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BRITAIN AND DISARMAMENT

1916 - 1931

by

DAVID JOHN SHORNEY

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

After the First World War Britain no longer had the resources to defend her empire and island kingdom in a world of highly armed states. She had little choice but to seek an international limitation of armaments. Though the United States and Japan were prepared to limit their naval forces Britain neither possessed the means nor the will to induce the European land powers to reduce their armaments. She shied away from commitments because her foreign policy was designed to minimise risks, not to lay the foundations of a new international order by guaranteeing the security of other states.

Between 1919 and 1922 the limitation of armaments was an important objective of British foreign policy but the Lloyd George government like its successors refused to bind Britain to come to the assistance of states which felt threatened by their neighbours. Between 1922 and 1929 Britain did more to obstruct than promote international disarmament. In 1929 the second Labour government responded to an upsurge in popular support for disarmament by reaching an agreement with the United States over naval armaments which it was intended should pave the way for a comprehensive international disarmament treaty. The partial failure of the 1930 London naval conference dampened the Labour government's enthusiasm for disarmament but popular agitation and Britain's commitment to the League kept arms limitation on the agenda of British politics.

Britain lacked faith in the efficacy of the League as an agency for disarmament. She did little to ensure the success of the Preparatory Commission in the crucial years 1926 to 1929. Eventually, however, public pressures forced the government to assist the League's efforts to achieve an international arms limitation agreement.

As the international situation deteriorated in the years 1929 to 1931 the disarmament movement in Britain gathered momentum. By 1931 its 'ethical' goals had overtaken Britain's capabilities and the personal commitment of most of her political leaders.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACIQ	The Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International Questions.
BL Add. Mss.	British Library Additional Manuscripts.
CAB	Cabinet Office file.
CF	Council of Four.
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence.
Cmd.	Papers presented to Parliament by command of His (Her) Majesty's Government.
COS	Chiefs of Staff.
CP	Cabinet Papers (Memoranda).
DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy.
DC(P)	The Three Party Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence in preparation for the world disarmament conference, 1931.
DPC	Disarmament Policy Committee of the Cabinet, 1931.
E	Papers presented to the Imperial Conferences.
FO	Foreign Office file.
FRUS	Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States.
FS	Fighting Services Committee of the Cabinet.
HC Debs.	Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons.
HL Debs.	Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords.
IC	Council of Ten (Allied Supreme War Council), Paris Peace Conference.
ILP	Independent Labour Party.
LNA	Limitation of Naval Armaments Committee of the Cabinet, 1927.
LNC	(1) League of Nations Committee of the Cabinet, (2) London Naval Conference Committee of the Cabinet, 1929-30.
PAC	Permanent Advisory Commission.
PPC	Paris Peace Conference.
PREM	Prime Minister's Office file.
PRO	Public Record Office.
RA	Reduction of Armaments.
TMC	Temporary Mixed Commission (on disarmament).
UDC	Union of Democratic Control.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

1916	
August	Foreign Office memorandum proposes that Britain should make disarmament one of its war aims.
1917	
April-May	Imperial War Cabinet adopts a negative attitude to disarmament.
December	Disarmament given prominence in Labour party's statement of war aims.
1918	
January	Lloyd George in his Caxton Hall speech and Wilson in his Fourteen Points call for reductions in national armaments.
December	Candidates of all three political parties in the 'coupon' election pledge support for a league of nations and call for the abolition of conscription.
1919	
January	Opening of the Paris peace conference and establishment of the League of Nations Commission.
	League of Nations Union formed in London.
June	Victor powers at Paris pledge themselves to promote disarmament in a letter to the German government.
	Versailles treaty imposes disarmament on Germany.
	United States and Britain sign a treaty of guarantee pledging themselves to come to France's assistance in the event of unprovoked German aggression.
August	Ten Year Rule: the Lloyd George government instructs the Fighting Services to assess Britain's defence requirements on the assumption that there will be no major war for at least ten years.
1920	
May	League Council appoints a Permanent Advisory Commission (PAC) to advise them on military, naval and air questions including disarmament.
September	Brussels International Financial Conference convened by the League calls for large cuts in public expenditure including defence budgets.
December	First League Assembly requests the Council to appoint the Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments (TMC).
	United States Senate approves the Borah resolution calling on the United States government to enter into negotiations with Britain and Japan to achieve large reductions in naval armaments.
1921	
February	League of Nations Union sets up a disarmament committee.
	League Council sets up the Temporary Mixed Commission

August	Lloyd George government appoints Geddes committee on national expenditure.
November	Washington conference opens with an American proposal for the reduction and limitation of the battle fleets of the principal naval powers.
1922	
January	Cannes conference.
February	Viscount Esher presents his disarmament plan to the Temporary Mixed Commission.
	Washington naval treaty.
April-May	Genoa conference.
July	Cecil outlines proposals for a draft treaty of mutual guarantee to the Temporary Mixed Commission.
September	League Assembly adopts Resolution XIV linking security and disarmament.
December	Moscow disarmament conference attended by delegations from Russia, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania fails to reach agreement on the limitation of land armaments.
1923	
March-May	Fifth Pan-American conference at Santiago fails to extend the principles of the Washington naval treaty to the Central and South American states.
June	Baldwin government's air expansion programme announced.
September	League Assembly adopts the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance.
1924	
February	Rome conference of experts fails to agree on the extension of the principles of the Washington naval treaty to non-signatory powers.
July	Labour government rejects the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance.
September	(Geneva) Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes drafted by the First and Third Committees of the League Assembly.
1925	
March	British government reject the Geneva Protocol.
September	League Assembly calls on the Council to make a preparatory study for a world disarmament conference.
October	Locarno conference.
December	League Council appoints the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference.
1926	
May	First session of the League Preparatory Commission in Geneva.
1927	
April	Third session of Preparatory Commission ends in deadlock over naval disarmament.

June-August	Geneva (Coolidge) naval conference.
November	Russia proposes total disarmament at the fourth session of the Preparatory Commission.
1928	
July	Chamberlain announces that Britain and France have resolved their differences over naval disarmament - the Anglo-French Compromise.
August	Kellogg-Briand pact signed in Paris.
1929	
April	Sixth session of Preparatory Commission gives a second reading to a number of clauses in the 1927 draft disarmament convention and reaches a compromise on a number of contentious issues.
	Hugh Gibson of the United States announces his country's readiness to adopt new formulae over naval disarmament.
June-September	United States ambassador in London, Charles Dawes, and the new British prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, reach agreement over cruiser strengths and parity between the British and American fleets.
October	MacDonald meets President Hoover in the United States.
1930	
January-April	London naval conference.
April	London naval treaty.
November-December	Final session of the Preparatory Commission.
1931	
March-July	CID Three Party Committee on Disarmament.
July	Leaders of the three political parties address a disarmament demonstration organised by the League of Nations Union in the Albert Hall.

INTRODUCTION

Few wars in history have had such a profound effect on popular attitudes to war and peace as the First World War. When war once more broke out in Europe in September 1939 there were no crowds to greet the news with singing and wave after wave of cheering. The bloodshed, destruction and suffering of the years 1914 to 1918 had produced a deep-seated revulsion against war.

The principal European victor powers, Britain and France, emerged from the 1914-1918 war depleted in wealth and manpower and with a serious loss of confidence and morale. They had only survived the ordeal because of the intervention of the United States in 1917. When the American Senate refused to ratify the Paris peace settlement, they neither had the means nor the will to maintain indefinitely the terms they had imposed on their enemies. Britain's statesmen were not prepared to enter into commitments which might once again involve their countrymen in a European war. When they recalled the slaughter of the war years, the words most frequently on their lips were 'never again'. Every Armistice Day celebration from 1919 onwards was a pledge to the dead and a promise to the living that Britain would not become involved in another major conflict.

As soon as the war ended there was an instant and insistent demand for rapid demobilisation. This was soon followed by a well-orchestrated agitation for large reductions in the nation's arms budget. Other nations too reduced the size of their armed forces. Wars are almost always followed by a measure of disarmament as nations transfer material and human resources from the necessities of war to the needs of peace. What

was unique about this process in post-1918 Britain was its emotional appeal to a nation which came to believe that disarmament was the panacea for the world's ills.

This study of Britain and disarmament in the first decade of peace is an attempt to examine a number of inter-related questions. To what extent did British governments have the support of public opinion in pursuing a policy of general disarmament? How far was general disarmament an objective of British foreign policy in the years 1916 to 1931? What lead did Britain give the international community in achieving disarmament? How much did Britain herself disarm and what effect did this have on her power, prestige and diplomacy? How far were the British people aware of the obstacles which stood in the path to general disarmament and to what extent did they appreciate the price which Britain would have to pay to achieve that goal?

Though disarmament can take a number of different forms the term is used throughout this study as a convenient piece of shorthand for 'the general limitation and reduction of national armaments by voluntary international agreement'. It will, however, be necessary to refer to other forms of disarmament. In the first place, disarmament was imposed on Germany and her allies by the victor powers in 1919 and that disarmament was enshrined in the peace treaties. Secondly, as it has already been noted, nations disarmed unilaterally in the immediate aftermath of the war without reference to other powers. Of all the nations of Europe only Denmark pursued the policy of unilateral disarmament to its logical conclusion. Thirdly, disarmament resulted from international agreements amongst a limited number of powers. The Washington naval treaty in 1922, by limiting the capital ships each of its five signatories could retain, led to reductions in the battle fleets of the principal naval powers. Disarmament was in this case a consequence of the normal diplomatic processes. Fourthly, disarmament was an

objective embodied in the Covenant of the League of Nations and pursued by its members, and those non-member states prepared to associate themselves with it, to achieve that goal.

In Britain, most advocates of disarmament assumed that peace would be best preserved by mutual, balanced and phased reductions in national armaments though a minority believed that the 'moral' example of unilateral disarmament would do most to prevent war. Though numerically small, the latter were a vocal and articulate group in British political life in the inter-war years. Though they sometimes merged, it is necessary to draw a distinction between these two groups.

As early as 1824 a British Foreign Secretary, George Canning, had declared that to preserve the peace of the world was the chief objective of British foreign policy. For almost a century before 1914 British statesmen had reminded the British people that as a great trading nation Britain had a paramount interest in the preservation of peace. A Foreign Office memorandum in 1926 began: 'Broadly speaking the foreign policy of His Majesty's Government remains what it has been for many years...(1) to seek peace and ensue it, (2) to preserve the status quo and the balance of power, and (3) to protect and develop British interests in foreign countries.'[1] Other countries might have territorial ambitions but Britain had none. Her sole objective was to remain at peace.

For centuries statesmen had assumed that the best way to preserve peace was to prepare for war though on as limited a scale as international conditions permitted. A strong nation deterred aggression and maintained its influence in a world of competing states. Britain ruled the waves because she was strong enough to protect her commerce and challenge any would-be aggressor.

Before 1914 Britain was already over-extended in terms of her

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. 1, Appendix.

military and naval commitments. She neither had the military and naval capability nor the financial resources to meet all the needs of imperial defence. In 1919, with fewer resources, she faced much larger commitments: responsibility for policing huge new tracts of territory in the Middle East and Africa, the containment of disruptive nationalism in India, Ireland, Egypt and Palestine, the occupation of the Rhineland for fifteen years and Constantinople and the Straits for a shorter period, and an unlimited though ill-defined commitment to the League of Nations. With responsibilities of this magnitude she could not afford armaments expenditure in excess of that required to police her empire and defend her sea communications. In a world of competing nation-states, she had no choice but to press for an all-round limitation of armaments.

Between 1919 and 1923, the post-war Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Baldwin governments succumbed to strong Treasury pressure to reduce the cost of Britain's naval, military and air forces. Reductions were made with the wholehearted support of the Press, Parliament and public opinion. The Service departments were obliged to resign themselves to a policy of retrenchment. Not one of the prime ministers of the 1920s was particularly responsive to their pleadings. Preparation for future wars was a low priority among those who believed that Britain was without a foe in the world.

Although large reductions were made in British defence expenditure in the years 1919 to 1931, in real terms it did not fall substantially below the level reached in the peak years of the pre-war arms race.[1] Until the outbreak of war in 1939 Britain remained the strongest naval power in the world.

Such reductions as were made, for the most part unilaterally by successive British governments, took place at a time when the international situation in Europe and Asia was far from stable. That

1. See Appendix I.

instability alarmed British statesmen but did not prevent them from pursuing a policy of piecemeal, unilateral disarmament punctuated by the decision to expand the Air Force in 1923 and to construct 10,000 ton 8" gun cruisers in the years 1924 to 1928. On the eve of the world disarmament conference in 1932 Britain's statesmen were to complain that Britain's example in reducing her armed forces had not been followed by other powers. This was to some extent true but they were well aware that Britain's self-imposed disarmament had been dictated by economic circumstances and public pressure.

As nations became more highly armed in the last half of the nineteenth century Radical critics challenged the assumption that armaments prevented war. Unsuccessful efforts were made at the first Hague conference in 1899 and by the pre-war Liberal governments in Britain to check the arms race. Campbell-Bannerman launched his party's election campaign in December 1905 with a warning that the growth of national armaments constituted a great danger to the peace of the world. 'What nobler role could this country assume', he asked, 'than at the fitting moment to place itself at the head of a league of peace?'[1] In the last decade of peace the advocates of arms limitation mounted a campaign to capture the soul of the Liberal party.[2] They did not entirely succeed but they made a lasting impression on the future prime minister, David Lloyd George.

After the outbreak of war in August 1914 some foresaw that there would be a strong disarmament movement in Britain as soon as hostilities ended. A strong opponent of disarmament, the Cambridge ecclesiastical

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1. The Times, 22 December 1905.

2. See S. Koss: Asquith, London, 1976, passim; A. J. A. Morris: Radicalism against War, 1906-1914, London, 1972, passim; K. Robbins: The Abolition of War, The Peace Movement in Britain, 1914-1919, Cardiff, 1976, pp. 7-26.

historian and Dean of Jesus College, F. J. Foakes-Jackson, warned the leader of the Tory die-hards in the House of Lords, Lord Willoughby de Broke, that when the war ended, there would be a clamour for instant disarmament. If it was not checked Britain would scrap her navy and disband her army as she had done a hundred years earlier but with even more dire consequences for her power and prestige in the world.[1]

Four years of trench warfare brought a particularly strong reaction against armaments in Britain. Agitation for peace-time compulsory military service, a feature of pre-war British politics, virtually ceased.[2] In post-war Britain armaments had few defenders and many critics.

As the prospects of a second world war loomed ever larger in men's minds, the disarmament movement gained in momentum. As late as 1935 ten and a half million of the eleven million six hundred thousand polled in the Peace Ballot answered the question: 'Are you in favour of an all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement?' in the affirmative. Such was the public support for disarmament that the National governments of MacDonald and Baldwin were reluctant to embark on a programme of massive rearmament for fear of losing electoral popularity.[3]

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1. Foakes-Jackson to Willoughby de Broke, 9 November 1915, Willoughby de Broke Papers, WB/11/26.

2. Conscription did not become part of the Conservative party's programme before 1914 but it was given considerable support. Many Conservatives were prominent in the National Service League which Lord Roberts founded in 1905, among them Lord Willoughby de Broke. For the Conservative party's attitude to conscription see National Unionist Association of Conservative and Liberal Unionist Organisations' Campaign Guide, 13th Edition, London, n.d. (1914), p. 200. For post-war attitudes to conscription, see P. Dennis: Decision by Default, London, 1972, passim.

3. There were other reasons for Britain's failure to rearm to meet the threat of Nazi Germany, notably fears of inflation, but the 'pacifist' mood of the British people provided the governments of the early 1930s with a convenient excuse for not pursuing policies considered to be economically and politically hazardous.

It was not only the Left who believed that armaments bred international tensions and international tensions, war.[1] Si vis pacem, para bellum had been discredited by recent events. Furthermore, Germany, the most highly armed nation and best prepared for war in 1914, had not been saved from the ignominy of defeat. Armaments neither prevented war nor guaranteed eventual victory. They gave the illusion of security only to create even greater insecurity in neighbouring states.

In 1919 many believed that the world had entered a new era in which the old rules of international power politics were no longer relevant. It was assumed that the ordeal of war had changed the hearts and minds of a whole generation. The world could look forward to a long period of peace because there would never again be the same eagerness for war. That being so, there were new opportunities to create the machinery of lasting peace, opportunities which had eluded Britain and the world in the jingoistic pre-war days of 'We want eight and we won't wait'.[2] Peace would be maintained not by the threat of war but by the pressure of a well-informed and enlightened public opinion acting as a brake on the aggressive policies of governments. If the countries of Europe espoused democracy, their peoples could be trusted to see that the arms race was never resumed.[3] Armaments and war would become an anachronism in a democratic world which possessed in the League of Nations, machinery for the settlement of international disputes.

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1. See Martin Wight's comment in Power Politics, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 254: 'The doctrine that the arms race is the prime cause of war was widely believed after the First World War, and powerfully shaped the public opinion in the parliamentary democracies that were reluctant to rearm against the Axis powers. It is an example of learning the wrong lesson from history.'

2. It is noteworthy that the Conservative Opposition spokesman on naval affairs in the pre-war House of Commons, Arthur Lee, became after the war a staunch advocate of naval disarmament and as First Lord of the Admiralty one of Britain's delegates at the Washington conference in 1921-22. Lee was credited with the authorship of the slogan 'We want eight and we won't wait' in the dreadnought controversy of 1908.

3. See Philip Kerr's comment to Lloyd George: Kerr to Lloyd George, 18 February 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/2/23.

The disarmers were broadly correct in their assessment of British public opinion but they exaggerated the extent to which public opinion in other countries had changed as a result of the war. Writing towards the end of 1931 Norman Angell,[1] author of the pre-war classic The Great Illusion, said that the most important achievement of the years 1929 to 1931 was 'a certain subtle change of spirit and attitude, a change the profundity of which perhaps can only be grasped by those who fought in the peace cause before the war, and knew too well another attitude and spirit'.[2] A similar assessment was made by Gilbert Murray,[3] the Chairman of the League of Nations Union and distinguished Oxford classical scholar. Returning from the world disarmament conference in July 1932 he recorded his impressions in a letter to the Manchester Guardian.[4] There was, he said, 'a unanimous and passionate demand all over the world for real and drastic disarmament'. He went on to report uncritically the comments of a Polish journalist in Geneva. 'If you ever suggested to a Polish peasant the need of preparation for war he would drop his spade and shake his fist in your face.' If disarmament was not achieved there would be revolution. A year later in an address to the University of Wales at Aberystwyth at the opening of the 1933-34 academic year, Gilbert Murray said: 'I believe that any government which plunged into war now in Europe would be in danger of being torn to pieces by its own people. I believe that to be true of Germany, Italy and Russia.'[5] Fifteen years

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1. (Sir) Norman Angell, 1874-1967, journalist and author, Labour MP for Bradford North, 1929-31, Nobel Peace Prize, 1933. The Great Illusion first published as Europe's Optical Illusion in 1908 was translated into many different languages, led to the formation of the Garton Foundation to disseminate Angell's views, and the discounting of war as an instrument of national policy by many pre-war Liberals.

2. Norman Angell: The Unseen Assassins, London, (January) 1932, p. 269.

3. Gilbert Murray, 1866-1957, Australian by birth, Regius Professor of Greek, Oxford, 1908-36, Chairman of the League of Nations Union, 1923-38.

4. 28 July 1932.

5. Gilbert Murray: From the League to the U.N., London, 1948, p. 56.

later Murray freely admitted that he had underestimated the violence of nationalistic passions in Europe. Mixing as they did with an unrepresentative section of European opinion at Geneva and elsewhere on the continent of Europe, idealists in Britain too readily assumed that nationalism had been totally discredited by the First World War.

Though these illusions blinded many Englishmen to the realities of the post-1918 world, a convincing case could be made for disarmament to those who did not share the vision of a new international order. The well-informed, if not the nation as a whole, were aware of how near the British Empire had come to defeat in the 1914-1918 war and how much the war had contributed to the imperial problems which Britain faced in India, Egypt and elsewhere. Another war might spell the doom of the British Empire because it would become increasingly difficult to meet simultaneous attacks on Britain's far-flung territories with the necessary force to ensure victory. Nor was it the overseas empire alone which was menaced by war. In the new age of air power Britain's island fortress was no longer the impregnable bastion it once had been. Britain and the sea-lanes connecting her with the Empire were so vulnerable to air attack that Britain, more than any other power, had a vested interest in disarmament. It was now an illusion to rely on 'preparedness'.

One of the foremost advocates of disarmament in the inter-war years, Philip Noel-Baker,[1] wrote in 1926 that disarmament had two main purposes:

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1. Philip Noel-Baker, 1889- , created Lord Noel-Baker, 1977, son of the Liberal MP, J. Allen Baker, founder and first commandant of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, a member of Lord Robert Cecil's staff at the Paris peace conference, League of Nations Secretariat, 1920-22, Cassels Professor of International Relations, University of London, 1924-29, Labour MP for Coventry, 1929-31, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, 1929-31, Personal Assistant to Arthur Henderson, President of the World Disarmament Conference, 1932-33, Labour MP for Derby, 1936-70, author of The Geneva Protocol, 1925, Disarmament, 1926, and other works. An Olympic athlete and twice captain of the British team at the Olympic Games. In the post-war Attlee government he was Minister of State at the Foreign Office, Secretary of State for Air and Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. A Nobel Peace Prize winner, 1959, and an international authority on arms control.

to reduce the risks of war and to reverse the trend of the previous sixty years towards the militarisation of national and international life. There was a danger, he said, that the average European might come to take for granted a degree of militarisation which was, in fact, of comparatively recent origin. Disarmament would be frustrated so long as the military élites, and the industrial-military complexes which sustained them, remained unchallenged. Britain was in a unique position to lead Europe back to the armament levels maintained before the modern age of militarism began.

The benefits which would accrue to Britain and the world from international disarmament were plain for all to see. Enormous savings could be made without endangering national security. Deprived of those offensive weapons without which no aggressor could deliver a 'knock-out' blow, states would be rendered incapable of launching aggressive war.

British policy makers were motivated not only by the desire to reduce the risks of war but by the opportunity of enhancing Britain's relative military and naval power. Thus by abolishing conscription and limiting military manpower three specific goals might be achieved. Continental powers would be deprived of the means of waging wars of aggression. The relative effectiveness of Britain's small but more highly mechanised professional army would be increased, and a damaging blow would be struck at the roots of militarism by removing from military élites the reserves of trained manpower on which, it was believed, their power and influence rested. Similarly, by limiting capital ship construction Britain would be spared a wasteful and expensive competition in ships of doubtful utility without sacrificing her naval power. By abolishing submarines she would reduce the risks of being starved into submission in some future conflict. A general limitation of air armaments would reduce her vulnerability to air attack while leaving her free to use aircraft as a cheap and effective means of policing large tracts of her empire.

In their public utterances about the League and disarmament British political leaders were often guilty of raising false expectations. During the war they had introduced a note of idealism to justify the sacrifices being demanded of the British people. They had held before them the prospects of a bright new world in which wars would be no more. When peace returned, they were reluctant to dispel those hopes and shatter those illusions. Prisoners of their wartime promises, they only too frequently failed to acquaint the British people with the limitations of the League's authority and the realities of the post-war world. They failed to drive home the lesson that disarmament could only be achieved in a stable and secure international order. They failed to inform them that Britain's contribution towards creating that world order would inevitably be large and costly. The disarmament debate frequently took place in an atmosphere far removed from reality.

Britain was never prepared to envisage replacing the pre-war system of competitive armaments by a plan for co-operative armaments internationally deployed to preserve the peace of the world. Her policy makers in 1919 regarded such a plan as completely utopian and unrealistic. Article 8 of the Covenant, however, committed its signatories to the principle that the maintenance of peace required a reduction of armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety <u>and</u> the enforcement of international obligations by common action. National armaments would henceforth serve two distinct purposes: to defend member states against external attack and internal subversion <u>and</u> to enforce League sanctions. Disarmament and sanctions were two sides of the same coin but Britain chose to deal in a debased and defaced coinage.

British statesmen optimistically believed that member states would abide by the recommendations of the League. It was not likely, they thought, that nations would willingly endure the hardships and expense of another war after the ordeal of 1914 to 1918. Public opinion would

restrain governments from embarking on aggressive policies and the League would not be forced to resort to sanctions. Should it decide to do so, Britain could only lend her support if the action had the approval and assistance of the United States. When Balfour said in 1924[1] that there was no battery of sanctions which could stop a determined and unscrupulous government bent on aggression, he was reflecting the view of Britain's foreign policy-making establishment. Hence, in the British view, the League could not function effectively in a world of highly armed states. The League of Nations was a pious futility in an armed world.[2] In Britain people spoke of the League and disarmament in the same breath. That was not so in France, the successor states and much of Europe.

It soon became obvious that general disarmament was not possible without the full agreement and co-operation of France. France held the key to European disarmament but she would not agree to reductions in armaments until she received what she regarded as adequate guarantees of her security. At no stage in the inter-war years did she regard the League as adequate. The United States' Senate, by refusing to ratify the treaty of guarantee signed on 28 June 1919, deprived France of an effective guarantee of her security and contributed much to her subsequent intransigence and obstinacy. There is some force in the contention that the Senate's action was 'the decisive and symbolic event of the inter-war years'.[3]

The successor states of central and eastern Europe felt equally apprehensive. They had gained territory at the expense of Germany, Hungary and Russia. Those in the east of Europe felt more threatened by Russia than by Germany. To force them to accept a measure of general

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1. Quoted by R. B. Henig: The League of Nations, Edinburgh, 1973, p. 10.
2. Lloyd George in 1931, Lloyd George Papers, G/138-9. Notes for the Three Party Committee on Disarmament.
3. M. Wight: Power Politics, p. 202.

disarmament without a large and costly commitment to maintain their security was beyond the powers of Britain's statesmen.

If Germany rearmed, no one in Britain was in any doubt about the threat she would pose to the peace of Europe. Only so long as she remained disarmed could Europe prevent the forcible revision of the 1919 peace settlement. Germany was potentially the strongest power in Europe. She was the most highly industrialised and, apart from Russia, the most populous. There were three Germans to every two Frenchmen. If she rearmed she was well placed to plunge Europe into another war. Neither France nor the successor states, in isolation or in combination, would be capable of containing German expansion. That was recognised in France as much as it was in Britain. General disarmament was the prerequisite of any lasting reconciliation between the victor and the vanquished powers.

No satisfactory solution to this dilemma was ever found. Britain was psychologically, morally and legally committed to disarmament. The Paris peace conference had bequeathed to the victor powers responsibility for bringing about disarmament. Though that responsibility was nominally laid at the door of the League Council, it was effectively placed on the shoulders of Britain and France. By disarming Germany, Britain and France committed themselves to a process which could only lead to general disarmament in Europe and the world. The only other alternative was to acquiesce in the rearmament of Germany and the revision of the 1919 peace settlement, if needs must be, by force of arms. It was the latter course they were forced to embrace. Appeasement and rearmament were the only alternatives to general disarmament in Europe.

Of all the European powers in 1919, Britain was the most secure. Throughout the 1920s and beyond, France and the successor states looked to her to provide the security they lacked. They were the consumers.

She was the unwilling provider.[1] It was widely believed that her naval blockade of Germany and the Central Powers in the First World War had been an important factor in the Allied victory. It prompted the architects of the League to believe in the sufficiency of economic sanctions. They assumed that the British and American fleets would co-operate to maintain peace. Though they exaggerated the effectiveness of a blockade as a means of exerting international pressure, Britain's naval power was an essential and important ingredient of any collective security system. Energetically applied it could contribute much to deter and defeat aggression.

In 1919 Britain faced a choice between maintaining naval and air squadrons to place at the disposal of the League should the occasion arise and reducing her armaments to conserve her financial resources. She unhesitatingly chose the latter. Her policy makers were never in any doubt that the price Britain would be asked to pay was a costly one, threatening her trade and almost certainly requiring her to maintain armaments over and above those needed for her own security. By reducing her naval and air forces in the early 1920s she deprived herself of that margin of strength which she might have contributed to European security and the consolidation of the League's authority. In deploying her naval, military and air power, the interests of imperial defence took precedence over the League and European security. With the exception of the inconclusive Cabinet discussions during the Abyssinian crisis in 1935, at no stage did she ever seriously consider putting at the disposal of the League any of her naval, military and air forces.

It is not surprising, therefore, that British disarmament policy in the first decade of peace lacked consistency, coherence and direction.

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1. A. E. Zimmern: The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, London, 1936, p. 333.

Formulated as a response to various domestic pressures it was only a first priority of government for two short periods in 1921 and 1929. Public support for disarmament wavered in the years 1919 to 1931. It was strongest in the years immediately after the First World War and more especially in the months which preceded the Washington Conference in 1921. Between 1926 and 1931, despite a certain disenchantment with the League's Preparatory Commission, the disarmament movement in Britain gained momentum. It was an important issue of British domestic politics from the failure of the Geneva naval conference in August 1927 to the opening of the world disarmament conference in February 1932.

At no stage in the inter-war years did British governments come near to resolving the problems associated with European disarmament. No solution was possible without a wide-ranging political agreement of a nature totally unacceptable to official opinion. In 1928 one perceptive observer of the international scene warned the Foreign Office that of all subjects disarmament was the most dangerous if taken by itself.[1] Few others, however, saw so clearly how futile it was for Britain to pursue disarmament as an isolated goal of foreign policy.

It was the importance accorded to Anglo-American relations in 1921 and again in 1929 which forced British policy makers to take international disarmament seriously. Britain was consequently forced to seek disarmament outside the jurisdiction of the League. The United States, a non-League power, was the second largest naval power in the world. She had the resources to challenge Britain's supremacy on the high seas. Britain was obliged to by-pass the League and enter into bilateral and multilateral negotiations with the United States and the other principal naval powers. The Washington Conference of 1921-22 achieved notable results and set a precedent for the future. At Geneva in 1927 and in London in

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1. Philip Kerr to Sir Ronald Lindsay, Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, 18 December 1928, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/242. Philip Kerr, Marquess of Lothian (1930), 1882-1940, Private Secretary to Lloyd George, 1916-21, British ambassador to the United States, 1938-40.

1930 Britain sought an agreement to limit naval armaments independently of the League. In both Britain and the United States the Washington precedent was highly favoured. There was much criticism of the more ambitious and all-embracing schemes of the Preparatory Commission in Geneva. When they contrasted the ease with which the naval powers had reached an agreement in Washington in the winter of 1921-22 with the Preparatory Commission's slow and ponderous procedures, British policy makers became increasingly sceptical about the League of Nations as an agency for promoting disarmament. Even the leader of the Labour peers in the House of Lords and former Lord Chancellor, Viscount Haldane,[1] did not conceal his doubts.

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1. R.B.Haldane, Viscount Haldane of Cloan (1911), 1856-1928, lawyer, statesman and philosopher, Liberal MP for East Lothian (Haddingtonshire), 1885-1911, Secretary of State for War, 1905-12, Lord Chancellor, 1912-15, 1924, Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence in the first Labour government, 1924, and as such a quasi-Minister of Defence, leader of the Labour peers in the House of Lords, 1925-28.

P A R T I

CHAPTER ONE

THE PRESS AND PUBLIC OPINION

Before 1914 foreign policy in Britain was formulated by the Secretary of State on the advice of his permanent officials and with the tacit approval of his Cabinet colleagues. It was seldom debated by the House of Commons but when the Foreign Secretary spoke for his country he could claim to be reflecting the broad current of public opinion. Though there were differences on points of detail between the parties and some deep differences within the Liberal party itself,[1] there was broad agreement on one point. British and imperial interests had to be defended, if need be, by force of arms. Radical critics of the government might criticise the level of British naval expenditure but they did not question Britain's right to defend her interests and prepare for every contingency of national and imperial defence.

During the First World War a number of small but vocal pressure groups waged a campaign for the democratic control of foreign policy.[2] When the war ended in 1918 there was no longer a broad consensus of opinion as to what that policy should be. Foreign policy became an element in party warfare. Liberal and Labour critics of the government were not prepared to leave foreign policy to the experts. With clear memories of the chain of events which had led to war in 1914, the Radical

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1. For the 'dissenting' tradition in British foreign policy, see A. J. P. Taylor: The Troublemakers, London, 1957.

2. For an examination of these pressure groups see K. Robbins: The Abolition of War, and M. Swartz: The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during World War One, Oxford, 1971.

critics of Grey's pre-war foreign policy became the dominant voice in the Liberal and Labour parties of the 1920s.

None the less Conservative, and not Radical, attitudes were to dominate British foreign policy in the inter-war years. With the exception of the two brief interludes of Labour government in 1924 and in 1929-31, the Conservative party was in office for the whole of the period. Lloyd George's post-war coalition government was dependent on Conservative support and in the years of the National governments, 1931 to 1940, the Conservative party was the dominant partner in government. With slight modifications to accommodate British foreign policy to the changed circumstances of the post-1918 world, the Conservative party tried to operate according to the pre-war traditions of diplomacy. Nevertheless, though the Conservative party dominated Parliament and British politics in the inter-war years, radical attitudes played no small part in moulding public opinion and in shaping public attitudes to foreign and defence policy.

Homogeneity is seldom a characteristic feature of public opinion. On only rare occasions in the years 1919 to 1931 did public opinion coalesce to exert strong pressure on the government of the day. What is not in doubt, however, is that throughout the whole period successive governments were aware of certain domestic pressures restricting their freedom of action.

In the Britain of the inter-war years three main strands of opinion can be isolated and identified. There were, firstly, the 'never again' isolationists who fought shy of all foreign entanglements, including the League of Nations, but who continued to believe, to some extent, in the old doctrine of 'preparedness'. There were, secondly, the 'never again' pacifists who, after the experience of the First World War, believed that all war was wicked and that unilateral disarmament provided the surest path to peace. There were, thirdly, the League of Nations

enthusiasts who saw in the machinery of the League, which few of them fully understood, the one and only instrument for preserving peace. All three were concerned with the avoidance of war. All three endorsed the slogan: 'it must not happen again'. All three shied away from binding commitments which would have drastically curtailed Britain's freedom of manoeuvre though the League of Nations enthusiasts came nearest to endorsing a policy of collective security. British public opinion in the 1920s was basically isolationist at heart.[1]

Interacting with each other these three strands of opinion stripped war of its glitter and its glamour and created a climate which was well-disposed to disarmament. One influential publicist and statesman, not usually associated with the popular clamour for disarmament, Winston Churchill, said in 1929 that the prevention of war ought to become the main preoccupation of mankind.[2] Fear of war haunted the imagination of a whole generation. Whatever doubts might be expressed about the utility of the League of Nations and those two much-proclaimed substitutes for war, arbitration and conciliation, most people in Britain believed that disarmament was the most effective way to prevent war. Even the 'never again' isolationists were uncertain about the value of armaments and though they, more than any other group, championed the cause of the Service departments they were far from being implacable opponents of disarmament.

'Who in Europe does not know that one more war in the West and the civilisation of the ages will fall with as great a shock as that of Rome?' Baldwin asked in his presidential address to the Classical Association in January 1926.[3] The same sentiments were echoed by the

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1. R. H. S. Crossman in War and Democracy edited by E. F. M. Durbin and G. E. C. Catlin, London, 1938, pp. 276-8.
2. W. S. Churchill: The World Crisis, Vol. 5, The Aftermath, London, 1929, p. 451.
3. The Times, 9 January 1926.

Daily Mail on the eve of Armistice Day 1927. 'Another great war would spell the suicide of the Western peoples, the ruin of Europe, and perhaps even the destruction of civilisation.' In February 1925 Baldwin's Secretary of State for Air, Sir Samuel Hoare,[1] told the Commons that air warfare in the future might well mean the destruction of civilisation as they knew it.[2] Nine months later The Times warned its readers that 'the war of the future must mean catastrophe to the whole population. Bombs of volcanic power will explode in crowded cities and a whole region may be laid under a pall of poison gas.' War, it said, was no longer a legitimate instrument of policy. It welcomed the fact that an early comprehension of these horrors would increase the general and growing aversion to war.[3] A similar view was expressed by Churchill in the fifth volume of The World Crisis published in March 1929. 'Should war come again to the world it is not with the weapons and agencies prepared for 1919 that it will be fought, but with developments and extensions of these which will be incomparably more formidable and fatal.... Mankind has got into its hands for the first time the tools by which it can unfailingly accomplish its own extermination.'[4] If for the first time in its history mankind was capable of bringing about its own extermination, its survival clearly depended on the adoption of new remedies. It was difficult, therefore, for the man in the street to resist the conclusion that general disarmament was essential if war was to be avoided.

In the immediate aftermath of the First World War the Lloyd George government swiftly reacted to the mood of public opinion. Expenditure on armaments was considerably reduced and an agreement over naval armaments

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1. Sir Samuel Hoare, Viscount Templewood (1944), 1880-1959, Conservative MP for Chelsea, 1910-44, Secretary of State for Air, 1922-24, 1924-29, Secretary of State for India, 1931-35, etc., Deputy League of Nations High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, 1921.
2. 180 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 2210, 26 February 1925.
3. 13 November 1925.
4. p. 454.

was concluded with the United States, Japan, France and Italy in 1922. After the successful conclusion of the Washington Conference popular interest in disarmament waned. In the middle years of the decade, as opinions began to diverge, public opinion was not so important a factor in the formulation of British foreign policy. As Foreign Secretary in Baldwin's second administration, 1924 to 1929, Austen Chamberlain[1] was reluctant to take public opinion into his confidence. This was especially true in the critical years of the 1927 Geneva Naval Conference and the 1928 Anglo-French compromise over disarmament. More inclined to adopt the secretive methods of pre-1914 British diplomacy he only infrequently shared his thoughts about disarmament with the British people. What was true of Chamberlain was true of the whole of Baldwin's Cabinet with the notable exception of Lord Cecil.[2] Until the League of Nations Union succeeded in mobilising an influential section of public opinion in the late 1920s[3] the Baldwin government could, to a large extent, ignore what agitation there was in the Press, Parliament and the country for disarmament.

In an editorial on 20 August 1926 The Times commented: 'disarmament

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1. Sir (Joseph) Austen Chamberlain, 1863-1937, Unionist MP for E. Worcestershire, 1892-1914 and Birmingham West, 1914-37, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1903-5 and 1919-21, Secretary of State for India, 1915-17, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Commons, 1921-22, Foreign Secretary, 1924-29.

2. Lord Robert Cecil, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (1923), Conservative MP for E. Marylebone, 1906-10 and (Independent) Conservative MP for Hitchin, 1911-23, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1915-16, Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Blockade, 1916-18, British representative on the League of Nations commission of the Paris Peace Conference, 1919, represented South Africa at the League of Nations Assembly, 1920-22, Lord Privy Seal, 1923-24, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with responsibility for disarmament, 1924-27, resigned from the Baldwin government over differences with its disarmament policy, August 1927, chairman of a Foreign Office departmental committee on League of Nations affairs and a quasi Minister of State in the Second Labour Government, 1929-31, deputy leader of the British delegation to the League Assembly, 1929-31, President of the League of Nations Union, 1923-45.

3. See Chapter Three below.

is a subject which more than any other divides mankind into cynics and enthusiasts.' Editorial comment in The Times and other leading British newspapers belies that comment. However sceptical they might sometimes be about the likely success of international disarmament negotiations under the auspices of the League at Geneva, the leader writers of the British Press did not range themselves behind the cynics who derided disarmament. Some embraced disarmament with enthusiasm. The Daily Herald, the organ of the TUC and the Labour Party, the Daily News, the chief standard-bearer of Liberalism, and the Liberal Manchester Guardian gave disarmament wholehearted support. Others such as the independent but influential Observer edited by J. L. Garvin, Reynolds's News, the organ of the Co-operative Movement, the Conservative Daily Telegraph and The Times gave the disarmament cause general support. Lord Cecil might in his correspondence bemoan Belgravia's cynicism about the League and disarmament[1] but the sentiments he heard expressed around the dining tables of Eaton Square were not typical of the British Press nor is there any evidence that they were typical of British opinion as a whole.

Nothing could be more revealing about the Press's attitude to disarmament than the contrast between its warm and wholehearted support for the Washington Conference and its hostility to the Geneva Protocol. The Washington Conference had been called on President Harding's initiative to find solutions to the problems of the Far East and to prevent a new naval arms race between Britain, the United States and Japan. The Geneva Protocol was drafted in committees of the 1924 League Assembly to promote disarmament by closely linking it with the compulsory arbitration of international disputes and the more effective enforcement of League sanctions.[2]

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1. Cecil to Davidson, 30 December 1927, copy in Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 55/57.
2. See pp. 255-63.

'Let there be no mistake about it, we shall not be drawn into a war with the United States', the Sunday Express told its readers on 15 November 1920. Eight months later the Daily Telegraph, commenting on the unveiling of the Washington statue in Trafalgar Square said that together the United States and Britain constituted the strongest political, economic and moral force upon earth. There was hardly anything which they could not achieve if they set themselves to the task in unison.[1]

On 2 July 1921, some days before President Harding invited the principal naval powers to a conference in Washington, the Daily Telegraph took up the theme of the Press's role in promoting world peace. 'If the Press of the world were always united to seek Peace and ensue it, the cause of Peace would always prevail. Today the Press of the leading nations is more sincerely convinced of the folly and danger of entering a new rivalry of armaments than at any previous period of its history. It is convinced of its folly because armaments are an insatiable Moloch, and of its danger because when once armaments reach a certain pitch there is no stopping, and war, sooner or later, becomes certain. We doubt if any responsible statesman believes that the machinery of the League of Nations would be effective to stop war if once an era of rivalry set in, and so there is a general desire, nay, a general demand, on the part of some of the great nations of the world for a limitation of armaments... the entire Press of Great Britain is in President Harding's phrase "a sane Press". Not a voice has been raised against the important lead already given by the British Government to lighten the burden of naval armaments.... We have definitely abandoned the Two Power Standard; we have proclaimed to the world that we are willing to accept the basis of equality with any other single Naval Power.... The duty of the Press to help forward this movement was never clearer.'

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1. 1 July 1921.

The Daily Telegraph was not alone in recognising the role which the Press could play in promoting peace and disarmament. When the Washington Conference opened in November 1921 the Sunday Express asked: 'What can we do to help? We can organise public opinion.... Let us send across the Atlantic a message of faith to the peacemakers. Let us take up arms in defence of our children. They shall be saved from the agony we have endured.'[1]

The Press gave enormous coverage to the Conference itself. For more than a week before it convened, the Daily Mail advertised the fact that H. G. Wells would be covering the Conference for them and advertisements to that effect were placed in a number of other papers.

Four column reports of the opening proceedings of the Conference appeared in a number of papers. The Daily Mail said that the purpose of the Conference was to end 'the mad competition in armaments' and to reach a durable settlement of the Pacific question. If it failed the armaments race would continue until there came 'a war in all probability much more terrible than the worst phases of the conflagration' that had not then been quite extinguished in Europe. It was the Conference's task to deliver the world from such a disastrous prospect.[2]

The Times was afraid that the British public would not fully appreciate the significance of the Conference. 'There is nothing that matters so much to us as Englishmen, as Britons, as members of a great and free commonwealth of nations, as whether the Washington Conference succeeds or fails...responsibility for the success of the Conference lies now in a very large degree upon this country and upon the British Empire as a whole.' An ardent desire for its complete success would be for a number of months the primary impulse of Britain's imperial policy.[3]

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1. 13 November 1921.
2. 2 November 1921.
3. 21 September 1921.

On the first Sunday after the Conference opened in Washington the Sunday Express exaggeratedly exclaimed: 'Never in the history of mankind was the world nearer its dream of brotherhood'.[1] Seldom, if ever, said The Times, had a conference held its first session under auspices so happy. Though disappointment was expressed by a number of papers over the Conference's failure to abolish submarines and tackle the problem of land armaments no disarmament treaty of the inter-war years was more warmly applauded.

In striking contrast to the Washington Conference, the Geneva Protocol, in so far as it was noticed at all by the Press, met with scathing criticism. Reports that 'the future control of the British Navy' was being discussed by the League and that 'in certain circumstances...the British Navy will be at the entire disposal of the League of Nations' angered The Times and a number of other papers.[2] So far as The Times was concerned, there could be no question of loosening the nation's control over its most powerful weapon of defence. 'The mere idea that in any contingencies our Navy should be placed at the disposition of an organisation of foreign lawyers and diplomatists would excite the whole nation to fury, could they be persuaded to take it seriously. They know it to be utterly impracticable and they intend it to remain so.'[3] Three days later, in an editorial marking the return of the Navy's Special Service Squadron to Britain after a ten months' cruise around the world, The Times referred to the Navy as 'this speaking instrument and symbol of the might and majesty of the Imperial State'. The navy clearly evoked greater loyalty than the League of Nations.

The Daily Mail, under totally different control from The Times, after Lord Northcliffe's death in 1922, was equally critical of the

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1. 13 November 1921.
2. 17 September 1924.
3. 24 September 1924.

Protocol. It was admirably adapted for keeping Britain and the British Navy 'in constant hot water'.[1] 'People who make proposals of this sort live in their own world of theories and unrealities. They ignore the hard facts which condemn their dreams and illusions...instead of reducing our maritime forces we should have to increase them substantially.'

Equally instructive are the varying responses to President Coolidge's initiative in convening a naval disarmament conference in 1927 and its subsequent failure some months later.[2] 'Great Britain's anxiety to reduce naval expenditure has not diminished but increased since the Washington Conference', the Daily Telegraph wrote on 15 March 1927. Three days earlier The Times commented: 'There is no desire in the Navy to enter into a race of armaments with other countries.' Both papers favourably contrasted the prospects of the forthcoming conference with those of the deadlocked Preparatory Commission in Geneva.[3] 'If any practical progress at all is to be achieved in the matter of naval disarmament, it will be achieved rather by this limited conference than by endless, largely theoretical and often insincere discussions in which navyless Powers do not hesitate solemnly to record their voices', the Daily Telegraph commented on 13 April.

The Sunday Express did not take such a sanguine view of the conference's prospects. France and Italy's abstention made it 'unreal and unpractical'. The British Empire was in a very different position from the other participants. Its very existence depended on sea power and the defence of its sea communications. The safety and security of the Empire, not disarmament, was Britain's paramount interest.[4]

When the Geneva conference failed to bridge the gap between British

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1. 19 September 1924.
2. See pp. 198-211.
3. See pp. 308-10.
4. 19 June 1927.

and American demands even the government's sternest critics were loath to place all the blame on the British delegation. It was widely recognised that the Americans shared some of the responsibility for the conference's failure. Just before the conference broke up the Sunday Express and the Daily Mail counselled their readers not to take the matter too seriously. 'At the moment the British people are not worrying about Geneva and parity', wrote the Sunday Express.[1] 'They are like the child who was "more than usual calm: she did not give a single damn". They simply do not believe either in war or in naval competition with the United States. They therefore turn without a qualm or tremor to the delights of the holiday season.' 'Even if the Naval Disarmament Conference at Geneva breaks up as some assert that it will', said the Daily Mail, 'there is not the least need for any Briton to allow his holiday to be overclouded by the news.'[2]

The Daily Telegraph drew a slightly different conclusion. The true lesson to be drawn from the conference was that disarmament was a far more complex matter than the average man assumed. If two friendly nations like Britain and America could not agree on the limitation of cruisers it was not likely that the nations of the world would be able to agree about the limitation of land forces.[3]

The Observer took a much more serious view of the Conference's failure. No progress would be made in European disarmament until the process begun in Washington in 1921-2 was allowed to continue. 'If the Naval Conference had reached an agreement, confidence would have moved out on a flowing tide.' Both Britain and the United States could do more for peace than they had already done. Peace could not be clinched without disarmament.[4]

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1. 31 July 1927.
2. 30 July 1927.
3. 5 August 1927.
4. 28 August 1927.

In the years 1919-31 some papers did not waver in their support for disarmament while others only lent it their support when it promised immediate reductions in defence expenditure. The Daily Mail commended the efforts of the Washington Conference and condemned the makers of the Geneva Protocol because the former would lead to a reduction in public expenditure whereas the latter threatened to impose fresh burdens on the British people which would be costly in their execution.

Among the papers which consistently advocated disarmament throughout the 1920s the Daily Herald has an untarnished reputation. It did little, however, to throw light on the fundamental problems and issues which disarmament posed and assumed only too readily that bold but simple policies would lead to a general reduction of armaments. Though not the mass circulation newspaper it was to become a decade later it was none the less broadly representative of opinion in the Labour Movement. In 1919 it was one of the first papers to regret that disarmament had been relegated to a comparatively minor place in the League Covenant because, it said, with the notable exceptions of Lord Robert Cecil and Colonel House,[1] those who had drafted it did not believe that the 1914-18 war would be the last.[2] Its pacifist sympathies, however, made it critical of Article 16 which committed the League to 'the employment of force against force'.[3] In 1921 it was one of the few newspapers to mock the efforts of the 'peacemakers' at the Washington conference on the grounds that it was impossible to make lasting peace in a world of competing capitalist states.[4] The abolition of war was such a revolutionary task that it could only be accomplished by men who believed in it.[5] Though

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1. Col. E. M. House, 1858-1938, friend and confidant of President Wilson, Wilson's special envoy to the belligerent powers in 1915 and 1916, an American member of the League of Nations commission of the Paris Peace Conference and a consistent supporter of the League in the United States.
2. 31 March 1919.
3. 30 April 1919.
4. 11 November 1921.
5. 12 November 1921.

it was most critical of the 1923 air expansion scheme which the Baldwin government introduced to reduce the enormous disparity between British and French air power, it did not align itself with those who advocated unilateral disarmament. From France's occupation of the Ruhr, it drew the conclusion that it would be a mistake for Britain to throw away her armaments in a world of armed states.[1]

In the last half of the 1920s the Daily Herald criticised the conduct of all the great powers in the League and its Preparatory Commission but singled out the British government for being most responsible for sabotaging disarmament.[2] It commended the smaller powers for challenging them in the 1927 League Assembly and warmly welcomed their efforts to revive the Geneva Protocol. In December 1927 it embarrassed MacDonald and the leaders of the Labour party by enthusiastically endorsing Russia's proposals in the Preparatory Commission for total disarmament.[3] When the Preparatory Commission adjourned its sixth session in May 1929 without finalising its draft disarmament convention, it commented sarcastically that the Commission's record over the previous three years could not have failed to gladden the hearts of militarists everywhere. 'One after another, every kind of limitation has been rejected.... Europe remains as before the war, an armed camp.'[4] When the Commission eventually completed its work in the days of the second Labour government it was, however, slightly more sanguine about its achievements than some other papers. Though it admitted that the draft convention fell short of expectations it conceded that it represented the maximum which could be achieved by agreement. It did not believe that either France, Italy or the smaller powers of Europe were prepared to agree to any substantial

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1. 11 May 1923.
2. 8, 12, 14, 15, 19, 26 and 27 September 1927.
3. 1, 2 and 10 December 1927.
4. 7 May 1929.

reductions in armaments at that juncture.[1]

Like the Daily Herald, the Daily News was a staunch advocate of disarmament. None the less in 1923 it gave general approval to the Baldwin government's air expansion scheme. 'We cannot believe that the passive acceptance of French domination in the air would bring the abolition of air armaments at all nearer.' Writing in the same issue, Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice,[2] a strong champion of disarmament in the immediate post-war years, said that regrettably Britain had to copy the jingoes of the 1870s and say: 'We have the planes, we have the men, we have the money too.'[3]

When in July 1923 MacDonald moved a motion in the House of Commons calling on the Baldwin government to summon an international disarmament conference without delay the Daily News criticised the Labour party for 'its incomplete diagnosis of the evil to be remedied' and its almost total indifference to the League of Nations' own efforts to promote disarmament through the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance.[4] Almost a month earlier it admitted that it would have been much less sympathetic towards the government's air expansion scheme had it been in any doubt about Baldwin's wholehearted support for the draft Treaty.[5]

The conclusion of the Locarno agreements[6] in October 1925 led the

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1. 11 December 1930.
2. Maj.-Gen. Sir F. B. Maurice, 1871-1951, Director of Military Operations at the War Office, 1915-18, author of a famous letter to the Press in 1918 accusing the Lloyd George government of deceiving Parliament and the public about the strength of the British army on the Western Front.
3. 28 June 1923.
4. 24 July 1923. For the work of the League of Nations in promoting disarmament and the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, see
5. 28 June 1923. The Daily News was mistaken in thinking that the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance had the full backing of Baldwin and his Cabinet. Because it had, to a large extent, been drafted by Lord Cecil the Daily News assumed that it represented the thinking of the British government.
6. For the Locarno agreements, see pp. 263-9.

Daily News to write on Armistice Day 1925 in a mood of exultant jubilation: 'It [the First World War] may after all prove to have been in the true historical sense the war that ended war.' On New Year's Eve 1925 it wrote: 'No year for a long time has opened with such bright prospects for peace abroad as that which begins tomorrow.' The course of events in 1926 and 1927 were, however, to shatter its illusions. It became much more critical of the Conservative government's foreign policy. In an editorial entitled 'Shrinking Armies' it contrasted the substantial reductions which had been made by a number of continental powers since 1923 with the inconspicuous part Britain had played in promoting disarmament.[1] In January 1927 it attributed the American government's decision to launch a new cruiser construction programme to 'the wickedness and the folly of British naval policy'. The net result of Britain's 'wantonly aggressive naval policy' was to stimulate international naval competition and threaten Britain's own naval supremacy.[2] On 15 March 1927 it warned that 'it must be fairly evident to persons of ordinary intelligence not only that the British Admiralty has no intention of making any serious contribution to the cause of naval disarmament but also that in its jealous adherence to an out-of-date tradition of naval prestige, it is blind to the changing principles of defensive strategy, careless of the nation's financial needs, and out of touch with the spirit of the age'. After Cecil resigned from the Baldwin government in August 1927[3] it drew the conclusion that 'sooner or later the dictation of the Admiralty will have to be boldly met and crushed'.[4] In October 1927 it warned: 'We cannot contribute anything to the cause of constructive peace as long as

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1. 9 August 1926.
2. 7 January 1927.
3. Cecil's resignation from the Baldwin Cabinet, though precipitated by the government's refusal to make concessions to the American point of view at the Geneva Naval Conference, was due primarily to deep differences of opinion with his colleagues over disarmament.
4. 30 August 1927.

our statesmen create the impression that in all discussions on disarmament they are thinking first and only and all the time of their nation's "military security" and would rather lose an agreement than a single 6 inch gun; and that their own idea of effective intervention at Geneva is to exercise the right of veto with almost automatic regularity.'[1] In the 1929 general election the Daily News, having decided that peace and employment were the chief issues in the campaign, tried to persuade its readers that the Liberal party was the only party with a constructive policy for peace and disarmament.

When the Preparatory Commission completed its task in December 1930 the News Chronicle, the Daily News' successor, warned its readers that neither France nor Italy nor any of the smaller states of East and South East Europe would do anything more than talk about disarmament so long as Russia had a well-equipped army whose striking power was increasing from month to month. Europe was caught in a vicious circle. If the victor powers failed to carry out their Versailles obligations to disarm, they could not expect Germany to keep her side of 'the bargain'. 'In the welter of arguments', it said, 'one fact stands out supreme. Unless France disarms, Germany will inevitably re-arm.'[2]

Like the Daily Herald and the Daily News, the Manchester Guardian gave unequivocal support to disarmament. It was one of the first to point to the intimate connection between the League and disarmament. Without the League the world would be forced once again to rely on alliances and armed defence.[3] War would be the inevitable consequence of a new competition in armaments but unless a solution was found to some of the political problems which confronted Europe and the Far East there could

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1. 22 October 1927. The Daily News was commenting primarily on the actions of the British delegation at the Preparatory Commission in opposing the disarmament policies of the continental powers.
2. 10 December 1930.
3. 4 July 1919.

be no disarmament.[1] So terrible was the prospect of a new arms race that there was no place for partisan attitudes in British politics. The parties should confer together like a group of menaced friends to try and find a way of escape. Some of the greatest European powers were still saturated with pre-war ideas about armaments but Britain could by her energy and patience bring Europe a step nearer to that state of affairs when arms would only be used as a last resort, to enforce what Europe collectively decided to be just. In 1923 the Manchester Guardian was in no doubt that Britain could best accomplish that end by throwing her influence behind the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance.[2]

By the end of the first decade of peace the Manchester Guardian was taking a far less sanguine view of the prospects for disarmament. The international scene, it said, was littered with a number of far-reaching proposals which no one took seriously.[3] Since 1919 there had been a great wash of eloquence in praise of disarmament and a greater expenditure of money and energy on preparing for war but in the wake of the Great Depression, however, it detected a slim chance that economic ruin might bring Europe to its senses.[4]

Reynolds's Newspaper, though one of the smaller and less well-known Sunday papers of the 1920s, is worthy of notice because it reflected those radical attitudes which played such a major role in shaping public opinion in the inter-war years. Surveying the prospects of the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919 it concluded that armaments ought to figure prominently on the conference's agenda. It recognised, however, that in the long run how that problem was dealt with would depend on the success or failure of the League of Nations.[5] There was a danger, it warned, that

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1. 12 July 1921 and 24 July 1923.
2. 24 July 1923.
3. 11 July 1931.
4. 13 July 1931.
5. 19 January 1919.

some nations might wish to convert the League into an alliance of militaristic powers. If on the other hand it was well and truly established, 'enthroning right instead of force', the League could be relied upon to promote disarmament.[1]

'Wherever we look in the world we see but wars and preparations for wars', it observed in December 1920. Ordinary people were not to blame. Statesmen, soldiers and sailors had brought the last war on the world. As soon as the nations of the world had recovered their strength they would bring yet another war on mankind. Unless the masses impressed their will on their rulers, mankind would, sooner or later, drift into another world war in which civilisation might perish from the face of the earth.[2]

Almost a decade later it was drawing the same conclusion. The men who presented the greatest peril to peace were the soldiers and sailors whose careers depended on war and preparations for war. 'Unless we can set ourselves free from them they will lead us into the next war just as surely as night follows today.'[3] Commenting on the failure of the 1930 London Naval conference to achieve complete success,[4] it said that their hopes and expectations had been shattered because France was unable to think of security in any other terms than those of armaments. It would take a long time for French and Italian statesmen to realise that world peace could not be built on armaments.[5]

No paper tried more earnestly than the Daily Telegraph to combine zeal for disarmament with a proper regard for Britain's defence requirements. Though it regarded itself as peculiarly representative of the

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1. 11 May 1919.
2. 19 December 1920.
3. 23 June 1929.
4. See pp. 222-4.
5. 13 April 1930.

Services' point of view it went out of its way to pay tribute to the work which Lord Cecil had done for disarmament when he resigned from the Baldwin government in August 1927. Many others, it said, shared Lord Cecil's view that the limitation of armaments was 'by far the most important question of the day' and that the attainment of international disarmament agreements was of greater value than any other political objective.[1] Notwithstanding its sympathy for Lord Cecil and disarmament the Daily Telegraph gave strong support to the Baldwin government by defending Britain's record over disarmament, contrasting it favourably with that of other countries. Along with many other newspapers it came to recognise, however, that there could be no further advance towards general disarmament until Britain and the United States adjusted their differences and came to a further agreement on the limitation of naval armaments.[2] It supported the second Labour government's efforts to achieve disarmament and when in July 1931 the League of Nations Union mounted a major demonstration in favour of disarmament in the Albert Hall[3] it described the meeting with noticeable enthusiasm as 'the most impressive demonstration in the cause of disarmament that had been witnessed in any country'. It bore witness to the whole world, it said, 'that the whole heart of Great Britain' was in 'that liberating movement'. Like other organs of Conservative opinion it regretted, however, that Britain's example in disarmament had not been followed by the other great powers.[4]

During the last years of Lord Northcliffe's proprietorship, The Times, though sometimes taking a line at variance with both the Lloyd George government and the Conservative party, gave general support to

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1. 31 August 1927.
2. 15 and 23 April 1929.
3. See pp. 102-4.
4. 13 July 1931.

disarmament and the government's efforts to reach a naval limitation agreement with the United States. After Lord Northcliffe's death The Times became 'a reliable party paper' of the Conservative party.[1] In the years 1922 to 1931 its equivocal attitude to the League and disarmament mirrored the changing responses of the Conservative party to the problems of European security and international disarmament.

The Times was far from consistent in its attitude to the League and disarmament. In July 1921 it described disarmament as the first objective of the League of Nations.[2] Seven months later it commended Balfour's work for disarmament with the words: 'No statesman who ever left our shores on the nation's business has ever had such wholehearted support as Mr. Balfour had in his great work for peace at the Washington Conference.'[3] In 1918 it had called for a League of Nations 'with teeth' capable of coercing the unruly members of the international community[4] but when in 1924 the League of Nations commended the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol to member states as instruments by which the unruly might be coerced, The Times gave them no support. When, however, its views were challenged by such pillars of the establishment as Lord Cecil and Lord Hardinge of Penshurst[5] in two persuasive letters defending the Protocol, it admitted that the Protocol contained 'many excellent features' which deserved 'the warm sympathy of the British peoples'.[6] A few months later it was only too ready to take its cue from Austen Chamberlain and unequivocally reject the Protocol.

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1. J. Ramsden: The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940. A History of the Conservative Party, London and New York, 1978, p. 170.
2. 1 July 1921.
3. 23 January 1922.
4. 12 January 1918.
5. Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, 1858-1944, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1906-10 and 1916-20, Viceroy of India, 1910-16, British ambassador in Paris, 1920-22, chief Indian delegate at the 1924 League Assembly, regarded by many as one of the chief architects of the 1904 Entente Cordiale.
6. 30 September and 3 October 1924.

If it wavered in its attitude to the Geneva Protocol, The Times wholeheartedly welcomed the Locarno treaties as a landmark in European history. It warned its readers, however, against too exuberant anticipations. There could be no sudden leap into Utopia.[1] It did not rate the chances of an international disarmament agreement at all highly. In February 1925 it had described the obstacles in the way of an agreement over land armaments as insuperable.[2] In April 1926 it told its readers that disarmament was not a subject that powerfully moved European opinion.[3] War remained an inescapable risk in a world of sovereign states. Though it was sceptical about the chances of the Preparatory Commission ever accomplishing an acceptable disarmament convention, it recognised that there were dangers to peace which only disarmament could avert. It declared that a costly and dangerous international competition in land, sea and air armaments was wholly alien to British opinion.[4] No one, it believed, would contest the elementary principle that an all-round reduction of armaments would greatly reduce the temptation to solve international conflicts by war. To translate that truism into a binding international agreement was, however, extremely difficult because it was no easy thing to establish the necessary confidence between nations. The jealousies and suspicions of years could not be dissipated in a day. All that the Preparatory Commission could ever hope to achieve was a code of rules which nations could subsequently adopt when they felt 'disposed to diminish their expenditure upon armed forces'.[5]

When in September 1927 after the failure of the Geneva Naval Conference, Chamberlain went to face criticism of British policy at the League Assembly,

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1. 17, 21 and 24 October, 1 December 1925.
2. 13 February 1925.
3. 24 April 1926.
4. 12 March 1927.
5. 3 February 1926.

it commended him for refusing to allow Britain to be entangled in ambitious schemes for security and disarmament. Throughout 1927 and 1928 it continued to give Chamberlain its uncritical support. In September 1928 at the time of the disastrous Anglo-French compromise over disarmament it wrote: 'It is possible to blame the Government for many things but least of all for a foreign policy which has enhanced British prestige and should be a source of pride to the British nation.'[1] It was not until after the defeat of the Baldwin government in May 1929 that The Times was prepared to admit that Britain bore some responsibility for the deadlock over disarmament. 'It is the British and American peoples with whom the hopes of progress primarily rest and whose responsibilities are by far the largest. Their failure to agree, as Continental critics have been justified in saying, has halted, and until it is amended, will continue to halt disarmament.'[2]

At the conclusion of the London Naval conference in April 1930 The Times succinctly expressed the attitude of most Englishmen to the inter-related problems of European security and international disarmament. 'Public opinion in this country is instinctively averse from accepting any obligation which might commit it, more deeply than it is already committed, to active intervention in conflicts between other Powers arising in the indefinite future out of circumstances which it can neither foresee nor control.' If a formula was devised which committed Britain to responsibilities no greater than those to which she was already committed, it would not satisfy France's demand for additional security. If it did not satisfy that demand and facilitate a reduction in French armaments, The Times asked, what useful purpose would it serve?[3]

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1. 27 September 1928.
2. 19 June 1929.
3. 9 April 1930.

When in July 1931 the League of Nations Union held its demonstration in favour of disarmament in the Albert Hall The Times commented that it impressively demonstrated the strength of the British nation's determination to do everything in its power to make the Disarmament Conference a practical success. It is not without significance, however, that though it fully reported the speeches of the participants including those of the three party leaders, Baldwin, Lloyd George and MacDonald, it made over its picture page, not to the colourful procession of demonstrators who, with their banners, made their way from the Embankment to the Albert Hall, but to HMS Warspite and Rodney of the Atlantic Fleet at anchor in Tor Bay.[1]

Among the papers which campaigned for disarmament in the late 1920s none was more vocal in its support than the Observer. In March 1927 it prophetically wrote: 'Were it proved that the peace-movement after the Great War of 1914-18 had failed in spite of the League, there could be no rational belief whatever that any new peace-movement could succeed.'[2] More than most other papers the Observer had a clear view of the vital role which Britain could play in promoting peace and disarmament. Europe wanted Britain's co-operation in maintaining peace, it said, because 'the war revealed, more conspicuously than at any time in history, the decisive influence of sea power. The weapon of the blockade, by cutting off a belligerent from supplies of food and war material, compels him in the end to surrender.' Control of this weapon was to a large extent in British hands.[3] It was for this reason among others that the Observer vigorously called for close Anglo-American co-operation. It deprecated those policies of the Baldwin government which had undermined Anglo-American co-operation. 'There will be absolutely no hope of any real

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1. 13 July 1931.
2. 13 March 1927.
3. 4 December 1927.

change for the better in the ministerial attitude until Bridgeman[1] goes. How I wish that the General Election was nearer. I cannot love these people', J. L. Garvin, the Observer's editor, wrote to Philip Kerr on 17 January 1929.[2] Two days later the Observer warned its readers that if the United States made large additions to her navy it would be because of the obtuseness of the British government. 'In the conditions of today', it said, 'we can hold the seas only jointly with America.'[3]

Two months later the Observer called on the government 'to take a trenchant and determined lead in the general cause of disarmament'. The first task awaiting the new government, which would be elected at the forthcoming general election, would be to seek disarmament through a conference with the United States. Settle that issue, it said, and progress with general disarmament would be assured.[4] Nothing short of reductions, 'patent and comprehensive', would satisfy the world's will to peace. No rigid formulae could be allowed to obstruct the achievement of that objective.[5] In December 1929 the Observer could look back with gratitude and pride at the changes which had taken place in Anglo-American relations in the course of 1929. Patriotism, it suggested, should, in future, inspire the British people to seek co-operative disarmament.[6]

There can be little doubt about the influence exercised by the Daily Mail in the inter-war years. In the early 1920s it could boast of a circulation in excess of one and a half million. Politicians of the standing of Baldwin and Austen Chamberlain were only too well aware of

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1. W. C. Bridgeman, 1864-1935, Viscount Bridgeman of Leigh (1929), Unionist MP for Oswestry, 1906-29, Secretary of Mines, 1920-22, Home Secretary, 1922-24, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1924-29.
2. Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/240.
3. 19 January 1929.
4. 3 March 1929.
5. 5 May 1929.
6. 22 December 1929.

its power and influence. Chamberlain believed that its voice swayed his Cabinet colleagues[1] and Baldwin was forced to fight for his political life to counter a determined effort by the Daily Mail and the Daily Express to remove him from the leadership of the Conservative Party.[2]

In an editorial on American Independence Day, 4 July 1921, in which it called for much closer co-operation between the United States and the British Empire, the Daily Mail said that among the questions which would have to be discussed foremost was the question of disarmament. Always quick to point the connection between disarmament on the one hand and greater prosperity and lower taxation on the other, it went on to say: 'Let us plan a reign of peace and set about re-starting trade and lightening the burden of everybody.'

When in 1922 and 1923 the Daily Mail campaigned for an Anglo-French pact, one of its chief arguments was that without it Britain would find herself involved in a fresh competition in armaments.[3] Furthermore, France's anxieties would lead her to maintain costly and burdensome armaments.[4] When the Locarno treaties were initialled in October 1925 it expressed the hope that Locarno would inaugurate an era of peace in Europe. 'The desire of the British nation is to end the period of mutual suspicion and of competition in armaments, to strengthen old friendships, and, whether in Europe or in the Far East, to get rid of prejudices and animosity', it wrote.[5]

In March 1927, some three months before the naval disarmament conference convened in Geneva, the Daily Mail criticised the government

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1. Austen Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 19 June 1926 and 20 February 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/386 & 410.
2. K. Middlemas and J. Barnes: Baldwin. A Biography, London, 1969, pp. 541-602.
3. 18 July 1923.
4. 7 July 1924.
5. 17 October 1925.

for spending too much on the nation's defence. 'The figures of the Navy Estimates, which were published yesterday', it wrote, 'and the debate on the Air Estimates in the House of Commons show that the defence expenditure of this country is still on much too high a footing.... There has thus been an increase not far from fifty per cent. since 1914.' As a consequence no other nation had to bear such an extortionate burden of taxation.[1]

Though it was critical of the Baldwin government's defence expenditure it could not resist the temptation to report with patriotic pride the latest developments in British weaponry. On such occasions as the Hendon air pageant it dubbed RAF pilots 'Our Knights of the Air'.[2]

When the 1930 naval disarmament conference met in London its proceedings were given prominence in the pages of the Daily Mail. 'All our wishes here are and have always been for the swift and complete success of the Conference', it wrote. 'We [the British] have been advocates of disarmament for more than twenty years. As far back as the second Hague Conference we effected large reductions in our Navy[3]... American statesmen may rest assured that the British public and British Press in unison with the British Government will do all that is in their power to remove the obstacles in the way of a marked reduction in naval expenditure.'[4] Nevertheless, for all its flamboyance, disarmament was, to a large extent, a tax-saving device so far as the Daily Mail was concerned.

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1. 11 March 1927. It failed to remind its readers that the cost of living had risen by about forty per cent. since 1914 and that, therefore, in real terms defence expenditure was scarcely in excess of the pre-war level.

2. 2 July 1927.

3. It was misleading to say that as a result of the 1907 Hague conference Britain made large reductions in her naval expenditure. Though it is true that Britain's naval construction programme was slightly curtailed in a vain effort to persuade the German government to abandon its construction programme, naval expenditure continued to rise in the years 1907 to 1914.

4. 27 February 1930.

One of the first newspapers to nail its isolationist colours to the mast and proclaim its faith in the British Empire was the Sunday Express. When it became clear that the United States would not be playing a major role in either the League of Nations or European affairs the Sunday Express declared: 'We cannot afford, and we do not intend to police Europe, and our relationship with European politics must be determined by the national interest and not by emotional altruism.'[1] During the war John Bull, it said, had bitten off more than he could chew. He ought, therefore, to abolish all his foreign commitments until he could afford them.[2] More than a decade later it was still proclaiming the same message. 'We ought to turn our backs to Europe and look out over the seas.'[3] The British people should 'offer up grace to imperialism'[4] and remind the world that Britain's navy had abandoned none of its pretensions and lost little of its power. Sea power was the breath of life and the condition of freedom for Britain's island people and far-flung empire.[5]

Notwithstanding its isolationist and imperial sentiments, the Sunday Express was not averse to giving flamboyant if superficial support to disarmament. It welcomed the Washington Conference with jubilant emotion.[6] It even went so far as to censure the delegates for disappointing Europe's aspirations for land disarmament.[7] If the conference failed, it warned, Britain would bear her share of the responsibility.[8] A decade later it described armaments with the facile comment that they were 'just a bad habit' and went on to admonish the nations of the world

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1. 12 October 1919.
2. 5 December 1920.
3. 11 January 1931.
4. 9 November 1919.
5. 27 July 1924.
6. 13 November 1921.
7. 27 November 1921.
8. 4 December 1921.

to keep before them 'the ideal of a world unarmed except for necessary policing and the maintenance of civil order'.[1]

Throughout the years of peace, from 1919 to 1931 and well beyond, Britain's press assumed that there was a national consensus which strongly favoured disarmament. Disarmament, it believed, would confer enormous benefits on the British people and at the same time make a major contribution to the preservation of world peace. It was a widely held view that Britain's defence expenditure was far too high and that cuts in the defence budget would make a major contribution to the country's economic well-being. Both papers of the Left and those of the Right feared the consequences of a new international arms race. Few questioned the assumption that it would inevitably lead to another major war.

For much of the 1920s the papers of the Right assumed that Britain had set an example in disarmament which other powers had failed to follow. The organs of the Left, though critical of France and other powers for maintaining excessively high armaments, were less inclined to praise Britain's example. They criticised successive British governments, and particularly Baldwin's second administration, for failing to give a bolder lead. They believed that Britain not only stood to gain more from disarmament than any other power but that she was also in a special position to give a lead to the rest of the world in promoting general disarmament. Neither the papers of the Left nor those of the Right gave any indication that they fully understood the price which Britain would have to pay if she were to give an effective lead to the world.

It would be wrong to conclude that disarmament was a newsworthy item for Britain's newspapers. Whereas the Washington and London naval conferences of 1921-22 and 1930 were given wide coverage and great prominence there were long periods in the 1920s when disarmament received only scant

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1. 22 February 1931.

coverage. It was difficult for journalists to excite the interest of their readers in the technical proceedings of the League of Nations Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference which held six sessions in Geneva between 1926 and 1930. On the other hand, the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927 was not given the attention it deserved nor was sufficient publicity given to the work of the League's Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments which produced between 1922 and 1924 the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the precursor of the equally unnoticed Geneva Protocol for the Settlement of International Disputes. In the middle years of the decade events in China and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt occupied the headlines and distracted the papers and their readers from giving adequate consideration to disarmament. As a result it was not until the end of the decade that the British people awoke to the challenge which disarmament posed to them as one of the most privileged and powerful nations of the world.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND DISARMAMENT

Disarmament was not an issue which divided the public on strictly party lines. Prominent members of all three political parties graced the platform in most of the major disarmament demonstrations in the decade before the 1932 world disarmament conference. The Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties all professed a commitment to disarmament but the conviction with which that commitment was expressed by their various spokesmen differed considerably. Though Cecil and a small band of Conservatives preached disarmament with as much fervour as any in the other two parties, they were more than outnumbered by those in their party who either openly despised their enthusiasm or were deeply sceptical about the feasibility of disarmament. In the public mind, disarmament was much more closely associated with the Labour and Liberal parties than it was with the Conservatives.

Both the Conservative and Labour parties were divided in their attitude to foreign policy and those divisions reflected themselves in differences over disarmament. In the Conservative party there were those who, distrusting the League and all that it stood for, believed that Britain should concentrate her energies and resources on developing a self-contained empire, essentially non-European in character and free of all entangling European commitments. On the other hand there were those like Austen Chamberlain who believed that British interests were so inextricably bound up with the European continent that Britain had no choice but to take her share of European responsibilities. For the 'imperialists' disarmament was a matter of convenience. For the 'Europeans' it was a question of policy.

Within the Labour party there were three main groups. One section of the party believed in unilateral and total disarmament, the repudiation of war and the value of moral example. Another gave strong support to the League of Nations and worked to secure general disarmament by international agreement. A third group, inspired by the teachings of Marx and Lenin, despaired of lasting peace in a world of competing, capitalist states. International disarmament by voluntary agreement was illusory and irrelevant. Both the pacifists and the Marxists were to a very large extent indifferent to the League's quest for disarmament.

Of the three political parties, the Liberals were most consistent in advocating general disarmament. Before the 1914-1918 war the National Liberal Federation had been converted to disarmament.[1] The war reinforced the Liberal party's commitment to disarmament.

British political life from 1916 to 1931 was dominated by the Conservative party. In all but three of those fifteen years the Conservatives were the dominant partner in government, playing a major role in shaping Britain's domestic and foreign policy. The Bonar Law and Baldwin Conservative governments enjoyed large majorities. Even in the brief periods of Labour government in 1924 and from 1929-1931, Conservative representation in the House of Commons never fell below two hundred and fifty seats. Though Baldwin's leadership of the Conservative party was to be savagely assailed by Lord Beaverbrook's Express newspapers and Lord Rothermere's Daily Mail, the Conservative party had the support of the vast majority of the nation's newspapers. British disarmament policy between 1916 and 1931 was, to a very large extent, shaped by the Conservative party and conservative attitudes. However, of the 100 m.

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1. E. B. Baker and P. J. Noel-Baker: J. Allen Baker, A Memoir, London, 1927, pp. 165-7; A. J. A. Morris: Radicalism against War, 1906-1914, p. 329; Cf. S. Koss: Asquith, pp. 146-52 and S. Koss: Sir John Brunner, London, 1970, pp. 293-5.

votes cast in the six general elections from 1918 to 1931, less than 44m. votes went to Conservative candidates.[1] Though their opponents were divided on important domestic issues, they shared a common approach to foreign policy. The Conservative governments of the 1920s could not, therefore, ignore the alternative foreign policy its political opponents were advocating.

Before 1914 the Conservative party had not distinguished itself by its devotion to disarmament. Many Conservatives called for increased defence expenditure and some advocated compulsory military service. They criticised the Liberal government for neglecting national and imperial defence and proclaimed that the needs of the army and navy took precedence over all other claims on the nation's resources because national defence was the first and most important priority of government.[2]

When during the war a large section of opinion embraced the league idea, Conservatives were reluctant to link disarmament too closely with a future league of nations. Lord Lansdowne, the former Conservative Foreign Secretary and wartime advocate of a negotiated peace, suggested in a House of Lords debate in March 1918 that disarmament was fraught with such enormous difficulties that it would be a mistake to place it on the agenda of a future league. If the world succeeded in establishing lasting peace, disarmament would automatically follow.[3] That was a view which most Conservatives were to share in the first decade of peace. Disarmament could not be engineered, except on the most limited scale, by international diplomacy. It was the spontaneous response of nations which felt secure.

After 1918 most Conservatives assumed that for a long time to come Britain would look, not to the League, but to the navy to protect her

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1. The Labour party received 32m. votes and the Liberals 20m.
2. The National Unionist Association of Conservative and Liberal Unionist Organisations: The Campaign Guide (1914), pp. 175 and 192.
3. 29 HL Debs., 5th Series, cols. 496-7, 19 March 1918.

imperial heritage. Britain could not afford 'experiments' so far as the safety and security of the Empire was concerned. Even Lord Robert Cecil had serious doubts about the practicability of international disarmament. In July 1919 he told the Commons that the limitation of armaments was the most difficult of all the problems facing them. 'Let anyone take a piece of paper and write down exactly what he would propose to do and he will find the difficulties enormous. How are you to measure the reasonable requirements of one country or another.... How are you to ensure that any limitation laid down will be obeyed?'[1] It was only maverick Conservatives like Brigadier-General H. P. Croft,[2] the founder of the breakaway right-wing National party in 1917, and Oswald Mosley, shortly to defect to Labour before eventually founding the British Union of Fascists, who, in 1919, described disarmament as the supreme issue of the hour.[3]

Conservatives were not unaffected, however, by anxieties about the British economy in the immediate post-war years. They joined in demands for cuts in defence expenditure. They shared the fears of their contemporaries that the world might be witnessing a new arms race between the three principal naval powers, Britain, the United States and Japan. In a Commons debate on the 1921 Imperial Conference, Major-General Sir John Davidson[4] warned that if the competition was allowed to pass a certain point, war would be inevitable. Responding to his remarks, the Conservative Leader of the House and Lord Privy Seal, Austen Chamberlain, said that a

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1. 118 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 980-1, 21 July 1919.
2. Henry Page Croft, 1st Lord Croft, 1881-1947, Conservative MP for Christchurch, 1910-40. For an account of his career at this period see W. D. Rubinstein 'Henry Croft and the National Party, 1917-22' in Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1974.
3. 118 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1067-8, 21 July 1919, and 120 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 277, 27 October 1919.
4. Maj.-Gen. Sir John Davidson, 1876-1954, Director of Military Operations in France during part of the war, Conservative MP for Fareham, 1918-31.

new competition between Britain and America would be not merely a tragedy for those two countries but for the world as a whole.[1] In the first half of 1921 Conservatives were among those who pressed the Lloyd George government to take the initiative over naval disarmament. It was Conservative members of Lloyd George's post-war coalition government who shaped Britain's naval disarmament policy and negotiated the 1922 Washington naval limitation treaty.[2]

Conservatives shared the almost unanimous sentiment in favour of naval disarmament in the autumn of 1921. One of them said on the eve of the conference: 'There has never been a period at which the opinion of all classes, parties and creeds in this country has been so unanimous as it is today behind the Government in connection with the Washington Conference' and another: 'As a soldier, whose trade it has been to do some of the fighting, I shall welcome as cordially and as heartily as anybody the possibility of reducing our forces without endangering the future of the country.'[3]

A mixture of disenchantment and complacency set the Conservative party on a different course in the years 1922-23. The Campaign Guide for the 1922 general election warned the electorate: 'It is given to no one to read the inmost thoughts of all governments and nations. Some day they may agree to universal disarmament but until that time

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1. 143 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 787 and 850, 17 June 1921.
2. Walter Long, Viscount Long of Wraxall (1921), 1854-1924, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1918-21, had been Leader of the Opposition during Balfour's absence in 1906 and a contender for the leadership of the Conservative party on Balfour's resignation in 1911. He was to take the decisions which led to the abandonment of the Two-Power Standard. Viscount Lee of Fareham, 1868-1947, had as Conservative MP for Fareham, 1900-18 been chief Opposition spokesman on naval affairs before the war. Lee was First Lord of the Admiralty from 1921 to 1922. A. J. Balfour, the former Conservative prime minister, was Britain's principal delegate at the Washington conference. Lee was the second member of the delegation.
3. Major (Sir) J. D. Birchall, Conservative MP for Leeds, North East, and Col. C. R. Burns, Conservative MP for Torquay. 147 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 2120 and 2123-4, 4 November 1921.

the British Empire with its many responsibilities and the many millions which it is its duty to defend from aggression must maintain a Navy, Army and Air Force.'[1] Voices were raised to protest against the effects the government's economy measures were having on the efficiency of the three Services. Viscount Long claimed that ninety per cent. of serving sailors and soldiers were Conservatives and he and many of his colleagues were concerned about their morale.[2] The Earl of Birkenhead in his Rectorial Address to the University of Glasgow posed the question was it even conceivable that war could ever be abolished?[3] An increasing number of Conservatives began to revert to their pre-war philosophy that if a nation desired peace, it ought to prepare for war.

With the arrival at Westminster of a small group of able young Members who had experienced the war at first hand, the divisions became more marked. One of them, Victor Cazalet,[4] said it was incomprehensible how anyone who underwent active service in the recent war could be anything but a convinced pacifist for the rest of his life.[5] Others such as Alfred Duff Cooper, Anthony Eden, Walter Elliot and Harold Macmillan

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1. National Unionist Association: The Campaign Guide, 1922, London, n.d., pp. 18, 366-7.

2. Long to Chamberlain, 1 August 1922, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 24/4/51.

3. 7 November 1923. F. E. Smith, 1st Earl of Birkenhead, 1872-1930, Conservative MP, 1906-18, Attorney-General, 1915, Lord Chancellor, 1919-22, Secretary of State for India, 1924-28.

4. Victor Cazalet, 1896-1943, had listened to Norman Angell address a meeting at Eton in 1913, joined the army in 1915, corresponded with Chamberlain and Churchill from the front line, enthusiastically welcomed along with his fellow officers the Lansdowne peace letter, been awarded the MC for bravery, been elected for Chippenham in 1924, had, at first, opposed rearmament but later became a champion of collective security and effective sanctions against Italy, served in the Second World War and died alongside the Polish prime minister in exile, General Sikorski, in a mysterious air crash in 1943. See R. R. James: Victor Cazalet, London, 1976.

5. 182 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 353, 24 March 1925.

did not share the cynicism of some of their older colleagues.[1] Many of them continued to believe as late as the early 1930s that disarmament could be brought about by slow but patient diplomacy, if not immediately, then at some future date.

The views of an older generation of Conservatives were expressed by Sir Frederick Banbury[2] in a debate on the naval estimates in July 1923. If Britain had spent more on her army and navy before 1914 she might have prevented that war, he argued. 'Had they listened to Lord Roberts[3] we should not have had the war.'[4] When four days later the Commons debated an Opposition disarmament motion it was clear that most Conservatives did not regard disarmament as a matter of extreme urgency. It was in this respect, above all, that they differed from their political opponents.

Conservatives were none the less in no doubt about the mood of the country. Moving a reasoned amendment to the Opposition motion on disarmament Hugh O'Neill, the Ulster Unionist MP for Mid Antrim, said that to negative it 'would unfortunately not be in accordance with the feeling of the great mass of the people of the country'.[5] Another Conservative, Major-General Sir John Davidson, asked: 'Who is the soul of the League of Nations? An Englishman, the Lord Privy Seal,[6] backed by the English nation.'[7]

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1. Of this group, Walter Elliot was the most active campaigner for disarmament. Duff Cooper, though making ambiguous speeches about disarmament in Parliament, addressed League of Nations Union disarmament campaign meetings. Macmillan was on the Executive Committee of the Union and Eden was actively engaged in promoting disarmament as a junior Foreign Office minister at the time of the world disarmament conference. In his post-war memoirs Facing the Dictators, pp. 14-15, Eden made no attempt to retract from that position.
2. Sir Frederick George Banbury, 1st Lord Banbury of Southam (1924), 1850-1936. Conservative MP for Peckham, 1892-1905, City of London, 1906-24.
3. Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, 1832-1914, Commander in Chief of the British expeditionary force in the South Africa War, 1899-1902, resigned in 1905 from the Committee of Imperial Defence to campaign for compulsory military service.
4. 166 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 2590-1, 19 July 1923.
5. 167 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 90-6, 23 July 1923.
6. Lord Robert Cecil returned to ministerial office when Baldwin formed his first administration in May 1923.
7. 167 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 157-61, 23 July 1923.

Cecil's membership of Baldwin's Cabinet enabled the Conservative party to adopt an ambivalent attitude to disarmament. It could either bask in his glory and masquerade as the party of the League and disarmament or disown him and champion national armaments and the balance of power.

The clearest exposition of Conservative thinking about disarmament was made by the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, in a debate on the proposed security pact in June 1925. Some four months before the Locarno conference, Chamberlain described the security proposals, which were to be embodied in the Locarno treaties, as 'a step, a practical step and a very large step, towards disarmament'. It was fear which caused nations to maintain large armies. Once that fear was removed, nations would begin to disarm. Disarmament treaties would not be needed. Economic pressures would oblige countries to disarm as soon as they felt secure.[1]

From the beginning Chamberlain and many Conservatives were sceptical about the prospects of the League of Nations Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference which began its work in 1926. Chamberlain criticised it because it was too ambitious and all-embracing. Duff Cooper told the Commons in July 1927 that it would not do much harm if it failed. Progress towards disarmament was bound to be slow. It would be achieved not by conferences but by education and propaganda.[2] That was a view which apparently the leader of the Conservative party, Baldwin, also shared.[3] Neither of them believed that disarmament would be realised in the near future.

In its last two years in power, the second Baldwin government had to defend itself against a barrage of criticism for its handling of the 1927 Geneva naval conference, its ill-judged attempt to reach a compromise

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1. 185 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1566-7, 24 June 1925.
2. 208 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1804-10, 11 July 1927.
3. 254 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 924-6, 29 June 1931.

over disarmament with France in 1928, and the unconstructive policy it pursued in the Preparatory Commission between 1926 and 1928. To counter these criticisms the Conservative party weekly publication Hints for Speakers made nineteen separate references to the government's disarmament record in the period July to December 1928. Only three other issues, the safeguarding of industry with forty-two, unemployment with thirty-eight and housing with thirty-seven, were given more space and attention. No government had done more for disarmament than the second Baldwin government, Hints for Speakers claimed on 7 March 1929. Defence expenditure had been cut by £5½m. since the government came to power and in real terms it was £15m. less than in 1914.[1]

In the 1929 general election campaign the Conservative party could, with some credibility, bid for electoral support as the party of 'practical' disarmament. In a speech at Plymouth to an audience which must have contained some who earned their livelihood in the dockyards, Baldwin boasted that Britain had led the way in disarmament. "The Fleet is half the size it was in 1913. This is practical disarmament, and there is no nation in the world that can come anywhere near that.'[2] If armaments, as some Conservatives had not been ashamed to say,[3] were a measure of a nation's greatness, Baldwin and the Conservative electoral machine made no attempt to convey that belief in 1929.

However, in opposition Conservatives became increasingly apprehensive about Britain's naval and military weakness. They exaggerated the extent to which other nations were rearming and claimed that as a result of the 1930 London naval treaty Britain had been relegated to a position of

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1. This was misleading. Defence expenditure had risen from £113.4m. in 1924 to £119.5m. in 1925 to fall back to £113.3m. in 1929. In claiming that in real terms defence expenditure was £15m. below the pre-war figure, Hints for Speakers was applying the retail price index. Adjusted to the wholesale price index defence expenditure in 1929 was £5½m. more than in 1913. See Appendix I.

2. Daily Mail, 14 May 1929.

3. See, for example, the speech by Sir Gerald Strickland, the Cons. MP for Lancaster on 1 April 1926, 193 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 2420-23.

naval inferiority.[1] The only useful service general disarmament could perform, they suggested, would be to redress the balance in Britain's favour.

Conservatives, always less ready to believe that the peoples of the world were eager for disarmament than their opponents, were the first to recognise that the policy of making unilateral reductions in British armaments, adopted by successive governments in the 1920s, had made no real contribution to general disarmament. They also sensed that public attitudes were not exactly as Labour and Liberal spokesmen portrayed them. If the Air Force and the Navy were abolished tomorrow, Duff Cooper told the Commons in July 1927, 'there would be a revolution the day after because it would be a most unpopular step'.[2] Conservatives were more aware of the latent imperialist sentiment of the British people. They never lost sight of the fact that international, as much as national, politics was about power.

The Labour party was much more in tune than the Conservatives with the pacific mood of the British people in the inter-war years. It was an article of faith in the Labour party that armaments caused war and that the 1914-1918 war had been brought about by secret diplomacy, military alliances and competitive armaments. If these practices were abandoned and the rule of law substituted for the rule of force, the world would be set free from the scourge of war. Labour supporters believed that Europe, if not the whole world, had learnt a profound lesson from the war. If statesmen adopted new remedies for the age-old problems of war and peace, a new order could be built on the blood-drenched

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1. Hints for Speakers, 31 July 1930 and 1 January 1931. Much of their publicity was directed to condemning the Soviet Union's rearmament programme. Hints for Speakers on 18 June 1931, ignoring the large fall in the value of the rouble, accused the Soviet Union of increasing its defence expenditure by fifty per cent. between 1928 and 1931.

2. 208 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1909, 11 July 1927.

soils of Europe's battlefields. Britain was well-qualified to give a lead. Acting with resolution and determination, she could galvanise the 'moral forces' of mankind. Those pressures would be sufficient to coerce the renegade opponents of disarmament. If she failed to act while memories of the war were fresh, the opportunity would be lost and might never occur again. Unless decisive action was taken in the first decade of peace, the world would once again tread the path to war. Nations would be forced to shoulder an ever-increasing burden of armaments, the social and moral progress of mankind would be halted, and the sacrifices of the 1914-1918 war would prove to have been in vain.

Before 1914 Labour had done little to formulate a distinctive approach to foreign policy. Alongside radical critics of the Liberal government its spokesmen had assailed militarism and focused attention on the activities of armaments' manufacturers as the villains of the piece. Armed with the strike weapon, the Labour Movement did not feel completely powerless to prevent war. 1914 shattered its illusions and punctured its optimism.

In August 1914 a large majority supported the war but MacDonald, the parliamentary leader of the party, and a few others, parted company with their colleagues to oppose the war. Arthur Henderson[1] succeeded MacDonald and thanks to his efforts Labour remained a united party.[2] Henderson was to serve in both the Asquith and Lloyd George coalition

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1. Arthur Henderson, 1863-1935, Labour MP for Barnard Castle, 1903-18, Widness, 1919-22, Newcastle, 1923, Burnley, 1924-31, Clay Cross, 1933-35, Chairman (and leader) of the parliamentary Labour party, 1908-10, 1914-17, resigned from the Lloyd George government over its refusal to sanction his attendance at the proposed Stockholm conference of socialist parties in August 1917, Home Secretary, 1924, Foreign Secretary, 1929-31, President of the World Disarmament Conference, 1932-33. As honorary secretary of the Labour party with an office at Eccleston Square and latterly at Transport House, he had a power base within the Labour party which gave him a unique influence but detracted from the time he was able to give to departmental responsibilities when he was in office.

2. Unlike most of the continental socialist parties, the Labour party did not split as a result of the war. Henderson prevented MacDonald from being ostracised.

governments from 1915 to 1917. MacDonald devoted much of his time and energies to the formulation of an alternative foreign policy in the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) which, with Liberal critics of the war, Arthur Ponsonby[1] and Charles Trevelyan,[2] he helped to create.

The Labour party was to adopt, almost in its entirety, the programme outlined by the Union of Democratic Control (UDC) during the war years. In a four point programme in the autumn of 1914 the UDC suggested that Britain should propose as part of the peace settlement a drastic reduction of armaments. To facilitate that policy she should advocate the nationalisation of the armaments industry and governmental control of the arms trade on a world-wide basis,[3] a policy which some Labour spokesmen, including Philip Snowden, had advocated in the last years of peace. In an independent study entitled National Defence. A Study in Militarism[4] MacDonald formulated a critique of international relations which was to make a deep impression on the Labour party. MacDonald argued that to contemplate using military power, under whatever auspices, to preserve

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1. Arthur Ponsonby, 1st Lord Ponsonby (1930), 1871-1946, son of Queen Victoria's private secretary, served in Foreign Office and Diplomatic Corps, private secretary to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, succeeded him as Liberal MP for Stirling Boroughs, 1908-18, critic of Grey's policies, 1911-14, Labour MP for Sheffield, Brightside, 1922-30, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1924, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Dominions, 1929, Parliamentary Secretary at Ministry of Transport, 1929-30, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1931, Leader of the Labour Opposition in the House of Lords, 1931-35. Advocated war resistance and pacifism in the inter-war years.

2. Sir Charles Trevelyan, 1870-1958, Liberal MP, Elland, 1899-1918, Labour MP Newcastle Central, 1922-31, Parliamentary Secretary, Board of Education, 1908-14, resigned from government on outbreak of war, President of the Board of Education, 1924, and 1929-31, heir to the Trevelyan estates in Northumberland and brother of historian, G. M. Trevelyan, he moved steadily to the Left and resigned from MacDonald's government in March 1931 because of its failure to pursue socialist policies.

3. See especially Pamphlet No. 1 by the UDC's Secretary, E. D. Morel, The Morrow of the War, 1914; Pamphlet No. 4 by H. N. Brailsford, The Origins of the Great War, 1915; and Pamphlet No. 7 The International Industry of War, 1915.

4. J. R. MacDonald: National Defence. A Study of Militarism, London, 1917.

peace was to play into the hands of the militarists. Only the triumph of democracy in every sphere of national and international life could ensure peace. Peace would be preserved by open diplomacy and the democratic control of foreign policy, not by a league of nations employing arbitration and military sanctions. MacDonald spoke for those who were suspicious of a league endowed with powers of coercion. Those suspicions were, to a large extent, to mould the Labour party's attitude to the League and sanctions in the inter-war years.

When Henderson resigned from the War Cabinet in August 1917 those who had supported the war and those who had opposed it were able to come together to formulate a distinctive foreign policy and elaborate a statement of war aims. A special conference held in London on 28 December 1917 gave its approval to a Labour party statement on war aims which was to mark an important milestone not only in the development of the Labour party's thinking but in the nation's attitude to the future peace settlement. The statement declared that whatever might have been the real cause of the war, it was clear that the peoples of Europe had had no hand in bringing it about. In so far as the Labour party had supported the war, it had done so in order to make the world safe for democracy because the future peace of the world would only be assured if democracy became universal. The declaration called for the abandonment of imperialism, an end to secret diplomacy, the parliamentary control of foreign policy, the abolition of compulsory military service, 'the common limitation of...costly armaments', and the abolition of profit-making armaments firms 'whose pecuniary interest lay always in war scares and rivalry in preparation for war'. It went on to call for the establishment of a league of nations, an international court, an 'International Legislature' representing 'every civilised State', and appropriate machinery for prompt and effective mediation between states in non-justiciable disputes. It affirmed the party's rejection of all

attempts to turn the war into a war of conquest and expressed the hope that the working classes of all countries would unite against militarism and imperialism.[1]

The statement was given wide publicity and was a contributory factor in Lloyd George's decision to make a statement of war aims to a trade union audience a few days later.[2] It followed fairly closely policies advocated by the UDC but in other respects represented a compromise between those like MacDonald who distrusted international machinery for the preservation of peace and those like Henderson who believed that the best hopes for peace lay in the creation of a league of nations. When in February 1918 a conference of Labour and Socialist parties from eight Allied countries met in London at the invitation of the Labour party, the delegates agreed to a statement which with one exception, its reference to conscription, echoed the policies outlined in Labour's own statement of war aims.[3]

During 1918 the Labour party strongly supported the popular agitation in favour of a league of nations. In a Cabinet meeting on 20 March 1918, G. N. Barnes[4] alluded to the 'strong views' held by the Labour party[5] and in December Cecil alerted the Prime Minister to 'the great agitation in favour of the League of Nations' which a number of prominent Labour

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1. Memorandum on War Aims, 28 December 1917, Labour Party Library.
2. D. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, popular edition, London, 1938, pp. 1490-1517. See also pp. 128-9.
3. Memorandum on War Aims, Inter-Allied Labour and Socialist Conference, London, February 1918, Labour Party Library. This was the third such conference of socialist parties which the Labour party had been instrumental in calling during the war.
4. George Nicoll Barnes, 1859-1940, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1896-1908, Labour MP Gorbals, Glasgow, 1906-18, Coalition Labour, 1919-22. Minister of Pensions, 1916-18, Minister Plenipotentiary, Paris Peace Conference, 1919. When Henderson resigned from the War Cabinet in August 1917, Barnes became Labour's chief spokesman in the government. He resigned from the Labour party in 1918 to fight the general election as a coalition candidate. He was firmly committed to the League and one of the few advocates in Britain of a League international military force.
5. CAB 23/5.

leaders were promoting.[1] Further endorsement was given in a second statement of war aims published by the party in June 1918.[2]

Some members of the Labour party, influenced by the writings of Karl Marx and Lenin, came to a different conclusion. Britain had been caught up in an imperialist war, the inevitable conflict of competing, capitalist states. Subsequently they were to denounce the Paris peace settlement as a capitalist peace which only a socialist revolution could undo. Capitalist governments could not be trusted with armaments because their national policies were designed to promote the interests of the capitalist class and could only be understood in economic terms.[3] The Labour party's task was to make the masses understand that the ruin wrought by the war was the result of imperialist capitalism.[4] Even the ex-Liberal opponent of the war, Charles Trevelyan, was driven to ask whether the only way to a new international order was through revolution.[5] 'If there is another war', the Communist, J. T. Walton Newbold,[6] told the Commons in December 1922, 'I shall try to stop it by revolution.'[7] To those who believed that the British working classes were involved in a revolutionary struggle which cut across national frontiers, the League

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1. Cecil to Lloyd George, 19 December 1918, Lloyd George Papers, F/6/5/53.
2. Labour Party Short Statement of War Aims, 25 June 1918, Labour Party Library.
3. See, for instance, the remarks of the future Labour prime minister, C. R. Attlee, at the Labour party conference in 1923. See Labour Party: Report of the 23rd Annual Conference, London, n.d., pp. 229-33.
4. Memorandum No. 149, Advisory Committee on International Questions of the Labour Party (ACIQ), July 1920, Labour Party Library.
5. Quoted by Michael Howard: War and the Liberal Conscience, pp. 10-11.
6. John Turner Walton Newbold, 1888-1943, author and lecturer, author of the pre-war polemic The War Trust Exposed, Communist MP for Motherwell, 1922-23, resigned from the Communist party in 1924 to fight as Labour candidate for Epping in 1929, a member of the Macmillan Committee on Finance and Industry, 1929-31, resigned from the Labour party in 1931.
7. 159 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1398, 4 December 1922.

and the progressive reduction of national armaments were irrelevant.

The war transformed the fortunes of the Labour party. In the December 1910 general election Labour candidates had polled a mere 370,000 votes. In the 'coupon' election eight years later they received 2¼m. votes despite the fact that the cards were stacked against them. Labour emerged from the war as a major political force and the Labour Movement as an estate of the realm. Less than six years after the end of the war MacDonald formed the first Labour government.

In the immediate post-war years the Labour party's attitude to disarmament can only be understood in the context of its bitter denunciation of the peace treaties, its outright repudiation of pacts and alliances, and its disillusionment with the League. The peace treaties, MacDonald wrote in 1923, had been devised by men who wore the labels of statesmen but had the minds of soldiers.[1] There was little likelihood of disarmament because the ascendancy of the victor powers rested on force.[2] Britain and France had gone to war to destroy Prussian militarism but their treatment of Germany would ensure its survival.[3] Treaty revision was Labour's main foreign policy objective in the years 1919 to 1923.

In their attempt to understand the origins of the war Labour spokesmen came to the conclusion that the pre-war alliances and ententes had been a major cause of that conflict. Britain, they concluded, should never again be tempted to make understandings similar to those she had made with France in the decade before 1914. Indifferent to the insecurity felt by the French nation, they accused France of seeking to dominate Europe by creating a network of alliances and maintaining excessively

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1. Daily News, 20 February 1923.
2. ACIQ Memorandum No. 198 by H. N. Brailsford, November 1921. Brailsford argued that the occupation of the Rhineland necessitated the retention of large armies.
3. ACIQ Memorandum No. 61 by Norman Angell, May 1919.

large military forces. In February 1923 MacDonald wrote: 'The best thing we have done is to refuse a military guarantee of safety to France.'[1]

Labour criticised the League because it was not the all-embracing world organisation they had hoped for. It had not brought together victor and vanquished in a peace of reconciliation. Labour was especially critical of Germany's exclusion and regarded the League as a tyrannical instrument of the victor powers. It stood condemned because of its record in the Russo-Polish war and its failure to deal equitably with the Vilna and Corfu disputes in 1922 and 1923. It was an inter-governmental organisation and not a league of peoples. There were suggestions in 1919 that the Covenant should be amended to make the League Council responsible to an elected Assembly, representative of electorates, not governments.[2] MacDonald seemed to go out of his way to slight the League in moving a Commons motion on disarmament in July 1923. Because the League lacked the confidence of some of the major nations of the world it was in no position to promote disarmament.[3]

Disenchantment with the League led the Labour party to look to the international socialist movement as an agency for the promotion of general disarmament. The party had played a prominent part in the development of the Second International in the decade before the war. Its 1918 constitution committed it 'to co-operate with Labour and Socialist organisations in other countries'. During the war it had maintained close contact with socialist parties in the Allied countries. When the war ended it was instrumental in the creation of the Labour and Socialist International (the LSI) whose London-based secretariat was presided over by a British trade union leader and Labour MP, Tom Shaw.[4] 'We who

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1. Daily News, 20 February 1923. The Labour party's opposition to an Anglo-French pact was a constraint on Lloyd George's diplomacy in 1921-22.
2. Labour Party: Report of the 19th Annual Conference, London, n.d., (1919), p. 24. The Times, 4 April 1919.
3. 167 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 75-87, 23 July 1923.
4. Tom Shaw, 1872-1938, Labour MP for Preston, 1918-31, Minister of Labour, 1924, Secretary of State for War, 1929-31.

belong to the great International Working Class Movement', MacDonald told the Commons in July 1923, 'feel that we are creating an international public opinion that will bear the strain of feeling secure without armaments.'[1] Contact with European socialist parties modified the party's insular outlook and stiffened its resolve to pursue internationalist policies. When the Labour party vacillated in its attitude towards the Geneva Protocol in January 1925 it was the unanimity of continental socialist opinion which persuaded the party to campaign for the Protocol.[2] A few months later continental socialist pressures led the Labour party to abandon its outright opposition to the proposed security pact and in the autumn to give a qualified approval to the Locarno treaties.[3] Labour's European dimension acted as a strong counter thrust to its insular pacifism. In 1927 the LSI rejected the party's request, emanating from its pacifist wing, that war resistance should become part of its programme.[4]

Ties with the German social democratic movement led the Labour party to adopt an uncritical attitude towards the Weimar Republic. It had more confidence in German social democracy[5] than in French socialism. British socialists looked forward to a period of close collaboration with a social democratic Germany. They were, therefore, too ready to take at their face value, statements by Hermann Müller, the future German Chancellor, and others at the 1919 Berne conference of Labour and

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1. 167 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 87, 23 July 1923.

2. Manchester Guardian, 13 January 1925; Labour Party: Report of the 25th Annual Conference, London, n.d. (1925), pp. 65-6, 342; Minutes of the ACIQ, 11 February 1925, LP/IAC/236; ACIQ Memorandum, No. 334, February 1925; NEC Minutes, Vol. 34, 1-3/25, Labour Party Library.

3. MacDonald to Hamilton Fyfe, 24 March 1925; Mitrany to MacDonald, 15 May 1925; Noel-Baker to MacDonald, 3 July 1925, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/5/36.

4. Labour Party: Report of the 26th Annual Conference, London, n.d (1926), pp. 63 and 256-7.

5. In 1914 the German Social Democratic Party was the largest in Europe and the largest party in the Reichstag.

Socialist parties that Germany had once and for all turned her back on militarism. They accepted uncritically the claims of the German trade union movement that they would be able to prevent the re-emergence of German militarism.[1]

Such was the eloquence and persistence of the pacifist wing of the Labour party that the casual observer of the political scene might easily have concluded that the party was committed to pacifism and unilateral disarmament for most of the inter-war years. Many of those who had belonged to the war-time No Conscription Fellowship such as Clifford Allen[2] and Fenner Brockway[3] became leaders of the Independent Labour Party (the ILP) which was then an integral part of the Labour party. The party had close links with the No More War Movement to which many members of the No Conscription Fellowship gravitated after its formation in 1921. Several attempts were made to win the Labour party for the programme of the War Resisters' International to which the No More War Movement was affiliated. At the 1922 conference R. C. Wallhead,[4] one of the founding members of the No More War Movement, succeeded in getting a resolution calling on the Socialist and Labour parties of all nations to oppose all wars, whatever their ostensible objective, passed by 3,231,000 votes to 194,000.[5] When, however, a year later

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1. Labour Party: Report of the 22nd Annual Conference, London, n.d. (1922) pp. 25-30. Frequent reference was made to the role played by the Berlin trade unions in the collapse of the Kapp putsch in 1920.

2. Reginald Clifford Allen, 1st Lord Allen of Hurtwood (1932), 1889-1939, imprisoned as a conscientious objector in the First World War, Chairman and Treasurer of the ILP, 1922-26, a Director of the Daily Herald, 1925-30. A close friend of MacDonald, he continued to support him after his breach with the Labour party in 1931.

3. Archibald Fenner Brockway, Lord Brockway (1964), 1888- , imprisoned during the war as a conscientious objector, General Secretary of the ILP in 1928 and from 1933 to 1939, Editor of the New Leader, 1926-29, 1931-46, Chairman of the No More War Movement and the War Resisters' International, 1923-31, Labour (ILP) MP for E. Leyton, 1929-31.

4. R. C. Wallhead, 1869-1934, Labour MP for Merthyr Tydfil, 1922-34, Chairman of the ILP, 1920-22, a founding member of both the No More War Movement and the War Resisters' International.

5. Labour Party: Report of the 22nd Annual Conference, London, n.d. (1922), pp. 200-203.

J. H. Hudson,[1] tried to persuade the annual conference to adopt a resolution calling on the parliamentary Labour party to vote against all military and naval estimates, it was defeated by 2,924,000 votes to 808,000. Arthur Henderson described the proposal as 'absolutely absurd and futile' and said that until conditions in the world had radically changed, Britain would need the navy - 'our Navy' as he put it - for national defence.[2] In 1926 Brockway and Ponsonby were more successful. They persuaded the conference to adopt a resolution which called on workers to make clear to their governments that they would meet any threat of war by organising resistance including the refusal to bear arms, produce armaments, or render them any material assistance. Its effect, however, was to some extent neutralised by a National Executive Committee motion backing the efforts of the Preparatory Commission and another resolution, moved by a member of Glasgow's Trades and Labour Council, stating that there would be no security against war until the capitalist system had been overthrown. At the 1926 conference pacifists, internationalists and Marxists all succeeded in persuading the party to endorse their views.[3]

Though the pacifists tried unsuccessfully to win the party for their programme of war resistance and total disarmament at the 1928, 1930 and 1931 conferences, the Russian proposals in the December 1927 session of the Preparatory Commission for universal and total disarmament were welcomed by a majority of the party. MacDonald and his immediate colleagues were openly critical and chided the rank-and-file for their naivety. That did not prevent the National Joint Council, representing the General

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1. J. H. Hudson, 1881-1962, Secretary of the National Temperance Federation, Labour MP, Huddersfield, 1923-31, Ealing West, 1945-50, Ealing North, 1950-55, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1924 and 1929-31.

2. Labour Party: Report of the 23rd Annual Conference, London, n.d. (1923), pp. 229-33.

3. Labour Party: Report of the 26th Annual Conference, London, n.d. (1926), pp. 63, 253-7.

Council of the Trades Union Congress and the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, from issuing a statement calling on the government to express its willingness to take them seriously with 'a view to preparing the way for the general acceptance of complete disarmament'.[1]

In the years 1928 to 1931 there was growing disenchantment with the gradualist approach to disarmament which the party's leaders had been advocating since 1923. Before the 1928 conference the National Executive Committee received a number of emergency resolutions calling on the party to commit itself to total and complete disarmament. Wearied by a succession of unsuccessful attempts to achieve disarmament by international agreement, many Labour party supporters came to the conclusion that there was a simple choice between total disarmament and no disarmament at all. The Fabian doctrine of the inevitability of gradualness might be a sensible working philosophy for those intent on changing the economic and social order but for those who hoped to save the world from impending disaster it was a futile policy. Could the risks of disarmament by example be any greater than the risks the country was taking in preparing for another war? If the Labour government was to satisfy the hopes and expectations of the electorate, it would have to break the circle of armaments while it was still in office.[2]

It would be wrong to assume that a majority in the party were committed to these views throughout the inter-war years. The party almost always spoke with two distinct voices. On the one hand were those who

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1. Minutes of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, Vol. 44, 8 December 1927. At the 1928 conference MacDonald accused those who welcomed the Russian proposals of being misled by words. In a speech in Glasgow in March 1928 Lord Thomson, Secretary of State for Air in 1924 and again in 1929, said that the Russian proposals were like offering the Glasgow hospitals £10,000 on condition that ninety-nine others did the same. Manchester Guardian, 27 March 1928.

2. See the debates at the 1930 and 1931 party conferences. Report of the 30th Annual Conference, pp. 238-40 and Report of the 31st Annual Conference, pp. 184-7.

having inherited the radical tradition's distaste for armaments and power politics, had been in many cases converted to pacifism as a result of the war. On the other hand were trade unionists who had practical experience of power relationships in industry and thus a shrewd appreciation of some aspects of international politics. The tensions between the two were never resolved, not even when the trade unionist, Ernest Bevin,[1] ousted the pacifist, George Lansbury,[2] from the leadership of the Labour party in 1935.

Before the war ended in November 1918 the Labour party had already set up an advisory committee on international questions (ACIQ) to brief the parliamentary party and its National Executive Committee on international affairs. To that committee it recruited men and women with specialised knowledge and first-hand experience. From the beginning L. S. Woolf[3] acted as the committee's unpaid secretary. The committee provided the party with a great number of imaginative proposals and educated it in the technicalities and complexities of international relations.

Even before the Covenant of the League was drafted at Paris in 1919 there were those in the Labour party who recognised the need for sanctions if the League was to promote disarmament. One of the first memoranda commissioned by the ACIQ in 1918 proposed that the League should either create an international navy or require its members with naval forces

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1. Ernest Bevin, 1881-1951, leader of the Dockers' Union, 1910-21, creator and first general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, 1921-40, Labour MP for Wandsworth, 1940-50, Minister of Labour and National Service and a member of the War Cabinet, 1940-45, Foreign Secretary, 1945-50.

2. George Lansbury, 1859-1940, Labour MP for Poplar, 1910-12, 1922-40, editor of the Daily Herald, 1919-22, First Commissioner of Works, 1929-31, Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, 1931-35.

3. Leonard S. Woolf, 1880-1969, husband of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Ceylon civil service, 1904-11, author of International Government, 1916, Literary Editor, The Nation, 1923-30, Joint Editor, The Political Quarterly, 1931-59, founded the Hogarth Press, 1917.

to earmark warships for League use.[1] J. R. Clynes,[2] the deputy leader of the parliamentary Labour party, said in a Commons debate on the peace treaties that if the League of Nations was to function successfully it would require 'some force or manner of physical support behind it'.[3] Three years later L. S. Woolf in an ACIQ memorandum entitled 'The League of Nations and Disarmament'[4] argued that until members of the League were given additional guarantees of their security there could be no large and universal measure of disarmament. In 1923 an ACIQ memorandum[5] proposed an international disarmament authority with wide-ranging powers. Armaments, it stated, could only be reduced in so far as public confidence was created in the machinery for the maintenance of peace. Among its various proposals was one for neutral and demilitarised zones which, if they were violated, would entail warlike action by the guarantor powers.[6]

During 1923 the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance was subjected to careful scrutiny by the Labour party. Though the party never gave the draft Treaty its approval, it came to recognise how essential was the part the League had to play in the post-war international order if peace was to be secure. Henderson played a key role in persuading the party to align itself with the League and make a more realistic appraisal of

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1. 'The Freedom of the Seas', September 1918 by G. Lowes Dickinson.
2. J. R. Clynes, 1869-1949, Labour MP for Platting, Manchester, 1906-31, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Food, 1917-18, Food Controller, 1918, Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, 1921-22, Lord Privy Seal and Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, 1924, Home Secretary, 1929-31.
3. 118 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 961-4, 21 July 1919.
4. ACIQ Memorandum No. 251, July 1922.
5. ACIQ Memorandum No. 278, Principles of a Disarmament Policy, Amended Draft, June 1923.
6. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne contained provisions for a neutral zone. The idea of creating neutral zones attracted the leader of the party and in 1924 it was among the proposals he put to Poincaré on 21 February: 'the creation between certain states of bands of neutralised territory under mutual or even collective guarantee and supervision'. The Times, 3 March 1924.

the international situation. The ACIQ, recognising that the main issue which was likely to divide the party was whether even a reformed League of Nations could rightly employ force, was chary about giving the draft Treaty its unqualified support.

The 1924 Labour government surprised its Conservative critics by its moderation but angered some of its supporters in the Commons and many of the Liberal Members, on whom it depended, by continuing the defence policies, with the exception of plans to construct a naval base at Singapore, of the outgoing Baldwin administration. MacDonald devoted his energies to Anglo-French relations and a settlement of the reparations question. It was not until the London conference on reparations was brought to a successful conclusion in August 1924 that he was able to turn his attention to disarmament and the problems associated with European security.

The Geneva Protocol, the product of a new accord between Britain and France, was drafted by committees of the 1924 League Assembly in the last weeks of the Labour government. Though it led to divisions within the Cabinet it eventually won the overwhelming support of the party as a whole. In February 1925 the National Executive Committee adopted a resolution, formulated by the ACIQ, stating that 'The Party stands by the Protocol on the grounds that it furnishes the only practical plan at present for obtaining disarmament and substituting arbitration for war as the method of settling disputes. It holds that this country should do everything in its power to obtain the acceptance of the Protocol and the holding of a Disarmament Conference. The Party should strongly oppose any suggestion of substituting for the Protocol any form of limited military alliance.'[1] From the spring of 1925 the Labour party vigorously championed the Protocol and MacDonald became

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1. ACIQ Memorandum No. 334, February 1925; Minutes of the ACIQ, 11 February 1925, LP/IAC/236; NEC Minutes, Vol. 34, 1-3/25.

one of its strongest partisans. In an article in Forward in September 1927 MacDonald showed how far he had travelled since the war and its immediate aftermath. 'There must, in the present state of Europe, be sanctions and the aggrieved State victimised by a war...must be supported by the League. This is the Protocol, not this phrase or that.'[1]

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of Labour's attachment to the Protocol in the development of the party's thinking about international affairs. It enabled those who prided themselves on their internationalist outlook to unite with those whose basic tenet was absolute opposition to pacts and alliances. Pacifists and non-pacifists alike believed that compulsory arbitration, one of the three basic principles of the Protocol,[2] was the only alternative to war and that it provided the best means of creating the right conditions for general disarmament. The party's comparative indifference to the negotiations in the summer of 1925 which led to the conclusion of the Locarno treaties, reveals how much less importance it attached to security arrangements.

Far more than the other two parties, the Labour party devoted itself to analysing the technicalities of disarmament. It devised its own draft disarmament convention and subjected the proposals of the Preparatory Commission to detailed investigation. In this task, undertaken by the ACIQ, Philip Noel-Baker acted as one of the foremost mentors of the party. An intimate friend of Lord Cecil, a former member of the League Secretariat, an authority on international law, a well-travelled observer of the European scene and the holder of a chair in International Relations, he was in an ideal position to bridge the gap between the idealistic aspirations of the Labour party and the realities of international

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1. 26 September 1927.
2. See p. 255.

politics. He was responsible for many of the proposals which the ACIQ put before the party during the years of the second Baldwin government.[1]

Though much thought was given to international disarmament in the years 1924 to 1929, abhorrence of war led many Labour spokesmen to demand, first and foremost, arbitration coupled with the repudiation of war as an instrument of national policy. Labour would make 'all-in' arbitration one of the key issues in its campaign at the next general election, Hugh Dalton[2] informed the 1928 Brussels conference of the Labour and Socialist International (LSI).[3] Whereas Noel-Baker believed that the danger of 'criminal aggression' would never be entirely eliminated and the need for some form of collective security would remain, many in the Labour party continued to believe that to talk of force in international relations was to invite the use of force. Until comprehensive machinery for the settlement of international disputes by arbitration, conciliation and judicial decision had been established, it would be impossible to persuade nations to reduce their armaments.[4] Nowhere is this view more clearly stated than in Labour and the Nation, the programme

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1. Together with Leonard Woolf, Noel-Baker was responsible for the section on foreign policy in the Labour party's 1929 general election manifesto. See Philip Noel-Baker: The First World Disarmament Conference, 1932-1933, And Why It Failed, Oxford, 1979, p.36.

2. Edward Hugh John Neale Dalton, Lord Dalton (1960), 1887-1962, son of a Canon of Windsor who had also been a tutor to George V. Labour MP, Peckham, 1924-29, Bishop Auckland, 1929-31, 1935-59, formerly Lecturer and Reader in Economics, London School of Economics, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1929-31, Minister of Economic Warfare, 1940-42, President of the Board of Trade, 1942-45, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1945-47, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1948-50, Minister of Local Government and Planning, 1951, Chairman of the NEC of the Labour party, 1936-37. An anti-appeaser. Probably one of the four or five most influential leaders of the Labour party from 1930 to 1950.

3. Report and Resolutions of the Labour and Socialist International Congress, Brussels, August 1928, published in Zurich September 1928. See Labour Party Library, LSI/5/3.

4. As early as 12 September 1924, H. N. Brailsford, however, challenged the basic assumption that nations could be trusted to accept an arbitration award by asking in the New Leader whether Ulster or the Irish Free State would necessarily accept the verdict of the Boundary Commission.

on which the party fought the 1929 general election. Though it committed the party to 'a radical programme of disarmament' it gave priority to a pledge to sign the Optional Clause of the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice and the General Act of Arbitration formulated by the League in 1928.

Divided on many issues, the Labour party could unite behind the banner of arbitration. Trade unionists knew its value in industrial relations. Pacifists saw it as the panacea for all international ills. Critics of sanctions supported it because it provided an alternative to warlike measures. It is not perhaps surprising, therefore, that the party's press and publicity department in 1928 and 1929 issued a number of pamphlets on arbitration but none on disarmament.

Between its rejection of the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance in 1924 and its return to office in 1929, the Labour party searched for palliatives which would neither involve military guarantees nor costly commitments. It sought to develop policies which would command the support of pacifist and non-pacifist alike. It continued to support efforts to control the manufacture and trade in arms but above all it pinned its faith on the arbitral and judicial settlement of disputes. Believing that public opinion would always act as a restraining influence on governments it sought to galvanise opinion at home and abroad behind those policies which it was convinced would preserve peace and prevent war.

When MacDonald formed his second government in June 1929 his administration was far better disposed towards disarmament than its Conservative predecessor but it believed that certain pre-conditions would have to be realised before the task of securing reductions in national armaments was taken in hand. In 1924 MacDonald had devoted his energies to improving Anglo-French relations and settling the reparations question before seeking to promote disarmament through the Geneva Protocol. In 1929 Anglo-American relations took priority over the general reduction

of armaments but MacDonald was in no doubt that an agreement between the powers was essential if nations were to disarm.[1] When the London naval conference in 1930 revealed how irreconcilable were French and Italian interests, MacDonald and his Cabinet began to falter. By signing the Optional Clause, the General Act of Arbitration, Conciliation and Judicial Settlement, and the Convention to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War, the 1929-1931 Labour government did everything possible to pave the way for disarmament without achieving a general reduction in armaments.

There had been many in the pre-war Liberal party who had been deeply disturbed by the growth of national armaments and Britain's alignment with one of the rival continental alliances.[2] What distinguished Liberals from their Conservative opponents in pre-war Britain was their refusal to accept the international order as fixed and immutable.[3] Liberals believed that the world was profoundly other than it ought to be and that through human reason and action it could be changed for the better.[4] The Liberal government's failure to halt the arms race by bilateral negotiations with Germany convinced many Liberals, including Lloyd George, that a future arms race could only be prevented by general disarmament through international agreement. Having failed to prevent the First World War, armaments weighed heavily on the Liberal conscience. Of all the prime ministers of the inter-war years, none was more committed

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1. In a Commons debate on the proposed security pact in June 1925, MacDonald distanced himself from the views which the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, had expressed on disarmament. MacDonald said: 'I do not agree for a moment that any individual nation is ever, by the force of economic pressure, going to reduce its armaments by a ship or a gun unless it gets a conference with other nations and come to an agreement with them.' No nation would ever say: 'We have spent 20 per cent. too much on armaments, let us reduce it.' 185 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1579, 24 June 1925.
2. See, for example, E. B. Baker and P. J. Noel-Baker: J. Allen Baker, A Memoir, passim.
3. L. W. Martin: Peace without Victory, New Haven, 1958, p. 13.
4. M. Howard: War and the Liberal Conscience, p. 11.

to disarmament than David Lloyd George. It was the former Liberal Foreign Secretary, Viscount Grey of Fallodon,[1] who lent the authority of his name to the view that the pre-war arms race had made the 1914-1918 war virtually inevitable.[2] No other party gave such consistent support to general disarmament as the Liberal party in the inter-war years.

In the secret conclaves of the Paris peace conference as much as on the floor of the House of Commons Lloyd George called for a general reduction of armaments in the first year of peace. Without disarmament, he said, the League of Nations would be like other conventions of the past - something that would be blown away by the first gust of war. If nations entered a new competition in armaments the war would prove to have been the greatest tragedy the world had ever seen. The omens were good. There would be no great eagerness for war in their generation because the menace posed by Germany's military might had disappeared from the European scene. If, on the other hand, those nations which had promoted the League of Nations increased their armaments, peace would be an illusion and the League a sham.[3]

It was the small band of Independent Liberals in the years 1919 to 1921 who took the lead in the House of Commons in pressing the government to initiate discussions with other powers for reductions in national armaments. By the summer of 1921 their political opponents had, to a large extent, come to share their anxieties as different

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1. Sir Edward Grey, Viscount Grey of Fallodon (1916), 1862-1933, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Offairs, 1892-95, Foreign Secretary, 1905-16, President of the League of Nations Union, 1919-23. Though only a year older than Lloyd George, he was prevented from playing a fuller role in the politics of the 1920s by deteriorating eyesight.

2. Viscount Grey of Fallodon: Twenty-Five Years, London, 1925, popular edition, 1928, Vol. I, pp. 160-2 and Vol. III, pp. 265-75. See especially: 'The enormous growth of armaments in Europe, the sense of insecurity and fear caused by them - it was these that made war inevitable.'

3. 117 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1222-6, 3 July 1919; 118 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1048-9, 21 July 1919; 119 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 2018-20, 18 August 1919.

sections of the community expressed concern about the state of the British economy, the prospects of a new naval arms race, and the failure of the world to recover from the dislocation and distress of the war.

A 1923 Liberal party pamphlet, The Liberal Foreign Policy, identified four guiding principles: friendly relations should be cultivated with all nations, Britain should acknowledge that all nations had equal rights, all entangling engagements should be avoided and there should be no secret treaties or secret implications in any treaties, and, fourthly, there should be a system of organised co-operation among nations to settle international disputes and take common action to prevent war and reduce armaments. The pamphlet claimed that all the ideals of Liberal foreign policy were embodied in the League of Nations. Liberals, therefore, gave their fullest support to the League, the Permanent Court of International Justice and the International Labour Office. In a section entitled 'International Security and Disarmament', the pamphlet said that a treaty of mutual guarantees[1] should be signed by all the members of the League and non-members should be invited to give their assent. It claimed that if such a treaty was concluded competition in armaments would cease and a scheme of international disarmament could then be carried into effect. Drastic curtailment of armament expenditure, it affirmed, was an important plank in the Liberal platform.[2]

If Liberals were united in supporting disarmament, they, too, were divided over the price Britain should pay for general disarmament. Most Liberals gave their backing to the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and

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1. The Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, later to be renamed the Treaty of Mutual Assistance, was formulated by the League's Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments in 1922 and 1923. See

2. The Liberal Publications Department: Pamphlets and Leaflets for 1923, London, 1924.

the Geneva Protocol but Lloyd George, H. A. L. Fisher[1] and a few others did not disguise their opposition. Those who shared Lloyd George's Francophobia were reluctant to commit Britain to guarantees which were primarily for the benefit of France and the successor states, the beneficiaries of what most Liberals regarded as a far from just 1919 peace settlement.

At the Paris peace conference Lloyd George laboured in vain to persuade his fellow delegates to agree to abolish conscription. Conscription was an affront to the liberal conscience and most Liberals believed that conscription had enabled the continental land powers to plunge Europe into war in 1914. In an article in his own Daily Chronicle Lloyd George summed up the Liberal view when he described armies as grabbing machines. Nations, Lloyd George said, should be deprived of those reserves of trained manpower which enabled them to launch aggressive wars.[2]

Liberals were no less zealous in seeking to persuade the British people that the Admiralty exercised too great an influence over the formulation of foreign policy and absorbed too high a proportion of the nation's resources. They wholeheartedly endorsed the reductions made at the Washington conference, criticised successive governments for their naval construction programmes, and backed MacDonald's decision to reduce British cruiser strength in 1929 to bring about an improvement in Anglo-American relations.

In the Liberal party manifesto for the 1929 general election pride of place was given to peace and disarmament. Writing to Philip Kerr, who was charged with drafting the party's manifesto, Lloyd George wrote

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1. H. A. L. Fisher, historian, university administrator, educationalist and Liberal Cabinet Minister, Vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, 1912-16, President of the Board of Education, 1916-22, British delegate to the League Assemblies, 1920-22, a member of the League's Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments, 1921-22, 1865-1940.
2. 6 January 1923.

in August 1928: 'After a criticism of the present Government, I would certainly put Peace first.'[1] The manifesto said that disarmament was the acid test of whether covenants, treaties, and pacts of peace meant anything. If the British government had confidence in the League of Nations, the Kellogg Pact and the Washington treaties, it would cut Britain's 'vast and swollen armaments' to the 'police' level.[2]

An early draft of the manifesto put the Liberal case for disarmament in its most cogent form.[3] It was a fatal illusion, it said, to believe that a nation could obtain security through armaments. No country could make itself secure without making others insecure. Attempts to obtain security through armaments inevitably bred fear, suspicion and competition and that in turn led to alliances and war. The 1927 Geneva naval conference had failed because the delegates had been guided in all their discussions by considering what armaments each power would require in the event of war. The Anglo-French compromise in 1928 had also failed because it was based on what was necessary for British and French security. So long as nations possessed armaments, which could be used for sudden and successful aggression, it was futile to expect lasting peace. Even if no war occurred, fear of war would keep the whole world in tension. If, on the other hand, nations divested themselves of armaments by reducing them to the level permitted to Germany in the peace treaty, the risks of war would be immensely reduced and the likelihood that disputes would be settled by peaceful procedures much increased.

In a message to all Liberal candidates in the 1929 general election Lloyd George declared that the dominant issues before the electorate

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1. Lloyd George to Kerr, 11 August 1928, Lloyd George Papers, G/12/5/14.
2. F. W. S. Craig: British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1945, Chichester, 1970, pp. 43-62.
3. Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/110.

were unemployment, peace and disarmament.[1] When, four months after the second Labour government came to power, the Liberal party met for its annual conference in the Albert Hall, Nottingham, Lloyd George devoted most of his speech to foreign affairs. Rejoicing in the steps which had been taken by the Labour government to re-establish good relations with the United States, he went on to warn the conference that land and air disarmament was more important than the reduction of naval armaments. So long as nations were highly armed they would never submit their disputes to arbitration and there would be no peace on earth or goodwill among men.[2]

It was to be Lloyd George, backed by his two Liberal colleagues, the Marquess of Lothian[3] and Sir Herbert Samuel,[4] who was to dominate the proceedings of the Three Party Committee on Disarmament which, in 1931, prepared Britain's brief for the world disarmament conference.[5] Liberals were the pace makers in Britain's inter-war years' disarmament debate.

The party manifestos for the 1929 general election afford ample proof of the importance disarmament had assumed in British political life at the end of the first decade of peace. Notwithstanding the fact that unemployment and the structural problems of British industry headed the agenda of political debate, a strong current of opinion thrust disarmament to the fore as a major contemporary issue. The international community had established the League of Nations almost ten years earlier

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1. Daily Mail, 21 May 1929.
2. 4 October 1929. See the Liberal Publications Department: Selection of Pamphlets and Leaflets, 1929, London, n.d., pp. 35-43.
3. Philip Kerr succeeded as 11th Marquess of Lothian in March 1930.
4. Sir Herbert Samuel, Viscount Samuel (1937), 1870-1963, Liberal MP, Cleveland, 1902-18, Darwen, 1929-35, Parl. Under-Secretary, Home Office, 1905-9, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1909-10, Postmaster General, 1910-14, Home Secretary, 1916 and 1931-32, Leader of Parl. Liberal Party, 1931-35.
5. See pp. 341-55.

but little had been done to eradicate the causes of international conflict. In the aftermath of the Locarno conference the international situation seemed to blossom with opportunities. It was difficult for the British public to resist the conclusion that its own government was dragging its feet and failing to profit from the improvement in international relations. Against such criticisms it is not surprising that the Conservatives decided to devote thirty-eight lines of their 1929 election manifesto to defending their record in foreign and disarmament policy compared with Labour's fifteen. Five years earlier the three parties had virtually ignored disarmament in their manifestos. Both internal pressures and external events made the reduction and limitation of armaments an important issue in domestic British politics in the years 1927 to 1931.

None the less neither of the two parties of government had a coherent disarmament policy. After the disappointments of the 1930 London naval disarmament conference, Labour lacked the inner conviction to work with redoubled vigour for international disarmament. Despite the public interest aroused by the League of Nations Union and other organisations, neither the Conservatives nor Labour when in power pursued a bold and resolute disarmament policy.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS UNION AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR DISARMAMENT

The League of Nations Union has been described as the single most important and influential pressure group in British foreign politics during the inter-war years and the most successful organisation of its kind since the Anti-Corn Law League.[1] Between 1922 and 1935 no British government could afford to ignore it. With, by 1931, an individual membership of almost a million and over three thousand branches throughout the United Kingdom it could claim to represent the mainstream of political opinion in Britain.[2] Unlike the No More War Movement, the Union of Democratic Control, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, it attracted wide support from all shades of opinion and all sections of the community. Its influence far outweighed that of any other national league of nations society. In no other country of the world would membership of an unofficial organisation to promote the objectives of the League of Nations have led to the claim, frequently made by members of the League of Nations Union in Britain, that they belonged to 'the League'.[3]

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1. D. C. Watt: Personalities and Policies, Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century, London, 1965, p. 35, and R. H. S. Crossman in War and Democracy edited by E. F. M. Durbin and G. E. C. Catlin, p. 278.

2. Annual Report of the Executive Committee to the General Council of the League of Nations Union for the year ending 31st December 1931, and Michael Howard: War and the Liberal Conscience, London, 1978, p. 86. The Union's paid-up membership was less than half its nominal membership. In 1931 951,588 members were listed of whom only 406,868 had paid a subscription.

3. A. E. Zimmern: The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, London, 1936, p. 331.

The Union was founded in January 1919 when representatives of the League of Nations Society and the breakaway organisation, the League of Free Nations Association, set up a General Council at a meeting in Central Hall, Westminster. Grey was elected President, Asquith, Balfour and Lloyd George honorary Presidents, and, to underline the Union's intention of looking to the churches and religious organisations for active support, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the President of the Free Church Council and the Chief Rabbi were made Vice Presidents. To its Executive Committee the Union recruited both those who had stressed the value of moral persuasion in the League of Nations Society and those who had formed the League of Free Nations Association because they believed that a league without effective military sanctions would be of no avail.

The parent body, the League of Nations Society, had been founded by a number of prominent Liberals in May 1915 to advocate the establishment of a league of nations after the war. Though it gained recruits from the Union of Democratic Control and other left-wing organisations, it failed to attract any prominent Conservatives. Not even the Conservative 'rebel', Lord Lansdowne, responded to its overtures. It was its pacifist tendencies, left-wing inclinations, allegedly pro-German sympathies, and lack of drive which led David Davies[1] and others to form a rival association in the summer of 1918. The League of Free Nations Associations aimed to win support from the Right as well as the Left in British politics by supporting the prosecution of the war to a victorious conclusion.[2]

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1. David Davies, Lord Davies of Llandinam (1932), 1880-1944, Welsh landowner, mine owner and philanthropist, Liberal MP for Montgomery, 1906-29, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lloyd George, 1916, the foremost advocate of an international police force in Britain. See, especially, his The Problem of the Twentieth Century, London, 1930.
2. G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1978, pp. 50-73.

The Union set itself the task of so mobilising public opinion behind the League that the British government would have no choice but to make it the cornerstone of Britain's foreign policy. To achieve that objective the Union formed branches throughout the country, conducted a vigorous propaganda, brought pressure to bear on MPs and government alike, sponsored and organised research, study and discussion, and attempted to influence such opinion formers as the churches, trade unions, women's groups, schools, colleges and universities.

The Union invested the League of Nations with a religious glamour for hundreds of thousands of men and women who joined its ranks because they believed that a new era had dawned in the history of the world. In January 1919 the League of Nations Society was a small organisation of Liberal intellectuals with a membership of 2,230. The League of Free Nations Association had a mere 987 members. By the end of the year the Union had over 14,000 members and branches in almost a hundred different places, some as far from the metropolis as Aberdare and Wrexham, Barnstaple and Weston-super-Mare.[1]

From the beginning the Union donned the mantle of social respectability. To its numerous committees it recruited those with an established place in society. Generals, admirals, titled members of the aristocracy and pillars of the business community filled its committees and its coffers. The Annual Report for 1927 listed among its Vice Presidents Admiral of the Fleet, Earl Beatty,[2] Lieutenant-General Sir

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1. Notes about Lord Grey by Gilbert Murray, 30 August 1935, Gilbert Murray Papers; T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. I, p. 61; L. Woolf: Beginning Again, An Autobiography of the Years, 1911-1918, London, 1964, pp. 191-2; The Times, 13 and 23 January 1919; G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, pp. 11-12, 51-2, 90-2.
2. David Beatty, Earl Beatty (1919), 1871-1936, Naval Secretary to Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty, 1912, Commander of the Grand Fleet, 1916-19, First Sea Lord, 1919-27.

Hubert Gough[1] and fourteen members of the peerage.[2] It reported that during the year twenty-four individuals had given one hundred pounds or more and that Cadbury Bros. Ltd. had donated two thousand pounds to its funds. It also reported that eight individuals had given donations ranging from fifty to five hundred pounds to the Union's disarmament campaign.[3]

Almost from its birth Lord Robert Cecil was the hero and the darling of the League of Nations Union. He, more than any other, guided its destiny and made it an effective instrument in British political life. Without a substantial following in the Conservative party, he drew on the support of the Union's large and influential membership. If his position in the Union was weakened, he told Wilson Harris[4] in November 1925, his influence in the Cabinet would be undermined.[5] A year after his resignation from the Baldwin government in August 1927, a backbench Conservative MP, Sir John Power,[6] told Thomas Jones, the Assistant Secretary of the Cabinet and a close friend of the Prime Minister, that if Baldwin brought Cecil back into his government it would be worth a million votes to the Conservative party at the next general election.[7]

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1. Sir Hubert Gough, 1870-1963, leader and spokesman of the rebel officers at the Curragh in March 1914, Commander of the Vth Army in France, Independent Liberal candidate in the Chertsey by-election.
2. Marquess of Crewe; Earl of Derby; Duke of Devonshire; Earl of Home; Viscount Irwin; Lord Marshall; Lord Parmoor; Lord Phillimore; Marquess of Reading; Lord Revelstoke; Marquess of Salisbury; Earl of Selborne; Lord Shaw of Dunfermline; and Lord Shuttleworth. Lord Queensborough was honorary Treasurer, Viscount Grey and Viscount Cecil were joint Presidents, Baldwin, Clynes and Lloyd George honorary Presidents.
3. Annual Report of the Executive Committee to the General Council, 1927.
4. H. Wilson Harris, 1883-1955, formerly Diplomatic Correspondent of the Daily News, from 1923 a member of the headquarters staff of the Union, Editor of the Spectator, 1932-53, Independent MP for Cambridge University, 1945-50.
5. Cecil to Wilson Harris, 20 November 1925, copy in Gilbert Murray Papers.
6. Sir John Power Bt., died 1950, Conservative MP for Wimbledon, 1924-35, philanthropist and benefactor of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Institute of Historical Research.
7. T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. II, diary entry 11 December 1928, p. 162.

That was no doubt an exaggeration but there can be no doubt about the loyalty and affection he commanded among those who took the League of Nations seriously in Britain.

Writing from the Paris peace conference in March 1919, Cecil told the Union's President that governments had created the League but it would be for the peoples of the world to give it a living soul. Many people in Britain still needed converting and others had not yet realised how they could give effective expression to their internationalist faith.[1] The League of Nations Union had to become an organisation with an evangelistic purpose.[2]

In the autumn of 1921 the League Assembly's Third (Disarmament) Committee suggested that limitation of armaments would never be imposed by governments on peoples but it might be imposed by peoples on governments. It urged League delegates to carry on a vigorous propaganda to bring home to the peoples of the world the urgent necessity of disarmament.[3]

From the very first the Union struck a realistic note in its approach to disarmament. In January 1919 its acting Executive Committee sent the Prime Minister a memorandum expressing the view that there could be no reduction of armaments until a league of nations had been established.[4] It was not until December 1920 that the Union began to put pressure on both the government and the League to promote international disarmament. Though it called on the government to endorse the recommendations of the Brussels International Financial Conference[5] for the reduction of armaments it repudiated a suggestion that the Union should initiate agitation against the Service estimates.[6]

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1. Cecil to Grey, 24 March 1919, copy in Lloyd George Papers, F/6/6/19.
2. H. Wilson Harris: Life So Far, London, 1954, p. 200.
3. League of Nations: Records of the Second Assembly, Plenary Meetings, Geneva, 1921, pp. 655-6.
4. The Times, 13 January 1919.
5. See p. 172.
6. Minutes of the Executive Committee, 4 and 9 December 1920.

The decision to set up an armaments committee in February 1921 reflected growing popular dissatisfaction with the lack of progress in disarmament. At the Union's General Council meeting on 26 January 1921, to which one hundred and ten branches sent representatives, a member of the Derby branch moved a resolution calling on the League to make definite proposals for the reduction of armaments. With a few minor emendations, the resolution was unanimously approved and forwarded to the League Secretariat at Geneva.[1]

The committee was made up, for the most part, of men with distinguished and specialised experience in military and naval affairs.[2] Its terms of reference were:

1. To compare the military and naval expenditure of Great Britain in 1914 and 1921.

2. To compare the military, naval and air forces maintained by the principal Allied and Associated Powers with those maintained by the ex-enemy states.

3. To enquire into the feasibility of budgetary limitation of armed forces.

4. To compare the Permanent Armaments Commission's[3] report on

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1. Minutes of the seventh meeting of the General Council.

2. Maj.-Gen. J. E. B. Seely (Chairman), 1st Lord Mottistone (1933), 1868-1947, Conservative MP for Isle of Wight, 1900-4, Liberal MP, Isle of Wight, 1904-5, Liverpool, Abercromby, 1906-10, Ilkeston, 1910-22, Secretary of State for War, 1912-14, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Air, 1919; Charles Roberts, Liberal MP for Lincoln, 1906-18, Parl. Under-Secretary of State for India, 1915-16; (Sir) Leonard Bairstow, FRS, Professor of Aerodynamics at Imperial College, London, and a leading authority on aviation; David Davies, MP; Dr. J. C. Maxwell Garnett, General Secretary of the Union, 1920-38; Rear Admiral R. A. Hopwood, General Secretary of the Navy League, 1919-22; Lt.-Gen. Sir Hubert Gough; J. M. Keynes, Cambridge economist and former Treasury civil servant; Maj.-Gen. Sir F. Maurice, Director of Military Operations at the War Office, 1915-18; (Sir) Archibald Hurd, a leader writer on naval affairs for Daily Telegraph and a joint editor of Brassey's Naval and Shipping Annual, 1922-28; Harold Judd, chartered accountant and Deputy Controller of Contracts at the Ministry of Munitions in 1917; and (Sir) Oswald Mosley (Bt.), MP.

3. See p. 229.

the use of poisons including poison gas in war with the actual measures being taken by the British government and other governments.

5. To enquire into the disposal of surplus arms by Great Britain and the non-implementation of the St. Germain-en-Laye Convention of September 1919.[1]

6. To enquire into the possibility of limiting the nature of armaments by abolishing all modern developments.

7. To enquire into the possibility of a League of Nations force to supersede to a greater or lesser extent national armies and navies.[2]

The committee issued an interim report in March and a final report in June. Both received full publicity and copies of the final report were distributed very widely among Dominion prime ministers, League of Nations societies in other countries, representatives of the American press in Britain, members of the government and the League Secretariat. The committee repudiated unilateral disarmament, rejected budgetary limitation, the international inspection and supervision of a disarmament convention, and attempts to prohibit offensive weapons such as poison gas. They proposed a limitation of battle fleets suggesting that ten should be the maximum number of capital ships Britain or any other naval power should be permitted to retain. Asserting that no external body could fully assess a nation's defence requirements, they proposed two sets of criteria for determining the level of national armaments: the forces needed to maintain law and order and those needed to deter aggression and fulfil a country's international obligations. They differentiated between forces needed for home defence and those required

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1. The Convention signed on 10 September 1919 was designed to impose national and international controls on the export of arms. It was never implemented because only four of its twenty-three signatories ratified it.

2. Minutes of Executive Committee, 13 January, 3 and 10 February 1921. See also Women's Leader, 22 July 1921.

for the defence of overseas possessions thereby providing colonial powers such as Britain and France with a justification for forces well in excess of those maintained by Germany and other European states without overseas colonies. They suggested that the League should submit a questionnaire to each member state enquiring what forces it required for each of these purposes.[1] In most respects their recommendations bore a striking resemblance to the proposals which the Service departments and the Committee of Imperial Defence were to make to the government on the eve of the Washington Conference.[2]

The Union was far from complacent about European disarmament. It criticised the League's Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments (TMC)[3] for its dilatoriness. On Maurice's advice it set up another committee, five of whom had sat on the previous disarmament committee,[4] to consider the implications of the Washington conference and the 1921 report of the League Assembly's Third (Disarmament) Committee.[5] Realising that there could be no progress towards disarmament in Europe until the continental nations enjoyed a greater measure of security, the Union drafted a disarmament treaty linking arms limitation with security.[6]

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1. Interim Report of the Committee on Limitation of Armaments, 29 March 1921, Annex 'B' in the Minutes of the Executive Committee, 3 May 1921 and Minutes of the Executive Committee, 30 June 1921. See also the Daily Telegraph, 23 February, 2 March and 28 April 1921, The Times, 26 April 1921.
2. See pp. 179-81.
3. See pp. 229-30.
4. Charles Roberts; Lt.-Gen. Sir Hubert Gough; Rear Admiral R. A. Hopwood; Prof. L. Bairstow, and Maj-Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice.
5. Minutes of Executive Committee, 17 November 1921.
6. The draft Treaty of Mutual Guarantee which Cecil put before the TMC in 1922 bore a striking resemblance to the Union's disarmament treaty. In a paper given at Chatham House on 29 April 1921 Maurice first outlined proposals for a treaty linking disarmament with security. These, it would seem, were adopted by Cecil and put before the Union's Executive Committee on 5 January 1922. They were approved by them on 16 March in an amended form. The proposals which Cecil put to the TMC in July 1922, see reports in the Daily Telegraph and

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When the General Council met in Birmingham on 20 January 1922, Cecil tried to enlist its support for the draft treaty. Its third resolution contained the statement: 'in order to reassure those States who are reluctant to limit their armaments for fear of attack by their neighbours, a joint and several defensive alliance open to all members of the League as well as to Germany, Russia and the United States on condition that armaments are reduced to an agreed level, should be proposed'.[1] On 18 February the Executive Committee wrote to the Prime Minister quoting the General Council resolution and calling on the government to look favourably on proposals for a general defensive alliance which might be regional in character but warning against agreements which might divide Europe into mutually antagonistic military alliances. Lloyd George's reply, though it referred to the proposals which had been considered at the Cannes conference,[2] showed scant sympathy for a general defensive alliance.[3] About that time Cecil informed Leon Bourgeois,[4] the veteran French statesman and the League's most enthusiastic champion in France, that the Union was disposed to advocate a much more effective scheme than 'the proposed general guarantee' [sic] suggested at

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Fn. 6, p. 87 contd.

the Morning Post, 5 July 1922, were almost identical to the amended draft in Annex 'A' of the Executive Committee's Minutes for 16 March 1922. The evidence suggests that both the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, see p.242 below, and the Esher Plan, see p.241 below, originated in the mind of the former Director of Military Operations at the War Office, Maj.-Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice.

1. Report of the General Council, 20 January 1922.
2. See pp. 235-6. In the House of Commons in March 1925 Lloyd George stated that Britain's proposals for a pact were conditional upon disarmament and France's agreement to a European pact. 182 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 335, 24 March 1925.
3. Minutes of the Executive Committee, 18 February and 27 April 1922. The Union's correspondence with Lloyd George was published in full in the Manchester Guardian and commented on in eleven other newspapers.
4. Leon Bourgeois, 1851-1925, Minister of the Interior, 1890, Prime Minister, 1895, chief French delegate at the 1899 Hague conference, chief French representative on the Paris peace conference's League of Nations Commission. See pp. 157-9.

Cannes. What the Union had in mind was a general defensive alliance with machinery for giving special rights to any country in particular danger.[1] The Union was prepared to countenance those special defensive arrangements which were particularly attractive to France.

In October 1926 the Union published the proposals of another sub-committee on the reduction and limitation of national armaments[2] in a pamphlet for general distribution.[3] The report began by stressing the relationship between general disarmament on the one hand and arbitration, security, mutual defensive arrangements and enlightened economic policies on the other. It was the great powers' responsibility to take the initiative in disarmament. Their objective should be not to seek an exact balance of military strength but adequate security against attack and the initiation of an agreed process of arms reductions. In the first stage, the powers should agree to make no increases. The second stage would be an agreement to make a simple percentage reduction in either expenditure on armaments or trained manpower or, perhaps, both. A realistic objective, the report suggested, would be a twenty per cent. reduction spread over five years. The report rejected as impracticable in the prevailing climate of opinion the extension to other powers of the disarmament imposed on Germany and her allies by the peace treaties but it expressed the hope that if such a proposal should at some

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1. Cecil to Bourgeois, 17 February 1922, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51095.
2. Gilbert Murray (Chairman); Rear-Admiral J. D. Allen; C. Delisle Burns, university lecturer and historian; Col. David Carnegie, a Canadian member of the TMC, 1921-24, Liberal candidate for Canterbury, 1924, 1927 and 1929; David Davies, MP; Vice-Admiral S. R. Drury-Lowe, H. A. L. Fisher; Dr. J. C. Maxwell Garnett; Brig.-Gen. H. Hartley, formerly Controller of the Chemical Warfare Department in the Ministry of Munitions; Sir Charles Hobhouse, a Liberal MP, 1892-95 and 1900-18, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1911-14, Postmaster General, 1914-15; Maj.-Gen. Sir F. Maurice; Prof. P. J. Noel-Baker; Charles Roberts; Maj.-Gen. J. E. B. Seely, and S. Sherman (Secretary).
3. League of Nations Union Pamphlet No. 198: Armaments, Their Reduction and Limitation, London, October 1926.

subsequent date become acceptable to European opinion, Britain would throw her weight behind it. Without apologising for its partiality towards colonial powers, it suggested that they should be accorded special treatment because the League's writ did not run among the Pathans of the North West Frontier or the Riff tribesmen of Morocco. Far more sweeping reductions could be made in forces deployed to repel foreign aggression than among those intended for preserving order at home and abroad. It optimistically assumed that the League Covenant, the Locarno treaties and other recently concluded arbitration treaties had created new conditions of security.

The main object of a disarmament plan, the report suggested, was not to reduce the ultimate war strength of a nation but to prevent it making a sudden and successful attack on a neighbour. Continental conscript armies should, therefore, be transformed into national militias on the Swiss model by progressively reducing the period of compulsory military service. To halt the expansion of air forces air personnel and air budgets should be strictly limited.

Differing from its 1921 predecessor, the 1926 committee came out in favour of international inspection and supervision but in most other respects it followed the cautious line adopted by the Baldwin government. It repudiated the suggestion that it would be possible to prohibit the manufacture of poison gas[1] or proscribe certain weapons or methods of warfare.[2]

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1. Noel-Baker dissented from this conclusion. In his chapter on chemical warfare in Disarmament (London, 1926, pp. 275-89) he suggested that no price was too high to pay to prevent gas warfare. Basing himself on the proposals of a foremost British authority, Maj. Victor Lefebure in The Riddle of the Rhine (London, 1921), Noel-Baker concluded that steps could be taken to prevent the manufacture of poison gas.

2. Seely, dissenting from this view, wrote a minority report. He argued that Germany's violation of the rules of war between 1914 and 1918 had been counter-productive. Self-denying ordinances were, therefore, more likely to be observed in the future than they had been in the immediate past. Hitler's reluctance to violate the 1936 submarine protocol would appear to add substance to Seely's view.

By far the longest section of the report was devoted to naval armaments. Declaring that battleships were the most costly of all ships to build and maintain and drawing attention to the fact that the largest battleships in the Battle of the Tsushima Straits[1] were 15,000 ton vessels with 12" guns, it tentatively suggested that the limit set by the Versailles treaty for Germany's navy - a maximum displacement of 10,000 tons - provided a useful guideline. It refrained from making any proposals for the limitation of cruisers and smaller warships but cast some doubt on the wisdom of the Washington precedent of restricting the scope of a limitation treaty to a few powers. It demonstrated its orthodoxy by rejecting proposals for the establishment of an international police force but it allowed David Davies to set out the case in a fairly lengthy minority report. Though the report was cautious and conservative in tone, it put on the agenda of the disarmament debate a number of proposals - among them percentage reductions and a radical lowering in the maximum displacement of battleships - which were to figure prominently in governmental discussions in the years immediately before the world disarmament conference.

However much the Union might seek to grapple with the technicalities of disarmament it never lost sight of its primary purpose of trying to influence governments and mould public opinion. In order to achieve that goal it was forced to consider most critically and carefully its tactics and organisation. In so doing it pioneered techniques which other pressure groups have subsequently followed.

The Union was from its birth not reluctant to bring pressure to bear at the highest level. When its Parliamentary Committee, chaired by Sir Samuel Hoare, failed to organise a deputation to the Prime Minister

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1. The Japanese navy's annihilation of the Russian fleet in the Tsushima Straits between Korea and Japan on 27 May 1905 in the Russo-Japanese war has been described as one of the most decisive naval battles in history.

to press for naval disarmament in the summer of 1921, it was censured by the Executive Committee. It was among the first, however, to offer its congratulations to the government over the success of the Washington conference.[1] Throughout the second half of 1923 and the first half of 1924 it put pressure on the Baldwin and MacDonald governments to look favourably on the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, urging its branches to send resolutions to the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and even the Lord Privy Seal himself,[2] voicing their support for the draft treaty.[3] Having learnt from a misguided attempt in 1921 to organise agitation, the Union advised its branches to compose their own resolutions rather than use one drafted by headquarters.[4] In May 1924 the Union sent MacDonald a letter urging him to give it favourable consideration[5] and a month later the Executive Committee tried unsuccessfully to persuade him to receive a deputation.[6]

The Union was not successful in its efforts but until comparatively late in the day it had been far from united in its attitude to the draft treaty. By the time it had reconciled its own differences to unite behind a set of proposed amendments, the CID, the Foreign Office and their political masters had taken an irrevocable decision to reject it.[7] MacDonald had in fact taken up an unsympathetic stance towards it a year before taking office.[8]

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1. Minutes of Executive Committee, 30 June and 17 November 1921.
2. Lord Robert Cecil no doubt hoped that these resolutions would strengthen his hand against the draft treaty's critics in the Cabinet.
3. Report of the Fourth General Council of the Union, 19 July 1923.
4. Minutes of Executive Committee, 19 June 1923; Maxwell Garnett to Curzon, 23 June 1923, FO 371/9419.
5. C.35(24), 30 May 1924, CAB 23/48.
6. Murray to Cecil, 21 June 1924, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51132.
7. For the differences within the Union, see Gilbert Murray in the weekly edition of the Westminster Gazette, 7 June 1924. For the response of the Baldwin and MacDonald governments, see
8. MacDonald to Cecil, 22 February 1923, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.

The Union met with no more success in seeking to persuade the second Baldwin government to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards the Geneva Protocol. Its deputation and agitation came too late to influence a government which had been ill-disposed towards the Protocol from the moment it took office.[1]

From these unsuccessful efforts, the Union turned increasingly to other forms of pressure. In November 1923 the Executive Committee had drafted a questionnaire to be put to all parliamentary candidates in the forthcoming general election. Its fourth question asked: 'Will you press for a general limitation of armaments in accordance with the provisions of Article 8 of the Covenant of the League?'[2] At each successive general election the Union was to adopt similar tactics. It would have been rash for any parliamentary candidate to ignore an organisation which was well established in most constituencies in the country and had many influential supporters in all three political parties. Some did but the majority bowed to the pressure which the Union could exert. Shortly after the 1929 general election, Gilbert Murray reported that the Union's questionnaire had been put to all but eighty-three of the one thousand three hundred and eighty-seven candidates. Of the six hundred and fifteen recently elected Members of Parliament, two hundred and thirty-six could be relied on to support the definite points in the questionnaire and another one hundred and eighty-eight had given it general approval. Only twenty-eight Members had made non-committal replies.[3]

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1. A deputation from the Union consisting of Gilbert Murray, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, J. W. Hills, MP, the Countess of Selborne, J. R. Clynes, MP, Tom Shaw, MP, and Dr. J. C. Maxwell Garnett called on the Prime Minister on 3 February 1925. For the government's rejection of the Protocol see
2. Annex 'A' to Minutes of Executive Committee, 15 November 1923.
3. Minutes of Tenth Annual Meeting of the General Council, 27-29 June 1929 and the Annual Report of the Executive Committee to the General Council for 1928.

However much it might succeed in lobbying governments and Members of Parliament, the Union could not afford to ignore what it regarded as its main task: the education of public opinion. It tried to win the young by involving itself in syllabus planning, citizenship training and history teaching in schools.[1] It was, nevertheless, the conversion of an adult electorate which was its main task. When it failed to persuade successive British governments to accept in principle the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol it blamed itself for its failure to educate public opinion.[2]

In the years immediately after the war the Union had been quick to exploit the anxieties of the British people about the state of the economy and Europe's failure to recover from the war. In the same month that Lloyd George appointed the Geddes committee,[3] the Union issued a manifesto declaring that a reduction of armaments would save a number of European countries from 'bankruptcy, high taxes, small trade, low wages, unemployment, bad housing, high rents, neglected education and general social and industrial discontent.'[4] Though its crude exaggeration must have antagonised the more discerning, it was not wholly unsuccessful in turning the campaign against 'squandermania' and 'waste' which the Daily Mail and other newspapers were then waging,[5] into a demand for reductions in armaments. In a society more interested in retrenchment than in generating employment through arms production, it was comparatively easy to win the business community and a considerable section of the electorate for disarmament.

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1. When the Board of Education issued its 1927 edition of Handbook of Suggestions for Teachers it added an appendix on the League of Nations and stressed the importance of the League in History and citizenship teaching. See pp. 113, 125-6, 428-50.
2. Murray to MacDonald, 12 May 1925, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/5/36.
3. See p. 173.
4. Minutes of the Executive Committee, 11 August 1921.
5. See p. 172.

At the same time the Union decided to mount a disarmament campaign in the following autumn. A committee was established and it was decided to enlist the support of other organisations. Union speakers were requested to make disarmament the theme in all the meetings they addressed during the autumn. It was also agreed that disarmament should figure prominently in all the Union's summer school programmes.[1] Before the end of July, sixteen regional conferences on disarmament had been planned for the autumn of 1921 in centres stretching from Carlisle and Newcastle upon Tyne in the North, to Exeter, Bristol and Reading in the South.[2]

After the rejection of both the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol, the Union again turned its attention to the high level of armaments in most European countries. Prompted by Cecil's request[3] to provide him with a good head of steam as he pressed the government from within to promote international disarmament, the Union made disarmament the keynote of its propaganda activity in the closing months of 1925. In December the General Council passed a resolution urging the government to put disarmament in the forefront of its programme. It called on the government to instruct its advisers to prepare 'forthwith' an effective disarmament scheme for submission to the League and do all in its power to see that the international disarmament conference, envisaged in the resolution of the Sixth League Assembly,[4] was held at the earliest possible moment.[5]

In November 1926 the Union appointed a small committee to launch a massive campaign for disarmament. Chaired by the Conservative MP,

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1. Minutes of Executive Committee, 30 June 1921.
2. Minutes of Executive Committee, 21 July 1921.
3. Cecil to Murray (Chairman of the Executive Committee), 9 and 21 October 1925, Gilbert Murray Papers.
4. See p. 267.
5. Minutes of General Council, 16 December 1925.

J. W. Hills,[1] it consisted of Noel-Baker, Mrs. Oliver Strachey[2] and the former Liberal MP. Henry Vivian.[3] It also enlisted the services of four of the Union's headquarters staff including the General Secretary, Dr. J. C. Maxwell Garnett, and Wilson Harris. At its first meeting it adopted a set of detailed proposals, drafted by Noel-Baker. These included the formation of study circles, the sponsoring of pamphlets primarily for the use of speakers, and the manipulation of the Press. Noel-Baker suggested that Murray should encourage leading statesmen to write letters to The Times and other newspapers making the case for disarmament. Grey was, on more than one occasion at Noel-Baker's instigation, induced to write to one or other of the leading national newspapers in support of disarmament.[4] Realising that the provincial press could also provide a useful platform for the campaign, Noel-Baker suggested that members of the Union's headquarters staff should offer to provide them with articles. Whenever the League published a report on disarmament the committee should seek to gain maximum publicity for it by letters to the Press. Union members should also be encouraged to write to MPs to bring indirect pressure to bear on the government. The support of the business world should be enlisted through recruiting prominent industrialists and financial experts to address them through

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1. Maj. J. W. Hills, 1867-1938, Conservative MP for Durham City, 1906-22, Ripon, 1922-24, 1925-38; served in France 1914-16, wounded 1916, Member of the TMC 1923-24, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1922-24.

2. Mrs. Oliver Strachey, 1887-1940, Hon. Parl. Secretary of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Editor of Women's Leader, Secretary of Women's Employment Federation, Ind. parl. candidate, 1918, 1922 and 1923.

3. Henry Vivian, 1868-1930, Lib.-Lab. MP for Birkenhead, 1906-10, Liberal MP for Totnes, 1923-24. In 1906 he took an active part in the campaign to press the Liberal government to reduce armament expenditure and work for international disarmament at the forthcoming Hague peace conference.

4. See Noel-Baker to Murray, 4 October 1924, 8 September and 3 October 1927, Gilbert Murray Papers.

Chambers of Commerce.[1] Noel-Baker's sixth proposal was that a special fund should be launched to provide the campaign with adequate financial resources.[2]

Noel-Baker had been extremely critical of the Union's propaganda. He did not believe that it made the best use of its leading supporters like Cecil and Grey. He felt that it could achieve far more by gaining entry to the conferences of such organisations as Rotary and the Headmasters' Conference than by conducting its own mass meetings. He believed that far too little was being done to mobilise the churches and educational institutions. The Union had completely failed to convey its message to the great crowds which assembled at sporting events such as the Cup Final, the University Boat Race and the Derby. Not enough was being done to use posters and the newer media such as the cinema. The Union's own Speakers' Notes gave it an opportunity it seldom used to speak from a thousand platforms with one voice.[3]

There can be little doubt that the Union's campaign was designed to coincide with the work being done at Geneva by the League's Preparatory Commission. Much of the impetus for the campaign came, however, from a growing dissatisfaction with the government's inaction and the League's failure to secure an agreement for the reduction of armaments. Many felt that time was running out and that disarmament had become a matter of extreme urgency.[4] It was that feeling which no doubt prompted some of the Union's wealthier supporters to contribute most generously to the campaign's expenses.[5]

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1. Among those who addressed Chambers of Commerce on behalf of the Union were Sir Arthur Haworth, Chairman of the Manchester Royal Exchange, and Sir Josiah (later Lord) Stamp, a financial adviser to successive governments, a member of the Dawes committee, a director of Nobel Industries and I.C.I.
2. Minutes of the Disarmament Campaign Committee, 11 November 1926.
3. Noel-Baker to Murray, - April 1926, Gilbert Murray Papers.
4. Noel-Baker to Murray, 6 September 1927, Gilbert Murray Papers.
5. Lady Cowdray donated five hundred pounds, Lord Revelstoke and Sir Thomas Barlow, one hundred pounds each, and Sir Daniel Stevenson promised forty pounds for every six months the campaign ran up to six and a half years.

When Cecil resigned from the government in August 1927, the campaign moved into top gear. Freed from the responsibilities of office, he set out to promote a cause to which he attached the greatest importance. Less than a fortnight after his resignation he proposed that the Union should concert its efforts with those of the Liberal and Labour parties.[1] By 14 September he had mapped out a rough draft of a programme and within three days a declaration had been drawn up and moves made to enlist the services of both MacDonald and Lloyd George. On 17 September he wrote: 'I believe a vigorous disarmament campaign will sweep the country.'[2] Although he was anxious to have the support of the Liberal and Labour parties, Cecil was determined that the campaign should take on the character of a national crusade cutting across political boundaries. In October he approached the Archbishop of Canterbury to chair a meeting in the Royal Albert Hall which, he hoped, would take the form of a demonstration 'religious in character'.[3]

Cecil was given an enthusiastic reception by the Union's General Council at a meeting specially convened on 21 October to hear him explain his reasons for resigning. A Union pamphlet containing his speech and the resolution passed at the meeting was published with the title Law not War and circulated not only in Britain but throughout the world.[4] Branches were invited to hold their own meetings to campaign for disarmament. By 31 December 1927 six hundred had been held in different parts of the country and Cecil himself had addressed large rallies in Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Scarborough and Birmingham.[5]

The committee was enlarged and given the full-time services of an

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1. Cecil to Murray, 10 September 1927, Gilbert Murray Papers.
2. Cecil to Murray, 17 September 1927, Gilbert Murray Papers.
3. Cecil to Randall Davidson, 11 October 1927, Gilbert Murray Papers.
4. Annual Report of Executive Committee to General Council for 1927.
5. Ibid.

organising secretary and assistant and the campaign was brought to the notice of the public by a house-to-house distribution of leaflets and handbills. The Annual Report for 1927 said that never before had the Union mounted such a massive campaign to win over the public.[1] On 15 February 1928 it was reported that of the one hundred and two meetings held during the previous week, it was known that sixty-two had been on disarmament and a week later that of the one hundred and four meetings held between 15 and 23 February, seventy-six had been on disarmament.[2]

So incessant was the propaganda that fears were expressed that the public might become wearied of it. However, when there was talk of dropping the campaign, Cecil made it clear that he would take very little further interest in the Union if this were done and the campaign went on to attract even larger crowds.[3] On 27 March it was reported that two thousand five hundred people had attended a meeting at Golders Green chaired by Bishop Gore[4] and addressed by representatives of all three political parties, Cecil had addressed over a thousand delegates at the Free Churches' Conference in Bridlington and Noel-Baker had spoken to six hundred delegates at a Co-operative conference in Manchester.[5]

The meetings were planned as evangelistic crusades. On 6 December 1927 Cecil had proposed that a form containing a pledge to work for arbitration and disarmament should be printed and distributed at their meetings. The pledge read:

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1. Annual Report of Executive Committee to General Council for 1927.
2. Minutes of the International Disarmament Campaign Committee, 15 and 23 February 1928.
3. Minutes of the International Disarmament Campaign Committee, 13 March 1928 and Cecil to Murray, n.d. and 3 March 1928, Gilbert Murray Papers.
4. Charles Gore, 1853-1932, Bishop of Worcester, 1902-4, Birmingham, 1905-11, Oxford, 1911-19. A Christian socialist, theologian, and founder of the Community of the Resurrection.
5. Minutes of the International Disarmament Campaign Committee, 27 March 1928.

'To Viscount Grey, Viscount Cecil and Mr. J. R. Clynes.
I undertake to do my utmost by all constitutional means to forward the policy of International Arbitration and Disarmament.
Signed .....
Address .....'

When the pledge was received at the Union's headquarters it was to be acknowledged by a letter signed by Grey, Cecil and Clynes which would read:

'We desire to thank you for your promise to help the cause of International Arbitration and Disarmament and trust you may be able to induce others to give a like undertaking. Without disarmament peace can never be secure.'[1]

On 7 February 1928 Cecil reported a highly successful meeting in Glasgow at which six hundred new members of the Union had been enrolled and a large number of pledge forms distributed to members of the audience. Already several hundred had been returned to the Union's headquarters when a telegram was received asking for eight thousand additional forms for distribution in Glasgow churches on the following Sunday, 5 February 1928.[2]

The Annual Report for 1927 gave an assessment of the campaign's first year. A syllabus had been prepared for study circles and pamphlets and leaflets circulated to a wider public.[3] A number of posters had been prepared to bring home the campaign's message to an even larger section of the public.[4] A very successful conference organised by Noel-Baker

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1. Minutes of the International Disarmament Campaign Committee, 6 December 1927
2. Ibid., 7 February 1928.
3. Titles included On the Verge of Disarmament, Armaments, The Limitation of Navies, and Moral Aspects of Disarmament.
4. Among captions selected for Union posters were: 'Prepare for War - and You'll Get it', 'Armaments Cause Fear, Fear Causes War', and 'Europe Armed is Europe Doomed'.

had been held at the London School of Economics in May 1927.[1] It concluded by noting how rapidly public interest in disarmament, arbitration and security had developed in recent months.[2] The Union could rightly claim much of the credit.

A month after the 1929 general election Gilbert Murray summed up the Union's achievements in the first ten years of its history. 1929, Murray claimed, had set the seal on the great conversion of the public which the Union had set out to achieve soon after its foundation. An average of ten meetings a night had been held for ten years. 'Unless our speakers are extraordinarily unpersuasive you would expect that to have some effect upon public opinion and I think it has', he said.[3]

When the Preparatory Commission completed its task in December 1930 the Union set to work to prepare public opinion for the forthcoming world disarmament conference and Cecil tried to secure the backing of all three political parties for a vigorous disarmament campaign in 1931. The partial failure of the 1930 London naval conference and a deteriorating European situation led Gilbert Murray and others to express serious doubts about disarmament.[4] Murray's disenchantment prompted Cecil to warn him that he would not be a party to any suggestion that the Union should weaken or slacken its advocacy of disarmament. A critical moment in the post-war crusade for disarmament had been reached. If the Union redoubled

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1. The speakers included the Belgian socialist, de Brouckère, Sir William Beveridge, the Director of the London School of Economics, Sir Josiah Stamp, Cecil and Murray.
2. Annual Report of the Executive Committee to the General Council for 1927 (May 1928).
3. Minutes of the Tenth Annual Meeting of the General Council, 27-29 June 1929 and the Annual Report of the Executive Committee to the General Council for 1928.
4. On 7 October 1930 Murray had written to the Prime Minister saying that 'disarmament simply won't go'. He had gone on to urge the government to declare its support for Article 16 of the Covenant, i.e. sanctions, and to do all in its power to promote international economic co-operation. Murray to MacDonald, Gilbert Murray Papers.

its efforts it could achieve a great success. The government needed all the support it could get to fight the Service departments. The Union had to campaign to ensure that the Preparatory Commission's disarmament plan was actually implemented.[1]

Ever aware of the objections which would be raised by the opponents of disarmament, the Union decided to stress in all its propaganda that reductions in armaments could be made without endangering national security or adding to Britain's international commitments.[2] It specifically advocated an all-round twenty-five per cent. reduction in armaments expenditure, the separate budgetary limitation of air armaments,[3] a direct limitation of the larger weapons of land warfare, and a maximum 10,000 ton displacement for all warships including battleships and aircraft carriers.[4]

Between 1 January and 28 February 1931 the Union supplied speakers[5] for almost six hundred meetings. In March it began to plan a massive demonstration for Saturday, 11 July 1931, in the Albert Hall. In an unsuccessful attempt to get the Prince of Wales to chair the meeting, Cecil described the purpose of the meeting as 'to impress the country with a sense of the extreme seriousness of the Disarmament Conference' and 'the very great danger' that would arise if the conference should fail and, in the second place, 'to have a demonstration of such importance' that it would have 'an influence even beyond the shores of this Island' which might convince the continental powers that in Britain they would

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1. Cecil to Murray, 15 and 20 October 1930, Gilbert Murray Papers.
2. Minutes of the Political and Parliamentary Committee, 28 January 1931.
3. Cecil had been bitterly disappointed at his failure to persuade a majority of the powers represented on the Preparatory Commission to accept budgetary limitation of air armaments. See p. 334.
4. Minutes of the Political and Parliamentary Committee, 12 February 1931.
5. Among those who spoke at disarmament meetings on behalf of the Union were Henderson, Cecil, Noel-Baker, R. S. Hudson, and three admirals: S. R. Drury-Lowe, J. D. Allen and Mark Kerr.

have to reckon with 'a practically unanimous sentiment'.[1]

The Albert Hall meeting must rank as one of the most impressive political demonstrations of the inter-war years. It was preceded by a colourful procession, bedecked with banners and accompanied by four bands, from the Thames Embankment via Trafalgar Square. Among the three thousand marchers were members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the British Legion. The women outnumbered the men. Though the majority were those with memories of the First World War, young people, some bearing the flags of the nations, were well represented. Over eleven thousand filled the hall to hear the Prime Minister and two ex-Prime Ministers, Baldwin and Lloyd George. Thousands more heard the speeches relayed over loudspeakers in Kensington Gardens and at meetings in sixty different places as far apart as Aberdeen and Falmouth, Cromer and Carmarthen.[2]

Chairing the meeting, Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson,[3] the Chief of the Imperial General Staff for two of the most fateful years of the First World War, told the audience: 'As one who has passed pretty well half a century in the study and practice of war I suggest to you that you should give your support to Disarmament and so do your best to ensure the promotion of peace.'[4] Prime ministers and religious leaders might well be expected to issue a call for disarmament but for a Field-Marshal to do so was of a different order. Robertson's presence on the

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1. Cecil to Sir Godfrey Thomas, Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales, 7 May 1931, copy in Gilbert Murray Papers.

2. Reynolds's Illustrated News, Sunday Express, 12 July 1931, Daily Telegraph, Manchester Guardian and The Times, 13 July 1931. Annual Report of the Executive Committee to the General Council for 1931. Cecil to Murray, 16 July 1931, Gilbert Murray Papers.

3. Sir William Robertson, 1860-1933, the first Field-Marshal to rise from the ranks, CIGS, 1915-1918, created a Baronet and voted £10,000 by Parliament in 1919, had spoken for the Union on a number of previous occasions though as late as October 1921 he extolled the value of armaments. See Daily Telegraph, 20 October 1921.

4. Quoted by P. J. Noel-Baker: The Private Manufacture of Armaments, London, 1936, p. 20.

platform symbolised not only that curious relationship which the Union had established with many of the Services' elder statesmen but that peculiar characteristic of the disarmament movement in Britain, the support it received from many who had devoted their lives to the arts of war.

The meeting was a political demonstration with a religious flavour. Each of the three parties was represented by its leader. It had been engineered to demonstrate to the nation and the world that Britain's three political parties were united in their determination to achieve disarmament. Throughout the 1920s the Union had worked systematically to permeate the three parties to win them for the League and disarmament.

In its early years the Union had been dominated by men and women whose instincts were conservative and whose party allegiances seldom aligned them with the Labour party. Relations with Labour were far from cordial. MacDonald, who had been piqued because the Union had totally ignored him at its inception, remained hostile to it.[1] When in 1923 an honorary presidency was belatedly offered him, he rejected the offer.[2] In 1920 the head of the Union's Labour Department was rebuffed when he tried to bring about closer relations between the Labour party and the Union.[3] Labour was prepared to co-operate with the pacifist No More War Movement but not with the Union. When further overtures were made in 1922 the party's Advisory Committee on International Questions recommended their rejection.[4] Even in the late 1920s when Noel-Baker and a number of others were playing a prominent role in both the Union and the Labour party, suspicions lingered on. In September

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1. R. W. Lyman: The First Labour Government, London, 1957, p. 168n.
2. MacDonald to Murray, 9 and 12 July 1923; Murray to MacDonald, 10, 18 and 20 July 1923, Gilbert Murray Papers.
3. Lt.-Col. S. L. Murray, Head of the Union's Labour Department, to MacDonald, 15 May 1920, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/5/30.
4. Minutes of the ACIQ, 19 October 1922, LP/IAC/1/178.

1930, Philip Snowden[1] described the Union as 'a most harmful organisation' and Cecil as 'a Tory Jesuit'.[2] The Union was not particularly successful in bringing pressure to bear on the 1924 and 1929-1931 Labour governments. When a Union deputation consisting of Cecil, Walter Elliot and Vice-Admiral Drury-Lowe tried to persuade A. V. Alexander,[3] the First Lord of the Admiralty, to reconsider the government's naval construction programme in July 1930, it met with no success.[4]

If relations between the Union and the Labour party marginally improved during the 1920s, its relations with the Conservative party deteriorated, especially in the years of the second Baldwin government.[5] From the beginning many Conservatives had serious reservations about the League of Nations. The attitude of rank and file Conservative opinion is well illustrated by the comments of the Conservative MP for the Barnard Castle division of County Durham, Lieutenant-Colonel Cuthbert Headlam,[6] in 1925. On 19 April he noted: 'I worked late trying to prepare a speech for the League of Nations Union meeting at Frosterley[7]... One

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1. Philip Snowden, 1864-1937, Viscount Snowden (1932), Chairman of the ILP, 1903-16, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1924 and 1929-31, Lord Privy Seal, 1931-32.

2. Snowden to MacDonald, 27 September 1930, quoted by D. Carlton: MacDonald versus Henderson, London, 1970, p. 19.

3. A. V. Alexander, Viscount Alexander of Hillsborough (1950), 1885-1965, Labour and Co-operative MP for Sheffield, Hillsborough, 1922-31, 1935-50, Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade, 1924, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1929-31, 1940-45, 1945-47, Minister of Defence, 1947-50, formerly Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the Co-operative Congress. Served as a Captain in First World War. A Baptist lay preacher.

4. Minutes of the Political and Parliamentary Committee, 22 July 1930. Admiralty to League of Nations Union, 22 July 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51100.

5. See, for example, the attack on the Union in the Conservative party publication Hints for Speakers, in December 1927, entitled 'A Campaign of Misrepresentation'.

6. Lt.-Col. (Sir) Cuthbert Headlam, 1876-1964, Conservative MP for Barnard Castle, 1924-29, 1931-35, Newcastle upon Tyne, North, 1940-52, Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, 1926-29, Chairman of the National Union of Conservative Associations, 1941.

7. Frosterley, then in the Barnard Castle division, is a quarrying village with a population of just over one thousand in Weardale, County Durham.

must be polite about the League and try and believe that it really can do what its supporters urge...it is abundantly clear to any sensible human being that when once Germany - or any other great power for that matter...means to fight, she will do so, League or no League.'[1]

Cecil regretted that so many Union branches were controlled by those who were not members of the Conservative party.[2] Believing that the Conservatives would be in power for a number of years after their election victory in October 1924, he tried to ensure that the Conservative party was adequately represented on the Executive Committee. If the Union was to exert effective pressure on the government it was essential for the party to be well represented on the committee.[3] While a member of Baldwin's Cabinet, Cecil was careful not to associate himself with any of the Union's activities which ran counter to government policy. When the Union gave general support to the Geneva Protocol in the winter of 1924-25, he was careful to remain aloof. He also realised that his own position in the government would be jeopardised if there was a breach between the Executive Committee and the Cabinet.[4] After his resignation in August 1927 he worked hard to prevent a breach and only many months later reluctantly came to the conclusion that it could not be avoided. That did not prevent prominent young Conservatives such as Harold Macmillan[5] playing an active role in the Union's affairs while others

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1. Headlam Diaries, 19 (and 22) April 1925, Durham County Record Office, D/He/21.
2. Cecil to Davidson, 30 December 1927, copy in Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 55/57.
3. Cecil to Murray, 21 November 1924, Gilbert Murray Papers.
4. Cecil to Murray, 26 and 29 April 1926, Gilbert Murray Papers.
5. Harold Macmillan, 1894- , Conservative MP for Stockton on Tees, 1924-29, 1931-45, Bromley, 1945-64, a Conservative 'rebel' for most of the inter-war years and advocate of the 'Middle Way', he represented the government in North Africa for part of the Second World War, became Foreign Secretary in 1955, Chancellor of the Exchequer later that year, and Prime Minister in 1957. He resigned from the Union's Executive Committee in February 1929.

who either came to hold junior office such as Duff Cooper[1] and Walter Elliot[2] or had held it in the previous Baldwin administration like J. W. Hills continued to give it their support. Despite the efforts of these Conservative activists, relations between the party and the Union were strained when the December issue of the party publication Hints for Speakers described the Union's campaign for disarmament as 'a campaign of misrepresentation'. This prompted Cecil to warn the party's chairman, J. C. C. Davidson,[3] that if the Conservative party became identified with an anti-disarmament policy the electoral consequences might be extremely serious.[4]

Relations between the Union and the Conservative party did not improve when Labour came to power in 1929. Baldwin rebuffed several requests for support and only reluctantly agreed to speak at the Albert Hall demonstration when he learnt that both MacDonald and Lloyd George had pledged their support.[5]

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1. Alfred Duff Cooper, Viscount Norwich (1952), 1890-1954, Conservative MP for Oldham, 1924-29, St. George's, Westminster, 1931-45 winning a celebrated by-election to vindicate Baldwin in his struggle with the Press Lords, Beaverbrook and Rothermere in 1931, Financial Secretary to the War Office, 1928-29, 1931-34, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1934-35, Secretary of State for War, 1925-38, resigned over Munich, Minister of Information, 1940-41, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1941-44, Ambassador to France, 1944-47.

2. Walter Elliot, 1888-1958, Conservative MP for Lanark, 1918-23, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, 1924-45, 1950-58, Scottish Universities 1946-50, Under-Secretary for Health at the Scottish Office, 1923-24, 1924-26, Under-Secretary of State at the Scottish Office, 1926-29, Minister of Agriculture, 1932-36, Secretary of State for Scotland, 1936-38, Minister of Health, 1938-40.

3. J. C. C. Davidson, Viscount Davidson (1937), 1889-1970, private secretary to Bonar Law, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Baldwin, 1921-22, Conservative MP, Hemel Hempstead, 1920-23, 1924-37, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1923-24, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, 1924-27, Chairman of the Conservative Party, 1927-30. A close friend of Baldwin.

4. Cecil to Davidson, 20 December 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.

5. See especially the memoranda by Fry, 1 and 9 April 1931, Murray's request for a statement in favour of disarmament, 28 May, and Baldwin's refusal, 11 June. See also Royden to Baldwin, 31 March; Zangwill to Baldwin, 29 May and 2 September; Fry to Zangwill, 15 June; Duff Cooper to Fry, 12 November, and a memorandum by Fry,

[Contd. overleaf

However unsympathetic Baldwin himself might be towards the Union, the Conservative party could not afford to ignore it or the disarmament cause it had come to espouse. Sir Geoffrey Fry, Baldwin's private secretary, reminded him in a memorandum on 9 April 1931 that disarmament might well become an important issue at the next general election and some sort of policy ought to be laid down by the Conservative party.[1] Pressure was put on the Conservative party from the Union itself. Colonel Fisher of the Union's headquarters staff approached Sir Patrick Gower[2] of the Conservative and Unionist Central Office to counteract the impression that the Conservative party was wholly opposed to the Union. On 10 July 1931 Gower wrote to Geoffrey Lloyd,[3] one of Baldwin's private secretaries, saying that he thought there was something to be said in favour of the Leader (Baldwin) emphasising the importance of Conservatives taking an active interest in the Union. Only if Conservatives played a prominent part in the Union could they ensure that it was run on 'non-Party' lines.[4] Two months later Baldwin sent Fisher of the Union's headquarters staff a message stressing the importance of Conservatives participating in the County Federal Councils

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Fn. 5, p. 107 contd.
12 November 1931; Baldwin Papers, Vols. 115 and 133. On 30 May 1931 Lord Stonehaven, Chairman of the Conservative Party, sent party agents a reasoned rejection which Conservative MPs and parliamentary candidates might use if they were approached to support the Disarmament Declaration which the Union and a number of other organisations were then promoting. Baldwin papers, Vol. 115.

1. Baldwin Papers, Vol. 115.
2. Sir (Robert) Patrick Gower, 1887-1964, private secretary to Austen Chamberlain, 1919-22, and successively to Bonar Law, Baldwin and MacDonald as prime ministers, 1922-29, Chief Publicity Officer, Conservative and Unionist Central Office, 1929-39.
3. Geoffrey Lloyd, Lord Geoffrey-Lloyd (1974), 1902- , private secretary to Sir Samuel Hoare, 1926-29, private secretary to Baldwin, 1929-31, Conservative MP, Birmingham, Ladywood, 1931-45, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Baldwin, 1931-35, Secretary for Mines, 1939-40.
4. Gower to Lloyd, 10 July 1931, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 134.

which the Union was about to set up.[1] Austen Chamberlain was coaxed into taking an active interest in the Union, sitting on its Executive Committee from 1932 to 1935.[2]

Other Conservatives continued to play an important role in the Union's affairs but neither of the Conservative leaders of the 1930s disguised his distaste for the Union's activities. Baldwin described its propaganda as 'poppycock and mush'[3] and Neville Chamberlain, writing in February 1938, rejoiced that the Union's influence and membership was then in decline. It was, he said, the sort of body which always appealed 'more to academic Liberals and Socialists than to red-blooded Conservatives'.[4] No doubt he was right but there were others who regretted that the Conservative party had become estranged from the Union. In July 1941 Anthony Eden told R. A. Butler[5] that Baldwin had never given enough support to the Union.[6] Though Baldwin was impressed by its strength, particularly at the time of the Peace Ballot in 1934-35, unlike Churchill, he never aligned himself with it to try and redirect its energies into supporting rearmament

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1. Baldwin to Fisher, 16 September 1931, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 134. On 28 July Baldwin summoned Austen Chamberlain, J. W. Hills, Sir Thomas Inskip, Mrs. Blanche Dugdale, R. S. Hudson, Walter Elliot and Sir John Power to a meeting to discuss the party's relations with the Union. On 14 September J. W. Hills wrote to Baldwin to express his grave concern about the growing estrangement between the Conservative party and the Union.

2. Austen Chamberlain had been critical of the Union's activities in 1925 and at one time threatened to withdraw his support. On one occasion he described Gilbert Murray as 'that most conscientous and devoted soul but silly politician'. On another occasion he wrote: 'I have no love for professors in politics...they always think wrong.' Austen Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 21 June 1925 and 30 May 1931, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/356 and 540.

3. Baldwin to Austen Chamberlain, 17 February 1933, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 40/122.

4. Chamberlain to Headlam, 25 February 1938, Headlam Papers, Durham County Record Office, D/He/47/42.

5. R. A. Butler, Lord Butler of Saffron Walden (1965), 1902- , Under-Secretary of State for India, 1932-37, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour, 1937-38, Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 1938-41, Minister of Education, 1941-45, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1951-55, etc. Conservative MP for Saffron Walden, 1929-65.

6. R. A. Butler (Lord Butler): The Art of the Possible, London, 1971, p. 88.

as the most practical way of backing the League when disarmament was no longer a feasible policy for Britain to pursue.

If the Union was uncertain about its relationship with the Conservative and Labour parties it was never in any doubt about the loyalty of the Liberal party. Its first President was the former Liberal Foreign Secretary, Grey, and for most of the inter-war years its Chairman was the Liberal academic, Gilbert Murray. The Union also received strong support from those outposts of Liberalism, the nonconformist churches of England and Wales. By 1929 four hundred and sixty-three Congregational churches had taken out corporate membership of the Union and over two thousand churches and religious organisations were affiliated to it.[1] If the League of Nations was the product of European liberalism, the League of Nations Union was to a large extent a late flowering of the English liberal tradition.

The membership of the Executive Committee in 1927 throws some light on the relative strength of the three political parties in the League of Nations Union. It was made up of twenty Liberals, fourteen Conservatives, nine members of the Labour party and four or five of no known political affiliations. Most of the Liberals were former Asquithians. The Lloyd George faction was not prominent in the Union's affairs.[2] As the Executive Committee was elected annually by the branches its composition reflected to a large extent their views and allegiances. In January 1928 Gilbert Murray told Austen Chamberlain: 'It is a fact, though I regret it, that a disproportionate number of Union supporters are Liberals. The

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1. The figures for other denominations were Wesleyan Methodist, 437; Anglican, 354; Baptist, 195; Presbyterian, 169; Primitive Methodist, 114; United Methodist, 102; Independent Methodists, 12; Unitarians, 21; Society of Friends, 12; Roman Catholics, 8. Organisations such as the Brotherhood Movement in which Arthur Henderson was very active, were also affiliated to it. Minutes of the Christian Organisations Committee, 17 April 1929.

2. Cecil to Davidson, 30 December 1927, copy in Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 55/57.

Conservatives, unfortunately, hold aloof and the Labour party do the same because they...think us too Conservative'.[1] Neither the Conservative nor the Labour party had the weight in the Union's counsels to which their electoral support in the country entitled them. It is not altogether surprising that the Union never had the influence with the Conservative and Labour governments of the period to which it aspired.

The League of Nations Union was one among a number of organisations in Britain campaigning for disarmament.[2] Some had a much longer history than the Union and considerable experience in organising agitation before the First World War.

The National Council for the Prevention of War,[3] founded in 1904 but not officially constituted until 1908 as the National Peace Council - a name to which it was to revert in 1931 - profited from the long experience of such organisations as the British Peace Society, founded in 1816, and the International Arbitration and Peace Association of Great Britain and Ireland which came into existence in 1880.[4] It supported a number of disarmament campaigns such as the 1927 Ponsonby Peace Letter[5] and in

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1. Murray to Chamberlain, 6 January 1928, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 55/384.

2. On the suggestion of Miss Kathleen Courtney who, after the Second World War was to become President of the Union's successor, the United Nations Association, a Central Disarmament Bureau was set up in March 1931 with the services of a full-time organising secretary, Col. J. V. Delahaye, DSO, MC, to co-ordinate the activities of the various organisations working for disarmament.

3. It adopted this name in 1924.

4. K. G. Robbins: The Abolition of War, pp. 7-8; F. H. Hinsley: Power and the Pursuit of Peace, Cambridge, 1967, paperback edition, pp. 93-101, 109-11, 124-33; A. C. F. Beales: A History of Peace, London, 1931, passim; A. J. A. Morris: Radicalism against War, passim.

5. The Ponsonby Letter, called after its main sponsor, Arthur Ponsonby, was presented to the Prime Minister on 8 December 1927. It was signed by 128,770 people and read: 'We, the undersigned, convinced that all disputes between nations are capable of settlement either by diplomatic negotiations or by some form of international arbitration, hereby solemnly declare that we shall refuse to support or render war service to any Government which resorts to arms.' The Times, 9 December 1927.

1930 campaigned in its own right for large reductions in naval armaments and the abolition of the battleship. Though it could boast that hundreds of different organisations were affiliated to it,[1] its influence was slight in comparison with the League of Nations Union.[2]

One of the most active pacifist organisations of the 1920s was the No More War Movement. Founded in February 1921 by former members of the war-time No Conscription Fellowship, it was affiliated to the War Resisters' International formed by European pacifist organisations at The Hague a month later in March 1921. It had strong support in the ILP and succeeded in persuading the Labour party conference in 1926 to adopt a resolution in favour of war resistance.[3] Its members repudiated war by making a declaration stating: 'War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined: 1. not to support war or take part in any war, international or civil, 2. to work for total disarmament, the removal of all causes of war, and the establishment of a new social and international order based on the pacifist principle of co-operation for the common good.' By 1928 it had a membership of just under 140,000 and one hundred and fourteen branches. Despite the fact that it commanded considerable support among rank and file members of the Labour party, it did not enjoy the confidence of the party's leaders. Its attempt to canvas support for Russia's proposals for total disarmament in 1927[4] particularly antagonised MacDonald. It made virtually no impact on the Conservative and Liberal parties and its influence did not extend beyond

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1. By 1935 it could claim to represent three hundred and fifty organisations among them, the Boys' Brigade, Ethical Union, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Holiday Fellowship, National Association of Schoolmasters, Union of Democratic Control and the Union of Post Office Workers.

2. Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/91: Kenneth Ingram: Fifty Years of the National Peace Council, 1909-1958, London, n.d., passim.

3. See p. 65.

4. See pp. 65-6.

those who adopted a pacifist standpoint. In 1937 it merged with the Peace Pledge Union.[1]

Much smaller but equally active in the pacifist cause was the British section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Founded at The Hague in April 1915 as an offshoot of the International Suffrage Alliance, a well-established organisation with a strong pacifist bias, the League never became a body with a mass membership. By 1926 its membership in forty different countries was a mere 50,000. The British section, which attracted a number of women prominent in public life,[2] was among the largest. It insisted that only total and universal disarmament would be effective. It campaigned against conscription and, true to its pacifist principles, actively opposed the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance. Perhaps its most spectacular demonstration in favour of disarmament was the Peace Pilgrimage it organised in England in the summer of 1926. Setting out from places as distant from one another as the North of Scotland and Lands End, its seven columns converged on London on 18 June for a massive demonstration in Hyde Park. From twenty-two different platforms speakers representing all three political parties commended its twin objectives: the summoning of a world disarmament conference and Britain's signature of the Optional Clause in the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice. En route for London the peace pilgrims held meetings in a thousand different towns and villages, persuaded hundreds of churches to hold special peace services, and attracted during the course of the pilgrimage considerable local and

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1. Walter H. Ayles, Financial and Organising Secretary, to MacDonald, 29 October and 17 November 1928; MacDonald to Ayles, 6 November 1928; Lucy Cox, General Secretary, to MacDonald, 20 February 1928, and Cox to Rosenberg, MacDonald's secretary, 6 March 1928; MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/31. W. J. Chamberlain: Fighting for Peace. The Story of the War Resistance Movement, London, 1929; Grace M. Beaton: Twenty Years Work in the War Resisters' International, London, 1945; K. G. Robbins: The Abolition of War, pp. 210-11.

2. Among them Mrs. Philip Snowden, Mrs. H. M. Swanwick, Miss Ellen Wilkinson, Dr. Maude Royden, and Miss Catherine Marshall.

national press coverage. Prominent in the demonstration was the young actress, Sybil Thorndike. On 6 July the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, received a deputation from the pilgrimage. In 1931 the Women's International League was to be in the vanguard of the campaign for disarmament. Though it was rebuffed by Baldwin it collected one and a half million signatures for its international disarmament petition.[1]

Of all the peace organisations in 1918, none was at that time more influential than the Union of Democratic Control. Founded in the autumn of 1914 by such radical members of the Liberal party as Arthur Ponsonby and Charles Trevelyan and with the support of MacDonald and a few others in the Labour party, it campaigned principally for the parliamentary control of foreign policy but also for self-determination, a league of nations, to replace all military alliances, and the limitation of armaments. By 1918 it had almost a hundred branches, an individual membership of ten thousand, and an affiliated membership of 650,000, mainly in the ILP and the trade union movement. Within a year of the Armistice it had shrunk to thirty-two branches and another twenty-three groups. After the death of E. D. Morel, its brilliant organiser, it ceased to make any great impact outside the ranks of the Labour Movement. The extent to which it had influenced the Labour party has already been indicated.[2] Another indication of its importance can perhaps be seen in the fact that nine members of the Cabinet and fifteen members of the government formed by MacDonald in 1924 were members or former members of the UDC.[3]

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1. Royden to Baldwin, 31 March 1931; Zangwill to Baldwin, 29 May and 2 September 1931; Baldwin Papers, Vol. 115. Among Conservatives who backed the petition were Lady Astor, Lord Lytton, Duff Cooper and J. W. Hills. See G. Bussey and M. Tims: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965, London, 1965, passim.

2. See p. 57.

3. M. Swartz: The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War, passim. 'The Work of the Union of Democratic Control' The Secretary's Report, October 1919. See also L. W. Martin: Peace without Victory, New Haven, Conn., 1958, pp. 54-60, and C. H. Rolph: Kingsley, The Life, Letters and Diaries of Kingsley Martin, London, 1973, p. 71 et seq.

Other organisations, not associated with the peace movement played a not insignificant part in promoting disarmament. Foremost among them was the British Legion whose membership even surpassed that of the League of Nations Union. Prominent among those presenting petitions at the opening of the world disarmament conference in February 1932 as well as in the Union's disarmament demonstration in London in July 1931 were members of the British Legion. In the October issue of the monthly magazine British Legion, Lieutenant-Colonel G. R. Crosfield, Chairman of the Legion's National Executive Committee, wrote: 'The old adage "if you wish for peace, prepare for war"...contains...a real danger to minds which have not the leisure or the capacity to probe deeper...A safer recipe and a much truer one is "if you want peace, then work for it".' Moving the annual report at the Legion's 1929 conference, Crosfield said that he made no apology for putting peace first because organised ex-servicemen co-operating together throughout the world could do an immense amount to facilitate the cause for which the League of Nations stood. As early as 1924 the Legion in its questionnaire put to all parliamentary candidates had asked: 'Are you in sympathy with and will you support the League of Nations?'[1]

Even the Navy League whose first objective was 'to enlist on Imperial and National grounds the support of all classes in maintaining the Navy at the requisite standard of strength...with the object of securing British prestige on every sea and in every port of the World' felt obliged in 1928 to join with the Air League of the British Empire in issuing a joint manifesto supporting disarmament. It began: 'We endorse the great ideal of a general limitation of armaments. But we feel that such disarmament is only practicable on the basis of its being general and simultaneously progressive...' Though some of its members were

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1. British Legion, passim. Worthington-Evans Papers, Box 5.

critical of the League of Nations and wished to have no dealings with the League of Nations Union, its general secretary did not refuse the Union's invitation to sit on its first disarmament committee.[1] The staunchest champions of British naval power were not unmoved by the agitation for disarmament. Such was the all-pervasive influence of the disarmament movement in Britain in the 1920s.[2]

Within two or three years of its foundation, the League of Nations Union had eclipsed in importance and influence those other organisations which were also working to win the British people for a peace programme. By 1923 it had become a far from negligible factor in British politics. When Baldwin formed his first administration in May 1923 he appointed Cecil Lord Privy Seal with responsibility for League affairs. Though Cecil had enhanced his reputation during the war as Minister responsible for the blockade in both the Asquith and Lloyd George coalition governments, it is doubtful whether he would have re-entered ministerial office in so senior position if it were not for the influence of the Union. A month later Balfour resigned as one of the Union's Presidents. Explaining his reasons to Cecil, he described the Union 'as a very widespread organisation - probably, at certain moments, wielding considerable electoral power'.[3] There can be no doubt that Baldwin and the Conservative party came to believe this in the years 1927 and 1931. Though the

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1. See p. 85 above. The 26th Annual Report for the year 1921, London, 1922 reports a special General Council in February 1922 in which (Sir) Patrick Hannon, Conservative MP for the Moseley division of Birmingham, an armaments manufacturer and prominent member of the Navy League, moved a motion which included the clause 'The Navy League shall cease forthwith all association, direct or indirect, with the League of Nations Union or any similar organisation or body.' Carried by 31 votes to 22 with 12 abstentions it was no doubt intended to be a rebuke to the League's general secretary. It is doubtful whether such a motion would have been carried later in the decade.

2. The 33rd Annual Report for the year, 1928, London, 1929, contains the joint manifesto on disarmament.

3. Balfour to Cecil, 4 June 1923, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51071.

government's failure to deal effectively with unemployment and other 'bread-and-butter' issues was largely responsible for Baldwin's defeat in 1929, it was the Union, first and foremost, which brought disarmament to the fore as a major political question. That disarmament was an issue in the election is not in dispute. The manifestos of the three political parties leave us in no doubt. Disarmament was not an issue which the politicians could ignore. Having set out to win the election on a domestic platform, Baldwin was forced to devote more and more time to peace and disarmament in the course of the campaign.[1]

The League of Nations Union was founded in the heady days of post-war optimism when many confidently believed that the world had been made safe for the peace-loving democracies. The corollary of that belief was that henceforth public opinion would be the most potent factor in international politics. Many assumed that the war had deprived potentates and kings, bureaucracies and military élites not only of their power but their right to decide the fate of nations. Sovereignty at last resided in the people. It would be the responsibility of voluntary organisations like the Union to ensure that they were not cheated of their newly-acquired birthright.

The Union devoted much thought and time to a whole host of issues such as education for world citizenship, economic relations between the nations, industrial peace, conditions of employment and social insurance in Britain and throughout the world, the opium trade, and intellectual co-operation, but it saw its main purpose as being the mobilisation of public opinion behind the League and disarmament. It hoped by so doing to ensure that British foreign policy conformed with the principles of the Covenant.

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1. A comparison between Baldwin's Drury Lane speech on 18 April 1929, opening the campaign and specially prepared by a committee of leading Conservatives, and his later speeches and articles, some almost entirely devoted to peace and disarmament, brings out the shift in emphasis.

The Union was among the first to recognise the intimate connection between international disarmament and collective security. Its failure to persuade the British government to back the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol, had a sobering effect on its efforts to get the British people to take seriously the more onerous part of their League responsibilities. Though it did not cease to direct the nation's attention to both arbitration and security as two essential pillars of lasting peace, it concentrated its energies on seeking to secure the wholehearted support of the British people for disarmament.

Although it failed in its task of seeking to determine the course of British foreign policy it acted as a constraint on the freedom of successive governments. It reached the peak of its influence in 1934-35, the years of the Peace Ballot and the Abyssinian crisis, when it helped to make foreign policy a major issue in the 1935 general election campaign. Throughout the years 1919 to 1935 it was far more successful in mobilising public opinion than the other peace organisations of the day. Unlike them it fastened on the fact that abhorrence of war was a feature common to both Left and Right in British politics. More than any other pressure group of the inter-war years it cut across social and political barriers. By bringing men and women of different political persuasions and differing social backgrounds into one movement, it came nearer to creating a national consensus than perhaps any other organisation of the twentieth century.

P A R T I I

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LIMITATION OF ARMAMENTS:

BRITISH WAR AIMS AND THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

There was a marked reluctance on the part of the Asquith government to formulate a set of war aims in the first two years of the First World War.[1] It defended its decision to go to war by portraying the conflict as a crusade against Prussian militarism for the maintenance of 'public right' in Europe. On 19 September 1914 Lloyd George described the war as a war 'for the emancipation of Europe from the thraldom of a military caste'[2] and in a speech at the Guildhall on 9 November Asquith declared that Britain was fighting to secure four objectives: the restoration of Belgium's independence, French security against aggression, adequate guarantees of the independence of small nations, and the destruction of Prussian militarism.[3] Though not entirely absent from the thoughts and correspondence of Sir Edward Grey,[4] the Foreign Secretary, arms limitation did not figure in the ministerial statements of the Asquith government. Except in the newly created Union of Democratic Control, the well-established ILP, and the editorial offices of the Liberal periodicals

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1. V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914-1918, Oxford, 1971, pp. 18-19.
2. E. R. Jones (ed.): Selected Speeches on British Foreign Policy, 1738-1914, London, 1914, p. 549.
3. H. H. Asquith: 'Justice of Our Cause' and 'The Duty of Everyman': Four Speeches, London, 1914, p. 224.
4. G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, pp. 25-29; L. W. Martin: Peace without Victory, p. 94; K. Robbins: Sir Edward Grey, London, 1971, pp. 336-48.

the Economist and The Nation,[1] the pre-war quest for arms limitation was forgotten as the emotional and physical energies of the British people were galvanised to destroy Germany's military power and, as some idealists suggested, to fight 'the war to end wars'.[2]

On the eve of war, Grey warned the Commons that Britain could not afford to allow the whole of western Europe to fall under the domination of a single power. Throughout the war years the restoration of the European balance of power was the main objective of British policy. Though it was Germany's Weltpolitik which made a clash between the Wilhelmine and British empires virtually inevitable, it was the post-war settlement of Europe which engrossed the attention of British policy makers. Despite the fact that the threat which Germany posed to British imperial interests beyond Europe was never far from the thoughts of Britain's statesmen, Europe was still regarded as the centre of the world even by the imperially-minded British nation.

In August 1916 Asquith invited the members of the Cabinet's War Committee to define Britain's war aims. The possibility of a negotiated peace settlement arising from President Wilson's efforts to mediate between the belligerents and unduly optimistic forecasts by the General Staff of an early ending to the war, forced the Foreign Office to consider what Britain's priorities in a peace settlement ought to be.[3] Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, responded to Asquith's invitation with a memorandum which envisaged a return to the conditions of Bismarck's Europe. With a marked anti-Slav and anti-French bias, Robertson suggested that Germany should retain her military and

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1. G. R. Crosby: Disarmament and Peace in British Politics, 1914-1919, Cambridge, Mass., 1957, pp. 18-42; K. Robbins: The Abolition of War, pp. 49-50, 60, 94.
2. H. G. Wells coined the phrase 'the war to end wars' in September 1914.
3. H. I. Nelson: Land and Power. British and Allied Policy on Germany's Frontiers, 1916-1919, London, 1963, p. 8; V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 38-42.

political predominance in Europe as the price for surrendering her claims to world power status.[1] Balfour, at that time First Lord of the Admiralty but soon to replace Grey at the Foreign Office, preferred to balance a strong Germany against a powerful Russia. Fearful lest Germany remain truculent and aggressive, Balfour proposed that Britain should form an Anglo-French-Belgian alliance and insist on Germany ceding Alsace-Lorraine to France. Balfour concluded: 'If, therefore, Europe after the War is to be an armed camp, the peace of the world will depend, as heretofore, on defensive alliances, formed by those who desire to retain their possessions against those who desire to increase them.'[2] Preoccupied with the European balance of power and Britain's imperial interests, neither Robertson nor Balfour believed that the war would lead to a reduction in national armaments.

Far more radical in outlook were two memoranda, one by the senior Foreign Office advisers, Sir Ralph Paget[3] and Sir William Tyrrell,[4] and the other by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Lord Robert Cecil, who since February 1916 had been minister responsible for the blockade with a seat in Asquith's Cabinet. In a

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1. D. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. I, pp. 497-503; H. I. Nelson: Land and Power, pp. 8-14.

2. CAB 37/157, 4 October 1916. Balfour expressly excluded 'such subjects as restriction of armaments, the freedom of the seas, and the revision of international law' but in speculating on 'the unforeseeable and unpredictable future' he suggested that 'universal bankruptcy' might destroy 'universal armaments'. In January 1916 in a memorandum entitled 'Irresponsible reflections on the part which the pacific nations might play in discouraging future wars' Balfour had briefly discussed national self-determination, the limitation of armaments, and an 'Anti-War Federation' only to conclude that none of them held out much hope for the future. FO 899/3.

3. Sir Ralph Spencer Paget, 1864-1940, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1913-16, British ambassador to Denmark, 1916-18, Brazil, 1918-20.

4. Sir William George Tyrrell, Lord Tyrrell (1929), 1866-1947, Private Secretary to Sir Edward Grey, 1907-15, member of the Phillimore Committee, 1917-18, Head of the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department, 1918, Under-Secretary of State, 1919-25, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, 1925-28, British ambassador to France, 1928-34. Tyrrell lost both his elder and his younger sons in the war. A Roman Catholic.

fifteen page memorandum of which three pages were devoted to disarmament, Paget and Tyrrell proposed a fundamental reconstruction of the map of Europe by applying the principle of national self-determination. Whereas Robertson and Balfour had looked to the balance of power, Paget and Tyrrell pointed to arbitration and disarmament as the best means of preserving peace. Peace, they suggested, was the most important of all British interests. They recognised that though public opinion in Britain would probably support disarmament there was little hope of Germany accepting it if the war resulted in a stalemate. If, however, Germany was defeated, her people might come to question the axiom 'that the safety of a State is exclusively secured in proportion to the extent of its armaments'. If the Allies convinced the German people that might was not right they would have achieved one of the essential elements in securing a reduction of armaments. Much would depend on the support of the United States, the establishment of a league of nations prepared to use force against a nation breaking its covenants, and the growth of a new international morality, however slow that might be. No scheme for the settlement of Europe after the war would be acceptable, they concluded, which did not concern itself with the question of disarmament.[1]

A month later Cecil circulated a memorandum which argued that neither the destruction of Prussian militarism nor a territorial settlement based on the principle of nationality would guarantee peace. Only a regularised and mandatory conference system - a league of nations - could preserve peace. Cecil's first draft, influenced no doubt by his Foreign Office colleagues Paget and Tyrrell, advocated disarmament but so devastating were the criticisms levelled against his proposals by his friend,

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1. 'Suggested Basis for a Territorial Settlement in Europe', 7 August 1916, CAB 42/17 and CAB 29/1. V. H. Rothwell (British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 44) suggests that it was the work of a small Foreign Office committee of whom Paget and Tyrrell were the most senior members.

Sir Eyre Crowe,[1] that he decided to delete all reference to disarmament in the memorandum circulated to the Cabinet.[2] Like all his Cabinet colleagues with the exception of Lloyd George, Cecil came to believe that disarmament would have to be relegated to be one of mankind's more distant and remote aspirations. He was, in fact, to remain sceptical about disarmament until after the League was established in 1920.

Crowe's criticisms of Cecil's proposals were circulated in the Foreign Office and subsequently in the Cabinet in a lengthy and cogently argued memorandum. So persuasive were his arguments that little attention was paid to Paget and Tyrrell's advocacy of disarmament. Lloyd George alone among British statesmen was prepared to say that Crowe had not said the last word on disarmament. In the years 1916 to 1931 Crowe's arguments were to be echoed time and again by those who were sceptical about disarmament. His memorandum must, therefore, rank as one of the most formidable documents in the history of British disarmament policy.[3]

Crowe conceded that the proposition 'that the world would be as secure and each nation as strong relatively to the rest if their armaments were proportionately reduced' was a most attractive one. The burden of his argument was, however, that as soon as any attempt was made to put theory into practice, insuperable difficulties arose. Even if the

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1. Sir Eyre Alexander Barby Crowe, 1864-1925, born and educated in Germany, author of the influential Foreign Office 'Memorandum on the present state of British relations with France and Germany' in 1907, secretary to the British delegation at The Hague Peace Conference, 1907, a British delegate at the 1908 International Maritime Conference in London called to codify the laws of maritime warfare, a strong upholder of the Admiralty point of view and instrumental in securing the rejection of the Declaration of London, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1912, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, 1920-25. After his death in 1925 Baldwin described him as 'the ablest servant of the Crown'.

2. CAB 27/626, September 1916 and Cecil Papers BL Add. Mss. 51102. For a discussion of Cecil's proposals for a league of nations and earlier proposals by Haldane and Balfour see G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, pp. 34-9.

3. 'Notes by Sir Eyre Crowe on Lord R. Cecil's Proposals for the Maintenance of Future Peace', 12 October 1916, FO 371/3082.

manpower of national armies could be limited by minute regulation, Crowe argued, such limitations could be easily offset by the deployment of more effective weapons and improved techniques of war. If some weapons were banned, states would produce others not proscribed in the disarmament treaty. Not even budgetary limitation could inhibit the development of military science nor could anything limit the inventiveness of man.

There were two more serious objections. International supervision was an impossible dream so enforcement would depend on the good faith of all the signatories. Secondly, proportionate reductions in existing levels of national armaments would not meet with general approval because they would freeze the status quo indefinitely. Schemes for regional disarmament were impracticable because sooner or later a non-signatory state would challenge one or other of the disarmed nations. Crowe concluded by urging in the strongest terms that Britain should refrain from bringing forward any scheme for the limitation of armaments.

It was in 1916 that the appalling cost of the war came home to the British people. Tyrrell, like many others in public life, had lost a son in the fighting. The newspapers were full of casualty lists. The bloodshed led Cecil to call for a league of nations, Lansdowne to plead for a negotiated peace,[1] and Paget and Tyrrell to demand disarmament.

For over a year the UDC and the ILP had been arguing that the adoption of arbitral procedures and reductions in national armaments were essential if future conflicts were to be averted. It is not easy to gauge whether their arguments made any impression on the Cabinet and the Foreign Office

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1. Lansdowne, the former Conservative Foreign Secretary and Minister without Portfolio in Asquith's coalition government, criticised Lloyd George's 'knock-out blow' interview. 'Generations will have to come and go before the country recovers from the loss which it has sustained in human beings, and from the financial ruin and the destruction of the means of production which are taking place', he argued. CAB 37/159, 13 November 1916. A year later, when no longer in the government, Lansdowne wrote a letter to the Daily Telegraph reiterating his arguments, made a year earlier to the Cabinet, for a negotiated peace. Britain, he believed, would never be in a position to dictate the peace terms.

but it would be ironical if they were able to influence the President of the United States without making any impact on policy makers in Britain.[1] It is a strange coincidence that on 15 July 1916, three weeks before Paget and Tyrrell circulated their memorandum, The Nation called on the British government to make disarmament one of its war aims.

Like Paget and Tyrrell, Lloyd George believed that if the war resulted in a stalemate the chances for disarmament would be slim. In September 1916 he gave an interview to an American newspaper correspondent in which he repudiated the idea of a negotiated peace and called on the Allies to deliver a 'knock-out blow' to ensure that Germany was adequately chastised for her aggressive policies. Lloyd George was the chief spokesman of those who believed that there could be no lasting peace until Germany was forced to repent of her militarist past.

When British and Dominion statesmen gathered in London on 20 March 1917 for the first meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet Lloyd George told them: 'The conviction must be planted in the minds of the civilised world - a conviction that will ripen into an instinct - that all wars of aggression are impossible enterprises; that they accomplish nothing but the destruction of the aggressor. Men must in future be taught to shun war as every civilised being shuns murder... That is the only sure foundation for any league of peace.'[2]

Lloyd George had become convinced that two objectives - the destruction of German militarism and the democratisation of Europe - outweighed all others. Territorial issues were of secondary importance in comparison.

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1. L. W. Martin in Peace without Victory has convincingly demonstrated Wilson's debt to radical opinion in Britain during the First World War. Neither V. H. Rothwell in British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy (p. 1) nor K. Robbins in The Abolition of War (p. 133) believe that the Cabinet was greatly influenced by these radical pressures before the end of 1917.

2. D. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. I, pp. 1049-50. See also H. I. Nelson: Land and Power, pp. 16-21, and V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 70.

He was, however, under no illusion that the destruction of German militarism and the democratisation of Europe would of themselves guarantee peace. The war had deepened his long-standing distaste for armaments and his dislike of the military. In his view, if Britain eventually succeeded in destroying German military power but failed to halt the growth of national armaments, the sacrifices being made by the British people would have been in vain. Others, equally appalled by the bloodshed and just as fearful of the prospect of future wars, drew different conclusions. Many of them looked not to the limitation of national armaments but to an institutionalised system of conference diplomacy which would substitute conciliation and arbitration for war. In the last two years of the war it was the league idea, not disarmament, which captured the public imagination and made a considerable impact on official thinking. Lloyd George's colleagues differed widely on what the precise function of a league should be and with what powers it should be invested.[1] Whether it should be an instrument of coercion or an instrument of conciliation few, if any, assumed that it would, in the foreseeable future, bring about a sizeable reduction in national armaments. Lloyd George alone among British statesmen regarded disarmament as other than a distant dream.

The Imperial War Cabinet did not share Lloyd George's commitment to disarmament. Its sub-committee[2] set up to consider the British

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1. For a full examination of official attitudes to the league idea in the years 1916-1918 see G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, pp. 35-79.

2. The Imperial War Cabinet set up two sub-committees, one chaired by Curzon to discuss territorial war aims and the other chaired by Milner to discuss economic and non-territorial war aims. The Curzon committee advocated a moderate peace settlement which would not unduly weaken Germany while at the same time safeguarding British imperial interests. Among the members of the Milner committee were the Canadian prime minister, Sir Robert Borden, the historian and President of the Board of Education in Lloyd George's government, H. A. L. Fisher, the Labour leader, Arthur Henderson, the Colonial

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Empire's economic and non-territorial war aims was more concerned lest hatred of war, which they said had grown a 'millionfold' since August 1914, might in the future lead to inadequate defence preparations. Despite the fact that Britain was at that moment fighting for her survival against a German U-boat campaign designed to starve her into submission, the committee ruled against any attempt being made to abolish submarines. They grudgingly conceded that some form of international machinery for the prevention of war should be established but they warned that it would be most harmful if 'it fostered the idea that any serious risk of future war had passed away'.[1]

When its report was discussed by the Imperial War Cabinet on 26 April 1917, Lloyd George was the only person to express regret that it had failed to make any positive recommendations about disarmament. There would be great disappointment at the end of the war, he said, if it was thought that nothing could be done to limit armaments. Five days later he told them that, to a large extent, the war had been caused by a great and highly professional army, the German army, exciting public opinion and eagerly seeking to test its strength. He would replace such armies by militias, essentially non-provocative in character and organised solely for defence. Lloyd George's remarks drew from his colleagues the comment that if land armies were reduced similar reductions would be demanded in naval armaments. Money saved on land forces would be money available for increased naval armaments to challenge British

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Fn. 2, p. 126 contd.

Secretary, Walter Long, the South African Minister of Defence, General Smuts, and the New Zealand Minister of Finance, Sir Joseph Ward. Thomas Jones acted as secretary. L. S. Amery was his counterpart in the Curzon committee and seems to have been the more influential of the two in the drafting of the reports.

1. CAB 23/40 and CAB 21/71. See also W. K. Hancock and J. van der Poel: Selections from the Smuts Papers, Vol. III, Cambridge, 1966, Document No. 738 for the draft of its paragraph on the league and T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. I, pp. 29-34 for a fairly full summary of its proceedings. D. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. I, pp. 1066-7 gives a summary of the report.

sea power. Opposition to disarmament in Britain was particularly strong among those who believed that British naval supremacy was not merely a vital national interest but also an important guarantee of world peace. Crowe had criticised Cecil for advocating a revival of pre-war conference diplomacy because, he alleged, at the Second Hague Peace Conference in 1907 almost the whole of the conference's energies had been directed towards weakening British sea power.[1] Crowe and those who thought like him believed that the outcome of any disarmament treaty would be a relative weakening of British power and influence. Nevertheless, Lloyd George succeeded in persuading the Imperial War Cabinet to agree to the inclusion of disarmament on the agenda of any future discussions with the United States government on a league of nations though neither Cecil, Henderson nor Smuts, subsequently to be three of the foremost champions of arms limitation, supported him.[2]

In 1917 the fortunes of the Allied powers were at their lowest ebb. There were mutinies in the French army and Russia sued for peace. General Staff manpower projections predicted that, if the war continued to the end of 1919, Britain would only be capable of putting 23 divisions in the field compared with America's 120 and France's 40. In August 1917 the government became so alarmed by pacifist propaganda and the war weariness of the British people that it set up the National War Aims Committee to counter these tendencies. In December the Labour party and trade union movement warned the government that the price for their continued support of the war effort was a clear statement of war aims which they could approve. Prompted as much by statements emanating from the Central Powers at the opening of their peace negotiations with the Bolsheviks at Brest-Litovsk as by domestic pressures in Britain, the government, in the last days of

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1. 12 October, FO 371/3082.
2. CAB 23/40.

1917, set to work to formulate a list of war aims which Lloyd George incorporated in a speech to a trade union conference on manpower in the Caxton Hall, Westminster, on 5 January 1918. Though the speech was a considered statement of war aims its main purpose was to intensify the war effort.

Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech could justly claim to represent a national consensus on Britain's war aims. Based on drafts by Cecil and Smuts it was composed after the Prime Minister had held careful consultations with Asquith, Grey, a Labour party deputation, and his own Cabinet. In his speech, Lloyd George denied that Britain wished to destroy Germany or Austria-Hungary nor was it her intention to deprive the Ottoman Empire of any of its Turkish territories. In its dealings with friend and foe alike the British government was committed to the principle of national self-determination. It also sought 'some international organisation to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war'. Lloyd George described 'the crushing weight of modern armaments, the increasing evil of military service, and the vast waste of wealth and effort involved in warlike preparation' as blots on western civilisation 'of which every thinking individual must be ashamed'.[1]

The reasons which British leaders in the First World War gave as to its justification were frequently spurious in that they were often presented as primarily beneficial to other countries rather than to Britain herself.[2] British foreign policy during the war was formulated to promote British

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1. CAB 23/5; W. K. Hancock: Smuts, Vol. 1, Cambridge, 1968, p. 471; T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. 1, pp. 42-3; D. Lloyd George: War Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 1510-17; V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 147-53. Sir Ian Malcolm, one of Balfour's secretaries, put a different slant on the speech when he informed Balfour that 'L. G's speech has been well received but not enthusiastically. The only cheers were for those passages about Alsace-Lorraine and standing by France to the death.' Malcolm to Balfour, 5 January 1918, Balfour Papers, BL Add. Mss. 49748.

2. V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 287.

interests. Lloyd George never seriously believed that Germany would accept the conditions outlined in his speech. He was, none the less, bidding for the support of liberal opinion throughout the world and seeking to lay the foundations of an Anglo-American partnership which would exercise a dominant role in the peacemaking.

Less than a month after making his Caxton Hall speech Lloyd George told the Allied Supreme War Council that nobody was bound by a speech.[1] The significance of the speech should, therefore, be sought not so much in what it revealed about the objectives of the British government as in Lloyd George's perception of the popular aspirations of the British people at the beginning of 1918. It reflected the domestic constraints which a democratically elected government in Britain had come to experience in the conditions of waging twentieth century total war. Large sections of the British public had come to question whether the European balance of power and British imperial interests could fully justify the kind of losses Britain had sustained in the course of the war. More than any of his colleagues Lloyd George was acutely sensitive to the popular mood. That was to be amply demonstrated in the closing weeks of 1918 by his electoral victory in the 'coupon' election.

When the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918 a general election in Britain was long overdue. The short campaign which preceded the election was dominated by the efforts of competing candidates to satisfy the vindictive passions of the British people which victory had unleashed. Though candidates vied with one another in demanding reparations and the execution of the Kaiser, they were forced to pledge themselves to work for the abolition of conscription at the earliest possible opportunity. It was Lloyd George who made conscription more than an issue of British domestic politics. He told an audience at the Colston Hall, Bristol on

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1. Minutes of Supreme War Council, 2 February 1918, CAB 25/120; V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, p. 285.

11 December that the forthcoming peace conference would be a farce and a sham if it did nothing to abolish conscription. 'The first thing to do, believe me,' he said, 'is to prevent a repetition of the blunders of the past by making it impossible for the great conscript armies to exist in the future.'[1] On the eve of the election he issued a statement in which he said: 'I wish to make it clear beyond all doubt that I stand for the abolition of conscription in all lands.... These great military machines are responsible for the agony the world has passed through, and it would be a poor ending to any peace conference that allowed them to continue.'[2]

Although a small group of dedicated Englishmen had campaigned for the introduction of compulsory military service in the decade before the war, most people in Britain regarded conscription as an evil. In 1916 the trade union movement had only reluctantly agreed to it and the Liberal party had been deeply divided by the Asquith government's decision to introduce conscription. It was widely believed that conscription as much as increased military expenditure had enabled the continental land powers to prepare for war in the years before 1914. Nations like Britain which relied on voluntary enlistment demonstrated their peaceful intentions because, it was argued, they would never be in a position to launch an aggressive war. There was a deep distrust of standing armies going back to the time of Cromwell. The war reinforced the conviction that conscription was not only a violation of personal liberty but a contributory cause of war.

The Paris Peace Conference

When the delegations of the Allied and Associated powers gathered in Paris in January 1919 there was no clearly defined joint programme

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1. The Times, 12 December 1918.
2. Quoted by R. Chaput: Disarmament in British Foreign Policy, London, 1935, p. 253.

for peace despite the existence of the Fourteen Points. The three great European victor powers, Britain, France and Italy, which had endured immense privations and made enormous sacrifices to win the war, were in no mood to forgo the spoils of war in the interests of a peace of reconciliation. Europe was in a state of disarray. Three empires had collapsed. A fourth - the Ottoman Empire - was in the process of disintegration creating a power vacuum in the Middle East which British 'imperialists' were only too ready to fill. Fighting was to continue during the first half of 1919 in Russia, the Baltic region and in parts of central and eastern Europe. Conditions were such that no lasting political equilibrium could be established because Russia and the successor states were unknown quantities in the new balance of power created by the war. Russia which had contributed much to the eventual defeat of the Central Powers was absent from the peacemaking and the United States which had contributed little to the military victory of the Allied and Associated powers exercised great influence. Political conflict and social unrest in the United States, Britain, France and Italy weakened the authority of the principal peacemakers and deflected their attention from the problems of peacemaking. Within four years of the end of the war all four had fallen from power, Orlando[1] of Italy before the conference came to an end. The war aims which had been carefully fashioned during the course of the war seemed scarcely relevant in the harsh conditions facing Europe in the winter of 1919.

Throughout the four years of war, the defeat of Germany had been Britain's major objective. All others, in retrospect, pale into insignificance. As late as the winter of 1918 the prospect of a German sphere of influence stretching from the North Sea across central Europe and southern Russia to the borders of India loomed menacingly in the

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1. Vittorio Emmanuele Orlando, 1860-1952, leader of the Italian delegation to the Peace Conference, Prime Minister of Italy, 1917-19.

minds of British policy makers only to disappear in the dissolution and general collapse of the Central Powers in the autumn of 1918. With the removal of that threat the British government was subjected to a number of domestic and external pressures which pulled it in diametrically different directions. Parliament and the public clamoured for rapid demobilisation and large cuts in public, including defence, expenditure. Marshal Foch,[1] the supreme allied commander responsible for imposing the armistice terms on Germany, was demanding an enormous British army of occupation to deter German violations of the armistice. The Admiralty were insisting on the destruction of Germany's submarine fleet and a large proportion of her surface vessels. There were obligations to the Dominions which could not be gainsaid and in the course of the war Britain had entered into secret commitments to her allies which, however unpalatable, she felt bound to honour.

It was against this background of competing pressures that the British Empire delegation had to formulate a set of objectives. These came to include German reparations to meet the cost not only of physical damage, such as the loss of merchant ships, but of pensions and allowances to those disabled or widowed as a result of the war, the retention of those German colonies which Australia, New Zealand and South Africa had acquired during the war, and the acquisition of the strategically-placed Palestine and the oil-rich Mosul from the Ottoman Empire. The British government felt little enthusiasm for the absorption of former German colonial territories into the British Empire but it was not possible to resist the claims of the Dominion governments. Though Lloyd George and some of his colleagues wished to acquire former Turkish territories in

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1. Ferdinand Foch, 1851-1929, Chief of the French General Staff, 1916, Commander of the Allied armies in France, 1918, chief French military representative at the Paris peace conference and the most outspoken advocate of depriving Germany of the west bank of the Rhine.

the Middle East, Bonar Law[1] and others did not share this passion. Only a small minority of statesmen and their advisers realised, however, that the jealousy of other nations towards the British Empire was an important factor making for international instability.

The threat which Germany had posed to Britain and British imperial interests before 1914 would largely disappear, British policy makers believed, if she was deprived of her navy and its overseas naval bases but the danger of a resurgent Germany disturbing the peace of Europe would remain so long as she was allowed to retain large military forces. Accordingly when Lloyd George and Wilson met in December 1918 they agreed that the ex-enemy states should be disarmed and conscription proscribed in their territories. Germany should, however, have the right to seek a revision of any 'provisional limitation' when once the League of Nations was established. They also agreed that decisions about disarmament should be taken before the peace conference separated and the League was created. When the peace conference convened Lloyd George did not receive, however, Wilson's full support for all his disarmament initiatives. In August 1919 he complained: 'One of its [the Peace Conference's] main objectives was the reduction of armaments, yet what do we find? America, the protagonist of the League, is about to increase her navy and army to an enormous extent.'[2] On Christmas Eve, 1918, he assured the Imperial War Cabinet that if conscription was abolished in the ex-enemy states the rest of Europe would follow suit because the French people would not allow their

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1. Andrew Bonar Law, 1858-1923, succeeded Balfour as leader of the Conservative party as the compromise candidate in 1911, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1915-16, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1916-18, Lord Privy Seal, 1919-21, Prime Minister, 1922-23. A Canadian by birth but educated in Scotland, he was strongly opposed to the extension of British power in the Middle and Near East. See, especially, his correspondence with his Foreign Secretary, Curzon, 5, 7, 12, 14, 21 and 28 December 1922 and 8 January 1923, Bonar Law Papers, 111/12/38, 40, 44, 46, 48, 54 and 57.

2. Lord Riddell: Lord Riddell's Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918-1923, London, 1933, p. 118.

children to be conscripted into an army for defence against a shadow.[1] That assumption too, proved to be false.

Germany would no longer pose any threat to the peace, in the British view, if she was deprived of her military and naval power and the extra-European dimension which her colonies had once given her. Having abandoned the Hohenzollerns Germany should be given an opportunity to establish her democratic credentials and play a role as a major European power. Though in their more cautious and sober moments British statesmen doubted whether any part of the German nation was untainted by militarism they hoped that democratisation would lead her people to adopt a 'reasonable frame of mind'. Britain was opposed to depriving Germany of German-speaking territory in the Rhineland and in West Prussia, Posen and Silesia. To detach territory from Germany was to invite a war of revenge. The strategic arguments deployed by the French to justify large Polish acquisitions in the East and the separation of the Rhineland in the West met with little sympathy in British official circles. Britain wished to see Germany play an important role in the political and economic rehabilitation of Europe. A discontented Germany would be an element of instability in Europe and a prey to Bolshevism.

The majority of Lloyd George's Cabinet favoured a close partnership with the United States in the task of peacemaking. Balfour, like Grey before him, wished to encourage American participation in European affairs to make good the loss of Russian power and influence, and, wherever possible, to bring American power to bear in support of British interests.

The league idea had played a central role in Anglo-American relations throughout the war. It was widely recognised that a league of nations could cement and sustain an Anglo-American partnership and maintain a new balance of power in the post-war world. In their joint election

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1. CAB 23/42.

manifesto in November 1918, Lloyd George and Bonar Law had pledged the Coalition government to promote the formation of a league of nations. The league idea, initially the response of liberal opinion in Britain and America to the horrors of modern war, had been endorsed by all three political parties in the election campaign and applauded by those institutions of greatest influence in British public life, the press, except the Morning Post, the churches, and the trade unions.

The British government, however, entered the peacemaking without having reached agreement with the United States or any of its allies on the league question and without any agreed and considered policy of its own. In the last year of the war President Wilson had vetoed diplomatic discussions and discouraged public debate. Within the British government there were serious differences of view. The Foreign Office favoured a conference system in which - to use the words used by Crowe in 1916 - 'all are heard but none are coerced'. Others came to the conclusion that a league without sanctions would be of no avail.

In December 1918 Smuts[1] circulated a Cabinet paper, later to be published under the title The League of Nations - A Practical Suggestion, which tried to resolve these differences. Smuts proposed that responsibility for peace keeping and disarmament should rest with a league council, modelled on the Allied Supreme War Council at Versailles but with some

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1. Jan Christian Smuts, 1870-1950, South African soldier and statesman, born in Cape Colony, migrated to the Transvaal, State Attorney for the Transvaal, 1898, leader of guerrilla bands against the British in the South African war, represented South Africa at the Imperial Conference and in the Imperial War Cabinet, 1917, resided in Britain 1917-18, member of the British War Cabinet, 1917-18, largely responsible for the creation of the Royal Air Force in 1918; during the course of the war he became vehemently anti-French and after the war opposed continental commitments which might drag Britain and the Commonwealth into a European war, Prime Minister of South Africa, 1919-24, regarded by most authorities as one of the chief architects of the British Commonwealth of Nations. During 1917 Smuts made two speeches in Britain advocating disarmament after the war. In May he warned a meeting of the League of Nations Society in London that it was no use trying to prevent wars if nations were armed to the teeth and in the following October he told a Sheffield audience that the one great dominant war aim of the British people should be the abolition of militarism and standing armies.

representation for the smaller powers. Smuts warned the Cabinet that unless 'the taproot of militarism' was cut, all the league's labours to preserve peace would be to no avail. He, therefore, proposed that conscription should be abolished in all member states, their armaments industries nationalised and placed under international control, and national armies and their equipment strictly regulated and restricted. Smuts' proposals made a great impression on both Lloyd George and President Wilson but met with strong criticism in the Foreign Office.

His paper met with an unsympathetic response in the Imperial War Cabinet. Lord Reading[1] opposed the suggestion that the League should be responsible for disarmament and Churchill once again warned his colleagues that a league of nations would be no substitute for national defence.[2] None the less all recognised that given the strength of popular feeling in Britain and President Wilson's commitment to the league idea, the creation of some kind of international organisation was unavoidable. The solution favoured by the majority of the Cabinet was a league modelled on the Allied Supreme War Council and the Imperial War Cabinet which would leave national sovereignty unimpaired. The criticisms levelled against Smuts' scheme convinced Lloyd George that it would be a mistake to attempt too much at the beginning. There was, in fact, such strong opposition to sanctions, territorial guarantees and compulsory arbitration that there was no chance of the Wilsonian conception of the league meeting with the approval of the British Cabinet.[3] Six weeks earlier on the day after the Armistice, Cecil had summed up the British attitude to the league in a speech at the University of

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1. Rufus Daniel Isaacs, 1st Marquis of Reading, 1860-1935, Liberal MP, 1904-13, Solicitor-General, 1910, Attorney-General, 1910-13, Lord Chief Justice, 1913-21, Special Envoy to the United States, 1918-19, Viceroy of India, 1921-26, Foreign Secretary, 1931.
2. 24 December 1918, CAB 23/42.
3. G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, passim.

Birmingham. He told his audience that if only an international body could by discussion delay potential conflicts, public opinion would act effectively to enforce a peaceful settlement. Explaining his own view to the editor of the Spectator a few days later Cecil wrote: 'I rely on delay and not on decisions.'[1] It was the British view that future wars would be averted not by the decisions and judgements of international organisations but by consultation between the powers, discussion, and delays which would allow tempers to cool.

Disarmament did not figure in the league proposals which the British delegation took to Paris in January 1919. Opposing the limitation of armaments, the Admiralty had argued, in two memoranda presented to the Cabinet in October and December 1918, that there was no effective substitute for British sea power.[2] The Times threw its weight behind the Admiralty. 'This war could not have been won for civilisation but for British sea power', it wrote on 11 December 1918. 'There can, therefore, be no question, so far as this country is concerned, of diminishing the sharpness of the weapon that has given us victory in this war.' More guarded opposition was expressed by the Air Staff[3] and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson.[4] Both argued that Britain would be obliged to maintain sizeable forces in the post-war era and Wilson went so far as to describe a league of nations as 'futile nonsense'.[5] There was a deep reluctance to entrust the nation's security to an untried international organisation. The Admiralty went

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1. Quoted by V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 212-3 and 213n.
2. Correlli Barnett: The Collapse of British Power, London, 1972, pp.246-7; S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. I, London, 1968, pp.81-4; V. H. Rothwell: British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, pp. 258-60.
3. 'Air Power Requirements of the British Empire', GT 6477, 9 December 1918, CAB 24/71.
4. 'Military Commitments Remaining after Peace Has Been Signed', GT 6434, 5 December 1918, CAB 24/71.
5. G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, p. 98.

even further in its opposition. It warned against any commitment to take military and naval action on behalf of the League and criticised those who, in the interests of general disarmament, were advocating the nationalisation of the armaments industry. When the British Empire delegation went to Paris in 1919 the maintenance of British naval power took priority over all other commitments including disarmament.

Three days before the League of Nations Commission[1] began its work, Lloyd George tried to impress on Britain's chief representative, Lord Robert Cecil, the importance of adhering to those principles which the Imperial War Cabinet had enunciated the previous December. Using a brief prepared by Philip Kerr, Lloyd George attacked proposals to impose on member states an obligation to honour a territorial guarantee and participate in collective action against aggression.[2] Nevertheless, at its first meeting on 3 February 1919, the Commission adopted as the basis of its work an Anglo-American draft covenant which not only contained provisions for a territorial guarantee and collective sanctions but an article instructing the League Council to promote disarmament. On 7 February a joint Admiralty, Army and Air Council memorandum protested against its provisions and argued that the limitation of armaments should be considered independently of the League.[3] The First Lord of the Admiralty, Walter Long, went even further and took the Admiralty's objections to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.[4] He proposed three

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1. The League of Nations Commission was set up by the Peace Conference at its second plenary session on 25 January 1919 on the advice of the Council of Ten which at meetings on 13 and 23 January had agreed that the Peace Conference should give priority to the league question.
2. Lothian Papers GD 40/17/54; G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, pp. 121-4.
3. G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, p. 144.
4. Long to Lloyd George, 14 February, 7 March 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/33/2/12 and 22; G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, p. 144; D. H. Miller: The Drafting of the Covenant, Vol. 1, New York, 1928, pp. 286-9; S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, p. 84.

amendments which, if they had been adopted, would have emasculated the disarmament provisions of the covenant. The first would have down-graded the League Council's proposals to recommendations which could be adopted or rejected by member states. The second proposed deleting the obligation not to exceed agreed limitations without the permission of the Council. The third stressed the importance of League Council decisions being unanimous. His memorandum also deprecated the League discussing disarmament before it had demonstrated 'its power to afford security to its members'. It pointed out that the Admiralty, not a league of nations, had the constitutional responsibility to advise the British government as to the strength of Britain's naval forces.

Cecil, who shared some of the Admiralty's misgivings, was able to reassure the British Empire delegation and Britain's Service representatives that no League disarmament plan would be implemented unless it had the unanimous approval of the Council in which Britain would have a veto. He, at the same time, tried, not altogether successfully, to persuade President Wilson to redraft the disarmament article to make it more acceptable to the British government. Eventually he was forced to defend it and, in particular, Wilson's insistence on making League disarmament proposals binding on member states. The Admiralty's plea that derogations by the simple procedure of 'giving notice' of an intention to depart from agreed limitations was also rejected. Others, too, in the British Empire delegation were critical of the article. Sir Robert Borden, though far from unsympathetic to disarmament, was doubtful whether it would ever be effective in bringing about a reduction in armaments.[1]

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1. CAB 29/28, 13th and 26th meetings of the British Empire delegation, 13 March and 21 April 1919; G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, pp. 144-54. Cecil in A Great Experiment, London, 1941, p. 61 attributes the inclusion of Article 8 in the Covenant to the insistence of the Dominion representatives at Paris. Both Borden and Hughes, however, voiced their criticisms of the article. Viscount Grey was also critical of the proposals. See K. Robbins: Sir Edward Grey, p. 351.

There was little enthusiasm within the British Empire delegation for the League Covenant which Wilson, Cecil and their advisers had fashioned. Hankey[1] decided that as the British Empire was worth a thousand leagues of nations he would reject the suggestion that he become the League's first Secretary-General.[2] No member of Lloyd George's government, with the exception of the uninfluential G. N. Barnes,[3] publicly voiced his support for the final version of the League Covenant. In May 1919 Hankey wrote: 'The more we look at the famous Covenant the less we like it.'[4] Plans were already afoot to use the Allied Supreme War Council as the principal forum for post-war diplomacy. When the Cabinet undertook a major review of British defence policy in August 1919 culminating in the enunciation of the Ten Year Rule,[5] no reference was made to the League of Nations. It was partly because they believed that the League would make no effective contribution to Britain's security that Lloyd George and his principal advisers at the Paris peace conference sought an agreed limitation of national armaments. If there were large armies the League of Nations would be unable to exercise a restraining influence. In July 1919 Lord Curzon told the House of Lords in a debate on the treaties of peace that so long as there were large standing armies governments might find it difficult to resist the temptation to use them to seize some coveted gain.[6] In an armed world the League could only

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1. Sir Maurice Hankey, Lord Hankey (1939), 1877-1963, Assistant Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 1908, Secretary, 1912-38, Secretary of the War Cabinet, 1916, Imperial War Cabinet, 1917-18, Secretary of the Cabinet, 1919-38. British Secretary to the Peace Conference, 1919.
2. S. Roskill: Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. II, p. 80.
3. George Nicoll Barnes, 1859-1940, Minister Plenipotentiary at the Paris Peace Conference, General Secretary Amalgamated Society of Engineers, 1896-1908, Labour MP for Gorbals, Glasgow, 1906-22, Minister of Pensions, 1916-18.
4. S. Roskill: Hankey, Vol. II, p. 88.
5. See p. 171.
6. 35 HL Debs. 5th Series, cols. 171-2, 3 July 1919.

make a minor contribution to the preservation of peace.

Few apart from Cecil and the devotees of the league idea believed that the League of Nations would be an adequate substitute for the balance of power. It was widely recognised that, as in the past so in the future, equilibrium in Europe would depend very largely on a balance of armed forces. Britain wanted a stable balance of power without the threat of escalating armaments expenditure. She could not afford the cost of competitive armaments in the straitened financial circumstances bequeathed her by the war. She sought an alternative: a balance of power based on arms limitation rather than arms competition. For the first time in Britain's history disarmament became an objective of British foreign policy despite the antipathy of the Service departments. In 1919 Lloyd George and his colleagues went to Paris to seek disarmament not through the unformed and untried League of Nations but through the diplomatic processes of the peace conference itself. They had three objectives: the disarmament of Germany, the limitation of American and, to some extent, Japanese naval power, and drastic reductions in the land armaments of France, her central and eastern European allies, and the other continental powers.

On 21 January 1919, three days after the first plenary session of the conference, Balfour suggested in the Council of Ten that a commission should be set up to consider disarmament.[1] Two days later Lloyd George himself proposed 'that a Commission be appointed with two representatives apiece from each of the five Great Powers and five representatives to be elected by the other Powers represented at the Conference:- (1) to advise on an immediate and drastic reduction in the armed forces of the enemy, (2) to prepare a plan in connection with the League of Nations for a permanent reduction in the burden of military, naval and aerial forces and armaments.'[2]

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1. CAB 28/6, IC 114.
2. CAB 28/6, IC 117.

Lloyd George's proposals met with an unsympathetic response from the other powers. When the peace conference set up commissions on 25 January to draft proposals for a league of nations, an international labour organisation, reparations, international transit regulation, and the trial of war criminals no steps were taken to promote the cause of international disarmament.

At the end of January acute industrial unrest broke out on Clydeside and Lloyd George was forced to return to England to deal with a serious industrial and political crisis at home. Balfour took over the leadership of the British Empire delegation and Philip Kerr remained in Paris to plead the cause of international disarmament and to keep Lloyd George briefed on major developments at the peace conference. When on 14 February new armistice terms were imposed on Germany Kerr advised Lloyd George to explain them as 'the first great step in the demilitarisation of the world'.[1] A few days later in a conversation with Colonel House Kerr expounded the view that there were two essential steps if Europe was to enjoy real security. The first was to break the habit of militarism in Europe. The second was to 'destroy armaments and interrupt conscription for five or six years'. Attributing these views to Lloyd George Kerr predicted that if this were done the peoples of Europe could be trusted to see that the armaments process was never restarted.[2] Neither House nor Wilson for that matter regarded disarmament as a matter of extreme urgency. They were much more reluctant than Lloyd George and Kerr to see the victor powers divest themselves of the military superiority which had given them victory in war.

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1. Kerr to Lloyd George, n.d., Lloyd George Papers, F/89/2/14.
2. Kerr to Lloyd George, 18 February 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/89/2/23.

When Lloyd George returned to Paris on 5 March 1919 Harold Nicolson[1] noted in his diary: 'Ll. G. is back. He is going to make a stand against the principle of compulsory military service.'[2] In 1918 Lloyd George had pledged himself to the Cabinet and the country to work for the abolition of conscription throughout Europe. He believed that if it was abolished in Germany it would be impossible to justify it elsewhere. After preliminary agreement had been reached in consultations between Clemenceau, House and Kerr on the principle of voluntary enlistment and the strength of Germany's naval and military forces,[3] Lloyd George proposed in the Council of Ten that Germany's naval, military and air forces should be raised entirely by voluntary enlistment, that the period of service should be twelve years, and that the strength of the German army and air force should not exceed two hundred thousand men.[4] Despite the strong opposition of Foch and the other military representatives, the proposal was adopted though it was later decided to restrict Germany's army to one hundred thousand men and to deprive her of all military aviation. That same day Lloyd George boasted to Frances Stevenson, his secretary: 'What I proposed practically amounts to the abolition of conscription in Europe.'[5]

Lloyd George was to be sadly disappointed. The continental powers were wedded to the principle of conscription. The army was a school for citizenship and in those countries like France which prided themselves on their democratic credentials it was argued that military service was

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1. (Sir) Harold Nicolson, 1886-1968, diplomat and writer, son of the former Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Sir Arthur Nicolson (Lord Carnock), a member of the British delegation to the Paris peace conference, National Labour MP for Leicester, 1935-45.
2. H. Nicolson: Peacemaking, 1919, London, 1933, diary entry for 6 March 1919, p. 278.
3. Memorandum by P. Kerr, 7 March 1919, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/1173.
4. CAB 28/6, 7 March 1919.
5. A. J. P. Taylor (ed.): Lloyd George. A Diary by Frances Stevenson, London, 1971, p. 170.

a burden which should fall equitably on the whole of the male population. Furthermore, conscripts were cheap. Volunteers were dear. It was doubtful whether most European governments would be able to lure sufficient volunteers into their armies to maintain the level of armed forces they deemed to be essential.

In the last ten days of March the peace conference entered its most crucial stage. Bela Kun took over Budapest on 22 March. Central and Eastern Europe was in turmoil. There was serious labour unrest in Britain and Italy. By-election results in Britain revealed a mood of growing disenchantment with the Lloyd George government and an insistent demand for rapid demobilisation. 'I would vote for the devil himself if he promised to get me demobilised' a young soldier on leave from France told Lord Eustace Percy, the defeated Coalition candidate at the Central Hull by-election in March 1919.[1] Deep and bitter differences divided the British and Americans on the one side from the French on the other over the future of the Rhineland and the Saar. The Italians were pressing their claim to Fiume and additional territory on the Adriatic coast. Reparations continued to prove a contentious issue between the Americans and the other powers. There were ominous signs that the Anglo-American partnership, which the government had worked so hard to create, would founder over the question of naval armaments. It was against this background of turmoil and unrest that Lloyd George went into conference with his most intimate advisers, Hankey, Kerr and Sir Henry Wilson, at the Hotel de France et d'Angleterre at Fontainebleau on the weekend of 22-24 March 1919. His purpose, according to one close observer, was 'to think out the possibility of drastic changes which would give the whole peace settlement a more inspiring appearance and one more in

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1. Eustace Percy (Lord Percy of Newcastle): Some Memories, London, 1958, p. 74.

sympathy with the progressive forces making themselves felt all over the world'.[1]

Although agreement had been reached two weeks earlier on the disarmament of Germany there were wide differences about its merits. Foch had warned the Allied Supreme War Council in January that Germany could never be effectively disarmed[2] and even Lloyd George had come to the conclusion that the permanent limitation of German matériel was an illusion. 'The jigs and gauges necessary for the manufacture of armaments and munitions could be concealed in one room.'[3] If Germany once again chose to pursue a policy of world domination, Balfour wrote on 18 March 1919, it would tax all the statesmanship of the rest of the world to prevent a repetition of the calamities from which Europe was just emerging. The only radical cure was a change in the international system of the world. No manipulation of the Rhine frontier, Balfour declared, would make France anything more than a second-rate power, trembling at the nod of its great neighbour to the east.[4] Eight days earlier Balfour had alluded to a much more immediate problem than a resurgent Germany. If Germany was to have 100,000 armed men while France, Poland and Czechoslovakia had as many as they liked, she would be completely at the mercy of her neighbours.[5] In a memorandum for Lloyd George written shortly before the Fontainebleau

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1. Sir William Wiseman to the Marquess of Reading, 23 March 1919, quoted by A. J. Mayer: Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking. Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919, London, 1968, p. 520. At the Council of Four on 27 March 1919 Lloyd George told his fellow delegates that though the English upper classes might still have an unbridled hatred of the Germans there had been a marked change in the attitude of other classes since the establishment of a democratic régime in Germany. If the peace terms were viewed as too moderate he would have great difficulties in Parliament but not from the working classes.
2. CAB 28/6, IC 118, Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 24 January 1919.
3. CAB 28/6, IC 156, Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 7 March 1919.
4. Lloyd George Papers, F/3/4/19.
5. CAB 28/6, IC 158, Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 10 March 1919.

conference Hankey suggested that it should be plainly stated that the disarmament of Germany was part of the disarmament of the world.[1] So far as the British Empire delegation was concerned the disarmament of Germany was the first stage in the demilitarisation of Europe and the world.

In the Fontainebleau memorandum[2] Lloyd George appealed to the other victor powers to make a peace settlement which was not only fair to themselves but would be acceptable to a responsible German government intent on fulfilling its obligations. A settlement which contained no provocations would constitute an alternative to Bolshevism and commend itself to all reasonable people in Europe. If the League of Nations was to provide an effective guarantee of international right and liberty it was essential that its leading members - the victor powers - should first reach an understanding about armaments. It was idle to endeavour to impose a permanent[3] limitation of armaments upon Germany unless the victor powers were prepared to impose a limitation on themselves. Though he conceded that for the time being it would be necessary to retain considerable forces to deal with any military adventures by either Germany or Russia and 'to preserve liberty in the world', Lloyd George warned them that if the victors were to present a united front to the forces of reaction and revolution, they would have to arrive at an agreement to limit their armaments. Rivalries and jealousies over armaments would prevent the League from functioning effectively. The first condition of success for the League of Nations was a firm under-

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1. Lord Hankey: Supreme Control at the Paris Peace Conference, London, 1963, p. 98.
2. The memorandum was drafted by Kerr and approved by Lloyd George and his other advisers though it cannot have been acceptable in its entirety to F-M Sir Henry Wilson. Hankey suggests that Lloyd George also consulted Smuts (Supreme Control, p. 98) and some other writers have suggested that Edwin Montagu was also present. For Kerr's pencilled notes and draft memorandum, see Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/60 & 61.
3. My italics.

standing between the British Empire, the United States, France and Italy that there would be no competitive building up of fleets and armies between themselves. It would only then be possible to ensure that both Germany and the smaller states of Europe undertook to limit their armaments and abolish conscription. He concluded: 'If the small nations are permitted to organise and maintain conscript armies running each to hundreds of thousands, boundary wars will be inevitable and all Europe will be drawn in. Unless we secure this universal limitation we shall achieve neither lasting peace nor the permanent observance of the limitation of German armaments we now seek to impose.'[1]

It has long been recognised that in the Fontainebleau memorandum Lloyd George was seeking to make the peace terms more acceptable to reasonable opinion in Germany and Europe as a whole. More recently it has been argued that one of Lloyd George's main purposes was to stem the Bolshevik tide which appeared to be sweeping across Europe.[2] Clemenceau's rejoinder to the memorandum on 31 March and the subsequent publication of both the memorandum and Clemenceau's reply at a time of acute Anglo-French antagonism some three years later have led many historians to assume that it was directed principally at the French government. It seems just as likely to have been aimed at Wilson and the American government. Wilson had, as yet, taken no steps to modify the 1916 and 1918 naval construction programmes undertaken to give the United States 'a navy second to none'. Britain was faced in March 1919 with a serious challenge to her naval supremacy which she was ill-equipped to meet. As government expenditure rose to unprecedented levels in peacetime and the extent to which the war had undermined Britain's power and wealth dawned on the British government, Lloyd George had good reason for fearing a competitive arms race.

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1. Cmd. 1614, 1922 and Cmd. 2169, 1924.
2. A. J. Mayer: Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking, passim.

Furthermore, Britain's influence in Europe would be dwarfed if France and the successor states were able to deploy vast military forces. Though it was unrealistic to expect them to abandon conscription it was not altogether utopian to strive for the limitation of land armaments in the new dawn of 1919. Memories of the pre-war Balkan wars were still fresh in people's minds. Britain had no desire to be drawn into a European war resulting from the petty squabbles between the successor states and their neighbours. Only reluctantly in the last year of the war had the Foreign Office accepted the inevitability of the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire. With the emergence of the successor states there were new dangers in Europe. Arms limitation seemed to many in Britain the necessary corollary of applying the principle of national self-determination to the map of Europe.

In The League of Nations - A Practical Suggestion Smuts had proposed that the successor states, as a condition of their recognition and admission to the League, should agree to raise no military forces or acquire any armaments other than those decreed by the League itself. If such a policy was adopted, Smuts had argued, militarism would be scotched ab initio in all the new states. Furthermore, a great impetus would be given to the peace movement throughout the world because it would be much easier for the older states to adopt a policy of disarmament. When Cecil referred to Smuts' disarmament proposals at the Imperial War Cabinet on 30 December 1918, Lloyd George said that conscription should be forbidden in 'the friendly new States' created out of the territory of the Austro-Hungarian empire.[1]

In March 1919 Balfour indirectly raised the question of the armaments of the successor states when he referred to the potential threat which

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1. CAB 23/42. The Imperial War Cabinet instructed the General Staff to consider the question of the armaments to be permitted to the successor states.

Poland and Czechoslovakia posed to German security.[1] Though he was at pains to direct the attention of the Council of Ten to Germany's vulnerability to attack he recognised as clearly as the French that if Germany was allowed to rearm she would in all probability strike eastward where the forces to deter her would be so much weaker than those in the west.[2] Such long term considerations, however, did not shape British policy towards the successor states. Britain was not alone in 1919 in thinking that Germany would not be a danger to the peace for a long time to come.[3]

During the summer of 1919 the armaments of the successor states ceased to be a matter of academic interest. Fighting and unrest in Central Europe obliged the Council of Four to devote much of its time and attention to peacekeeping missions to bring peace and stability to the area. When the Council considered the military clauses of the Austrian peace treaty Lloyd George took the opportunity to condemn 'the miserable ambitions' and 'imperialistic enterprises' of the successor states. If Poland was allowed to have two million men under arms and Czechoslovakia another one and a half million, it would be 'an outrage on decency, fair-play and justice' to limit Austria's army to a few thousand and Germany's to one hundred thousand he told his fellow delegates.[4]

Clemenceau had little sympathy for Lloyd George's views. The French had been arguing for some time that a vigorous Polish army was the key to

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1. 10 March 1919, Minutes of the Council of Ten, CAB 28/6.
2. Memorandum for Lloyd George, 18 March 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/3/4/19.
3. Albert, King of the Belgians, told the Council of Four on 4 April 1919 that Germany would not be a danger to the peace for twenty to twenty-five years.
4. CAB 29/38, 23 May 1919. At that same meeting of the Council of Four Lloyd George persuaded his colleagues to agree to making aid and assistance for Admiral Kolchak's government in Russia conditional upon a promise to join the League of Nations and co-operate 'with the other members in the limitation of armaments and of military organisation throughout the world'. He was not successful in making aid condition on a pledge to abolish conscription in Russia, however.

political stability in Eastern Europe. A strong Poland would not only check German expansion eastward but would also contain Russia and prevent the spread of Bolshevism. Clemenceau urged that it would be wrong to limit the armaments of the successor states without first hearing their own representatives. Accordingly, on 4 and 5 June Benes of Czechoslovakia, Bratiano of Roumania, Paderewski of Poland, Venizelos[1] of Greece, and Vesnitch of Yugoslavia were invited to put their case to the Council of Four. Both Wilson and Orlando were won over by their arguments. Lloyd George was isolated. The French view prevailed. Even Lloyd George was forced to concede that the limitation of armaments was out of the question until conditions stabilised. The Council of Four agreed that the limitation of the armaments of the successor states should await the establishment of the League of Nations.[2] At a time when large reductions had already been made in Britain's own armed forces Lloyd George told Bratiano that it would not be long before Britain had a smaller army than Roumania. At the same time the Foreign Secretary was receiving representations to back the anti-Bolshevik Czech forces against Magyar incursions.[3] Instability in Central and Eastern Europe as much as the opposition of Clemenceau condemned this British initiative to sterility.

No part of the Versailles treaty more closely mirrored Lloyd George's own thinking than the preamble to Part V: 'In order to render possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations, Germany undertakes strictly to observe the military, naval and air clauses which follow.' It was the explicit assumption of the British

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1. Venizelos had informed Cecil in January 1919 that he was opposed to compulsory disarmament on the grounds that it was impracticable. Cecil Diary, 12 January 1919, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51131.
2. CAB 29/39.
3. Among those who tried to persuade Balfour to give his backing to the Czechs was Sir Samuel Hoare who as head of military missions to Italy and Russia between 1916 and 1919 gave considerable assistance to Benes, Masaryk and other Czech patriots. See Hoare to Balfour, 19 June 1919, Balfour Papers, BL Add. Mss. 49749.

Empire delegation that the disarmament of Germany would pave the way for the reduction of armaments throughout Europe. There would be no justification for large continental armies once Germany was disarmed. That view was expressed by Balfour, Cecil, Hankey, Kerr and Lloyd George in one form or another during the first two months of the peace conference. It was President Wilson, however, who proposed in the Council of Four on 26 April that the disarmament clauses of the treaty would be made more acceptable to German opinion if it was stated that they were intended to prepare the way for the general limitation of armaments.[1] When the draft treaty was communicated to the German government it was the disarmament clauses with their preamble which drew from them the most subtle and ingenious response. On 29 May they sent the Council of Four a Note claiming that their acceptance of these clauses was ample proof that Germany had abandoned, once and for all, her 'militaristic' and 'imperialistic' past. Disingenuously they called on the victor powers to abolish conscription and reduce their own armaments in the same proportions. The reply which Clemenceau sent on behalf of the Council of Four on 16 June only served to underline the relationship between German disarmament and general disarmament which the Allies had set out to define in the preamble to Part V.[2] Few at the time foresaw that these words would subsequently rank as among the most controversial of the utterances made at the peace conference. In June 1919 they seemed to

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1. CAB 29/37.

2. Clemenceau's reply contained the words: 'The Allied and Associated Powers wish to make it clear that their requirements in regard to German armaments were not made solely with the object of rendering it impossible for Germany to resume her policy of military aggression. They are also the first step towards the general reduction and limitation of armaments which they seek to bring about as one of the most fruitful preventives of war, and which it will be one of the first duties of the League of Nations to promote.' The Council of Four appointed a committee consisting of Bourgeois of France, Cecil, House and the Marchese Imperiali of Italy to draft the reply to the German Note but it would appear that the wording was largely the work of Cecil's assistant, Philip Noel-Baker. See Cecil to Lloyd George, 7 June 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/6/6/51.

represent a victory for British policy which the other victor powers were unable to prevent.

Britain failed to secure the co-operation of the other great powers including the United States in its quest for arms limitation at the Paris peace conference. Not even the American delegation made disarmament a main priority. Wilson had gone to Paris in January 1919 with a set of priorities, in many respects, very different from those of Britain.

When war had broken out in Europe in 1914 Wilson had declared America's neutrality and offered his services as a mediator. Three months earlier he had despatched Colonel House to Europe on a mission to bring about a rapprochement between Britain and Germany based on a naval arms limitation agreement, joint economic co-operation, and the harmonisation of American, British and German overseas investment policies. War in Europe was not in America's interests. The basic interest of the United States was her own national economic growth. Already in 1914 her national wealth exceeded that of Britain and Germany combined. Nevertheless her overseas investments amounted to a mere two and a half billion dollars and her navy had been relegated to third place in the league of naval powers. Before his death in 1914 the great American writer on naval power, Captain Alfred Mahan, had convinced many influential Americans that the United States could not afford to neglect her maritime strength. Naval power and a chain of naval bases across the oceans of the world was the key to national power and greatness. The war reinforced that lesson. American foreign commerce found itself at the mercy of Britain's naval blockade and Germany's submarine warfare. In 1916 Wilson was forced by the logic of events to take up Mahan's thesis to propose a navy second to none.

As a great trading nation the United States had a vital interest in the maintenance of European peace and stable conditions throughout the world. In June 1915 a number of prominent Americans including

ex-President Taft formed the League to Enforce Peace in order to advocate a league of nations whose members would, if necessary, use military force against an aggressor state which threatened the peace. Within a year the League had become one of the most effective pressure groups in the United States with a budget of $250,000 and chapters in forty-six states. In a much publicised speech in May 1916 Wilson embraced the League's programme and pledged American participation in the making of the post-war peace settlement. Wilson turned his back on America's isolationist past. 'We are participants, whether we would or not, in the life of the world. The interests of all nations are our own also. We are partners with the rest. What affects mankind is inevitably our affair as well as the affair of the nations of Europe and Asia.' Between 1916 and 1919 Wilson set out to exploit America's newly-discovered sense of national power and well-being in the interests of a new international order based on justice between peoples and the equality of sovereign states in a league of nations. In articulating the main themes of the New Diplomacy Wilson tried to enlist the support of the American people and win the allegiance of liberal and progressive opinion throughout Europe and the world. He believed that America's financial power backed by progressive opinion throughout the world would enable him to overcome the unenlightened opposition and obscurantism of the European great powers.

On several occasions before America's entry into the war in April 1917 Wilson made a strong plea for international disarmament. In his 'peace without victory' speech to the Senate on 22 January 1917 he said that there could be no sense of safety and equality among the nations if great preponderating armaments were henceforth to be built up and maintained. 'The question of armaments, whether on land or sea, is the most immediately practical question connected with the future fortunes of nations and of mankind.' As a belligerent America's commitment to disarmament became far less pronounced. In the fourth of the Fourteen

Points Wilson made a brief reference to the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety but he made no other pronouncements on disarmament.

In September 1917 Wilson set up 'The Inquiry' to prepare America's brief for the future peace conference under Colonel House's direction. House collected together one hundred and fifty scholars[1] who over a period of fifteen months produced two thousand reports and twelve hundred maps on practically every part of the world and every aspect of international policy. Apart from a proposal to control armaments manufacture through the international regulation of nickel production and distribution The Inquiry came forward with few proposals for disarmament.[2] Those studies which were made by the American administration took place under the auspices of the War Department. One member of the American General Staff, General Tasker H. Bliss, became a convinced advocate of arms limitation. In December 1918 Bliss wrote: 'If the war has not made us ready to disarm, God help us.' Equal representation in a league of nations would not make sense if some nations were armed to the teeth while others remained militarily weak.[3] Though that view was not disputed, disarmament was never accorded priority by the American Commission to Negotiate Peace at the Paris peace conference. The American attitude was well summed up by Major-General F. J. Kernan in a letter to the Secretary of the Commission, Joseph Grew, on 12 January 1919. 'The whole subject of the limitation of armaments is so interwoven with the question of a League of Nations and so dependent thereon that no

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1. Among those recruited to The Inquiry were the geographer, Isaiah Bowman, the historians; S. B. Fay, Charles H. Haskins, S. E. Morison and Wallace Notestein, and the specialists in international law and foreign affairs, Walter Lippmann, David Hunter Miller and James T. Shotwell.

2. Lawrence E. Gelfand: The Inquiry. American Preparations for Peace, 1917-1919, New Haven, 1963, passim.

3. FRUS, PPC, 1, pp. 521-4.

profitable treatment is possible until the large subject upon which this one hangs has taken shape and has been in some definite manner agreed upon.'[1] That position was consistently maintained by the United States delegation throughout the peace conference.

It was inevitable that British and French interests would not always coincide in the peacemaking but, nevertheless, close Anglo-French co-operation was essential if British interests in Europe and the non-European world were to be safeguarded. Britain had no intention of abandoning the Anglo-French entente in favour of an exclusive Anglo-American partnership despite the Francophobe sentiments of some of Britain's leading statesmen. It was widely recognised that President Wilson had very little sympathy for some of Britain's aspirations and, furthermore, there were serious doubts whether he would be able to carry the American public with him in his peace programme. As early as November 1918 Senator Lodge, the Republican leader, informed Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, that many Americans regarded Wilson's plans for a league of nations as 'hopelessly impracticable'.[2] Another slant was put on the picture by Sir Eyre Crowe when he pointed out that 'our friend America lives a long way off; France sits at our door'.[3]

The French differed from the British in thinking that Germany would remain for a long time to come a menace not only to France but to Europe as a whole. Foch looked across the Rhine with the eye of a Caesar or a Julian confronting what seemed to be an illimitable world of aggressive barbarism.[4] So long as Germany had immense demographic and economic advantages the limitation of her armed forces would not provide an adequate

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1. FRUS, PPC, 1, p. 326.
2. 25 November 1918, Balfour Papers, BL Add. Mss. 49742.
3. Quoted by G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, p. 87.
4. A. J. Toynbee (ed.): Survey of International Affairs, 1924, London, 1926, p. 4.

guarantee of French security. France sought additional guarantees: the military occupation of the Rhineland, control of the Rhine bridgeheads and a system of military alliances with the successor states to the east of Germany. Both the British and the Americans were opposed to the occupation of the Rhineland and strenuously resisted French attempts to detach the Rhineland from the rest of Germany. On 10 March 1919 Lloyd George warned the French that the occupation of any key points thought to be necessary for France's security would ultimately be a burden on France alone.[1] The British were astonished that the French refused to admit that German disarmament, the creation of the League, and the demilitarisation of the Rhineland provided them with adequate security. Nevertheless to assuage French fears Lloyd George proposed an Anglo-American guarantee of France's security against German aggression but it was made clear to the French that it would only remain in force so long as the signatories considered that the League was incapable of affording France sufficient protection.

The French never demonstrated the same degree of enthusiasm for the League of Nations as did important and influential sections of British and American opinion. Leon Bourgeois, the foremost French exponent of the league idea and France's chief representative on the peace conference's League of Nations Commission, did not enjoy the full confidence of the French government nor could he ever claim to represent the main stream of French opinion.[2] It is not, therefore, surprising that his initiatives in the League of Nations Commission did not receive the full backing of

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1. Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 10 March 1919, CAB 28/6.
2. On 27 February 1919 Cecil noted in his diary: 'Mandel came to lunch. He said the French were opposed to the League because they thought it meant disarmament and because they wanted an alliance against Germany. I asked him why if they were against disarmament Bourgeois had proposed to make the disarmament proposals in the Covenant stronger than they were but he had no answer except that Bourgeois had always been regarded as the advocate of the League of Nations.' Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51131.

his more powerful colleagues in the French delegation.[1] Frenchmen never believed that the League would provide France with an effective guarantee of her security. In so far as they valued the League, they saw it as an enforcement agency to restrain Germany.

When the preliminaries to the peace conference took place in the second week of January 1919 the French delegation failed to win the approval of the British and American delegations for their elaborately conceived agenda designed to secure France's vital interests before other issues were discussed. Instead they were forced to accept an agenda which gave priority to the establishment of a league of nations.

Despite the pleas of the French, Italian and Belgian representatives, the League Commission, at its first session on 3 February 1919, adopted the Anglo-American draft covenant, the so-called Miller-Hurst draft, as the basis of its discussions. When subsequently the French moved a series of amendments they were strenuously opposed by the British and Americans. The Covenant which emerged from the Commission took very little account of French views.

The French believed that disarmament would only be feasible if it was linked with the creation of an international force capable of enforcing League decisions. They, therefore, called for a League force 'so superior to that of all nations or to that of all alliances that no nation or combination of nations' would be able to challenge or resist it.[2] Wilson opposed the proposal on the grounds that it would be a violation of the American constitution for the United States government

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1. On 28 February Cecil noted: 'He [Tardieu] quite admitted that Bourgeois' amendments were useless.' Cecil Papers BL Add. Mss. 51131. On another occasion Clemenceau and Tardieu explained Bourgeois' insistence on an international general staff and an inspection commission as a bargaining tactic related to France's negotiations with her allies on Germany's western boundaries. See D. H. Miller: The Drafting of the Covenant, Vol. II, pp. 220-1, and G. W. Egerton: Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations, p. 156.

2. D. H. Miller: The Drafting of the Covenant, Vol. II, pp. 291-2.

to put American forces under the control of an international authority and Cecil warned that the British people would never agree to maintain armed forces solely for League use. When Bourgeois, having unsuccessfully tried on a number of subsequent occasions to win over the Anglo-Saxon powers to his proposal, modified it by substituting an international general staff with powers to prepare plans for military and naval action on behalf of the League, Cecil went some way towards meeting him by proposing the creation of an armaments commission to advise the League Council on military, naval and air questions, a proposal which was later incorporated in the Covenant as Article 9. A third amendment, if it had been accepted, would have opened armament factories to international inspection and subjected the information on armaments supplied to the League by member governments to the scrutiny of an inspection and verification commission. The only minor success which the French with the assistance of the Italians scored in the Commission was the rejection of proposals for the abolition of conscription.

The French conception of the League differed fundamentally from the British and in some respects from the American. The French regarded the League as a coercive instrument of the victor powers, designed to maintain the peace settlement against those who would seek to challenge it. They sought to outlaw war by making arbitration compulsory but though they had the support of the Belgians, Greeks and Yugoslavs in the League Commission their efforts were to no avail. They believed that it was the responsibility of the League not merely to limit armaments but to see that member states maintained sufficient forces to uphold the League's authority. When Britain and America resisted their efforts to give the League the sanction of armed force, Clemenceau intimated that France would be obliged to look elsewhere for its security.

In 1919 France unhesitatingly put her trust in the balance of military power. She had one overall objective: to increase French

power by reducing the territory, economic power and military resources of her mighty neighbour to the east. She set out to achieve this objective by seeking to impose on Germany territorial losses which would be to the detriment of her economic and military power, by economic penalties and reparations, by disarmament and the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, by detaching the Rhineland from the rest of Germany, by alliances with Poland and the other successor states, and by forging an alliance with Britain and Belgium which would make a repetition of the events of August 1914 impossible in the future. She, therefore, did all in her power to strengthen Poland and to resist British attempts to limit the size, power and armaments of the successor states. Conscious of her economic weakness and the importance of restoring national morale, France's statesmen put their faith in her military hegemony and the military power of those who had an interest in maintaining the 1919 settlement.[1]

Neither Italy nor Japan showed any strong desire to promote disarmament[2] and none of the smaller powers was prepared to enter into discussions about the limitation of armaments. If Gilbert Murray, the Chairman of the British League of Nations Union was right in stating, five years later, that 'in 1919 all nations genuinely wished to disarm and intended to do so'[3] none, with the exception of Britain, attempted to put disarmament on the conference agenda. All paid lip-service to the ideal of disarmament and even Clemenceau admitted that economic

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1. Marc Tractenburg 'Reparations at the Paris Peace Conference', Journal of Modern History, Vol. 51, No. 1, March 1979. D. R. Watson, 'The Making of the Treaty of Versailles' in Troubled Neighbours. Franco-British Relations in the Twentieth Century, edited by N. Waites, London, 1971.

2. For an assessment of Japan's attitude to disarmament, see the memorandum by the US ambassador in Tokyo, 27 November 1918, FRUS, PPC, Vol. 1, p. 491. Italy's attitude is well summed up in Orlando's remarks to the Council of Four, 5 June 1919, CAB 29/39.

3. Westminster Gazette, weekly edition, 7 June 1924.

circumstances would force France to reduce her army.[1] Nevertheless, the predominant and prevailing view of the relationship between the level of national armaments and the peace settlement was put by Wilson when he said on 31 May 1919 'in the last analysis the military and naval strength of the great powers will be the final guarantee of the peace of the world.'[2] The unsettled conditions of Europe in the summer of 1919 convinced the peacemakers, with the exception of Lloyd George, that the time was not ripe for an international agreement on the limitation of armaments.

Lloyd George had no difficulty in carrying the British Empire delegation with him but the Cabinet at home was not entirely convinced that Britain's salvation lay in a general reduction of armaments which would limit Britain's own military and naval forces. Churchill told the Prime Minister that the difficulties of his task were so enormous that they could not be handled without the backing of a strong army[3] and when he visited Paris in March 1919 he went out of his way to defend Foch's attitude to disarmament and the maintenance of large armies in Europe.[4] Not surprisingly Walter Long, the First Lord of the Admiralty, tried to persuade Lloyd George that the British public were prepared to make considerable sacrifices to ensure that Britain's position at sea was not imperilled.[5] It was not only Churchill and Long, the two Service ministers, who expressed doubts about disarmament. Others too believed that the new Europe could not be built by nations which had prematurely disarmed. However, by the spring of 1919 other considerations led even Long to recognise that it was imperative to keep defence expenditure within

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1. Minutes of the Council of Four, 5 June 1919, CAB 29/39.
2. Quoted by S. de Madariaga: Disarmament, London, 1929, p. 28.
3. Churchill to Lloyd George, 29 January 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/8/3/9.
4. A. J. P. Taylor (ed.): Lloyd George. A Diary by Frances Stevenson, diary entry for 9 March 1919, p. 171.
5. Long to Lloyd George, 23 January and 13 March 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/8/2/7 and 26.

strict limits. There were dire warnings from the Treasury of the dangers of rising public expenditure. The spectre of Bolshevism haunted the imagination of Britain's ruling classes. Escalating armaments expenditure posed a threat to Britain's economic and social fabric. Long, twice in one week, congratulated Lloyd George on securing the abolition of German conscription and Bonar Law told his Cabinet colleagues that in pressing for disarmament Lloyd George 'had gone to the root of the matter' and should be backed at all costs.[1] Lloyd George had the support of his two leading Conservative colleagues, Chamberlain and Bonar Law. Both were convinced that it was essential to reduce Britain's defence expenditure. Without all-round reductions in armaments by the other great powers it would be perilous for Britain to make large savings in her Service estimates.

The First World War opened a new era in international relations. It was not only the Allied Supreme War Council but also other organisations of wartime co-operation such as the Supreme Economic Council and the Inter-Allied Maritime Transport Council which had proved the utility of international co-operation to achieve specific objectives. France, too weak economically to stand by herself, banked on the continuation of these wartime agencies of economic co-operation when the war ended only to be disappointed by the United States' indifference.[2] Hankey and other influential policy makers in Britain recognised the value of the new institutions of international co-operation forged in the war. Neither Britain nor America, however, took the initiative to build on these wartime foundations. Without investigating the obligations which the new European order imposed on them, they pursued two very different

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1. Long to Lloyd George, 13 and 19 March 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/33/2/26 and 28. Jones to Hankey, 26 March 1919, in T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. 1, p. 82.

2. M. Trachtenburg 'Reparations at the Paris Peace Conference' in Journal of Modern History, Vol. 51, No. 1, March 1979.

policies, disarmament on the one hand, and the establishment of the league on the other, evading the responsibilities which their victory in the war had imposed on them.

There were other reasons besides Britain's refusal to shoulder new responsibilities in Europe for Lloyd George's failure to achieve a measure of European disarmament. He was the victim of his own propaganda and self-deception. The British had deceived themselves into thinking that had it not been for Prussian militarism there would have been no war in Europe in 1914. It was all too easy to assume that peace and disarmament would flow from the destruction of German military power. No one, however, believed that the disarmament of Germany could be enforced in perpetuity. German disarmament was, in the short term, a political necessity but in the long term the only useful purpose it could serve would be to pave the way for the demilitarisation of Europe.

Other powers did not see Britain's intentions in the same light. In 1914 British naval power had been almost as great a cause of disquiet to other powers as German militarism had been to Britain and for the first two and a half years of the war it was seen in that light by the American government. Clemenceau pertinently pointed out to Lloyd George in his reply to the Fontainebleau memorandum that British power had been considerably enhanced by Germany's defeat and many Americans believed that the British Empire was the main beneficiary of the war. Had Lloyd George capped these successes by securing reductions in the size and power of the continental armies, he would have done much to ensure the hegemony of British naval power and Britain's ascendancy in Europe. A general limitation of armaments would have tipped the balance of power in Britain's favour and deprived France of the military hegemony in Europe which she had won at such great cost in the war. It would have also frozen the world balance of forces to the detriment of American

and Japanese ambitions. Such an objective could only have been secured at a price far higher than the British people were prepared to pay.

CHAPTER FIVE

BRITISH NAVAL DISARMAMENT POLICY, 1919-1931

In 1900 few in Britain would have disputed the historic claim that it was the navy 'whereon under the good providence of God, the wealth, safety, and strength of the Kingdom chiefly depends'. Even Liberal advocates of disarmament believed that it was vital for Britain to retain her naval supremacy. When in the 1880s France and Russia began to challenge the position Britain had held on the high seas since Trafalgar, Lord George Hamilton, First Lord of the Admiralty in Salisbury's Cabinet, enunciated the Two-Power Standard: Britain should have a navy more powerful than the combined strength of the two next largest navies in the world. The economic basis of the Two-Power Standard was the fact that British exports until the late 1870s exceeded those of the two next largest trading nations in the international economy. Britain's naval strength reflected Britain's economic power. By 1914 the situation had changed. Both Germany and the United States were exporting as much as Britain and the wealth and productive capacity of the United States was greater than that of Britain and Germany combined. Furthermore, Britain was spending per capita more on armaments than either the United States or Germany. In the age of Wilhelm II and Tirpitz, Britain was paying an excessively high price for her naval supremacy. In the last years of peace, there was a vocal and not politically insignificant lobby urging a large reduction in naval armaments.[1]

When the First World War ended in November 1918 Britain's fleet was

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1. See A. J. A. Morris: Radicalism against War, 1906-1914, passim, and K. G. Robbins: The Abolition of War, pp. 7-26.

equal in size to the combined strength of her allies[1] but though its main rival, Germany, had been defeated, its supremacy was not undisputed. The United States had set out in 1916 to build a navy bigger than Britain's and Japan had used the war years to expand her shipbuilding capacity and her naval power. In 1919 Japan's navy was the third largest in the world and the United States was poised to overtake Britain.

If in 1914 Britain was over-extended in terms of the financial resources, capabilities and mental commitment of her people, in 1919 she faced the well-nigh impossible task of paying her way in the world, maintaining her power and prestige, and keeping her public expenditure within the strict limits dictated by the financial orthodoxy of the day. Saddled with colossal war-time debts and, therefore, vulnerable to the economic pressures of her chief creditor, the United States, unable to sell the same volume of goods abroad as she had done before the war, and burdened with world-wide commitments far in excess of those she had borne in 1914, she was in no position to engage in a new arms race to maintain her naval supremacy. Britain had little choice but to pursue a policy of all-round reductions in naval armaments in order to fend off a challenge to her naval power. Her policy at the Washington, Geneva and London naval conferences of 1921-22, 1927 and 1930 was the inevitable response to changed circumstances.

The British government became seriously alarmed by the growth of American naval power in the winter of 1919. Britain would be forced into a naval arms race she could not possibly win if America's ambition was to have a navy as strong as Britain's. Between November 1918 and April 1919 Lloyd George, Long and Cecil warned the American government in different ways that Britain would spend her last shilling to ward off

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1. S. W. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, London, 1968, p. 71.

a threat to her naval supremacy.[1] Lloyd George went so far as to threaten withdrawing Britain's support for the League of Nations if the United States refused to come to terms over naval armaments.[2] To conciliate Britain Wilson abandoned the 1918 naval construction programme and instructed Colonel House to assure the British government that 'there was no idea in the mind of the President of building a fleet in competition with Great Britain'.[3] He promised that as soon as the peace treaty was signed, the United States would enter into negotiations with Britain to limit the strengths of the two fleets.

Britain and the United States agreed to a naval truce in April 1919. From various sources Britain learnt that the American government had neither the public backing, the money, nor the manpower for the implementation of a vast naval expansion programme. The American people were no more willing than the British to shoulder the burden of a vast increase in naval armaments. In the last resort the 'Naval Battle of Paris' was a game of bluff and counter bluff.[4]

No one was more influential in the policy-making processes of the inter-war years than Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey. Hankey had emerged during the war as a key member of Britain's policy-making élite. Between 1908 and 1912 he had been assistant Secretary of the recently created Committee of Imperial Defence. From 1912 to 1938 as secretary of that committee he played a decisive part in formulating Britain's defence

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1. Col. House's Diary, 4 November 1918, quoted by J. K. McDonald 'Lloyd George and the Search for a Post-War Naval Policy, 1919' in Lloyd George, Twelve Essays, edited by A. J. P. Taylor, London, 1971, p. 191; Long's memorandum on his talks with Admiral Benson, 29 March 1919, Lloyd George Papers, F/192/1/4; Cecil to House, 8 April 1919, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51094.
2. Cecil Diary, 3 April 1919, and Cecil to Balfour, 5 April 1919, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51131 and 51094.
3. Memorandum on conversation with Col. House, 10 April 1919, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51094.
4. J. K. McDonald in Lloyd George, Twelve Essays, passim.

policies and in frustrating the efforts of those who sought to promote general disarmament. He maintained close contact with the Chiefs of Staff and the Service departments. On more than one occasion he saved them from policies which their civilian masters would have imposed on them. Though not always well informed on opinion within the three political parties, no man had a more intimate knowledge of the views and attitudes of the key policy makers in British politics. As Secretary to the Cabinet from 1916 to 1938, he was in a unique position to observe and to influence the leading figures in British political life. No study of British disarmament policy in the first decade of peace could ignore his formative role.[1]

While staying with Lloyd George at Criccieth in North Wales in July 1919 Hankey produced his momentous paper 'Towards a National Policy'.[2] Hankey argued that there was no sense in basing British defence policy on the possibility of war with the United States because America's immense economic power guaranteed her victory in any contest with the British Empire. It was not enough, however, to persuade the Americans to modify their naval construction programme. That in itself would not lead to reductions in British naval expenditure. Criticising the Fighting Services' non-productive use of manpower and resources, Hankey called on the government to initiate talks for all-round naval disarmament. Within a month of his memorandum the government had taken a number of major policy decisions including its enunciation of the Ten Year Rule and its invitation to Viscount Grey to undertake a special mission to the United States to pave the way for a naval disarmament agreement.

More than a month later Hankey wrote in his diary: 'Bankruptcy stares us in the face. We are confronted by overwhelming difficulties and can only meet them by drastic economies.'[3] For several months Austen

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1. See especially S. Roskill: Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vols. II and III, London, 1972 and 1974, passim.
2. 17 July 1919, CAB 21/159.
3. Hankey Diaries, 25 August 1919, Hankey Papers, 1/5.

Chamberlain, Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lloyd George's post-war Cabinet, had been fighting a losing battle to curb public expenditure. Hankey was in July 1919 articulating the growing concern of many in public life over Britain's capacity to maintain the Two-Power Standard in the straitened financial circumstances of the first year of peace. It is a strange irony that one who was to be regarded by many protagonists of disarmament as an arch militarist, should in the high summer of 1919 be pleading for substantial reductions in naval armaments.

Government expenditure had risen by 300 per cent and defence expenditure by 287.5 per cent between the financial years 1914-15 and 1919-20.[1] Furthermore, whereas in 1913, the last year of peace, Britain had a balance of payment surplus of £237m., in 1919 she had a deficit of £182m.[2] Never was the pressure for large cuts in defence expenditure greater than in the summer of 1919.

Both the War Office and the Admiralty came in for severe criticism from the Treasury in the summer of 1919 but it was the Admiralty's proposed naval estimates of £182m. for the coming financial year which Austen Chamberlain singled out for scrutiny in a Cabinet memorandum in July 1919. It would come as a profound shock to Parliament and the public, he wrote, that despite the surrender of the German, Austrian and Turkish fleets the Admiralty considered it necessary to maintain a fleet almost as large as the naval forces maintained to meet the German menace in 1914. Going on to discuss the prospects of war with each of the major European powers, the United States and Japan, Chamberlain concluded that war with any of them was most unlikely. At a time when Britain's financial position was 'very grave' and Britain was without a foe in the world, there was no

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1. Memorandum on public expenditure by Sir Warren Fisher, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Treasury, 16 June 1920, and Fisher to Lloyd George, 19 June 1920, Lloyd George Papers, F/17/1/1 and 4.

2. The London and Cambridge Economic Service: Key Statistics of the British Economy, 1900-1962, London, n.d., p. 13.

justification for the level of expenditure which the Admiralty was proposing.[1]

Reviewing the position in the Cabinet on 5 August 1919 Lloyd George said that the war had brought about a great change in Britain's standing in the world. Before the war Britain had been a creditor but as a consequence of the war she had become a debtor. For a great trading nation that was a fact of immense importance. Britain was living off capital because she was purchasing abroad more than she could pay for. It looked as if government expenditure in the coming year would be four times the pre-war level and yet the country was living on diminished resources and had lost a great part of the young manhood of the nation. It was clear that the country could not go on living as it was then doing. The government had to be prepared to take risks but it should not take risks with the health and prosperity of the British people. Britain had destroyed the only enemy she had had in Europe. If, therefore, the government continued to maintain an army, navy and air force larger than before the war, people would say that either the war had been a failure or that the government was making provision for fighting an imaginary foe. The Cabinet should decide what forces were needed for the next five or ten years and tell the Service departments against what risks they must provide.[2]

Although Churchill and Long defended their departments against Lloyd George's implied criticisms, the Prime Minister's analysis of the country's position went undisputed. Chamberlain said that he was sure that the Prime Minister had voiced the sentiments of all those present. As a result of the Cabinet's deliberations the Admiralty, the War Office and the India

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1. GT 7646,8 July 1919, CAB 24/83. See also Chamberlain to Long, 25 March 1919, Chamberlain Papers, AC/25/2/7; GT 7729, 18 July 1919, CAB 24/84; G 257, 26 July 1919, CAB 24/5.

2. WC 606A, 5 August 1919, CAB 23/15.

Office were instructed to formulate a statement on the responsibilities of the Fighting Services during the subsequent five or ten years and a committee was set up to review the expenditure of all government departments. Out of these deliberations was born the Ten Year Rule, an instruction to the three Fighting Services to frame their estimates and plan their requirements on the assumption that there would be no major war for at least ten years.

The Ten Year Rule was later to come in for much criticism. It has been derided as 'a calamitous act of policy'[1] and 'the expression of a profoundly pacific feeling in the country which wished to forget war altogether'.[2] Though it can be argued in the light of developments in the 1930s[3] that it was a mistaken policy, seen in the context of the situation facing Britain in 1919, it was an eminently sensible decision. Hankey, the Air Staff and the Admiralty had each discounted the possibility of another major war between first class powers for a long time to come.[4] It was financial and not 'pacifist' considerations which dictated the policy adopted by the Cabinet in 1919.

In the summer of 1919 the call for strict economy came with insistent urgency. On 26 July Chamberlain informed the Cabinet that the country was heading for a £200m. deficit.[5] A month later Hankey advised the Prime Minister to disband the Air Ministry and the Ministries of Food and Shipping and to force the Admiralty and War Office to make much larger reductions.[6] Even a year later the Treasury was telling Lloyd George

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1. C. Barnett: The Collapse of British Power, London, 1972, p. 278.
2. A. C. Temperley: The Whispering Gallery of Europe, London, 1938, p. 170.
3. The Ten Year Rule, renewed periodically up until the end of the decade, was finally rescinded in March 1932.
4. Hankey told Balfour on 25 May 1916: 'It seemed reasonable to suppose that after the end of the present war financial and economic considerations will force peace on the world for at least a generation.' Balfour Papers, BL Add. Mss. 49704 and CAB 27/626; Air Staff memorandum, GT 6477, 9 December 1918, CAB 24/71; S. W. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, p. 215.
5. G 257, CAB 24/5.
6. Hankey Diaries, 25 August 1919, Hankey Papers, 1/5.

that the only way in which public expenditure could be substantially reduced was by imposing economies on the Fighting Services.[1]

Britain's economic recovery was to take priority over the claims of national and imperial defence. An Australian delegate at the Genoa conference criticised the British government for giving disarmed Germany an immense trading advantage by continuing to burden Britain with a huge defence bill.[2] High taxation, the extravagant demands of the Fighting Services, and unsettled conditions in Europe which, it was alleged, were being perpetuated by excessive armaments expenditure, were blamed by politicians and journalists alike for Britain's economic malaise.[3]

This analysis was endorsed by the Brussels International Financial Conference in September 1920.[4] Over eighty financial experts from thirty-nine countries concluded that extravagant government expenditure was largely to blame for the high cost of living and slow recovery in Europe. If the European economy was to revive it was imperative that governments reduced their expenditure and strictly limited defence expenditure. Preparations for war and the continuance of a war atmosphere were hampering the resumption of 'normal' trading relations in Europe.

As unemployment rose in Britain to unprecedented heights and trade declined during the last half of 1920 and the first half of 1921,[5] the Lloyd George government was subjected to an insidious Press campaign, led by Northcliffe's Daily Mail, against waste and 'squandermania' in

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1. Memorandum by Sir Warren Fisher, 16 June 1920, Lloyd George Papers, F/17/1/1.
2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, No. 66.
3. Far less attention was paid to the effects of the war, the creation of new frontiers, and the establishment of new currencies in dislocating Europe's trade.
4. The Brussels conference was convened by the League of Nations.
5. The post-war boom had resulted in a remarkable recovery in British exports which climbed from £963m. in 1919 to £1569m. in 1920. Thanks to invisible exports of £422m. Britain had a surplus on her balance of payments account of £235m. in 1920. When prices continued to rise and the government became alarmed at the fall in the value of sterling, it pushed up bank rate in April 1920 to 7 per cent and brought the post-war boom in Britain to an end.

the public services. Alarmed by the outcry for economy but against the wishes of an important section of the Cabinet,[1] Lloyd George appointed the Geddes Committee on National Expenditure in August 1921. In three successive reports this committee of businessmen recommended in February 1922 cuts in government expenditure totalling over £86m. of which £21m. were to come from the naval estimates, £20m. from the army, and £7.5m. from the air estimates. Strong protests from the Service departments led to the appointment of another committee, chaired by the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill,[2] to examine the impact the Geddes proposals would have on the armed services. Though the Churchill committee did not propose major modifications in the financial recommendations of the Geddes committee, Admiralty pressure subsequently succeeded in limiting the savings on the naval estimates to £10.5m. The War Office and the Air Staff were not, however, so successful in deflecting the Geddes axe.[3]

The government's economy measures were remarkably successful. The 1922 estimates were £75m. lower than the previous year's. The Geddes axe led to further savings of £64m. The 1922 budget was the first post-war budget to be below £1000m. The effects of the economies on the navy were minimal, however, because the Washington treaty slashed Britain's naval construction programme.

The Washington Conference, 1921-1922

Two years before the American government issued its invitations to the Washington conference the Admiralty had tacitly abandoned Britain's

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1. Fisher Diaries, 2 August 1921, Fisher Papers.

2. Churchill had been both First Lord of the Admiralty and Secretary of State for War and Air. He was sympathetic to the Services' point of view and enjoyed a close relationship with Beatty who put the Admiralty's case. See S. Roskill: Churchill and the Admirals, London, 1977, p. 75.

3. P. Dennis: Decision by Default, London, 1972, pp. 12-13; C. L. Mowat: Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940, London, 1955, pp. 130-1; S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, pp. 230-33, 336-41.

pretensions to undisputed naval supremacy.[1] Grey set out on his special mission to Washington in September 1919 with instructions which clearly stated that Britain had no intention of asserting her naval supremacy in the western Atlantic or the Pacific and that in framing future naval estimates Britain would not take into consideration the strength of the United States fleet.[2] In presenting the naval estimates in March 1920 Long implicitly repudiated the Two-Power Standard justifying himself with the observation: 'Look where you will, you will find it difficult today to find a possible enemy.'[3] Lloyd George instructed Long's successor, Lord Lee of Fareham, in February 1921, to cut the naval estimates and curb the influence of the Sea Lords.[4] The Washington conference set the seal on a process which had begun two years earlier.

No year of the inter-war years was more propitious for disarmament than 1921, the year of the Washington conference. When Senator Borah submitted a resolution to the United States Senate on 14 December 1920 calling on the President of the United States to confer with Britain and Japan to secure a fifty per cent. reduction in the naval building programmes

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1. In presenting its revised estimates to the Cabinet in October 1919, the Admiralty warned: 'It must be clearly understood that Great Britain will no longer be supreme at sea.' Adm. 167/56 quoted by S. W. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, pp. 215-6.

2. It had been tacitly assumed since the 48th meeting of the CID on 8 July 1904 that war with the United States was improbable and that no preparations need be made against that contingency. Grey reminded the government that the United States fleet had not been taken into consideration in framing pre-war naval policy. As J. K. McDonald in Lloyd George, Twelve Essays, edited by A. J. P. Taylor has pointed out, Grey not only insisted on writing his own instructions but effectively brought about a change of policy by so doing.

3. 126 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 2300, 17 March 1920.

4. A.Clark (ed.): A Good Innings. The Private Papers of Viscount Lee of Fareham, London, 1974, p. 204. Long had resigned through ill-health in February 1921. His successor, Arthur Hamilton Lee, first Viscount Lee of Fareham, 1868-1947, had been Conservative MP for Fareham, 1900-18, chief Opposition spokesman on naval affairs, 1906-14, an articulate champion of the dreadnought building programme and according to some authorities author of the slogan 'WE WANT EIGHT AND WE WON'T WAIT'. He had spent part of his early career in the United States, had come to know President Theodore Roosevelt, and had become staunchly pro-American.

of the three principal naval powers, his proposal received a warm welcome not only in the United States but in Britain and Japan also. Congress refused to approve the completion of the 1916 naval construction programme and the Harding administration failed to persuade the Senate to drop the Borah resolution.[1] Similar pressures were at work in Japan. The war-time boom had collapsed. Agreement with the United States was vital to save Japan from naval and military expenditure which threatened to consume over half the government's revenues. In January 1921 the prominent Japanese politician, Ozaki Yukio, after his expulsion from the Kenseikai party, attempted to stage a political comeback by holding mass rallies in favour of disarmament. Though he failed to carry the Diet with him, he had strong popular support and the backing of a number of major Japanese newspapers.[2]

The Dominion statesmen who gathered in London in July 1921 for the first post-war imperial conference added their voice to those demanding naval disarmament. Smuts said that the most fatal mistake Britain could possibly make would be to enter into an arms race with the United States and the Australian prime minister, W. M. Hughes who had not been conspicuous in 1918 and 1919 in supporting disarmament and the league idea, asked the conference to give a lead to 'the world weary of war and staggering beneath its crushing burdens'. The conference called on the British government to seek a naval limitation agreement with the United States and to resolve those Far Eastern questions which threatened to divide the two nations. When they also made it abundantly clear that they were not prepared to make any sizeable contribution to financing imperial defence, despite their frequent references to the prime importance of

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1. W. R. Braisted: The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922, Austin, Texas, 1971, pp. 491-504.
2. I. Nish 'Japan and Naval Aspects of the Washington Conference' in W. G. Beasley (ed.): Modern Japan. Aspects of History, Literature and Society, London, 1975, p. 70.

British naval power in protecting imperial communications, the British government found another reason for seeking a naval limitation agreement.[1]

Prominent Americans were not averse to warning Britain that her alliance with Japan[2] was a major impediment to naval disarmament. So long as the alliance continued there was a danger that the United States would not participate in a disarmament conference. The Anglo-Japanese alliance was unpopular in the United States because it was alleged that it strengthened Japan at the expense of American interests in the Far East. The United States government was apt to blame the failures of American diplomacy in Shantung and Siberia on the alliance. Both the United States and Japan had emerged from the First World War strengthened by the conflict and potential rivals in East Asia and the Pacific. The United States' decision to reject the 1919 Paris peace settlement set her free to focus her attention on the Far East and to extract from both Britain and Japan important concessions as the price for naval disarmament. It was, therefore, impossible for Britain to reach a settlement on naval armaments without resolving a host of issues relating to the relative strength and influence of the United States and Japan in the Far East.

The war had made an immense impact on East Asia. It confirmed Japan's predominance in the Far East, led to the virtual elimination of Germany and Russia from the East Asian balance of power, and weakened British and French influence. In both China and Siberia conditions were far from stable. China was in the grip of civil war. Siberia was not under the effective control of Russia's Bolshevik rulers. During the war Britain had meekly accepted the growth of Japanese power on the mainland of Asia

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1. Cmd. 1474, 1921, and CAB 32/2.
2. Britain had made the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1902 as a counterpoise to Russian and German influence. It was revised in 1905 and again in 1911. It came up for review in 1921. For a full discussion of the alliance, see I. Nish: The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, London, 1966, and I. Nish: The Alliance in Decline, London, 1972.

and though she was not unduly perturbed by Japan's expansionist policies she could not be indifferent to the deterioration in Japanese-American relations which those policies, particularly in Shantung and Siberia, had caused. As British exporters struggled to regain those Asian markets they had lost to their Japanese competitors during the war and the Foreign Office began to adopt a sterner tone in its communications with the Japanese government over its policies in East Asia and the Pacific, it was not those policies themselves but their repercussions on Anglo-American relations which exercised the minds of British policy makers in the first years of peace. If China was the nub of Japanese-American relations the Anglo-Japanese alliance was the most contentious issue dividing the two Anglo-Saxon powers.

In October 1919 the Admiralty had warned the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) that in the days of financial stringency which lay ahead Britain would not be in a position to maintain a fleet equal to Japan's in Far Eastern waters.[1] Australia, New Zealand and Britain's possessions in the Pacific would be vulnerable to attack if the Anglo-Japanese alliance was not renewed. There were other reasons too why Japan's friendship was so vital to Britain. The war had revealed the weakness of Britain's position in India. Indian nationalists had looked, albeit unsuccessfully, to Japan for assistance and Britain had turned to Japan for naval support in the Indian Ocean. With British commercial interests in China under threat from resurgent Chinese nationalism it was imperative that Britain should retain Japan's goodwill.

Though the Anglo-Japanese alliance was more popular in Japan than it was in Britain, when the Cabinet discussed its renewal on 30 May 1921 Curzon, the Foreign Secretary, had no difficulty in putting a convincing

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1. FO 371/3822, Admiralty to CID, 31 October 1919, quoted by I. Nish: Alliance in Decline, pp. 284-5.

case for its retention. It was the Colonial Secretary, Churchill, voicing the strong views of the new Canadian prime minister, Arthur Meighen, who opposed renewal. When the British Empire delegation went to Washington in November 1921 the decision to abandon the alliance had already been taken by the Cabinet. Naval disarmament and good Anglo-American relations were to take precedence over the alliance and, perhaps, Britain's long-term interests in the Far East.[1]

There was an element of illusion in the war scares which developed in Britain, the United States and Japan in 1921.[2] The naval building programmes of the three powers, unlike those of Britain and Germany in the years before 1914, did not have the approval of public opinion and were to a large extent bargaining counters designed to extract concessions from other powers. None the less the Washington conference was preceded by careful planning by the British, American and Japanese naval staffs. Those preparations in London led to the formulation of a British disarmament policy for the 1920s. It is no part of this study to discuss the negotiations which led to the conclusion of the Four Power Treaty which replaced the Anglo-Japanese alliance or the Nine Power Treaty concerning China nor will it be necessary to re-trace the main stages of the negotiations which led to the conclusion of the Naval Limitation Treaty concluded on 6 February 1922, all of which have been thoroughly investigated elsewhere.[3]

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1. I. Nish: Alliance in Decline, pp. 277-367 and M. D. Kennedy: The Estrangement of Great Britain and Japan, 1917-36, Manchester, 1969, pp. 48-59.

2. I. Nish: Alliance in Decline, p. 282.

3. The best accounts of the conference are to be found in W. R. Braisted: The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1909-1922, pp. 567-666; S. W. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, pp. 300-30; H. and M. Sprout: Toward a New Order of Sea Power, Princeton, New Jersey, 1946; and J. C. Vinson: The Parchment Peace: the United States and the Washington Conference, 1921-1922, Athens, Georgia, 1955. For the general diplomatic background and Japanese policy in particular see M. G. Fry: The Illusions of Security. North Atlantic Diplomacy, 1918-1922, Toronto, 1972; M. Ito and R. Pineau: The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1868-1941, New York, 1962; J. W. Morley (ed.): Japan's Foreign Policy, 1868-1941, New York, 1974; and I Nish: Alliance in Decline.

Our main purpose is to assess the place which the conference occupies in the evolution of British disarmament policy.

On 15 August the Cabinet entrusted the preparatory work for the conference to the CID suggesting that it be undertaken in 'the most serious and hopeful spirit'.[1] Before the Empire statesmen dispersed, Britain had already sent the American government a memorandum embodying her views on disarmament.[2] Her request for preliminary discussions with the United States, like her proposal for a separate conference in London to discuss Far Eastern and Pacific affairs, met with a negative response. Britain's Fighting Services set to work to prepare Britain's case for the Washington conference without any prior knowledge of American intentions.

The Admiralty's views were collated by Rear Admiral Chatfield and sent to the CID on 5 October. In a prefatory note, Lord Lee wrote that the Admiralty were fully alive to the grave consequences of failure. Though they did not hesitate to express their own priorities they were in no doubt that the United States should take the initiative in making proposals at the conference. They stressed the importance of securing a numerical limitation of capital ships of post-Jutland design[3] and suggested, in order to reduce construction programmes, that their replacement life should be fixed at twenty years. They drew attention to the importance of the proposed Singapore naval base and boldly asserted that the naval needs of the British Empire were far greater than those of any other power. Though they were aware of the opposition it would arouse,

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1. C. 67(21), 15 August 1921, CAB 23/26.
2. Appendix 1, E 46 in CAB 32/2 and A 6282 in FO 371/5618.
3. The term post-Jutland design was used for those battleships mounting 16" guns with improved armour plating and other innovations which were then being built by the United States and Japan. With the exception of the Hood with its 15" guns, Britain's battleships were armed with guns of a maximum calibre of 14". The construction programme approved by the Cabinet in the previous July made provision for four post-Jutland design 16" gun battleships to be constructed in the financial year 1921-22 with others to follow in succeeding years.

they proposed the abolition of submarines, setting out the strategic advantages Britain, with its chain of naval bases across the world, would gain from abolition. They deprecated discussion of the rules of war and concluded that the conference's main purpose was 'to try and find some practical solution to the question of vast Budgets for naval and military purposes'.[1]

Despite the fact that Britain in her memorandum to the American government had cast doubts upon the wisdom of discussing land and air armaments at the forthcoming disarmament conference, both the War Office and the Air Staff were invited to prepare memoranda on land and air disarmament for the CID. Both were almost entirely negative. The General Staff painted a picture of Britain's military impotence which made talk of further reductions nonsensical[2] and the Air Staff, ignoring the conclusions reached by its own experts at the Paris peace conference in 1919, concluded that nothing could be done to limit air armaments because no satisfactory differentiation could be made between military and civil aircraft.[3]

The Admiralty's proposals not unnaturally occupied the lion's share of the CID's time though in a brief discussion on air armaments an alarmist picture was drawn of the growing disparity between French and British air strength.[4] Churchill, whose memory of the pre-war Anglo-German arms race proved to be most instructive, made two additional proposals. The first for reciprocal inspection of ships and dockyards

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1. CID Paper 277-B, 5 October 1921, CAB 4/7.
2. CID Paper 276-B, 5 October 1921, CAB 4/7.
3. CID Paper 279-B, 11 October 1921, CAB 4/7. The air experts at Paris in 1919 had concluded that such a differentiation could be made. Germany was deprived of military aviation but no attempt was made to prevent her building civil aircraft.
4. CID, 145th Meeting, 14 October 1921, CAB 2/3. Balfour raised the matter. Chairing the CID he told its members that Britain was incapable of 'resisting an aerial invasion by the French'. It was decided, however, not to press the issue at the conference.

was rejected by the Admiralty who were 'loathe to share the fruit of expensive research...with other powers'. The other, which owed much to his pre-war experience as First Lord of the Admiralty, was adopted by the CID. Britain would go to the conference table with a paper programme which she had no intention of implementing but which could be used as a bargaining counter to secure concessions from other powers. Lee's announcement to the Imperial Conference in July 1921 that Britain would lay down four capital ships in the financial year 1921-22 and another four in the following year paved the way for the deployment of these tactics.[1]

Though Balfour, Britain's first delegate, was given considerable discretion over Far Eastern policy so far as disarmament was concerned the British Empire delegation went to Washington with a set of clearly defined objectives which had been fashioned in the months preceding the conference. Britain's first objective was to prevent competition in post-Jutland design capital ships. If the United States and Japan were to complete their construction programmes Britain would either be forced to cripple herself financially in order to maintain her superiority or see her large battle fleet rendered obsolete. No one was in any doubt about the consequences of Britain being relegated to second or, perhaps, third place in the league of naval powers. In a veiled reference to the American naval construction programme Lloyd George had told the House of Commons in July 1919 that if one country went on increasing its armaments Britain could only demonstrate her desire for disarmament by taking risks which no British statesman could afford to contemplate.[2] Two years later he informed the 1921 Imperial Conference that Britain was building up her

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1. The funds were provided in the estimates approved by the Commons on 21 March 1921. It was not until 20 July that the Cabinet sanctioned their construction [C.60(21), CAB 23/26]. Lee gave details of the programme to the Imperial Conference on 29 July. The announcement was greeted without any expression of dissent.

2. 118 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1040 and 1048, 21 July 1919.

fleet because the prestige, honour and existence of the Empire required it. When the Empire's statesmen went to Geneva it was known that they represented a first-class power. Britain would go to the brink of bankruptcy rather than sacrifice her naval power. The fleet was essential if Britain's position in the world was to be maintained.[1] Britain went to Washington to fend off a challenge to her naval power. 'It is assumed that the aim of the British Empire Delegation...is to achieve the largest possible reduction in expenditure on armaments', Hankey wrote in October 1921 in a brief for Britain's negotiators.[2] At Washington in 1921, at Geneva in 1927, and in London in 1930, the Admiralty's proposals were inspired by Britain's paramount concern for economy.

In 1921 the Admiralty had two immediate objectives: the numerical limitation of capital ships and the abolition of submarines. Though they were not averse to the limitation of aircraft carriers and total destroyer tonnage they were opposed to restrictions on other categories of warships. In the mid-1920s they were led to propose limitations on the maximum displacement and armament of those other categories, including cruisers, but throughout the decade they were implacably opposed to any restrictions which would prevent Britain building such numbers of commerce-protection vessels as she deemed necessary.

The proposals which Charles E. Hughes, the American Secretary of State, outlined at the opening session of the Washington conference could scarcely have been more favourable to Britain. Their overall effect was to ensure Britain's numerical superiority in capital ships over the United States and other naval powers until the late 1930s.[3]

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1. 20 July 1921, Meeting of the Prime Ministers of the Empire, CAB 32/2.
2. CID Paper 280-B, 24 October 1921, CAB 30/1A.
3. The United States proposed that the three principal naval powers should scrap such numbers of older capital ships and those under construction so that Britain retained twenty-two, the United States eighteen, and Japan ten. Almost two decades would elapse before the 5 : 5 : 3 ratio would apply to their respective battle fleets.

[Contd. overleaf

Although the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Lee of Fareham, would have given Hughes' proposals an unqualified endorsement,[1] the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet, Earl Beatty, Britain's principal naval adviser and a man of great influence in the years 1919 to 1927, made a number of reservations. His arguments won over his colleagues in the British Empire delegation but not the government in London. Beatty argued that a ten year naval holiday in capital ship construction would doom Britain's shipyards and armaments firms to decay and eventual extinction and as an alternative he suggested a three year naval holiday followed by a reduced building programme of two capital ships every three years.[2]

His suggestion was strenuously opposed by Lloyd George, Churchill and others. Eventually the Foreign Secretary, Curzon, was forced to issue a stiff rebuke when Beatty and his staff tried to sabotage the Hughes proposal by pointing out to their American counterparts that it conferred an enormous benefit on Britain. Churchill warned the CID that if any ships were built during the ensuing decade the naval powers would be kept in a state of anxiety and rivalry. The views of the civilians prevailed. Public opinion in Britain was firmly behind the government. Though Beatty was able to call the tune in the summer of 1927 when the Geneva naval conference was deadlocked, he was not able to dictate to

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Fn. 3, p. 182, contd.

Whereas the United States would be obliged to scrap fifteen ships under construction and Japan seven, Britain was only required to abandon the construction of the four 'super Hoods' on which practically no work had, as yet, been undertaken. In the revised proposals designed to save the Japanese battleship Mutsu, Britain was allowed to retain two of the four ships she was to have scrapped. These were later named Rodney and Nelson.

1. A. Clark (ed.): A Good Innings. The Private Papers of Viscount Lee of Fareham, p. 214.

2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 417. Cf. Nos. 418, 426 and 456.

the Lloyd George government in the late autumn of 1921.[1]

Beatty made two other reservations which won the support of the CID and Cabinet in London. Hughes had tentatively suggested that other categories of warship might be limited on the same principle as capital ships. While prepared to accept proportionate reductions in those classes of auxiliary vessel which could be regarded as complementary to battle fleets, Beatty insisted that Britain would require additional cruisers to protect her commerce. It was this claim for additional cruisers which six years later was to wreck the Geneva naval conference and was to embitter relations between the United States and Britain until Ramsay MacDonald imposed his will on the Admiralty in the late summer of 1929. The CID established the principle in response to Beatty's pleading that Britain's cruiser strength should not be based on the numbers maintained by other powers but on the length and variety of the sea communications over which Britain's food and vital supplies had to be transported.[2]

Beatty also indicated his strong preference for the abolition of submarines and, should this be rejected, a large reduction in submarine numbers and tonnage. The Cabinet, on the recommendation of the CID, endorsed his views. Admiral Field told the CID on 14 November that a battleship of 35,000 tons - the maximum permissible displacement if the American proposals were to be adopted - would not have adequate protection against submarine attack. The battle fleets of the world would be at the mercy of large flotillas of submarines of improved design if submarines were allowed to proliferate. On 16 November Beatty, taking his cue from instructions just received from London, told the British Empire delegation

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1. Curzon wrote a personal letter to Balfour on 9 December 1921. See DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 485. For Churchill's views see CID, 149th meeting, 14 November 1921, CAB 2/3. T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. 1, p. 191, diary entry for 15 November 1921, reports Lloyd George as saying: 'There must be no question of considering employment nor of building a small number of ships to keep the armament firms going.'

2. CID, 149th meeting, 14 November 1921, CAB 2/3.

that if the ten-year naval holiday was approved Britain 'should insist on the abolition of the submarine'.[1]

At the beginning of December the CID instructed the British Empire delegation to press for 'total abolition'. If they failed they were to warn the conference that Britain would insist on absolute freedom in the construction of surface warships of under 10,000 tons to protect her commerce.[2] Having first sounded out the chairman of the conference, the American Secretary of State, the delegation complied with his request not to raise the issue in open session. Lord Lee put Britain's case to the Committee on Limitation of Armaments on 22 December but the delegation made sure that the British point of view received the maximum publicity by issuing verbatim reports to the American Press. So effective was their manipulation of the Press that postcards, letters, petitions demanding abolition flooded into Washington.

Putting the case for abolition Lee argued somewhat disingenuously that 'it was against merchant ships alone' that submarines had achieved any real success in the First World War. He studiously avoided referring to the Admiralty's fears that surface warships including capital ships would prove increasingly vulnerable to submarine attack. Submarines constituted as great a danger to Britain, Lee argued, as any faced by France on her eastern frontier because Britain only produced two-fifths of her food supplies and only kept enough stocks to feed her people for seven weeks. If submarines were retained, nations with large mercantile fleets would be forced to construct vast numbers of anti-submarine craft and there would be no relief for the overburdened taxpayer. Submarines might be cheap for the aggressor but they were very expensive for the victim.

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1. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, Nos. 417, 420 and 421; CAB 30/1A.
2. CID, 152nd meeting, 1 December 1921, CAB 2/3.

The case for abolition was rejected by France, Italy and Japan whose delegates argued that submarines were a legitimate weapon of defence which a power deficient in capital ships could use to defend its coasts and sea communications. Britain received no support from the American delegation whose naval advisers were divided over the issue. Hughes' attempt to persuade the conference to accept a tonnage limitation also met with the outright opposition of the French. Britain had to rest content with the Root resolutions which attempted to regulate the conduct of submarines in time of war.[1]

Britain had good reason for seeking the abolition of submarines. German submarines had sunk twelve million tons of merchant shipping and caused the death of twenty thousand non-combatants. German submarine warfare had outraged not only British but neutral opinion too. In Britain the abolitionist cause acquired something of the moral fervour of the anti-slavery crusade of a century earlier. Strong support for abolition came from the king, George V,[2] and that consistent critic of disarmament proposals, Sir Eyre Crowe.[3] Britain had little to gain and much to lose from their retention and what was true of Britain was also true of the other principal naval powers though both the United States and Japan were slow to realise it. This in itself, however, does not explain why the Admiralty adopted the abolitionist cause with such vigour in the closing months of 1921. They had failed to secure abolition at the 1919 Paris peace conference and, before the Washington conference convened, had reluctantly come to the conclusion that abolition was, for all intents and purposes, a lost cause.[4] Having secured their main objective, the

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1. CAB 30/9.
2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 485, Note 3; S. W. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, p. 306.
3. CID, 150th meeting, 23 November 1921, CAB 2/3.
4. CID Paper 277-B, 5 October 1921, CAB 4/7.

limitation of capital ships in the first few days of the conference, it was not unnatural that they should seek to realise their only other goal. By championing the abolitionist cause they, at one and the same time, won the approval of the disarmament lobby in Britain and when abolition was rejected, strengthened their own case for additional auxiliary vessels to protect British commerce and assert British naval power in seas where Britain's battle fleet would no longer operate.

Lloyd George was obliged to raise the submarine question again when he discussed disarmament with Briand at the Cannes conference in January 1922 but despite the pressure he was instructed to bring to bear on the French by his Cabinet colleagues at home his efforts were to no avail. H. A. L. Fisher summed up the attitude of many of his Cabinet colleagues when he wrote at the end of 1921: 'The French attitude on submarines fills me with despair. I have had some dealings with representatives of the French Admiralty at Geneva and a more unteachable set of men I have never come across, as vain as peacocks and eaten up with jealousy of us.'[1] France's uncompromising rejection of the British case embittered relations between the two countries. Coupled with her unwillingness to discuss land armaments at the Washington conference it made Anglo-French co-operation over disarmament virtually impossible in the early 1920s.

Though the technical experts made a very full investigation of the problems associated with land and air disarmament, the Washington conference made no positive proposals. The conference's successes were entirely in the field of naval armaments and Far Eastern affairs.[2]

With the single exception of her failure to secure an agreement over submarines, the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty were considered

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1. Fisher to Gilbert Murray, 31 December 1921, Fisher Papers.
2. H. Latimer: Naval Disarmament, London, 1930, pp. 2-11, 78-88 contains a succinct summary of the Washington conference and the text of the naval limitation treaty.

at the time wholly favourable to Britain. The American proposals had been greeted with gratitude and relief. They meant that the United States made the biggest sacrifices while Britain was called on to surrender very little of her freedom and practically nothing of her naval strength.

The Washington treaties were to come in for severe criticism ten years later when Japan resumed her policy of expansion on the mainland of Asia. Both Britain and the United States paid a price for naval disarmament but it would be wrong to exaggerate the concessions made to Japan. The standstill agreement on fortifications gave Japan naval hegemony in the western Pacific but there is no evidence that, had the Washington conference not taken place, the United States would have constructed naval bases in Guam and Manila or Britain at Hong Kong. Britain's decision to build a naval base at Singapore was taken before the Washington conference. Though ostensibly its purpose was to protect imperial communications, its justification was the possibility of war with Japan. So long as Britain was powerless to maintain a battle fleet in the Pacific the Singapore base would, however, be of little value in a war with Japan. The deterioration in relations between the Anglo-Saxon powers and Japan in the aftermath of the Great Depression had little to do with the Washington conference and the 1922 naval arms limitation treaty.

The conference led to a considerable improvement in Japanese-American relations and Anglo-American understanding. That this was subsequently undermined by the actions and policies of British, American and Japanese statesmen reacting to changed circumstances does not detract from the achievement itself. The conference's success owed much to the coincidence that there were powerful influences at work in London, Washington and Tokyo working for an arms limitation agreement and an improvement in the relations between the three powers. Most Japanese politicians and journalists recognised that it would be an enormous blessing if Japan's

naval and military expenditure could be reduced.[1] What was true of Japan was equally true of Britain and America. Never again was there to be such a unanimous demand for arms limitation and control as there was in Britain, the United States and Japan in the summer and autumn of 1921. Though Britain's policy in Ireland and Japan's in China had led to fierce resentment in the United States it was the prospect of a naval arms race which engrossed the attention of the public in all three countries. The United States' pre-eminence in the world of finance convinced British and Japanese statesmen of the prime importance of good relations with the American government.[2] The conference symbolised America's emergence as the richest and most powerful nation on earth, wooed not only by Britain and Japan but by France and the other participating powers. In December 1920 Lloyd George had warned the Committee of Imperial Defence that if Britain began a naval building programme, the United States might press for the immediate repayment of the £1000m. Britain owed her.[3] The United States was the arbiter of both Britain's and Japan's destiny. She alone could ensure the success of a major disarmament conference.

The conference had political repercussions at home. Though Lloyd George attended twenty-four post-war international conferences the delicate nature of the Irish negotiations in the autumn of 1921 and other domestic problems prevented him from leading the British Empire delegation at Washington and enhancing his reputation as an international negotiator. That responsibility fell on Lloyd George's most senior colleague. Balfour

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1. I. Nish: Alliance in Decline, p. 384.
2. On 27 December 1921 Admiral Kato Tomosaburo sent the Navy Vice-Minister a memorandum which summed up Japan's reasons for agreeing to an arms limitation pact. 'One has to admit that, if one has no money, one cannot make war...If we examine where funds can now be obtained, we cannot discover any country apart from the United States which can give us a loan...national defence is not a matter exclusively for soldiers.' Quoted by I. Nish: Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869-1942, pp. 289-90 and in 'Japan and Naval Aspects of the Washington Conference' in Modern Japan, ed. W. G. Beasley, pp. 67-80.
3. CID, 134th meeting, 14 December 1920, CAB 2/3.

was a statesman of unrivalled experience and immense political stature. He had been in turn Prime Minister, First Lord of the Admiralty, Foreign Secretary and Lord President of the Council. With the assured backing of both his Conservative and Liberal colleagues there was never any likelihood that his Washington handiwork would be repudiated by the Cabinet at home. Unlike his successor as Britain's principal negotiator in the disarmament negotiations of the years 1926 to 1927, Lord Cecil, he enjoyed an almost unequalled personal authority and the virtually unanimous support of the public. He was in an immensely powerful position as a negotiator. His success earned him an earldom and the gratitude of the public. It gave credibility to Conservative claims to be supporters of disarmament.[1]

The Washington treaties won almost universal praise in Britain and were far from unpopular in the United States and Japan. It did not seem too far-fetched for Curzon to claim that the treaties had laid a firm foundation for peace throughout the whole world[2] and for Balfour to describe them as an absolute and unmixed benefit to mankind.[3] In October 1923 Baldwin was to tell the Imperial Conference: 'I do not think I exaggerate if I say that the results achieved our most sanguine anticipations.'[4] When the Commons approved the Washington treaty in July 1922 Asquith said it commanded universal approbation and assent and Colonel J. C. Wedgwood, speaking on behalf of Labour Members, said it had the

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1. Both Balfour and Lee were members of the Conservative party but their views were not, at that time, wholly representative of the party. C. P. Scott believed that Balfour had become a Liberal in his old age and quoted Lloyd George as saying that in matters of foreign policy Balfour was more Liberal than Grey. T. Wilson (ed.): The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott, 1911-1928, London, 1970, pp. 421 and 429. Lord Lee of Fareham was deprived of the welcome and kudos received by his senior colleague. He was the victim of a vendetta in the Northcliffe papers.
2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 578.
3. K. Young: Arthur James Balfour, London, 1963, p. 420.
4. CAB 32/9. Baldwin was referring to the achievements of the conference as a whole and not just to the limitation treaty.

united support of the House.[1] A Manchester Guardian editorial summed up the debate by saying that the general sense of the House was one of regret that it had not been possible to go further.[2]

Britain had achieved most, if not all, her objectives without imposing sacrifices on other powers which were too costly or too humiliating for them to bear. Special care was taken to meet the special requirements of France and Italy whose battle fleets were also restricted by the treaty. Its principal merit was that it prevented a wasteful competition in capital ship construction and in so doing saved the taxpayers of the five signatory powers financial expenditure which would not in any way have added to their security.

In Japan, military and naval expenditure was reduced from forty-nine to thirty per cent. of government expenditure and in 1924 four divisions of the Japanese army were disbanded.[3] Throughout the 1920s the main objectives of Japanese foreign and defence policy were armaments control and co-operation with the Anglo-Saxon powers. According to H. L. Stimson, one of Japan's sternest critics, her conduct in the 1920s earned for her 'an exceptional record of good citizenship in the life of the world'.[4]

Reporting the findings of the Cabinet Committee set up to examine the effects of the Geddes' Committee's proposals on the three Fighting Services, Churchill wrote in February 1922: 'We do not believe that so large a reduction in naval expenditure could have been recommended unless the Washington Conference had taken place...if the Washington Conference

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1. 156 HC Debs. 5th series, cols. 22-25 and 132, 7 July 1922. The only dissentient note was struck by two Conservative MPs for dockyard constituencies, Sir B. Falle (Portsmouth, N.) and Sir C. Kinloch-Cooke (Devonport).
2. 8 July 1922.
3. J. B. Crowley in Japan's Foreign Policy, 1868-1941, ed. J. W. Morley, pp. 38-43.
4. H. L. Stimson: The Far Eastern Crisis. Recollections and Observations, New York, 1936, p. 36.

had failed...we should have been confronted with a naval situation of great and growing tension, the last effort to relieve...by conference and agreement had definitely failed. It is hardly too much to say that the failure of the Washington Conference would have brought us within measurable distance of a great war in the Pacific...We should have been confronted with a great increase in Japanese and American naval strength and this would have required of us the most rigorous efforts if we were not to resign ourselves to the second and third place among the world's naval Powers.'[1] Churchill was not alone in thinking that the Washington conference had delivered the British people from the menacing prospect of naval competition and international conflict.

None the less the Washington treaty had its critics. Both Lord Robert Cecil and Philip Noel-Baker disliked the Washington precedent which was to tempt successive British governments in the years 1922 to 1935 to seek bilateral agreements with other naval powers. Like the French, Cecil and Noel-Baker believed that disarmament was the proper concern of the League and not of a small group of naval powers acting independently of it. However, most people in Britain welcomed their government's endeavours to come to terms with the United States in the three naval conferences of 1921-22, 1927 and 1930. So long as the United States remained outside the League there appeared to be no other alternative. Others said with some justice in the aftermath of the conference that the great powers were spending more time and energy in devising means to increase the fighting strength of their navies than ever before. Some noted that the only categories of warship to be restricted were battleships and aircraft carriers, the one of doubtful utility in the new era of submarines and aerial bombardment,[2] the other virtually new and untried in war. Sir

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1. CP 3692, 4 February 1922, CAB 27/164.

2. The CID Naval Shipbuilding Sub-Committee, set up by the government under the chairmanship of Bonar Law in December 1920, was divided on the issue and two prominent naval authorities, Admiral Sir Percy Scott and Admiral (Sir) Herbert Richmond, came out publicly against the battleship. In both Press and Parliament many questioned the wisdom of constructing new capital ships in the years immediately after the war.

Eyre Crowe suggested in June 1923 that Britain would not have signed the treaty had she not been motivated by a strong desire to save money and a sneaking suspicion that the days of the battleship were in the past. He questioned whether Britain had gained anything by her signature because almost eighteen months after the conclusion of the conference a number of powers had not then ratified their signature, a fact, he said, which should act as a warning against assuming that other powers were anxious to disarm.[1]

One restriction placed on the construction of warships by the Washington treaty, a 10,000 ton 8" gun limitation on cruisers, had unforeseen and unfortunate consequences for Britain. When the proposal was unwittingly made by the Admiralty in November 1921 the largest cruisers in the world then under construction were the American 'Omaha' class warships of 7,050 tons and 6" guns. Ships of that size were more than adequate for Britain's needs. 10,000 ton 8" gun cruisers were an extravagance Britain could ill afford. The limit led to the construction of cruisers which were unnecessary for commerce protection and whose armament made them of considerable value in augmenting the fire power of those very battle fleets Britain had set out to restrict.

In the summer of 1922 the Admiralty reacted to Japanese construction plans by demanding that Britain should build seventeen ships of this class. The United States naval authorities followed suit and by the mid-1920s the five signatory powers were engaged in a new naval arms race. It was ironically enough the decision of the first Labour government in 1924 to lay down five of these cruisers, a measure it justified as alleviating unemployment in the dockyard towns, which translated proposals into actual construction. When in the Spring of 1924 the Labour government instructed the Admiralty to devise new naval disarmament plans it was Beatty who

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1. FO 371/9419, 24-26 June 1923.

tentatively suggested to his naval colleagues that Britain should propose a 7,000 ton 6" gun limitation for cruisers in any future disarmament negotiations.[1]

When Churchill, much to his surprise, was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 1924, he set to work with great zeal and singleness of purpose to reduce public expenditure and cut taxation. One of his first targets was the naval estimates. Convinced that there was not the slightest chance of war with a first-class naval power, including Japan, for another twenty years,[2] Churchill tried to get all new construction deleted from the estimates. 'The poacher in the naval interest of earlier times became the Treasury's gamekeeper.'[3] The Admiralty, however, took the offensive and briefed the First Lord, W. C. Bridgeman,[4] and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, J. C. C. Davidson,[5] to persuade their fellow countrymen that Britain's cruiser strength was vital for the defence of the Empire's trade routes. They also found a valuable ally in Sir William Tyrrell of the Foreign Office who set out to persuade Austen Chamberlain that if Britain ceased to command a powerful navy the world would lose confidence in the British government and the Foreign Secretary's word would carry no weight with other powers.[6] Tyrrell's views were shared by a large and powerful section of the Conservative party.

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1. S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. I, pp. 353 and 428.
2. Churchill to Baldwin, 15 December 1924, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 2.
3. S. W. Roskill: Churchill and the Admirals, London, 1977, p. 78.
4. William Clive Bridgeman, 1st Viscount Bridgeman (1929), 1864-1935, Cons. MP for Oswestry, 1906-29, Secretary of Mines, 1920-22, Home Secretary, 1922-24, First Lord of the Admiralty, 1924-29.
5. John Colin Campbell Davidson, 1st Viscount Davidson (1937), 1889-1970, Cons. MP for Hemel Hempstead, 1920-23, 1924-37, PPS to Baldwin, 1920-22, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1923-24, 1931-37, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, 1924-27, Chairman of the Conservative Party, 1927-30.
6. R. R. James (ed.): Memoirs of a Conservative. J. C. C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-1937, London, 1969, p. 213.

'People forget', the Conservative MP for Barnard Castle, Cuthbert Headlam, wrote, 'that it is our possession of a first-rate fleet which is one of the main preventatives of war.'[1] Similar views had been expressed by Earl Balfour over a year earlier. In a House of Lords debate in March 1924 Balfour said that armaments were one of the most powerful means of preserving peace because they made a potential belligerent feel that war was not worthwhile.[2] An increasing number of Conservatives were returning to the view that if Britain wanted peace she must prepare for war.

The Prime Minister was forced to intervene decisively when Bridgeman and the Sea Lords threatened to resign and the party whips told him that if the navy was sacrificed on the altar of the Treasury it would mean the end of the Conservative party.[3] Overruling not only Churchill but a majority of his Cabinet, Baldwin decided that two 8" gun cruisers should be laid down in October 1925, another two in February 1926, followed by two more in October 1926 and one in February 1927.[4] It is doubtful whether Baldwin or any members of his Cabinet foresaw the impact this decision would make on Anglo-American relations in the following four years.

The 1925 cruiser crisis, which has been described by one authority as the most serious internal crisis of Baldwin's second administration,[5] was seen by some contemporaries as a plot by Churchill and the ex-Coalitionists to unseat Baldwin.[6] Whether this was so or not, the navy lobby's victory was of considerable political significance. It

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1. Headlam Diaries, 16 July 1925.
2. 56 HL Debs. 5th Series, col. 764, 13 March 1924.
3. R. R. James (ed.): Memoirs of a Conservative, pp. 211-19; K. Middlemas and J. Barnes: Baldwin, London, 1969, p. 339; see also Bridgeman to Baldwin, 11 February 1925 and his handwritten memorandum 'The Political Case for the Admiralty' n.d., Baldwin Papers, Vol. 2.
4. C.39(25), 22 July 1925, CAB 23/50.
5. R. R. James (ed.): Memoirs of a Conservative, p. 211.
6. Headlam Diaries, 23 July 1925.

represented an assertion of British imperial power at precisely the moment when Chamberlain was steering the Conservative party towards Europe via the negotiations leading to the Locarno agreements.

It was also a reflection on the influence the Admiralty still wielded. Though they were fortunate in having as their political chiefs two of Baldwin's closest friends and advisers,[1] there can be no doubt about the power they themselves exercised. Haldane was so impressed with their influence that he told Beatrice Webb that they were powerful enough to overturn governments[2] and Churchill criticised them for giving less value for money than the other two Services because they were so accustomed to carrying all before them by threats of resignation.[3]

By far the most powerful of the three Services, the Admiralty was also the most contemptuous of the League and Wilsonian internationalism. In 1910 they had made an ineffectual response to tentative American proposals for an international naval force[4] and when in 1919 Admiral Benson, Chief of the American Naval Staff, suggested that the British and American navies form an Anglo-American condominium of the world's oceans, Walter Long, the First Lord, rejected it out of hand.[5] Believing that there was no substitute for the free and unfettered deployment of British naval power, the Admiralty were incapable of devising the imaginative proposals for a League naval force then being outlined by some members of the United States Navy's General Board.[6] In 1924 it

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1. Baldwin's candidature in 1923 had been promoted by Davidson, Amery and Bridgeman. See D. Dilks in The Conservatives, ed. Lord Butler, London, 1977, p. 283. Davidson was perhaps the closest of all Baldwin's advisers but Bridgeman enjoyed a very close personal relationship to which his correspondence in the Baldwin Papers bears ample testimony.
2. Haldane to Beatrice Webb, 23 January 1925, Passfield Papers.
3. Churchill to Baldwin, 29 January 1928, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 2.
4. G. E. C. Catlin 'The Roots of War' in Challenge to Death, London, 1934, p. 34.
5. Unsigned memorandum, 29 March 1919, to be attributed on internal evidence to Long, Lloyd George Papers, F/192/1/4.
6. S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, pp. 84-5.

was the Admiralty which first raised the standard of revolt against the Geneva Protocol, sending a staff officer to Geneva to thwart the efforts of the British delegation lest Britain's naval power be placed at the disposal of the League.[1]

The navy was well served by a succession of First Lords who, with the exception of Lee and Chelmsford,[2] were men of considerable influence in the Conservative party.[3] In Earl Beatty, the navy had a powerful and able champion as First Sea Lord in the years 1919 to 1927. It commanded the affection of the Conservative party, most of the Press, and a sizeable section of the public. None the less, there was some decline in its popular appeal. In 1920 the Navy League had 105 branches but by 1927 it had only 41.[4] Though it was frequently said in the aftermath of victory that British sea power had brought about Germany's defeat, the navy's reputation had not emerged unscathed from the war. Writing to a friend on the day after the Armistice Beatty said: 'We are not going to win in the Council all that our great victory entitles us to.'[5] There had been no great ocular demonstration of British sea power comparable to Trafalgar and the great naval victories of past wars. It was increasingly difficult to persuade the public to spend vast sums on a navy whose role, however important, had been so unspectacular in the First World War.

The Washington conference's success led others to seek disarmament

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1. See p. 259.
2. F. J. N. Thesiger, 3rd Lord and 1st Viscount Chelmsford (1921), 1868-1933, Viceroy of India, 1916-21, First Lord of the Admiralty in the first Labour government, 1924.
3. Long had been a contender for the Conservative party leadership in 1911 and Bridgeman was closely associated with Baldwin's rise to power. Amery was a man of considerable intellectual force whose imperialist philosophy was attractive to the bulk of Conservative opinion.
4. Navy League: 25th Annual Report for the Year 1920, London, 1921, and 32nd Annual Report for the Year 1927, London, 1928.
5. W. S. Chalmers: The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty, London, 1951, p. 342.

on a regional or restricted basis. In December 1922 the Soviet Union convened a conference of Baltic and East European powers and in the following March a number of Latin American countries tried to reach an agreement over naval armaments at Santiago. In February 1924 the League summoned a conference at Rome to extend the principles of the Washington treaty to the naval forces of the rest of the world. The complete failure of all three conferences did not discourage the British and American governments from contemplating another naval disarmament conference. MacDonald did not disguise Britain's enthusiasm for the Washington precedent when he addressed the League Assembly in September 1924. When in 1924 and 1925 the United States made a number of tentative initiatives they were, however, quickly rebuffed by France.

The Geneva Naval Disarmament Conference

None the less in February 1927 President Coolidge invited the signatories of the Washington treaty to augment the work of the League of Nations Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference,[1] which was at that time deadlocked over naval disarmament, to attend another naval disarmament conference, not in Washington, but in Geneva. The invitation was accepted by Britain and Japan but rejected by France and Italy.

President Coolidge's initiative produced a mixed reaction in the Foreign Office. Alexander Cadogan,[2] who no doubt because of his responsibilities for disarmament within the Office had urged the government a few days earlier to take the lead, welcomed it. If the conference met with success, the naval powers would be in an unassailable position to urge

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1. See pp. 298-310.
2. (Sir) Alexander George Cadogan, 1884-1968, Head of the League of Nations section of the Foreign Office, 1923-33, Deputy Under-Secretary of State, 1936-37, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, 1938-46, Permanent British representative at the United Nations, 1946-50.

land and air disarmament on other countries.[1] R. H. Campbell[2] took a totally different view. Britain had no need to fall in with Coolidge's plans which, Campbell believed, were almost entirely motivated by electoral and domestic considerations.[3] He correctly predicted that land and air disarmament would provide a more promising prospect.[4] Austen Chamberlain had no doubts. No power had a greater interest in securing further limitation of naval armaments than Britain. Though he disliked Coolidge's suggestion that the 5 : 5 : 3 ratio should be extended to other categories, he believed that Britain would be able to propose an alternative scheme.[5]

Long before the Coolidge conference convened in Geneva in June 1927 the Admiralty found themselves constrained to give considerable thought to further measures of naval disarmament. As the estimates were pared down from year to year by a parsimonious Treasury and House of Commons it became imperative to devise means of reducing the construction and maintenance costs of Britain's warships. In April 1924 Beatty proposed a reduction in the maximum permitted displacement and armament of battleships, cruisers, and other categories of warship. Further proposals were made in 1925 and 1926. The Coolidge initiative was warmly welcomed by the Admiralty. To create a favourable climate of opinion Bridgeman announced on 9 March 1927 that the government would not proceed with the construction of three cruisers scheduled in the 1925 programme.[6] Two

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 333.
2. (Sir) Ronald Hugh Campbell, 1883-1953, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1906-11, Private Secretary to Lord Carnock, 1913-16, to Lord Hardinge, 1916-19, to Lord Curzon, 1919-20, Assistant Head of Western Department, 1920-28, Counsellor, 1928, Minister at Paris, 1929-35, Ambassador to Yugoslavia, 1935-39, to France, 1939-40, to Portugal, 1940-45.
3. Campbell believed that Coolidge, with an eye to the 1928 Congressional and Presidential elections, was embarrassed by the delay in implementing the US Navy's cruiser construction programme.
4. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 334.
5. Ibid., Note 3.
6. 203 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1214. See also his remarks on 14 March 1927, 203 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1683-4.

weeks before the government received Coolidge's invitation, Bridgeman submitted an Admiralty memorandum to the Prime Minister which contained a number of detailed proposals for reducing the maximum displacement and armament of all the main categories of warship. The Preparatory Commission, it declared, held out few prospects of success. At best it was likely to lead to further prolonged delay. Unless action was taken immediately naval expenditure in Britain was bound to rise from 1928 onwards.[1]

The Admiralty's main purpose was to prevent a wasteful and expensive competition in warships which Britain could ill afford by reducing their size and extending their replacement life. There is no evidence that they shared the view of many of their contemporaries that an arms race inevitably led to war.

The Coolidge initiative produced a very different response in the United States. Congress reversed an earlier decision not to provide funds for the completion of the 1924 cruiser construction programme.[2] Many held the view that in 1922 the United States had been cheated of her rightful prize - parity with Britain. Anti-British sentiment reared its head in Congress and the Press. The Chicago Tribune demanded the British West Indies as the price for an agreement.[3] Accusations were later to be levelled at United States steel interests and armaments firms for the provocative tone of much of the American press.[4]

Coolidge's invitation was well received in Japan. Though there were elements within the Japanese navy, led by the Commander-in-Chief,

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1. The memorandum was written by three Sea Lords, Admiral Sir Frederic Dreyer, the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Frederick Field, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, and Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield, Third Sea Lord and Controller of the Navy. See S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, p. 499 and CID, 227th meeting, 20 May 1927, CAB 2/5.
2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 346.
3. Ibid., No. 360.
4. See Bridgeman's remarks at the second plenary session of the Geneva naval conference, 14 July 1927, CAB 27/350.

Admiral Kato Kanji, who were opposed not only to naval disarmament but to the policy of peaceful co-operation with the Anglo-Saxon powers, they were not powerful enough to influence the policy of the Tanaka government.[1]

Believing that the United States had gained a tactical advantage at Washington in November 1921 by springing their proposals on the conference without prior consultation with the other powers, the Admiralty persuaded the British government not to communicate its proposals in advance to the United States and Japan. They were regarded as so confidential that they were not even circulated to the Cabinet or the Dominion governments until a few days before the conference began. Their efforts were, none the less, in vain. Before the conference convened, the United States Navy and the American press had remarkably accurate forecasts of Britain's intentions.[2]

In a discussion dominated by Beatty, the CID approved the Admiralty's proposals on 20 May 1927. They had two objectives: to reduce the size and armament of capital ships and to extend the Washington treaty to other categories of warship. Bridgeman gave a further justification. They would save the Exchequer £5m. a year in the next decade.[3]

It was the second of the Admiralty's two objectives which was to prove Britain's undoing. As Bridgeman foresaw, if Britain was forced to justify her claim for cruisers - her 'absolute requirement' of seventy cruisers - the United States might make a similar claim for basically the same reasons, the protection of her world-wide commerce. Beatty conceded that if the United States and Japan were to claim the same

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1. J. B. Crowley in Japan's Foreign Policy, 1868-1941, ed. J. W. Morley, pp. 38-40; M. Ito and R. Pineau: The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy, pp. 13-14; I. Nish in Modern Japan, ed. W. G. Beasley, pp. 79-80; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 335.

2. CID, 227th meeting, 20 May 1927, CAB 2/5; C.34(27), 25 May 1927, CAB 23/55; S. Roskill, Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, pp.499-500.

3. CID, 227th meeting, 20 May 1927, CAB 2/5. A month later Beatty boasted to his wife that he had so tied the hands of the British delegation that they would not be able to decide any important question without first referring it to him. Beatty to his wife, 17 June 1927, W. S. Chalmers: The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty, p. 414.

number of cruisers as Britain, that figure, seventy, would have to be revised upwards. He failed to take seriously the warnings which had been received from the Americans, that they would demand parity in cruiser strength.[1]

Preparatory work for the conference was also undertaken by the United States Navy. In the middle of April its General Board produced a massive report, decidedly anti-British in tone, which summed up American objectives at the conference as the avoidance of entangling alliances, the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine, support for the Open Door policy in China, and the acquisition of a navy 'second to none'. It called for a strict limit on total tonnage of the three categories of auxiliary ships not limited by the Washington treaty - cruisers, destroyers and submarines - by the application of the 5 : 5 : 3 ratio. It rejected proposals to limit the number of ships and the maximum displacement of individual ships within each category to which the British attached such importance. It stated that the United States' main objective was equality with Britain. The United States should make its first objective an upper limit for total cruiser tonnage of 250,000 to 300,000 tons in the British and American fleets.[2]

The opening statements by the principal delegates to the conference on 20 June 1927 heartened many supporters of disarmament.[3] Despite the fact that British and American objectives were so different, all three powers proposed substantial reductions and limitations. 'The scheme put forward by the Japanese, who at this time appear genuinely to have favoured a further limitation agreement, amounted to a total cessation

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1. CID, 227th meeting, 20 May 1927, CAB 2/5.
2. J-B. Duroselle: From Wilson to Roosevelt. The Foreign Policy of the United States, 1913-1945, London, 1964, p. 160 et seq. S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, pp. 501-2.
3. See, for instance, Philip Noel-Baker's optimistic assessment of the conference's prospects in Noel-Baker to Gilbert Murray, 21 June 1927, Gilbert Murray Papers.

of naval building.'[1] On 28 June, however, Britain's chief naval representative, Admiral Sir Frederick Field,[2] much to the dismay of the Americans, stated Britain's requirement in cruiser strength. With a minimum requirement of seventy cruisers, Britain would be forced to ask for a total tonnage of 600,000 tons unless there was a drastic limitation on the maximum displacement of individual ships.[3] On 5 July Admiral Jones, the United States senior naval representative, countered the British proposals by demanding that either the other two delegations accepted a total cruiser tonnage limitation for Britain and the United States of 400,000 tons and granted the United States the right to build twenty-five 10,000 ton 8" gun cruisers and complete freedom to mount 8" guns on any of her smaller cruisers or the United States would break off negotiations.[4] Both the British and the Americans adopted positions in the cruiser controversy which were virtually irreconcilable.

The American demand for twenty-five 10,000 ton 8" gun cruisers was regarded in London as absolutely preposterous. When the American ambassador in London called on the Foreign Secretary on 8 July 'to prevent an impending calamity' by offering to use his personal influence with President Coolidge to bring about an agreement, Chamberlain was able to point out that Britain had fourteen cruisers of that type, whereas the United States had only two. If the United States persisted with her claim, Britain would demand the same number. She would then be faced with a construction programme which would more than wipe out the £30m. anticipated savings which her own proposals would have produced. If the

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1. S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. 1, p. 503.
2. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Frederick Field, 1871-1945, 3rd Sea Lord, 1920-23, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, 1925-28, C in C Mediterranean Fleet, 1928-30, First Sea Lord, 1930-33. Described by Roskill as 'the most colourless First Sea Lord' of the period.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 381.
4. C.39(27), 6 July 1927, CAB 23/55, Appendix II; Bridgeman to Headlam, 5 July 1927, Headlam Papers, D/He/47/29.

United States was prepared to reduce her demands, Britain would scrap some of her fourteen large cruisers not all of which had been completed. When Houghton said that small cruisers were useless to the United States because she lacked the naval bases Britain possessed and therefore needed large cruisers with a greater cruising radius, Chamberlain totally rejected his arguments.[1]

The CID, to whom the Cabinet referred the cruiser issue, were agreed that the United States' proposals would lead to a vast expansion in the numbers of the most aggressive and expensive cruisers.[2] Differences arose, however, in the course of their discussions. Churchill thought that the government should not be unduly worried if the conference broke down. Chamberlain, on the other hand, thought that if the conference failed the prospects for a general disarmament conference would be poor. The American 'Big Navy' lobby would have a field day and Britain would be forced either to undertake a large construction programme or abandon the One-Power standard. Siding more with Churchill than with Chamberlain, the CID endorsed a statement, drafted by Balfour, which stated that Britain had no objection to the 5 : 5 : 3 ratio being applied to large cruisers but she could not agree to any restriction being imposed on her freedom to protect her vital sea communications with whatever number of small cruisers she deemed necessary.[3]

Admiral Jones' 'ultimatum' was tacitly repudiated by his own delegation and by 14 July the Americans had reduced their claim for large cruisers from twenty-five to twelve.[4] On 9 July the principal delegates of the three powers agreed to adopt the advice of their experts and seek

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 412.
2. The British government made a hard and fast distinction between those cruisers which they regarded as essentially offensive in character because of their speed, displacement and armament, and those smaller cruisers whose function was to protect commerce.
3. CID, 228th meeting, 7 July 1927, CAB 2/5.
4. CID, 229th meeting, 14 July 1927, CAB 2/5.

a solution not in a rigid limitation of total cruiser tonnage but by the publication of construction programmes.[1] By this means Britain would have been able to claim the number she needed without forcing the United States, in the name of parity, to build exactly the same number. The Americans would have been free to build a larger number of 8" gun cruisers each year without overtaking Britain in total tonnage before 1936. This, plus a formal admission that the United States was entitled to parity, would, it seemed, have satisfied the American delegation.[2] In London, however, the government stuck to the principle that a maximum tonnage stipulation should be included in any agreement to publish construction programmes for the period up to 1936.[3] There was virtually no response in London to the conciliatory gestures of the American and Japanese delegations at Geneva.

The Geneva naval conference led to deep divisions within the Cabinet and several threats of resignation of which only one, Viscount Cecil's, materialised.[4] The Foreign Secretary unsuccessfully pleaded with the Prime Minister to abandon his visit with the Prince of Wales to Canada.[5] With Baldwin out of the country, Britain's principal representatives, Bridgeman and Cecil, were outvoted and outmanoeuvred in the Cabinet. The conference was allowed to break down without any determined effort to reach an agreement with the United States.

The conference failed for two principal reasons. Before the

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 416; Bridgeman to Baldwin, 9 and 10 July 1927, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 150.
2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 392.
3. Ibid., No. 423.
4. On 6 August 1927, Chamberlain informed Baldwin that there were four resignations pending. Baldwin Papers, Vol. 115.
5. In a hand-written letter on the morning of 22 July, Chamberlain pleaded with Baldwin to abandon his visit because, he said, the Prime Minister was the only person capable of holding the Cabinet together. Baldwin Papers, Vol. 130. Lord Eustace Percy has suggested that Baldwin went ahead with his visit because he attached such importance to guiding the Prince of Wales in his apprenticeship for kingship. Some Memories, p. 131.

conference began there were no preliminary consultations between the three powers. As early as 4 July the Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Cuthbert Headlam, put much of the blame for the difficulties Britain was encountering at Geneva on the Admiralty's failure to engage in preliminary parleying with the other two powers.[1] The Admiralty kept their proposals 'unprecedently secret' and it was only on the Prime Minister's instructions that Cecil was shown them in advance of the conference.[2] No one in Britain could have been in any doubt that sooner or later the Americans would achieve parity with Britain because they had the money to do so. It would have been more politic to admit with a good grace what Britain was powerless to prevent. In a letter to Chamberlain on 2 July Cecil recalled the advice of an old legal friend, 'Always admit what you know the other side can prove.' It gave a good impression and did you no harm.[3] Perhaps if the Geneva conference had been held in the context of a wider political understanding between Britain and the United States that concession would have been made.

Striking testimony to the influence wielded by Beatty and Hankey is afforded by the Cabinet's volte face over the question of parity. On 29 June Balfour drew his Cabinet colleagues' attention to America's determination to accept nothing less than parity in all categories of warship. He proposed that they should try to remove all misunderstanding by a public announcement stating categorically that Britain was not opposed to conceding parity to the United States. No one dissented from Balfour's proposal which was backed by the accumulated evidence of several telegrams received in the Foreign Office. At a late stage in the Cabinet discussion, reference was made to Beatty's telegram sent

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1. Headlam Diaries, 4 July 1927.
2. Undated memorandum by Cecil's private secretary, Nevile Butler, FO 800/419.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 392.

the previous evening asking the British delegation at Geneva 'not to adopt the principle of parity'. It was, therefore, decided not to pursue Balfour's proposal.[1]

After the meeting Hankey put the Admiralty's point of view to Baldwin who had supported Balfour's original proposals. Later that day he expanded these arguments in letters to Baldwin and Balfour, which were markedly anti-American in tone.[2] Between 29 June and 3 July Beatty and Hankey persuaded the Cabinet to abandon all thought of conceding parity to the United States. When they met on 4 July Beatty's advice was adopted almost in its entirety.[3]

The opponents of parity were convinced that it spelt inferiority for Britain and superiority for the United States. It could not be conceded without damaging Britain's status as a world power. Like the French they believed that in most circumstances equality of armaments meant inequality of security. Whereas France resisted Germany's claim to equality of armaments because her superior war potential would convert that equality into military superiority, the British opponents of parity argued that because of Britain's economic vulnerability and exposed sea communications with her Empire, she needed a superiority in certain categories of warship.

Anti-American sentiment also played a part. Baldwin, Balfour and Churchill had first-hand experience of those Anglo-American negotiations over war debts which had done so much to sour relations between the two countries. Baldwin disliked the Americans because they had replaced Britain as the chief creditor nation in the world and were threatening to replace her as the greatest naval power. The anti-British tone of

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1. C.37(27), 29 June 1927, CAB 23/55; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 378 and 383.
2. Hankey to Baldwin, 29 June 1927, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 130.
3. C.38(27), 4 July 1927, CAB 23/55.

much of America's Press heightened those feelings and added to the difficulties of the negotiators at Geneva.

The United States government was motivated by considerations of prestige and not by any desire to outbuild Britain. In 1928 a United States official informed a member of the Foreign Office that if Britain conceded parity the United States would not build up to actual equality of strength with Britain. He also asserted that Hugh Gibson, the United States's chief representative at the Geneva naval conference, had assured Bridgeman that in no circumstances would the United States build more 10,000 ton 8" cruisers than Britain possessed.[1]

The Admiralty failed to understand the motivation of American policy and never gave an adequate justification for their doctrine of 'absolute requirements'. They did not explain why, if in 1921 they considered fifty cruisers adequate for the protection of the Empire's trade routes,[2] they needed seventy in 1927. Furthermore their insistence on a 6" gun limitation for small cruisers seems in the light of the experience of the Second World War to have been unnecessary.[3]

The conference had been called, without consulting the League, to break the deadlock in the Preparatory Commission but it did nothing to smooth its efforts to achieve disarmament. The conference ignored the experience which the League had accumulated over the previous six years and did not avail itself of the services of the League Secretariat. By holding their deliberations in secret and allowing garbled versions to

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. V, No. 492.
2. CID, 152nd meeting, 1 December 1921, CAB 2/3. 'They concur with the suggestion of the First Sea Lord that the total number of cruisers for all purposes should be fixed tentatively at fifty.'
3. The United States naval authorities questioned the massive superiority of 8" gun cruisers over 6" gun cruisers which the Admiralty put at $2\frac{1}{2}$: 1. Twelve years later in December 1939 it was the 6" gun cruisers Ajax and Achilles which rounded on the German pocket battleship Graf Spee after the 8" gun cruiser Exeter had been put out of action.

be leaked to the Press, the negotiators deprived themselves of the support of public opinion. War between the United States and Britain was regarded in both countries as unthinkable. There was strong support for disarmament in both the United States and Britain. If the conference had been held in public it is unlikely that informed opinion would have allowed the vast store of latent goodwill in the United States and Britain to waste away without a bold attempt being made to save the conference from disaster. No such attempt was made. Minor concessions by the British government would in all probability have produced an agreement.

The conference's failure was the occasion, if not the pretext, for Cecil's resignation from the Baldwin Cabinet. In a letter to the Prime Minister on 9 August he claimed that there had been no disagreement in the delegation itself and that he had worked with Bridgeman and Field with one common purpose to reach an agreement. His differences were with a majority in the Cabinet who were not prepared to give disarmament the priority he felt it deserved. During the third session of the Preparatory Commission, he said, he had been obliged to uphold propositions which were difficult to reconcile with a serious desire for disarmament and during the Cabinet discussions on the Geneva conference which he had attended between 21 and 26 July a number of his colleagues, including Churchill, had opposed any compromise which would have resulted in agreement. He, therefore, believed that there was no prospect of successful negotiations for the further limitation of armaments during the life-time of the Baldwin government.[1]

Cecil's resignation was welcomed by Baldwin[2] and came as something

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1. Cecil to Baldwin, 9 August 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.
2. CAB 21/297 contains papers collected by Hankey on Baldwin's instructions which confirm Cecil's own contention that Baldwin did little to dissuade him from resigning. Chamberlain did make considerable efforts to prevent Cecil from resigning but during the previous three years there had been a number of disagreements over League rather than disarmament policy and on one previous occasion in 1926 Cecil had threatened resignation because of his differences with Chamberlain.

of a relief to the Foreign Secretary who had always found Cecil a prickly colleague. Whether Cecil was wise to resign is open to question. Within the Cabinet there was a small group of Ministers who genuinely wanted disarmament. Cecil's resignation weakened their influence.

The failure of the Geneva naval conference and Cecil's resignation from the Baldwin government highlight the basic weaknesses of British disarmament policy in the first decade of peace. A measure of success had been achieved at the Washington conference because public opinion in Britain, the United States and Japan was strongly in favour of disarmament and the three governments had the political will to achieve results. In 1927 neither the Baldwin nor the Coolidge administration was sufficiently determined to reach an agreement to make one at all likely. In both countries influential opinion was divided. Only a small minority of opinion formers in Britain, the Observer, Philip Kerr and some others, regarded good relations with the United States as a first priority of British foreign policy. One consequence of the Baldwin government's preoccupation with such questions as British interests in China, Egypt and the Middle East was its failure to appreciate the intimate connection between good Anglo-American relations and the progress of European pacification and disarmament. The most serious criticism which can be levelled at the second Baldwin government's foreign policy was its failure to come to terms with the United States. The 1923 war debt settlement laid the foundations for a comprehensive settlement of the outstanding differences between the two countries but the Baldwin government failed to seize the initiative or to capitalise on its assets. Anti-American sentiment so distorted its vision that vital opportunities were thrown away.[1]

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1. T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. II, pp. 131 and 177 for Baldwin's anti-American sentiments. For Chamberlain's distaste for America see his correspondence with Hilda and Ida Chamberlain, 19 June 1926, 16 June (July) and 17 December 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/386, 420 and 441. See also Chamberlain to Hugh F. Spender of the Christian Science Monitor, 10 January 1927: 'I am not myself in any hurry to see the United States join the League...we might easily find that the only result of American participation was a deadlock in all critical questions.' Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/453.

Chamberlain only made half-hearted attempts to secure American co-operation in China.[1] Though there were faults on both sides of the Atlantic it was Britain which stood to gain most from good relations between the two countries. The failure of the Geneva conference was to a large extent symptomatic of the low priority accorded good Anglo-American relations by the Baldwin government.

1927 brought little encouragement to the supporters of disarmament. At the close of the year the British naval attaché in Rome summed up the cynical reaction of many Italians to the Geneva naval conference and put his finger on the weakness in Britain's position with the comment: 'A very generally expressed view is that disarmament conferences are not inspired by genuine altruistic motives but are the insidious designs of those nations who possess as much of the world as they can want in order to hold their possessions with the least possible outlay on naval insurance.'[2] The same point was shrewdly put by the Head of the Disarmament Section in the League Secretariat, Salvador de Madariaga:[3] 'We know that a disarmament conference in the present state of development of the World Community is bound to turn out as an armaments conference.'[4] In the first half of 1928 many members of Baldwin's government did not conceal their disenchantment with disarmament.[5]

None the less Chamberlain and others in the Foreign Office came to recognise that an improvement in Anglo-American relations was a first priority of British foreign policy and that without concessions to the American point of view over naval armaments no improvement was possible.

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1. Lord Eustace Percy: Some Memories, pp. 140-1.
2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, Enclosure in No. 87.
3. Salvador de Madariaga resigned as Head of the Disarmament Section at the end of 1927.
4. S. de Madariaga: Disarmament, London, 1929, p. 89.
5. See, for instance, Lord Cushendun's remarks at Geneva and in Lincoln in March and April 1928, The Times, 24 March 1928, and the Manchester Guardian, 21 April 1928.

Sir Esmé Howard, the British ambassador in Washington, told the Foreign Secretary that if Britain abandoned Belligerent Rights the major bone of contention between the two countries would disappear. During the Geneva conference Britain's naval representatives had been so preoccupied, arguing the case for cruisers to protect Britain's food supplies, that they had ignored American fears about the offensive role small cruisers might play in the enforcement of a blockade.[1] In a Cabinet memorandum in October 1927 Chamberlain tried unsuccessfully to persuade his colleagues to abandon Belligerent Rights which had never been recognised in international law.[2] Britain, he said, could no longer ignore the rise of American financial and naval power. She would not be able to enforce a blockade against the interests of the United States in any future conflict.[3] Chamberlain's memorandum stung Hankey, a passionate defender of Belligerent Rights, into action. Enlisting Balfour's support and canvassing his opinions widely, he made it virtually impossible for Chamberlain, though his views were shared by such influential members of the Cabinet as Churchill, to succeed.[4] When the Cabinet set up a committee to consider the question, Chamberlain's supporters were in a minority. The committee's deliberations were to continue to almost the end of Baldwin's second

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 503 and 504, Vol. IV, Nos. 209 and 215. It was Britain's enforcement of Belligerent Rights between 1914 and 1917 which most antagonised the Wilson administration and led to the decision in 1916 to build 'a navy second to none'. In his Fourteen Points speech in January 1918 Wilson stressed the doctrine of Freedom of the Seas and the rights of neutrals to trade with belligerents in time of war.

2. Britain's insistence on Belligerent Rights had given offence to the United States and many neutral nations in the First World War. Britain claimed the right to intercept and detain neutral merchant ships and confiscate their cargoes if it could be shown that they were destined for an enemy country. Britain's position over Belligerent Rights remained unchanged until the outbreak of war in 1939.

3. CP 258(27), 26 October 1927, CAB 24/189; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, No. 219.

4. S. Roskill: Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. II, pp. 451-9; S. Roskill: Churchill and the Admirals, p. 80; CP 286(27), 31 October/14 November 1927, CAB 24/189.

administration. Belligerent Rights were not abandoned and when MacDonald replaced Baldwin, Hankey succeeded in persuading him to have a reference to them struck out of the joint communiqué issued after his Rapidan talks with President Hoover in October 1929.[1]

As a direct consequence of the deterioration in Anglo-American relations and to overcome the deadlock in the League's Preparatory Commission, the Baldwin government was led in 1928 to consider some kind of compromise over naval armaments with the French government. The Anglo-French compromise of July 1928 was a vain attempt to bid for French support in the forthcoming world disarmament conference.[2]

Behind the scenes Philip Kerr and a number of others worked privately to improve Anglo-American relations and to lay the foundations for an agreement over naval armaments. Seeking to exploit public interest in the Kellogg-Briand peace pact proposals Kerr sought to persuade Bridgeman, Chamberlain, Cushendun and such influential members of the Foreign Office as R. L. Craigie and Sir Ronald Lindsay that a few minor concessions and political gestures would pave the way for an all-embracing agreement between the two countries in which naval disarmament would form the most important component.[3] At the same time he tried to persuade Kellogg, Hoover, the American ambassador in London and others that there were no serious differences dividing the two countries.[4] Interpreting the

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1. C.57(27), 23 November 1927, CAB 23/55; Dalton Diaries, 25 October 1929; Hankey Diaries, 15 November 1929; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, No. 444; D. Marquand: Ramsay MacDonald, London, 1977, p. 507; S. Roskill: Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. II, pp. 491-6.

2. See pp. 312-17.

3. Kerr to Bridgeman, 29 March 1928; Kerr to Austen Chamberlain, 24 January 1928; Kerr to Cushendun, 16 August, 22 and 28 November 1928; Kerr to Craigie, 9 January 1929; Kerr to Lindsay, 18 December 1928; Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/226, GD 40/17/227, GD 40/17/239, GD 40/17/240, GD 40/17/239 and GD 40/17/242.

4. Kerr to Kellogg, 30 March 1928; Kerr to Hoover, n.d. (1928); Kerr to Houghton, 24 May 1928, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/228, GD 40/17/88, and GD 40/17/228.

American point of view to the British government and British interests to the Americans Kerr contributed to the improvement in relationships between the two countries which occurred in 1929 but during the life-time of the Baldwin government his efforts and those of others like J. L. Garvin of the Observer were of no avail. Aware that the price of an agreement was naval parity, the government resisted his proposals. In December 1927 Bridgeman informed him: 'The only agreement we could have got them to sign would have been one which either gave away our security or one which would have led to an increase in armaments amongst all naval powers'[1] and less than a year later Cushendun commented: 'I do not believe that we can make any agreement with the Americans in regard to the limitation of cruisers for they are so ignorant and so suspicious.'[2] Throughout 1928 the Admiralty's counsels prevailed.

During 1928, the American presidential election campaign provided a ready excuse for not entering into negotiations with the United States government. Between Chamberlain's return to the Foreign Office in December 1928[3] and the fall of the Baldwin government in June 1929, a few steps were taken to heal the wounds the Geneva naval conference and the Anglo-French compromise had inflicted on relations between the two countries but most of the initiatives came not from the British government but from the outgoing Coolidge administration and its successor.

There was no strong, common desire within the Baldwin Cabinet to reach an agreement with the United States. While, on the one hand,

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1. Bridgeman to Kerr, 23 December 1927, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/87.
2. Cushendun to Kerr, 27 November 1928, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/240.
3. Chamberlain had been taken ill in July 1928 and had spent part of his convalescence in California. For the place Anglo-American relations assumed in his thoughts after his return to the Foreign Office, see Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 8 and 26 December 1928, and Chamberlain to Locker-Lampson, 12 February 1929: 'Our relations with America are now most urgent. They have occupied a very large part of my time and thought since my return.' Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/462 and 464, AC 55/303.

Chamberlain, Cushendun and the Foreign Office drew attention to the 'widespread misgivings' in the country and their possible repercussions on the Conservative party's electoral fortunes if a bold attempt was not made to improve Anglo-American relations,[1] Churchill prophesied that if concessions were made to the Americans which went against the strong feelings of rank-and-file Conservative opinion there would be a revolt in the constituencies of such a magnitude that the government would be overthrown.[2] Bridgeman criticised the apologetic tone adopted by the Foreign Office and the assumption that it was Britain's duty to make concessions.[3] Neither Churchill nor Bridgeman was prepared to recognise the changed balance of power between Britain and the United States. They were not alone. The evidence suggests that the Baldwin government would not have been prepared to make the necessary concessions had it been returned to power in May 1929. More than the conciliatory gesture of a £1½m. reduction in the naval estimates, announced by Bridgeman in the Commons in March 1929, was required before an agreement could be reached.

The second Labour government came to power in 1929 with a firm commitment to pursue disarmament and reach an agreement with the United States. The protracted negotiations between the British prime minister and the new American ambassador in London, General Charles Dawes, demonstrated that more than conciliatory gestures and public declarations of intent were necessary before an agreement was reached. It was MacDonald's singular achievement to carry the Admiralty with him in a major change of policy. Parity was conceded and Britain's 'absolute' requirement in cruisers was scaled down from seventy to fifty. In

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. V, No. 490.
2. Ibid., No. 497.
3. Bridgeman to Baldwin, 23 December 1928, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 163. See also Bridgeman's correspondence with Chamberlain between 16 January and 13 May 1929 for the Admiralty's intransigence and inconsistency. Austen Chamberlain Papers AC 55/47, 49, 50, 51 and 53.

February 1924 the first Labour government had implemented its predecessor's cruiser construction proposals and had done nothing to modify the 1923 air expansion scheme. MacDonald's second Labour government was not deterred by fears of an adverse political reaction to its radical initiatives. Such was MacDonald's own personal standing and the support in the country for an agreement that the only opposition came from Churchill in the Commons and Beatty and Stanhope in the Lords.[1]

Unemployment had been a major issue in the 1929 general election campaign but on 10 July the new government decided to abandon work on two cruisers and a submarine depot ship then under construction and to cancel contracts for two additions to Britain's submarine fleet. Though the government tried to mitigate the effects of its action on dockyard employment by proposing the suspension of overtime working and the absorption of displaced labour into other occupations, the decision required considerable political courage.[2]

The 1930 London Naval Disarmament Conference

In the autumn of 1929 the current of opinion was flowing strongly in favour of disarmament.[3] When Henderson appealed to the delegates at the Brighton conference of the Labour party to take up the crusade for disarmament, he received a prolonged, standing ovation.[4] In both the British and American press MacDonald was hailed as a peacemaker. When the third major naval disarmament conference of the inter-war years was held in 1930, it was held not in Washington or Geneva but in London.

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1. S. Roskill: Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. II, p. 511; 75 HL Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1467-1488, 18 December 1929.
2. C.24(29), 10 July 1929, and C.30(29), 24 July 1929, CAB 23/61.
3. On 29 June 1929 J. L. Garvin, the editor of the Observer, wrote to Lloyd George: 'Our big national majority is out and out with Hoover...for drastic reductions of navies.' Lloyd George Papers, G/8/5/19.
4. Labour Party: Report of the 29th Annual Conference, London, n.d., p. 210; Dalton Diaries, 27 September - 4 October 1929.

Such was MacDonald's own standing and the popular support for his government in 1929[1] that he was able to impose his will on the Admiralty and conduct the negotiations with only a perfunctory reference to his Cabinet colleagues. A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, was very much a junior and subordinate partner. Arthur Henderson, the Foreign Secretary, was virtually excluded from playing any part at all. The only serious criticism of his strategy came from Lord Cecil and Lloyd George. Both men saw the dangers of reaching an agreement over naval armaments before the Preparatory Commission had devised adequate plans for the limitation of land and air armaments. Cecil begged MacDonald to postpone the proposed Five Power Naval Conference until such time as the Preparatory Commission had completed its work.[2]

In the closing months of 1929 the government had a choice between two alternative strategies. Whereas Cecil and Lloyd George believed that an immense effort should be made to impose some limit on the growth of European land and air armaments, the Labour government, and no doubt most of the country, thought that Britain's immediate objective was an agreement with the United States which would lead to a substantial measure of naval disarmament. Few shared Cecil's preoccupation with the European situation. The government believed that Britain could best serve the cause of general disarmament by securing large reductions in the fleets of the principal naval powers. On 10 August Noel-Baker wrote

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1. See, for example, J. L. Garvin to Lloyd George, 29 June 1929: 'I feel quite certain that Labour if given prematurely any kind of colourable excuse would triumph at the polls. They have wonderful cards if they know how to play. First a big hand in international politics, then an equally big hand in "employment and empire" politics.' Lloyd George Papers, G/8/5/19. Both Lloyd George and Cuthbert Headlam predicted in September and October 1929 that if MacDonald dissolved Parliament he would win a good majority. See Headlam Diaries, 4 September 1929 and Lloyd George to Churchill, 16 October 1929, Lloyd George Papers, G/4/4/24.

2. Cecil to MacDonald, 4 and 7 August, 29 November 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081 and PRO 30/69/5/40; Lloyd George's speech to the Liberal Party Conference, 4 October 1929, Liberal Publications Department: Selection of Pamphlets and Leaflets, 1929, London, n.d., pp.35-43.

to Hugh Dalton, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, suggesting that once agreement had been reached with the Americans over cruisers, Britain should press for reductions in the battle fleets of the two powers. Four times as much could be saved by scrapping a battleship as could be saved by scrapping a cruiser and it was known that Hoover wanted to make cuts in the numbers of battleships.[1] In his book Disarmament published in 1926 Noel-Baker had argued that the advent of air power spelt the doom of capital ships. There was a strong case for reducing the maximum size of warships to the 10,000 ton 10" gun limitation imposed on Germany in the Versailles treaty and for extending the Washington treaty naval holiday in capital ship construction well beyond 1931.[2]

Noel-Baker was not alone in holding such views. In November Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond[3] published two articles in The Times[4] advocating smaller battleships on the grounds that navies were for defence and all that was required by the great naval powers were ships capable of successfully challenging merchantmen armed with 6" guns, the maximum armament, in the experts' view, any merchant ship could carry. In the middle of December five admirals came together to draft a manifesto

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1. Noel-Baker to Dalton, 10 August 1929, (copy), Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.

2. P. J. Noel-Baker: Disarmament, pp. 198, 203-4, 207, 211-12.

3. Admiral Sir Herbert W. Richmond, 1871-1946, Captain of HMS Dreadnought, 1908-10, Assistant Director of the Operations Division of the Admiralty War Staff, 1912, Director of the Training and Staff Duties Division, 1918, C.in C. East Indies Station, 1923, Commandant of the Imperial Defence College, 1927. Richmond fell foul of the Sea Lords at the end of the war and was dismissed from the Naval Staff. Beatty, though he opposed the views which Richmond put before the Bonar Law Committee in 1921, had a high opinion of him. It was Richmond's proposals for the reorganisation of the Naval Staff which were adopted by the Admiralty. As a writer on naval affairs in the inter-war years he was highly regarded and as a close relative of Sir Charles Trevelyan, President of the Board of Education in the two Labour governments of the period, he had an entrée into the inner counsels of MacDonald's Cabinet.

4. 21 and 22 November 1929.

advocating the abolition of battleships but at the last moment had second thoughts about publication.[1] Others too spoke out in favour of abolition or a drastic reduction in the maximum size of capital ships. Lord Tyrrell, Britain's ambassador in Paris and former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, advocated abolition on the grounds that it would create an excellent impression in Europe and might even force the French to modify their position over submarines.[2] Shortly before the London conference opened in January 1930 The Times came out with an editorial advocating a large reduction in the maximum size of battleships.[3]

Battleships had a symbolic significance both for the Admiralty and the protagonists of disarmament. Looking back on the inter-war years, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, the military writer, commented that the naval authorities of the time cherished battle fleets with a religious fervour. A battleship was to an admiral what a cathedral was to a bishop.[4] Though the Admiralty favoured a reduction in the maximum size and armament of battleships they still regarded them as the ultimate measure of a navy's fighting strength. They also knew that their American counterparts would not contemplate any lowering in the maximum limits set by the Washington treaty. The champions of disarmament, for their part, believed that nothing would do more to dethrone the Admiralty from their pinnacle of power than the abolition of battleships.[5]

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1. They were Admirals Richmond, Webb, Kerr, Allen and Drury-Lowe. See Dalton Diaries, 18 December 1929.
2. Dalton Diaries, 10 January 1930.
3. 12 January 1930.
4. B. H. Liddell Hart: Memoirs, Vol. 1, London, 1965, pp. 325-6.
5. Even outside the ranks of the disarmers there was much resentment over the power and influence wielded by the Sea Lords. Lord Tyrrell told Hugh Dalton that until their bluff was called and they were allowed to resign, as it was anticipated they would rather than agree to the abolition of battleships, the politicians would never be on top. A different view was held by R. L. Craigie of the Foreign Office's North American Department. A mass resignation would rally public support behind the navy and jeopardise disarmament. Dalton Diaries, 21 January 1930 and 30 December 1929.

In the two or three months before the opening of the London conference, Cecil, Dalton, Noel-Baker, Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Sir Charles Trevelyan, the President of the Board of Education, worked behind the scenes for a drastic reduction in the size and number of battleships. They also argued that if Britain secured the abolition of the battleship at the London conference it would greatly strengthen her position at the world disarmament conference in putting the case for abolishing submarines. When, however, the Cabinet committee charged with preparing Britain's case for the London conference met on 13 December 1929 their arguments were successfully resisted by the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Charles Madden. It was not possible, he said, to build battleships of less than 23,000 to 25,000 tons if they were to have the necessary 5" to 6" armoured deck and underwater protection to resist bombs, plunging shells, torpedoes and mines. If battleships were abolished, Britain would still need a main fleet to defend her trade-protection vessels. He dismissed the arguments of those who saw some connection between battleships and submarines and informed the committee that there was no likelihood of the United States agreeing to abolition.[1] Though Henderson lent his support to those seeking a drastic reduction in the battle fleets of the world both MacDonald and Alexander rallied to the Admiralty's defence.[2] However, on 14 January 1930 MacDonald and the vast majority of the Cabinet were won over by the abolitionist case. It was a memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Snowden, then absent from London at the Hague conference on reparations which seems to have produced a volte face in MacDonald's attitude. Attacking the Admiralty's construction proposals, Snowden argued that the Prime Minister's visit to the United States in the previous October had aroused great expectations

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1. LNC(29)4, 13 December 1929, and memorandum by Madden, 20 December 1929, CAB 29/117.

2. LNC(29)5, 9 January 1930, CAB 29/117.

and that there would be a terrible reaction when the public realised that Britain's proposals for the conference meant an increase in the estimates. The Liberals would raise a public outcry and there would be open rebellion on the Labour benches. Both the future of disarmament and the good faith of the Labour government were at stake. Though he would have liked to propose the abolition of battleships, which he regarded as useless adornments, he would be content if Britain reduced her battle fleet from twenty to fourteen.[1]

Ignoring the Admiralty's advice, the Cabinet reached the conclusion that the battleship was 'essentially and solely a ship of war' and that as political security in the world improved it must tend to disappear. They recommended that an attempt should be made at the conference to postpone all replacements until after 1935 so that the powers might, in the meantime, consider whether battleships could be abolished.[2] Shortly after the opening of the conference the government published a White Paper[3] setting out its proposals for reducing the maximum tonnage and armament of capital ships and lengthening their replacement life. It declared: 'In the opinion of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom the battleship, in view of its tremendous size and cost, is of doubtful utility and the Government would wish to see an agreement by which the battleship would in due time disappear altogether from the fleets of the world.'

The Cabinet's conversion was probably due to other factors besides Snowden's memorandum. The encouragement of the Press, particularly The Times, and a petition signed by seventy-seven Labour MPs no doubt

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1. C.1(30), 14 January 1930 (Appendix), CAB 23/63.
2. C.1(30), 14 January 1930, CAB 23/63. The Cabinet also concluded that fifty cruisers would be amply adequate to meet Britain's needs despite the belated second thoughts of some members of the Admiralty. Britain should be content with 150,000 tons of destroyer tonnage, 50,000 tons lower than the Admiralty had been advocating.
3. Cmd. 3485, 1930.

played a part.[1] On the day after the Cabinet meeting MacDonald wrote in his diary: 'Our pronouncement must be...clearly in favour of reduction and the battleship gives us our chance. The world must know what we want and then we must strive to reach compromise bargains as good as we can get.'[2]

From the outset it was clear that the Americans would not accept Britain's capital ship proposals but it was agreed to extend the Washington naval holiday to 1936. Eventually the conference decided that Britain should scrap five capital ships, the United States three, and Japan one in accordance with the 5 : 5 : 3 ratio decided at Washington in 1922. Britain's other proposals met with little success. No reduction was made in the maximum displacement and armament of aircraft carriers nor was their replacement life lengthened as the Admiralty had proposed. A similar fate befell Britain's submarine proposals though a shift in American and Italian naval opinion enabled some slight progress to be made. All five powers agreed to limit the maximum displacement and armament of submarines and once again pledged themselves to abide by the accepted rules governing their conduct in time of war. Britain, the United States and Japan accepted parity in submarine strength and a strict limitation of their total cruiser and destroyer tonnage on a 10 : 10 : 7 ratio. France and Italy refused to accept any limitation of their total cruiser, destroyer and submarine strength until they had resolved the differences which divided them.[3]

France's demands for additional guarantees of her security and Italy's unrealistic claims to parity with France made the conclusion of a meaningful five power treaty impossible. France's behaviour at the London conference and in the Committee of Eleven then meeting in

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1. Dalton Diaries, 20 January 1930.
2. MacDonald Diaries, 15 January 1930, PRO 30/69/8/1.
3. Accounts of the London naval conference are to be found in S. Roskill: Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. II, and A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1930.

Geneva[1] revived the Francophobia of the Labour Cabinet. MacDonald's government responded to French intransigence by pursuing a pro-Italian policy.[2] Britain safeguarded her position in European waters by insisting on an escalator clause should France or Italy at some future date pose a challenge to her naval power. The London naval treaty of 22 April 1930 was, for all intents and purposes, a three power agreement between the United States, Britain and Japan. The London naval conference had not improved the prospects for the final session of the League's Preparatory Commission.

The London naval conference revealed the weakness of Britain's negotiating position. A Labour government fully committed to disarmament was neither able to persuade the United States to change its attitude towards battleships nor bring pressure to bear upon the French government to accept an equitable settlement without giving France guarantees of a kind which no British government of the inter-war years was prepared to concede. The most significant and beneficent result, the settlement of the cruiser controversy which had bedevilled Anglo-American relations for three years, owed more to the negotiations which preceded the conference than to the conference itself. Though no decision was taken to abolish battleships and the Washington limits[3] remained in force, the extension of the naval holiday in capital ship construction to 1936 made it virtually certain that never again would the world witness the costly competition in capital ships of the decade before the First World War. Whether the London treaty, which only lasted five years, had any other beneficial results is open to question. Internal developments in Japan - the assassination of its chief protagonist, the prime minister Hamaguchi,

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1. See p. 271.
2. MacDonald Diaries, 20 March 1930, PRO 30/69/8/1; DBFP, Second Series, Vol. 1, Nos. 158 and 160, Note 1.
3. The Washington treaty made 35,000 tons and 16" guns their maximum displacement and armament.

the resignation of the Chief of Naval Staff, and the growing rift between the civilian government and its military and naval advisers - deprived it of any lasting influence on relations between Japan and the Anglo-Saxon powers.

The 1930 London naval treaty was strongly criticised by the Conservative Opposition[1] and caused considerable uneasiness within the government's own ranks.[2] Alexander was obliged to defend it as enhancing Britain's relative naval strength. He reminded the Conservative Opposition that in certain respects Britain was in a stronger position than she had been under the second Baldwin government because the United States and Japan had both accepted limits to the expansion of their auxiliary fleets.[3] Whereas in July 1929 the government had decided to curtail the construction programme in May and June 1930 it took decisions to lay down three cruisers, nine destroyers and a number of smaller craft.[4]

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the London naval conference in the history of British disarmament policy. There can be no doubt that in the first nine months of the second Labour administration disarmament was a major objective of government policy. MacDonald and his Ministers used great resourcefulness in the pursuit of disarmament but by March 1930 their passion was spent. MacDonald was never again to give such single-minded devotion to the cause of disarmament. The conference led MacDonald to believe that Britain's dedication to the cause of peace and disarmament had been interpreted by other powers

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1. See, for example, the debates in the House of Commons on 15 May and 2 June, 238 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 2098-2114 and 239 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1791.

2. See Dalton Diaries, 13 April 1930 and Beatrice Webb Diaries, 20 August 1930.

3. 238 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 2197-8, 15 May 1930 and Alexander's notes for the government's reply to Lord Bridgeman in the House of Lords in Alexander Papers, AVAR 5/2/9 and 10.

4. FS(29)9 and 11, 13 May and 3 June 1930, CAB 27/407; C.31(30), 4 June 1930, CAB 23/64.

as a sign of weakness.[1] The Labour government was determined to show other powers that Britain was capable of building up to the limits set by the treaty.[2]

When Snowden informed the Cabinet on 14 January 1931 that with rising unemployment there was a danger that government expenditure would outrun revenue there was no support for proposals to reduce the 1931 naval construction programme. Both the Prime Minister and the First Lord of the Admiralty told their colleagues that any further reductions would be a breach of faith. The Sea Lords had only agreed to the lower limit of fifty cruisers on the understanding that no further reductions would be made. Furthermore, unless Britain built up to the limits of the London treaty Britain could not expect to retain her prestige, even with Italy. If the government failed to appropriate funds for naval construction Britain would be deprived of bargaining power at the forthcoming world disarmament conference.[3]

In the autumn of 1929 Cecil had contended that naval reductions by themselves would do little to secure peace and that a relatively weak British army had to be balanced by a relatively strong British navy if an unduly large share of international authority was not to pass to the continental land powers.[4] Though it would be argued that the London

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1. MacDonald to Cecil, 13 August 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081; Dalton Diaries, 21 August 1930. The remarks which MacDonald made to Cecil in his letter on 13 August 1930 bear a remarkable similarity to those expressed by Hankey when staying with the Webbs on 25 February 1930. MacDonald paid a glowing tribute to Hankey publicly and privately at the end of the London conference and there is some evidence to suggest that Hankey's views made a considerable impression on the Prime Minister. Both Cecil and Dalton suspected Hankey of having great influence on MacDonald at this time. See Dalton Diaries, 21 March 1930 and Cecil to Noel-Baker, 9 May 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.

2. As late as the winter of 1931 the government was taking this attitude. See, for example, FS(29)14, 26 January 1931, CAB 27/407.

3. C.6(31), 14 January and C.11(31), 4 February 1931, CAB 23/66; FS(29)14, 26 January 1931, CAB 27/407.

4. Cecil to MacDonald, 4 and 7 August, 17 December 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.

naval conference paved the way for the successful completion of the Preparatory Commission's work later in the year, there is some force in the contention that it was not so much the conference but the negotiations between MacDonald and Dawes in the summer and autumn of 1929 which removed the main stumbling block. The predilection of successive British governments for the Washington precedent led them to exaggerate the significance of limitation agreements between the principal naval powers. Though the Washington and London treaties reduced the burden which fell on taxpayers in Britain, the United States and Japan and smoothed relations between the three powers for a limited period, they did little to promote general disarmament.

CHAPTER SIX

DISARMAMENT AND EUROPEAN SECURITY

Introduction

The Paris peace conference did not usher in the reign of peace as many in Britain had hoped. There was no agreed limitation of armaments nor was peace fully restored to the war-ravaged continent of Europe. For more than three years much of Europe and the Near East remained in turmoil. Poland pursued aggressive policies towards Russia and Lithuania which the League was powerless to prevent. Hungary was restive, Italy disconsolate, and France and the successor states apprehensive lest German and Hungarian revanchism plunge them once more into war. Britain herself confronted political and economic problems of almost unparalleled magnitude. In Ireland, India and the Middle East she faced the challenge of resurgent nationalism. Despite a short-lived post-war boom, her economy failed to recover from the war. Europe's economy remained depressed. To restore European peace and prosperity became the main objectives of British foreign policy. It was evident, however, that there could be no recovery without a greater measure of European security. To achieve that goal at the lowest possible cost was the main endeavour of British policy makers in the years 1919 to 1925. To some, though not all, it seemed obvious that a reduction in national armaments would do more to promote European peace, prosperity and security than any other single factor. Furthermore, many came to believe that disarmament could be achieved painlessly without imposing any fresh burdens on the war-weary and war-impoverished British people.

The First World War brought to the fore significant changes in

Britain's foreign policy-making process. During Lloyd George's tenure of power the Foreign Office was eclipsed and its advice sometimes ignored as the prime minister assumed the role of chief architect of British policy. Though Baldwin was only to play a minor role, all the other prime ministers of the inter-war years exercised a decisive influence on the formulation of British foreign policy.

For a decade before the war, the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) complemented the work of the Foreign Office. Such was the authority of its membership, ministerial and professional, that no government could ignore its advice. A fortnight after the outbreak of war C. P. Scott, the editor of the Manchester Guardian, said that in matters of war and peace it was more powerful than 'the Government'.[1] Though technically in abeyance from November 1914 to February 1921, it played a key and decisive role in the formulation of Britain's disarmament policy. Its secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, and its successive chairmen, in particular Balfour, Haldane and Salisbury, profoundly influenced the policy which Britain was to pursue in the 1920s.

The Cabinet continued to have overall responsibility for Britain's foreign and disarmament policy and not even Lloyd George could ignore their views. They drew heavily on the expert advice tendered by the Foreign Office and the Service departments. As economic issues assumed greater importance, they became increasingly dependent on the information and advice supplied by the Treasury and the Board of Trade in formulating that policy.

The League of Nations and Disarmament, 1920-1922

The peace makers at Paris had bequeathed to the League of Nations an unambiguous and precise responsibility to bring about disarmament, but they had failed to vest the League with sufficient authority to

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1. C. P. Scott to E. D. Morel, 18 August 1914 in T. Wilson (ed.): The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott, 1911-1928, London, 1970, pp. 100-1.

make an adequate contribution to European security. They had laid at the door of the League Council a solemn responsibility to formulate plans for a reduction in armaments, but they had not provided it with powers to enforce its decisions. To assist it in its task of promoting disarmament, the League Council in May 1920 set up a Permanent Advisory Commission on Military Naval and Air Questions (the PAC) as foreshadowed in Article 9 of the Covenant. In December the PAC reported that any attempt to promote disarmament at that juncture would be premature. Dissatisfied with the Council's inaction and the negative attitude of the PAC the first League Assembly took two initiatives to bring about a reduction of armaments. In the first instance it recommended that another body, not dominated by the service advisers of the great powers as was the case with the PAC, should be created by the League. The Council responded by setting up in February 1921 a Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments (the TMC) to which it nominated a number of people prominent in the political and economic life of their own country to sit alongside some service representatives who possessed the requisite technical competence. The second initiative was to recommend that the League request its member states to give an undertaking not to exceed for the first two years following the next financial year the sum total of expenditure on their military, naval and air services provided for in the latter budget.

Between April and September 1921, twenty-five member states, fifteen of them in Europe, responded to the League's request. Fourteen, including Britain,[1] gave non-committal replies. Five, including Belgium and Czechoslovakia, promised to comply with the League's request. Six, including France and most of her eastern European allies, refused to

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1. LNC, 28 April 1921, CAB 27/98; C.38(21), 11 May 1921, CAB 23/25. The British government replied that it looked forward to 'the possibility of further economies in the next two years'.

give any assurance whatsoever. Neither France nor the successor states, with the exception of Czechoslovakia, believed that the League was capable of making any contribution to their security. For that reason, they argued, they were not prepared to pledge themselves to limit their armaments. Discouraging though these replies were, some reductions were made by all the European powers in the years 1921 to 1924.[1] No government was altogether exempt from those political and economic pressures which led successive British post-war governments to reduce expenditure on the armed services. Despite that fact, armaments expenditure continued to consume a far higher proportion of Europe's wealth than her financial experts regarded as remotely acceptable.[2]

British Economic and Military Weakness and The Problem of French Security

Such were conditions on the continent of Europe in the first three years of peace that the continental land powers were not encouraged to follow Britain's example in making immense reductions in their military and air forces. Surveying the prospects for the coming year in January 1921 Hankey wrote: 'New states from the Baltic to the Black Sea are each more greedy than their neighbours and will remain a danger to the peace of Europe for years to come.'[3] France might justify her army as necessary to prevent a German war of revenge but it was obvious that there were many other reasons for the high level of armaments in Europe besides the possibility of future German aggression. Britain, on the other hand, had so reduced her armed forces that her army was barely capable of meeting its imperial commitments and her air force was a mere shadow of its

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1. The reductions made by member states are set out in the first of the Armaments Year Books which the League of Nations published in 1924. See League of Nations: Armaments Year Book, A37 1924 IX, Geneva, 1924.
2. The point was made most forcefully by the Brussels Financial Conference in 1920 and frequently throughout the early 1920s in memoranda and articles. See also J. W. Wheeler-Bennett: Information on the Reduction of Armaments, London, 1925, pp. 33-45.
3. Hankey Diaries, HNKY 1/5, January 1921.

former self. On 14 October 1921 Balfour informed the CID that France had forty-seven independent squadrons to Britain's three. Viewing the situation with 'profound alarm', he said that the fact was that Britain was incapable of resisting an aerial invasion by France.[1] The contrast between British military impotence and the continental land powers' war capability was a cause for serious concern but it was the disparity between British and French air power which exercised the minds of British statesmen in the autumn of 1921. There were other considerations too. Many believed that the failure of the British economy to recover from the war was due very largely to the unsettled conditions on the continent of Europe which, it was alleged, stemmed from excessively high military expenditure and the tensions and uncertainty that expenditure produced.

By 1921 it was widely believed that France held the key to European security and disarmament. When on 1 November the Cabinet approved the instructions for the British Empire delegation attending the Washington conference, they turned their attention to the abortive Treaty of Guarantee which the United States and Britain had made with France on 28 June 1919. Everything should be done, the Cabinet concluded, to persuade the United States to ratify the treaty and to take advantage of France's anxiety to secure a British guarantee in order to persuade her to agree to a limitation of air armaments.[2] When Balfour, at the second plenary session of the conference, welcomed the American proposals for naval limitation he went on to plead not for a limitation of air power but to regret that no reference had been made to the limitation of land armaments which, he said, 'every man coming from Europe must feel to be a question of immense and almost paramount importance'.[3] Six days

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1. CID, 145th meeting, 14 October 1921, CAB 2/3.
2. C.83(21), CAB 23/27. The disparity between the British and French air forces had already been discussed by the CID.
3. Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, Washington, 1922, pp. 65-70.

later Briand took up Balfour's challenge in a speech which was to cause consternation in London.[1]

Speaking at the plenary session on 21 November, Briand claimed that France had done all she could to promote disarmament. So long as she was forced to stand alone against the threat of German aggression she could not make any further reduction in her armaments.[2] Two days later in the Committee on Limitation of Armaments he protested that unless the governments represented at the conference were prepared to share the burdens and perils which had befallen France, they had no right to try and limit French armaments. 'If a definite proposal of collaboration were advanced, if it were a question of establishing in common an international force...disarmament might be considered. If the peoples of the world were as eager as was claimed to see armaments limited, their representatives should say: a danger exists, we recognise it; we will share it with you, shoulder to shoulder...In that case France would fully agree to consider the problem of limitation of armaments.'[3]

Balfour's gratuitous reference to the limitation of land armaments must remain a mystery. Before the conference began the government had come to the conclusion that nothing could be done to promote land disarmament. Briand's rejoinder not only caused anger in London but led to differences between the delegation in Washington and the government at home. It also opened up divisions in the ranks of the foreign-policy making élite in Britain.

In November 1921 the British government was unwilling to face the dilemma Briand had posed. Instead it chose to deny it. France had not reduced her armaments as Briand had claimed and the German danger to

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1. See, for example, the entry for 22 November 1921 in T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. 1, p. 178 and C.88(21), 22 November 1921, CAB 23/27.
2. Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, pp. 77-88.
3. 2nd meeting, Committee on Limitation of Armaments, 23 November 1921, CAB 30/9.

which he had referred in such dramatic terms did not exist. Britain faced a far greater danger in the menace posed by submarines to her shipping.[1] The argument was not to rest there. When the Cabinet discussed the text of Briand's speech it did so in the context of worsening Anglo-French relations. Earlier on the agenda they had considered the negotiations which Franklin-Bouillon, the French representative in Turkey, had been conducting with the Angora government and the view had been expressed that French policy constituted an act of gross betrayal of her British ally. In many other parts of the world French policies were inconsistent with British interests. So long as France and her 'Slavonic Satellites' maintained large armies, Europe would be unsettled and Britain's economic recovery retarded. If Britain was the only European power to be disarmed and France remained powerful on land, on the sea and in the air, British diplomatic influence would suffer and Britain would have to exist on the sufferance of her more powerful neighbour.[2] On 23 November Curzon cabled Balfour: 'We feel strongly that question of land armaments cannot remain where it was left by published speeches of M. Briand and yourself.'[3]

The weakness of Britain's position was fully revealed on 23 November when Balfour, against his better judgement but with some support from the Italian foreign minister, Carlo Schanzer, launched a spirited attack on the French case. Britain, he said disingenuously, was not prepared to dissociate land from naval armaments. If nothing was done about land armaments there would be great disappointment in both Europe and America. When, however, the American Secretary of State, Hughes, asked him whether

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1. CID, 150th meeting, 23 November 1921, CAB 2/3; DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, Nos. 439, 442 and 443.
2. C.88(21), 22 November 1921, CAB 23/27.
3. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 442. See also No. 439. It is clear that both telegrams were intended to be a form of rebuke to Balfour for failing to stand up to Briand.

he had any proposals to make he was forced to admit that he had none. Briand was able to score at Balfour's expense. It was, he said, the expression of empty, platonic aspirations which would bring disappointment to the people of Europe.[1] The following day Balfour vigorously protested against the instructions he had received.[2] What sense was there, Balfour demanded, in wrangling over the size of the French army so long as Britain's naval supremacy remained unchallenged?

Balfour was not alone in holding these views. Similar views were held by Churchill and Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. When the CID met on 26 November Wilson said that it would be most inadvisable to press France to reduce the size of her army at a time when the continent of Europe was in a state of chaos. It was fortunate that France, one of the most pacific nations in Europe, had the power to impose the orders of the Allied Supreme Council and Britain was exceptionally fortunate to have her as an ally. Though the CID accepted Wilson's point of view, Lloyd George, in a cable to Washington, totally ignored Wilson's arguments. Instead he castigated French military power, compared it with German militarism in 1914, and asserted that it constituted a grave threat to peace. Two days later, Churchill, who had chaired the CID in Balfour's absence, told the Prime Minister that it would come as an enormous shock to the British public who had six hundred thousand graves in France if their statesmen had to tell them that they had backed the wrong horse.[3]

Lloyd George was not averse to a British guarantee to France so long as it was of a strictly limited character and led to a reduction

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1. Second meeting, Committee on Limitation of Armaments, 23 November 1921, CAB 30/9.
2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 448.
3. CID, 151st meeting, 26 November 1921, CAB 2/3; DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIV, No. 452; Churchill to Lloyd George, 28 November 1921, Lloyd George Papers, F/10/1/48.

of French armaments. When Briand called on Lloyd George at Downing Street, on 21 December 1921, to discuss reparations, Russian reconstruction, and plans for an international economic conference, Briand raised the issue of disarmament. Aware of the irritation, apprehension and anxiety French policy at the Washington conference had produced in Britain, he informed Lloyd George that one of the first results of a firm British commitment to come to France's assistance in the event of unprovoked German aggression would be a large reduction in French armaments. He also assured him that disarmament was something which three-quarters of the French people wanted.[1]

The discussions which Lloyd George held with Briand and his successor, Raymond Poincaré, in January and February 1922 revealed how wide was the gulf which separated British and French views about European security.[2] Though differences over German reparations and the settlement which the allied powers should impose on Turkey bedevilled relations between the two countries, it was two fundamentally different attitudes to European security which made both the conclusion of an Anglo-French pact and a reduction in armaments impossible in the international climate of 1922. Those differences were never to be resolved. The issues which came to the fore in the first two months of 1922 were to remain central in the disarmament debate until the rise of Hitler transformed the European situation in the early 1930s.[3]

At the first session of the Cannes conference, called to discuss reparations and economic recovery, Briand pleaded for an 'accord' between

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1. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XV, No. 110.
2. For a full discussion of the negotiations for an Anglo-French pact in 1922 see Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, London, 1978, pp. 6-36.
3. For an examination of the differing views of the British and French governments of the inter-war years over Germany, see W. M. Jordan: Great Britain, France and the German Problem, 1918-1939, London, 1943/1971, pp. 199-202. See also E. W. Bennett: German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933, Princeton, N.J., 1979, pp. 89-101, 509-12.

Britain and France which would be a solid and serious agreement of long duration. Lloyd George, while freely admitting that Britain had a direct interest in preserving France against unprovoked German aggression, told Briand that an agreement would not long survive a large French submarine programme. Briand retorted that no one in Britain seriously believed that French submarines would ever be used against British shipping. Lloyd George continued to warn Briand of the dangers of naval competition and made it a condition of any agreement with France that the British and French naval authorities should hold consultations about their naval building programmes.[1]

Subsequent discussions at Cannes, Paris and Boulogne demonstrated how peripheral was France's submarine programme to the main issues which divided the two countries. Both Briand and Poincaré refused to discuss disarmament until Britain concluded a military convention as specific in its reference to the military forces to be maintained as the Franco-Russian military convention of 1892. Alliances and military conventions were, however, anathema to post-war British opinion. It was widely believed that they had been a major cause of the 1914-1918 war and of Britain's involvement in it. Furthermore a military convention between Britain and France would allow France to determine the level of Britain's armed forces. For Britain it spelt not disarmament but rearmament though for France it was the sine qua non of both security and disarmament. Where would France stand, Poincaré asked, if Britain, having given France a guarantee against German aggression, then disarmed? How could France calculate what forces she should retain unless she knew what forces Britain was prepared to bring to her assistance?[2] To Lloyd George these were hypothetical questions. It was nonsense to talk about German aggression as a likely contingency at a time when Germany was disarmed

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1. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, No. 1; Cmd. 2169, 1924.
2. Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp. 24-25.

and France possessed the largest army in Europe. If sometime in the future the military balance changed to the disadvantage of France there would be ample time to discuss the terms of a military convention. British disarmament policy was founded on the assumption that political gestures rather than military engagements would best promote European security.

It was abundantly clear that, as in 1914 so in the future, Britain would not allow France to be overwhelmed by her more powerful neighbour to the east. Whether she gave France a guarantee or not she would come to her assistance because it was in her interests to do so. Thus, though she was prepared to guarantee France against unprovoked German aggression she was not willing to guarantee the general peace of Europe. As many Frenchmen were not reluctant to point out, a guarantee of so limited a character was virtually worthless. Although a direct attack by Germany on France was unlikely, the chance of France being dragged into a war with Germany as a result of German aggression against France's allies, Poland and Czechoslovakia, or her violation of the demilitarised Rhineland could never be ruled out. In that case France might find herself at war with Germany without any assurance of British assistance. Unless it formed part of a larger agreement, a British guarantee was a meaningless gesture. To meet these criticisms Lloyd George began to contemplate a non-aggression pact which would embrace most of Europe including Germany, Hungary and Russia.[1]

None the less European economic recovery remained the first priority of the British government in 1922. To promote it Lloyd George was willing to consider an Anglo-French pact, an agreement with the Soviet Union - even at the price of splitting his Cabinet,[2] and a European non-aggression

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1. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, Nos. 1, 5 and 6; CAB 21/239.
2. Chamberlain to Lloyd George, 21 March; Lloyd George to Chamberlain, 22 March; Chamberlain to Curzon, 24 March 1922; Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 23/6/18, 19 and 21; Daily Chronicle, 23 and 24 March 1922.

pact. Discussing such a pact with Briand at the Cannes conference in January 1922, Lloyd George claimed that it would be a powerful means of reducing armaments and Briand said that Europe needed some more practical instrument to preserve peace than the League of Nations.[1]

By 'peace' Lloyd George meant more than a pledge to refrain from aggression. 'Peace' implied both a relaxation of international tensions and a reduction of armaments. Without them both there could be no restoration of business confidence or any significant increase in the volume of trade. Disarmament had become an essential component of the government's economic strategy. If his government was to win back its credibility with the British electorate it had to show solid progress in realising these objectives. In Curzon's phrase disarmament was 'a universal aspiration as well as a universal need'.[2]

When Lloyd George met Poincaré at Boulogne on 25 February 1922 he told him that the British public attributed Britain's economic difficulties to French policy and believed that two things stood in the way of real peace: the Versailles treaty and the exclusion of Russia from the comity of nations. Poincaré reluctantly agreed to Russian participation in the forthcoming Genoa economic conference but once again made it perfectly plain that France would not take part if treaty revision, reparations and disarmament were placed on the agenda.[3]

Summing up Britain's objectives at the Genoa conference on 28 March Lloyd George said: 'Our first object should be to establish peace and our second object to establish commercial relations with Russia.'[4] Although disarmament would not appear on the conference's agenda, Lloyd George and most of his Cabinet believed that improved relations with

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1. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, No. 10.
2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XVI, No. 768 (28 December 1921).
3. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, No. 34.
4. C.21(22), CAB 23/29.

Russia and the signature of a non-aggression pact would bring disarmament nearer. There was also some reason to believe that if Europe reduced her land armaments the United States might modify her economic and financial policies in Europe's favour.[1]

The 1922 Genoa conference was a bitter disappointment to Lloyd George. Its failure was greeted with glee by his opponents and contributed to his own undoing. Russia was not brought back into the comity of nations nor was there any significant increase in trade with Russia and eastern Europe. Neither the cause of Anglo-French understanding nor European economic reconstruction was advanced as a result of its discussions. It would be some time before a British government again tried to promote the cause of European security and disarmament. If disarmament remained a universal need it ceased to be a universal aspiration of the British people.

Though Lloyd George remained loyal to his undertakings not to raise disarmament at the conference and joined with the French in rebuking the Russian foreign minister, Georgy Chicherin, when he attempted to put disarmament on the conference's agenda, he could not resist the temptation to denounce militarism at the opening session. Though the fighting had ceased the snarling continued to unnerve the whole continent of Europe.[2] Unless the conference led to disarmament it would be a failure but before there could be any disarmament there had to be a basis for an understanding between the European powers.[3]

Despite the efforts of the French government and Lloyd George's willingness to comply with France's requests in order to secure other British interests, it was not possible to exclude disarmament altogether

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1. T. Jones to Lloyd George, 16 and 23 March 1922, Lloyd George Papers, F/26/1/16 and 22; T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. 1, p. 195; Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post, 18 February 1922; J. T. Shotwell in International Conciliation, August 1924.

2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, No. 67.

3. Ibid., and J. S. Mills: The Genoa Conference, London, 1922, pp. 30, 63-9.

from the consideration of the conference. The International Federation of Trade Unions forced the conference's Committee on Labour Questions to discuss the question by informing delegates that it was the unanimous conviction of workers' organisations throughout Europe that disarmament was a necessary condition for economic recovery.[1] Disarmament figured in the talks Lloyd George held with the Czech statesman, Eduard Benes, on 26 April and the preamble to the British draft of the proposed non-aggression pact which they discussed committed the high contracting parties to reductions in national armaments.[2] Britain tried to ensure German and Russian participation in any forthcoming League negotiations on disarmament and it was forcefully argued that Russian disarmament would do much to reduce fear and insecurity in eastern Europe and enhance the value of a non-aggression pact.[3]

The Esher Plan and the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance

During the course of 1922 the initiative in disarmament passed from the British government to the League of Nations. In December 1921 the second League Assembly, at the instigation of Lord Robert Cecil[4] but against the wishes of the British delegation, instructed the Temporary Mixed Commission on Armaments (TMC) to draft proposals for general disarmament in the form of a treaty.[5] In July 1922 Cecil and a French member of the TMC, Henri de Jouvenel, proposed four resolutions which

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1. British Empire delegation memorandum No. 311 and minutes of the fifth meeting of the Committee on Labour Questions, 2 May 1922, CAB 31/12.

2. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, Nos. 63 and 95. See also Box 11 in the Worthington-Evans Papers and CAB 21/239.

3. DBFP, First Series, Vol. XIX, No. 93 and memorandum on an anti-aggression pact, 1 May 1922, Lloyd George Papers, F/26/1/29.

4. Cecil was in the anomalous position of representing South Africa at the League. He was at the time a severe critic of Lloyd George and his government, devoting some of his energies to attempts to persuade Viscount Grey to lead a Centre party which would challenge the political ascendancy and - in Cecil's view - dubious international morality of the Lloyd George coalition.

5. Foreign Office memorandum, 4 April 1922, CAB 31/1; Hymans to Lloyd George, 13 April 1922, CAB 16/40.

indissolubly linked disarmament with security. These resolutions were adopted by the third League Assembly in September 1922 as Resolution XIV to provide the springboard for launching the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance.[1]

The first disarmament plan to emanate from the League was, however, the Esher Plan which Viscount Esher,[2] a British member of the TMC, put forward in 1922. Esher, who had been instrumental in setting up the CID in 1904, became a strong advocate of disarmament as a result of his experiences as a liaison officer between the British government and the French army during the First World War. Adopting the Washington treaty precedent of applying a ratio to limit armaments, Esher proposed that the armies of the European powers should be restricted by limiting their manpower. By excluding troops stationed outside Europe in colonial territories, his plan favoured imperial powers like Britain and France. It was none the less rejected by a small sub-committee of the TMC because it made no recommendations to limit war material and ignored the question of security.

Although Lloyd George took a copy of the Esher Plan to Boulogne in February 1922 for his meeting with Poincaré, it at no stage received the endorsement of the British government.[3] It also came in for severe criticism in most sections of the British Press. Esher was described

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1. The four resolutions were: (1) no scheme for the reduction of armaments could be fully successful unless it was general, (2) many governments were unable to make sizeable reductions in their armaments unless they received in exchange a satisfactory guarantee of their security, (3) a defensive agreement, open to all countries, could provide such a guarantee, (4) previous consent to a reduction of armaments should be a prior condition for a treaty of guarantee.

2. Reginald Baliol Brett, 2nd Viscount Esher (1899), 1852-1930, Lib. MP, Penryn and Falmouth, 1880-85, member of royal commission to investigate the military preparations for and conduct of the South African war, 1902, chairman of the War Office reconstruction committee, 1903, joined the CID, 1904.

3. Esher to O.S.B., 1 March 1922, Oliver, Viscount Esher (ed.): The Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher, Vol. IV, London, 1938, pp. 276-7.

as 'an amiable and industrious nuisance'[1] and it was alleged that his scheme would make Britain 'a fifth-rate power'.[2]

The plan, nevertheless, is not without significance in the history of disarmament. It was the first attempt of the inter-war years to devise a unit of comparison. The limitation of manpower was to figure in many subsequent disarmament schemes including the last major disarmament initiative of a British government of the inter-war years, the MacDonald Plan of March 1933.[3] Its significance lies, however, not so much in its technical details but in its origins and sponsorship.[4] It is one of a number of indications of how seriously disarmament was taken by prominent Englishmen well versed in military and naval affairs in the aftermath of the First World War. The general limitation of armaments was not so much the panacea of the pacifists who had rejected the war in 1914 as the refuge of many who, in the years 1914 to 1918, had not only experienced the war at first hand but had been responsible for its conduct and direction.

The draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, like the Esher Plan, owed much to the studies undertaken by the League of Nations Union in Britain during 1921.[5] Though both were essentially English in their provenance neither won the support of the British government. Of the two, it was the draft Treaty which aroused the greater antagonism in the foreign policy-making establishment in London. Cecil with whom the draft

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1. Sunday Express, 9 July 1922.
2. Daily Express, 10 July 1922; Evening Standard, 13, 14 and 15 July 1922.
3. Presented to the World Disarmament Conference on 16 March 1933 it proposed that the number of effectives in the French, German, Italian and Polish armies should be fixed at 200,000 with France being allowed to retain an additional 200,000 in her colonial territories. Russia, because of her greater area, population and frontiers, was allowed 500,000. Unlike the Esher Plan, it proposed to limit the calibre of guns, the size of tanks, and naval and air armaments.
4. See pp. 87-88, 88n.
5. See pp. 87-9.

Treaty was identified was in an anomalous position. Whereas Esher was a private individual who had once exercised great influence,[1] Cecil was by May 1923 a senior Cabinet Minister in the Baldwin government. He had been brought back into the government to sit alongside colleagues who neither shared his enthusiasm for the League and disarmament nor held him in great esteem. Furthermore Cecil was disliked by the Foreign Office establishment and his relations with its political chief, Curzon, were strained. Cecil was regarded as a crank by the government's advisers and as a renegade by his Conservative colleagues.[2] Few, if any, of his fellow delegates at Geneva, however, realised how little he represented the views of the British government.[3]

The draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, in its final form,[4] was a plan for a general defensive alliance buttressed by supplementary agreements between states which felt themselves to be in special danger of attack. It was designed both to complement a scheme for the limitation

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1. M. Howard in The Continental Commitment, London, 1972, p. 17 describes Esher as the most influential adviser on defence policy of his day. His days of influence do not seem to have extended beyond the First World War.

2. When Cecil first put forward his proposals in July 1922 he was not a member of the British government. His activities at Paris in 1919 had not endeared him to the Foreign Office nor had his political excursions in the years of the Lloyd George post-war government won him the respect of the Conservative party. Hankey described him as 'a crank' (Hankey Diaries, 11 November 1923) and Austen Chamberlain described him as a 'sentimentalist with some of the wisdom of a serpent' (T. Jones: Whitehall Diary, Vol. I, p. 148). On 7 February 1924 Chamberlain informed Baldwin that Cecil 'had ceased to be in any real sense a member of our Party'. Memorandum by Chamberlain on his meeting with leaders of the Conservative party, 7 February 1924, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 35/4/5.

3. See S. de Madariaga: Disarmament, p. 97. Had this been grasped, Madariaga argues, it would have saved many disappointments.

4. The draft Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, as it was first known, met with criticism in France and from the League's PAC. In June 1923 Col. Requin, who was a member of both the PAC and the TMC, presented an alternative scheme which put more emphasis on special defensive arrangements. The draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the name given to it in its final form, was a compromise between the original Cecil scheme and Requin's proposals which had not been acceptable in their entirety to the Japanese, Italian and Spanish representatives on the TMC.

and reduction of national armaments and to enable France and her allies to integrate into the League system those pacts which they had already concluded for their own security. The League of Nations had been set up to prevent a return to the pre-war system of alliances but France in the immediate post-war years had tried to combine her allegiance to the League with a system of defensive alliances to defend the 1919 peace settlement against those powers which wished to revise it. Left-wing opinion in Britain was strongly opposed to alliances and the Right viewed them with distrust. The draft Treaty was an attempt to marry France's predilection for special defensive arrangements with the British public's faith in the League system.

Cecil first put forward his proposals in July 1922 at a time when the negotiations for an Anglo-French pact were virtually moribund and more than seven months had elapsed since the League Assembly had issued its instruction to the TMC to formulate plans for disarmament. Other than discuss the private manufacture of armaments and the exchange of information between nations the TMC, under its French chairman M. Viviani, had done nothing to promote disarmament since its inception in February 1921. Cecil articulated the growing concern, particularly of the smaller nations, that nothing was being done to limit armaments.

The draft Treaty led to the first major debate on disarmament policy of the inter-war years. It was criticised by government departments because the burden of enforcement would fall on Britain.[1] With the defection of the United States from the League, Britain had become the chief 'provider' or 'producer' of security. It was argued that it would lead not to a reduction but to an increase in British armaments. Britain with its world-wide possessions and interests would not benefit from its

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1. For a full account of the debate which took place within the government and the criticisms of the Service departments, the CID, the Foreign Office, the Dominions and the Cabinet see Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp. 38-46.

provision limiting the obligation to render assistance to those states in the same continent as the victim of aggression. Furthermore, the Service departments doubted the efficacy of the supplementary defensive arrangements and, with the exception of Lord Robert Cecil, no one in the Cabinet believed that a general guarantee would lead to a reduction in national armaments.

The case against the draft Treaty and disarmament agreements in general was ably put by the First Lord of the Admiralty, L. S. Amery, and the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Sir Eyre Crowe, who seven years earlier had provided the British government with a devastating critique of general disarmament agreements.[1]

Amery, who was convinced that Britain's salvation lay in remaining aloof from continental entanglements, denied that armaments were a cause of war. It was idle to imagine that disarmament could achieve peace so long as there were clashes of interest in Europe. Sooner or later adjustments would be made to the 1919 settlement and it would be foolish for Britain to guarantee the status quo. In a world of such harsh realities the draft Treaty would lead to more, rather than less, armaments.[2]

Crowe questioned whether it was either necessary or wise for Britain to monopolise the position of standard-bearer in the cause of disarmament. By disarming after the war she had reduced herself to military impotence and played into the hands of other powers. He doubted whether France would disarm even if she was given a guarantee of her security and he questioned whether outside the British Isles there was any large body of opinion which favoured disarmament. No one knew how long Germany would remain disarmed and the allied military authorities responsible for enforcing her disarmament knew that it would be impossible to prevent

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1. See pp. 123-4.

2. CID, 171st and 173rd meetings, 11 April and 29 June 1923, CAB 2/3; CP 311(23), 4 July 1923, CAB 24/161.

her reconstituting her army as it was certain she was already preparing to do. Furthermore, he doubted whether Russia would keep her word if she was persuaded to sign a disarmament treaty.[1]

Cecil tried to win over his colleagues not by denying the difficulties or by minimising the price Britain would have to pay but by warning them that if they were to announce that they were unable to support disarmament they would be defeated in the House of Commons and at the next general election.[2] There was, however, little likelihood of the government adopting such a course and he was unwise to attempt to bludgeon his colleagues in this way. Aware of his lack of standing within the Conservative party he fell back on the support which he believed he could muster in the League of Nations Union which was at that time in the forefront of those advocating disarmament. He exaggerated public support for disarmament and misjudged the situation in the House of Commons. When a debate took place on disarmament less than a month later[3] the government had a comfortable majority of 286 votes to 169. None the less on the back benches and in the Press it was frequently assumed by outspoken advocates of disarmament that because Cecil was a member of the government, the draft Treaty had already received the government's imprimatur.

Cecil did not deny that the obligations imposed by a general treaty of guarantee would add to Britain's commitments and he foresaw situations in which she would be required to render financial assistance, enforce a naval blockade or despatch small contingents of troops or aircraft.[4]

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1. 24-26 June 1923, FO 371/9419.
2. CID, 173rd meeting, 29 June 1923, CAB 2/3.
3. 167 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 75-182, 23 July 1923. The debate was on a Labour motion deploring the growth in armaments expenditure and calling on the government to take immediate steps to summon an international disarmament conference. The government was able to masquerade as the champion of the League because, in effect, the Labour motion was calling on the government to by-pass the League.
4. CID, 173rd meeting, 29 June 1923, CAB 2/3.

He reminded them, however, that the draft Treaty could not come into force until signatory states had begun to reduce their armaments. As armaments were reduced so would the chances of aggression. If peace was secured what practical importance would Britain's new commitments have? Whatever Britain decided about the treaty, situations would arise, he prophesied, in which Britain would be dragged into war. The more effective the system of sanctions the less likely it was they would have to be applied and the greater the reduction of armaments that would be achieved. Such was the importance of the treaty that he was 'ready to advocate the acceptance of considerable obligations to secure it'.[1]

Cecil tried to persuade his colleagues that they had to consider French as well as English opinion. Though the French had as great a distaste for excessive armaments as the English, they would always insist on adequate protection against sudden attack and the secret rearmament of their neighbours. With the failure of the 1919 treaty of guarantee the French had a genuine grievance which should be remedied. The attitude of the French people and their General Staff had changed during the previous year. Many observers were predicting a swing to the Left at the next general election[2] and the draft Treaty had won the approval of the General Staff. Any disarmament plan which had their support should not be lightly dismissed.[3]

Cecil's arguments cut little ice with his colleagues who were more opposed to extending Britain's commitments than to promoting disarmament. Britain was 'not in a position to subscribe to a policy of disarmament', Curzon said.[4] Cecil was no more successful in persuading the Labour

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1. W 4750, 15 June 1923, FO 371/9419; CID Paper 431-B, CAB 4/10.
2. Cecil's prediction proved correct. In May 1924 the Cartel des Gauches won the French general election.
3. Cecil to Curzon, 28 November and 21 December 1923, FO 371/9421 and Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51077.
4. Curzon at the 173rd meeting of the CID, 29 June 1923, CAB 2/3.

party to take a sympathetic view. In February 1923, almost a year before he took office and long before he was in a position to be influenced by Service advisers or the Foreign Office, MacDonald told Cecil that the draft Treaty would only succeed in raising around the League of Nations such a baffling network of understandings and arrangements as to increase jealousy and fear, and perpetuate militarism.[1] It was the first Labour government which in July 1924 notified the League of Nations that Britain could not endorse the draft Treaty.

The decision was a popular one. With the exception of the League of Nations Union, most Liberals and such organs of Liberal opinion as the Daily News,[2] The Nation,[3] and The Economist[4] it had few supporters. With some exceptions in the initial stages of the debate, the Conservative and Labour press was hostile to it.[5] There was much truth in Gilbert Murray's comment that militarists and pacifists both hated the treaty, the one because it threatened to reduce armaments, the other because it contemplated war.[6] The statement issued by the Executive Committee of the Union of Democratic Control in August 1924 would not have been disputed by either the Conservative or the Labour party. 'The Treaty would make not for disarmament and peace but for greater armaments and war.'[7]

The discussions which took place over the draft Treaty during the summer of 1923 are a revealing commentary on the prevailing mood of

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1. MacDonald to Cecil, 22 February 1923, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081. Cecil made another attempt to persuade MacDonald to take a favourable view of the draft Treaty after MacDonald came to power, see Cecil to MacDonald, 26 February 1924, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.
2. 24 July, 18, 19 and 20 September 1923, 21 July 1924.
3. 8 March 1924.
4. 2 August 1924.
5. The Times, 24 July 1923, Daily Telegraph, 5 and 9 August 1923 and even the Morning Post, 9 and 10 August 1923 made some initially favourable comments. They soon changed their tune.
6. Westminster Gazette (weekly edition), 5 April 1924.
7. Yorkshire Post, 7 August 1924.

disenchantment with diaramament and the international order to emerge from the war. There was some substance in Cecil's complaints about the indifference and obstruction he encountered in Whitehall. A Foreign Office official commended the appointment of a Lieutenant Colonel Oppenheim to the TMC because of his strong views 'on the impracticability not to say folly of disarmament and pacifism'.[1] Others like Balfour and Hankey, who had supported disarmament in 1919, began to air their misgivings. France's occupation of the Ruhr convinced most of Cecil's colleagues that disarmament was not a sensible policy in 1923. It would be misconstrued as a sign of weakness. The strength of France's land and air forces and Britain's relative weakness on the land and in the air revived the latent Francophobia of the British people. 1923 was a most imopportune year to promote a treaty designed to augment France's security. Furthermore, the League's failure to penalise Italy for her bombardment and occupation of Corfu in August 1923 did not enhance the prestige of the League or encourage belief in collective security.

The debate within the government brought home to Britain's foreign policy-making establishment the price which Britain would have to pay if there was to be a reduction of European armaments but there is no evidence that it made any impact on the British people as a whole. Outside government circles few fully appreciated that a disarmed Europe might mean, at least for a time, a more highly armed Britain. As one Service memorandum put it, disarmament linked to security meant 'additional commitments of indefinite magnitude and uncertain application'.[2] That was an unpalatable policy for a nation struggling to regain its prosperity in the aftermath of a war which had demonstrated the cost of continental commitments.

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1. Memorandum by G. H. Villiers, 28 June 1923, FO 371/9419. Villiers was head of the Western Department of the Foreign Office.
2. CP 311(23), 3 July 1923, CAB 24/161.

In 1923 disarmament was not an important issue in British politics. The nation was preoccupied with the question of unemployment. Baldwin wrestled not only with the problems of the economy but with the divisions within the Conservative party which had resulted from the break-up of the Lloyd George coalition. In the autumn of 1923 he sought a mandate from the British people not to promote disarmament but tariff reform. Unlike Lloyd George he did not believe that disarmament would make any major contribution to British economic recovery. In this respect he did not differ essentially from the Labour party. Its 1923 general election manifesto contained only a perfunctory reference to disarmament.[1]

In February 1924 Philip Kerr advised Lloyd George that domestic problems and above all relations between capital and labour had to take priority over international affairs. It had taken the United States ten years after the Civil War to get rid of war passions and it might take Europe even longer.[2] With Britain dispirited by France's German policy and her support for Italy in the Corfu dispute, the international climate seemed singularly unfavourable to general disarmament.

More time and thought was given to the task of improving Britain's defences than to disarmament in the years 1922 to 1924. An alarmist picture was painted by Balfour, Hankey, Hoare and others of the dire consequences for London of Britain's inferiority in the air.[3] In August 1922 the Lloyd George government took the decision to spend an additional two million pounds on the air force and in June 1923 Baldwin announced a scheme to expand Britain's home-based air force to fifty-two squadrons

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1. F. W. S. Craig: British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1945, Chichester, 1970, pp. 18-27.
2. 4 February 1924, Lloyd George Papers, G/12/5/2.
3. CID, 145th meeting, 14 October 1921, CAB 2/3; C.18(22), 15 March 1922, CAB 23/29; Hankey to Lloyd George, 21 March and 28 July 1922, Lloyd George Papers, F/26/1 and F/26/2/9; K. Young: Arthur James Balfour p. 437.

of which only eighteen would be composed of fighter aircraft.[1] Britain's policy was to deter attack by the threat of retaliation from her bomber squadrons and, if possible, to persuade France and Italy to sign a limitation agreement. In all but the Labour party the decision was a popular one. It was approved by some of the staunchest supporters of disarmament. One of them, Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, said that it had been a blunder to reduce the size of Britain's air force immediately after the war without first securing an air limitation agreement. If Britain went to a disarmament conference with an air force too weak to protect herself, France would have the whip hand. An increase in Britain's air force was an essential step towards any agreement for the reduction of armaments.[2]

The decision to expand the air force was endorsed by the 1923 Imperial Conference but the Marquess of Salisbury[3] reminded Dominion statesmen that the policy of the British government remained the limitation of armaments. That objective, however, could only be achieved if Britain herself possessed 'a background of power'. If Britain, by strengthening her bargaining position, could induce other countries to reduce their armaments, she would limit the forces she would have to contend with in any future conflict. Unrealisable though that goal proved to be, no British statesman ever put the practical objective of British disarmament policy more succinctly.[4]

Salisbury's brother, Lord Robert Cecil, for all his advocacy of

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1. 157 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1662, 3 August 1922, and 165 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 2142, 26 June 1923.
2. Daily News, 28 June 1923.
3. James Gascoyne-Cecil, 4th Marquess of Salisbury, 1861-1947, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1900-3, Lord Privy Seal, 1903-5, President of the Board of Trade, 1905, Lord President of the Council, 1922-24, Lord Privy Seal, 1924-29, Leader of the House of Lords, 1925-29. Salisbury spoke to the Imperial Conference in his capacity as Chairman of the CID.
4. Minutes of the 1923 Imperial Conference, CAB 32/9.

disarmament did not seek to evade the issue. In the autumn of 1922 he raised a hornets' nest by suggesting that the League create a bomber force to retaliate against any nation which had the temerity to use the air weapon in a sudden act of aggression.[1] Cecil consistently argued that without providing some form of security it was useless to expect nations to disarm but his proposal, none the less, ran counter to the arguments he had deployed in 1919 at the Paris peace conference in resisting French demands that the League should be endowed with its own armed forces.

Cecil warned that there was nothing to prevent France sending two thousand aircraft across the Channel to destroy London. It was far easier to make secret preparations for an air strike than to plan aggression by land or sea. Aircraft were small and easy to conceal, and commercial aircraft could be converted into bombers with comparative ease. Cecil's solution was that each member of the League should earmark considerable numbers of aircraft to crush any power which ventured to deliver a sudden attack from the air.[2] Cecil was not a member of the government at the time and there is no evidence that the government ever considered such a proposal. It is of some significance, none the less, that both advocates of League action and those who put their trust entirely in national armaments believed that the only defence against air attack was the threat of retaliation. Deterrence was a more appropriate policy than disarmament.

The first Labour government, which came to power in January 1924, did not waver from that policy. Lord Haldane, who as Chairman of the CID described himself as 'practically Minister of Defence',[3] told the

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1. Westminster Gazette, 30 September and 6 October 1922.
2. Cecil to Smuts, 6 October 1922, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51076.
3. Haldane to his mother, Mrs. Mary Haldane, 25 January 1924, Haldane Papers, Vol. 6007.

House of Lords that the policy of the government was to keep up the defences of the country so as to be in a better position to negotiate.[1] The Labour government did not court weakness by pursuing unilateral disarmament though it was prepared to shelve work on the Singapore naval base in the interests of improving the climate of opinion in the Far East.

MacDonald[2] did not view the outlook for disarmament in a rosy light. It was a distant prospect which would have to await an improvement in Anglo-French relations.[3] Despite French preferences for linking a settlement of the reparation question with European security, MacDonald refused to consider either security or disarmament until agreement had been reached over reparations. In the first part of the year he worked hard to establish a good working relationship with Poincaré but it was the victory of the Cartel des Gauches in the French elections of May 1924 which led to closer relations between the British and French governments. The highly successful London conference on reparations in July-August 1924 was preceded by lengthy discussions between MacDonald and the new French prime minister, Edouard Herriot.[4] Its success established MacDonald's own reputation[5] and paved the way for a new initiative to link disarmament and security.

With inadequate preparation and wearied by the protracted negotiations and Cabinet dissensions over the London conference on reparations,

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1. 56 HL Debs. 5th Series, col. 78, 12 February 1924.
2. MacDonald combined the office of Prime Minister with that of Foreign Secretary, a task which demanded more stamina than he, and certainly most men, possessed.
3. MacDonald Diaries, 3 February 1924, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/8/1; MacDonald to Cecil, 25 February 1924, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081; The Times, 3 March 1924 (text of MacDonald's letter to Poincaré, 21 February 1924).
4. For a full discussion of these talks see Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp. 58-65.
5. See, for instance, Hankey to Haldane, 20 August 1924, Haldane Papers, Vol. 5916: 'Make no mistake it was Ramsay MacDonald's Conference... He ran it in his own way...'

MacDonald went to Geneva in September 1924 as the first British prime minister to address the League of Nations.[1]

His speech to the League Assembly on 4 September 1924 can have come as little surprise to those who had followed his pronouncements on foreign policy since the days in August 1914 when he had broken with many of his colleagues to help found the Union of Democratic Control. Military alliances could never bring security. Pacts or no pacts, smaller nations would be crushed if the world once again put its faith in military organisation. The alternative was a League to which nations looked not because its arm was strong but because its nature was just. In arbitration lay the best hopes for peace. Praising the recent initiatives of the Danish government[2] and the achievements of the Washington conference he intimated that Britain would welcome another American initiative over naval disarmament but that only a European conference could find a solution to the problem of land armaments. Before a disarmament conference was held the ground would have to be well prepared and he suggested a League preparatory commission, with German and Russian participation, to undertake that work.[3]

MacDonald's speech was not well received[4] but Herriot's subsequent endorsement of MacDonald's emphasis on arbitration led to the drafting of the Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes. A period of close collaboration between Britain and France

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1. MacDonald Diaries, 21 September 1924, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/8/1; Cecil to Noel-Baker, 9 February 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51106; D. Marquand: Ramsay MacDonald, London, 1977, pp. 342-51; Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, p. 69.

2. The newly elected social democratic government had earlier that year introduced legislation, subsequently rejected, to disband its armed forces.

3. League of Nations: Records of the Fifth Assembly, Special Supplement No. 23, Geneva, 1924, pp. 41-5.

4. S. de Madariaga: Morning without Noon, Farnborough, 1974, pp. 54-5. 'Ramsay MacDonald was disastrous...he was blind to the fact that his audience was composed of hard-boiled diplomats, officials, lawyers, and experts who held his cheap eloquence in contempt...because they felt it to be insincere.' See also The Times, 6 September 1924.

led to what seemed to many contemporaries one of the most promising initiatives of the inter-war years.

The Geneva Protocol

On 6 September MacDonald and Herriot jointly presented the Assembly with a resolution linking arbitration, security and disarmament. It called on the Assembly's Third Committee to re-examine the problem of security and disarmament,[1] paying special heed to the observations of member governments on the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, and its First Committee to examine the Optional Clause in the Statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice[2] together with those articles in the Covenant which dealt with the settlement of disputes.[3] That same day the two delegations began their private talks which resulted in the Geneva Protocol.[4]

Whereas the draft Treaty had been primarily concerned with the provision of military assistance to victims of aggression, the Geneva Protocol's main purpose was to provide exhaustively for the compulsory settlement of all international disputes.[5] It was, however, far more explicit in its provisions for disarmament. Article XVII bound its signatories to take part in an international disarmament conference at

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1. In his speech to the Assembly Herriot had reminded his audience that the intentions of Article 8 of the Covenant were both security and disarmament.

2. MacDonald had referred approvingly to the Optional Clause in his Assembly speech but in July Haldane had expressed his opposition and Beatty had voiced the Admiralty's anxieties. See CID, 187th meeting, 28 July 1924, CAB 2/4. Haldane wrote a memorandum, later to be unearthed and used by Austen Chamberlain in 1926, arguing the case against its acceptance. His memorandum and Beatty's fears had been aroused by a speech by Lord Parmoor in the House of Lords on 24 July 1924 suggesting that the jurisdiction of the Court should be made compulsory. The Optional Clause, Article 36 in the Statute, obliged states to recognise the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court in four classes of legal disputes.

3. League of Nations: Records of the Fifth Assembly, Special Supplement No. 23, pp. 77-9.

4. Le Temps, 7 September 1924.

5. A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1924, London, 1926, p. 49.

Geneva on 15 June 1925 and Article XXI decreed that the Protocol would not come into force until a plan for the reduction of armaments had been adopted. Should that plan not be implemented, the League Council was obliged to declare the Protocol null and void. If a signatory state defaulted on its obligations under the disarmament plan, it would cease to be a beneficiary of the Protocol.[1]

1924 witnessed not only a change of government in both Britain and France but a subtle transformation in the attitude of the French people. International reactions to the Ruhr occupation and France's hard line policy towards Germany led the French nation to question whether reliance on military power and military engagements to the exclusion of all other considerations could guarantee French security. None the less, in all the discussions between the British and French delegations and in the Assembly's committees, the French insisted that arbitration, security and disarmament were indissolubly linked and that they would not take part in a disarmament conference unless they first received guarantees of their own security.

On the British side the detailed work of implementing the Assembly resolution was left to Lord Parmoor[2] and Arthur Henderson, the leaders

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1. For two contemporary estimates, see P. J. Noel-Baker: The Geneva Protocol, London, 1925 and D. H. Miller: The Geneva Protocol, New York, 1925. For a short summary of the Protocol's provisions and the attitude of the British government to it, see Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp. 68-80.

2. Charles Alfred Cripps, Lord Parmoor (1914), 1852-1941, barrister and churchman, won four Firsts at New College, Oxford, in History, Mathematics, Jurisprudence and Civil Law, became a QC in 1890 with a lucrative practice, Cons. MP for Stroud, 1895-1900, Stretford, 1901-5, Wycombe, 1910-14, opposed British participation in the war in 1914, championed conscientious objectors, supported Lansdowne's peace letter and early attempts to found a league of nations, chaired the post-war 'Fight the Famine' Council, Lord President of the Council and Minister responsible for League affairs, 1924, Lord President and Leader of the House of Lords, 1929-31. He aroused considerable criticism in 1924, not just in the Admiralty. Cecil told Murray on 8 March 1924 that he was 'most depressing as a League Minister' and Beatrice Webb, the sister of his first wife, noted in her diary on 21 July 1925: 'He was not a success in the Labour Cabinet and we wondered why JRM asked him in - it was not our doing, though, of course, it was assumed to be so.'

of the British delegation.[1] As the days went by they moved closer to the French position and drew down upon themselves the wrath of the Admiralty in London and a section of the British Press. Parmoor, who in the first days of the Assembly had embarrassed his colleagues by his 'pure pacifism', began to accept the need for sanctions.[2] Apparently unaware of how strenuously successive British governments, with the full backing of the Foreign Office and the Service departments, had resisted automatic sanctions and a generous interpretation of Article 16, Henderson[3] argued that the obligations in what was to become Article XI of the Protocol were already implicit in Article 16 of the Covenant. If members of the League were not prepared to give military or naval assistance to a victim of aggression and did exactly as they pleased, aggressors would go scot-free and small states would always be at the mercy of a powerful neighbour.[4]

Though they were prepared to move towards the French position on sanctions and security, Parmoor and Henderson were determined to make the price of their 'surrender' a firm commitment to disarmament. On 18 September a great battle took place between the two delegations as to whether the Protocol's arbitration and security provisions should

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1. MacDonald left Geneva on 7 September. Parmoor and Henderson were assisted by Sir Cecil Hurst and Philip Noel-Baker who both played a notable role in the drafting of the Protocol. Noel-Baker had gone to Geneva as the secretary to Gilbert Murray, another of the delegates, but during the course of the Assembly he virtually became Henderson's personal assistant.

2. Murray to Cecil, 5 September 1924, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51132; see also adverse criticism in MacDonald Diaries, 21 September 1924, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/8/1. For his pro-sanction remarks see Le Temps, 12 September 1924.

3. Arthur Henderson, 1863-1935, was Home Secretary in the 1924 government. As Secretary of the Labour party and a leading member of the Labour and Socialist International - he was President in 1928 - Henderson was a powerful figure in both the British and the European socialist movements.

4. League of Nations: Record of the Fifth Assembly, Special Supplement No. 26, p. 42 and FO 371/10570.

come into force regardless of the success or failure of the disarmament conference. The French contended that they should. The British said that they should not. After a lengthy discussion, the British view prevailed. Parmoor argued that in accepting compulsory arbitration and 'the heavy obligations in regard to sanctions', states were surrendering part of their sovereignty. Britain would only accept such sacrifices if they formed part of a scheme for disarmament. Responsibilities such as these could only be discharged in a disarmed Europe.[1]

The Admiralty were certainly not prepared to discharge such onerous obligations even in a disarmed world. When the draft Protocol reached London, they mounted a campaign against it. On 20 September they sent the Foreign Office a strongly worded memorandum opposing any provision which would oblige Britain to participate in the enforcement of a blockade or in rendering naval assistance to a state whose sea communications were threatened by an aggressor. They could not 'protest too strongly against the British fleet being placed in such a dangerous position'. Such responsibilities were totally incompatible with the one-power standard.[2] That same weekend, L. S. Amery, a former First Lord, attracted considerable publicity by an article in the Sunday Times[3] and a speech in his Sparkbrook constituency subjecting the terms of the Protocol to searching criticism.[4] On Sunday, 21 September, a day set aside by the Labour party, the TUC and the International Federation of Trade Unions for demonstrations against war, MacDonald reacted to Admiralty protests and the campaign in the Press, by instructing Parmoor to inform the French that the Protocol would have to be considered by the government and approved by Parliament before the British government could fully endorse it.[5]

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1. FO 371/10570.
2. Ibid.
3. 21 September 1924.
4. The Times, 22 September 1924; Le Temps, 22 September 1924.
5. FO 371/10570 and C.51(24), 29 September 1924, CAB 23/48.

The Admiralty sought to exert the maximum pressure on the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the British delegation at Geneva. On 27 September they despatched Captain (later Admiral Sir) Dudley Pound to Geneva to try, albeit unsuccessfully, to persuade Parmoor and Henderson to make changes in the approved text of the Protocol.[1]

The Protocol was only briefly discussed by the Cabinet and the CID before the Labour government fell from power.[2] MacDonald assured its critics in the Cabinet that the government would not be committed by any action taken by their delegation at Geneva. When on 9 October the Cabinet approved the text of the King's speech proroguing Parliament they endorsed a reference to the Protocol which described it as 'an important advance on the road to the reduction of armaments' which, it was hoped, would 'lead to the first practical measure for lightening the heavy burdens' under which the nations of the world were labouring.[3] There was no hint that the government might find it necessary to repudiate it.

Doubts have been expressed by historians and others over the half century since 1924 whether the Labour government would have carried the Protocol if it had survived.[4] Chelmsford, Haldane[5] and Wedgwood[6]

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1. Chelmsford to MacDonald, 26 September 1924, FO 371/10570; CP 456(24), 27 September 1924, CAB 24/168; Chelmsford to Haldane, 27 September 1924, Haldane Papers, Vol. 5916; Dalton Diaries, 15 March and 4 December 1928.

2. Minutes of a meeting of Ministers, 22 September 1924, CAB 23/48; C.51(24), 29 September 1924, CAB 23/48; CID, 188th meeting, 2 October 1924, CAB 2/3.

3. C.55(24), 9 October 1924, CAB 23/48.

4. See, for example, Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, p. 69.

5. In the House of Lords on 16 November 1927 Haldane said: 'I did not like the Protocol just because it involved so many agreements and I may say I never was a party to any suggestion for us to sign it.' 69 HL Debs. 5th Series, cols. 104-5.

6. Wedgwood was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He wrote in Clarion on 30 January 1925 'The Protocol involves the risk of war and not the security of peace.' See also his remarks at the Labour party conference, Report of the 25th Annual Conference, London, n.d. (1925), p. 257.

within the Cabinet were opposed to it. Snowden eventually adopted a hostile attitude to it.[1] J. H. Thomas, the Colonial Secretary, had proved extremely susceptible to Admiralty pressures in February 1924[2] and might well have felt obliged to voice the opposition of the Dominion governments. On the other hand it seems highly likely that MacDonald would have supported it though perhaps only in an amended form.[3] It was strongly supported by the League of Nations Union and most of the Liberal party.[4] The evidence seems to suggest that it would have commanded a majority in the Commons but that if the government had tried to meet the criticisms of the Service departments it would have been so emasculated as to make it worthless to France and the 'consumers' of security.

Before the new Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, notified the League Council in March 1925 that the British government could not accept the Geneva Protocol, it was subjected to exhaustive study in the Foreign Office, the Service departments and the CID. They were virtually unanimous in condemning it as were also the Dominion governments.[5] The Protocol had few friends in the Conservative party. Its October 1924 general election manifesto had warned the electorate that it would be

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1. Reynolds News, 4 September 1927 and Manchester Guardian, 14 September 1927.

2. W. S. Chalmers: The Life and Letters of David, Earl Beatty, p. 395.

3. A. C. Temperley: The Whispering Gallery of Europe, London, 1938, p. 29 took the view that MacDonald would have rejected it but the evidence of his speeches and correspondence in the years 1925 to 1927 leads to a different conclusion. See pp. 69-70.

4. Lloyd George was opposed to it describing it as 'a booby-trap for Great Britain baited with arbitration'. However, H. A. L. Fisher took the view that the Labour party were behind it and quoted Henderson, a somewhat biased authority, to the effect that 'the Labour Party are going for the Protocol full steam ahead and say it is very popular in the country and that its advocacy is...good political business'. It would seem that MacDonald certainly came to that conclusion too. See Fisher to Lloyd George, 20 March 1925, Lloyd George Papers, G/7/1/3.

5. For a full account of the Baldwin government's scrutiny of the Protocol and the attitude of the Dominion governments see Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp. 70-80.

necessary to subject it to very careful scrutiny[1] and even Cecil was critical of it. He was dubious about its arbitration procedures and was fearful lest it virtually convert the League into some kind of super-state so ruling out all chance of the United States joining the League for a generation.[2] Nevertheless because it had the support of some of Europe's ablest statesmen, had already been signed by ten states, and had won the general approval of another forty-seven, Cecil believed that it could not be rejected out of hand,[3] a view which the Foreign Secretary also shared.[4]

With all its defects, Cecil thought that it was not beyond redemption. Its deficiencies could be remedied by appropriate amendments. Britain was pledged to the hilt to promote general disarmament and that objective was worth considerable effort and some sacrifices, Cecil suggested, because without it Britain could never enjoy real security. If there was no disarmament, sooner or later she would be caught up in another arms race. She would profit immensely if she could persuade the French to reduce their air force and agree to the limitation of submarines and cruisers. Armed strength was a relative matter. If Britain persuaded other nations to follow her example in reducing their armaments, so much greater would her relative military strength be. It should not be assumed that the Dominions were an irremovable barrier to the acceptance of the

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1. F. W. S. Craig: British General Election Manifestos, 1918-1945, pp. 28-42.
2. Cecil to Murray, 25 September 1924, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51132.
3. 17 November 1924, FO 800/256. Chamberlain had asked Cecil on 11 November to make no public statements on the Protocol until the government had had an opportunity to examine it. Cecil had returned to office in Baldwin's second administration as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with the same responsibility for League affairs as he had had in Baldwin's first administration in 1923. He cannot have endeared himself to his leader by his opposition to protection in 1923. In order of Cabinet precedence he returned to government in a more lowly office though his function remained the same and gave him a voice in the Cabinet.
4. CID, 192nd meeting, 16 December 1924, CAB 2/4.

Protocol.[1] Their true opinion should be ascertained and a special committee, representative of both the Dominions and all sections of British life, established to examine the Protocol.[2]

Adopting Cecil's suggestion, Chamberlain tried without success to persuade Baldwin to appoint a widely-representative committee to which both Grey[3] and Haldane[4] would be invited to formulate a national policy on the Protocol.[5] The only exhaustive examination of the Protocol, however, took place in a sub-committee of the CID.

The Conservative government rejected the Protocol because it was opposed to compulsory arbitration and automatic sanctions. Like MacDonald and most of the Labour party, Baldwin and his colleagues believed that moral force, not military power, was the League's principal weapon and that the pacification of Europe would be brought about by conciliation and discussion rather than by a battery of sanctions. Britain, furthermore, could not safeguard her world-wide imperial interests or her vital interests in western Europe if there was an ever-present danger of being dragged into a European war over Lithuania or Latvia or Poland or

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1. In June 1924 Cecil had remonstrated with MacDonald for conceding to the Dominion governments 'a liberum veto' in the formulation of British foreign policy. Cecil to MacDonald, 19 and 23 June 1924, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081. Cecil and his friend, Philip Noel-Baker, believed that too much attention was being paid to Dominion susceptibilities. The constitutional position was obscure and in The Present Juridical Status of the British Dominions in International Law, London, 1929, Noel-Baker as an authority on international law tried to produce an authoritative statement on the constitutional relationship between Great Britain and the Dominions. It is worth noting that the Dominions were not parties to either the abortive Treaty of Guarantee in 1919 or the Locarno treaties of 1925.
2. 17 November 1924, FO/256. Cecil had tried to persuade MacDonald to set up a similar body in October 1924.
3. Grey had voiced his support for the principles of the Protocol but he was not in a strong position to commit the Liberal party.
4. Haldane was opposed to the Protocol and was not, therefore, representative of the Labour party.
5. Chamberlain to Baldwin, 25 November 1924, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 35/1/12. Chamberlain also suggested that the Dominions should be brought into these discussions but at a later stage.

Bessarabia. With the single exception of Sir James Headlam-Morley, its Historical Adviser, no one in the Foreign Office believed that Britain should pledge herself to defend any European frontiers other than the eastern boundaries of France and the Low Countries. He alone had the vision to see that Britain had a direct interest in the peace and stability of central and eastern Europe. None the less it was generally recognised that Britain ought to try to replace the Geneva Protocol by some form of mutual security pact restricted to western Europe.[1]

Locarno

The Locarno conference in October 1925 brought to a successful conclusion more than six months of patient diplomacy in which Britain's Foreign Secretary played the major role. Though the conference adopted a treaty of mutual guarantee binding Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Italy to uphold the status quo in the Rhineland and along the Belgian-German and Franco-German frontiers it did nothing to promote disarmament. The German delegation pressed the cause for general disarmament but the conference contented itself in its final protocol with an anodyne commitment to pursue disarmament at some future and unspecified date. The British Cabinet had concluded on 2 March 1925[2] that a mutual security pact between France, Germany, Belgium, Britain and Italy might lead to a reduction of armaments but Chamberlain did not seek to make disarmament a condition of Britain's signature of a security pact. In defending his policy in the Commons on 24 June he said that if the powers succeeded in removing fear they would remove one major obstacle to disarmament. There was nothing to be gained from devoting time and energy to detailed provisions for disarmament because economic factors would force countries to make reductions in armaments as soon as they felt secure.[3]

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1. Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp. 74-80; A. Wolfers: Britain and France between two Wars, pp. 254-6, New Haven, 1940.
2. C.12(25), 2 March 1925, CAB 23/49.
3. 185 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1566-7, 24 June 1925.

There was nothing new in Chamberlain's line of argument. Smuts had predicted in January 1921 that financial pressures would solve the armaments problem.[1] Cecil had warned the Secretary of State for War, Sir Laming Worthington-Evans, in August 1922 that economic circumstances would compel nations to reduce their armaments. He might have added that they had already done so in Britain. In fact he predicted what the history of the 1920s was to demonstrate, that poor countries would make immense sacrifices to maintain huge armies at a time when the wealthier, democratic countries of western Europe were disarming.[2] Cecil foresaw a situation arising in Britain when financial pressures would be so great that the government would over-rule its Service advisers to make wholesale and drastic reductions which put the country in jeopardy. It was for that reason among others that he preached general disarmament by international agreement in and out of season.[3] Piecemeal reduction in armaments brought about by economic pressures would disrupt the balance of power and tilt it in favour of the least democratic countries of Europe. Only mutual and balanced force reductions could save the democracies from the adverse consequences of those electoral and economic pressures which threatened their armed forces.

The Labour party neither accepted Chamberlain's prognosis nor did it entirely share Cecil's views. MacDonald, following Chamberlain's statement to the Commons on 24 June, said that he profoundly disagreed with the Foreign Secretary. Ignoring recent British history and implicitly exaggerating the power of the military in Britain and other countries, MacDonald said that he did not believe that any nation would reduce its armaments 'by a ship or a gun' as a result of economic pressures. With

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1. Smuts to Cecil, 14 January 1921, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51076.
2. Cecil to Worthington-Evans, 14 August 1922, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51095.
3. Cecil to Churchill, 24 July 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51097.

its national existence at stake no nation was going to say that it had spent twenty per cent. too much on armaments, let us reduce it. There would be no disarmament without a disarmament conference[1] because no country would voluntarily reduce its armaments without securing similar reductions in other countries. Without disarmament no security pact would produce real security.[2] A fortnight after the conclusion of the Locarno conference Noel-Baker,[3] to whom MacDonald was much indebted at this time for advice on disarmament and foreign policy, commented that the treaty of mutual guarantee was 'the Treaty of Mutual Assistance minus, alas, disarmament'.[4] Britain had given a guarantee to France and Belgium without insisting on disarmament as a quid pro quo.

Both Baldwin and Chamberlain assured the Commons during the first half of 1925 that Britain was willing to join with other powers to secure general disarmament,[5] and partly to placate Cecil, Chamberlain informed Briand in July that the British government would welcome a practical advance towards the limitation of armaments at the forthcoming 1925 League Assembly.[6] None the less the Baldwin Cabinet showed little interest in disarmament during the months leading to the signature of the Locarno treaties. It was Amery who articulated the views of his colleagues on disarmament at a meeting of the CID in February 1925. Disarmament could only come about by creating the right atmosphere. Public opinion would ultimately produce the necessary confidence if it was allowed to operate through a League of Nations untrammelled by sanctions and systems of

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1. The Geneva Protocol had provided for a disarmament conference to be convened at Geneva nine days earlier on 15 June.
2. 185 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 1579-81.
3. See Noel-Baker's memoranda for and correspondence with MacDonald on 23 and 25 May, 3 July 1925, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/5/36,
4. Noel-Baker to Gilbert Murray, 30 October 1925, Gilbert Murray Papers.
5. 181 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 2258, 18 March 1925 and 185 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1654, 24 June 1925.
6. C 8604/459/18, 2 July 1925 quoted in CP 324(25), 2 July 1925, CAB 24/174.

security. Institutionalised procedures would prevent rather than promote disarmament.[1] When in July Cecil proposed that the recently formed League of Nations Co-ordination Committee[2] be entrusted with the task of conducting a searching enquiry into the principles of disarmament, Chamberlain opposed the proposal.[3] He did not think that any progress could be made towards disarmament until the basic condition for success, a greater measure of security, had been achieved. Even if the western security pact was concluded, Europe would still be insecure because nothing would have been done to remove eastern Europe's fear of Bolshevik Russia. Without apparently being aware of the contradiction in his own argument, Chamberlain went on to forecast that disarmament would follow the signature of a western security pact. Economic pressures would force 'a great reduction' in armaments on a not unwilling France. However, such reductions would not necessarily be in Britain's interests so long as Russia remained strong. In any case, Cecil's proposal would be wrong. For Britain to take the initiative without the certainty of success would be courting disaster but there was wisdom in Cecil's suggestion that Britain's Service advisers should be instructed to devise proposals which Britain could propose at the most opportune moment. The Cabinet sided with Chamberlain. No effective progress could be made until the pact was concluded but an expert enquiry should be set up to formulate principles to guide the government in any future disarmament negotiations.[4]

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1. CID, 195th meeting, 13 February 1925, CAB 2/4.
2. The Co-ordination Committee, comprising both military and civilian personnel, had been set up to replace the TMC.
3. Cecil's memorandum is CP 329(25), 6 July 1925, CAB 24/174. Chamberlain's rejoinder is CP 357(25), 16 July 1925, CAB 24/174.
4. C.39(25), 22 July 1925, CAB 23/50. A week later Hankey drafted a Note to the Chiefs of Staff reminding them that Britain was pledged by the Covenant and Versailles Treaty to further measures of disarmament and it was, therefore, essential for the government to be well briefed when the negotiations began. CID Paper 627-B in CAB 16/61 and CP 365(25), 27 July 1925, CAB 24/174.

Disarmament was an important issue at the Sixth League Assembly in September 1925. Throughout the deliberations of the Assembly's Third Committee, Britain's delegates had the unenviable task of urging caution and thus laying themselves open to the charge of obstruction. France took the lead in advocating disarmament and such was the momentum generated by France and some of the smaller nations that on 25 September the Assembly adopted a resolution calling on the League Council to initiate a preparatory study for a disarmament conference.[1]

The significance of the Locarno treaties was widely and wildly exaggerated in Britain. It was assumed that the prospects of a major European war had been banished for the foreseeable future. To show how seriously the government took the Locarno settlement the Cabinet decided to postpone the completion date of the 1923 air expansion programme from 1930 to 1935 and the CID, 'in view of the great advance in the pacification of Europe resulting from Locarno', abandoned its endeavours to educate the public about the dangers of air raids.[2] In their annual review of imperial defence in 1926 the Chiefs of Staff said that the Washington and Locarno treaties had reduced the risks of war in those parts of the world where Britain was most vulnerable. They even suggested that the threat of aerial bombardment to London and the South of England had been 'reduced to a minimum'.[3] They made no plans, however, to implement Britain's guarantee. It could well be asked how plans could be made to bring immediate military assistance to Belgium, France or Germany in such different circumstances. It is not, therefore, altogether

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. 1, No. 42; Granville to Chamberlain, 24 September 1925, FO 371/11067; CID Paper 631-B, in CAB 16/61; Drury-Lowe to MacDonald, 20 September 1925, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/5/36; The Times, 23 September 1925.
2. C.57(25), 3 December 1925, and C.58(25), 9 December 1925, CAB 23/51; CID, 208th meeting, 26 January 1926, CAB 2/4.
3. COS 41, 22 June 1926, CAB 53/12.

surprising that no such optimistic assessments of the beneficial effects of Locarno were to emanate from the French military authorities.[1]

The government did not forget that the Final Protocol of the Locarno conference had committed its signatories 'to give their sincere co-operation to the work relating to disarmament already undertaken by the League of Nations and to seek the realisation thereof in a general agreement'. On 18 November Chamberlain informed the Commons that the Locarno treaties had made disarmament practicable and given it a degree of urgency.[2] When there was a three months' delay in 1926 in the opening of the Preparatory Commission[3] Chamberlain expressed his impatience. He told the French ambassador in London that a large section of British public opinion would feel that the Locarno treaties had been robbed of almost all their merit if no progress was made towards disarmament.[4] Five months earlier he had tried to persuade the Polish government that the Locarno treaties justified large cuts in Poland's military expenditure.[5]

The government knew it could not ignore the strong and growing public support for the League and disarmament and for a brief period in

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1. Cf. the anonymous article 'A Propos du Désarmement' in Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 May 1926 and Foch's description of Locarno as a 'soporifique' quoted by J. H. Morgan: Assize of Arms, Vol. 1, London, 1945, p. xi. A slightly more optimistic assessment was made by the Quai d'Orsay in July 1931 in its memorandum on disarmament: 'in a particularly sensitive European area, and one of vital interest to France, the signing of the Locarno Agreement...made for France, as well as for the other Powers adjacent to that area, a great additional contribution to the guarantees of security resulting from the strict observance of the Treaties [of Peace].' League of Nations Conference for the Limitation and Reduction of Armaments, Document IX, 9, Geneva, 1932.
2. 188 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 423, 18 November 1925.
3. In response to the Sixth Assembly resolution on 25 September 1925 calling for a preparatory study for a disarmament conference, the League Council on 12 December fixed the composition of a Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference and decided that it should begin its work on 15 February 1926. Its opening session was postponed to 18 May 1926 as a result of representations from France, Italy, Japan, Czechoslovakia and Uruguay who were anxious that it should not begin its work without German and Russian participation.
4. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. 1, No. 430.
5. Ibid., No. 57.

the afterglow of Locarno it gave the impression that it would bend all its energies to support the League's endeavours to achieve disarmament despite its own preference for regional or limited agreements on the lines of the Washington treaty. Two factors deprived Britain of the opportunity of giving a firm and, perhaps, decisive lead in the Preparatory Commission: the obstruction of the Service departments and her unwillingness to go beyond the Locarno commitments. From the beginning of the Preparatory Commission Britain's delegation resisted every attempt to link disarmament with further guarantees of European security. That stance did not change when the Labour party returned to power in 1929.

1930

The 1930 London naval conference provided France with another opportunity to demand additional security guarantees as the price for an arms limitation agreement. Before the conference began the MacDonald Cabinet set themselves to resist French demands.[1] The insistency of France's delegation only served to reinforce their determination. Henderson even went so far as to say that he would not be bounced by the French into any new Geneva Protocol.[2] France's rejection of Italy's claim to naval parity coupled with her demands for a Mediterranean mutual security pact - a Mediterranean Locarno was how some contemporaries described it - made a five power naval limitation agreement unattainable. MacDonald's government refused to see that France would never rest content with the provisions of the Covenant and the Locarno treaties and that she would insist on additional guarantees if she was required to surrender her margin of superiority over Italy. On 16 February 1930 MacDonald summed up his own attitude: 'Whilst willing to discuss security and [an] understanding relating to it, I am determined not to drift into the position in which Grey found himself [in 1914]. That gives France a free hand in determining

1. C.1(30), 14 January 1930, CAB 23/63.
2. Noel-Baker to Cecil, 27 February 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.

European policy with Great Britain a bound follower or pawn subordinate in the game.'[1] A Mediterranean agreement couched in terms acceptable to France would never be conceded by a government headed by one of the most outspoken critics of Grey's pre-war diplomacy.

There were those within the foreign policy-making establishment who did not accept that policy. Behind the scenes Noel-Baker, with the assistance of Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office and R. L. Craigie, the head of the American department, worked to find a formula which would satisfy both the British and French governments. Vansittart believed that a Franco-British understanding was essential if the status quo in Europe was to be preserved and the standing and prestige of the League upheld.[2] Though they had some assistance from Dwight Morrow of the American delegation,[3] their efforts were to no avail. In Britain a strong isolationist tide had set in and neither MacDonald nor Henderson was immune to its influence.[4] Francophobia was once again in the ascendant. MacDonald concluded that France would not allow Europe to disarm. 'The French mentality is exactly what it was before the war.... It allows no value for political security. It thinks in guns and bayonets.... War is the central fact of its mind.'[5]

There were faults on both sides of the Channel. In 1930 the French were not slow to exploit their new-found economic strength which contrasted so much with Britain's predicament. Britain's ambassador in Paris believed that France was determined to extract those guarantees she had failed to secure when the franc was weak. This was, however, peripheral to the main issue. The London naval conference brought into sharp relief the

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1. MacDonald Diaries, 16 February 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/8/1.
2. Dalton Diaries, 13, 21 and 24 March, 7 April 1930.
3. H. Nicolson: Dwight Morrow, London, 1935, pp. 372-6.
4. Dalton Diaries, 7 April 1930.
5. MacDonald Diaries, 12 and 14 February, 20 March 1930, MacDonald Papers, PRO 30/69/8/1.

differences which divided the two countries in their approach to security and disarmament.

Geneva was also the scene of Anglo-French differences in the winter of 1930 when the League took up the perennial question of Covenant revision. Ever since the signature of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in Paris in August 1928 renouncing war as an instrument of national policy it had frequently been suggested that an attempt should be made to harmonise the Covenant with the Peace Pact. Whereas the Pact outlawed war, the Covenant, in certain circumstances, implicitly legitimised it. At the 1929 League Assembly Britain unwisely suggested that a fresh attempt might be made to amend the Covenant. At the Assembly's request the League Council set up the Committee of Eleven to propose amendments to Articles 12 to 15. Cecil, who had been opposed to raising the issue at the 1929 League Assembly, worked to prevent a breach with France in the Committee but when news of one of the Committee's recommendations, a proposal to amend Article 15 so that in some circumstances arbitration would be both obligatory and enforceable, reached London it sparked off another round of controversy over sanctions and produced a hostile reaction in Whitehall. Philip Kerr and Austen Chamberlain aired their objections to League enforcement procedures in the correspondence columns of The Times,[1] pleading the view that prevention was better than punishment and bringing once more into the open those differences over security which divided Britain from France. The government rejected the Committee of Eleven's report and at the 1930 League Assembly Henderson announced that as far as Britain was concerned a disarmament agreement was a precondition for any radical revision of the Covenant.[2]

Britain made a far from cordial response in the summer of 1930 to

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1. 20 and 27 February 1930.
2. D. Carlton: MacDonald versus Henderson, London, 1970, pp. 87-91.

Briand's proposals for European unity despite the promise they held out of liberalising trade in Europe - an attractive prospect to a Labour government wedded to Free Trade and struggling to find markets for Britain's ailing export industries. No more favourable was the government's reaction to France's claim in July 1931 that 'the general reduction of armaments lays upon the stronger and less threatened Powers fresh responsibilities which they cannot elude'.[1] It was Britain's refusal to recognise such a responsibility which had prevented agreement in the more auspicious climate of the 1920s.

From 1919 to 1931 Britain's statesmen were haunted by memories of the sequence of events between the making of the Entente Cordiale in 1904 and the final dénouement of the July Crisis in 1914 which had drawn Britain into war. A few of them had had a hand in those events. All of them believed that they had learnt the lessons of history.[2]

It was impossible to ignore the fact, however, that conditions in Europe posed a serious threat to peace. Britain could not stand aloof from the continent as many of her citizens wished. Too many vital British interests were at stake. France, it was believed, held the key to European peace and security. If she felt secure, the process of European pacification and regeneration would begin. Nations would reduce their armaments, the European economy would prosper, and peace would be secure. A guarantee of French security was the minimum price Britain could expect to pay to secure these gains but as early as September 1922 Balfour pointed out that France would not be content with anything the British

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1. Tyrrell to Henderson, 15 July 1931, CAB 21/347.

2. The point was well made by Philip Kerr in a letter to the American Secretary of State, F. B. Kellogg, on 30 March 1928. 'The last world war was really predetermined between 1902 and 1906 when the Chamberlain proposals to Germany were rejected and the Entente was formed, and the foundations of naval competition were laid.' Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/228. There were numerous allusions to Grey's foreign policy and the consequences of the Entente in the discussions of the second Labour Cabinet in February and March 1930.

Empire was prepared to give.[1] By 1927 others began to question whether France could change the mood of Europe. The Franco-German problem was far from being the only cause of European insecurity. 'The further one travels East', Alexander Cadogan, the head of the Foreign Office's League of Nations section, wrote in October 1927, 'the more the Russian menace hangs over Europe.'[2] Three years later MacDonald questioned whether a guarantee was worth the price. Would it not make Britain 'the bound follower' of France? A guarantee, he suggested, would not only deprive Britain of her freedom of diplomatic manoeuvre but would strengthen French diplomacy at Britain's expense.

It had been said unwearyingly since 1922 that disarmament would flow, some said automatically, from a sense of security but by 1927 serious doubts were being expressed whether general guarantees or even regional agreements would ever provide sufficient security to induce states to reduce their armaments. The Locarno signatories had not been led to conclude a regional disarmament agreement.[3] In February 1928 Chamberlain, perhaps unwittingly, put his finger on the basic weakness and dishonesty in Britain's position. The essence of the Locarno treaty, he said, was reconciliation between old enemies and not the guarantee of a third power.[4] Throughout the 1920s Britain offered gestures not guarantees.

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1. 15 September 1922, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51095.
2. CP 256(27), 26 October 1927, CAB 24/189.
3. In three memoranda in May, August and October 1927, Alexander Cadogan expressed his misgivings. 'Is it possible to believe that even a Protocol', he asked, 'would effect such a radical improvement as to change the whole mood of Europe?' CP 256(27), 26 October 1927, CAB 24/189, Cf. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 200 and 300.
4. 10 February 1928, CAB 27/361.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE PREPARATORY COMMISSION AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE WORLD DISARMAMENT CONFERENCE

The League of Nations had been in existence for six years when the Preparatory Commission began its work in May 1926. Other than collect a vast store of information about armaments expenditure, the arms trade, chemical and bacteriological warfare, and the armed strength of the powers, the League had done little more than request its members to limit their defence budgets and comment on schemes linking disarmament with regional security. Its inaction produced frustration especially in Britain, Scandinavia and Holland where pro-League sentiment was strong. Such was the disappointment in Britain that in July 1923 the Labour Opposition in the House of Commons asked the British government to by-pass the League and summon a world disarmament conference. The Assembly's request to the Council in September 1925 to make a preparatory study for a disarmament conference reflected the growing impatience of a large section of League opinion.

The Locarno conference had not then taken place and the Assembly recognised that a disarmament conference would have to await an improvement in general security. When the League Council met in the following December the Locarno treaties had been signed. A practical step had at last been taken to promote European security. The work of disarmament could begin.

The Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference was charged not with determining armament levels but with establishing the principles which should govern a disarmament convention. It was to consist of delegations from the ten states represented on the League

Council, the three great powers not then members of the League, Germany, Russia and the United States, and Bulgaria, Finland, Holland, Poland, Roumania and Yugoslavia, states which because of their geographical position and special circumstances had an exceptional interest in disarmament. As a result of subsequent co-options, the Commission was by 1930 to have delegations from twenty-seven states.

The League Council at its December 1925 meeting also approved a set of seven questions, based on British and French drafts, for the Commission's consideration.

(1) What was to be understood by the expression 'armaments'?

(2) Was it practicable to limit a country's ultimate war strength?

(3) What units of comparison could be devised to compare the armaments of one country against those of another?

(4) Was it possible to distinguish between 'offensive' and 'defensive' weapons?

(5) What geographical and other factors should be taken into consideration in limiting a nation's armaments?

(6) Was it possible to differentiate between civil and military aircraft?

(7) To what extent was regional disarmament stemming from regional security agreements practicable, and would it promote general disarmament?

It would be impossible to understand British disarmament policy in the Locarno era without reference to the main objectives of Britain's foreign policy as they were then perceived by those responsible for its formulation and execution. A Foreign Office memorandum in April 1926 stated that as a great power with far-flung possessions and commercial interests in every part of the world, Britain's sole object was to keep what she had and to live in peace. Wars, rumours of wars, quarrels and friction, wherever they occurred, spelt loss and harm to British interests. Whatever else might be the outcome of a disturbance of the peace, it was

almost certain that Britain would be the loser.[1] Replying to the Ponsonby Peace Letter[2] on 16 December 1927, Baldwin claimed that the whole foreign policy of his government was inspired by one purpose - the maintenance of peace and the prevention of war. It was for that reason that support for the League and the development of its authority had been the constant preoccupation of his government.[3] Though Britain's policy makers recognised that there were defects in the 1919 peace settlement they had no desire to revise it except in so far as it might be possible to remove the grievances of other powers. The preservation of the status quo and the balance of power were vital British interests.

Though these objectives commanded almost universal assent there were differences of emphasis and a wide divergence of views as to how best they should be pursued. In 1922 there had been complete unanimity within the Cabinet that Britain should fight to preserve free access through the Dardanelles.[4] In a celebrated letter to The Times, Bonar Law challenged the Cabinet and went on to win a general election in which, apparently, the electorate repudiated that policy. 'We cannot alone act as the policeman of the world.... The financial and social condition of this country makes that impossible.'[5] It would be said incessantly and with authority that Britain's commitments all over the world outran her capacity to fulfil them yet whether she liked it or not she could not evade the role of world policeman. Britain was an imperial power with extra-colonial interests she felt obliged to defend. In

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1. COS Paper No. 36, 16 April 1926, CAB 53/12 printed in DBFP, Series IA, Vol. 1, Appendix, drafted by Mr. J. D. Gregory.
2. The Ponsonby Peace Letter was a statement, addressed to the Prime Minister and signed by 128,770 people, declaring that the signatories would refuse to support or render war service to any government which resorted to arms. It was sponsored by Arthur Ponsonby, MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the 1924 Labour government.
3. The Times, 21 December 1927.
4. J. G. Darwin 'The Chanak Crisis and the British Cabinet' in History, Vol. 65, No. 213, February 1980, p. 48.
5. 7 October 1922.

January 1927 Chamberlain told Lloyd George: 'We cannot allow ourselves to be hustled or driven from Shanghai as we were from Hankow.' The consequences of a disaster in Shanghai for Britain's position in the Far East, India, Afghanistan, Persia and even Turkey were far too serious to contemplate.[1] If a disproportionate amount of the Cabinet's time and the Foreign Secretary's energies between 1924 and 1927 was taken up with recurrent crises in Egypt and China it was in part due to Britain's priorities. However much she might champion the League and the cause of peace she was first and foremost an imperial power. To many of her people she appeared to be a poorly armed policeman in an unruly world. It is not altogether surprising that her Press took comfort when she successfully asserted her imperial will.[2]

Britain was also part of Europe. When Chamberlain told a Conservative audience in May 1926: 'Our policy in international affairs, as in national concerns, is a policy of peace and reconciliation', he had his sights firmly fixed on Europe. A peaceful Europe could only be built on the basis of a close and cordial friendship with France, common understanding and co-operation with Italy, and reconciliation with Germany and Britain's other former enemies.[3] There was no chance of Britain enjoying cordial relations with Germany, France and Italy unless they felt secure. Britain's policy in Europe was to promote harmonious relations between these three powers and to assist them in their search for security without burdening herself with commitments her people were loathe to undertake. So long as Europe was insecure, Germany would be tempted to sow dissension among the ranks of her former enemies and

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1. Chamberlain to Lloyd George, 19 January 1927, Lloyd George Papers, G/4/3/3.

2. Far more space was devoted by Britain's Press to the despatch of troops to Shanghai and the movements of her cruiser squadron in the China Sea in the years 1926 to 1927 than to the proceedings of the Preparatory Commission at Geneva.

3. Daily Telegraph, 1 May 1926.

prepare for a war of revenge. France would seek her salvation in military power and military alliances and Britain would lose all influence over French policy. From 1919 onwards Britain sought the rehabilitation of a peaceful Germany in a Europe which was not dominated by any one power, a Franco-German understanding which would remove one major cause of war, and a resolution of those differences which divided France and Italy in the Mediterranean and Central and South-Eastern Europe. If harmonious relations existed between Germany, France and Italy, Russia could be virtually ignored but if Germany was at odds with France, a Russo-German combination would become a menacing prospect. To secure these objectives Britain sought a substantial share in shaping the policy of Europe.

It has been said that the foreign policy of the second Baldwin government was to make the League work for all it was worth but for no more, to supplement it with limited regional commitments rather than global ones, and to keep in step with France while conducting an orderly retreat from the Peace of Versailles.[1] Of these three objectives, the second assumed major significance because of its bearing on the other two. Chamberlain and his colleagues believed that the Locarno treaties had introduced a wholly new spirit into relations between Germany and her former enemies. In 1929 Churchill was to write: 'Since Locarno hope rests on a surer foundation.' There was good reason to believe, so Churchill thought, that the period of revulsion from war would be long-lasting.[2]

Locarno was seen as a victory for British ideas of compromise and conciliation over continental ideas of compulsion.[3] To a remarkable extent Chamberlain succeeded in persuading France to adopt a policy of

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1. Lord Eustace Percy: Some Memories, pp. 133-4.
2. W. S. Churchill: The World Crisis, Vol. V, The Aftermath, p. 459.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. 1, Appendix.

apaisement. It was the British view that Germany's wholehearted support for the Locarno settlement was far more important than the meticulous execution of the Versailles treaty. To secure her support, the Inter-Allied Control Commission was wound up, the economic clauses of the treaty were allowed to expire, the Rhineland occupation was terminated five years early, Germany was admitted to the League and re-admitted to the concert of Europe. In Britain's view none of these things would ensure lasting peace if, while Germany remained disarmed, her neighbours were free to deploy unlimited military power. Chamberlain as much as Cecil believed that the pressure for rearmament in Germany would assume unmanageable proportions if a general disarmament agreement was not concluded within a relatively short space of time.[1] Furthermore, a rearmed Germany would ultimately constitute as great a menace to Britain as to France.[2]

Put in its crudest form, policy makers in Britain believed that without general disarmament the Locarno treaties would ultimately fail to bring about European pacification. The threat to peace came not so much from the insecurity of France and the successor states as from the maintenance of excessive armaments.[3] So long as Europe was divided into armed and disarmed states, resentment and jealousy would breed hostility and war. Disarmament, on the other hand, would promote Franco-German reconciliation, Franco-Italian understanding, and general European security. If at some future date Britain was forced to intervene in Europe's quarrels to throw her weight into the scales on behalf of peace, the effectiveness of her intervention would be in inverse proportion to the size of Europe's armies and air forces. British disarmament policy was designed to minimise the risks of war and maximise Britain's role

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. I, No. 264, Note 5 and No. 326.
2. Ibid., Appendix.
3. Draft Instructions to Viscount Cecil for His Guidance in Attending the Preparatory Commission, May 1926. CP 177(26), 27 April 1926, CAB 24/179; FO 371/11883; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. II, No. 2, Note 2.

in shaping European policy. Its weakness lay in its assessment of French and German intentions.

To maintain the European balance of power, Britain felt obliged from 1919 onwards to try and counteract French influence. None the less however much suspicion French policies might create there were always those in Britain who regarded French military power as the best guarantee of European stability and Britain's own interests in Europe. 'So far as French armaments are concerned, we can be certain that they will not be used against us' was the Foreign Office view in April 1926.[1] A War Office memorandum for the Foreign Office ended with the words: 'The General Staff repeat that their mistrust and apprehension about Germany remain undiminished. They regard the German nation as primitive people, scientifically equipped. The General Staff have no fear of France; their fear is for France.'[2]

If the German nation was irreconcilable and the German government bent on revising the Versailles treaty, if need be by force of arms, Franco-German reconciliation was a sterile hope and general disarmament a futile policy. Lingering doubts about Germany's intentions called into question the whole basis of British disarmament policy. In so far as that policy was designed to set within strict limits the military and air power of France and the successor states it was of doubtful wisdom if Europe's prime need was a bulwark against German expansion. If on the other hand Germany was prepared to work for peaceful change, French fears were unjustified and French military power dangerous and unnecessary. General disarmament would strengthen the authority of the League and further the cause of peace. There was some confusion and

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. I, Appendix.
2. 6 January 1925, FO 371/3018.

and uncertainty in London as to which was the correct assessment.[1]

If British policy makers were uncertain about French and German intentions they were even more doubtful about the Soviet Union. Though she had not fully recovered from the revolution and civil war, she posed a potential threat to her eastern European neighbours and Britain's own interests in Asia.[2] It was impossible for western Europe to make substantial progress towards disarmament without the co-operation of eastern Europe. To rob the eastern European powers of their arms was to pave the way for Soviet expansion. Doubting the good faith of the Soviet government, British policy makers were far from single-minded in their desire for Russian participation in the Preparatory Commission. Doubts about Soviet intentions led to further doubts about general disarmament.

There were none the less solid gains to be secured from European disarmament. The more peaceful Europe became the freer Britain would be to protect her world-wide interests. So long as she could move troops and ships speedily and freely from one part of the world to another her navy would remain a flexible instrument of imperial power. Without firing a shot, she could land troops, overawe local populations, win friends and influence people. Her navy was a warrant of intent for British diplomacy.[3] It symbolised Britain's power. To safeguard and enhance that power was one of the chief objectives of her disarmament policy.

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1. E. W. Bennett in <u>German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933</u> has convincingly shown that Britain and the United States did not want to believe that German military power was reviving. For that reason, more than any other, they failed to fathom Germany's long-range intentions.

2. See, for example, CID Paper 655-B, 15 December 1925, CAB 4/14 entitled 'The Extension of Soviet Influence in Asia'. Britain's misfortunes in China were attributed to Russian influence. It accused the Soviet Union of increasing its defence budget by fifty per cent. at a time when the nations of Europe were 'bent on reduction of expenditure on armaments'. The paper took little account of the depreciation of the rouble in making its assessment.

3. C. I. Hamilton 'Navies and Foreign Policy' in <u>Historical Journal</u>, Vol. 21, No. 4, December 1978.

In March 1925 Chamberlain told the Commons that it rested with the British Empire to determine whether there should be war or peace,[1] but in the second half of the 1920s Britain's main contribution to the consolidation of world peace was made through the League of Nations and not through the assertion of imperial power. As Chamberlain was to tell the 1926 Imperial Conference, the League had become a permanent factor in international politics which no country could ignore.[2] No one played a more important role in the transformation of the League from being merely 'a beautiful dream' to a thing of practical value in international relations than Austen Chamberlain.[3] By his regular attendance at the quarterly meetings of the Council and the annual meetings of the Assembly, Chamberlain helped to make the League what Britain in 1919 had intended it should be, a standing conference of the powers and, in particular, the great powers. It is not, therefore, altogether surprising to discover that when the Foreign Office was instructed in 1926 to list in relative order of importance Britain's commitments it began with the Covenant of the League of Nations.[4]

Though Britain was keen to develop the authority of the League, Chamberlain and the Baldwin government were far from convinced that the League was the best instrument for promoting disarmament. Admirably suited to the work of international conciliation it was not held in high regard as an agency for disarmament.

Suspicious of institutionalised procedures and reluctant to delegate authority to its officials, the government relied too much on Chamberlain's

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1. 182 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 307-22, 24 March 1925.
2. 20 October 1926, CAB 32/46.
3. A. E. Zimmern: The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, p. 360.
4. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. I, Appendix.

personal diplomacy.[1] In the Locarno era the League system worked because a few individuals, notably Chamberlain, Briand and Stresemann, trusted each other and spoke with sufficient authority to commit their countries. Personal ties brought agreement and the gulf between Geneva and the capitals of the great powers was bridged because the actors on the Geneva stage commanded the respect of their colleagues at home and to a limited extent infected them with the Geneva spirit which they themselves had imbibed. With the departure of Chamberlain and Stresemann from the Geneva scene in 1929 that era came to an end. Though those personal factors exercised a benign influence in the Council, they were virtually non-existent in the Preparatory Commission. Furthermore, the British government did not empower Cecil, Cushendun and its expert advisers with sufficient authority to take those bold and imaginative initiatives without which progress was well nigh impossible.

Setting the risks, both domestic and external, which Britain faced in the post-war world against the depleted resources she was able to command led British governments to pursue a policy of general disarmament. To secure the agreement of other powers to reduce their armaments it was necessary to offer them some inducements. The dilemma Britain faced in the 1920s was that the fewer the resources she commanded, the fewer the inducements she had to offer.

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1. See, for example, Austen Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 15 October 1927: 'England will never be popular on the Continent...but we are respected and trusted, our sympathy is courted, our advice and our help continuously sought...Poincaré appeals for my help to make the Greeks see reason and settle their debts to France' and 17 December 1928: 'If Stresemann, Briand and I were left alone to find a solution, I think we should manage to secure the evacuation of the Rhineland within a reasonable time' and to Ida Chamberlain, 9 July 1928: 'He [King Alfonso of Spain] remarked that I was the League and when I modestly deprecated this exaggerated view, replied "No, it's not the League, it's you, you. You just talk to a man for five minutes and then he turns right round and does what you want." Well, it's a useful reputation to have.' Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/434, 459 and 463. For an examination of Chamberlain's personal relations with Mussolini see Peter Edwards 'The Austen Chamberlain-Mussolini Meetings', Historical Journal, Vol. XIV, No. 1, 1971.

Disarmament was never a top priority of the second Baldwin government. The work of the Preparatory Commission was eclipsed by the day-to-day pressures of domestic and foreign events. These were the years of the coal stoppage, the General Strike and the endemic problems of Britain's export industries. Britain's relations with Egypt and China dominated the Cabinet's agenda. Far more consternation was caused by the Kuomintang's challenge to British interests in China and Britain's humiliating eviction from Hankow than by the disarmament deadlock in Geneva. Short term considerations took precedence over long term goals.

From 1919 onwards the British government was reluctant to leave disarmament in the hands of the League. Chamberlain and most of his colleagues deprecated large, grandiose schemes for disarmament.[1] Preferring the precedent set by the Washington conference, they did not welcome the establishment of the Preparatory Commission. Only reluctantly did Chamberlain concede that Britain would be obliged to seek disarmament through the League of Nations.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of 1926 Chamberlain was not pessimistic about the prospects for disarmament. Locarno had made a measure of French disarmament possible.[2] In the aftermath of Locarno Britain's prestige stood high. If she knew what she wanted, her voice would be decisive in the forthcoming disarmament negotiations.[3] Though dubious about Russia's intentions and anxious about the threat she posed to the states on her western borders Chamberlain believed that Russian participation in the work of the Preparatory Commission was vital.[4] Once the

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1. CID, 206th meeting, 30 November 1925, CAB 2/4; CP 454(25), 31 October 1925, CAB 24/175; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. I, No. 42.
2. CID, 205th meeting, 17 November 1925, CAB 2/4.
3. CP 454(25), 31 October 1925, CAB 24/175.
4. CID, 205th meeting, 17 November 1925, CAB 2/4; CID, 217th meeting, 11 November 1926, CAB 2/4.

Commission embarked on its task in May 1926 he was determined to do all in his power to see that it succeeded. When in July the United States reacted angrily to French intransigence, Chamberlain told the United States ambassador in London that the breakdown of the Preparatory Commission would be a calamity.[1] Just over a year later when little progress had been made and the Geneva naval conference had resulted in failure, Chamberlain informed the Prime Minister that there was no subject of greater importance than disarmament for the standing of the government at home and abroad.[2]

Chamberlain never regarded the idea of holding a great world disarmament conference as the most practical approach to disarmament but there is no reason to think that he regarded disarmament as a wholly unattainable goal so long as the League was held in high esteem and the Locarno treaties gave Europe a foundation of security.[3] Cecil recognised Chamberlain's commitment to disarmament. Shortly before his resignation in August 1927 he told him: 'You have always shown yourself as among those most favourable to the policy of disarmament.'[4] Where they differed was in the relative importance they attached to disarmament in preserving peace. Whereas Cecil believed that it was by far the most important factor, Chamberlain thought it was one, but not necessarily the most important, preventive of war.[5]

The other members of Baldwin's Cabinet were not outspoken champions of disarmament. Hoare showed some commitment to the cause and it is noteworthy that both Chamberlain and Cecil were more favourably disposed

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. II, No. 78, Note 3.
2. Chamberlain to Baldwin, 12 September 1927, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 129.
3. Chamberlain to Cecil, 14 August 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/94.
4. Cecil to Chamberlain, 16 August 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/95.
5. Chamberlain to Cecil, 14 August 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/94.

towards him than to the other two Service Ministers. Commenting on Baldwin's Cabinet appointments in November 1924, Chamberlain described him as 'very good' whereas Bridgeman and Worthington-Evans were merely 'adequate'.[1] Hoare, who had been active in the League of Nations Union and in 1921 Deputy League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was as Secretary of State for Air well aware of Britain's vulnerability to air attack. Even his Chief of Air Staff had said in April 1925: 'If I had the casting vote, I would say "Abolish the air".'[2] In March 1926 Hoare wrote to Cecil urging concerted efforts by those in the government who wanted to achieve disarmament.[3] There may have been others besides Cecil, Chamberlain and Hoare but the evidence is lacking.

Balfour, the most senior if not the most influential member of Baldwin's Cabinet, gave little support to disarmament. Though he had been an advocate of arms limitation after the war he had subsequently imbibed the pessimism of his friend and confidant, Sir Maurice Hankey. He told the CID in 1925 that with nothing to offer Britain would enter the disarmament negotiations in a weak position and that apart from the abolition of submarines she had nothing to gain.[4]

Baldwin's own attitude in these years is dubious and ambiguous. Having chilled the spine of the British people by telling them that another war would spell the doom of western civilisation he did little to promote the League or disarmament. It is of some significance that in addressing the 1926 Imperial Conference a few months after the Preparatory Commission completed its first session he made no reference to disarmament and focused attention on the needs of imperial defence.[5]

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1. Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 9 November 1924, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/340.
2. A. Boyle: Trenchard, London, 1962, pp. 519-20.
3. Hoare to Cecil, 24 March 1926, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51083.
4. CID, 205th meeting, 17 November 1925, CAB 2/4.
5. 19 October 1926, CAB 32/46.

No one in the first rank of British politics was more dedicated to the cause of disarmament than Viscount Cecil of Chelwood. The third son of the third Marquess of Salisbury, the last prime minister of Queen Victoria's reign, at no stage of his career was he truly representative of English Conservatism. Elected to Parliament in 1906 as Conservative MP for East Marylebone, for much of the eighteen years he was in the House of Commons he took a line at variance with his party and for some of that time was Independent Conservative MP for Hitchin. An able eccentric, tolerated by his colleagues because of his antecedents and abilities, he for a short time played a major role in the Conservative shadow cabinet. He was one of the Conservative MPs Asquith invited to join his coalition government in May 1915 and by December 1916 he was sufficiently prominent to play alongside Chamberlain and Curzon a not insignificant part in the events which led to Asquith's replacement by Lloyd George. As Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office and later Minister responsible for the blockade, he was in effect deputy Foreign Secretary for the last two years of the war. Though he resigned from Lloyd George's government at the end of the war because his high Anglicanism would not permit him to support the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, he was invited to join the British Empire delegation at the Paris peace conference. From 1916 onwards he was the most ardent champion of the league of nations idea in British politics and his appointment as British representative on the peace conference's League of Nations Commission was recognition of that fact. Reference has already been made to his work at Paris and the negative attitude he then adopted to disarmament.

Cecil became highly critical of the post-war Lloyd George coalition. For a time he flirted with the idea of helping to form a Centre party, a course of action which did not enhance his standing in the Conservative party. Most of his energies were devoted to work for the League at Geneva

and on behalf of the League of Nations Union in Britain. Party affiliations became of secondary importance but in May 1923 Baldwin invited him to join his first administration as Lord Privy Seal. There can be little doubt that his return to ministerial office in so senior a position was due to his standing in the League movement. His opposition to protection in the autumn of 1923 and his indifference to party and electoral calculations did not endear him to Baldwin and his colleagues. When he returned to office in November 1924 though his responsibilities were much the same as they had been in 1923 it was as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and not as Lord Privy Seal. However much influence he may have commanded in the country as a League figure he had little in the Cabinet and probably even less among the rank and file of the Conservative party. Possessed of great dialectic skills - before entering Parliament he had taken silk in 1900 and established himself as a highly successful barrister at the Parliamentary Bar - and of abilities which dwarfed those of most of his colleagues, he lacked the skills and balanced judgement necessary to be effective in British politics.

No goal of national policy was more important to Cecil than disarmament. In August 1927 he resigned from the Baldwin government not because of its refusal to make concessions to the Americans at the Geneva naval conference but because, in his opinion, it had continuously refused to give disarmament the priority it deserved.[1] The choice facing Britain, he believed, was to place herself in the vanguard of the movement for disarmament or to oppose it by default or deliberate policy.[2] Procrastination would give Germany a pretext for rearmament and result in a disarmament scheme being foisted on Britain which was not in her best interests.[3] Britain had nothing to lose and everything to gain by

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1. Cecil to Baldwin, 9 August 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.
2. CP 419(25), 5 October 1925, CAB 24/175.
3. Cecil to Baldwin, 6 January 1926, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.

disarmament because in no conceivable circumstances would she be asked to make further reductions in her army though she might be required to reduce her naval and air forces.[1] On the contrary it was more likely that she would be pressed to increase her land forces.[2] Britain's military weakness could only be remedied if other powers were induced to reduce their land forces.[3]

Responsibility for the Preparatory Commission's success or failure, Cecil believed, would rest, as had been the case with some other great movements of the past, with the British Empire.[4] No power had a greater interest in ensuring that international questions were discussed in a pacific atmosphere.[5] In July 1927 at the height of his controversy with Churchill over British policy at the Geneva naval conference Cecil told him: 'I regard a future war on a big scale as certainly fatal to the British Empire whether we win or lose it, and probably also to European civilisation.'[6] The Empire had many vital interests but for how many would the British public and the Dominions be prepared to fight? Would British public opinion support a war for the maintenance of Britain's position in Egypt or the status quo in Tangier? Events in China had demonstrated that Britain could not always uphold her interests without taking warlike measures. The public's reluctance to support such measures was a factor the government could not ignore.[7]

Public opinion in Cecil's view was the deciding factor in determining how much nations would reduce their armaments because no government would disarm unless an overwhelming majority of the public supported it.[8]

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1. CP 419(25), 5 October 1925, CAB 24/175.
2. Cecil to Hankey, 24 August 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51088.
3. CID, 217th meeting, 11 November 1926, CAB 2/4.
4. E 126, 3 November 1926, CAB 32/47.
5. CID, 217th meeting, 11 November 1926, CAB 2/4.
6. Cecil to Churchill, 26 July 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51073.
7. CID, 217th meeting, 11 November 1926, CAB 2/4.
8. 64 HL Debs. 5th Series, col. 351, 9 June 1926.

If the League system was to succeed a well-informed public opinion would have to play the part which a threat of resort to war had played in pre-war diplomacy.[1] Much time and energy would need to be spent in educating both public and professional opinion if the obstacles in the way of disarmament were to be removed. The time might come, however, when public opinion compelled a reluctant government to disarm.[2] Nevertheless, the Fighting Services needed to learn that, like the politicians, they were obliged to bow to public opinion.[3]

Cecil did not believe that the first world disarmament conference would achieve much but if a disarmament agreement was ratified and lasted for five years, the world would be a safer place at the end of that period than it had been at the beginning.[4] 'If as the result of continuous effort in the next few years', Cecil told Hankey in August 1925, 'we get some slight reduction of the French and Russian armies and perhaps those of some of the Slav powers also together with our general agreement not to expand for a period, that is more than I believe probable.'[5] The world would take short, halting steps towards disarmament or none at all. Unless the British Empire made an enormous effort the process would never begin.

Cecil believed that nothing could be done to try to limit the ultimate capacity of a nation to wage war - a view his colleagues came to share - but something could be done to reduce the chances of a nation delivering a knock-out blow at the outset of hostilities.[6] Wrestling with the problem which Crowe had posed in 1916: 'On what principle was one

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1. Cecil to Baldwin, 31 March 1926, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.
2. 64 HL Debs. 5th Series, col. 351, 9 June 1926.
3. Cecil to Baldwin, 5 December 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.
4. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 202.
5. Cecil to Hankey, 24 August 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51088.
6. CID, 206th meeting, 30 November 1925, CAB 2/4.

nation to be asked to accept a lower standard of armaments than another?'[1] Cecil at first came to the conclusion that the armaments of a state should be proportional to the international obligations it was prepared to accept. The larger its armaments the greater the assistance it would be pledged to render to a victim of aggression.[2] Later he concluded that this was not a feasible solution. A much more practicable policy was to limit a nation's capability to deliver a knock-out blow by proscribing the most offensive weapons and by limiting its capacity to wage war by budgetary limitation.[3]

If political and electoral considerations sometimes discouraged Cecil's Cabinet colleagues from fully expressing their scepticism, Sir Maurice Hankey felt no such inhibitions. We may assume that his opinions, which he never attempted to conceal, were fairly representative of an important section of right-wing political opinion in Britain and of a majority of Baldwin's Cabinet.

In 1919 Hankey, like many others, had been prepared to endorse disarmament to save Britain from economic ruin. By 1923 Britain had survived in the harsher economic conditions of the post-war international economy without suffering disaster. Hankey believed that reductions in Britain's defence budget and the general decline in the arms industry and shipbuilding had contributed to her post-war economic weakness.[4] The iron and steel industry was depressed because the loss of warship orders, both British and foreign, was a serious handicap to it. He noted that the countries which spent most on armaments were the countries with the lowest unemployment.[5]

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1. 12 October 1916, FO 371/3082. See pp. 123-4.
2. Cecil to Noel-Baker, 16 December 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51106.
3. See, for example, his remarks in the CID Three Party Committee for the World Disarmament Conference, 7th meeting, 19 June 1931, CAB 16/102.
4. Memorandum entitled 'An Introduction to the Study of Disarmament', 4 August 1925, accompanying Hankey to Cecil, 6 August 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51088.
5. Undated memorandum probably written in 1930, Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/28.

Hankey challenged many of the basic assumption of those who advocated disarmament. In no subject, he said, had loose catchwords and phrases exercised so baneful an influence as in the study of war and peace. Disarmament was a quack medicine which had misled the British people.[1]

Political tensions and intolerable situations, not armaments, were the real causes of war. Armaments were only a secondary cause. Disputes between nations could not be settled by procedures similar to those used in settling disputes between individuals. The League of Nations might be an admirable instrument for maintaining the status quo but wars came about because the status quo needed changing. Only when the League demonstrated that it could bring about changes in the status quo would it have proved its effectiveness. Germany had only been prevented from bringing about a forcible revision of her frontiers because of the superior armaments of her neighbours. A conference which either reduced the armaments of her neighbours to her level or raised her armaments to the general level of other countries would not make for peace.[2]

Unlike Cecil, Hankey did not believe that war was an anachronism. Whatever policies Britain chose to pursue there would be wars in the future as there had been wars in the past.[3] 'Some of the propaganda of the extremists of the League of Nations Union' was 'pernicious' because it undermined the nation's military spirit.[4] If by pursuing disarmament the government weakened the nation's morale and destroyed its military prowess, when the challenge came Britain would not be able to defend herself nor would she be able to save civilisation.[5] None the less, despite his contempt for disarmament propaganda, Hankey could not forbear

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1. Undated memorandum probably written in 1930, Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/28.
2. Undated memoranda probably written in 1930 and 1931, Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/28.
3. Hankey to Cecil, 18 August 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51088.
4. Hankey to Chamberlain, 21 August 1925, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 24/7/16.
5. Hankey to Cecil, 18 August 1925, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51088.

from expressing anxiety lest there was no very considerable fall in the level of Europe's land and air armaments.[1]

In July 1925, two months before the League Assembly requested the Council to establish the Preparatory Commission, Cecil persuaded the Cabinet to instruct the Service departments to begin the work of formulating Britain's policy for the world disarmament conference which, he believed, could not be long delayed.[2] Little was done during the summer recess but on the day before the Assembly resolution Hankey reminded the Service Chiefs of the principles which he thought should guide British policy makers.[3] It was essential that Britain retained her freedom to move her forces as circumstances required. Budgetary limitation was an unsatisfactory method of limiting armaments because armaments expenditure could be concealed in a national budget. International inspection was unacceptable to Britain. Only such information about scales of armaments and construction programmes as was given to Parliament should be made available to international agencies. Britain should continue to oppose all attempts to regulate the conduct of war because recent experience had proved that such rules were unenforceable and were disadvantageous to the more law-abiding nations of the international community. In securing further naval disarmament, the principles adopted at the Washington conference should be applied but Britain should insist that full allowance be made for her special requirement for cruisers to protect the Empire's trade routes. Britain should continue to press for the abolition of submarines. As for land and air armaments, Britain could not expect the continental nations to abandon conscription or

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1. Undated memorandum probably written in 1931, Hankey Papers, HNKY 8/28.
2. CP 329(25), 6 July 1925, CAB 24/174; C.39(25), 22 July 1925 and C.41(25), 29 July 1925, CAB 23/50; CID Paper 627-B, CAB 16/61; CP 365(25), 27 July 1925, CAB 24/174.
3. CID 628-B, 24 September 1925, CAB 16/61. Hankey was reiterating points he had made in his memorandum for the Washington conference in October 1921, see p. 182.

France to reduce her land forces until she received reliable guarantees of her frontier with Germany.[1] Nor should Britain contemplate any further reductions in her own land forces. As for air armaments, no satisfactory formula for their limitation had yet been devised. Britain should strenuously eschew all attempts to promote disarmament by applying the principle of mutual guarantee because experience proved that international co-operation by a large number of states was too cumbrous to be effective.

Hankey's memorandum set the tone for the Services' response which with the exception of the Admiralty[2] was almost completely negative and unconstructive. If Britain was obliged to accept a limitation of air armaments, the Air Staff said, it should only apply to metropolitan shore-based aircraft. Disarmament would not be brought about 'by complex and cunningly devised schemes', the War Office declared. Like Hankey the Services were determined that Britain should retain, so far as she could, a free hand.[3]

A majority of Baldwin's Cabinet shared the Service departments' scepticism but however tempting it might be to abandon the quest for disarmament, that was not an option open to the British government. The public pressures were too great and Britain was pledged in the Covenant and the peace treaties to pursue disarmament, as the Cabinet themselves had pointed out to the Service departments in their instructions the previous July. The Cabinet was, therefore, forced to act. On 17 November a CID Sub-Committee, chaired by Cecil and with non-ministerial representatives from the three Services, Treasury, Foreign Office, Dominion Office and India Office, began the work of formulating

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1. Hankey's memorandum was written before the Locarno conference was convened.
2. The Admiralty proposed the abolition of submarines and restrictions on the maximum permitted tonnage and armament of aircraft carriers and cruisers. They also sought a limitation of total destroyer tonnage.
3. CID Papers 634-B, 13 October 1925, 644-B, 4 November 1925, 641-B, 4 November 1925, CAB 16/61.

Britain's policy for the Preparatory Commission.[1] The policy which was hammered out in that sub-committee was a compromise between those who wished to resist disarmament because they believed that it was an impracticable policy for Britain to pursue and a small minority led by Cecil who regarded disarmament as the most important goal of national policy.

British policy at the first session of the Preparatory Commission was formulated by the CID Sub-Committee on the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments which the Cabinet reconvened at the end of 1925. To counter what he regarded as the obstructive and unconstructive influence of the Service representatives Cecil persuaded Baldwin to make two ministerial appointments to the committee. Salisbury, Cecil's brother and the Chairman of the CID, was an obvious choice. Walter Elliot, the Under-Secretary for Health at the Scottish Office and later in the year to become Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, was a less obvious one. Elliot was an active member of the League of Nations Union and a consistent advocate of disarmament throughout the years 1925 to 1931. It is noteworthy that in September 1928, commenting on the up-and-coming junior ministers in the government, Churchill described Elliot as 'by far the best'.[2] He was to have a distinguished career in the National governments of the 1930s but though at one time tipped for the leadership of the Conservative party, he destroyed his chances by failing to dissociate himself in time from Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policy.

The Sub-Committee's report, submitted in April 1926, represented the maximum concessions the Services were then prepared to make but fell far short of what Cecil desired. On naval armaments it made a number of specific proposals - a reduction in the displacement and

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1. C.52(25), 11 November 1925, CAB 23/51; CID, 205th meeting, 17 November 1925, CAB 2/4.

2. Churchill to Baldwin, 2 September 1928 quoted M. Gilbert: Winston S. Churchill, Vol. V, London, 1976, p. 301.

armament of cruisers and restrictions on the numbers, displacement and armament of submarines - but was far less constructive in its approach to land and air armaments.

Recognising that the abolition of conscription - a traditional British objective - was totally unacceptable to the continental powers and believing that nothing would be gained by limiting the period of compulsory military service - a view which many authorities later rejected - the report recommended a straightforward limitation of effectives[1] with a vague reference to limiting the equipment appropriate to their use. The report skated over the difficulties which countries relying on conscription would experience and went on to reject both the direct limitation of material[2] and its indirect limitation by restrictions on budgetary expenditure. The former it said was unworkable, the latter too open to evasion. It did, however, declare itself in favour of an exchange of budgetary statistics which, it said, would furnish a valuable additional check on national armaments.

Departing from the unconstructive attitude adopted by the Air Ministry since 1921 the report recommended that an attempt should be made to differentiate between civil and military aircraft.[3] It suggested that the problem would be simplified if a limitation agreement was restricted to first-line aircraft in home-based squadrons.[4] If agreement was not possible

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1. Effectives was the term used to describe military personnel on full-time active service.
2. Material, or its French equivalent matériel was used as the term to describe all types of military equipment, weapons and ammunition.
3. The air representatives at Paris in 1919 had not foreseen any difficulty. Germany was forbidden military aircraft but she was allowed to develop her civil aviation. Though the French authorities contended that German civil aviation posed a potential threat to France, the Air Ministry took the view that no such threat existed.
4. The restriction excluded not only aircraft used to police the more turbulent areas of the Middle East and East Africa etc. but also those held in reserve. Chamberlain later opposed the exclusion of aircraft held in reserve though Cecil sided with the Air Ministry and defended it on the grounds that a disarmament convention was only concerned with those aircraft available for a first strike at the outset of hostilities. The restriction also excluded aircraft stationed on aircraft carriers or other ships.

Britain should seek a separate agreement with her nearest rival, France.

One section of the report referring to German armaments was deleted when it was strongly criticised by both Chamberlain and Cecil. The report had argued that a datum line based on post-war German armaments was preferable to calculations founded on the level of pre-war national armaments in determining armaments levels in other states.

Unlike the French authorities, the Sub-Committee came to the conclusion that no distinction could be made between offensive and defensive weapons and that no scheme for international inspection and control of a disarmament convention would be satisfactory. Parliament would not be willing to pass the necessary enabling legislation and the experience of the Allied Control Commissions in the ex-enemy states in seeking to enforce disarmament was far from encouraging.

British policy at Geneva should be to press for the reduction of armaments as being in itself an element of security. No attempt should be made to relate the reduction of armaments to the provision of mutual assistance but as an alternative to economic sanctions, a scheme to provide financial assistance to the victims of aggression should be supported.

The report was endorsed by the CID with one or two modifications. Cecil informed his colleagues that though he had chaired the Sub-Committee he was not altogether in agreement with the report. He regretted that the Sub-Committee had rejected all schemes for inspection and supervision. He thought that Britain would be obliged to agree to a measure of supervision and he could see no reason why, if a state was willing to accept investigation to rebut a charge of infringing a disarmament convention, a commission should not be established to investigate it. He received no support from his colleagues, not even from Churchill.[1]

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1. Churchill had proposed a scheme of mutual inspection of dockyards before the Washington conference. CID, 145th meeting, 14 October 1921, CAB 2/3, see p. 180.

The CID authorised Cecil to draft his own instructions on the basis of the report and suggested that he hold informal talks with both the American and French ambassadors in London to try and harmonise British policy with that of the United States and France.[1]

The Preparatory Commission did not make an auspicious beginning. The French revived the old controversies about mutual guarantees and both the Poles and the Finns came forward with schemes for regional security which threatened to deflect attention from disarmament itself. The Russians refused to send a delegation to Geneva because they had not yet settled their dispute with the Swiss government over the murder of their delegate to the 1923 Lausanne conference, Vaslav Vorovsky.

The provision of mutual assistance was not the only issue to divide Britain and France. Because she commanded the loyalty and support of her European allies on the Preparatory Commission, France was able to secure a majority for many of her proposals. She successfully resisted British and German attempts to include trained reserves in a limitation agreement. Though Britain, the United States, Italy and Japan were all opposed to international inspection, France secured a majority in favour but when, however, the first reading text of the disarmament convention was approved in April 1927 the issue was carefully side-stepped.

France was also able to block Britain's proposals for the limitation of naval tonnage by categories. To Britain it seemed that France was deliberately undermining the principles established at the Washington conference by mobilising the support of her allies to push through proposals which were totally unacceptable to the principal naval powers.

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1. For the minutes and report of the Sub-Committee, CID Paper 682-B, see CAB 4/14; the revised draft of the report on which Cecil's instructions were based is CP 165(25), 28 April 1925, CAB 24/179; the report was discussed by the CID at its 212th meeting on 19 April, CAB 2/4; Cecil's instructions are to be found in CP 177(25), 27 April 1925, CAB 24/179; see also FO 371/11883 and DBFP, Series IA, Vol. II, No. 2, Note 2.

None the less, on a number of issues agreement was reached. This was frequently interpreted in London as a surrender to the French. More often than not the British delegation felt obliged to accept the French point of view because it was more logical and had the support of the majority of the Commission. Though little progress was made over naval disarmament there was a wide measure of agreement over the limitation of land and air armaments. Britain was forced to concede that a distinction could and should be made between offensive and defensive weapons and that civil aircraft could be evaluated as an element in a nation's air strength.

Suspicions lingered on but when and where private consultations were held between the British and French delegations differences narrowed. As one British delegate put it 'the French have always been more reasonable when sitting round a small table, and the smaller powers welcome a clear lead'.[1] Cecil was prepared to go further. Adopting a point of view not altogether different from that urged upon him by his colleagues in the CID before the Commission began its work, Cecil wrote: 'My impression has always been that we ought to arrive at some arrangement whereby the French should take the lead on land and, perhaps, air questions but we should do so on naval questions.'[2] Only by bargaining and compromise could their differences be resolved. The question was were the naval authorities in London and Paris sufficiently flexible to permit agreement?

The Preparatory Commission's slow progress led to strong criticism in the 1926 League Assembly and the Council was requested to summon a world disarmament conference before the Assembly next convened in September 1927. At its second session that same month the Preparatory Commission instructed its two sub-commissions,[3] to which it had entrusted

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. II, No. 144.
2. Ibid.
3. In May 1926 the Preparatory Commission appointed two committees, Sub-Commission 'A' whose personnel was identical to the PAC with the addition of German and American Service personnel, and Sub-Commission 'B', made up of experts on the economic aspects of disarmament. Sub-Commission 'A' was entrusted with the technical questions relating to land, sea and air armaments.

the work of providing answers to the Council's questionnaire, to expedite its work. In November the Commission was able to publish the one hundred and seventy-six page report of its Sub-Commission 'A', which provided a mass of technical information for a disarmament convention, and on 23 December 1926 the Council directed the Commission to draw up an agenda for a forthcoming world disarmament conference.

Despite the differences which divided the British and French delegations it was possible at the beginning of 1927 for Cecil and his supporters to look back on the first two sessions of the Preparatory Commission and, in particular, the detailed examination of the technicalities of disarmament undertaken by Sub-Commission 'A', with some satisfaction. Agreement had been reached on a whole range of questions and the obstacles over outstanding questions did not seem insuperable. Furthermore, the prestige of the League stood high. Relations between France and Germany had continued to improve. Britain's relations with the United States were better, according to one expert,[1] than at any time since the war. In Britain, the government's authority had been strengthened by its handling of the General Strike. Exports were rising and unemployment was falling. The British government was in a strong position to make a major contribution towards determining the rate of progress towards disarmament.

Both Cecil and Cadogan came to the conclusion that a British draft convention might serve a useful purpose in expediting the work of the Preparatory Commission at its third session in March 1927. They also recognised that it would be in Britain's best interests if her own particular viewpoint was embodied in a draft convention.[2]

Cecil's draft made several concessions to the Services' point of

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1. R. L. Craigie, Head of the Foreign Office's American section, in an assessment in November 1928. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. V, Annexe to No. 490.

2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 10. Cadogan as Head of the Foreign Office's League of Nations section was responsible for disarmament policy.

view which were not entirely to his liking. Whereas navies and air forces would be restricted by a limitation on numbers and armament of ships and aircraft, that is by a limitation of material, armies would be limited by restricting the number of troops serving with the colours at any one time, that is by a limitation of effectives. He regretted that the convention contained no proposals for limiting the material an army would have at its disposal. He was far from happy about the exclusion of ship-based aircraft and aircraft stationed abroad. He believed that the government's refusal to consider any scheme to enforce a disarmament convention foolish and indefensible.[1]

The draft made a number of concessions to the French which were not acceptable either to the Service departments or to Cecil's ministerial colleagues. Despite the War Office's sympathy for France, its Director of Military Operations criticised Cecil for excluding trained reserves.[2] A provision requiring signatories to give notice of any intention to increase their defence expenditure was so severely criticised by Baldwin, Bridgeman, Chamberlain, Hankey, Hoare and Salisbury that it was deleted. An article providing for budgetary limitation met with such strong criticism from the Secretary of State for War that it was struck out. With these emendations the draft convention was approved by the CID but not before Britain's opposition to 'inquisitorial commissions' had once again been reiterated.[3]

On reaching Geneva, Cecil privately showed the draft to a number of leading delegates, including Joseph Paul-Boncour, the head of the French delegation. Paul-Boncour was critical because it ignored the question of supervision and inspection. If Russia signed a disarmament

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 37; CP 79(27), 7 March 1927, CAB 24/185.
2. CAB 21/305.
3. CID, 222nd meeting, 4 March 1927, CAB 2/5.

treaty, he asked, would the British government be prepared to accept her assurances without any form of inspection?[1]

The French also produced a draft convention which proposed a limitation of personnel in all three Services and drew a distinction between personnel stationed at home and those garrisoned abroad with separate quotas for each. It excluded trained reserves but not aircraft held in reserve. It proposed the limitation of total naval tonnage and rejected the limitation of warships by categories. It called for budgetary limitation and demanded that the enforcement of a disarmament treaty should be entrusted to a commission with wide-ranging powers of inspection and control.[2]

When the Commission debated the two drafts there were few who were not prepared to concede that the French had the best of the arguments. The French had studied disarmament more carefully than other nations. Their two Service departments, the War Ministry and the Ministry of Marine, had employed some of their best brains on research into disarmament and the Quai d'Orsay had its own competent specialists in disarmament.[3]

It would be easy to exaggerate the differences in the attitude of the two countries to peace and disarmament. France was not immune from those pressures which led British governments to reduce defence expenditure and seek general disarmament. The French defended conscription not only because it was democratic and egalitarian but also because it meant that every Frenchman and every French family had a personal interest in preventing war.[4] France in the 1920s was a nation in psychological

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 43.
2. Ibid., Nos. 67 and 85.
3. A. C. Temperley: The Whispering Gallery of Europe, pp. 50 and 64.
4. See the remarks of the French ambassador in London, de Fleuriau, to Lord Cushendun in January 1928, DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, No. 257.

revolt against the blood-tax of military service and the horrors of the 1914-1918 war.[1] Fear of war and a sense of its futility drove many Frenchmen into the ranks of the pacifists.[2] Popular and financial pressures forced the French government to create an almost entirely new military organisation. By 1928 compulsory military service had been reduced from three years to one year. By a slow evolution the French army was transformed into a militia-type force only capable of defensive warfare. Offensive warfare was so severely censured that France was obliged to adopt a defensive posture. In the early 1930s a considerable proportion of her defence budget was spent not on weapons of war but on the construction of the Maginot Line which the evacuation of the Rhineland had made essential for her security.

Military expenditure between 1920 and 1926 failed to keep pace with inflation. Funds voted by the Chamber were never appropriated. Military programmes were not properly implemented and the army was starved of equipment. Though rebellions in Syria and Morocco forced France to spend more on her overseas garrisons than she had done before 1914, far less was expended on the army at home.[3] An anonymous writer in a responsible French journal could claim in 1926 that France had reduced her military expenditure compared with pre-war by forty per cent. and her army by one third.[4]

There were those within the French General Staff who saw the logic of disarmament. General Maurice Gamelin, whose victory over the Druse rebellion in Syria in 1926 so enhanced his military reputation that by 1931 he had been promoted to Army Chief of Staff, believed that only

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1. P. C. F. Bankwitz: Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, p. 44.
2. R. D. Challener: The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939, New York, 1955, pp. 218-19.
3. R. D. Challener, pp. 138-46; J. Minart: Le Drame du Désarmement Français, Paris, 1960, pp. 13-18; D. C. Watt: Too Serious a Business, pp. 35-7.
4. 'A Propos du Désarmement', Revue des Deux Mondes, May 1926.

an efficient international control of armaments could prevent Germany violating the Versailles treaty and the world slithering into another arms race. Aware of public support for disarmament he feared that if the World Disarmament Conference failed, the army would be blamed and France would be isolated. France could not afford to put her faith in her own military power because she could not compete in a gruelling arms race with an industrially and demographically superior Germany. Gamelin's views were not shared by his immediate predecessor, General Maxime Weygand.[1] Weygand optimistically believed that a rearmed Germany could be held at the Maginot Line and that France, therefore, had much more to gain from maintaining her own military power intact than from either arms control or collective security.[2]

A large section of French public opinion was strongly behind disarmament but it lacked powerful leaders as well as the means for action.[3] There was no organisation in France comparable to the League of Nations Union in Britain. Nevertheless, France formulated a coherent disarmament policy for the Preparatory Commission and the World Disarmament Conference.

There was a consistency in France's attitude to disarmament in the years 1919 to 1931. Writing in the Daily Herald in January 1930 Paul-Boncour summed it up in words which echoed the views enunciated by Leon Bourgeois at the Paris peace conference in 1919. 'There can be no real and complete disarmament until the world realises the necessity of an international force at the service of the League of Nations.... This is France's point of view and it is the only one that can lead to real disarmament.'[4] In a memorandum for the World Disarmament Conference

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1. General Weygand was appointed Chief of the General Staff in January 1931 by André Maginot, Minister of War in Tardieu's Cabinet. Within a month of his appointment left-wing criticism forced his resignation and in February he was replaced by Gamelin.
2. P. C. F. Bankwitz: Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France, pp. 50-54.
3. M. Baumont: The Origins of the Second World War translated by S. de C. Ferguson, New Haven and London, 1978, p. 24.
4. 13 January 1930.

communicated to the League and other powers in July 1931[1] the French government stressed the inter-relationship of common action to defend the peace, procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes, and arms limitation. It rejected the notion that there could be any levelling or automatic equalisation of armed forces on the grounds that equality of armaments between two states would only be justifiable in the unlikely event that their geographical situation and other circumstances were identical. Germany's claim to equality of armaments could thus be set aside.

Never enamoured with the Washington precedent, French governments insisted that land, sea and air forces were interdependent and could not be treated separately. Like Britain, however, France stressed her own special requirements. She needed not only sufficient forces to protect French territory against aggression but also military forces to maintain law and order in her overseas empire together with adequate naval forces to protect communications between her scattered colonial territories.

There were other similarities between the two countries. Like Britain, France had emerged from the war weakened by her ordeal. She was acutely conscious of her economic and demographic weakness and plagued with an inferiority complex which provoked a passion for security. Her prime need was to rebuild her war-ravaged economy and restore her lost morale behind secure frontiers. The Maginot Line mentality of the French was the counterpart of the 'never again' isolationism of the English.[2]

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1. League of Nations Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments, Geneva, 1932, Documents, IX, 9.

2. M. Baumont: The Origins of the Second World War, pp. 6-16; J. Néré: The Foreign Policy of France from 1914 to 1945, London and Boston, 1975, passim; M. Trachtenburg: 'Reparations at the Paris Peace Conference' in Journal of Modern History, Vol. 51, No. 1, March 1979; D. R. Watson 'The Making of the Treaty of Versailles' in Troubled Neighbours ed. N. Waites, London, 1971.

There were differences too. It was these differences which made agreement over disarmament unattainable. Within a matter of months of the 1918 armistice the French, not without good reason, began to suspect the British of seeking to cheat France of the fruits of victory by sparing Germany the consequences of her defeat. Whereas France saw Germany as a potential enemy, Britain saw her as a future customer and at worst a rival competitor. With increasing intensity the French felt that though they had won the war they were losing the peace. Shortly before his death in 1929 Clemenceau, whom the French had accused of being duped by Lloyd George at Paris in 1919, wrote: 'We must have the courage to prepare for it [war], instead of frittering away our strength in lies that no one believes.'[1]

Clemenceau reflected an important section of opinion which was disillusioned with the League and the policy of reconciliation which Briand, Chamberlain and Stresemann had pursued in the second half of the decade. With some justification they felt that Chamberlain and Stresemann were trying to substitute a community of relatively disarmed European states for the armed preponderance which France and her continental allies had enjoyed since 1919. Until France received copper-bottomed guarantees of her security they believed that it would be folly to allow her army and those of her allies to be reduced. So long as the French army was the only organised peace-keeping force in Europe a favourable military balance was more important that disarmament. As Painlevé put it: 'Une France désarmée ne serait un exemple mais une tentation.'[2]

At the third session of the Preparatory Commission in March and April 1927 Cecil found himself in the embarrassing position of having to defend propositions which he believed to be indefensible. It was comparatively

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1. G. Clemenceau: Grandeur and Misery of Victory translated by F. M. Atkinson, New York, 1930, pp. 384-5.
2. J. Minart: Le Drame du Désarmement Francais, p. ii.

easy for the French to drum up support for their own counter proposals by misrepresenting Britain's position as a ruse to maintain her naval supremacy and exempt her air force from limitation while insisting on reductions in continental armies. Cecil was obliged to resist the limitation of naval and air personnel and in opposing the latter he found himself in a minority of one with the United States and Japan siding with France and the Little Entente. He was also required to resist proposals to limit ship-based aircraft and aircraft in training establishments which could at a moment's notice be switched to combatant use.[1]

Cecil's overall strategy was to make concessions to the French over issues which he regarded as of minor importance in the hope that he would be able to persuade them to concede to the British view on naval armaments. He was understandably angry when the obtuseness, obstinacy and insularity of the Admiralty and the Air Ministry threatened to cut the ground from beneath his feet.[2]

Cecil had strong allies in the Cabinet. Salisbury, who as Chairman of the CID and Lord Privy Seal was far from being a minor figure, worked deftly behind the scenes to bring about a change of heart in the Service departments. Chamberlain gave Cecil loyal support. Baldwin, though no great friend to disarmament, had some sympathy for Cecil's predicament and understood the implications of the Service departments' obstructionism. Together Baldwin, Chamberlain and Salisbury were able to wrest concessions from the Services and win the backing of the CID and the Cabinet but not before some damage had been done to Britain's standing in the Preparatory Commission. Despite these concessions Cecil continued to feel handicapped by the comparative indifference of many of his colleagues and their

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 85, 89, 89 Note 3, 91, 92, 99, 100, 103, 104, 106, 111, 112 and 115.

2. Cecil to Salisbury, 30 March 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51086; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 106.

failure to appreciate that the sands of time were running out.[1]

Under strong pressure from the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chairman of the CID, the Admiralty and Air Ministry gave way and agreed to the limitation of naval and air personnel.[2] The Air Ministry made a number of other concessions. Ship-based aircraft and aircraft in training establishments, so long as they were of combat type, should be limited and a French compromise proposal combining limitation by horsepower with a limitation of aircraft numbers could also be accepted.[3]

Naval disarmament was the major stumbling block in the third session of the Preparatory Commission. Cecil, in common with his professional advisers at Geneva, thought the French proposals totally unacceptable. He discovered, however, that Paul-Boncour was privately convinced of the validity of the British case. With Chamberlain's assistance he sought to put pressure on the French government to compromise. On 6 April the French put forward a new set of proposals and Cecil advised Baldwin: 'I feel we are giving away nothing of value by accepting them in the form I suggest.'[4] The French proposed that fleets should be divided into three categories: those of over 500,000 tons which would be limited on the lines of the Washington naval treaty, those of between 100,000 and 500,000 tons which would be limited by total tonnage, and those of under 100,000 tons which would not be limited in any way. The second class, fleets with a total tonnage of between 100,000 and 500,000 tons, would have a further

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1. Cecil to Baldwin, 6 April, Cecil to Salisbury, 30 March, 8 April, Salisbury to Cecil, 3 and 5 April 1927, Cecil Papers BL Add. Mss. 51080 and 51086; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 13, 14 and 15 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/437; Cecil to Chamberlain, 30 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/81; Campbell to Hankey, 31 March 1927, CAB 21/305. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 101, 106, 148.

2. CID, 224th meeting, 4 April 1927, CAB 2/5. Salisbury to Cecil, 5 April 1927, Cecil Papers, BL 51086. On 8 April Cecil wrote to his brother: 'Please tell the Prime Minister how grateful I am to him for his backing.'

3. Cecil to Hoare, 8 April and Hoare to Cecil, 11 April 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51083. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 116, 124, 130 and 140.

4. Cecil to Baldwin, 6 April 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080.

restriction placed on them which was of major importance to Britain. Each power in that class would be required to submit a detailed construction programme from which it would not be permissible to deviate without giving at least one year's notice. Cecil and his chief naval adviser, Admiral Aubrey Smith, believed that Britain would have nothing to fear because she would be fully informed of France's or any other power's intentions so long as their fleet was more than a token force. In practice only ten or twelve thousand tons of construction tonnage might be transferred from one category to another in any one year and that in itself could not cause any uncertainty to worry the British naval authorities.[1]

Cecil was nevertheless, obliged to announce in the Preparatory Commission on 11 April that the French compromise proposals were unacceptable to the British government.[2] He, none the less, continued to bring pressure to bear upon his colleagues in London to secure a change of heart. The new French proposals had the support of the overwhelming majority of the Commission including the Japanese, Argentinians and Chileans who had formerly supported Britain's proposals. American opposition to the proposals was half-hearted and a year later abandoned. Of the principal naval powers only Italy disapproved of them but on the grounds that they made too many concessions to the British point of view. Cecil believed that if Britain was prepared to discuss them it would be possible to persuade the French to accept a maximum displacement and armament limitation for individual ships in each category.[3]

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 120, 139, 148.
2. The Admiralty speciously argued that if any nation had the right to build vessels which were not subject to limitation there could be no security for Britain nor would there be any check on competitive building. They described the French proposal to permit changes in construction programmes as 'dangerous and unacceptable' and insisted that instead of the four categories of warship which the French had suggested, there should be five. See DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 126 and 142.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 148. A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1927, London, 1929, p. 16.

Salisbury tried to steer the Admiralty towards accepting the French compromise by proposing a solution which anticipated the Admiralty's own proposals in the closing stages of the Geneva naval conference. His proposals evoked no response from the Admiralty and he was reluctantly to conclude, as his brother had done some time earlier, that the Admiralty were for some unknown reason determined to wreck the Preparatory Commission.[1]

Consequently Britain went into the Geneva naval disarmament conference in June 1927 with the United States and Japan without having secured any limitation of French and Italian naval armaments other than those imposed by the 1922 Washington treaty. The British government knew that French naval policy had been formulated with little or no reference to Britain's requirements and that France's main preoccupation was the possibility of an Italian attack on her lines of communication with her North African colonies.[2] Whereas there was a resurgence of Francophobia in the British government with Hankey describing the latest French mobilisation plans as 'the greatest scheme for organisation of a nation for war that has ever been attempted in the history of the world',[3] the British rejection of the French compromise resulted in an anti-British campaign in the French press with Cecil's action being compared to Chamberlain's rejection of the Protocol in March 1925. Paul-Boncour was led to conclude that it was useless to show a conciliatory spirit.[4] When the session was brought to an end in the last week of April the French had seen not only their naval compromise rejected but budgetary limitation and international inspection and control set aside.

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1. Salisbury to Cecil, 9 and 16 April 1927, Baldwin to Cecil, 12 April 1927, Cecil to Salisbury, 12 April 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51080 and 51086; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, No. 148; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 15 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/440.
2. Cecil to Salisbury, 8 April 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51086; Salisbury to Chamberlain, 13 April 1927, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 54/437; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. III, Nos. 149 and 201.
3. Hankey to Cecil, 7 April 1927, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51088.
4. A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1927, p. 16.

Writing two years later in 1929, de Madariaga,[1] who in 1927 had been head of the League Secretariat's disarmament section, was severely critical of the attitude adopted by Britain. He singled out for special criticism her refusal to accept what he described as 'the very reasonable proposal' the French had put forward to break the deadlock over naval disarmament. He was equally critical of the British government's refusal to accept budgetary limitation which he regarded as an indispensable part of a disarmament convention. It was significant, he said, that the adversaries of budgetary limitation, notably Britain and the United States, were among the most wealthy nations of the world. On other issues he berated the British for their indifference to the best and most responsible opinion in the world. Britain's attitude was an obstacle to progress. Gloomily he summed up the results of the session: 'Disarmament revealed its true nature as a mere symptom of politics, that is, of power. The debates of the Commission forced every nation to take the attitude which the requirements of her power dictated.'[2]

After the disappointments and frustrations of the Preparatory Commission's third session and the fiasco of the Geneva naval conference, the great powers, with the exception of Germany and Russia, were reluctant to proceed with the work of disarmament. At the short-lived fourth session of the Commission, 30 November to 3 December 1927, the Russian delegation[3] put forward proposals for total and immediate disarmament. Regarded in

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1. Salvador de Madariaga was far from being an Anglophobe. In 1927 he had already lived in London for a short period during the war and he was to return to England to spend most of the remainder of his long life as a Spanish exile. See S. de Madariaga: Morning without Noon, Memoirs, Farnborough, 1974.

2. S. de Madariaga: Disarmament, London, 1929, pp. 171-86. Britain subsequently accepted budgetary limitation and a number of proposals she had rejected in 1927.

3. The Russians took their seat at the Preparatory Commission for the first time in November 1927, having patched up their quarrel with the Swiss government following the latter's failure to apprehend the assassins of Vaslav Vorowsky, the Russian delegate to the 1923 Lausanne conference.

the West as a propaganda move on Russia's part, the proposal was conveniently set aside though it was revived in a modified form at the fifth session in March 1928.

In the aftermath of the Geneva naval conference both the Foreign Office and the Cabinet committee appointed to formulate disarmament policy[1] adopted an almost wholly negative attitude to disarmament. One Foreign Office memorandum said that it was 'positively undesirable' for Britain to take the lead over disarmament.[2] Chamberlain and Hoare, however, continued to press their colleagues to promote disarmament.[3] Chamberlain tried in vain to persuade the Service departments to reconsider their attitude to international inspection and control.[4] When the Salisbury Cabinet committee reported in February 1928 it was forced to admit that progress in air disarmament was blocked 'by the difference between ourselves and other countries on the question of international control. In regard to this question, however, the committee are not able to recommend any concession.'[5]

From the middle of 1928 onwards the Cabinet was forced to consider some of the electoral and international consequences of a wholly negative attitude to disarmament. In Britain the League of Nations Union had mounted its campaign in favour of disarmament. Abroad relations with both the United States and France were poor. In June Cushendun, who

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1. The Cabinet committee consisted of Salisbury (Chairman), Bridgeman, Cushendun, Hoare, Sir Douglas Hogg, the Attorney-General and from March 1928 as Lord Hailsham, Lord Chancellor, and Worthington-Evans.

2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, No. 211, Annex III. The writer was R. H. Campbell of the Western Department.

3. See especially Chamberlain's letter to Baldwin, 12 September 1927, following his lunch-time conversations with him at Talliores on Lake Annecy the previous day, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 129; Hoare's Cabinet Paper, 6 October 1927, CP 234(27), CAB 24/188, attacking the government's negative attitude, which was discussed at the Cabinet on 12 October 1927, C.50(27), CAB 23/55; see also Chamberlain's comments on the negative attitude adopted by Cadogan of the Foreign Office in DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, No. 219 and Annex II to No. 219.

4. 13 February 1928, CAB 27/361.

5. CP 44(28), 14 February 1928, CAB 27/361.

had replaced Cecil as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, drew his colleagues' attention to the serious repercussions of a failure to achieve disarmament on British and German opinion,[1] and in October Hoare warned the Prime Minister that it would be mad to throw in their hand and dissociate themselves from the Preparatory Commission so near to a general election.[2]

During the first three sessions of the Preparatory Commission the British and French delegations learnt that if they were in agreement, the smaller powers would generally follow their lead. Anglo-French differences were largely responsible for the deadlock in the Commission. There could be no real progress until the two countries resolved their differences. At the fourth session of the Commission Britain's chief military representative, Major-General A. C. Temperley, learnt from his French opposite number, Colonel Requin, that though France might make some concessions she would never agree to the limitation of trained reserves because they were such a vital factor in her national defence.[3]

In January 1928 Cushendun reminded the French ambassador in London that if France felt strongly about trained reserves, Britain felt equally strongly about the rigid limitation of warships by categories because only in that way was it possible to eliminate the factor of surprise which was such an all-important element in war.[4] Negotiations between representatives of the two governments at ministerial and non-ministerial level continued until agreement was reached on 27 July.[5] Three days later Chamberlain announced in the House of Commons that Britain and France had reached an agreement over naval armaments and the same day the American, Japanese and Italian governments were notified though no reference was made to the

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1. C.34(28), 22 June 1928, CAB 23/58.
2. Hoare to Baldwin, 15 October 1928, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 115.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, Enclosure in No. 233.
4. Ibid., No. 257.
5. Ibid., Vol. V, No. 427.

fact that Britain had agreed to abandon her opposition to the exclusion of trained reserves from a limitation agreement.[1] Britain and France agreed to a fourfold classification of warships which would exempt from limitation 6" gun cruisers and submarines of under 600 tons. The compromise was bitterly assailed in Germany, Italy and the United States and aroused anger in the Labour and Liberal parties in Britain. It caused a further deterioration in Anglo-American relations and because it was totally unacceptable to both the United States and Italy, had to be abandoned.

The government's folly belies a simple explanation. It was to be severely censured by friend and foe alike. It appeared unprincipled and opportunist. It seemed to invite increases rather than reductions in armaments. The British side of the bargain had been unequivocally rejected by the United States at the Geneva naval disarmament conference a year earlier. To antagonise the United States so gratuitously seemed absurdly foolish yet in one respect the compromise illustrates the sensitivity of the Baldwin Cabinet to world as much as British opinion.

In February 1928 Cushendun warned his colleagues that Britain was constantly being represented at Geneva as attempting to obstruct progress in regard to security and disarmament. It was essential that the government should do something to refute these accusations.[2] There were several indications that the French were more favourably disposed to the British point of view and keen to see progress over disarmament.[3] If this did not bring about an advance towards disarmament and the Preparatory Commission remained deadlocked, it was vital that responsibility for the deadlock should not rest with Britain. There was always a danger

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1. 220 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1837, 30 July 1928; CAB 21/321.
2. 10 February 1928, CAB 27/361.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. IV, No. 91 and Note 5 to No. 91; Cf. Nos. 267 and 283. See also Noel-Baker to Cecil, 2 April 1928, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.

that the United States and France might come to terms over naval disarmament and leave Britain isolated. The United States' acceptance in April 1928 of the 1927 French compromise proposals was an ominous warning. It was of supreme importance to have French support in something which was of such vital significance for Britain, an adequate cruiser force to protect her lines of communication. In March Chamberlain tried to persuade his colleagues that it was essential to end Britain's diplomatic isolation. Gaining French support for her naval proposals should be given first priority.[1]

Conversations with Carl von Schubert, the German State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, further convinced Chamberlain of the importance of reaching an agreement with France in order to end the deadlock in the Preparatory Commission. Von Schubert had warned him that unless the Commission achieved some practical results fairly soon the German government would no longer be able to restrain public opinion. Many Germans had come to the conclusion that disarmament was a sham.[2] Paul-Boncour shared Chamberlain's concern. Unless progress was made, Germany would repudiate the disarmament clauses of the Versailles treaty.[3] If that happened, Chamberlain warned his colleagues in a memorandum on 9 June, he could not predict the consequences for the immediate or future peace of the world. Germany had accepted them under duress and had more or less respected them in the hope that they would prove to be the first steps to a general limitation of armaments. The moment that expectation was definitely falsified, she would not feel herself under any obligation to observe them. No League investigation, nothing indeed short of violence, would prevent them from becoming a dead letter. In the light of such considerations, had relative naval strengths quite the significance

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1. 12 March 1928, CAB 27/361 (Reduction and Limitation of Armaments (Cabinet) Committee); C.14(28), 13 March 1928, CAB 23/57.
2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. V, No. 55.
3. Ibid., No. 376.

the Cabinet appeared to be attaching to them? He had never favoured the approach to disarmament adopted by the League but past decisions committed them to that road. If the disarmament negotiations failed, one consequence would probably be the rearmament of Germany.[1]

There were considerable differences within the Cabinet. Salisbury was opposed to the formula because he believed that the Admiralty's proposals, which formed its basic ingredient, would embitter relations with the United States.[2] Britain's task was to find a middle course which would secure better relations with the United States while at the same time averting a crisis in Germany.[3] When, however, Chamberlain suggested a new initiative to reach agreement with the Americans his suggestion was rejected on the grounds that it would lead to renewed demands for parity with Britain.[4] As a result the Cabinet was driven to reconsider a separate agreement with France. Opposition to the compromise was neutralised by the incongruous alliance of Chamberlain and Bridgeman, the former promoting it because he believed it would lead to improved relations with France and progress with disarmament, the latter because it would deflect the Commission from limiting those warships on which Britain relied for commerce protection.

At the fateful Cabinet of 22 June Salisbury identified three objectives of Britain's policy: keeping in step with France, avoiding friction with the United States, and preventing Germany from denouncing the disarmament clauses of the Versailles treaty.[5] Anti-American sentiment in the Cabinet ensured that the first took priority over the second while the

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. V, No. 377.
2. CP 44(28), 14 February 1928, CAB 27/361 contains the recommendations of the Salisbury Committee of which the rejection of the Admiralty proposals was the most important. On 17 February, Cushendun persuaded the Cabinet to reject the advice, C.8(28), CAB 23/57.
3. CP 193(28), 18 June 1928, CAB 24/195; DBFP, Series IA, Vol. V, No. 385.
4. C.34(28), 22 June 1928, CAB 23/58.
5. C.34(28), 22 June 1928, CAB 23/58.

third was almost forgotten. A majority, misjudging American opinion, wrongly assumed that if Britain and France came to terms, the United States would be forced to step into line. Their failure to cultivate good relations with the United States is one of the most serious criticisms which can be levelled at the second Baldwin Cabinet[1] but it was in the last resort fear of diplomatic isolation in Europe which led them to make so serious an error of judgement.

When the delegates gathered for the sixth session of the Preparatory Commission in April 1929 two years had elapsed since the first reading of the draft disarmament convention. The fourth and fifth sessions had achieved virtually nothing. The Russians had been persuaded to withdraw their proposals for total and immediate disarmament and a second set for proportionate reductions in existing armaments was neatly shelved on the grounds that the Preparatory Commission was concerned not with figures but with methods. The decision to postpone the second reading of the convention to allow more time for discussion evoked strong protests from the German delegation who also tried to get the world disarmament conference convened in 1928. At the Lugano meeting of the League Council in December 1928 the powers agreed that no useful purpose would be served by convening the sixth session of the Preparatory Commission until after President Hoover's inauguration in March 1929. That postponement enabled the British government to make some modifications in its disarmament policy and reappraise the role its Service advisers had been playing in the formulation of that policy.

Though Chamberlain had aired his misgivings about the role the Service departments were playing in the formulation of Britain's

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1. The criticism is well made in Lord Eustace Percy: Some Memories, pp. 138-43. Percy was President of the Board of Education in the Baldwin Cabinet. For a discussion of the two schools of thought, the continental commitment and Atlanticism or an alliance of the Anglo-Saxon powers, see M. Howard: The Continental Commitment and D. C. Watt: Personalities and Policies, p. 211 et seq.

disarmament policy as early as September 1927[1] it was not until the winter of 1929 that the Foreign Office began to challenge that role. The basic assumption implicit though never explicitly stated in all the discussions of the CID and its sub-committees was that British disarmament policy was an aspect of Britain's defence policy. In the winter months of 1929 the Foreign Office indirectly posed the question whether disarmament policy was not really an aspect of foreign policy and whether, therefore, British foreign policy should be subservient to Britain's defence needs as these were perceived and evaluated by her Service departments.

In a Cabinet Paper on 20 February 1929 Cushendun took the Service departments to task for both opposing the direct limitation of material and objecting to a German proposal that the Preparatory Commission should publish data relating to effectives, material and expenditure. If other powers were prepared to give the information called for in the German proposals, Cushendun asked, was there any valid reason why Britain should not do the same?[2] Two weeks earlier Cadogan, whose scepticism about disarmament had not made him a natural enemy of the Service departments, had written: 'If we are to go ahead we must get the Cabinet to sit on the Service Departments.'[3] In March Cushendun began a Cabinet Paper with the words: 'It is becoming clear that unless the Cabinet is prepared to override the views of the Service Departments no advance is possible at the Preparatory Commission.'[4]

If British policy at the sixth session of the Preparatory Commission was to press for discussion of the non-naval clauses of the draft disarmament convention it was imperative that Britain should have a policy for the limitation of non-naval material. No such policy existed. Britain

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1. Chamberlain to Baldwin, 12 September 1927, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 129.
2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, No. 370.
3. Cadogan to Butler, 8 February 1929, FO 800/419.
4. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, No. 376.

stood virtually alone in opposing both budgetary limitation, which the whole of the continent with the exception of Germany favoured, and direct limitation which had the support of Germany and the United States. The Admiralty and the Air Ministry were totally opposed to budgetary limitation and the War Office was opposed to both methods on the grounds that they could not forecast the needs of the British army at a time when units were being mechanised.[1] They were not, however, entirely oblivious to the dangers of procrastination. In a CID paper in December 1928 the Chief of the Imperial General Staff warned that one consequence of the Preparatory Commission failing to reach an agreement might be the rearmament of Germany and her emergence as a first-class military power.[2]

Cushendun exploited these fears. If a breakdown in the Preparatory Commission might lead to German rearmament was it not worthwhile incurring some minor risks and ignoring a few imaginary foes if a very real and serious danger could thereby be averted? No one in the War Office had demonstrated that the British Empire would suffer from Britain pursuing a more conciliatory policy at Geneva. Even such Conservative organs as The Times and The Observer were exhorting the government to give a bolder lead. The policy which the War Office were asking the government to pursue entailed not co-operation but isolation.[3]

The choice was put by Cadogan in a more cogent form. Britain could not go on leading a double life, preaching disarmament on the one hand and impeding its progress on the other. The arguments put forward in Whitehall did not cut much ice in Geneva. It was not clear why other nations could accept proposals which Britain felt forced to reject. To

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1. From being adamantly opposed to budgetary limitation the War Office had in the autumn of 1927 come to accept the limitation of total expenditure on personnel and material but that did not go far enough to satisfy the continental powers.

2. CID Paper 926-B, CAB 4/18 discussed by the CID, 239th meeting, 13 December 1928, CAB 2/5.

3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, No. 376.

judge from some War Office statements, it would seem that Britain had secured a lead in 'mechanisation' and was determined to remain ahead at all costs. If Britain was convinced that by maintaining secrecy she could steal a march on other powers then she would, of course, have to prevaricate in the Preparatory Commission but was there not a chance that other powers might learn the same lesson and enter into competition with her?[1]

Minuting Cadogan's memorandum, the new Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Sir Ronald Lindsay,[2] called on the Cabinet to brush aside the opposition of the Service departments. Disarmament was the most important question of the day. It was the accepted policy of the government but the Service departments had prevented the formulation of constructive proposals. Britain should give a lead by formulating and publishing her own armaments programme for a five-year period and inviting others to do the same.[3]

The Service departments abandoned their opposition and the Cabinet adopted the German government's publicity proposals.[4] Though the decision did not represent a major shift of policy it did reveal a new sense of urgency. Largely because of the lead taken by the Foreign Office, concessions had been wrung from the Service departments.

Cushendun left for Geneva on 12 April 1929. His instructions were to seek to dissuade his fellow delegates from discussing naval armaments, to do all he could to promote land and air disarmament, and to try to

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, No. 379.
2. Sir Ronald Lindsay, 1877-1945, had been British ambassador in Berlin from 1926 to 1928 and was, therefore, more aware of continental opinion. In 1930 he succeeded Sir Esmé Howard as British ambassador in Washington.
3. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, Note 6 to No. 379.
4. C.13(29), 26 March 1929, CAB 23/60. The Cabinet endorsed decisions taken by its Disarmament Committee on 22 March. See CP 91(29), CAB 27/361.

persuade other states to formulate and publicise their armament programmes with a view to the conclusion of a 'publicity' convention.[1] By giving advance notice of Britain's proposals to the new American administration a good impression was created in Washington.[2]

The sixth session of the Preparatory Commission made more progress than any of its delegates had dared to hope but that progress was made as a result of concessions which left the German, Russian and other delegations profoundly dissatisfied. A German proposal for the abolition of bombing was rejected by a majority vote. In the interests of conciliation and agreement the United States and Britain abandoned their opposition to the exclusion of trained reserves and France refrained from insisting on budgetary limitation and international inspection and control. A speech by the American chief delegate, Hugh Gibson, on 22 April held out the promise of an agreement with Britain over naval armaments and did much to pave the way for the Anglo-American naval compromise of the following autumn.[3] A second reading was given to a large part of the text of the disarmament convention though consideration of the limitation of naval effectives and material was postponed until agreement was reached on the outstanding questions dividing the principal naval powers. There was agreement on the principles governing the limitation of land and air effectives, air material and chemical and bacteriological warfare. Britain gave notice of her intention to ratify both the 1925 Gas Protocol and the 1925 Protocol for the Control of the International Trade in Arms, Munitions and Implements of War. The Commission would reconvene when the outstanding differences between the naval powers had been resolved.

Before the Preparatory Commission resumed its task in November 1930,

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1. C.16(29), 11 April 1929, CAB 23/60.
2. C.13(29), 26 March 1929, CAB 23/60 and DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, Nos. 383, 386 and 390.
3. See p. 215.

the second Baldwin government had been defeated in the May 1929 general election and replaced by MacDonald's second Labour government. The years of the second Baldwin administration, 1924 to 1929, were the years of hope and promise in the inter-war history of the European continent. Chamberlain's League policy and the Locarno agreements created opportunities which did not exist before 1925. If it was in Britain's best interests that the Preparatory Commission, which was only concerned with the principles of disarmament, should reach an agreement the wisdom of allowing the Service departments to impede its progress must be called in question. Though it was their constitutional responsibility to plan for every contingency it is doubtful whether, had they been prepared to make concessions, those concessions would have adversely affected Britain's naval, military and air power or her diplomatic prestige and authority. Moreover, there is scarcely any evidence of the Service departments attempting to work out the implications of Chamberlain's pro-League policy. Some of the responsibility for that omission must rest with the prime minister himself who took little interest in foreign affairs in general and disarmament in particular.[1] Disarmament was accorded a low priority and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that opportunities were lost which were not to occur again. Whether a disarmament agreement would have been concluded had Britain's policy been more conciliatory is a matter for speculation. What is scarcely in doubt is that British policy in the Preparatory Commission did not fully reflect the aims and objectives of Chamberlain's foreign policy. It is not, therefore, surprising that it was so severely censured

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1. See, for example, the comments of Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick who acted as secretary to a Cabinet disarmament committee over which Baldwin presided. Kirkpatrick came to the conclusion that Baldwin's main concern was to keep the peace between his colleagues. I. Kirkpatrick: The Inner Circle, London, 1959, pp. 38-9. Milder criticism of Baldwin's attitude to foreign affairs is to be found in Lord Eustace Percy: Some Memories, p. 132. Percy suggests that Baldwin had admirable middle-sightedness but lacked far-sightedness and that the same criticism could be applied to his Cabinet as a whole.

not only by the government's opponents but by impartial observers such as the former head of the League Secretariat's Disarmament Section.[1]

The Second Labour Government and Disarmament

There is no reason to doubt the MacDonald Cabinet's commitment to disarmament though within a year of taking office, other more pressing considerations had overwhelmed and overshadowed it. Labour and the Nation had committed the Labour party to a radical programme of disarmament.[2] One of Dalton's first actions on becoming Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office was to have copies distributed to various heads of departments.[3] The Foreign Office team, Henderson, Dalton, Noel-Baker and Cecil,[4] were strongly committed to disarmament and were in a position to bring to their task expertise and experience which made them formidable in debate with their professional advisers and in countering opposition from the Service departments. Though Lord Thomson, the Secretary of State for Air, tried on behalf of the Services to exert pressure on the Cabinet, there was no one of Haldane's calibre to champion their cause. In these respects the situation in 1929[5] was far more auspicious for disarmament and the conduct of a Labour foreign policy than had been the case in 1924 but none the less the two years of the second Labour government were most inauspicious for disarmament and

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1. S. de Madariaga (Disarmament, pp. 256-8) accused Britain, next to the United States, of bearing the heaviest responsibility for the slow pace of disarmament.
2. Labour Party: Labour and the Nation, London, 1928, p. 45. See pp. 71-2.
3. H. Dalton: Call Back Yesterday, London, 1953, pp. 223-4.
4. Lord Cecil was invited by MacDonald to advise the government on League affairs. He was given a room in the Foreign Office and was a member of the British delegation to the League Assemblies in 1929 and 1930. He also headed Britain's delegation to the Preparatory Commission in November 1930. Though he never joined the Labour party he acted as if he was a member of MacDonald's government and played a notable role in the formulation of its disarmament policy. His position, none the less, was anomalous and has few, if any, parallels.
5. The second Labour government, though lacking an overall majority, was in a much stronger parliamentary position with its 288 Labour MPs than the 1924 government which had almost a hundred fewer MPs to support it.

an 'internationalist' foreign policy. Within six months of coming to office the death of Stresemann and the Wall Street Crash foreshadowed fundamental changes in the European situation and the international economy.

Although MacDonald was able to devote a large part of his time during the first six months of the Labour government to seeking a naval arms limitation agreement with the United States, Henderson was so absorbed in the day-to-day business of the Foreign Office and his duties as Secretary of the Labour party that he was not in a position to give much attention to disarmament. German reparations, the evacuation of the Rhineland, relations with Egypt, Russia and China presented problems which called for immediate action.[1] None the less Henderson gave his full backing to Cecil, Dalton and Noel-Baker in their efforts to work out a practical programme for the Labour government.

In the last week of July 1929, with the assistance of Dalton, Noel-Baker, Sir Cecil Hurst, the Foreign Office's chief legal adviser, and Cadogan, Cecil drafted a memorandum containing specific proposals on arbitration, security and disarmament.[2] In addition to recommending support for the Optional Clause, the General Act on Arbitration, Conciliation and Judicial Settlement, the Convention on Financial Assistance to States Victims of aggression, and the Treaty to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War,[3] Cecil proposed that the government should ratify the

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1. For an account of the foreign policy of the second Labour government and Henderson's work as Foreign Secretary see D. Carlton: MacDonald versus Henderson, London, 1970.

2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, Annex to No. 437. The memorandum took the form of recommendations for Britain's delegation to the 1929 League Assembly.

3. The General Act, the Convention on Financial Assistance and the Treaty to Strengthen the Means of Preventing War had been drafted by the League Council and the Preparatory Commission's Arbitration and Security Committee at the request of the League Assembly. See A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1928, pp. 81-93 and D. Carlton: MacDonald versus Henderson, pp. 75-8, 93.

1925 Arms Traffic Convention[1] and promote an Arms Manufacture Convention so that manufacture as well as trade in arms would be brought under some form of control.

Suggesting that the government's overall objective should be the progressive reduction of the manpower, material and money available to the land, sea and air forces of the nations of the world, Cecil took the opportunity to press for those forms of disarmament which the Baldwin government had rejected: the limitation of material either directly by enumeration or indirectly by budgetary control and the establishment of a competent international authority with adequate powers to enforce a disarmament convention. He also called on the government to press for the convening of the Preparatory Commission in the autumn of 1929 and the world disarmament conference no later than October 1930.

Brushing aside objections by Lindsay and Cadogan that the Service departments should first be consulted, Henderson forwarded the memorandum to the Prime Minister for his approval.[2] All Cecil's recommendations relating to disarmament MacDonald approved without reservation.

In August advocates of disarmament were much heartened by an interview MacDonald gave to Isaac Marcusson of the Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post which appeared in the Daily Herald.[3] Eager to allay suspicions in the United States and pave the way for a naval disarmament agreement, MacDonald did not content himself with a few broad generalisations about disarmament. Much to Noel-Baker's delight[4] he committed himself to a specific programme of disarmament bearing such close resemblance to Cecil's memorandum as to convince its author that its proposals would

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1. See p. 321.
2. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, Note 2 to No. 437; Cecil to Noel-Baker, 1 August 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.
3. 3 August 1929.
4. Noel-Baker to Cecil, 14, 20 and 23 August 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107; see also Cecil to MacDonald, 28 August 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.

not be ignored. An effective disarmament treaty, MacDonald informed Marcusson, had not only to limit the personnel in all three Services but also trained reserves, the number in the annual contingent, and their period of service. It should also limit the number of heavy guns, tanks and military aircraft as well as the arms and ammunition a state could hold in readiness for war. Naval armaments should be limited by categories of warship and a disarmament convention should contain a ban on the use of chemical and bacteriological warfare. It should also limit the amount a state could spend on armaments and also contain provision for international supervision, the international control of civil aviation, and the effective national and international control of the manufacture and trade in arms.

Cecil had been more favourably disposed towards France and French demands for security than most of his Conservative Cabinet colleagues in the years 1923 to 1927 but by 1929 he was becoming seriously alarmed by trends in French policy. During a tour of three European capitals in May and June he detected a hardening in the French attitude to disarmament and his suspicions were to some extent confirmed by conversations which Noel-Baker had with René Massigli, the head of the League of Nations section at the Quai d'Orsay, during the Hague conference on reparations.[1] He regretted that France had dropped its insistence on budgetary limitation and international control at the April session of the Preparatory Commission and thought that if Britain failed to promote general disarmament, the German problem would remain unsolved and France would bend all her efforts to secure the land and air hegemony of Europe. For these reasons Cecil begged MacDonald to postpone the proposed Five-Power Naval

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1. League of Nations Union memorandum SG 2799: an Account of a Tour of Madrid, Paris and Berlin, May-June 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51146; Noel-Baker to Cecil, 10 August 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107. Ten days later Noel-Baker was able to report that Massigli had modified his position and was more favourably disposed to the point of view which both Cecil and Noel-Baker shared.

Conference until such time as the Preparatory Commission had completed its work and to take steps at the 1929 League Assembly to challenge those decisions taken by the Preparatory Commission in the previous April which he regarded as retrograde.[1]

Cecil did not succeed in persuading the Prime Minister to postpone the London Naval Conference but he did win his backing for a League Assembly resolution which called on the Preparatory Commission to reconsider its attitude to land disarmament. Though Cecil's resolution came up against stiff resistance from the French and was withdrawn in favour of a compromise resolution proposed by the Greek delegation, the Preparatory Commission was as a result forced to reconsider its attitude to budgetary limitation and the direct limitation of material when in November 1930 it met to complete its work. The labours of Cecil, Dalton and Noel-Baker had not been entirely in vain.[2]

MacDonald made one other response to the promptings of Cecil and the disarmers in the Foreign Office by appointing a CID Sub-Committee in December 1929 to study the problems which would arise when the Preparatory Commission was reconvened. Of its eleven members four came from the Foreign Office, three from the Service departments and four from the Dominions.[3] Between December 1929 and July 1930 the committee subjected the clauses of the draft disarmament convention to meticulous

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1. Cecil to MacDonald, 4 and 28 August 1929, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.
2. D. Carlton: MacDonald versus Henderson, pp. 81-3; A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1929, pp. 31-4.
3. The four Foreign Office members were Henderson, Cecil, Dalton and Noel-Baker. The three Service members were C. G. Ammon, Parliamentary Secretary to the Admiralty, Earl De La Warr, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the War Office, and F. Montague, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Air. The Dominions were represented by the Australian Minister of Trade and Customs who was then in London, the High Commissioners of New Zealand and South Africa, and a representative of the Irish government in London. Due to pressure of other work, Henderson, who had been appointed by MacDonald to chair the committee, was seldom able to attend and his place as chairman was taken by Cecil.

examination. Never before had a CID sub-committee gone so fully into the technicalities of disarmament and never had a committee been so dominated by the disarmers, who were too well briefed to be daunted by the technical arguments of the Service advisers.

Though the War Office successfully resisted Noel-Baker's plea for the abolition of tanks they did agree to the limitation of heavy guns. Their objections to the exclusion of trained reserves from a limitation agreement were brushed aside and the committee concluded that 'a considerable reduction of the period of service' to the Swiss, Dutch and Scandinavian levels 'would really reduce armies to a defensive level and render aggression difficult'. There was no disagreement over the limitation of personnel in all three Services and the Air Ministry albeit momentarily agreed to a horsepower limitation for aircraft. Only budgetary limitation remained in dispute and had to be referred to the Cabinet.[1]

In the aftermath of the 1930 London naval conference there was a hardening in the Labour government's attitude to disarmament. Cecil unsuccessfully tried to persuade MacDonald to press for an early meeting of the Preparatory Commission.[2] No doubt influenced by Hankey, MacDonald was convinced that Britain's 'peace determination' was being interpreted on the continent as evidence of British weakness.[3] As unemployment soared above two million the MacDonald Cabinet became more sensitive to such

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1. The sub-committee's minutes and report are in CAB 16/98.
2. Cecil to Malcolm MacDonald, 27 April and J. R. MacDonald to Cecil, 3 May 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.
3. See Hankey's remarks to the Webbs, 25 February 1930: 'The Japanese, Italian and French delegates [to the London conference] are convinced that our desire to limit armaments is based on our feeling "down and out".' Beatrice Webb Diaries, 25 February 1930. Cf. MacDonald to Cecil, 13 August 1930: 'There is a fundamental weakness in our international transactions, and that is a lowering of the position which this country has held for so long in the eyes of the world...We shall have to be very careful not to allow our peace determination to be interpreted by unfriendly people to mean that we have got flabby and useless.' Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081. Cecil, Cadogan and Dalton all suspected Hankey's influence as being largely responsible for MacDonald's change of heart. See Dalton Diaries, 21 March and 21 August 1930 and Cecil to Noel-Baker, 9 May 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.

charges and to the plight of the unemployed, especially those in the dockyard towns.[1] MacDonald declined to attend the 1930 League Assembly but Henderson, on behalf of the government, made it plain that Britain would not enter into any fresh commitments or any extension of existing commitments until an arms limitation agreement was adopted.

Of the disarmament issues which faced the second Labour government none proved more contentious than the budgetary limitation of armaments. During the first decade of peace successive British governments had opposed budgetary limitation on the grounds that it was unworkable and not in Britain's best interests. In 1927 a different attitude emerged in the War Office and Cecil, who at the April session of the Preparatory Commission had opposed it, became convinced that, given the opposition of Britain and a number of other key powers to international inspection and control, it was a more satisfactory method of arms control than the direct limitation of armaments by enumeration. Talk of easy evasion was, therefore, far more applicable to direct limitation than to the control of budgetary expenditure. He also knew that the French would never agree to direct limitation because it would destroy their superiority over Germany and Italy which they had carefully acquired in the years since 1919. However, it was events in Germany, above all the construction of the pocket battleship Ersatz-Preussen later renamed the Deutschland and the writings of her military authorities, which more than anything else convinced the British government that Britain's opposition had been unwise. Authorities such as Hans von Seeckt in Germany and Basil Liddell Hart in Britain predicted that wars in the future would be won by relatively

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1. See, for example, the attitude of the Cabinet's Fighting Services Committee to naval construction in 1930 and 1931 compared with the stance adopted in 1929 and the relaxation in the regulations governing the sale of armaments to foreign powers during 1930. CAB 27/407 and C.55(30), 24 September and C.57(30), 1 October 1930, CAB 23/65.

small armies expensively equipped.[1] It dawned on British policy makers that the victors in 1919 had made a serious mistake in not placing any restrictions on Germany's arms budget. By 1930 the Foreign Office, the Treasury, the War Office and the Admiralty were certain that budgetary limitation was in Britain's best interests but the Air Ministry remained implacably opposed to it.

In the CID sub-committee on the reduction and limitation of armaments the Air Ministry's opposition to budgetary limitation had been unrelenting. The Secretary of State for Air, Lord Thomson, was strenuously opposed to budgetary limitation because he believed that Britain should pin her faith on a relatively small fleet of aircraft (and ships), excelling in quality rather than quantity.[2] Shortly before his death in the R101 air crash Thomson wrote to the Prime Minister putting the case against the strict budgetary limitation of each separate arm.[3] To placate the Air Ministry the CID recommended in September 1930 that another committee be appointed to investigate the special difficulties the Air Force would experience if the principle was applied to air armaments.[4] A few days earlier Cecil wrote to Henderson to stiffen his resolve to resist any compromise.[5] He pointed out that the direct limitation of air material would be an ineffective way of preventing unbridled competition in air power because the real danger lay in expensive developments. The War Office, fearing that funds at some future date might be transferred from the army and navy to the air force, brought their influence to bear in favour of budgetary limitation and against virement.[6]

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1. In fact most German military experts did not think of rearmament primarily in terms of war material but rather as an exercise in mobilising Germany's manpower for war. See E. W. Bennett: German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933, passim.
2. Beatrice Webb Diaries, 23 September 1929.
3. Henderson to MacDonald, 1 October 1930, FO 800/282.
4. CID, 250th meeting, 29 September 1930, CAB 2/5.
5. Cecil to Henderson, 24 September 1930, FO 800/282.
6. Shaw to Henderson, 24 September 1930, FO 800/282.

On 15 October the Cabinet approved the principle of budgetary limitation but at the same time adopted the CID recommendation that another committee should examine its application to the Air Force.[1] The Air Ministry continued to oppose it and Lord Amulree,[2] Thomson's successor, warned the Cabinet on 6 November that one consequence of the budgetary limitation of military aircraft might be the development of civil aircraft eminently adaptable for military use. In that case, London, deprived of adequate fighter protection, would be vulnerable to attack by civil aircraft which had been secretly converted into bombers. The Cabinet were unimpressed. It was fatuous to argue in one context that civil aircraft were of no military value and on another occasion to conjure up the spectre of the Capital wide open to attack from the self-same machines. The Cabinet reiterated its decision that Britain should adhere to budgetary limitation.[3]

Cecil's instructions for the final session of the Preparatory Commission endorsed the principle of budgetary limitation but from R. L. Craigie he learnt that the Prime Minister had not fully approved the Cabinet's decision. Craigie reported a conversation in which MacDonald had described budgetary limitation as worse than useless.[4] Cecil had already incurred criticism for anticipating the government's conversion by announcing in the Third Committee of the 1929 League Assembly that Britain intended to press for budgetary limitation 'on all occasions and with the utmost vigour'.[5] He had vindicated himself by quoting the Prime Minister's approval of his July 1929 Foreign Office memorandum,[6]

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1. C.60(30), 15 October 1930, CAB 23/65.
2. W. W. Mackenzie, Lord Amulree (1929), 1860-1942, barrister, President of the Industrial Court, 1919-25, Secretary of State for Air, 1930-31; supported MacDonald in the Cabinet crisis of August 1931.
3. C.66(30), 6 November 1930, CAB 23/65.
4. Cecil to Noel-Baker, 11 November 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.
5. Cecil to Henderson, 24 September, Minute by Cadogan, 13 October, Minute by Selby, 14 October 1930, FO 800/282.
6. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. VI, Annex to No. 437, 29 July 1929.

which had explicitly recommended budgetary limitation, and his verbal assurances of support at Geneva in September 1929. Having secured instructions giving him authority to support budgetary limitation, Cecil felt quite free to ignore reports of the Prime Minister's displeasure.

The Final Session of the Preparatory Commission, November-December 1930

The final session of the Preparatory Commission in November-December 1930 could scarcely have begun in less auspicious circumstances. France and Italy had not resolved their differences over naval armaments. The Stahlhelm demonstrations in Coblenz and the results of the German elections on 14 September produced a strong reaction in France and revealed the strength of German nationalism.[1] German public opinion appeared to be in open revolt against Stresemann's 'policy of fulfilment'. Italy had drawn closer to Germany and in the Third Committee of the 1930 League Assembly had supported German demands for the summoning of the world disarmament conference during 1931. As the world recession deepened internationalists were forced on to the defensive as aggressive nationalism became more strident. Some of the staunchest supporters of disarmament began to air their misgivings. 'Disarmament won't go' was how Gilbert Murray, the Chairman of the League of Nations Union, put it to the Prime Minister in a letter on 7 October 1930.[2]

Cecil and the apostles of disarmament refused to be despondent.

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1. Events in Germany during 1930 produced alarm and despondency not only in France but in Britain too. Following the fall of Müller's 'Great Coalition' in March 1930, German foreign policy became less conciliatory as the Brüning government had to bid against the Nationalists and National Socialists for public support. The National Socialists increased their representation in the Reichstag from twelve to one hundred and seven seats in the September general election. Reporting French reactions, Tyrrell, the British ambassador in Paris, tried to impress on the British government the importance of not appearing indifferent to French demands for security. Tyrrell to Henderson, 10 October 1930, FO 800/282.

2. Murray to MacDonald, 7 October 1930, Gilbert Murray Papers.

It was not unrealistic to think that the world economic crisis would force governments to reduce defence expenditure. Already Mussolini had come to realise that Italy would profit more from disarmament than from an unbridled competition in armaments.[1] The Convention on Financial Assistance to States Victims of Aggression, signed by twenty-eight states including Britain at the 1930 League Assembly, was a step forward because the British government had insisted that its provisions should be conditional upon disarmament. Britain still held the balance in Europe. There was no country, with the possible exception of Russia, which could afford to quarrel with her.[2] It was still possible to believe that a strong British lead might curb the growth of German nationalism and give a boost to the disarmament movement in France.[3]

It was, however, well nigh impossible for Britain to act as honest broker between France and Germany. It was most unlikely that anything which was acceptable to France would be regarded as satisfactory by Germany. To support Germany against France was tantamount to voting for the indefinite postponement of the world disarmament conference.[4] By siding with France Britain added fuel to the flames of German nationalism.

A majority of delegates at the 1929 session of the Preparatory Commission had given a second reading to those parts of the draft disarmament convention which dealt with the limitation of effectives

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1. In a speech on 5 June 1928 Mussolini expressed a hope for Franco-Italian detente and declared that 'the Italian government was ready to accept as the limit of its own armaments any figure whatever, even the lowest, provided it is not surpassed by any other European power.' His speech and subsequent speeches on the same lines were followed by a more conciliatory stance on the part of General de Marinis in the Preparatory Commission and a number of gestures by Dino Grandi, Italy's foreign minister from 1929 to 1932, to promote disarmament. D. Mack Smith in Mussolini's Roman Empire (London, 1976) expresses the view that Italy's support for disarmament 'was probably quite sincere', p. 30.
2. Cecil to MacDonald, 18 August 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081.
3. A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1930, London, 1931, p.100n.
4. Ibid., p. 99.

and chemical warfare. They had also agreed that the limitation of material could only be effected by publicising expenditure. The minority, led by Germany and Russia, expressed total dissatisfaction with these decisions and also the exclusion of trained reserves from limitation.

Like the minority, Cecil was unhappy with the decisions taken at the 1929 session and at the opening meeting in November 1930 he called for the reconsideration of the whole convention. As a compromise it was decided that articles which had already received a second reading in 1929 might be reconsidered if a majority favoured their reconsideration. When, however, Count Bernstorff, the chief German delegate, tried to persuade the Commission to reverse the 1929 decision to exclude trained reserves from limitation, Britain together with the United States and seven other powers decided to abstain and the amendment was defeated by twelve votes to six. Cecil had long reconciled himself to the fact that France and the conscriptionist states were so opposed to their limitation that it was pointless to pursue the matter.

An even more contentious issue was the limitation of war material. The Italian delegate, Marinis, came out boldly in favour of a German proposal for direct limitation and also put up a strong case for the limitation of reserve stocks although a year earlier Italy had opposed this method of limitation. When the proposal was put to the vote, nine voted in favour and nine against. Cecil abstained knowing that it would never be accepted by France. In Britain he was severely censured by sections of the Liberal Press and the National Council for the Prevention of War for refusing to support Bernstorff's amendment. His own proposal for the budgetary limitation of war material was carried by a large majority but much to Cecil's disappointment a proposal for the budgetary limitation of air armaments was opposed by a majority which included France and her allies.

Perhaps the most fateful decision taken by the Commission in the

whole of its four years was the adoption of a French amendment making the implementation of the convention conditional upon German's continued acceptance of the disarmament clauses of the Versailles treaty. That decision gave Bernstorff the excuse to denounce the convention as a whole. One contemporary British observer, Major-General A. C. Temperley, believed that Britain made a fatal mistake in voting for the French amendment. From that moment, in Temperley's view, the Disarmament Conference was doomed to inevitable failure.[1]

Unlike most of his fellow delegates Cecil was not displeased with the draft disarmament convention and the work of the final session of the Preparatory Commission. He was highly critical of the German delegation, never believed that the Russians seriously desired disarmament but was favourably disposed towards the Italians whom, in the past, he had regarded as a serious impediment.[2] Writing to Noel-Baker on 29 November he said: 'Assuming the scheme which we elaborated in the Foreign Office[3] was a good one, I think we have come marvellously well through the Preparatory Commission. In very few respects can it be said that the Preparatory Commission's scheme is worse than ours, and in some matters it seems an improvement.'[4] Although the convention was only a framework with its schedules left blank, it represented a large measure

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1. For an account of the final session of the Preparatory Commission see A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1930, pp. 101-23 and A. C. Temperley: The Whispering Gallery of Europe, pp. 131-40. Cecil's despatches to the Foreign Office are in FO 411/13. Report of the Preparatory Commission for the Disarmament Conference, Cmd. 3757, 1931 contains the text of the convention, the reservations entered by individual powers, a commentary on the proceedings and the text, and a few of Cecil's despatches. Cecil's correspondence with Noel-Baker contains an illuminating and informative account of the session and throws a great deal of light on Cecil's own thinking. Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.
2. Cecil to Noel-Baker, 3 December 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.
3. This was no doubt a reference to the memorandum of 29 July 1929 cited above, p. 324.
4. Cecil to Noel-Baker, 29 November 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.

of agreement as to what should be limited and how it should be limited. It rested with governments to give proof of their oft-repeated intention to reduce the burden of armaments. Provided goodwill was not lacking, the disarmament convention could be the first genuine step towards the disappearance of all aggressive armaments among the nations of the world.[1]

Cecil's conscious decision to side with the French and his pro-French stance was criticised in Britain. Henderson apparently believed that Cecil had given away too much to the French and had been unduly abrasive in his attitude to the German delegation.[2]

Others were not so optimistic. The German, Swedish and American delegates expressed disappointment and profound dissatisfaction. Spokesmen from France and the Little Entente reverted to the theme of security.[3] In a broadcast to the United States Henderson admitted that the year was closing in an atmosphere of anxiety if not gloom.[4] Dalton questioned the basic assumptions of British policy. 'We go on signing new bits of paper but who believes in the undertakings they enshrine?'[5]

Preparations for the World Disarmament Conference

Looking back on 1931 from the standpoint of October 1932 A. J. Toynbee christened it 'Annus Terribilis'.[6] At the beginning of 1931 there were two and a half million unemployed in Britain and in Germany nearly five million. At a Cabinet meeting on 14 January Snowden spoke to his colleagues about the worsening financial situation which was eventually to bring about the fall of the Labour government. It was recognised that large economies could only be achieved by changes in policy but 'in respect of defence, it was pointed out that the policy of the country

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1. Cecil to Henderson, 10 December 1930, Cmd. 3757, 1931.
2. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood: All the Way, p. 196; Noel-Baker to Cecil, 6 December 1930, Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51107.
3. A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1930, p. 122.
4. M. A. Hamilton: Arthur Henderson, London, 1938, p. 341.
5. Dalton Diaries, 29 December 1930.
6. A. J. Toynbee: Survey of International Affairs, 1931, London, 1932, p. 1.

could not be drawn up in isolation from the policies of other countries, and that in view more particularly of the coming Disarmament Conference, great caution would have to be exercised in regard to reductions in the defence forces'.[1] No one dared to suggest that disarmament was the remedy for the economic crisis. When the government was forced to bow to Liberal pressure in the debate on the Conservative Opposition's vote of censure in February 1931 by appointing the May committee to examine public expenditure, no one anticipated that it would seek large economies at the expense of the Service departments.[2]

Such was the mood of disenchantment with past policies that Snowden's plea for reductions in the 1931 naval construction programme was completely ignored. The erstwhile pacifist Secretary of State for War, Tom Shaw,[3] called for 'a firm attitude' to counter any impression that Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy. Though a large construction programme was approved, Henderson did succeed in persuading the Cabinet to agree that none of the ships should be laid down before the world disarmament conference convened in 1932.[4]

The January 1931 meeting of the League Council had fixed 2 February 1932 as the opening date of the world disarmament conference. However weary the government might be of international well-doing it could not

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1. C.6(31), 14 January 1931, CAB 23/66.
2. For the Labour government's response to the crisis see R. Skidelsky: Politicians and the Slump, the Labour Government of 1929-1931, London, 1967.
3. Tom Shaw, 1872-1938, Labour MP for Preston, 1918-1931, Minister of Labour, 1924, Secretary of State for War, 1929-31. A. C. Temperley records an intriguing story about Shaw's unwillingness to sanction the movement of troops to Palestine in 1929 because he was a pacifist. A. C. Temperley: The Whispering Gallery of Europe, pp. 118-19.
4. FS(29), 14 and 15, 26 and 29 January 1931, CAB 27/407; C.11(31), 4 February 1931, CAB 23/66; Dalton Diaries, 26 January 1931 et seq. and 5 February 1931. Concern about Britain's declining prestige was not confined to MacDonald, Shaw and Hankey. On 21 April 1931 Beatrice Webb noted in her diary: 'There remains the fact that instructed foreigners are convinced that Great Britain is "down and out" as a great Power, and possibly on the eve of economic catastrophe leading to social revolution.' She went on to say that the British people were becoming pacifist because their victory in the war had turned out to be a defeat. Beatrice Webb Diaries.

evade the responsibility of formulating British policy for the conference. On 4 February 1931 Henderson was appointed to chair a Cabinet committee charged with advising the Cabinet on the policy Britain should pursue. His suggestion that the other two political parties should be invited to co-operate in shaping British policy was also endorsed and MacDonald entered into correspondence with Baldwin and Lloyd George to enlist the co-operation of the Conservative and Liberal parties.[1]

The Cabinet Committee on Disarmament held three meetings in February and March in a vain effort to hammer out the main lines of British policy before the other two parties joined their deliberations. At its first meeting on 12 February there were strong differences of opinion. Snowden did not share Henderson's enthusiasm for budgetary limitation. The view which emerged was that it would be necessary to combine some form of direct limitation of both personnel and material with the budgetary limitation of armaments. Henderson's plea for a percentage reduction,[2] produced a strong reaction in the Air Ministry. Amulree argued that as Britain was fifth among the world's air powers, it would be unreasonable for others to expect her to reduce her Air Estimates.[3] Four days later he wrote to Hankey, the secretary of the committee, dissenting from the conclusions recorded in the Minutes that 'there was general agreement that the Committee should aim at giving a lead to other Powers in the direction of a reduction of armaments'. 'I don't wish', Amulree wrote, 'to be recorded as assenting to so sweeping a proposition.'[4]

Officials had been excluded from the first meeting of the Cabinet committee but when the Minutes reached the departments there was a quick

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1. C.11(31), 4 February 1931, CAB 23/66.
2. On the same day, 12 February 1931, the League of Nations Union came out with a proposal for a twenty-five per cent. reduction in armaments.
3. DPC(31)1, 12 February 1931, CAB 21/347.
4. Amulree to Hankey, 16 February 1931, CAB 21/347.

reaction from some of the government's advisers. C. L. Bullock, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Air Ministry and Secretary to the Air Staff, immediately set to work to persuade the Secretary of State to call for a One-Power standard in the air and to oppose Henderson's percentage reduction proposal which he described as 'fantastic' and 'out of touch with all practical realities'. It would be, in Bullock's opinion, an application of the principle 'to him that hath shall be given and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath'.[1] Soliciting Hankey's help, he pointed out that whereas in Britain a mere 2.3 per cent of total government expenditure was spent on the air force, in the United States it was 4.25 per cent., in France 5 per cent., and in Italy 4 per cent.[2] In reply, Hankey encouraged him to prepare 'some very powerful material' to circulate to the Committee at an opportune moment. It should be 'couched in terms sympathetic to the principle of disarmament' to avoid antagonism.[3] At their second meeting the committee decided that it would be appropriate for nations which had already made reductions to claim special treatment.[4]

Cecil, who had been invited to the second meeting at Henderson's request, made a spirited defence of the draft disarmament convention and budgetary limitation in particular. Referring to proposals for a percentage reduction, Cecil said that though it might be an appropriate basis for an agreement between the great powers it should not be applied to those countries which had already disarmed or small countries like Denmark which had practically no armaments at all. When Alexander, Snowden, Thomas and even Henderson raised objections to budgetary limitation and percentage reductions, Cecil said they were of the greatest importance

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1. Rough draft of a memorandum, 17 February 1931, CAB 21/347.
2. Bullock to Hankey, 18 February 1931, CAB 21/347.
3. Hankey to Bullock, 20 February 1931, CAB 21/347.
4. DPC(31)2, 18 February 1931, CAB 21/347.

because they struck a popular note by enlisting the taxpayer on the side of disarmament.[1]

The Cabinet committee held only one other meeting on 12 March before it was submerged in the proceedings of the Three Party Committee on Disarmament. It had reached no conclusions of any practical value but it had served to alert the government's Service advisers to some of the arguments which the advocates of disarmament would deploy when the Three Party Committee began the task of formulating a disarmament policy acceptable to all shades of political opinion in Britain. Henderson's proposal had inadvertently focused attention on the strongest weapon in the Services' armoury, the widely divergent trends in the armaments expenditure of the great powers.[2]

For a short time the morale of the disarmers revived when Henderson and Alexander returned from Paris and Rome with the Franco-Italian Bases of Agreement. In the euphoric atmosphere of the moment Dalton wrote: 'The World Disarmament Conference looks as though it might really succeed now.'[3] The rejoicing was short-lived. Before the end of March it became clear that France's interpretation differed radically from that of the British and the Italians. France assumed, amongst other things, that the agreement entitled her to replace over-age tonnage before the London naval treaty expired in December 1936, something which neither Britain nor Italy could concede.[4]

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1. DPC(31)2, 18 February 1931, CAB 21/347.

2. See, for example, the memoranda by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff, 13 and 25 March 1931, DPC(31)7 and 8, CAB 21/347.

3. Dalton Diaries, 6 March 1931.

4. DBFP, Second Series, Vol. II, No. 326; Dalton Diaries, 23 March, 14 and 24 April 1931; C.21(31), 31 March 1931, CAB 23/66. Alexander and Henderson crowned the patient diplomacy which R. L. Craigie had conducted over many months in Paris and Rome. Austen Chamberlain believed that Henderson hurried back too soon from Rome and that a few days' more careful drafting might have saved him subsequent disappointment and ill-success. If he was right it is a commentary on the pressures which prevented Henderson from giving adequate time to the complexities of disarmament. See Austen Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 25 April 1931, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/537.

The Three Party Committee held its first meeting on 18 March.[1] It was Lloyd George who came nearest to dominating its first and subsequent meetings. MacDonald laconically noted in his diary: 'L. G. propagandist as usual and will have much to say'.[2] Unaware that the Services had already set to work to inundate the committee with a flood of statistics, arguments and data to prove how much better armed were other countries in comparison with Britain, Lloyd George called for the fullest information possible on the peace establishments, reserves and equipment of the principal European armies and similar information on the world's navies. The Service departments were accordingly instructed to provide the committee with data on the land, sea and air forces of eleven countries, and an appreciation of their fighting potential.[3]

A recurrent theme running through all their deliberations was what most regarded as the unwarranted expansion of French military and air power. Although Chamberlain and Shaw defended France's military preparations[4] and even Lloyd George conceded that she should be allowed a superiority in military strength to enable her to resist a German attack,[5] the prevailing view was that French policy constituted a serious obstacle to disarmament. Milne's assertion that France had no intention of disarming went unchallenged.[6] Even Henderson for a time had doubts about

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1. MacDonald (Chairman), Alexander, Amulree, Henderson, Shaw, Snowden, Thomas from the government, Austen Chamberlain, Sir Samuel Hoare, Anthony Eden and Sir Thomas Inskip from the Conservative party, and Lloyd George, Sir Herbert Samuel and the Marquis of Lothian (Philip Kerr) from the Liberals. Cecil was also a member but he was not one of Baldwin's nominees. Baldwin declined to serve on the committee as apparently did Lord Hailsham also.
2. MacDonald Diaries, 18 March 1931, PRO 30/69/8/1. For Lloyd George's role in the committee see MacDonald to Henderson, 15 May 1931, FO 800/283, MacDonald's diary entry for 7 May 1931 and Austen Chamberlain to Hilda and Ida Chamberlain, 12 and 21 June, 18 July 1931, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/540, 543, 548.
3. The eleven countries were Britain, France, Italy, Russia, Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Roumania, Yugoslavia, the United States and Japan, CAB 16/102.
4. 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
5. 19 June 1931, CAB 16/102.
6. 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102. Milne was Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

France's intentions.[1] Tyrrell's Parisian viewpoint that never had the prospects for Anglo-French co-operation over disarmament been better would have struck most of the committee as wishful thinking.[2] It was Hoare who first described disarmament as essentially a French problem. He coupled his strictures on French policy with a demand for an air parity agreement with France and Italy as he had done so frequently in the past. He pleaded for preliminary negotiations with the French to try to avert what he regarded as the almost inevitable failure at the disarmament conference.[3] Later he was to argue for budgetary limitation as the only means by which French armaments might be held in check.[4]

The War Office, which in the past had been more sympathetic to France than most sections of British opinion, ridiculed the claims recently made by Maginot[5] in the Chamber of Deputies that France had disarmed. France had gone on increasing her armament expenditure since the franc was stabilised in 1926 and, though she had reduced the period of military service, she had not diminished her mobilisable forces by a single man. Her bluff had to be called. She held the key to disarmament. If she disarmed others would follow her example.[6] Similar views were held by the Admiralty and the Air Staff. Both alleged that France had doubled her expenditure over a five or six year period while Britain's had actually declined.[7] London remained far more vulnerable to air attack than Paris so that equality in numbers would not give Britain

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1. Beatrice Webb Diaries, 18 April 1931.
2. Tyrrell to Selby, 26 January 1931, FO 800/283.
3. 23 April 1931, CAB 16/102.
4. 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
5. André Maginot was French Minister of War; his statement was made on 24 February 1931.
6. DPC(31)7, 13 March 1931, CAB 21/347.
7. DPC(31)8, 25 March 1931, CAB 21/347 and CDC(31)2, 10 April 1931, CAB 27/476.

equality in effective air strength.[1] France should be pressed to make large reductions in her air force but Britain might offer 'to reduce, or not to build up beyond' a figure which would give her a one-power standard.[2]

Although an occasional reference was made to clandestine German rearmament and France's legitimate fears of Germany's will to war and greater manpower and industrial efficiency, little thought was given to relating the size of France's military and air forces to her defence requirements and status as a great power. Salmond of the Air Staff admitted that France had maintained a large air force because she was convinced that overwhelming air superiority was necessary to enable her to smash the industrial resources of the Ruhr and hold up the German army should it undertake a race for the Rhine bridgeheads, but he went on to demand for Britain equality with France. He even went so far as to call for a margin of technical superiority over the French to ensure that Britain really had equality in effective air strength. He justified his demands on the grounds that the vulnerability of the British Isles to air attack constituted the weakest point in the whole field of imperial defence. The point at issue was not so much whether Britain could, or should, build up to the strength of France but that her security demanded effective parity with France. However much Britain might believe that the French air force was maintained for security and not aggression, Britain could not continue indefinitely to depend on the goodwill of a neighbour.[3]

On one or two occasions, Chamberlain and others attempted to counter the anti-French bias in so much that was being said and written on disarmament. France's fortification of her eastern frontier, Chamberlain

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1. DC(P)11, 27 April 1931, CAB 16/102.
2. DPC(31)8, 25 March 1931, CAB 21/347.
3. DC(P)11, 27 April 1931, CAB 16/102.

asserted, would redound to Britain's advantage. He went on to tell his colleagues that if the French knew that Britain was militarily strong, they might be a good deal more willing to effect reductions in their own forces.[1]

In the Commons debate on disarmament, 29 June 1931, Chamberlain drew attention to the consequences which would follow a weakening of British armed strength. Britain would become dependent on other nations and at the mercy of other powers. 'The weakness of Great Britain is not in the interests of European stability, European confidence or the peace of the world.' With the exception of Churchill, no one in the debate attempted to apply the same criteria to France. Churchill alone championed French military power as being in the best interests of European peace.[2]

The Marquess of Lothian, formerly Philip Kerr, probably expressed the view of a majority of the committee when he informed Lloyd George that no disarmament agreement was possible if Britain acquiesced in the French thesis that France could only reduce her armaments so long as she and her allies remained militarily predominant in Europe. Lothian had long believed that an anti-German entente with France was inimical to peace and that the only hope of preventing war was an Anglo-French-German combination, a view which MacDonald shared.[3] Outlining a wide-ranging policy for Britain, which included the possibility of frontier revision in eastern Europe, he suggested that no power or group of powers in Europe should possess military preponderance and that every nation should be allowed defensive armaments but be strictly limited so far as offensive armaments were concerned. Britain should make it clear

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1. 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
2. 254 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 962 and 1015-17, 29 June 1931.
3. Kerr to MacDonald, 16 and 19 November 1928, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/243.

that she was prepared to help police a disarmed world but would not bind herself to be dragged at the behest of others into a European war between nations armed to the teeth.[1]

Running France a close second as the villain of the piece was Soviet Russia. Chamberlain raised the Russian bogey at the second meeting of the committee and quoted Milne's allegation that Russia's Five Year Plan was 'largely military in conception'.[2] Hoare added that although he used to think that the Russian danger could be discounted, the growth of Russian air power had forced him to change his mind.[3] Chamberlain and Hoare were expressing views frequently aired by Conservative spokesmen when seeking an excuse for not supporting the campaign for disarmament.[4] A few days later the Chief of the Air Staff reported that Russia had over a thousand aircraft poised to threaten British interests from the Khyber to Mosul. 'The success or failure of air limitation and disarmament mainly depends upon the attitude of France and Russia, the one preponderant in Western, the other in Eastern Europe. Russia may be the more probable enemy but geographical factors fortunately put limits to the damage that her air forces could inflict upon us in the present state of development.'[5] About the same time a War Office memorandum set out to demonstrate that Russia had tripled her military expenditure between 1924-25 and 1930-31, a far larger increase in expenditure than that incurred by either France

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1. Lothian to Lloyd George, 15 May 1931, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/257.
2. In response to a request by Chamberlain, Milne amplified his views in a paper, 5 May 1931, CAB 16/98.
3. 23 April 1931, CAB 16/102.
4. The National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations' Election Notes for Conservative Speakers and Workers, General Election, 1931, devoted over twenty pages to the Soviet Union. Among its many anti-Soviet comments: 'From the point of view of world peace nothing is more disturbing than the militarist campaign conducted by the Soviet government and the arrangements it is making to develop its military resources and train all sections of the population in the art of war.' p. 395. Baldwin, Chamberlain and other Conservative speakers in the Commons debate on disarmament, 29 June 1931, referred to Russia's military expansion.
5. DC(P)11, 27 April 1931, CAB 16/102.

or the United States.[1] All the eastern European states lived in dread of Russia and doubted the sincerity of her assurances that she was prepared to disarm.[2]

The United States did not escape criticism. In January 1931 the United States government had been asked whether she wished to take part in preliminary conversations before the world disarmament conference convened. Stimson had replied that as the United States was not a land power there was no point in her being involved in these discussions.[3] In March 1931 the Chief of the Imperial General Staff took some delight in revealing the hypocrisy of the United States government. Whereas in Britain military expenditure had decreased by £4½m. since 1924, America's had increased by over £11m. although she had no serious enemy to fear and few foreign commitments to honour. The United States showed no strong desire to disarm but lost no opportunity in rebuking others for their lack of goodwill in this respect.[4] The Chief of the Air Staff was no less scathing in his criticisms. United States expenditure on air armaments had increased by one hundred and fifty-nine per cent. since 1925 and, whereas Britain had just over eight hundred aircraft of which only some four hundred constituted home-based, first-line machines, the United States had well over a thousand military aircraft.[5] No one suggested that the United States had any aggressive intentions but the expansion of her armed forces provided the Chiefs of Staff with yet another reason for resisting disarmament.

The common theme running through all the papers presented by the

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1. DC(P)15, 22 April 1931, CAB 16/102. These calculations ignored the depreciation of the rouble.
2. DPC(31)7, 13 March 1931, CAB 21/347.
3. 24/26 January 1931, CAB 21/347.
4. DPC(31)7, 13 March 1931, CAB 21/347.
5. DC(P)11, 27 April 1931, CAB 16/102. The expenditure figure included expenditure on civil aviation and was, therefore, scarcely relevant.

Chiefs of Staff was that Britain had disarmed while other powers had continued to increase their air, sea and land forces. Though there was an element of truth in this basic contention much of the evidence they supplied was misleading. British defence expenditure excluded items which were shown in the expenditure of many other powers. Whereas France included expenditure on troops stationed in North Africa and Syria, only a very small proportion of the military expenditure in the Colonies was shown in the War Office vote. A French Foreign Ministry memorandum was able to demonstrate that British defence expenditure had increased in real terms by ten per cent. between 1924 and 1930.[1] In 1924 total British defence expenditure was £113,375,000. By 1925 it had risen to £119,531,000 to fall back to £116,468,000 in 1927, and in 1928 and 1929 to approximately the 1924 level with a drop to £109,539,000 in 1930. However, between 1924 and 1930 the retail price index fell by ten per cent. and, more importantly for the armed forces, the wholesale price index by twenty-nine per cent. Though in money terms British defence expenditure fell by three and a half per cent. between 1924 and 1930, adjusted to the retail and wholesale price indices it rose by seven and thirty-five and a half per cent. respectively.[2]

Only Lloyd George questioned the statistics supplied by the Chiefs of Staff which MacDonald used to such good effect in defending Britain's disarmament record in the Commons on 29 June 1931.[3] Lloyd George pointed out that they underestimated Britain's armed strength and failed to explain that increased defence expenditure in other countries might be due to higher wages, allowances and similar factors.[4]

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1. Wigram to Henderson, 15 July 1931, CAB 21/347.
2. See Appendix I.
3. 254 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 907-9.
4. 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102. A good illustration of the inadequacy of the statistics supplied them is afforded by the military budget of the Roumanian army for the years 1924 to 1927. Though army personnel only rose very slightly, army pay more than doubled.

One other consideration could not escape their notice. Existing ratios represented the strength which nations had freely accepted for themselves. Financial and other constraints might have played a part in determining armament levels but, with the exception of those states disarmed by the peace treaties, those levels had been voluntarily adopted by national governments. MacDonald's contention that it was ridiculous to talk about a twenty-five per cent. reduction for all because Britain had already made such a reduction might carry conviction with his colleagues on the committee[1] but it was unlikely to convince other powers.

An inevitable consequence of the emphasis the Chiefs of Staff placed on the defence expenditure of the powers, was to bring to the fore the question of budgetary limitation. Alexander, Chamberlain and Hoare, who did not dispute the validity of the statistics presented by the Service Chiefs, spoke in its favour. Lloyd George, who regarded their statistics as misleading if not tendentious, repudiated budgetary limitation. The majority nevertheless accepted Cecil's view that budgetary limitation was an essential component of an effective disarmament treaty.[2]

Rightly or wrongly most of the committee regarded the Preparatory Commission's draft disarmament convention as French in origin and bias. On 21 May Lloyd George launched a strong attack on it. The Germans had been quite right to object to it.[3] A week earlier, in what Dalton described as a long rambling discussion in which all the participants said whatever came into their heads,[4] MacDonald suggested radical changes in the Versailles treaty to allow Germany to re-introduce conscription and build military aircraft.[5] Although Chamberlain, according to Dalton,

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1. 21 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
2. 7 and 21 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
3. 21 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
4. Dalton Diaries, 14 May 1931. Dalton was deputising for Henderson. Both Cecil and Lloyd George were also absent and of those present, only Samuel, according to Dalton, seemed to want disarmament.
5. 14 May 1931, CAB 16/102.

also favoured some modifications to allow Germany to introduce conscription, he later warned MacDonald that such a proposal might so antagonise France as to ruin the chances of the disarmament conference, a view which Hoare also shared.[1] Despite Chamberlain's warning, Lloyd George persuaded the committee to consider proposals which were at variance with the draft disarmament convention and were more acceptable to Germany than to France.

Germany had repudiated the draft disarmament convention for three basic reasons. It kept her to the limits imposed on her by the Versailles treaty though other powers might only be obliged to make minor reductions, it excluded trained reserves from limitation, and it made no provision for the limitation of reserve stocks of war material. With the exception of Lloyd George, no one on the committee seriously contemplated re-opening the question of trained reserves but the majority came to the conclusion that unless war material in reserve was limited the disarmament treaty would be seriously defective. Milne, with some support from Alexander and Hoare, argued against it on the grounds that it would lead to the disclosure of serious deficiencies in Britain's defences.[2] After careful consideration Chamberlain brushed aside these objections. On 12 June he informed the Committee that in his opinion the only effective check on the size to which an army could be expanded on the outbreak of war was a limitation of the war material it had at its disposal. Although it would be impossible to control small arms, he saw no reason why large weapons such as tanks and heavy guns should not be included.[3] It was impossible to contemplate a disarmament treaty which did not oblige its

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1. 14 May 1931, CAB 16/102. Dalton Diaries, 14 May 1931.
2. 7 May 1931, CAB 16/102.
3. Chamberlain's suggestion provoked a sharp rejoinder from the War Office. On 20 June they circulated a memorandum objecting to the limitation of tanks though not heavy guns on the grounds that it would be to the disadvantage of the small armies of industrialised states like Britain. DC(P)43, 20 June 1931, CAB 16/102.

signatories to disclose their stocks of war material. He had considered the Chiefs of Staff opposition to advertising Britain's weakness but he thought that risk should be taken.[1]

At their meeting a week later,[2] Lloyd George defined four basic objectives which he suggested should guide them in formulating British disarmament policy. Britain was firstly under an obligation to fulfil her treaty commitments and pledges to disarm. Secondly, she should seek such reductions in national armaments as to ensure that while each state could enjoy a reasonable security it did not possess sufficient military power to overwhelm its neighbour, a point which Lothian had put to him a month earlier.[3] Thirdly, Britain should try to see that if war broke out it would not be on such a scale as in 1914 and, fourthly, national armaments had to be reduced to such an extent that nations were forced to look not to their own military power but to the League of Nations for their security. He believed that the only method of achieving real disarmament was to apply the principles enshrined in the disarmament clauses of the Versailles treaty. He favoured the Russian proposal to the Preparatory Commission for a prescribed maximum limit for war material and the destruction of everything in excess of that limit.

Lloyd George took a more optimistic view of the prospects for disarmament than most of his colleagues. He believed that, because of the economic situation, the time was propitious for disarmament. Most nations had declared themselves in its favour and if France stood out against it, she would be isolated.[4]

Cecil's views, though differing on points of detail, were not altogether dissimilar. On a number of occasions he pleaded with Lloyd

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1. 12 June 1931, CAB 16/102.
2. 19 June 1931, CAB 16/102.
3. Lothian to Lloyd George, 15 May 1931, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/257.
4. 19 June 1931, CAB 16/102.

George not to pursue the unrealisable goals of a limitation of trained reserves and the industrial capacity of a nation to wage war. He successfully persuaded him to abandon his opposition to budgetary limitation and the nine draft resolutions which Lloyd George formulated for the committee at the end of June were an amalgam of his own and Lloyd George's ideas. Like Lloyd George Cecil believed that the principles of the Versailles treaty should be applied to other nations by progressive stages. He told the committee that although he personally favoured the abolition of tanks, submarines and military aircraft together with a ten thousand ton limitation for all warships, it would be unwise to make such proposals until Britain had ascertained that they would have a large measure of support.[1]

At Chamberlain's suggestion,[2] Lloyd George was invited to formulate a number of resolutions embodying his four basic principles for the committee's consideration. On 29 June Lloyd George circulated the draft of nine resolutions[3] which the committee discussed and amended at their meeting on 2 July 1931. His first resolution repeated the principle enshrined in the first paragraph of Article 8 of the Covenant and his second called for such reductions in national armaments as to ensure that no nation would be able to overwhelm its neighbour. His third referred specifically to France and Germany. Lloyd George recognised that in the first stage of a disarmament convention countries like France with reasonable grounds for apprehension should be permitted to retain

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1. 21 May, 12 and 19 June 1931, CAB 16/102.
2. 19 June 1931, CAB 16/102. Chamberlain regarded many of Lloyd George's proposals as impracticable but so long as they were opposed by MacDonald and the government members of the committee he was reassured. However, on 19 June he was alarmed when MacDonald swung round to Lloyd George's point of view. His suggestion seems to have been designed to prevent the committee from being side-tracked on to a course of action which would be divisive. On 18 July he was able to report that during the last two meetings Lloyd George had become more reasonable. See Austen Chamberlain to Ida and Hilda Chamberlain, 21 and 26 June, 18 July 1931, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/543, 544 and 548.
3. DC(P)47, 29 June 1931, CAB 16/102.

sufficient military strength to deter any attack. It was equally important to give Germany security otherwise she might be driven to leave the League of Nations and embark on rearmament. Lloyd George's fourth resolution said that the principle of combining security with a limitation of a nation's offensive power raised three different aspects of disarmament: (1) its total amount, (2) its character, and (3) whether alliances which threatened the security of other nations could be permitted. His fifth resolution suggested that, in order to prevent warfare in the future being as devastating as it had been in the recent past, armies should be limited in size and in the destructiveness of their weapons. The sixth asserted that the most successful methods so far evolved were those imposed on Germany and her allies in 1919 but they would have to be supplemented by some form of budgetary limitation. The seventh advocated a ballot system to limit the effective strength of land and air personnel in those countries which relied on conscription. The eighth called for the limitation of material and material held in reserve as well as the machinery for its production. It also called on the British delegation to press for the elimination of weapons which were essentially offensive in character. The ninth and last of Lloyd George's resolutions declared: 'The Delegation should constantly keep in view the essential principle that the strength of national armaments should be of a character that will force the nations to look for security less to armaments and more to the methods of the League of Nations, including disarmament.'

Chamberlain and Cecil presented a set of reasoned amendments when the committee discussed the resolutions on 2 July.[1] The final draft[2] adopted by the committee on 15 July 1931 was a combination of the proposals made by Lloyd George, Chamberlain and Cecil, the three men,

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1. DC(P)47A and DC(P)47B, CAB 16/102; the date of Cecil's paper, DC(P)47B, is given as 7 July 1931.
2. DC(P)50, 15 July 1931, CAB 16/102.

who more than any other, were responsible for the form and content of British disarmament policy in the years 1919 to 1931.

Chamberlain, Hoare and Thomas were strongly opposed to any distinction being made between offensive and defensive weapons so the committee decided to eliminate references to such a distinction. In its place, was incorporated a sentence declaring that the military forces of a nation, whether personnel or material, available at the outbreak of war, should be limited in such a way as to make it unlikely that an aggressor would succeed with a knock-out blow. An opportunity would thus be given for the various methods of conciliation and pacification to be brought into play. They also struck out Lloyd George's references to alliances and the threat they might pose to other states, a ballot system to limit the effective strength of conscript armies, and a limitation of machinery for the production of war material. Instead of Lloyd George's call for a limitation of material and stocks of material held in reserve, they substituted a far more anaemic proposal for the publication of full information as to men and material held in reserve. They made two significant additions. The British delegates should make a full statement on the reductions which had already been effected by the United Kingdom and they should state that any further reductions by Britain must be part of an international agreement. They would bear in mind that it might be necessary to reconsider whether Britain's low level of armaments could be maintained at that level if other powers did not make comparable reductions. They also proposed that the system of supervision imposed on Germany by the Versailles treaty should be replaced by the system outlined in the draft disarmament convention.[1]

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1. The Inter-Allied Commission of Military Control established to enforce the terms of the peace treaty had been withdrawn in 1927 but disagreements between Britain and France in the years 1925 to 1927 had prevented the establishment of a League regime of supervision, as envisaged in the treaty, to take its place.

The 1931 Three Party Committee on Disarmament has no parallels in recent British political history. It was, as one of its Conservative members put it, a remarkable example of inter-party co-operation on a vital question of imperial policy.[1] It ostensibly achieved what the League of Nations Union had set out to accomplish a decade earlier, a national consensus on disarmament which cut across party differences.[2] Contemporary observers witnessing the Commons disarmament debate on 29 June 1931 and the League of Nations Union Albert Hall demonstration less than two weeks later can be forgiven for assuming that the three political parties were united in their desire for disarmament.[3] It was ironical that at precisely the moment British public opinion should become convinced of the importance of general disarmament its leaders, with very few exceptions,[4] should come to feel so overwhelmed by the obstacles as to regard the exercise as largely futile. 'The more I read and hear the less do I see any way through the difficulties', Austen Chamberlain wrote on 12 June 1931.[5] Though the Three Party Committee agreed on a specific set of proposals that agreement masked considerable differences of opinion and, more significantly, a mood of deep disenchantment with disarmament. If the British public was so insular as to be largely unaware of the dangerous trends of opinion in France and Germany their leaders were not entirely ignorant of the European situation.

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1. Sir Samuel Hoare, later Viscount Templewood. Viscount Templewood: Nine Troubled Years, London, 1954, p. 118.

2. On 18 July 1931 Austen Chamberlain informed his sister, Ida Chamberlain: 'We have...agreed on a statement of principles which has received the approval of our Conservative colleagues.' Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/548.

3. The comments expressed by A. J. Toynbee in Survey of International Affairs, 1931, (London, 1932, p. 290) reveal how easily informed observers were deceived by the unanimity of the political parties expressed on the public platform.

4. It was the leaders of the Liberal party, Lloyd George, Samuel and Lothian, who refused to be overwhelmed by the difficulties.

5. Austen Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/540.

There is nothing in the Minutes of the Three Party Committee which would lead us to question Chamberlain's assessment: 'From first to last the Government members of the Committee have not contributed a single word - literally not a single word - to the statement.'[1] MacDonald's diaries contain but two brief references to the committee and disarmament scarcely figures in them at all during the whole of 1931.[2] Henderson, 'all blather and mush' so far as Chamberlain was concerned,[3] did play a more significant role behind the scenes, keeping in close touch with the Liberals and working with Cecil to achieve practical results.[4] None the less it is an interesting reflection on contemporary politics that the two Opposition parties should play so prominent a part in the formulation of policy and that the Labour members, identified much more closely with disarmament in the public mind, should contribute so little.[5]

Any assessment of the government's performance must be set beside the growing demoralisation of the Labour movement in the years 1930 to

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1. Austen Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 18 July 1931, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/548.
2. MacDonald's only references to the committee are to the part Lloyd George chose to play, 18 March and 7 May 1931, PRO 30/69/8/1.
3. Austen Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 18 July 1931, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 5/1/548.
4. Dalton Diaries, 28 April and 3 June 1931; Lothian to Lloyd George, 10 July 1931, Lothian Papers, GD 40/17/257.
5. MacDonald threw some light on the role he had chosen to play when he informed Cecil on 6 July 1931 that it seemed to him that the country which went into the disarmament conference with a minimum of preconceived plans and figures would achieve the best results. Malcolm MacDonald a month later informed Cecil that his father favoured the abolition of certain weapons but was opposed to percentage reductions in defence expenditure. Cecil Papers, BL Add. Mss. 51081. It is noteworthy that on the Conservative side Hoare obtained the assistance of Basil Liddell Hart who, though a foremost military authority and writer, was active as an advocate of disarmament in League of Nations Union conferences in 1931 and 1932. See B. H. Liddell Hart: Memoirs, Vol. 1, London, 1965, pp. 183-4.

1931. Morale in the Labour party was low after Mosley's defection[1] and Trevelyan's resignation.[2] Though few were aware of how serious the financial situation had become, mounting unemployment and the government's helplessness bred acute disillusionment. For a short time the spirits of the parliamentary Labour party and the Cabinet revived when Henderson and Alexander returned from Paris and Rome with the bases of a naval disarmament agreement between France and Italy and news of the Gandhi-Irwin talks reached London but there were no striking successes in foreign policy to compensate for the gloom and despondency on the domestic front.[3]

When the Three Party Committee completed its work on 15 July 1931 Germany was in the grips of a serious financial crisis whose repercussions were to contribute to the fall of the second Labour government less than six weeks later. Disarmament was eclipsed, as it had been for some time, by other, more pressing considerations. Nevertheless the ramifications of the international financial crisis had a direct bearing on the government's attitude to disarmament. France's short-sighted refusal to accept the Hoover proposals for a one-year moratorium on all reparations payments and intergovernmental debts, coming as it did after her uncompromising opposition to proposals for an Austro-German Customs Union, angered and embittered MacDonald and did nothing to make the British government more sympathetic to France's disarmament

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1. Sir Oswald Mosley, who as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had, under the Lord Privy Seal, J. H. Thomas, some responsibility for the formulation of unemployment policy, resigned in May 1930 when the Cabinet finally rejected his memorandum which contained a set of imaginative 'Keynesian' proposals to protect employment and create new jobs. When later he formed the New Party he took with him from the ranks of the parliamentary Labour party, albeit momentarily, four or five Labour MPs.

2. Sir Charles Trevelyan, President of the Board of Education, resigned in March 1931 not simply because of the government's failure to raise the school-leaving age to fifteen but because he felt that the government was not applying socialist policies to meet the economic crisis.

3. See especially Dalton's diary comments for 8 March 1931.

proposals of 15 July 1931. On 11 July MacDonald wrote: 'The behaviour of the French has been inconceivably atrocious...when she found we were not to be her tool and partner, she tried to scratch us. We have put a virago into authority in Europe.'[1] The events of July-August 1931 were to exacerbate relations between the two European countries on whom the success of the world disarmament conference would chiefly depend.

The National government, formed in the last week of August 1931 to solve Britain's financial crisis, at first felt in no position to take fresh initiatives in the field of disarmament. It approved its predecessor's decision to refer one or two outstanding questions to the Chiefs of Staff and appointed a non-ministerial inter-departmental committee to continue the preparatory work for the disarmament conference.[2] With the exception of the Foreign Office representatives, the members of that committee demonstrated an almost total lack of sympathy with disarmament.[3]

A far different attitude was adopted by the Cabinet committee set up after the National government won a resounding electoral victory on 27 October 1931.[4] Chaired by the new Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, they were more radical than any previous Cabinet or CID committee on disarmament. Only the uncompromising opposition of their professional Service advisers prevented them from advocating the abolition of

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1. MacDonald Diaries, 11 July 1931, PRO 30/69/8/1.
2. C.48(31), 26 August 1931, CAB 23/67 and C.71(31), 6 October 1931, CAB 23/68.
3. Their minutes and report, 27 November 1931, are in CAB 16/104. The committee was chaired by Cadogan and consisted of representatives from the Foreign Office, Treasury, Dominions Office, Colonial Office and the three Services.
4. C.80(31), 20 November 1931, CAB 23/69. The committee consisted of the Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon (Chairman), the Secretary of State for War, Viscount Hailsham, the Secretary of State for the Dominions, J. H. Thomas, the Secretary of State for Air, Marquess of Londonderry, and the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell.

military aircraft and tanks and only the difficulty in setting a deadline from recommending an all-round percentage reduction in armaments. They frankly recognised that Britain's delegation would not be able to persuade other powers to reduce their armaments by telling them that Britain could make no further reductions. With little sense of realism they suggested that the only solution was to offer 'added' security on condition that the beneficiaries reduced their armaments to the same level as Britain or to a level which Britain regarded as satisfactory. Britain would thus have determined the level of armaments in those countries she proposed to assist, a suggestion which was not likely to commend itself to other powers. The report concluded by stating that the most practical contribution Britain could make to European security would be to participate in a Locarno-style Mediterranean agreement.[1]

Though the committee made seven positive proposals for disarmament[2] and recognised the connection between security and disarmament what they were prepared to offer was too little and too late. In the years 1927 to 1930 when it was on the agenda of international politics, a Locarno-style Mediterranean agreement would scarcely have satisfied either France or Italy. By 1931 it was largely irrelevant. The scene had shifted. Germany's bid for equality of armaments occupied the centre of the stage.[3] Only briefly and inadequately did the committee address themselves to this, the most crucial, issue facing the powers in the years 1931 to 1933. Their recommendations, which if they had been made five or ten years earlier might have made a significant contribution to the disarmament debate, had by 1931 been overtaken by events.

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1. CP 5(32), 11 January 1932, CAB 27/476.
2. They proposed (1) the abolition of submarines, (2) a reduction in the maximum displacement and armament of capital ships, (3) the abolition of gas and other chemical weapons, (4) the abolition of conscription, (5) the prohibition of land guns of above a certain calibre, (6) budgetary limitation complemented by the other methods proposed in the draft disarmament convention, (7) the establishment of a permanent disarmament commission.
3. E. W. Bennett: German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933, passim.

C O N C L U S I O N

It was almost inevitable that disarmament should be embraced by a large and influential section of the pacifically-minded British people in the aftermath of the First World War.[1] All other preventives of war paled into insignificance for a generation which had come to believe that armaments caused war. It was not, however, the pressure of public opinion which set Britain on the road to disarmament. Within a matter of months of the end of the war the Lloyd George government had committed Britain in word and deed to a policy of disarmament.[2] Long before the League of Nations Union or any other pressure group began to campaign for disarmament the Treasury, the Cabinet and even its Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, had become convinced that large reductions in national armaments were vital if Britain was to be saved from bankruptcy, another arms race and, perhaps, a second major war.[3] It was not until 1921 that the League of Nations Union, the parliamentary spokesmen of the Independent Liberals and the Labour party, and the Press began to put strong pressure on the government to work for an arms limitation agreement.[4] In the autumn of 1921 disarmament was for a brief period a universal aspiration of the British people. It was not merely a response of a nation in deep revolt against the horrors of modern warfare. It was more importantly a consequence of Britain's reduced power, wealth and status in the post-war world.

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1. For the important distinction between pacificism and pacifism and the pacificist mood of the British people after 1918 see M. Ceadel: Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945; The Defining of a Faith, Oxford, 1980, pp. 1-8, 60-2.
2. See pp. 142-53, 170.
3. See pp. 168-72.
4. See pp. 22-25, 49-50, 74-5, 84-7, 173-91.

The case for disarmament was admirably put by Lloyd George to the Cabinet on 5 August 1919.[1] It was to be put again by the Treasury more than ten years later on the eve of the 1930 London naval conference. 'The Treasury submit that it is in the best interests of this country, from a naval as well as a financial point of view, to secure an all-round reduction in the size of armaments. Our security in an emergency depends in the last resort on the superiority of our naval forces but we can no longer afford to spend as much as we have hitherto on our Navy; and unless other Powers can be induced to spend less, the danger is that our pre-eminence should be gradually taken from us, or that an overwhelming burden of expenditure should be imposed on the tax payer.'[2]

Between 1919 and 1923 large reductions were made in Britain's defence expenditure. In 1918 Britain was the most powerful air power in the world. Within a few years of the end of the war she had sunk to fifth place in the league of air powers.[3] Britain pursued a policy of piecemeal, unilateral disarmament. Whether these reductions seriously weakened British diplomacy is open to question. What is not in dispute is that well-informed observers such as Haldane, Sir Frederick Maurice and Sir William Tyrrell all believed this to be the case.[4] From 1924 to 1931 British defence expenditure rose steadily in real terms[5] yet Hankey, MacDonald and several of his colleagues were convinced in 1930 that Britain's power and prestige had suffered as a result of the unilateral disarmament policies of successive British governments.[6]

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1. See p. 170.

2. CP 12(30), 16 December 1929, CAB 24/209.

3. H.M.Hyde and G.R.F.Nuttall: Air Defence and the Civil Population, London, 1937, pp. 12-13; C.K. Webster and N. Frankland: The Strategic Offensive Against Germany, 1939-1945, Vol.1, London, 1961, pp. 52-64.

4. F.Maurice: Haldane, The Life of Viscount Haldane of Cloan, 1915-1928, Vol. II, London, 1939, pp. 126, 144 and 159; Daily News, 28 June 1923 and p. 251 above; K. Middlemas and J. Barnes: Baldwin, p. 206 and p. 249 above.

5. See Appendix I.

6. See p. 328.

Although economy in public expenditure was the over-riding consideration in the formulation of British disarmament policy in the years 1919 to 1931 other factors were of almost equal importance. Disarmament was a strategic device to reduce the military, naval and air capability of Britain's rivals and so enhance her own relative power. Any challenge which the United States and Japan might pose to British imperial interests would be diminished if they could be persuaded to limit their naval forces. Similarly Britain's influence in Europe would be in inverse proportion to the military might of France and the other continental land powers. Furthermore, the smaller the air forces maintained by her near neighbours on the continent of Europe the less vulnerable to air attack would Britain be. Disarmament was an essential component of Britain's foreign and defence policies.

Only the United States, however, could ensure the success of a major disarmament conference. This was the lesson to be drawn from the 1921-1922 Washington conference.[1] Though American statesmen were prepared to make concessions in 1929 which paved the way for the conclusion of the London naval treaty in 1930, never again was the United States to use all the resources of her power, authority and influence to achieve an important arms limitation agreement.

By 1922 it was clear that though the United States and Japan could be induced to limit their naval armaments the continental European powers were unwilling to enter into an arms limitation agreement without additional guarantees of their security. By repudiating the 1919 peace settlement, including the guarantee to France, the United States had removed the lynch pin of the League system on which international disarmament had been predicated by the architects of the Covenant. Only a minority of Englishmen were prepared to countenance ambitious schemes

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1. See p. 189.

like the draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol to shore up the edifice which the United States had undermined. Furthermore, Britain was reluctant to take any action which might bring her into conflict with the United States or lead her to forfeit American goodwill.[1] As the disarmament movement gathered momentum, government and public alike drew back from commitments which might involve Britain in a multitude of quarrels.

France's refusal to agree to the abolition of submarines at the Washington conference, the abysmal failure of the 1922 Genoa conference to promote European pacification, and the widening rift between Britain and France in the years 1922 and 1923 had a profound effect on British public opinion. Many became disenchanted with disarmament. Arms limitation ceased to have the same appeal to official and public opinion. Balfour, Hankey and other erstwhile advocates became sceptical, if not hostile. The Service departments and to some extent the Foreign Office obstructed progress. The Press was lukewarm. A section of the Conservative party did not conceal its contempt for disarmament and most Conservatives never gave the impression that they regarded disarmament as a matter of extreme urgency.[2] The Labour party was unable to formulate a disarmament policy which could command the full allegiance of both its internationalists and unilateralists.[3] Both parties shied away from policies which involved continental commitments. Only the Liberals consistently championed general disarmament.[4] It is not, therefore, altogether surprising that in the middle years of the 1920s Britain's voice at Geneva was hesitant and uncertain.

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1. Though the second Baldwin government did very little to cultivate good Anglo-American relations its attitude to the Geneva Protocol was influenced by American susceptibilities.
2. See pp. 50-3.
3. See pp. 64-9.
4. See pp. 73-8.

No British government of the inter-war years made any attempt to equate Britain's armaments with her responsibilities under the League and Locarno. Though the Foreign Office placed Britain's responsibilities to the League at the head of its list of commitments in 1926,[1] no Chiefs of Staff review of British defence needs set out to assess what these might mean in terms of British naval, military and air power.

As the French right-wing political commentator André Géraud (Pertinax) pointed out to a Chatham House audience in November 1929, Britain expected Europe to behave like a family who, having lost their possessions in a fire, refused to renew their insurance premium on the grounds that their new home was built of fire-proof materials. British policy was based on the most favourable hypothesis.[2] There is some force in the contention of one of the executants of British policy in the 1920s, Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, who wrote a generation later: 'Never in our history has there been a more flagrant case of muddled thinking and self-deception.'[3]

Britain sought not so much to lay the foundations of a new international order as to minimise the risks she would have to face in the post-war world. The danger which haunted the minds of the British people after 1918 was that armaments and armed alliances might spark off another arms race and plunge Britain into a second major conflict. Few, therefore, believed in elaborately conceived schemes for collective security. In December 1927 Baldwin responded to the Ponsonby Peace Letter[4] by stating: 'You cannot strengthen the League by weakening the British Empire' and in the event of unprovoked aggression he promised that 'the mighty weight of Great Britain' would be thrown into the scales against the aggressor.[5]

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1. DBFP, Series IA, Vol. I, Appendix.
2. Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Vol. IX, No. 2.
3. I. Kirkpatrick: The Inner Circle, London, 1959, p. 38.
4. See p. 111.
5. The Times, 21 December 1927.

Subsequent British policies were to belie Baldwin's pledge. Though British defence expenditure more than trebled between 1932 and 1938 Britain was no more disposed to guarantee the security of Europe in the 1930s than she had been in the previous decade. Isolationist sentiment and an exaggerated sense of her weakness prevented Britain from intervening 'prominently, promptly and with authority' on behalf of peace. Minimum initiative might mean minimum provocation but it led to minimal success in maintaining peace.

Outside Europe Britain no longer had the wealth and the political will to play the part of premier world power in a community of highly armed states. In the 1920s some advocates of disarmament saw that arms limitation might arrest Britain's decline as a world power and provide her with a new role before the loss of empire left her bereft of influence in the world.[1] When the Foreign Office scrutinised the Geneva Protocol in the winter of 1925, however, only its historical adviser, Sir James Headlam-Morley, suggested that Britain might have a direct and vital interest in the peace and stability of central and eastern Europe.[2] Mesmerised by her imperial role and resolved to avoid a repetition of the carnage she had suffered on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918, she neglected the claims of European security to focus her energies on the responsibilities of empire. Fourteen years later in 1939 she was obliged to honour a continental commitment and so hasten the dissolution of her empire.

In 1914 Britain had gone to war to maintain the balance of power in Europe and to break the power of Prussian militarism. Throughout the war years Britain's statesmen believed that there could be no

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1. P. J. Noel-Baker: The Geneva Protocol, pp. 3-4; Cf. P. J. Noel-Baker: Disarmament and the Coolidge Conference, London, 1927, pp. 33-43.
2. J. Headlam-Morley: Studies in Diplomatic History, London, 1930, pp.171-6; Anne Orde: Great Britain and International Security, 1920-1926, pp.70-80.

enduring peace so long as there was a highly militarised society in the centre of Europe.[1] German militarism was not, however, eradicated in 1918. It was to survive to sow the seeds of a second world war. In the 1920s those who had grown up amid the Victorian solidities of nineteenth century England were among the last to understand those forces in German society which were undermining the 1919 peace settlement and the democratic order in Germany.

It would be wrong, none the less, to exaggerate the extent to which violations of the Versailles treaty's disarmament clauses had the full support of the German people. Though the pacifist mood which swept through Germany in the first agony of defeat was of short duration most ordinary Germans did not want war. So consistent was the opposition of the Social Democrats in Prussia to rearmament that one of the main objectives of the Reichswehr was to destroy their power and influence.[2] Nevertheless, no democratic government in Germany could justify to its people a state of permanent military inferiority.

When Noel-Baker asked Churchill in the Commons debate on disarmament in June 1931: 'Is he going to allow Germany to rearm? This is the fundamental question in European politics today',[3] he was pointing to a central dilemma of British policy in the years 1919 to 1931. Cecil, Chamberlain and others had frequently argued that unless a general disarmament agreement was concluded in a relatively short space of time the pressure for rearmament in Germany would assume unmanageable proportions.[4] It has been argued with some cogency that had a comprehensive disarmament agreement been concluded as late as 1932 it might well have averted a second world war.[5]

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1. See pp. 119 and 125.
2. H. A. L. Fisher in The Background Issues of the War, Oxford, 1940, pp.10-11; E. W. Bennett: German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933, pp. 89-91, 507.
3. 254 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 977, 29 June 1931.
4. See p. 279.
5. B. H. Liddell Hart: Deterrence or Defence, London, 1960, pp. 250-1.

There were only two options open to Britain in the 1920s. One was to pursue a policy of 'preparedness' to complement 'the free hand' and 'no commitments'. The other was to promote general disarmament and collective security with all the authority, power and influence at her command. The first was politically unacceptable to a parsimonious House of Commons and a 'pacificist' public opinion. In addition, it risked the danger of provoking a new arms race in which Britain might be the eventual loser. The second would not have been readily accepted by public opinion. It involved huge risks and a high price but would these have been any greater than those she was forced to bear in the Second World War? By vacillating between the two policies, Britain neither had sufficient armaments to fend off a challenge to her empire nor did she make any significant contribution to general disarmament.

In a Commons debate in July 1927 Dalton warned Chamberlain that there would be a terrible indictment to answer at the bar of history if through lack of vision, vigour, imagination and leadership the Baldwin Cabinet betrayed their trust.[1] More than fifty years later it is difficult to find any adequate justification for the policy pursued by the second Baldwin government at the Geneva naval conference and in the League Preparatory Commission.[2] These were years of comparative tranquillity and stability. The League was an established institution. There was growing support for the League and disarmament in Britain. The government had a large majority in the Commons and the support of the Opposition parties for pro-disarmament policies. War was universally regarded as an indefensible instrument of national policy. After Locarno Britain was to a large extent umpire and arbiter in the European balance of power.[3]

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1. 208 HC Debs. 5th Series, col. 1840, 11 July 1927.
2. See pp. 202-208, 306-11.
3. W. S. Churchill: The Second World War, Vol. I, The Gathering Storm, London, 1948, pp. 27-28.

With no great war clouds on the horizon these were the most auspicious years between the two world wars. It was absurd to refuse to concede parity to the United States in 1927.[1] It was equally foolish to oppose international inspection in the Preparatory Commission.[2] It was short-sighted to withhold support for budgetary limitation and the direct limitation of war material[3] which Britain was subsequently to advocate. It is difficult to see what Britain could have lost if she had agreed to these proposals in the Commission. Gibson's initiative in April 1929 was to strengthen rather than weaken American diplomacy[4] and there is no reason to think that Britain's prestige would not also have been enhanced by bold, conditional offers at Geneva.

By 1929, however, most of the Press, many of the spokesmen of the three political parties, and a number of highly organised pressure groups, including the League of Nations Union, were calling for concerted and determined efforts to achieve general disarmament.[5] Between 1926 and 1929 the League of Nations Union promoted one of the most successful campaigns in British political history to mobilise a large and articulate section of the population behind disarmament.[6] Such was the effectiveness of its agitation that it forced Britain's political leaders to treat disarmament as a matter of some urgency.

In its first nine months in office the second Labour government responded readily and energetically to the popular demand for disarmament but the partial failure of the London naval conference in 1930 demonstrated that more was required to achieve general disarmament than the will of the British people. The conference revealed the weakness of Britain's

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1. See p. 206.
2. See pp. 293, 297 and 301.
3. See pp. 296, 311-12.
4. See p. 321.
5. See pp. 35, 38-40, 78-9, 116-17.
6. See pp. 95-101.

negotiating position. She was unable to persuade the United States to abolish or even reduce the size of battleships nor could she bring sufficient pressure to bear on France and Italy to accept an equitable settlement of their differences.[1] From the summer of 1930 disarmament was no longer a first priority of the second Labour government. Other factors besides the London naval conference, including the deepening economic recession and Mosley's defection, contributed to the government's malaise. None the less the advocates of disarmament did not slacken their efforts. In the year preceding the world disarmament conference there was a great upsurge in popular support for disarmament.[2] Popular emotions ran faster and further than expert opinion. That the world disarmament conference came so near to success in the uncongenial international climate of 1932[3] was due more to popular support than to any other single factor. Though the British people were not alone in articulating a strong popular demand for disarmament, in no other country of the world was the agitation so brilliantly organised and the arguments for disarmament so eloquently expressed.

In the immediate post-war years when European society lay in ruins, its political and social fabric undermined by the war, conditions were not conducive to disarmament. These were, however, the years in which British diplomacy was directed towards securing a substantial reduction in national armaments. By the middle years of the 1920s Europe had to a large extent recovered from the war and its peoples and governments were more favourably disposed towards the limitation of armaments yet it was in these years that Britain did more to obstruct than promote international disarmament.

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1. See p. 223.
2. See pp. 102-104.
3. B. H. Liddell Hart: Deterrent or Defence, pp. 236, 250-1, and Memoirs, Vol. 1, London, 1965, pp. 191-207; Philip Noel-Baker: The First World Disarmament Conference, 1932-1933, pp. 77-134; A. C. Temperley: The Whispering Gallery of Europe, pp. 200-58; J. W. Wheeler-Bennett: The Disarmament Deadlock, London, 1934, pp. 32-34.

The disarmament movement in Britain failed not simply because conditions in Europe and the world made arms limitation without comprehensive security guarantees an elusive goal of international politics. For only two brief periods on the eve of the Washington conference and in the autumn of 1929 did disarmament capture the hearts and minds of the British people as a whole. Many Conservatives were indifferent to disarmament for much of the period. The Labour party discovered that arbitration was a more unifying peace prescription than disarmament. The disarmament movement was the product of Liberalism but Liberalism as a party was a spent force in British politics. Though the League of Nations Union attracted a large and influential following it failed to capture either of the parties of government. It was, moreover, essentially a middle class movement making only a peripheral impact on working class politics. Post-war British pacificism was essentially isolationist not internationalist.[1] Consequently as in all other aspects of national policy the British people had the disarmament policy they were prepared to pay for and in the course of time reaped the consequences.[2]

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1. M. Ceadel: Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945, pp. 62-86.
2. M. Beloff: Foreign Policy and the Democratic Process, Baltimore, 1955, p. 49.

BRITISH DEFENCE EXPENDITURE, 1919-1931

A. Adjusted to the Wholesale Price Index

Year	Wholesale Price Index	Actual Defence Expenditure £m.	Adjusted to 1913 Prices £m.	Adjusted to 1919 Prices £m.	Adjusted to 1931 Prices £m.
1913	27	77.1	77.1	197.0	80.0
1919	69	620.2	242.7	620.2	251.7
1920	83	277.6	90.3	230.8	93.6
1921	53	175.2	89.3	228.1	92.6
1922	43	116.4	73.1	186.8	75.8
1923	43	110.6	69.4	177.5	72.0
1924	45	113.4	68.0	173.9	70.6
1925	43	119.5	75.0	191.8	77.8
1926	40	115.3	77.8	198.9	80.7
1927	38	116.5	82.8	211.5	85.8
1928	38	113.7	80.8	206.5	83.8
1929	37	113.3	82.7	211.3	85.7
1930	32	109.5	92.4	236.1	95.8
1931	28	106.9	103.1	263.4	106.9

B. Adjusted to the Retail Price Index

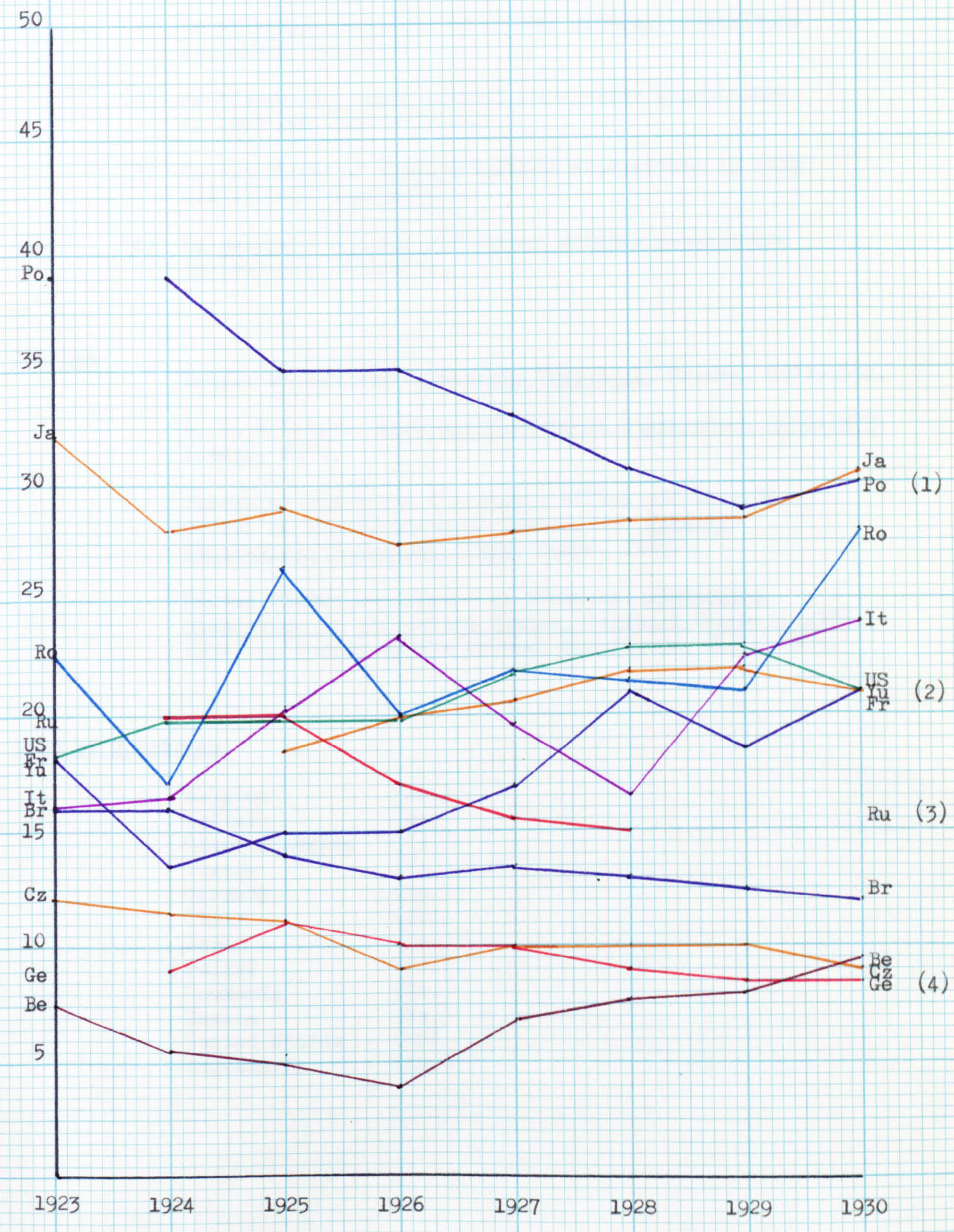
Year	Retail Price Index	Actual Defence Expenditure £m.	Adjusted to 1913 Prices £m.	Adjusted to 1919 Prices £m.	Adjusted to 1931 Prices £m.
1913	21	77.1	77.1	187.2	128.5
1919	51	620.2	255.4	620.2	425.6
1920	58	277.6	100.5	244.1	167.5
1921	53	175.2	69.4	168.6	115.7
1922	43	116.4	56.8	138.1	94.7
1923	41	110.6	56.6	137.6	94.4
1924	41	113.4	58.1	141.1	96.8
1925	41	119.5	61.2	148.7	102.0
1926	40	115.3	60.5	147.0	100.9
1927	39	116.5	62.7	152.3	104.6
1928	39	113.7	61.2	148.7	102.0
1929	39	113.3	61.0	148.2	101.7
1930	37	109.5	62.1	150.9	103.6
1931	35	106.9	64.1	155.8	106.9

Sources: 315 HC Debs. 5th Series, cols. 230, 257-8, 21 July 1936 and Key Statistics of the British Economy, 1900-1962 produced by the London and Cambridge Economic Service for The Times Review of Industry and Technology.

Notes: The wholesale price index is taken from the Board of Trade Journal which though it covers goods in all stages of processing gives predominance to raw material costs. The retail price index is a cost of living index calculated by the Ministry of Labour and based on working class expenditure in 1914. It is, therefore, a far less useful measurement of real defence costs than the wholesale price index.

Appendix II

Defence Expenditure as a Percentage of Total Central Government Expenditure



Defence Expenditure as a Percentage of Total Central Government Expenditure

Notes and Sources

(1) No reliable estimates of Polish defence expenditure available for 1923.

(2) No figure for total central government expenditure in 1923 and 1924 available.

(3) No estimates of Russian defence expenditure in 1923 and 1929-30 available.

(4) No reliable figures for German defence expenditure in 1923 are available.

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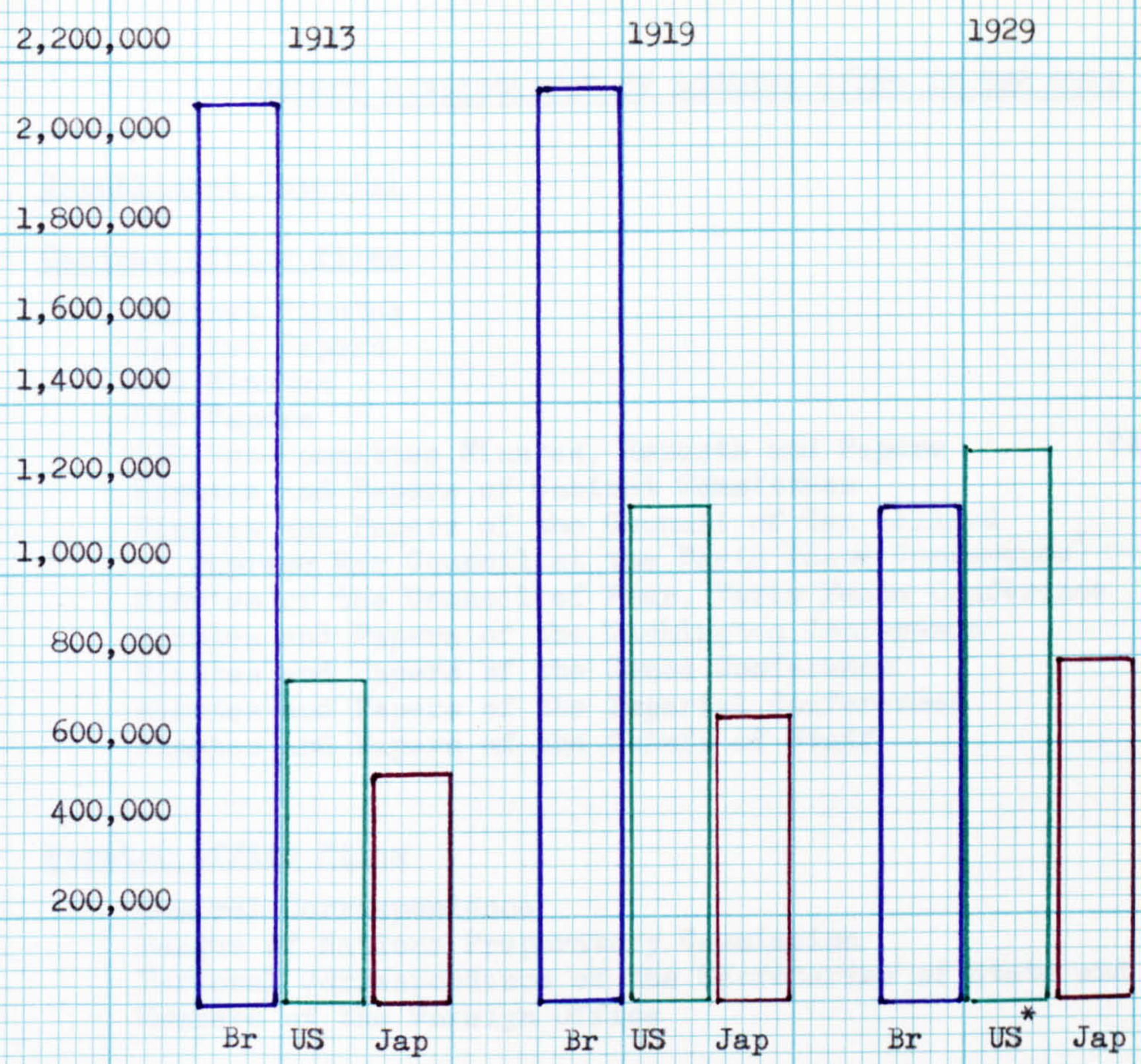
Belgium	(Be.)
Britain	(Br.)
Czechoslovakia	(Cz.)
France	(Fr.)
Germany	(Ge.)
Italy	(It.)
Japan	(Ja.)
Poland	(Po.)
Roumania	(Ro.)
Russia	(Ru.)
United States	(US)
Yugoslavia	(Yu.)

Military Effectives, 1923 - 1930

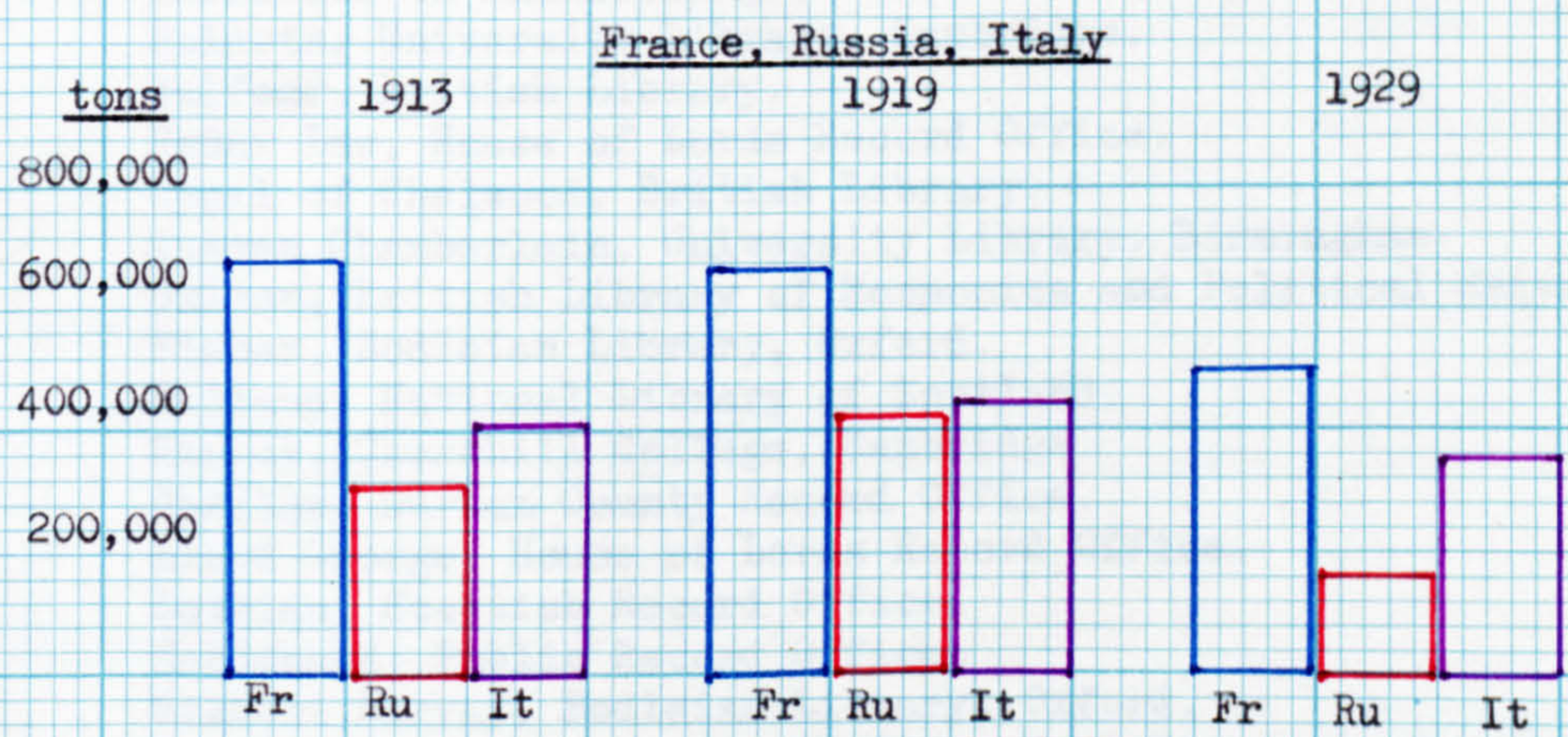
(1.) 1930 numbers computed on a different basis from earlier estimates and, therefore, omitted.

Source: League of Nations Armaments Year-Book, Geneva, 1924 - 1932.

Gross Tonnage of Six Naval Powers, 1913 - 1929



* Between 1929 and 1930 the gross tonnage of the United States Navy was reduced from 1,304,000 to 1,038,000 tons.



Source: League of Nations: Armaments Year-Book, Geneva, 1924 - 1932.

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Minutes and Papers of the Genoa Conference	CAB 31
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