Hello and welcome history friends patrons all to the VAP episode 75. Episode 75 is quite the landmark, and we’ve got a packed instalment in store today. Last time, we saw how the PPC entered into a dramatic new phase, as the counterproposals arrived from the German delegation, and the big three became inexplicably divided over how to proceed. LG, it seemed, came under the influence of his more conciliatory dominion delegates, and before long, was urging concessions. WW and much of the American delegation including House, seemed to be of the opinion that while the treaty was not perfect, it was too late to change it now. GC was on the opposite end of the spectrum, and insisted that the treaty had to be completely upheld, even those parts which now made the British uneasy.

It is also fair to say that LG’s own inherent biases were beginning to shine through; he pushed for a plebiscite in Upper Silesia due to his anti-Polish feelings; he vouched for the increasingly aggressive Hungarian regime due to his inbuilt dislike for the Romanian premier Ioan Bratianu, and he continued to insist that it was Russia, rather than the Germans, that would pose the greater threat in the future to European peace. Rallying against these ideas was Clemenceau first and foremost, so it shouldn’t be too much of a surprise that the formerly warm Anglo-French relationship begins to deteriorate from the first week of June onwards. Surprisingly enough, even while discussing the German counterproposals sounds like it should be the top of the big three’s priorities, they still managed to allow other unrelated concerns to unduly detain them. Or, perhaps it was the case that the big three felt unable to separate key issues like reparations, Eastern Europe, the Italian settlement and Russia from the German treaty.

From the 5th to 10th June either way, the discussions among the big three continued, and as they talked, deadlines for presenting their answer to Germany continued to tick by. First it was imagined that they’d have their answer by Friday 6th June, then by Monday 9th; in the end, Monday 16th June was the date affixed to the allied reply to the German counterproposals. Once again, the big three underestimated the task ahead of them, and before they could settle with the ‘main event’ of the PPC, they found that the closer to the end they got, the more urgent and pressing the appeals from the other delegations and actors became. The PPC, it was clear, was not going to go down quietly, much like the FWW itself. Without any further ado, I will now take you back to where this terrible problem began: the British Empire delegation meeting of Sunday 1st June 1919…

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It had all begun on Sunday 1st June. That was when the opposition of the British Empire delegates to the notions of a stringent peace was made known. The occasion of the meeting must have been quite surreal, but although so much confusion and difficulty was to emerge from it, the actual form of the meeting itself was remarkably calm. LG himself recalled the experience:

I summoned a meeting of British Ministers and Dominion Premiers in Paris to consider the reply we should make to the German note. It met in my flat in the Rue Nitot on Sunday, June the 1st, 1919. It lasted, with a short interval for lunch, until late that evening. It then adjourned to the following day and continued the whole of the morning. It was one of the most remarkable Cabinet Councils ever held by the British Empire. It consisted of nine of the principal members of the British Government. Every Dominion was represented by its chief political leaders. We had assembled to sit in judgment upon the reply given to the terms of peace offered by the Allies to an enemy that had fought us for four and a half years, and inflicted incalculable losses and injuries upon us in the course of the most destructive war ever waged in this world. We were all convinced that this devastating conflict had been deliberately provoked by the enemy that was now suing for more lenient terms, and we each represented nations that had suffered cruelly from the hurts wantonly inflicted upon them. Nevertheless the meeting was especially notable for the calm and impartial spirit displayed by every speaker. There was a complete absence of bitterness or vindictiveness in the observations made. As far as the temper that prevailed was concerned, it might have been a meeting of the official representatives of a benevolent neutral called upon to adjudicate upon the points in dispute between the parties.[[1]](#footnote-1)

LG went onto to detail that the major points of contention for the delegates assembled was to French occupation of the Rhineland, the unspecified nature of German membership of the LON, the settling of Eastern borders, and the reparations issue. With regard to the East, the fear was that Poland stood to gain at Germany’s expense, particularly in Silesia. As LG recorded Jan Smuts as saying regarding Poland:

Poland was an historic failure, and always would be a failure, and in this Treaty we were trying to reverse the verdict of history. He asked that the Allies should hesitate before guaranteeing frontiers for Poland such as were now proposed. These frontiers required careful reconsideration. Perhaps a plebiscite would afford a solution.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Regarding the reparations issue though, it is easy to become incredibly confused when examining the minutes. The short version is that LG started out relatively convinced that the best way to bring the Germans to the peace table would be to have a figure for reparations already agreed upon among the big three. This stance changed to devising the reparations sum within three or four months after the treaty was signed, and finally by 9th June, it was the Americans who were desiring that a sum be fixed, set at the maximum of 120 billion gold marks, while British financial experts, in league with the French, were of the view that:

…at present little more can be done than to hazard a hypothesis. Like all the other belligerent Powers, Germany is still living under an exceptional regime. The rate and extent of her recovery cannot at present be forecasted, but the period mentioned in the Treaty was chosen in order to give time for the national economy to adapt itself to the new situation. The substitution of a sum fixed now by an arbitrary hypothesis for the system established by the treaty after very full and arduous discussion appears to be very undesirable, and to abandon without any sufficient advantage a plan which secured to Germany the opportunity and the right to be heard and to have decision taken in accordance with equity.[[3]](#footnote-3)

This turnaround is confusing indeed; it seems that the American delegation came to believe that fixing a sum for reparations would be a good idea, whereas LG and GC came to be of the view that it would not. The explanation for this development seems to be partially explained by LG’s willingness to pick his battles; he focused much more intently, as we will see shortly, on the Upper Silesian region and the Polish question in particular. Yet, as LG notes himself in his 1938 memoirs on the peace treaties, ironically titled The Truth About the Peace Treaties, the simple reason for his relenting was that the mission of arriving at a set figure was just too difficult:

In the subsequent discussion there was a good deal of support given to General Smuts' view that it would be better to agree to a fixed sum if that were possible, although it was quite clear from the various suggestions made in the course of our deliberations that if we had attempted at that gathering to obtain agreement as to the actual amount of that sum, we should have failed entirely to do so.[[4]](#footnote-4)

LG knew that not even the British Empire delegates could agree on a sum, so it would hardly have surprised him to see that the big three’s delegates and their respective economic advisors were similarly flummoxed. It is interesting to note the mentioning by the American financial experts of the sum of 120 billion gold marks – this was more than double what Germany would eventually be asked to pay in the 1921 London Schedule of Payments. And yet, the German counterproposals had offered to pay some 100 billion gold marks, although as the British financial experts appreciated, this offer was “so hedged about with conditions and qualifications as to appear to be intended to provoke controversy and not to promote peace.”[[5]](#footnote-5) One figure who noted the strange inner turmoil of the PM and the reparations issue was his foremost economic expert, JMK. On 3rd June, Canes wrote in his diary that:

The P.M., poor man, would like now at the eleventh hour to alter the damned treaty, for which no one has a word of defence, but it's too late in my belief and for all his wrigglings Fate must now march on to its conclusion. I feel it my duty to stay on here so long as there is any chance of a scheme for a real change being in demand. But I don't expect any such thing. Anyhow it will soon be settled and I bound for home.

But the wriggling didn’t stop in the first few days of June; US SOS Robert Lansing recorded that on 4 June, the US economic advisers ‘were shell-shocked by receiving word that Lloyd George had changed his mind and now favoured an indefinite amount”. Lloyd George had by this point reached the second phase of his epiphany, and he wanted to give Germany three months in which she could suggest a reparation figure. ‘A chameleon has nothing on Lloyd George’, Lansing wrote. The US delegates seemed determined to press for a fixed sum and some concessions, including ‘the retention by Germany of certain amounts of working capital in the form of ships, gold, and investments abroad’. Lloyd George insisted: ‘Any figure that would not frighten [the Germans] would be below the figure with which he and M. Clemenceau could face their peoples in the present state of public opinion.’

It was clear, in other words, that the act of opening the reparations debate had been akin to opening Pandora’s Box; everyone wanted to change their minds, or at the very least begin a new phase of discussion and debate which time no longer allowed for. Little wonder Clemenceau wanted to tear his hair out.[[6]](#footnote-6) The discussions would all be for naught in any case, because reparations would not be changed in any notable way from the draft treaty to final treaty, meaning that these discussions were merely a great big waste of time. But they did have profound implications, in that they served as the final straw for one JMK, who resigned shortly after it was confirmed that no changes would be made. Only three weeks after resigning, he had already made a significant stab at that work which was to have such a transformative impact upon the 20th century – the *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Interestingly, when Canes met with his old friends from the British delegation in late June, he was unsure whether he would persevere with the depressing tract. These same friends, which included Cecil from the LON commission fame, persuaded him to keep at it, and the book was published in December later that year. One wonders what might have been had Canes decided against publishing what would go on to the most influential account on the PPC.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Considering the wounds which the resurrection of the reparations debate inflicted, we should feel apprehensive indeed about the other debates which the British Empire delegation honed in on. One of these was the general settlement in Eastern Europe. Jan Smuts, as LG’s account has made plain, had little faith in the ability of Poland to maintain itself or its borders, but as we have learned by now, Jan Smuts was in good company as a sceptic of Polish statehood. Tasked with defending his country’s track record and claim to the future was Ignacy Paderewski, the Polish premier and famed pianist Ignacy Paderewski, who on the morning of Thursday 5th June met face to face with Poland’s greatest critic, the British PM, in the 11AM meeting of the C4. Paderewski began by expressing his thanks in very extravagant language for the allied consideration of Poland, saying:

I beg to express first of all my sincere and deep appreciation of your thoughtful and gracious action in having me come here to be informed about your intentions. Of course, the destiny of my country is entirely in your mighty hands and you could have very well disposed of it without notifying me about these intentions. I beg to thank you most warmly and most sincerely indeed.

P then proceeded to discuss the different portions of Silesia which were causing the dispute. Wilson and LG wanted to know some of the details of the Upper Silesian region, and the distribution of German to Polish citizens. P gave as many details as he could from memory, and then explained the situation of Memel, a city along the coast of Lithuania, which had significant German roots, and which Poland was claiming. ‘Memel concerns Lithuania, and it is very dear to us’, P said, adding that ‘We have some trouble with Lithuania now, as we have had with every population which was formerly belonging to the Polish Republic, but we know to whom we owe these troubles – to the Germans – and we naturally understand it.’ This was an interesting note, because it demonstrated that P was basing the legitimacy of his claims on the spread of the old Republic, which actually meant the PLC of the 18th century. To prove his country’s deserving nature, P underlined Poland’s credentials, saying:

Mr. President and Gentlemen, I call your attention to the fact that the changes which you intend to introduce into the treaty might endanger the whole situation, not of my country alone, but of Eastern Europe. For the last few months Poland has been a stronghold of peace and order in the East. We have had no sign of revolution, no sign of Bolshevism, and if there is fighting, it is unfortunately fighting on the borders. It is not due to our people. It is due to the necessity of defending ourselves. We have not attacked anyone, and I am ready to prove the truth of my statement by facts and at any moment.

In fact though, one theatre where Poles were unquestionably engaged in violence was in the Ukraine, a region where confusion reigned thanks to the lack of clarity over where Russia, Ukraine and Poland ended. The RCW complicated matters, as did the spread of Bolshevism into Ukraine and the inclusion of Polish border questions into the final TOV. These factors all meant that no sense of clarity could be had until the final peace treaty with Germany was made, which of course left those aforementioned factors, including Polish security, in a state of permanent limbo. Yet it was in this state of limbo that LG evidently believed the Poles were endangering their neighbours: he went straight to the Ukrainian well upon P’s claim that Poland had not attacked anyone, which compelled P to engage in a long and probably rehearsed speech defending his country’s conduct in the region.

The disputed region of Galicia which Ukraine and Poland shared contained a relatively even split of peoples, P claimed, and Poland’s conduct had been exemplary throughout the recent advances there. P was careful to underline to acclaim of the local populace in Galicia for Polish rule, their fear of Bolshevism and the good order of their troops. He also explained how Ukrainian partisans had surged against Polish forces following the Polish acceptance of an allied demand to stop moving into the region, which was accepted in mid-May. P was loud in his insistence that this acceptance was unpopular, and added that:

…if you are interested in the fact that there should be no bloodshed in the country, I am able to tell you that the whole offensive in Galicia has not cost us a hundred people in killed and wounded. There were no battles. In many places, the population, stimulated by the news of Polish troops advancing, took the matter in hand themselves. The Polish population is very numerous there – about a third of the inhabitants being Poles – about thirty-seven percent.

To this, LG asked P straight out whether Poland claimed all of Galicia, to which P replied ‘historically, yes.’ LG then asked several more leading questions, which P evidently interpreted as the PM attempting to box in his country to a certain convenient criteria. P refused to back down though; regions in question were too ethnographically diverse to strip away from Poland, or they were once Polish, but had since been Germanicised in the recent decades, which was in fact true in several cases. But P was preaching to the wrong audience if he believed LG was in any mood to help him. Armed with a fierce sense of anti-Polishness and a newfound apprehension over taking any substantial land from the Germans, LG presented a stiff front. This prompted P to reply with a rebuke that elevated the temperature in the room significantly, and provided arguably the high point of the week’s meetings. P said:

If there is any essential change in that which has been already granted to Poland, I should immediately resign, because I could not return to my country if there is any such change as a plebiscite here, or any essential change in the disposition of the territory which has been already made public as granted to my country. If there are such changes, I couldn’t have anything more to do with politics, because it would be absolutely impossible to rule my country. You know that revolutions begin when people lose faith in their leadership. These people have belief in me now, because they were told by me, and most emphatically, that these things promised to them would be given to them. Well now, if something is taken away from them, they will lose all faith in my leadership. They will lose faith in your leadership of humanity; and there will be revolution in my country.

This prompted a withering response from the British PM. With the leadership of the peace effort challenged, it was essential he speed to the defence. Yet LG was also rushing to meet the challenge of his own misgivings; he had always believed that the Poles were inherently unsuited for self-rule, and that their instability had caused a morass of problems since the beginning of modern history. Their unilateral claims to Upper Silesia encapsulated all that was wrong with the Polish stance, and the potential that it might upset the Germans still further meant that it was essential to ask the people living there first, via plebiscite, how they viewed their lot in life. LG’s frustrations were palpable, and he held nothing back of his scorn for the Polish experience, saying:

Here is Poland that five years ago was torn to pieces, under the heel of three great powers, with no human prospect of recovering its liberty; certainly without the slightest chance of recovering it by its own exertions. Why, during the four or five years of the war the Poles were actually fighting against their own freedom in so far as they were fighting at all. We were capturing Poles on the Western front, and capturing them on the Italian front. That was the condition of things. Now, you have got at the very least, even if you took every one of these disputed parts away,—you have got twenty millions of Poles free, you have got an absolutely united Poland. It is a thing which no Pole could have conceived as possible five years ago; and in addition to that, they are claiming even populations which are not their own. They are claiming three millions and a half of Galicians, and the only claim put forward is that in a readjustment you should not absorb into Poland populations which are not Polish and which do not wish to become Polish. That is the only point that is put. The Poles had not the slightest hope of getting freedom, and have only got their freedom because there are a million and a half of Frenchmen dead, very nearly a million British, half a million Italians, and I forget how many Americans. That has given them their freedom, and they say they will lose faith in the leadership which has given them that, at the expense of millions of men of other races who have died for their freedom. If that is what Poles are like, then I must say it is a very different Poland to any Poland I ever heard of. She has won her freedom, not by her own exertions, but by the blood of others; and not only has she no gratitude, but she says she loses faith in the people who have won her freedom.

P attempted to weather the storm – he hadn't meant that the world would lose faith in the allied leadership, he insisted, only in the Polish leadership, but the minutes do record P addressing his remarks against the big three as well, whether this was a potential mistranslation or not, or a slip of the tongue. LG continued the pressure, adding a further wound by saying:

I was only referring to what you said. We won freedom for nations that had not the slightest hope of it, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and others; Nations that have won their freedom at the expense of the blood of Italians and Frenchmen and Englishmen and Americans. And we have the greatest trouble in the world to keep them from annexing other nations and imposing upon other nations the very tyranny which they have themselves endured for centuries. You know, I belong to a small nation, and therefore I have great sympathy with all oppressed nationalities, and it fills me with despair the way in which I have seen small nations, before they have hardly leaped into the light of freedom, beginning to oppress other races than their own. They are more imperialists[tic], believe me, than either England and France, than certainly the United States. It fills me with despair as a man who has fought all his life for little nations.

This was too much for a proud Pole like P, who knew full well that LG was jumping the gun in this claim. While they might be claiming more than was ‘undisputedly Polish’ according to the FPs and map information available, nobody could accuse Polish statesmen of imperialism with a track record such as that which the Commonwealth boasted. ‘I beg to protest emphatically against the accusation that we are imperialists’, P said, adding that ‘I am a representative of a nation which has fought for liberty for others; where other nations were oppressed, Poland was always there to fight for liberty, wherever liberty was fought for.’ P then harnessed the record of the Commonwealth as he had done when justifying her claims on Memel earlier on, saying with some emotion that:

We are not imperialists and we do not want to annex any country or any people. We have never imposed upon any nation or foreign language. We never persecuted any religion. We never imposed upon the people different customs, and the proof of it is this, that after six hundred years of common life with primitive people, like the Lithuanians, like the Ruthenians, even like the Ukrainians, these people are still existing and even with our assistance, with our practical help, are regaining their individual character.

With this flurry, P then recited a record given by a Catholic Archbishop from the east of traditionally Polish country. These emotive pleas may have awakened something of the statesman in LG, who perhaps realised now that he had pushed P’s buttons too far. ‘I ought to say that you and I have been very good friends, Mr. Paderewski’, LG said, adding ‘I don’t want to have any dispute with you’. LG then presented a definition of imperialism as he now understood it, and it amounted to the annexation of people against their will, regardless of race. P then reverted to his earlier argument – did the resolutions adopted by Poland’s constituent assembly not prove that Poland had no interest in this pursuit of imperialism? ‘You mean that the intentions of the Poles are not imperialistic.’ LG said, adding ‘I am just hoping that they will not be, and that they do not mean to annex foreign populations. That is all I want.’ ‘They don’t’, P replied, adding ‘but you must find it natural that we try to protect people of our own speech and our own blood if they are attacked, if they are murdered, if they are slaughtered, in Ukraine and by these people under the Bolshevist regime.’

Lloyd George held his ground though, making the very reasonable point that it was now a matter of he said-he said when it came to the East: ‘They are making the same accusations against your troops’, LG said, adding with a note of regret and also impatience. ‘I only saw a Ukrainian once. The only Ukrainian I have ever seen in the flesh was upstairs. I haven’t seen another. It is the last Ukrainian I have seen, and I am not sure that I want to see any more. That is all I know about it.’ But that was far from all P knew about it, he went on to tell an anecdote of the city of Lemberg, where Polish youths had been seriously wounded and illegally attacked. Then, P rained down the resolutions which Poland’s diet had passed in favour of liberalism and autonomy for the surrounding regions. In these resolutions, it is worth noting that the Diet referred to Lithuania still as the Grand Duchy, yet another echo of the Commonwealth past. P insisted that a plebiscite for Upper Silesia would never be fairly carried out, because the leading German statesmen were attempting to undermine Polish self-determination with internal provocations.

If that wasn’t bad enough, P even claimed that Ebert’s government was in contact with Trotsky, and actively scheming to choke Poland between two pincers, starting with Upper Silesia. In yet another example of foreshadowing in an era of foreshadowing, P noted that ‘Of course, it is not yet real war, but there are symptoms, and at any moment war may be a reality. And we have no munitions. We have no equipment.’ Within six months, the Polish-Soviet War would be in full swing, and Poland’s actual independence would in jeopardy. Then, as before, LG would view the Polish struggle for national survival not as the heroic stand that it was, but as further evidence for her inherent unsuitability for self-rule. The Polish-Soviet War, LG believed, merely proved his anti-Polish points.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Paderewski would be back before the C4 later that afternoon, along with several of his counterparts from E Europe. Evidently the big three planned to kill several birds with one stone by getting the Polish, Czech, Romanian and Serbian representatives together in the same room. Conspicuous in their absence was the Hungarian element, whom everyone seemed to have an opinion on. The day before it had been learned that Hungarians had come to blows with their Czech neighbours, and the Romanians and Hungarians had been at each other’s throats over Transylvania since the conference had begun. There remained a critical lack of information on the ground over who was at fault, but it was certainly easier to blame Bela Kun for the isolation of his country, rather than to blame his democratic neighbours for dogpiling him. Certainly, the surge into Slovakia was the first of several attempts by Bela Kun to revitalise his regime’s flagging popularity, by appealing to the nationalism of the Magyars in their defence. But these efforts only prolonged his regime until August, when it collapsed at the foot of a Romanian occupation of Budapest – the ultimate Hungarian humiliation.

Clemenceau weighed in against an idea which was presently doing the rounds – that of disarmament. The idea went that the LON could ensure peace between states, and that by reducing their arms, these states could dramatically help their case. GC made the point which had been elaborated on by P earlier in the day though, that even while these smaller and larger states might engage in this policy, Germany was not sitting still. ‘Crushed in the West, Germany was seeking expansion in the East, first military and then economic.’ Clemenceau said, adding that:

If Germany got control of Russia the war would have been lost. The Germans in Silesia were not there for a parade. Would the Germans sign the Treaty? Even if they did [I am] not sure that they would evacuate this territory. With 350,000 soldiers on the Polish frontier [I am] convinced, like all present, that the moment for limitation of armaments had not come.

In case one might have doubted his pacific credentials, in light of his leadership during the war, Clemenceau worked to make his position clear that he ‘had always been an enemy of war’, although he ‘had been dragged into it a great deal’, but he would today ‘take a solemn engagement before all that it would not be France who would provoke a future war.’ This was to prove correct of course; in spite of expectations to the contrary in some British quarters, the French army was not the strongest in Europe in the 1939 war, and France was far from the most provocative. As he continued to predict the future though, Clemenceau added another vision, insisting that it was essential…

…not to create a situation, of which some great Power in a spirit of aggression would take advantage. Supposing all were not in agreement on this question. It was mathematically certain that the war would cease before the limitation of armaments could begin, and [I am] by no means sure that peace itself would begin with the signature of the Treaty. He thought, therefore, the best plan would be to decide to take a mutual obligation by the great and little Powers to settle these questions when the right time came…We did not know what would happen to Germany nor to Hungary.

Ultimately, Clemenceau’s expressions here amounted to an appeal not to forget that war was still on, and that the LON, while a nice shiny new idea, was only an idea right now and not yet fully formed. Far better it would be to rely on traditional means for ensuring security, and to turn to the task of setting a ‘splendid example to the world’ by holding a disarmament conference within the next few years. The meeting adjourned shortly afterwards.[[9]](#footnote-9)

25 years before D-day would be launched, on 6th June 1919, a gathering far removed from that apocalypse convened at 11AM to discuss a range of issues as varied as the future of Russia and the settlement on Fiume. Of note in this meeting was how little Germany factored into the considerations, as perhaps ten different topics were lightly touched on in a single hour. It was also notable to see LG speak of Russia, due to the darkly prophetic vision of the place he conjured up. It was utterly impossible to imagine how Russia would develop within even the next year, as the RCW remained in full swing and devoid of regular updates which kept the big three informed of other theatres. As we have seen with other cases though, when the big three were ignorant of what was actually happening in a given region, be it in Weimar Germany, China or Fiume, they tended to resort to making pronouncements or predictions based on what they felt they knew about the subject. That was why LG’s notes on Russia’s future stood out to me so much here. He was both catastrophically wrong about the Germans, and terrifyingly accurate about the Russians. LG said:

France was most afraid of the Teuton, but [my] view [is] that the Teuton was largely done for. The nation [I fear is] the Slav, which was an incalculable factor, capable of following the instructions of a dictator or becoming Bolshevik. If some powerful, capable, ambitious man arose in Russia the Slav race might become a great danger.

Indeed, this ‘powerful, capable, ambitious man’ was an unknown entity to the big three in 1919, but the name Josef Stalin began to do the rounds within a few years of Lenin’s death in early 1924. Of further interest is the angle LG chose for this analysis – based on the fact that the Russians and Serbs were traditional allies, LG explained that Wilson could not begrudge the Italians for feeling concerned for their border with Yugoslavia, since this border could soon become completely entwined with that of Russia.[[10]](#footnote-10) Did this signify that the mood was softening on Italy, or that Britain was siding with her interests? Not exactly.

The next day on Saturday 7th June, WW presented the memorandum in the appendix of the minutes. This, Wilson said, was as far as he was willing to go for Italy in the Fiume question. VO gave his by now familiar response, of essentially saying ‘thank you, it means so much, I appreciate your efforts, I marvel at your sacrifices, this will never be forgotten, we will be friends forever…but…’ Orlando felt the need once more to refer to those impossible sacrifices he had had to make, and to the danger which befell his government in accepting. By now it was entirely likely the big three no longer believed Orlando when he insisted that his regime was in danger, as he had used this trope so many times. The minutes recorded Wilson responding that he ‘hoped Signor Orlando would not say this, because there were impossibilities on his side also.’

But what had Wilson just handed to the Italian premier, and how far did it go towards giving Orlando what he wanted? In eight terms, Wilson set out the conditions of Fiume as a state, and in a handy bit of language which makes me looks very smart indeed, actually compared the terms of the free port of Fiume to that of the free port of Danzig – you’ll remember in our episode examining Danzig and the Rhine, we saw that setting precedents which could be used by Wilson later on in his treaty making was believed by the President to be a critical exercise, and in this case, he certainly drew on it. Fiume would have a LON commission style government, it would be entitled to host a plebiscite on its status within five years, and Italy would be granted several new islands which were spelt out on a newly acquired map.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Considering the sense of urgency surrounding the resolution of the fallout from the German counterproposals, it is remarkable that the big three remained so preoccupied with issues relating and completely unrelated to that question during these eventful days. With Italy satiated for the moment, there was much talk from Monday 9th June about the situation in Eastern Europe, particularly the conflict underway between Hungary and her neighbours. The aforementioned dispute over reparations dominated the more serious discussions, but few decisions were actually arrived at. Incredibly, the situation saw the British and American leaders effectively swap their stances on the issue of a final sum, while Clemenceau remained more resolute than ever not to budge. On Tuesday 10th June, Wilson unloaded on the core problem in Eastern Europe. It wasn’t Hungarian paranoia, Czech opportunism, the sickly arrogance of Ioan Bratianu or even the expansionism of the Poles that was to blame for conflict in the east, but the Germans. Wilson declared that he had…

…no doubt intrigues of this kind had been started by Germany. Unquestionably Germany had tried to make the situation in Eastern Europe impossible for the Allies. It was, however, one thing to stir up trouble by means of propaganda and another to do it by aggression. The Allies must see that they do not contribute to it by giving anyone just ground to dread them.

Additional fulminations followed, as the Romanian and Czech figures defended their actions, and insisted that the positioning of their soldiers in the present conflicts did not mean that they intended to stay. Bratianu in particular came under scrutiny, rightfully so considering his past behaviour, when he insisted that the present conflict compelled Romanian soldiers to move several hundred kilometres forward into Transylvania, and along the River Theiss or Tisza, which hugs the border of Hungary with Romania. Also of interest was the general inclination of Clemenceau to side with Bratianu and the Czechs against the Hungarians, and this was especially notable when LG attempted to give his two cents on the Hungarian situation. Clemenceau by this stage was already thinking of the post-war era, where France would be faced with an eastern European block of states that she would be well-placed to court. Poland also formed an anchor in this chain, and this explains why Clemenceau was virtually silent when LG interrogated Paderewski on the 5th June.[[12]](#footnote-12)

LG recognised that France was stuck in a difficult position, but in his memoirs he also rallied against the notion that France and its military were desirous of a second war to finish the Germans off – a common misconception that did the rounds in the 1920s, thanks largely to the occupation of the Ruhr which Poincare’s government felt compelled to undertake in 1923-25. Thinking back to that meeting of 1st June 1919 in his memoirs, where so much of the discord of the British delegation was laid out, LG recalled:

It could be seen from the observations made by many, if not most of the speakers, that there was a real apprehension lest the Germans should refuse to sign the Treaty and that as a consequence we should have to march to Berlin. Some speakers went so far as to insinuate that such was the French hatred of Germany, that they were hoping that such a refusal would be provoked by the harshness of the Treaty in order to justify a military occupation of the German capital. I was convinced at the time – and still am – that no responsible Frenchman had that thought in his mind. France was tired of war, and all her soldiers were yearning to get back to their homes and to substitute the daily avocations, to which they had been accustomed before the War, for the misery and the squalor and the alternate peril and boredom of trench life.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Though he understood this key fact, he neglected to consider the impact which his sequence of epiphanies on the peace treaty was having upon Clemenceau, or on French public opinion. On 3rd June House was recording in his conversations with the French premier that ‘He said if the controversy continued, the hatred which the French had felt for the English for centuries would soon return. He cannot speak of Lloyd George in temperate tones.’[[14]](#footnote-14) And speaking of House, his diary is filled in the first two weeks of June with regretful notes on the state of affairs in Paris, and on the state of the treaty. On Tuesday 10th June, aside from making one notable remark that he was confident he could get Wilson to stand for a third term again – an utter impossibility as it turned out – House also took the time to comment on the demeanour of the man he had once called his best friend. As House had demonstrated before, he was more than willing to take the gloves off when he felt like, and he was feeling particularly salty on this Tuesday evening. Remarking of the new portrait of Wilson which had just been released, and the different man which seemed to be depicted in this third painting of his President, House wrote:

And this reminds me that it is not the President's face alone that changes. He is one of the most difficult and complex characters I have ever known. He is so contradictory that it is hard to pass judgment upon him. He has but few friends and the reason is apparent to me. He seems to do his best to offend rather than to please, and yet when one gets access to him, there is no more charming man in all the world than Woodrow Wilson. I have never seen anyone who did not leave his present impressed. He could use this charm to enormous personal and public advantage if he would, but in that, he is hopeless. Everything that does not square with good sense seems to him not worthwhile when, as a matter of fact, all of us have to yield to the prejudice, weakness and whims of our fellow man. Personally, I see people day after day who I know in advance will talk of matters about which I am better informed than they, and yet there is a certain advantage in seeing them and a great disadvantage in offending them. We must work collectively in order to work effectively. The President understands this intellectually, for he is always saying what he does not practice. He speaks constantly of "teamwork" but seldom practices it.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Perhaps House felt that this failure to properly invest in teamwork had led to a deterioration in the relationship of the big three as well. Certainly, LG’s decision to dig back up some of the most sensitive parts of the treaty did not endear him anymore to Wilson; it merely confirmed what he believed were the worst aspects of the PM’s character – the opportunist, the politician, the weather vane of public opinion. When it had suited him during the December 1918 GE, LG had called for fire and wrath to rain down upon the Germans; now, six months later, since opinion in the UK had notably changed, LG had moved with it. The PM could claim that he had been persuaded, by the passage of time and by the force of arguments put forward by his peers on 1st June. In Wilson’s mind though, this did not matter. All that rang true were the bare facts, and these were that, by 10th June 1919, the big three were perhaps less united on the terms of the peace than they had been since they first sat down together for a serious chat on the C4.

1. Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, vol. 1 (London: V. Gollancz, 1938), p. 688. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 693. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is quoted from Appendix I of the minutes of Council of Four, 9th June 1919. Available: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d32> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lloyd George, *Peace Treaties*, p. 694. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Extract from Lord Sumner, quoted from the Council of Four Minutes, 11AM, 10th June 1919. Available: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d33> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Donald Markwell, *John Maynard Keynes and International Relations: Economic Paths to War and Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 87-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid*, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Minutes for 11AM 5th June 1919 Council of Four meeting available: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d25> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Minutes available from 4PM 5th June 1919 Council of Four Minutes, available: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d26> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d27> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d30> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See the minutes of <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv06/d34> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Lloyd George, *Peace Treaties*, p. 695. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. House, *Diaries*, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Ibid*, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)