

# Ratification battle in the u.s. over the treaty of versailles after wwi



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After the long and deadly First World War, of which the U. S. had been embroiled in for over a year, people were finally ready for their soldiers to come home. Some were even ready for peace. However, many Europeans had lost everything in the war and were not ready for peace. They were ready for revenge. The Treaty of Versailles reflected those sentiments. Internationally, the battle over the terms of the Treaty of Versailles was between those, such as Woodrow Wilson, who wanted a “ peace without victory” and those who wanted to punish Germany for starting the war. At home in America, the battle over the treaty was quite different. It was a bitter dispute with no resolution, but many unintended consequences. The failure of the U. S. government to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations resulted in American isolationism and a lack of oversight in Germany, both of which were contributing factors to the beginning of the Second World War.

In the battle over the ratification of the treaty, there were three main factions. The first was the supporters of the treaty in its original form, led by Woodrow Wilson. The second faction was the Reservationists. This group was in favor of the treaty, but only after it had been modified to their interests. The third group opposed the treaty under any circumstance. At this time, they were known as Irreconcilables. Looking at their overall ideals and philosophies, however, they are more aptly called Isolationists. These were the people who had never wanted to enter the war in the first place. Now that the war was over, they wanted America to stay out of European affairs and focus on domestic issues. They also did not like the idea of the League of Nations. They felt that war was bred through contact and involvement, or

alliances, with other nations. Therefore, the only way to avoid war was to cut all ties and make no alliances with other countries.

This faction often referenced George Washington's farewell address, in which he warned the country to stay out of foreign affairs, lest they be dragged into conflict. During the ratification battle, this group was nothing more than a pawn between the two major players, the Supporters of the treaty and the Reservationists, but in the end, this group won out as the nation became isolated from the world, leaving Europe to be overtaken by fascist leaders.

After the war, Woodrow Wilson proposed a peace plan called the Fourteen Points. In this plan, there would be no more secret alliances between countries, all nations would decrease armaments, all nations would have a right to self-determination, and all countries would join the League of Nations, a coalition of nations that would determine world affairs and prevent conflict. His plan was not received well by the European leaders at the Paris Peace Conference. David Lloyd George, representing Britain, wanted to appease his constituency by treating Germany harshly. Georges Clemenceau of France also wanted to punish Germany, but not just to please the people of France. He had seen the destruction of his country and wanted to insure that Germany would never start another war. Because of the sentiments of other leaders in the Peace Conference and Wilson's failing health, a compromise was reached.

It clearly favored punishment of Germany, but the League of Nations and a few other proposals of Wilson's were included in the treaty, so Wilson supported it. When the terms of the treaty were decided and brought back to

the U. S. for ratification, it was met with staunch opposition by the Republican Henry Cabot Lodge, who had long been opposed to the Democratic Woodrow Wilson. The American public clearly supported ratification of the treaty, so Lodge knew that his would be an uphill battle. He stalled voting in Congress with long and tedious readings of complaints from disillusioned American minorities. As he realized that a general opposition to the treaty would not be enough to prevent ratification of it, he began to move towards a more moderate reserved attitude. This is where the opposition to the treaty split into two groups: the Reservationists, led by Lodge, who wanted modifications to the treaty before ratifying it, and the Irreconcilables, who opposed the treaty under any circumstance. Lodge wanted the majority of the changes to be to the covenant of the League of Nations.

In its current form, he felt that the U. S. had too many obligations to the League and wanted to modify the treaty to protect American interests. He was also concerned with the Article that called for collective security. He and many others did not like the idea of American soldiers being sent to protect foreign nations in conflicts that did not directly involve the U. S. However, Wilson was unrelenting. He would not budge for even the most minor changes. The treaty was voted on three times in the Senate. The first vote was on the treaty with 14 modifications. The supporters of the original treaty joined with the Irreconcilables to vote the Reservationist proposal down. The second vote was on the treaty in its original form. Democrats loyal to Wilson voted for ratification, but the Reservationists allied with the Irreconcilables to

again vote the treaty down. The result was a general distaste from the public of Senator Lodge.

After a few months, the treaty with even more Lodge modifications was voted on again. Again, as in the first vote, Democrats joined with the Irreconcilables to vote down the measure. Because the treaty was never ratified, the United States never joined the League of Nations. The Irreconcilables had gotten exactly what they had hoped for: isolationism. Except for the short occupation of Germany, America would not have a place in world affairs until the next world war. By then, it was too late to regulate European affairs to stop the rise to power of leaders that would bring an even deadlier conflict into action.

The Second World War was a result of many things, the most major of these being the punishment of Germany. The Treaty of Versailles had brought Germany to its knees. They were forced to reduce their military to 100,000 men. The military was also not allowed to have tanks, submarines, an air force, or any more than 6 naval ships. They lost the territories of Alsace-Lorraine, Eupen, Malmedy, Northern Schleswig, Hultshin, West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia. Their overseas colonies were to be controlled by the League of Nations and were divided into three new nations: Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. Financially, Germany was punished by having to pay billions in reparations, an obscene amount even by today's standards. In addition, there was the War-Guilt Clause in the treaty.

This clause forced Germany to accept all responsibility for the start of the war and the damage, including lives lost, that the war had caused. Because

of the treaty, Germans became disillusioned with foreign affairs. They felt unfairly treated and did not want to accept responsibility for a war that was caused by the combination of many factors, not just Germany's actions. The reparations portion of the punishment of Germany destroyed the German economy. People were desperate and looking for something to bring them hope. The fascist leader, Adolf Hitler, seemed to be that hope. He rose to power by promising to bring back the once strong German economy and make all of Europe pay for what they had done to Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. Perhaps Hitler's rise to power could have been stopped by foreign occupation of Germany. However, the rest of Europe's economy was also suffering.

All the other European countries that had been involved in World War I were also struggling to rebuild and recover from the devastating effects of war and were not interested in occupying Germany. The only nation that was even remotely equipped at the time to occupy Germany and prevent radical politicians such as Adolf Hitler from taking over Germany was the United States. However, Americans did not want soldiers to leave again and occupy the country that they felt was responsible for all the destruction resulting from the war. Even with this opposition, America did in fact occupy Germany beginning in 1918. This force was known as the American Forces in Germany, or the AFG. However, the occupation ended much too early in 1923 after accomplishing very little. Germany was still left to flounder in its devastated economy and desperation for a strong leader to bring them hope as America forgot all about European affairs until it was too late to stop the fascist Third Reich and they were forced to enter World War II.

In conclusion, the conflict between the American political groups of the Reservationists, led by Henry Cabot Lodge, and the Supporters of the original Treaty of Versailles, led by President Woodrow Wilson, ended without resolution. It was never ratified by the United States government, and due to this, the United States became isolationist and never entered the League of Nations. Germany was left to its own devices. The desperate people looked to a fascist leader to bring them hope and, after a short and unsuccessful occupation by the AFG, there was no one there to stop the movement toward Nazism. The result would not rear its ugly head until the late 1930's, but by then it was too late to prevent the even more deadly Second World War.