

The diplomats felt sidelined and resentful but, for all its innovative nature, the peace conference shows how important they were. Major decisions were usually made by the Council of Four or by the earlier Supreme Council. In many cases, however, the statesmen simply ratified the recommendations, including most of those on Europe's borders, which came up from the committees and commissions. These bodies took their work very seriously. Their members gathered huge amounts of information, interviewed experts and petitioners, and had exhaustive discussions. If the borders they drew left many people feeling dissatisfied, that was because the population in the centre of Europe was so mixed that there was no way of drawing borders based on ethnic considerations. The peace settlements left approximately 1/3 of all the people living in the centre of Europe as minorities in the countries in which they lived. That, of course, was going to be a source of trouble throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

As democratically elected leaders, the statesmen also carried the burden of domestic affairs. Sir Robert Borden, who was in Paris for several months, received dozens of letters and telegrams from his associates in Canada, telling him of crises and urging him to hasten home. Wilson and Lloyd George both had to leave the conference for a month to deal with problems at home. All the statesmen felt the pressure. Lloyd George, who was the youngest, survived the best. Wilson had trouble sleeping and developed a serious tic in his face. There is a possibility that he suffered a minor stroke while he was in Paris. Clemenceau, a man of extraordinary vitality, was wounded in an assassination attempt part way through the conference; observers felt that he never was quite the same again.

The great objective forces matter in history: factors such as economics, geography, military power. So does the intellectual and political context. People think largely in the categories which they have inherited. In 1919 people were thinking in ways which would have been alien to anyone in 1815 but which are familiar to us today: the whole notion of democratic participation in foreign policy, of ethnic nationalism, and of self-determination. Nevertheless the individuals who occupied positions of power are important. In moments particularly of crisis—August 1914, much of 1919, the weeks and