

# What were the limits of self-determination?

KS3 History- Lesson 3 of 4

Enquiry: What kind of Peace was made in 1919?

Ms Goult



# What was self-determination?

Woodrow Wilson, the American president, wanted a fair settlement to stop future wars in Europe. He came to the Paris Peace Conference with his '**Fourteen Points**'. These were the ideas which he felt should guide peacemaking after the First World War.

A key part of the Fourteen points was the idea of '**self-determination**'; he wanted people of different **ethnic groups** to rule themselves, instead of being ruled by more powerful countries.

Lots of national groups in Europe and around the world were **colonies**. Which meant that they were part of **empires**, ruled over by more powerful countries.



# **What did Europe look like before the First World War?**

Before the First World War, Europe had been made up of a mixture of individual countries and some empires.

The idea of having an empire had existed for hundreds of years. In the lead-up to the First World War, countries in Europe had competed over the size of their empires, this was a big factor in the outbreak of war in 1914.



# Why did self-determination cause problems in Europe?

There were three big problems with the idea of self-determination in Europe in 1919:

- It was **selective** – the **Big Three** decided when they thought an ethnic group should govern themselves and when they did not. When Wilson returned to the USA, Britain and France made most of the decisions.
- It was **self-interested** – Britain and France in particular changed borders so that their countries would gain the most. Britain and France often did not ask the local populations who they wanted to **govern** them/
- It was **short-sighted** – the Big Three did not think about the long-term consequences of the actions of splitting up the ethnic groups. The border changes often resulted in German-speaking people living in new countries where another ethnic group gained self-determination.



# Examples of self-determination causing difficulties:

## 1. Poland.

In 1918, Poland had no access to the sea. Because of this, Poland was unable to trade using ships. This meant that Poland was poor. It was decided that Poland would get a section of land, called the Polish Corridor and the city of Danzig (Gdańsk), which had been German. Poland would **govern** the city and it would mean they could get to the sea.

90% of the people of Danzig were German and 10% were Polish. In the countryside around the city, 90% of the people were Polish and 10% were German. Neither group were happy with the decision that had been made. This caused problems between Germany and Poland right up until Germany invaded Poland in 1939.



# **Examples of self-determination causing difficulties:**

## **2. German Colonies in Africa.**

When war broke out in 1914, Germany had several colonies in Africa. These were taken from Germany as part of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The colonies were not allowed to become independent so were not given self-determination. Almost all were given to Britain and France to rule.

This is an example of the Fourteen Points being used unfairly (in a racist manner) by Britain and France. Countries in Europe were given self-determination, but countries in Africa were not but African colonies were viewed as being unable to govern themselves. Additionally Britain and France stood to gain from taking on Germany's African colonies.

To Germany it seemed that self-determination and the Fourteen Points were being applied unfairly. If self-determination weakened Germany, it was used to change borders. But self-determination was never applied if it might weaken Britain and France.



# Examples of self-determination causing difficulties:

## 2. German Colonies in Africa – continued.

Also, there were Indian **citizens** at the Treaty of Versailles. They asked for self-determination to be applied to India (as a colony of Britain). They were not allowed. India was too valuable for Britain and Britain was too self-interested to see why it would be important to give India self-determination.

These are clear examples of self-determination being selective and self-interested; Britain and France were not giving self-determination to countries that they could gain from economically.



# **Examples of self-determination causing difficulties:**

## **2. Czechoslovakia**

One of the biggest empires before the First World War was Austro-Hungary. Within Austro-Hungary there were lots of different ethnic groups.

Czechoslovakia was one of the countries which was created out of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1919. Czechoslovakia was right next to Germany. The people in the north of Czechoslovakia, spoke German and wanted to be part of Germany. These citizens did not feel like they were part of the rest of Czechoslovakia.

The failure of the Britain and France to listen to the citizens, was very short-sighted. In the future, this might make Czechoslovakia a less stable country.

Image courtesy of Wikipedia Commons





# Glossary

'Big Three': The three main winning countries at the end of the First World War (Britain/France/USA)

Colonies: Less powerful countries ruled over by more powerful countries.

Empire: A group of countries ruled over by a single leader.

Ethnic group: A group of people who share the same background and are from the same place.

Fourteen Points: The ideas that Woodrow Wilson wanted to follow to keep peace in Europe after the First World War.

Govern: To make the political decisions for a country.

Selective: Choosing to affect some things and not others.

Self-determination: Countries having the right to rule themselves.

Self-interested: Doing things for yourself and not to help others.

Short-sighted: Making decisions without thinking about the future impacts.



# Comprehension Questions

1. What was self-determination?
2. Why was it difficult to organise self-determination in Europe?
3. What happened to Germany's African colonies and why did Germany think this was unfair?
4. Can you give an example of when self-determination was selective?
5. Explain why self-determination was likely to cause future problems in Europe.



# Extension Question

5. Explain why self-determination was likely to cause future problems in Europe. *Use the sentence-starters and the key words to help you.*

Sentence starters:	Key words
<i>One reason why self-determination was likely to cause future problems in Europe was...</i>	-Revenge -Selective -Self-interested
<i>Another reason why self-determination could cause future problems in Europe was...</i>	-Ethnic groups -Empire

