

So President Wilson went to the Paris Peace Conference in 1918 determined to see such an organization brought into being. In his famous Fourteen Points he had told the world what the United States was fighting to establish. The common people of every nation and on every continent had responded with enthusiasm to his proposal. About all that he demanded at that Peace Conference was that the peace treaty should establish a League of Nations to end the war-breeding international anarchy in which, to use Old Testament phraseology, every nation "did that which was right in its own eyes."

Perhaps, at Paris, Woodrow Wilson concentrated his attention too largely on securing the establishment of the League of Nations. Perhaps he let too many injustices and trouble-planting provisions slip into other parts of the Treaty of Versailles. We think he did. But that, he believed, was the price he had to pay to get the League. And he hoped that after the League had been in operation for a while it would find ways to correct most of the wrongs - which President Wilson knew were wrongs - in the treaty. The thing that counted, he insisted, was that the League had been formed. It wasn't perfect. It could not be expected to be perfect, growing as it did out of a terrible war and with its Covenant written by men who were still influenced by the passions of that war.

But it was a League of Nations - a body made up of most of the states which had gone through the agony of the war (even Germany eventually was admitted), sworn to deal with one another by peaceful methods and to restrain aggressors, to work out a body of international law and to carry disputes to a world court.

It is not the purpose of this study to discuss the League of Nations, because the League is dead. It is past history; water under the bridge. "Ah," says someone, "that's the point! The League died. It failed. Doesn't its failure prove that the nations will not work together successfully for peace in such an organization? If the League failed, isn't the U.N. doomed to fail likewise?"

Fair questions, and not easy to answer. Why did the League of Nations die? It accomplished a number of good things, and it had the support and prayers of millions upon millions of the world's people. Why did it die? Frequently it has been charged that it died because the United States stayed out. Certainly that was a factor, but it was hardly the decisive factor. As a matter of fact, after the bitterness subsided that had been generated by the partisan struggle between President Wilson and certain senators who blocked American entrance, the United States cooperated with the League to a degree which was scarcely distinguishable from membership.

The factor which spelled doom for the League, we are convinced as we look back at the record, was its rigidity. At the heart of the League Covenant was a pledge that the League would keep the boundaries of the nations exactly where they were drawn by the Peace Conference. That was intended to hold in check any future Kaiser Wilhelm who might be tempted to order his armies to invade another Belgium. What it actually did was to imply that the decisions of the Treaty of Versailles were perfect; that they were to be maintained world without end.