

which he wrote in the summer of 1919. *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which became an instant best-seller and has been in print ever since, attacks the peacemakers as foolish and short-sighted. They sat in their rooms at Paris indulging in sterile debates about punishment and reparations while they should have been rebuilding Europe and getting trade going again. The book was of course immediately translated into German and it also had a tremendous impact in the English speaking countries. In France, the notion that reparations were deeply unfair, and that the whole Treaty was a mistake, was never as widespread. When the French tried, with increasing desperation, to enforce the terms of the treaty in the interwar years, the British found them unreasonable. Britain, as it had so often done before, was withdrawing from engagement with the Continent and concentrating on tending its Empire. The Americans, although the extent of their isolationism has been exaggerated, withdrew partially from involvement in world affairs in the 1920s in part because they had tired of what they saw as the old vindictive European ways.

There is another sort of criticism of the Peace Conference which may offer useful parallels for the present and that is that it was not properly planned ahead and was simply inefficient. "Worthless schemes and improvised ideas" was how Paul Cambon, the wise old French ambassador in London, described the way in which the statesmen worked. There is something in his complaint. None of the Big Three had much experience in international relations. Lloyd George had a notoriously weak grasp of geography. Maps brought happy surprises such as his discovery that New Zealand was on quite a different side of Australia than he had always imagined. Unreasonably perhaps none of them had much use for their own foreign offices. Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau all chose as foreign ministers men whom they could safely ignore. All preferred to take advice from their close associates or from academic experts or journalists rather than their own diplomats. The conference took too long to get underway. What was meant to be a preliminary meeting of the Allies to work out a common position turned gradually into the only peace conference there was to be.

Given the extraordinary range of problems which came before it and the way in which the agenda kept expanding with as fresh issues,