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of, made their way to Paris. Suffragette groups asked for votes for women, Labour organizations promoted better working conditions. African-Americans appeared to ask for rights for their people. So did black Africans from French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa.

The peacemakers dealt with all these issues and more. Their days were crammed with work. Most of them tried hard, and with some optimism, to build peace settlements that would work. If there are lessons to be learned from the peace conference, it is that you can only make peace when the circumstances permit it. In 1919, in my view, the circumstances were not favourable.

In 1815, at the end of that series of wars which started with the French revolutionary ones and ended with those of Napoleon, when the great powers assembled at Vienna to make peace, they had a much easier task. They were dealing with a world that was tired of war, where the revolutionary impulses set off in France in 1789 had basically worked themselves out. What was quite different about 1919 was that the revolutionary fires – those of Bolshevism or other forms of socialism and anarchism as well as those of ethnic nationalism were still on the increase. In the case of Bolshevism they were not really going to burn themselves out until the 1980s. As for ethnic nationalism, it is not clear that we have seen the end yet. Nor was 1919 like 1945 when the revisionist, aggressive nations such as Germany, Italy and Japan were destroyed and inert and the powers, in that case largely the United States and the Soviet Union, could impose their will.

We tend to assume—as did the Allies at the time—that the peacemakers had the capacity to do the same in 1919. The statesmen who assembled in Paris knew their enemies were either defeated, in the case of Germany, or had simply vanished, in the case of Austria-Hungary. They had the significant remaining armed forces. They expected that they could reach out and do what they wanted in Europe, in the Middle East, and in parts of Asia and Africa. Yet they found time and time again that their capacity to influence events, particularly the further away they were from Paris, was very limited indeed.

In reality their power was much less than it appeared and certainly much less than the victors possessed in 1945. True the Allies possessed