often replied — we are fighting for a just and lasting peace — and we believe that, before permanent peace can be hoped for, three conditions must be fulfilled. First, the sanctity of treaties must be re-established; secondly, a territorial settlement must be securely based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed; and, lastly, we must seek by the creation of some international organization to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war.

Partly so that Lloyd George might not seem to be the spokesman for all of the Allied and Associated Powers, partly because the United States was not a party to any of the secret treaties among the European Allies, and partly because U.S. President Woodrow Wilson wanted to show that his nation had a broader and more unselfish view of the needs of the future, Wilson hastened to issue a statement of his own views. Addressing the U.S. Congress on January 8, 1918, he outlined “the only possible program” for peace, in what was to become known as Wilson's Fourteen Points, shown here slightly abridged:

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