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Primary Documents - Arthur Balfour on President Wilson's Addendum to the Fourteen Points, 27 February 1918

Reproduced below is the text of a speech given by British Foreign Secretary (and former Prime Minister) [Arthur Balfour](#) to the British Parliament on 27 February 1918.

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In his speech Balfour addressed himself to a speech given by [Woodrow Wilson](#) to the U.S.

Congress on 11 February in which the U.S. President expanded upon his [earlier Fourteen Points speech](#) of 8 January 1918. In his new address Wilson had set out the terms upon which belligerent nations were to discuss any potential peace settlement.

Balfour unsurprisingly came out in support of President Wilson's policy, and took the opportunity to critique the German Chancellor [Count Hertling's](#) "lip service" support for the U.S. position ([click here](#) and [here](#) to view Hertling's speeches regarding the Fourteen

Points).

[Click here](#) to read Belgian Prime Minister [Charles de Broqueville's](#) views regarding any peace settlement.

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Arthur Balfour's Speech to Parliament in Response to Woodrow Wilson's 11 February Speech to U.S. Congress, 27 February 1918

Many questions must be settled at the peace conference, but the question of Belgium is the best touchstone of the honesty of purpose of Central European diplomacy, and especially of German diplomacy.

There is only one course for the offending nation in this case, namely, unconditional restoration and reparation.

When was Belgium the jumping-off ground of enemy machinations and why should Germany suppose it is going to be? Belgium has been the victim, not the author, of these crimes, and why should she be punished because Germany is guilty?

Germany always had in mind new territorial, commercial or military conditions which would prevent Belgium from taking an independent place among the nations, which Germany and ourselves were pledged to preserve.

What we have to consider is how far von Hertling's lip service to President Wilson's four propositions really is exemplified by German practice.

I could understand a German taking a different view from the view of the French, British, Italian, or American Government, but not a German discussing the principles of essential justice and saying: "There is no question of Alsace-Lorraine to go before a peace conference."

Regarding President Wilson's second proposition, we have had within the last few weeks a specimen of how von Hertling interprets in action the principle he so glibly approves in theory. To take one instance only, there is the cession of Polish territory to the Ukraine. We would like to know how the Germans came to make this gross violation of their principle.

Coming to the third proposition, von Hertling says, with justice, that the doctrine of the balance of power is a more or less antiquated doctrine. He further accuses England of being the upholder of that doctrine for purposes of aggrandizement.

That is a profoundly unhistorical method of looking at the question. Great Britain has fought time and again for the balance of power, because only by fighting could Europe be saved from the domination of one over-bearing and aggressive nation.

If von Hertling wants to make the balance of power antiquated, he can do it by inducing his countrymen to abandon that policy of ambitious domination which overshadows the world at this moment.

As to President Wilson's third and fourth principles: Consider for a moment how von Hertling desires to apply the principle that the interest and benefit of the populations concerned should be considered in peace arrangements. He mentions three countries he wishes to see restored to Turkey, namely, Armenia, Palestine, and Mesopotamia.

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Does any one think that this would be to the interest and benefit of the populations concerned? Von Hertling accuses us of being animated with purely ambitious designs when we invaded Mesopotamia and captured Jerusalem.

I suppose he would say that Russia was similarly moved when she occupied Armenia. But when Turkey went to war she picked a quarrel with us for purely ambitious purposes. She was promised by Germany the possession of Egypt. Would the interest and happiness of the population of Egypt be best conserved by Turkish conquest of Egypt?

The Germans in the search for the greatest happiness of these populations would have restored Egypt to the worst rule the world has ever known. They would have destroyed Arab independence and abandoned Palestine to those who had rendered it sterile all these centuries.

How could any one preach seriously a profession of faith about the interests of populations after this evidence of the manner in which von Hertling desires to see it carried out?

If the Reichstag had any sense of humour it must surely have smiled when it heard the Chancellor dealing in that spirit with the dominating doctrine of every important German statesman, soldier, and thinker for two generations at least.

So much for the four principles which Mr. Holt says von Hertling accepts, and which he thinks the British Government is backward in not accepting. I hope my short analysis may have convinced him that there are two sides to that question.

I cannot, however, leave von Hertling without making some observation upon the Russian policy which he defines. That also is a demonstration of German methods. He tells us the recent arrangements with Russia were made on the urgent appeal of the populations for protection against the Red Guard and other bands, and, therefore, undertaken in the name of humanity.

We know that the East is the East and the West is the West and that the German policy of the West is entirely different from the German policy of the East.

The German policy in the East recently has been directed toward preventing atrocities and devastation in the interest of humanity, while German policy in the West is occupied entirely in performing atrocities and devastations.

Why this difference of treatment of Belgium on one side and other populations on the other? I know of no explanation, except that Germany pursues her methods with remorseless insistency and alters or varies the excuse she gives for her policy.

If she invades Belgium, it is military necessity; if Courland, it is in the interest of humanity. It is impossible to rate very high the professions of humanity, international righteousness and equity in regard to those populations which figure so largely in the speeches. I am quite unable to understand how anybody can get up in the Reichstag and claim that Germany is waging a defensive war.