

Any countries who might have had objections to this limitation of the Peace Conference evidently decided that it would serve no practical purpose to challenge the Council of Foreign Ministers.

The Peace Conference of Paris had no powers of final decision. It was presented with the draft peace treaties drawn up by the Great Powers, and, according to the Moscow arrangement, was to do no more than "make recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers, who, in drawing up the final texts of the treaties, will take these recommendations into account." The fact that the Conference (unlike the San Francisco Conference, which drafted the final text of the United Nations Charter) was able to do no more than make recommendations to the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the balance of membership which made it almost impossible for the smaller Powers to recommend any important alteration to agreed clauses of the draft treaties, or for the "Slav" Powers to secure acceptance of any of their major proposals, gave the Conference an air of unreality.

This being so, it was suggested privately by some delegates that no purpose would be served at the Conference by taking votes; the expression of views by delegations would be sufficient to guide the Council of Foreign Ministers in the preparation of the final drafts. The Rules of Procedure laid it down, however, that the Conference was to submit "recommendations" to the Council of Foreign Ministers, and since the Conference was nothing if not literal in interpreting its mandate it became necessary to decide what vote was necessary to create a "recommendation." It was this question which occupied the Committee of Procedure in barren and often bitter and irrelevant argument for two weeks, while the prestige of the Conference declined and its real work was delayed.

The Conference, once started on the procedural way of thinking, never escaped from the unfortunate groove, and in all Commissions of the Conference as much if not more time was spent in discussing procedure as in dealing with matters of substance. This proved doubly unfortunate, because the time-table of other international meetings made it necessary on 26 September to impose on the Conference a time-limit of nine days for the completion of the work of Commissions, and on 6 October a time-limit of less than ten days for the decisions of the Plenary Conference. Since, as a result of the Conference's absorption in procedure, most of the Commissions were still considering Articles 1 or 2 of the treaties the remainder of their work was rushed; new amendments were poorly drafted, votes were taken without proper discussion or without the exploration of compromise solutions, and many worth-while proposals were rejected almost out of hand. The Plenary Conference itself was little more than a voting-machine. This was certainly not an atmosphere likely to lead to the patient negotiation of just peace treaties, with the best possible prospect of enduring.