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the rebirth of Poland for example or the relief of many parts of the former Austria-Hungary, it is doubtful that any organization or meticulous plan could have kept up. The peacemakers were dealing with such a new world, with new forces in the shape of Bolshevism or ethnic nationalisms, that improvisation was forced upon them. It also made sense to draw on expertise beyond what existed in their foreign services. The peace conference marked the use of experts from the private sector and from the academic world. This was received by the diplomats with a certain amount of scepticism but in fact the professionals and the amateurs worked very well together on the conference's many committees and commissions.

Wilson spoke for many both in Europe and the wider world when he said that a new and more open diplomacy was needed based on moral principles including democratic values, with respect for the rights of peoples to choose their own governments and an international organization to mediate among nations and provide collective security for its members. He was called dangerously naïve at the time and Wilsonianism has been controversial ever since. In the world of 1919, though, when the failure of older forms of diplomacy—secret treaties and agreements, for example, or a balance of power as the way to keep peace—was so terribly apparent, a new way of dealing with international relations made considerable sense.

There was no need, though, for the statesmen to take on so much themselves. In each of their meetings the Big Three (or Four if Orlando is included) dealt with several different matters, some major issues but others details, such as minor adjustments to borders, which they should have left to the many committees and commissions which were working away. It was also foolish and self-defeating of the leading statesmen to ignore tried and useful procedures. The Council of Four, which Wilson insisted upon when he returned to Paris from the United States, was meant to be so informal that it did not at first have a secretary. At the end of three days, the statesmen found they could not remember what they decided so called in Maurice Hankey, the British secretary to the peace conference, who kept his usual meticulous records.