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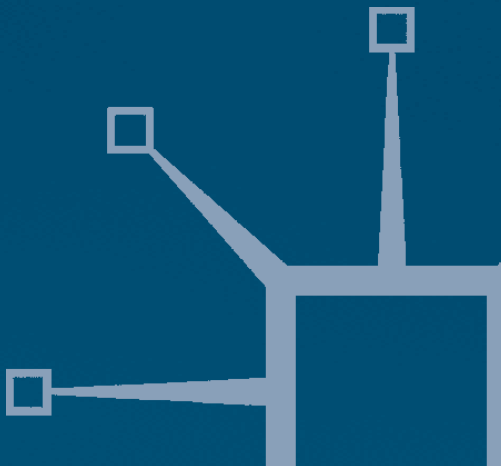
# The Paris Peace Conference, 1919

## Peace without Victory?

Michael Dockrill and John Fisher



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# The Paris Peace Conference, 1919

## Peace without Victory?

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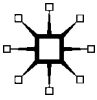



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# Notes on the Contributors

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**The Rt Hon. Lord Hurd of Westwell** retired as Foreign Secretary in July 1995, after a distinguished career in government spanning 16 years. After positions as Minister of State in the Foreign Office and the Home Office, he served as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1984 to 1985, Home Secretary from 1985 to 1989 and Foreign Secretary from 1989 to 1995. Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, Lord Hurd obtained a first-class degree in History and was President of the Cambridge Union in 1952. After joining the Diplomatic Service, he went on to serve at the British Embassy in Peking, New York (UN) and Rome. He ran Edward Heath's private office from 1968 to 1970 and acted as his Political Secretary from 1970 to 1974. He was MP for Mid-Oxfordshire from 1974 to 1997. He was created a life peer in 1997. Douglas Hurd has been interested in reading history all his life – and sometimes writing it. His first book, *The Arrow War*, was a well-received account of the Second Anglo-Chinese War (1856–1860). His first-hand account of Mr Heath's government, 1970–74, *An End to Promises,* remains an important source for later historians. His latest books are *The Search for Peace* (an account of modern diplomacy with the 1996 BBC TV series), *The Shape of Ice* (a novel, 1998) and *Ten Minutes to Turn the Devil* (a collection of short stories).

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**Keith Robbins** is Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales, Lampeter, and currently Senior Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales. He has held Chairs in History at the University of Wales, Bangor, and the University of Glasgow. He is a member of the Arts and Humanities Research Board and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He has written widely on twentieth-century British and international history. His publications include *Munich 1938* (1968), *Sir Edward Grey* (1971), *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870–1975* (1983), *The World Since 1945: a Concise History* (1998) and *Bibliography of British History 1914–1980* (1996).

**Alan Sharp** is a graduate of the University of Nottingham, which also awarded him his PhD. In 1971 he was appointed Lecturer in History at the New University of Ulster in Coleraine and in 1994 he became Professor of International Studies on the Magee campus of the University of Ulster. In 1998 he was appointed Head of the School of History, Philosophy and Politics. His research has concentrated on British foreign policy after the First World War, with a particular interest in the career of Lord Curzon as foreign secretary. His book, *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris 1919* was published in 1991 and his recent publications include a chapter in M. Boemeke, G. Feldman and E. Glaser (eds), *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment after Twenty Five Years* (1998), two articles in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 'Lord Curzon and British Policy towards the Franco-Belgian Occupation of the Ruhr' (July 1997) and 'James Headlam-Morley: Creating International History' (November 1998) and a chapter on 'Anglo-French Relations from Versailles to Locarno, 1919–1925: the Quest for Security' in the book he edited with Glyn Stone, *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation* (2000).

**Zara Steiner** is Emeritus Fellow at New Hall, Cambridge. She has published books and articles on British policy-makers and policy-making during the twentieth century, and her groundbreaking monograph *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy 1898–1914* (1969) had an immense influence on subsequent scholarship on this subject. Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson have recently revised her *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, first published in 1977, and the revised edition will be published in 2002. Her most recent work, *Of Men and Arms: a History of European International Relations, 1919–1939*, will also be published in 2002.

**Keith Wilson** is Reader in International History at the University of Leeds. His publications include *The Policy of the Entente 1904–1914* (1985), *Empire and the Continent* (1986) and *Channel Tunnel Visions 1850–1945* (1994).

# Preface

It is good news that the papers for the Public Record Office Conference on the Treaty of Versailles are being brought before a wider public. It was highly stimulating to go to this Conference at Kew in 1999 at which the papers were read.

As a former politician and diplomat I had long held a certain view of the Treaty, which owed much to the criticisms at the time of Keynes and Harold Nicolson. Now we can see that the work of later historians produces a fuller and rather less damning account. Certainly mistakes were made, as they have been made by other peacemakers since, but we can better understand the reasons for those mistakes. As a result we may be less scornful of those concerned in international diplomacy.

In the hectic months of peacemaking in 1919 the tension between idealism and reality came to a climax, but neither prevailed. Those of us who in a smaller way have experience of that same tension in lesser conflicts, know that at the end of the day if there is to be peace there has to be a compromise between what morality suggests and what reality dictates. The Treaty of Versailles contained a great array of compromises, some with a longer life than others. The importance of the subject amply repays the energetic scholarship here devoted to it.

THE RT HON. LORD HURD OF WESTWELL

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The organisers of the conference wish to thank the Humanities Board of the British Academy for sponsorship under the British Conference Grant scheme and also to Adam Matthew Publications and Primary Source Media for sponsoring the conference. They thank the Right Hon. Lord Hurd of Westwell, CH., CBE., for agreeing to deliver the keynote address to the conference and Lord Wright of Richmond, formerly Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for hosting the reception at the House of Lords and also Miss Kate Bligh and the staff of the House of Lords Record Office for mounting an exhibition at the House of Lords based on material in the Record Office. They were also grateful to Dr Michael Kandiah of the Institute of Contemporary British History and Professor David Cannadine, Director of the Institute of Historical Research, for advice on advertising and other matters in connection with the conference. Thanks are also due to Professor Wm. Roger Louis, Kerr Professor of English History and Culture at the University of Texas, Austin, and to Dr John Darwin of Nuffield College, Oxford for his paper 'Peacemaking and Empire Building after World War One', which he delivered at the conference. Woodrow Wilson's famous phrase, 'a peace without victory', which was contained in his speech to the US Senate on 22 January 1917, was used in the title of an excellent monograph by Laurence W. Martin *Peace without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the British Liberals* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1958). Professor Martin has kindly agreed to us re-using Wilson's phrase in the title of this volume: we have merely added a question mark.

MICHAEL DOCKRILL AND JOHN FISHER

# Introduction

The essays in this volume derive from a two-day conference in June 1999 at the Public Record Office, Kew, entitled '*A Peace to End Peace': Britain, Versailles and the Legacy of the Paris Peace Conference*, which was held on the eightieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. An earlier conference had taken place at the University of California at Berkeley in May 1994 to reassess the 1919 peace settlement after 75 years. Specialists on the Paris peace conference from the United States, Canada and Europe debated the major historical controversies about the peace conference. Its proceedings were subsequently published in *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment after 75 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), edited by Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser. The conference at Kew was on a smaller scale but papers were presented by leading specialists from Canada, the United States, Hungary and the United Kingdom, some of whom had participated in the conference at Berkeley.

The conference at Kew was largely, but not exclusively, concerned with British policy making in Paris in 1919. Of course the policies of the other major powers at Paris were discussed and analysed: policy making does not take place in a vacuum and the British delegates were engaged in a continuous process of negotiation, adjustment and compromise with the other delegations on a host of European and extra-European issues. Nevertheless the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, played a leading role in Paris and ensured that Britain secured practically all its war aims. The German navy had been interned and then sunk at Scapa Flow. Lloyd George, after a

long and often bitter campaign, had achieved for Britain the promise of a relatively generous proportion of eventual German reparations, and Britain, with the Dominions, had secured mandates over the bulk of the former German colonies in Africa and the Pacific Ocean. Britain had emerged as the predominant power in the Ottoman Empire and its military forces occupied key sectors on the peripheries of the former Russian Empire. Lloyd George had also forced France to abandon its demand for a permanent French occupation of the Rhineland. Finally, a League of Nations was created which conformed to British and American (but not French) *desiderata*.

It is doubtful if these achievements did Britain much good in the long run. After the United States had disavowed the Treaty of Versailles, reparations developed into a major source of tension between Britain and France, something which severely disrupted inter-European relations for nearly five years after the signature of the treaty. Britain's military, financial and economic weaknesses soon forced it to abandon many of its ambitious schemes in the Near and Middle East and in Russia. Although the Treaty of Lausanne with Turkey in 1923 was a signal success for Lord Curzon's diplomacy, it was based on Allied recognition of a Nationalist Turkey which remained in possession of Constantinople – not the intended outcome in 1919. Finally, the guilt which pervaded the British delegation at Paris about the alleged injustices imposed on Germany in the Treaty of Versailles soon influenced a much larger segment of British establishment opinion, especially after the publication of John Maynard Keynes' polemic *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1920). This widespread British sympathy for Germany's alleged mistreatment was of crucial importance in Hitler's progressive destruction of the Treaty after 1933.

While many British, American and German scholars in the interwar period wrote volumes dedicated to proving that Germany had been treated in a vindictive and one-sided fashion in 1919, recent historians have concluded that the settlement, 'whatever its shortcomings, … lent itself to future revision and eventually to an era of temporary stability between 1924 and 1931'. They suggest that, but for the depression, it would have been possible to negotiate further peaceful change after the relaxation of some of the provisions of the Treaty after Locarno. Indeed, the editors of *The Treaty of Versailles*

volume (quoted above) point out that 'scholars, although remaining divided, now tend to view the treaty as the best compromise that the negotiators could have reached in the existing circumstances' (p. 3).

The chapters in the present volume deal with some of the issues discussed above. Thus, in his keynote address, Lord Hurd, himself a former diplomat, a former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and a historian, examined the question of humanitarian intervention in international affairs partly through the perspective of his own experiences of the crisis in Bosnia. Humanitarianism was, of course, long established in human history, but as Lord Hurd points out, Woodrow Wilson initiated the first organised effort to enshrine the concept as a central feature of his 'new' world order. Lord Hurd looked at four key elements related to Woodrow Wilson's thinking and applied them to recent humanitarian efforts in the Balkans and elsewhere. These were first, 'open covenants of peace openly arrived at', second, self determination, third, world organisation and, finally, American leadership. He examined each of these in turn and, while all of them to a greater or lesser degree were found wanting after 1919, he contends that the world has 'slowly and painfully' learned from its earlier mistakes.

Dr Zara Steiner addresses the question of why many popular writers and scholars have continued to condemn the Treaty of Versailles, despite the mitigating features revealed by recent scholarly research. After all, given the circumstances of its birth and the almost impossible task of reconciling idealism with *realpolitik* at Paris, it did produce some substantial achievements: for instance, the territorial settlements (which proved remarkably durable until after 1989). She points to the basic problems which surrounded the settlement from the outset: the German refusal to accept the legitimacy of the treaty, the withdrawal of the United States from the settlement after 1919 and the inability of France and Britain to work together either to enforce the treaty or to correct its worst features between 1919 and 1924. This is followed by Professor Alan Sharp's examination of the roles of Lloyd George and the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, at the conference. While accepting that Balfour seemed lazy and frequently deferred to the Prime Minister, he shows that the Foreign Secretary played a more influential role at Paris than his detractors, such as his successor Lord Curzon, suggested. Furthermore, Lloyd George, contrary to Keynes's accusations, did possess a long-term

vision for a settled and prosperous Europe. The Prime Minister's hopes, however, were shattered by the poisonous effects of the reparations issue, and by the fact that it proved impossible to reconcile self-determination and collective security with the continued existence of the concept of a balance of power.

The next contribution, by Professor Antony Lentin, looks at the widespread influence of 'appeasement' among members of the British delegation at the Paris conference. During the long debates about the draft treaty at the British Empire delegation meetings at the end of May, he points out that the bulk of the British and Imperial ministers condemned the treaty as unworkable and unacceptable. Disillusionment with the Treaty was not restricted to a few idealists such as the South African Jan Christian Smuts. France, of course, was saddled with the blame for what the British regarded as the more objectionable features of the Treaty. In the end, the more far-reaching proposals formulated by the delegation for the revision of the draft treaty were ignored by Lloyd George since they would have entailed negotiating the treaty all over again. Keith Robbins also writes on the theme of appeasement and the Treaty of Versailles. He concentrates on the 'lessons' which British policy makers and writers during the 1930s and the Second World War thought could be learned from 'the mistakes' of 1919. Apart from Germanophobes such as Lord Vansittart, most accepted – without examining any other alternatives – that Germany had indeed been badly treated in 1919.

Keith Neilson deals with an entirely different theme – how the British delegation tried (and failed) to develop a coherent policy towards Russia during the peace conference. It was an intractable problem, made worse by the inability of the military, Foreign Office officials and politicians to find any common ground over the future of Russia. Since none of the great powers were prepared to send more than token military aid to the White forces – except Winston Churchill, who was overruled by Lloyd George – it proved impossible to find a solution and Russia was left to stew in its own juice. Hungary, which embraced Bolshevism under Béla Kun during the peace conference, was similarly abandoned by the peace conference after the failure of the Smuts mission to Budapest in April 1919. However, in Chapter 7, Miklos Lojko shows that after Béla Kun fell from power in August, Britain became closely involved in

Hungarian affairs, chiefly as a result of its interest in expanding its trade in Central Europe. Clerk, on the diplomatic front, sought to establish a democratic Hungarian Government and was impressed by Admiral Horthy, with whom he reached agreement in October 1919 for the establishment of a Hungarian regime which would uphold the civil rights of the Hungarian people. This British success, the first time in history in which Britain had become involved in the politics of Central Europe, was short lived: Horthy soon reneged on his commitments and Britain's role in Hungary thereafter rapidly diminished.

Erik Goldstein examines British policy in the Near East after 1919. Initially it was intended to extend British influence over the entire region. This involved the exclusion of the Turks from Constantinople and the establishment of a Greek military presence in Smyrna to fulfil Lloyd George's search for a Greater Greece which would defend British interests in the eastern Mediterranean. These ambitions perished with the rise of the Turkish nationalists after the Treaty of Sèvres. Strategic and imperial considerations also led to the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. The anticipation that the Jews would, like the Greeks, act as a British proxy soon collapsed when the Jews began demanding their own state and as a result the British found themselves facing increasing conflict between the Arabs and the Jews. In the end, Britain's wider ambitions in the region were drastically scaled down, with Britain retaining its control of Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Ruth Henig discusses the accusations by pro-League of Nations zealots such as Lord Robert Cecil and Smuts that British officials and the military had undermined the nascent League from its inception, while British politicians were at best lukewarm towards the project. She demonstrates that the distinction between the Old and New Diplomacy is misleading: Cecil and Smuts both opposed a superstate, while their League was intended to be an addition to, and not a substitute for, existing diplomatic procedures. Of course, there were many conservatives who had no time for a League and preferred to rely on the British fleet and the balance of power to defend British worldwide interests. Leading British politicians, on the other hand, promoted the virtues of the influence of world public opinion as a means of preserving peace and securing disarmament: an entirely erroneous assumption dictated by the popularity of the

'League ideal' among swathes of conservative, liberal and labour voters. Despite its manifest failure in the mid-1930s, Dr Henig points out that the League did achieve some successes in non-political areas.

Keith Wilson concludes this volume with an examination of the achievement of Sir Austen Chamberlain and J.W. Headlam-Morley of the Foreign Office in securing the publication of documents from the British official archives during the inter-war period. This was partially the result of Chamberlain's unhappiness with the secrecy surrounding the Anglo-French *entente* which, as a result, left the British public in complete ignorance about what British obligations were in the event of war and of the policy options which might have been open to the British government before 1914. From inside the Foreign Office, Headlam-Morley engaged in a long campaign to make Chamberlain's pressure for greater openness a reality. Although Headlam-Morley did not become, as he had hoped, the overall editor of the subsequent volumes of British foreign policy documents which Ramsay MacDonald authorised in 1924, his volume on July 1914 was included in the series, the other volumes of which were eventually edited by two professional historians. Nevertheless, he and Chamberlain had by their persistence achieved something of a breakthrough in making the diplomatic correspondence available to a wider public.

The chapters in this volume have examined many of the problems which faced the peace makers at Paris, and how they were dealt with (or, in the case of Russia, not dealt with). The volume does not claim to present a comprehensive overview of the treaty making. It demonstrates, from new archival and other evidence, the often appalling dilemmas involved in the peace process and of the often crucial importance of individual politicians and officials in the resolution of some of those problems.

MICHAEL DOCKRILL AND JOHN FISHER

# 1

# The Rise and Fall of Morality in Peace Making

*The Rt Hon. Lord Hurd of Westwell*

By foresight or good fortune this is a particularly apt moment to revive discussion of the Treaty of Versailles. At the Peace Conference of 1919 which led to that Treaty the world saw the first determined effort by a Western leader, President Wilson, to impose a pattern of humanitarian idealism on world affairs. We now revisit that Conference immediately after Britain and the West have engaged in two humanitarian efforts in the former Yugoslavia. Neither in Bosnia nor in Kosovo could anyone allege that we were acting to further our own strategic or economic interests, since in both cases these were negligible. The motive was unselfish and humanitarian.

Neither the Treaty of Versailles nor peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia or in Kosovo achieved their primary objective. As regards the first, Harold Nicolson wrote in his account of 1919 'We came to Paris convinced that the new order was about to be established; we left it convinced that the new order had merely fouled the old'. In Bosnia and in Kosovo we tried to avert a humanitarian catastrophe. In Kosovo strenuous efforts were made to learn the right lessons from the experience in Bosnia. The resulting action has been quicker, more decisive – and more destructive – than its predecessor. Both in Bosnia and in Kosovo the humanitarian catastrophe which we set out to prevent did in fact occur. Thousands of families were massacred and driven from their homes despite our efforts. It remained and remains for the West to repair as best we can the destruction and to heal the wounds. As a result we are now establishing in Kosovo a protectorate with even more emphatic powers, military and civilian, than the existing protectorate which we still sustain in Bosnia.

More widely, we have in practice, for humanitarian reasons, entered into a commitment for the peace and good governance of the Balkans in general, the magnitude of which task has not yet been fully understood. It will engage our armed forces, our administrators and our aid programmes for many years to come. President Wilson would have been amazed at the technology of the war in Kosovo, but he would have approved of its principle and of the determined effort which now follows the initial failure.

The doctrine of humanitarian intervention in international affairs did not begin with President Wilson's famous Fourteen Points, set-out in January 1918. Before that Britain had intervened across the world to close down the slave trade, something from which we had ourselves benefited largely in the preceding century. Gladstone had thundered against the Turks in the Midlothian campaign, though it is not clear that the Bulgarians for whom he was speaking benefited in any way from his distant eloquence as Leader of the Opposition. But Wilson's Fourteen Points and his subsequent effort between the Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles marked the first serious attempt to recreate international order with humanitarian principles as its foundation. Scholars continue to reach different verdicts both on that effort and the disillusion which followed. I do not want to follow down that path here. Rather, I would like to identify four elements present in President Wilson's thinking and see how they continue to apply in the fresh effort being made today. These four elements are first, open covenants openly arrived at; second, self-determination as a governing factor in defining frontiers; third, the harnessing of world opinion into international organisations, and fourth, American leadership.

President Wilson proclaimed the need for open diplomacy in reaction against the secret treaties which his allies had negotiated during the war in order to ensure victory. In practice he found he could not escape from these treaties. Nor did he himself show any sign of wishing to negotiate in the open when the peace-making began in Paris. All those concerned in Paris turned out to be as anxious to keep members of the press in the dark about their deliberations as their predecessors had been in the nineteenth century. Technology and the growth of the media have now transformed that scene. Diplomats and politicians now find themselves negotiating more or less in the open, and almost universally compelled to publish the

results. This is not because of any decision on their part that peace and justice are best obtained by openness. They know that the searchlights which play across the world stage can distort what they illuminate, and make a satisfactory outcome more difficult. Very occasionally, as in the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians, it is possible to achieve a breakthrough as a result of confidential discussion. Much more often politicians find themselves trying to harness for their own purposes the publicity which they are no longer able to suppress. To my mind there is an important distinction here which is not always drawn. There is nothing to be said for trying to suppress or soften the coverage by the media of the world's cruelty and suffering. When there is blood on the streets there should be blood on the television screen. Bias is best corrected by more reporting, not by less. But the diplomacy needed to rescue the world from these disasters must often be a matter of discussion and indeed bargaining over a period of time. During that period prospects for success can be poisoned if every move and every proposal is instantly revealed by one party or other to the discussion. There is no place at the beginning of the twenty-first century for secret agreements; but if there are to be agreements at all they may have to be arrived at in secret before they are published. That remains as true today as it was in 1919.

Secondly, we turn to self-determination. We are still wrestling in Europe with the difficulties of that concept. The Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana, has spoken about the need to preserve frontiers in Europe in a way of which Metternich would have approved. After the experience of Kosovo the attempt to secure frontiers by ethnic cleansing is rightly reviled. Yet as a matter of history the frontiers of Europe are more secure today than they were in 1919 precisely because of the ethnic cleansing which has occurred since. The Western frontiers of Poland and the Czech Republic are not now in question, following the ethnic cleansing of 1945 when the Germans were expelled. History consents to the ethnic cleansing of peoples (however innocent as individuals) who seemed to connive at aggression toward their rulers. *Vae Victis* remains a pretty well-established principle in such matters. Croatia now enjoys reasonably secure frontiers because the Serbs were ethnically cleansed out of the Krajna in 1995. Likewise, Milosevic's efforts to cleanse Kosovo of Albanians may have boomeranged to produce the opposite effect to

what he intended – a Kosovo in which the Serbs are a tiny and negligible minority, whose future will therefore be divorced from Serbia. Only in Bosnia have recent events and agreements preserved a country within its previous frontiers and containing three substantial communities: Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, who find it more difficult precisely because of those events to live together. The consequence is inescapable. Javier Solana was right, because ethnic cleansing is repulsive. We would be bound to intervene for example if the Serbs now attempted such a practice against the Muslims in the Sanjak, or the Hungarians in Voivodina, or indeed their fellow-Slavs in Montenegro. That is one result of Britain's new Balkan commitment. But if that is our doctrine then we have to do our utmost to enable, indeed compel, different communities to live in peace together within existing boundaries. As we know in Northern Ireland this can take a long time. It cannot be done, as in the time of Metternich, by imposing the rule of a dynasty. A combination of NATO, the EU and the UN will have to provide in a new form the authority with which the Hapsburgs held together most of Central Europe for Bosnia, Kosovo and perhaps other Balkan states in the future.

We tend to argue these matters purely in terms of Europe. But that cannot be philosophically acceptable. The newly independent African states took a clear, virtually unanimous line on this same subject. Although they criticised almost every aspect of colonial rule, they accepted that they needed to live within the boundaries fixed by the colonial powers in the previous century. Self-determination as a principle would be devastating for Africa. The war between Eritrea and Ethiopia proves the point. Two desperately poor countries have been fighting a murderous war to achieve minor frontier changes which would do neither of them any good. If anything is certain in world affairs it is that we shall be confronted over the next decades with new or revived conflicts within or between African countries. These may provide a sterner test even than the Balkans of the general principles of humanitarian intervention against savage rulers which the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, stated and restated over many months.

Third, we turn to world organisation. This was the weakest point of President Wilson's concept. He really believed that the League of Nations would be able, by mobilising world opinion, to dispense

with any instruments of collective security or even of economic sanctions. In the 1920s it did useful work in resolving disputes by negotiation and plebiscite in, for example, Memel and Silesia. This progress was reversed in the 1930s when the Japanese, Germans and Italians called the League's bluff. President Wilson would be dumbfounded by the alphabet soup of organisations which are now wrestling with the future of Kosovo. Our difficulty will not be in inventing new organisations, but in defining the role of those that already exist, so that they do not tread on each others toes. This was certainly one of the lessons of Bosnia, where the Western effort was seriously handicapped by the fact that the air component was under the control of NATO and the ground component under the UN, two organisations with different memberships and different cultures. In the Kosovo *war* this lesson was learned and the operation was conducted entirely by NATO. In the Kosovo *peace* the civilian effort operates under the UN, while the military effort will continue under NATO. It remains to be seen whether this dichotomy can be handled without the frictions which had to be dealt with in Bosnia.

President Wilson's fourth element was American leadership. His own brave but misguided assertion of leadership soon sputtered out. It was repudiated by the American Congress and people. Just as significant, it was repudiated by the Europeans. Huge European crowds acclaimed Wilson on his triumphant visit to Europe immediately after the Great War. He was welcomed as a Messiah or a saint. Colonel House, watching this and hearing of the forthcoming British General Election, was sure that the British people would compel their leaders to follow Wilson's principles. But the 1918 Election returned a House of Commons intent on hanging the Kaiser and squeezing the Germans until the pips squeaked. The popular pressures on Clemenceau were equally strong in the same direction. Wilson's concept of a generous 'peace without victory' put down no lasting roots in public opinion.

In the Second World War American leadership returned to the lands of Europe and has remained there ever since, to the huge benefit of our own security and prosperity. Roosevelt, and more decisively Truman, established American primacy and made it acceptable to us. In a later example, more than four-fifths of the strike effort of the Western Alliance in Kosovo was American, though one would hardly think this from reading European newspapers or listening to

European speeches. Maybe, and I underline *maybe*, this has changed in recent times. The effort in Kosovo has now switched to the ground, to the presence of troops and the spending of money. For the first time in half a century since the North Africa and Italian campaigns in the middle of World War Two, the Americans are no longer in the lead. They are contributing a substantial contingent to K-For, which is excellent, but it is smaller than the British, French or German contingents, even when these are taken separately.

This situation will require adjustments in American thinking since they will no longer be dominant in the making of policy on the ground. But even greater changes will be required in European thinking. For the European lead now established in the Balkans cannot be sustained by speech making or by conferences. It will require increased defence efforts, measured both in quality and quantity. Tony Blair was right to take up this subject in his discussions with the French at St Malo well before the Kosovo conflict erupted. It would be a huge mistake for any Party to shy away from the subject of European Foreign and Security Policy. We are not talking about creating a single European army or duplicating existing NATO investments in infrastructure. We are talking about the vocation of Europe to establish a valid partnership with the United States in peacemaking, certainly in Europe and I hope more widely. If the effort in Kosovo goes well it may provide an example of how this can be done.

At the time of the Treaty of Versailles a remarkably prescient cartoon was published. As the Western leaders emerge from the conference room, Clemenceau says 'Curious, I seem to hear a child weeping'. Behind a pillar a naked boy is indeed crying his heart out; on his back is the description 'Class of 1940'. That effort of 1919, with its strange mixture of illusion and cynicism, did indeed fail, and the class of 1940 were among those who paid the price. Despite the cynics it is possible to learn from mistakes and we have slowly and painfully done so. The next 50 years are unlikely to include the kind of catastrophe which twice shattered the world in the first half of the twentieth century. It is certain to include the kind of dangers and cruelties which have vexed us since 1945, and vex us still today. But we are closer than we were to finding the right mix of humanitarian and realistic policies to achieve slowly the decent world order, which they dashed at in 1919, and missed.

# 2
# The Treaty of Versailles Revisited

*Zara Steiner*

The Treaty of Versailles has had a bad press. From the time that it was signed and John Maynard Keynes penned his all-too-well-known polemic, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) until a recent book by that aging *realpolitiker*, Henry Kissinger, commentators have had little good to say about the Treaty. 'We came to Paris confident that the new order was about to be established', Harold Nicolson wrote in *Peacemaking, 1919*, 'we left it convinced that the new order had merely fouled the old'.[1] Scholarly opinion, if one can use such a collective term, though divided, has moved in a different direction. A massive compilation of contributions from almost all the leading historians of the Versailles settlement opens with the observation that scholars 'tend to view the treaty as the best compromise that the negotiators could have reached in the existing circumstances' and ends with a question. Why has the original indictment of the Treaty seen off almost every attempt at revision and not just in the popular view?[2] If what has emerged from recent multi-archival research is 'a much more nuanced portrait of statesmen and diplomats striving, with a remarkable degree of flexibility, pragmatism and moderation to promote their nation's vital interests as they interpreted them', why do even our more learned statesmen continue to repeat the shibboleths of the past?[3]

The reasons for the almost immediate disillusionment with the Peace Treaty are self-evident. Whatever the causes of the First World War, and a recent counter-factual statement has again stirred semi-stagnant waters, it had become a caesura in any study of the twentieth century.[4] The war represented, and very quickly for the

post-war generation, the moment when the old European order had collapsed or was destroyed. Forget for the moment all the historical qualifications to this statement, that is, the pre-war roots of its undermining, the events of the war itself and the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution. The continuities of societies, states and international structures, far more acceptable to historians than their breaks, do not reflect the perceptions of contemporaries. Statesmen at the time had the sense of living through an exceptional struggle, a unique and 'total war' experience that had shattered the world they knew. However attractive the past might have seemed to many, and the 'long peace' tended to be viewed through rose-tinted glasses, there was a general recognition that what David Stevenson has called the 'relatively benign and open international system of the later nineteenth century' was dead. Much of the jockeying for strategic frontiers and economic advantage at the Paris Conference arose out of this knowledge. Even outside the European continent, where the First World War, the term first actually used by Colonel Repington as the title of his two-volume study published in 1921, had no immediate disruptive consequences, the Europeans began to feel earth tremors. In March 1919, Sir Harry Johnston, the former British proconsul in East and Central Africa, warned the Royal African Society that the war had brought the beginnings of revolt against the white man's supremacy. The costs of the war and the figures – eight million killed, one in eight of the 65.8 million mobilised men and another 21 million wounded – do not wholly convey today, partly because of what has happened since: and their catastrophic impact, above all, on the French. To that sense of loss, both personal and material, must be added the manifold effects of the destruction of four great empires that touched the lives of all those who had lived within their borders and creating both hope and despair. For most combatants and for civilian populations, either from the start of the war or as a result of the new propaganda techniques used to sustain strained loyalties, people had gone to war for, in Adolf Hitler's terms, *Gott, Konig und Vaterland* and for the French *La Patrie*. By the war's end, the Victory medal given to British ex-servicemen was inscribed on its back, 'The Great War for Civilisation 1914–1919'. Even for those, probably the majority, who went to war without any conception of why they were fighting, there had to be some reason or explanation of why they had endured four years of the struggle.

Such expectations give a partial explanation of the tumultuous reception given to Woodrow Wilson, the 'Moses from across the Atlantic', compensating in part for the unwelcome results of the American elections. The way had been prepared in Eastern Europe and in Italy, by the vision of America as the land of milk and honey, itself the result of the waves of immigration in the 1880s and 1890s. Wilson became the embodiment of the fulfilment of the American dream in Europe. Among those who gathered in Paris to counsel or to service their political masters (1600 in the American delegation alone) or to petition for a vast multitude of political and humanitarian causes, there were high hopes that the old and tired European slate would be wiped clean and the 'peace to end all wars' put in place. The anger of the younger men, reflected in their letters and memoirs, many of whom who, in fact, had not served in the war, was directed at the 'terrible old men' still thinking in the discredited terms of the past. One need not have been a Cassandra to know that as soon as the peacemakers began to confer, their inflated expectations could not be met. Clemenceau, Lloyd George, Wilson and, to a lesser extent, Orlando, the key figures behind the peace treaties, had concrete short- and long-term goals in mind. Despite their democratic pedigrees, they were as affected by the need to compromise among themselves as by the restraints imposed by their electorates. There could be no correspondence between what was hoped and what was done. National interest, quite apart from the personalities of the leaders concerned, were not synonymous with the goals of the 'liberal internationalists' or with the cacophony of voices outside the conference rooms. Idealism and *Realpolitik* rarely march hand in hand.

There was another reason for the rapid disenchantment with the Treaty of Versailles. Apart from the defection of Russia, the war-time coalitions remained intact and prolonged the stalemate. But little beyond the defeat of Germany united the Western allies and their associate, the United States. Admittedly, the circumstances of the last months of war held out the promise of an American peace but Woodrow Wilson, to the relief of both Lloyd George and Clemenceau, lost much of his influence once the Armistice was concluded. As the negotiations continued in Paris, what little had united the coalition no longer acted as its cement. The different views as to how Germany was to be treated, the very centre of the Versailles Treaty, made both a compromise peace and a dictated peace inevitable. Almost every part

of the Treaty represented bargaining between politicians working against a ticking clock. The terms of the Treaty could not be discussed with the enemy out of fear that the whole structure would unravel and the Allied divisions be exposed to public scrutiny. Only those actually preparing the Treaty for the printers read it in its entirety. It was because of disagreements that so many final decisions were left for the future; the Treaty was more flexible than had been intended. The subsequent American defection put one nail in the coffin of implementation; the inability of the British and France to work together either to enforce or to revise the Treaty left the way open for the Germans to win the manoeuvring room they had been deprived of at Paris. It was the German reading of the peace that ultimately prevailed, not just in Berlin but in Washington and London, if not Paris.

The events of the 1930s, surely one of the darkest decades in the past century, and the outbreak of the Second World War, fulfilling Marshal Foch's prediction of a 20-year truce, confirmed the demonology of the treaty. Neither comparisons with the treaty of Brest–Litovsk, a far harsher peace in every sense, nor with Yalta, could shake the misused image of the 'Carthaginian' peace. The lines of historical descent that began with the Treaty led to the depression, the rise of Hitler and the origins of the Second World War. The catastrophe in Kosovo has been linked to the 1919 adoption of the principles of self-determination. The lines of continuity with the disasters of our age have become fixed in historical concrete. The interpretation of the Treaty as excessively harsh and fundamentally unjust and containing within itself the seeds of destruction was reinforced, above all in Germany, but elsewhere too, by the belief that responsibility for the Great War was shared by all the great powers. Professor Sidney B. Fay, dragged out of retirement in the 1950s to teach a seminar on the origins of the two world wars at Harvard, had no doubt at all that the second act of the catastrophic civil war in Europe was directly connected to the sins of the peacemakers at Paris and their efforts to make Germany carry the guilt of the Great War. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s, with the appearance of new documentation, that international historians returned to the story of war origins, the peace conference and the hitherto neglected or misrepresented decade of the 1920s. Why has this work failed to produce, at the very least, a re-writing of the textbooks with regard to the Versailles Treaty?

One answer is to be found in the nature of modern historical research. With but few exceptions, it has tended to be detailed, technical and particularistic. It is often a commentary upon commentary, Talmudic-like in its methods and disputatious in its conclusions. Current day revisionism takes at least a generation to reach the textbooks. Our experiences with the debate over appeasement as well as with the origins of the Cold War only serve to underline this point. But there is an equally important point. The historical record speaks against any radical revision of the accepted stereotype of the Treaty of Versailles as the culprit of the peace. The events that followed the collapse of the international order created by the peacemakers of 1919, particularly for the generation for whom the Second World War was the defining feature of their historical landscape, makes the effort to propagate a more balanced view of the treaties and their creators an uphill battle. The Versailles settlement did not create a lasting peace; the 20-year pause was only an interlude between two great wars. The concept of national self-determination has proved highly destructive of accommodation and stability. The United Nations is as weak a reed for the promotion of collective security as was the League of Nations. These failures naturally cast a heavy shadow over the mirrors of Versailles, already clouded by age, which no application of window cleaner could remove.

Present misconceptions only make it more important for historians to underline what was done and not done at Versailles. The problem of Germany was the central issue of debate in Paris. The Treaty was not a 'Carthaginian peace' in Keynes' only too memorable words but a peace imposed on a defeated nation, unable to fight any longer, after a punishing war of extraordinary length. In an anomalous situation, the defeated power had surrendered before the military struggle reached its frontiers. Just as Yalta was, in large measure, the product of where the Red Army stood at the time of the German surrender, so the Allied peace of 1919 was made with a country which had escaped the physical effects of the fighting and whose industrial heartland was left intact. Germany was defeated but not destroyed. The problem for the peacemakers was to recognise her existence but to punish and restrain her. Mainly due to Clemenceau's efforts, this was done through territorial changes, military, economic and financial restrictions, and other barriers to her

future expansion. For all his attempts to alter the balance of power between France and Germany, the former won only a breathing space and temporary enhancement of her strength but not a good deal more. In all, Germany lost around 13 per cent of its territory, with 46 per cent of its remaining inhabitants not being German at all. The economic losses, compared with the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk or the condition of Germany in 1945, were extensive but not crippling. Germany lost 80 per cent of its iron ore, 44 per cent of its pig iron capacity, 38 per cent of its steel and 30 per cent of its coal capacity. Much of this was due, of course, to the return of Lorraine to France. These losses did not prevent German industry from staging an impressive and rapid comeback; the weakness of the German economy did not primarily come from the loss of raw materials. Many of the disabilities from which the Germans suffered, such as the loss of most-favoured-nation status, were of a temporary nature. The French were in a position to prosper but even with the advantages won, it would be an uphill battle to permanently alter the balance of industrial power between the ex-enemies.

The Germans anticipated a hard Treaty. Well before the peace conference opened, the Germans – politicians, intellectuals, military men – began to live in what Fritz Klein has called a 'dreamland' where neither the conditions nor the consequences of the war were fully understood and where the concept of defeat was rejected. As the Germans did not accept their defeat and refused to believe that their army had been beaten in combat, they were welcome recipients of the *Dolchstoss* legend. Germany had been 'stabbed in the back' by its civilian leaders and by the collapse of its home front. Few Germans were prepared to accept a Treaty based on the presumption of defeat. We know, from Peter Krüger's work, that German support for the Fourteen Points was highly tactical and that only a small, if all-important, group in 1918–19, were 'more or less inclined to take up Wilson's ideas of a new international order'.[5] It was primarily for pragmatic reasons that the German representatives chose to deal with President Wilson. Similarly, the Germans used the threat of bolshevisation, the absence of dialogue with the victors, the violations of the Fourteen Points, and so on, as means to get the Treaty terms modified. Even before it was presented to the Germans, the 'diktat' was branded as unjust. It was the Germans themselves who turned the so-called infamous article 231 into an

Allied charge of Germany's sole responsibility for the war. Penned by Norman Davis and John Foster Dulles, it was intended to distinguish between Germany's moral responsibility for the war and its legal liability for the damage to persons and property, in the knowlege that the Germans could not possibly pay the bill that would result from the Allied deliberations. The 'war guilt' clause not only became the pretext for subsequent German opposition to reparations on the grounds that these were based on an indefensible moral judgement, but ultimately came to undermine the validity of the entire Treaty in broad sectors of the British and American political establishments.

The leaders of the victor nations at Paris had no doubt that Germany was responsible for the outbreak of the war. None had the knowledge necessary to write a counter-factual account of its origins. German hopes that they could avoid a hard Treaty were misplaced. The Big Three agreed that Germany had to be punished so that she would not again turn to aggression. Woodrow Wilson turned out to be even more vindictive in this respect than either Clemenceau or Lloyd George. The difficulty was that there was little consensus on how this should be achieved. The historical verdict may be that Clemenceau emerged as the short-term victor, though he sacrificed much to secure the fleeting Anglo-American support for a France that would have been defeated if she had stood alone. Historians agree, too, that Woodrow Wilson was the chief loser at Paris. The portraits of each of the Big Three, however, have undergone considerable change in the last decade and new lines have been added to their faces. Clemenceau appears far more concerned with French weakness and the need for diplomatic support than in earlier accounts; he proved more willing to follow up different lines with regard to the treatment of Germany than was once assumed. Woodrow Wilson, about whom the historiographic battle still rages, can, at the very least, be seen no longer as the innocent victim of his unscrupulous colleagues. Lloyd George, the 'dishevelled conjurer', we are told by one of his most convincing biographers, Antony Lentin, was not without principles and goals however much delight he took in his bag of tricks. These retouched portraits underline the differences between the peacemakers and clearly demonstrate why the Treaty had to be a 'bundle of compromises'. The differing conceptions of the peace did not bode well for its future enforcement.

Unexpectedly, the reparations clauses, in Lloyd George's view, the 'most baffling and perplexing of all' the challenges of the peace conference, became the central issue at debate. The problem, in itself highly technical and barely understood by statemen far less versed in economic theory than modern historians such as Gerald Feldman, Stephen Schuker or Niall Ferguson, to name but a few, acquired an importance never contemplated when the peace conference opened. Its subsequent importance was multi-layered. First, it became one of the defining markers in the history of the Weimar Republic. Secondly, because the problem was left to a future Reparation Commission to settle, it became, with the withdrawal of the Americans, the battleground between the opposing British and French interpretations of the Treaty, driving the two countries further apart, and the critical factor in determining the post-Treaty balance of forces in Western Europe. The war was resumed but fought with financial weapons and with different partners. And finally, the reparation and war debt questions came to define not just the relationship between Britain, France and Germany, but that of the Europeans and Americans. The key role of the American bankers and private investors at the very time when Washington had turned its back on Europe's security problems contributed both to the stabilisation of Europe and to its undoing. A new dimension was added to the diplomacy of the past; statesmen and diplomats gave way to new actors on the diplomatic stage both at home and abroad. Financial and economic problems touched on almost every aspect of post-war diplomacy in a manner that had no real equivalent in the pre-war period.

No subject has been the object of more intense argument than the reparation clauses of the Treaty and the decision reached in 1921. It was clearly a bad mistake to postpone the decision to the latter date. Whether the burden on the German economy (8 per cent of national income in 1921–22, but after the Dawes settlement something around 3 per cent) was too heavy, given the dependence of the economy on export income, and what role reparations played in the German inflation, are still hotly debated questions. It is fair to say that a number of later commentators have claimed that the figures arrived at by the permanent Reparations Commission in 1921 – £6.6 billion or 124 million gold marks – were within the German capacity to pay if successive governments had not decided

that they would try to postpone or avoid payment altogether.[6] It has been argued that the Weimar governments did not want to balance their budgets; the early inflation not only benefited industrialists but sections of the working class and other sectors as well. It allowed the republic to maintain the social peace needed to launch the republic. Weimar was able to wipe off most of its internal debt. By the time inflation became hyperinflation, the economic benefits (if any) had been much reduced. More important, in the longer term, inflation destroyed the confidence in democratic government among the very groups that might have remained loyal to the republic when Hitler launched his challenge to the Weimar system.

In his most recent book, Niall Ferguson has argued that the German government purposely, but mistakenly, encouraged depreciation in the hope that it would lead to a flood of exports that would damage the economies of the victor states and consequently bring about a revision of the reparation schedule.[7] This has given added weight to those who have argued that German resentment of the reparations and war-guilt question was out of all proportion to the sums that Germany was actually asked to pay. Other historians, including Gerald Feldman, Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich and Barry Eichengreen, continue to argue that the reparations fed German inflation and that the sums demanded were excessively burdensome for the economy to carry.[8] What is not disputed is that all the Weimar parties opposed reparations and that reparations, rather than domestic factors, were the cause of the inflationary spiral. Indeed, the pursuit of revision kept the domestic political struggle within certain limits and muzzled the German right. Harold James has argued that reparations stabilised Weimar democracy; '. . . is it too much to say that reparations were the (relatively cheap) price for keeping Weimar democracy alive?', he asks.[9] Reparations ended in July 1932; the Republic collapsed six months later. If there were no foreigners to blame, the domestic quarrels became insoluble. If hyperinflation wiped out the German domestic debt, the Hoover Moratorium in 1931, when Germany still owed $77 billion, effectively cancelled the reparation debt. There is abundant evidence that Germany covered all its obligations to the allies between 1919 and 1923 through imports of foreign capital, and that from 1924 until 1931 she received more in capital inflows, either through investment or loans, mainly from the United States, than she paid

in reparations. Due to the defaults of 1923 and 1932, Stephen Schuker has argued, it was the Americans, and not the Germans, who were left holding the empty purses.[10]

At the very least, the current argument over reparations suggests that Keynes' *Economic Consequences of the Peace* was ill-conceived and its influence on its Anglo-American audience, for whom it became the basis of the guilt complex that so bedevilled relations with Nazi Germany, baneful.[11] The reparations story of the 1920s is one of continued struggle between Britain and France over how much Germany was to pay, in what form and over what period of time. It was Britain, with American assistance, who won the contest, to the great advantage of the Germans. The Dawes Plan and the London Agreements were negotiated at French expense and paved the way for Locarno, a political settlement negotiated by the Europeans for Western Europe. There was, however, no return to the balance of power sought by the British and no real guarantor, despite words to the contrary, of the peace that was established. The Americans stood outside the agreement. The British were unwilling to pay the necessary price for underwriting French security even in the West. Eastern Europe was excluded. Briand achieved as much as was possible in 1925 but Locarno rested, as Austen Chamberlain, the British foreign secretary, fully acknowledged, on unsecured gambles.

Some of the weaknesses of the Peace Treaty, and there were many, stemmed from the circumstances of the time: a Europe still enmeshed in war, except on the western front, and with the whole future of the eastern half of the continent still uncertain. Differently from 1815, the peacemakers were faced with revolutionary changes of an unprecedented kind for which purely political solutions were inadequate. The Allied difficulties stemmed, too, from the German unwillingness to accept defeat and its considerable potential power for recovery, made more potent by the disappearance of its imperial neighbours. Contrary to what Keynes had predicted, the German economy quickly recovered and the Weimar governments learned how to perpetuate the myth of the 'Carthaginian peace' and how to take advantage of the failure of the Allied governments to agree on a common post-war strategy. The British became convinced, and the Ruhr occupation only confirmed their suspicions, that it was French intransigence that was undermining the stability of Europe. The

French, on the contrary, thought that they were being left exposed, with the collapse of the Anglo-American guarantee, to the danger of an inevitably resurgent Germany. Versailles failed to provide the formula for a stable or lasting peace. There was no hegemonic power to enforce it. The French were too weak to act alone. The British worked against, instead of with, the French, and created the conditions that favoured German revisionism. Even allowing for the inevitability of German recovery, Britain's recurring preoccupation with French obstinacy obscured the danger of a revival of German power.

It is often asserted that, apart from the reparation question, the real weakness of the peace lay in the acceptance and application of the principle of self-determination. The Wilsonian principle was not conceived by immaculate conception. The roots of the nation-state went back at least to the French Revolution. The state as deriving its sovereignty from the people, and people defined as an ethnic, cultural and linguistic group, whether real or invented, long pre-dated the Great War. Nationalism had already eroded the older dynastic or religious roots of the European empires. Where the pressure had been relieved by granting concessions – cultural autonomy, religious freedom and even political representation – these solutions were often temporary and were under constant threat. The war-time activities of the belligerents on both sides fanned the pre-war nationalist movements in the interests of subverting the empires which contained them. By the time the war ended, politically conscious and ambitious national leaders had gathered sufficient support to make their voices heard in the capitals of the victor powers. Self-interest and/or genuine ideological sympathy assured these self-proclaimed leaders a sympathetic hearing. It was, however, only gradually that the Great Powers embraced the idea of creating new nation-states in Europe. The Americans hesitated about recommending independence for Poland; it was with considerable reluctance that the British abandoned the idea of reconstituting the Habsburg empire.[12] They would subsequently attempt, with a conspicuous lack of success, to create economic unity where political unity had vanished. The French, whose support of the national movements pre-dated that of their war-time allies, were convinced that they needed territorial barriers against a resurgent Germany and a *cordon sanitaire* against a bolshevik tidal wave from the east. The sudden collapse of the empires (Turkey excepted) faced the peacemakers

with the immediate problems of state making. Plans – and much thought had already been given to the problem of Poland and the former territories of Austria–Hungary – had to become realities. In the territories that lay between the new Soviet Union and Ataturk's Turkey, the two latter powers came to their own arrangements that swallowed up temporarily independent states. Elsewhere, steps had already been taken towards the creation of new national units before the peacemakers rolled out their maps at Paris. There could be no restoration of the Habsburg empire. It had already become the Humpty Dumpty of Europe even before the peacemakers met.

The application of the principle of self-determination was flawed from the start. It was not applied to the defeated countries. In this sense at least, the peacemakers added an element of instability to the peace settlement. Revision was built into its terms. It has been argued that avoiding the amputations of territories inhabited by mainly German-speaking peoples might have encouraged the Weimar governments to accept the verdict of defeat. The losses to Poland, which put Germans under the rule of Poles, created a deep and abiding sense of grieviance not matched elsewhere. Nor was the principle of self-determination applied to the empires of the victors, though the mandate system, the first formal recognition that the rulers had some kind of responsibility towards those that they ruled, was a small first step towards the possibility of self-rule. The rejection of the Japanese suggestion of including a racial equality clause in the Covenant suggests that Wilsonian liberalism had its limits. At best, those who in theory acknowledged the right of nationalities to shape their own destiny, can rightly be accused of high selectivity in the application of their principles.

The territorial settlements did not, at first, bode well for the peaceful future of the new Europe, even allowing for the over-optimistic beliefs in the benevolent role of states, the powers of democracies and the attraction of assimilation. The ethnic distribution of the population in Eastern Europe, where the overwhelming proportion of the 'minority inhabitants' lived, was so complex that no one could have drawn borders based on ethnic principles. The experts sitting in the territorial commissions, whose recommendations, except in the case of Poland, were generally accepted by the overburdened and time conscious peacemakers, had to take into consideration strategic and economic concerns (as in Czechoslovakia and

Poland), promises made to war-time allies (i.e, the Treaty of London concluded with Italy), the national interests of the victors (such as security in the case of France), or even conflicting principles, as when Wilson consigned the German-speaking Tyrolese to Italy in order to get Orlando's support for the League of Nations. Other borders were accepted in order to end the wars between the states in Central and South-Eastern Europe as each country sought to stake out its claims at the expense of its neighbours. Some borders were left undecided, particularly in the east. Nor was the print on the non-German treaties actually dry before the Italians, French, British and Americans rushed to establish their claims to possible spheres of influence. The British took as much, if not more, responsibility for the political futures of Hungary and Austria as the French, whom that far-from-innocent Governor of the Bank of England, Montagu Norman, claimed were unique in their diabolical use of financial power to acquire political influence.

It was soon abundantly clear that democracy and toleration would not solve the problem of the minority populations in multinational states, of which Poland, where the minorities constituted a full third of the total population, was the extreme example. The boundaries drawn in 1919 conformed more closely to the linguistic frontiers in Europe than at any previous time but their establishment left or created new minorities. Though the figures are disputed, the peace treaties gave some 60 million people a state of their own but turned another 25 million into minorities. The latter included former rulers, now the subjects of the former ruled, minorities such as Jews, gypsies, Ukranians and Macedonians, who lacked any national homeland, and people incorporated into the new or re-constituted states when the geographic borders were re-drawn but were not of the majority ethnic group. With the exception of Czechoslovakia, authoritarian governments emerged in all the new states and Prague itself could hardly be credited with a liberal policy towards its minorities. With almost equal speed, the liberal hopes for assimilation gave way to the control, often backed by intimidation and force, of the minorities by the dominant ethnic groups. Brutal means were used both during and after the war. In 1915, the Turks tried to wipe out the Armenians and murdered between 800 000 and 1.3 million people. Polish troops battled with the Ukranians at the end of 1918 and there were a series of frightful

pogroms not just in the Ukraine but in a large number of Polish cities and in many dozens of towns and villages in Galicia. As many as 110 pogroms of varying degrees of gravity took place in the month of November 1918 alone.[13] More humane methods were outlined in the Treaty of Neuilly; the Bulgarian inhabitants of Selanik (Salonika) were exchanged for the Greeks living in Bulgaria. Less defensible was the forced exchange of 1.2 million Greeks and half a million Turks after the Greek defeat in Asia Minor in 1922. The problem of the property of these poor people, for whom religion was the only defining marker regardless of their language or traditions, poisoned Greek–Turkish relations for several years and burdened both countries with the expense of resettlement in the interests of national homogeneity. The League was called on to intervene to ease the cost of resettlement.

To their credit, the peacemakers made it clear that they abhorred massacres, disliked forced expulsions that were not repeated until the appearance of Nazi Germany, and opposed ethnic cleansing as it is now called. Woodrow Wilson had recognised, from the start, as had his British, French and Italian colleagues, that this 'imperative principle of action' had to be mitigated by other, equally 'imperative' considerations. The peacemakers sought to give protection to the non-predominant, now minority, groups in established states such as Rumania (where an effort had been made in 1878 to protect the religious rights of the Jews) and Greece, in former belligerents like Hungary, and in Poland and the other newly created states. The highly influential New States Committee's recommendations were first incorporated in the Polish Treaty signed on the same day as the Versailles Treaty. As the condition of recognition, the new Polish government had to guarantee certain rights to its minorities: equality before the law, religious freedom, and rights to certain forms of collective organisation in the cultural and educational spheres. Special protection was extended to the Jews. The Polish Treaty became the model for the 13 minority treaties that followed. The Council of the League of Nations, which accepted the nation-state as the norm and the basis for international relations, was empowered to hear grievances, to refer cases to the Permanent Court of International Justice and to censure if necessary, though not to impose sanctions on, the offending power. Present day research has revealed how much more might have been done in 1919 if the

British and French had not stepped back from the implications of their actions and refused to consider a universal system of minority rights.[14] It has to be remembered, however, that this was a new step, the first recognition in international law of 'national' as distinct from religious rights, for collective rather than individual rights, and that some form of mechanism for the hearing of complaints was actually put into operation. As David Vital has noted, 'the effort to meet the interests, needs and aspirations of the Jews of Europe as these had been articulated at Paris in 1919 was a remarkable one'.[15] There were even some successes in the 1920s. Curiously enough, it was Gustav Stresemann, the Weimar foreign secretary, who took up the minority cause as part of the German effort to revise the Versailles settlement. We know all too well that the Polish and then the German attacks on the novel but fragile structure created in 1919 brought such unbearable pressure on the structure that it basically collapsed. 'Blood is stronger than a passport', a Pan-Germanist wrote in 1937.[16] The appointment of Fridtjof Nansen as the first High Commissioner for Refugees and the slow and painful emergence of a legal protection system for refugees could not withstand the Nazi assault on the Jews. The American High Commissioner for Refugees, James G. MacDonald, resigned in 1935 in protest against the Great Powers' unwillingness to intervene in Germany over what they regarded as a purely domestic matter. The lines between state sovereignty and an international regime that had moved, ever so slowly, in the direction of the latter, swung back in the opposite direction. France, which had opened its border to refugees before 1937, closed its gates under Edouard Daladier's leadership on the grounds of national security. Between 1919 and 1939, at least 5 million Europeans for one reason or another were forced or felt compelled to leave their homes. Whatever was done to assist the Russians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Syrians, Armenians, as well as at least two-thirds of the 80 000 refugees who left Germany before 1935, was due to the efforts of a few individuals working under the aegis of the League's protection system.

The creation of nation-states opened up a Pandora's box of conflicts and tensions. It was already open in 1919 and could not be resealed. The present day break-up of empires and states only underlines the persistence of nationalist aspirations. Ethnic particularism and the continuing sense of national identity has proved far, far

stronger than the leaders of the victorious powers of either war could have imagined possible. Those who tried to give substance to the principles of self-determination in 1919 were recognising an existing condition that could not be ignored. There is a striking similarity between the present ethnic conflicts and those of the 1920s. Some, now and then, have been settled with surprisingly little bloodshed, while others involved violence and killing on a scale that had no equivalent in the more innocent post-1919 decade. The UN's commitment to individual rights was, in many ways, a step backwards from the collective rights approach initiated by the League. Whether the trials in The Hague against individuals who have committed genocide and/or the intervention in Kosovo represents a new chapter in the protection of minorities remains to be seen. The present condition of Kosovo suggests that the major questions inherent in the survival of nationalism and ethnic and religious identification have not only endured but are still unanswered.

It should be remembered how long the territorial settlements made in 1919, with all their drawbacks, actually lasted. Their persistance was not due only, or even primarily, to the wisdom of the peacemakers. Endurance resulted from the weakness of Germany and the Soviet Union but also from the Allied crippling of revisionist Hungary and Bulgaria, making them too weak to challenge the *status quo*. The victor powers, despite Italian restlessness, continually intervened to prevent regional revisionism. Internal stability owed much to the ability of the dominant groups or their leaders to keep the divisive forces, whether ethnic or political, under their control. But even the Nazi occupation and the spread of Soviet power did not erase the national lines drawn up in 1919. Apart from minor frontier changes, the key territorial differences after 1945 were the westward expansion of the Soviet Union to the so-called Curzon Line (rejected by Poland in 1919) and the expansion of Poland, in compensation, into Germany. The Poles forced their Ukrainian minority, some 486 000 people, to leave for the Soviet Union. The Czechs rid themselves of their German and Hungarian minorities. The 'Jewish problem' was solved, though not that of anti-semitism. Of an initial 9 415 840 Jews in pre-war Europe (excluding Britain and the three neutral countries of Sweden, Switzerland and the Irish Republic), between 5 596 029 and 5 860 129 were killed in the course of the Second World War.[17] It has only been in recent decades that

the multinational states have been able to unravel and that the geography books have had to be radically updated.

Our present inability to find ways of handling ethnic questions should lead to a more balanced approach to what was attempted in 1919. The peacemakers did not want to sanction the creation of ethnically or religiously pure states but they recognised that nationalism could not be eradicated or ignored. In creating the minority treaties, the peacemakers were moving into uncharted waters which were full of sharks. Whether the application of the doctrine to Germany (or to all states) would have robbed Hitler of one of his most persuasive arguments is still debated. There was a direct contradiction between treating Germany as a defeated country whose power had to be contained and surrounding her with weak and small states with discontented German minorities. There were those who hoped for peaceful revision. Stresemann, though the evidence is mixed, may have thought that the revision of the eastern frontiers would follow peacefully from Germany's return to the concert of Europe. By the time of Locarno, France was in the process of trading its security interests in Eastern Europe in the hope that Germany would be converted to the cause of peaceful change and that the British would underwrite French security in the west. Even before the cold winds of the depression blew over Germany, there were worrying signs. The German reading of the Versailles Treaty left the embers of nationalism and militarism still glowing.

The other aspect of the Treaty that has been the target for generations of 'realist critics' was the League of Nations. The significance of the League, whether or not it should have been included in the Treaty, cannot and should not be ignored. It embodied the views of those in Paris who genuinely believed that there had to be a change in the international order if future catastrophes were to be prevented. Their efforts, however expedient or unworkable, represented a genuine attempt to re-found Europe on a more morally acceptable basis. The League embodied their hopes and their sense of the possible. The League may now be dismissed as a misconceived and even dangerous attempt to find a substitute for the power considerations upon which all international systems are based. We know, thanks to the labours of many of the historians at this conference, that the League, from its inception, was a compromise worked out between Lord Robert Cecil, who came with concrete proposals, and Woodrow

Wilson, whose ideas were vague. It was not, and was never intended to be, a supranational body but one that tried to bridge the gap between sovereign states and a functioning international order. While neither Lloyd George nor Clemenceau, for opposite reasons, accepted the new institution even in its amended form, the revolutionary ideas, and they were revolutionary, which the Covenant embodied, left their mark on the world order as it functioned in the 1920s and in the immediate post-1945 world.

The story of their failures play a critical part in the history of international relations. It was not, of course, the United Nations, that god-child of the League, conceived by Franklin Roosevelt to make the idea of the Four Policemen acceptable to the American electorate, that maintained the 'long peace' after the Second World War. Nor in the supposedly multipolar world of today, does anyone expect the UN to play a major security role. The United States, as recent events show, remains the ultimate hegemonic power in Europe. If Europe benefits from her disinterest, it appears dependent on her leadership to settle its continental bush-fires. There was no equivalent state in the the 1920s and 'collective security' failed to fill the gap. There is no doubt that the main function of the League was to preserve the peace and to bring the collective will of the sovereign states to bear on any aggressor. Fundamentally, the hope, though Wilson was highly ambiguous on this point, lay not in the application of sanctions but in the ill-founded belief in the restraining power of international public opinion. The League failed in its primary task. It could only preserve the peace and settle disputes among states when Britain and France threw their combined weight behind its machinery. Disarmament, upon which so much hope was placed by the electorates if not by their leaders, proved to be a poisoned cup. Few try to make a case for the political effectiveness of the League of Nations; attention is focused on the reasons for its failure. Yet Geneva became part of a new regime that emerged from the Great War and was shattered, if not permanently, by the events of the 1930s. New practices and new machinery were introduced into the diplomatic system. And it is worth remembering that it was not the new but the old diplomacy, with the return to alliances and bi-lateral diplomacy, that failed so disastrously in 1939.

The real indictment of the post-war leaders, as I have tried to argue elsewhere, lay not in their practical use of the League of

Nations but in their perpetration of myths that did not correspond to the realities of the 'Geneva system'.[18] If the latter had been viewed as an addition, rather than as a substitute, to the traditional ways of preserving peace, it would not have become the whipping boy of the theorists. For it represented, as the UN does today, a subsystem based on sovereign states, operating within an imperfect international regime, but both affecting and reflecting an expanded concept of that regime. The new techniques of international discourse might have evolved without Geneva given the expansion of the international map, both territorially and functionally. But Geneva gave a particular shape to the way the new forces were handled and tried to create, by discussion and persuasion, the minimal consensus that would allow an international order to function at all.

The League did not occupy the place that Woodrow Wilson, as well as others, reacting to the devastation of the war, had hoped and intended. Statesmen misled their countrymen into thinking that it was something more than it could be. It may be that because the Nazi and Fascist assault on the so-called collective security system was so successful and the consequences so catastrophic that we focus attention on its failures. If the war of 1939–45 heightened the perception of the price paid for living in an anarchical world to the point of creating yet another illusory international organisation, we are still looking for the means to bridge the gap between sovereign states and an international regime, that is, the laws, customs and practices that states accept as the price for not living in a condition of perpetual warfare. There is no reason, however, to consign the League to the dustbin of history. For it made, during the 1920s and even after, a very positive contribution to the concept of multilateral diplomacy and to the forms of international cooperation. Attention has shifted in recent years from the League's failure to preserve peace to its non-political or functional contributions and its extension of the still-evolving concept of internationalism. By institutionalising the mechanisms of international cooperation, whether with regard to health, social questions, finance and trade, technical and cultural matters, the League, and in particular its Secretariat, expanded the trans-national agenda and developed its own expertise in handling these issues. In the very uneven growth of international cooperation, progress depends not just on the self-restraint of the dominant state or states but on their willingness to

accept responsibilities beyond their own borders. In so far as the League intervened to establish certain standards of international morality and to create the machinery needed to deal with an increasingly complex international menu, it opened new paths that were worth following.

The Treaty of Versailles was an ill-begotten child. Given the circumstances of its birth it could hardly have been anything else. The hotel corridors in Paris were crammed with petitioners from every country, would-be countries, and organisations both old and new. Five hundred journalists were on hand to record and broadcast the proceedings at a time when publicity was the exception and not the rule. Time was running out as the Germans arrived to receive a Treaty that had not yet been concluded. And the three main peacemakers, with their endless advisers and hangers-on, each had their own agendas. Clemenceau hoped to make France secure but knew she could not stand alone in Europe. Lloyd George, looking backwards as well as forwards, thought that Britain could establish a balance of power in Europe that would free her from the nightmare of another continental commitment and leave her free to enjoy the fruits of her industry and empire. And President Wilson, coming from a country basically untouched by war, hoped to bring the 'city on the hill' to the old, tired and debauched continent that suffered from too much history and too much blood. Each man, in turn, was forced to compromise and compromises rarely satisfy the compromisers. Much would have been different if the coalition had survived or if Britain and France had worked together. Or, indeeed, if the Germans had accepted the verdict of the war and not set out to sabotage the Treaty. As we look into the mirrors of Versailles, we see only the realities of the past and present. Those realities should include the hopes that inspired the immense labours of the men of 1919.

## Notes

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# 3

# Holding up the Flag of Britain … with Sustained Vigour and Brilliance or 'Sowing the seeds of European Disaster'? Lloyd George and Balfour at the Paris Peace Conference

*Alan Sharp*

George Curzon, the British foreign secretary from 1919 until 1924, believed that he had been bequeathed a fatally flawed inheritance by his predecessor at the Foreign Office, Arthur Balfour and by David Lloyd George, the first of three prime ministers whom he served as foreign secretary. In a sustained and vituperative attack written at the Lausanne conference in late 1922 and early 1923 'for use by my biographer', Curzon accused the two men most responsible for conducting British policy at the Paris Peace Conference of disregarding the professional advice and expertise of the Foreign Office and, whether for that reason or others, of failing to provide a lasting solution to the problems that had created war in Europe in 1914 and which had been exacerbated by the ensuing conflict. Indeed Curzon went further and suggested that they had sown the seeds of a future war.

Curzon was uncompromising in his criticism of Balfour. From an early stage he – a former Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister of the British Empire – allowed himself to be displaced in Paris and pushed aside. He allowed the Big Four to assume:

> exclusive control of the main proceedings meeting at times without even a secretary, and circulating no report of their meetings.

> Though he (Balfour) was living on the floor immediately above Lloyd George's rooms in Paris he did not know, was not told, and was as a rule too careless to enquire, what was going on. … Balfour freely admitted it, and in his half cynical half nonchalant way expressed his ignorance and astonishment as to 'what the little man was doing'.

Curzon's view of Lloyd George, the 'little man', was equally jaundiced:

> I feel convinced that it was his ill judged and calamitous interference in Foreign Affairs that brought about his doom. He had no instinctive appreciation of diplomacy, no knowledge of his subject, no conception of policy. He despised and disliked the instrument through which he was obliged ostensibly to work viz the F[oreign] O[ffice] …

His overall assessment of their performance in 1919 was damning:

> So the drama went on throughout that fatal year – Lloyd George was supposed to be holding up the flag of Britain and Balfour that of the Foreign Office with sustained vigour and brilliance in Paris. In reality Lloyd George was sowing the seeds of European disaster, Balfour was signing the abdication of the Foreign Office.[1]

To what extent are these fair criticisms? There is no doubt that the Foreign Office had high expectations of the peace conference. Accepting reluctantly that diplomacy in wartime had stricter limitations, and as inevitable some loss of influence in British decision making, the Office nonetheless hoped to reassert its authority when the fighting ended. Charles Hardinge, the Permanent Under Secretary, had strengthened his hand by poaching the talented members of the Information Bureau from the Ministry of Information and turning them into the Political Intelligence Department (PID) of the Foreign Office. Under the nominal leadership of William Tyrrell but effectively headed by James Headlam-Morley, the nucleus of the post-war historical and international relations disciplines (E.H. Carr, Lewis Namier, Arnold Toynbee, Harold Temperley, Charles Webster, Alfred Zimmern – truly a 'ministry of all the talents') conducted propaganda, assessed political intelligence and prepared briefings for

the future settlement. After the armistice, the PID focused on preparing material for the forthcoming conference but Lloyd George ignored the Foreign Office in his quest for a negotiating brief for the British delegation and turned instead to the South African, Jan Christian Smuts, whom he much admired. Smuts, however, turned back to the PID to give shape to a wide range of information and their unaltered material became the substance of his portfolio of briefing papers. Erik Goldstein concludes that '… Whitehall, and the Foreign Office in particular, played the principal role in the preparations for the Paris Peace Conference.'[2] This may have been more by accident than design but it does suggest that, at this stage at least, the Foreign Office was not ignored.

In Paris, however, its representatives did not play the roles to which they aspired – Lord Hardinge in particular was disappointed that his functions and status did not conform to Mr Alwyn Parker's (of the Foreign Office) 'planisphere'[3] – and they were never more than a fraction of the British delegation. Lloyd George undertook much of the negotiation himself and relied on a wide variety of advisers, both official and unofficial. However, the Foreign Office influence was much greater than it appeared on the surface and both the regular members of the service and the newly recruited auxiliaries such as Headlam-Morley played major roles in the preparation of material for the final decision of the peacemakers. Eyre Crowe, Harold Nicolson, Robert Vansittart, the Leeper brothers, all left their mark on the treaties, while Headlam-Morley provided imaginative solutions for the problems of the Saar and Danzig and concern for the issue of minority protection. It was only in the latter part of 1919 that the Foreign Office supplied the chief British negotiator in Paris and, justifiably or not, Lloyd George was not happy with the results, especially when he believed that Crowe had committed Britain to a policy which might entail the renewal of hostilities with Germany in December 1919. Thus, while the Foreign Office was not the medium through which the treaties were negotiated, nor did it coordinate the conduct of the British case in Paris, its members did have an appreciable impact on the settlement, something which more recent historians of the conference have come to recognise.[4]

What of Balfour? Given his record over the previous two years as Lloyd George's foreign secretary it would have been unrealistic to expect him to become the dominant personality within the British

delegation. It is clear that part of his attraction for Lloyd George, over and above his worth as a political ally and the esteem in which the prime minister held his intellectual and diplomatic skills, was his willingness to acquiesce – 'a free hand for the Little Man'.[5] Balfour was often described as lazy, he found it intellectually difficult to reach decisions on issues where his own intelligence made him aware of the multifaceted nuances and he was getting old. He was not the man to challenge the prime minister's dominance, though it is interesting that it was he and President Wilson's adviser, Colonel House, who, during the absence of their superiors in late February and early March 1919, attempted to force the pace of the conference, something which was partly at the root of the increasing gulf that developed between House and Wilson.

When the principals returned to Paris in March and the Council of Four began to untangle the complexities of the intermingled aspects of the settlement it was Balfour who insisted on proper minutes being taken of their meetings and that he receive them. In this respect, Curzon was mistaken in his comments. On the other hand, there were notable lapses in communication – the offer of a British guarantee to France was not only made without Balfour's knowledge but, at least according to Hardinge, not known to him until 6 May (this was an exaggeration but to what extent is not entirely clear). He was not at Fontainebleau for Lloyd George's brainstorming session on the conference and the way ahead for Britain. The famous episode of the memorandum intended for the prime minister that bounced back and forth between Balfour and Philip Kerr, Lloyd George's secretary, indicates that the problem was not one way and the extent to which the proximity of their accommodation in the rue Nitot mitigated such difficulties cannot be absolutely clear. When asked if the prime minister had seen the document, Kerr replied 'No, but I have.' – 'Not quite the same thing is it, Philip – yet?' was Balfour's sharp riposte.[6]

Balfour did not seem to resent his exclusion from the top table but continued to work in the Council of Five at the draft proposals for new frontiers and other aspects of the settlement which were, in the main, endorsed by the Four. Lloyd George asked him to redraft the French guarantee treaty, and the Four sought his advice over Fiume and Shantung. He offered strong support to Lloyd George during the British attempt to revise the draft treaty in June. He played lawn tennis, exuded charm and good manners, suggesting

that the delegates stand as the German representatives filed into the room to receive the draft treaty, and then not noticing Brockdorff-Rantzau's rudeness – 'A.J.B. makes the whole of Paris seem vulgar' noted Nicolson.[7] He was certainly more than Lloyd George's 'the scent on a pocket handkerchief', though his personal manner and his indecision offered more justification to French premier Georges Clemenceau's characterisation of him as 'cette vieille fille'. Curzon was even more savage:

> I regard him as the worst and most dangerous of the British Foreign Ministers with whom I have been brought into contact in my public life. … He never studied his papers, he never knew the facts, at the Cabinet he had seldom read the morning's FO telegrams. He never got up a case, he never looked ahead.

Curzon denounced 'the lamentable ignorance, indifference and levity of his regime'. For this he blamed Balfour's:

> sheer intellectual indolence, a never-knowing his case, an instinctive love for compromise and a trust in the mental agility which would enable him at the last minute to extricate himself from any complication however embarrassing.

Curzon was right to castigate Balfour's lack of preparation and detailed knowledge and other cabinet colleagues and negotiators were shocked at his ignorance of crucial events or even of the contents of the Treaty which he was about to sign. On the other hand Curzon's own record in defending the prerogatives of his ministry from the incursions of the 'little man' was not, in subsequent years, necessarily better than Balfour's. It was perhaps an example of Curzon's 'lack of acute sense of proportion' that he declared 'It was with terror that we saw him enter upon every international transaction since we always knew that Britain would have to pay the price' but Smuts did believe that 'Balfour was a tragedy, a mere dilettante, without force or guidance, when a strong British Foreign Minister might have saved the whole situation'.[8]

Was Smuts correct? To what extent was it possible for any combination of British negotiators to have improved upon the Treaty which Smuts feared would breathe 'a poisonous spirit of revenge,

which may yet scorch the fair face – not of a corner of France, but of Europe'?[9] Was Lloyd George indeed sowing the seeds of European disaster? Could Britain achieve its own objectives and help to broker a lasting peace in Europe and the world? At one level Britain's aims were deceptively simple – Kerr's notes for the weekend meeting of his closest advisers that Lloyd George convened at Fontainebleau, at a moment when the conference threatened to collapse in an inability to resolve key issues, suggest six; the limitation of German naval strength and the avoidance of a new naval race with the United States; all round arms limitation; '… as large an indemnity out of Germany as possible'; mandates for the empire in Palestine, Mesopotamia, East Africa, South-West Africa and the South Pacific islands; the consolidation of the British empire; and domestic social reform. The explanatory notes expanded upon this bald outline, suggesting that Germany should lose as few of her citizens as possible, especially to Poland. The Rhineland should not be detached from Germany though demilitarisation might be an option. The French should have the use of the Saar coalmines and be offered a military guarantee by Britain and the United States. Germany should be given free access to markets for raw materials in order that it should 'make reparation to the utmost of her capacity'. He suggested the ruthless punishment of the Kaiser and of war criminals and the establishment of the League of Nations 'to deal with international quarrels, especially in their opening stages and generally to keep Small States in order'.[10]

In the document that emerged from the conference Lloyd George suggested that it was 'comparatively easy to patch up a peace' that might last 30 years, but he wished to set his sights higher. He wanted more than a peace of exhaustion, but rather a settlement that 'would do justice to the Allies by taking into account Germany's responsibility for the origin of the war and for the way in which it was fought'; it should be such that 'a responsible German government can sign in the belief that it can fulfil the obligations it incurs'; it should 'contain in itself no provocations for future wars, and . . . constitute an alternative to Bolshevism.' Their terms might be 'stern and even ruthless' but they should be 'so just that the country on which they are imposed will feel in its heart that it has no right to complain. But injustice, arrogance, displayed in the hour of triumph, will never be forgotten or forgiven'.[11]

While there was some justice in Clemenceau's claim that Britain was adept at seeking others to pay the price of German reconciliation, the Fontainebleau memorandum was a good example of Lloyd George's longer-term vision. Of his short-term skill at negotiation there can be no doubt. He had an intuitive feel for moods and moments, an uncanny knack of finding the right words and gestures and the inestimable advantages of eloquence and a mind that could absorb and enhance a complex brief even under the most difficult circumstances. Tony Lentin highlights his persuasion of Wilson over Danzig by implying that the solution had sprung from the president; his ability to convince Clemenceau that the offer of a British guarantee was genuine by the promise to build a channel tunnel; his stereotypical mimicry leading to the embarrassment of Klotz over the issue of relief supplies for Germany; and the episode over Adriatic shipping where John Maynard Keynes, then a Treasury representative serving with the British delegation, had to rebrief Lloyd George in mid-speech – the prime minister reversing the flow of his previous arguments and convincing his listeners of the new case.[12] He was also able, in the British attempt to revise parts of the draft treaty in June 1919, to persuade Clemenceau and Wilson to reopen a number of settled issues. While Lloyd George was neither scrupulous about the truth nor over-concerned about implying contradictory outcomes to different parties in the same negotiation, he was, instinctively, a liberal with a vision of a peaceful and prosperous Europe. His problem, in many cases, was the bridging of the gap between his long-term aspirations and his short-term operational procedures. It was here that his dislike of day-to-day business and his need for the adrenalin of the excitement of reconciling the apparently irreconcilable created a fatal flaw in his diplomatic armoury. Thus, although he was often correct in suggesting that Britain was getting its own way at the conference, there were frequently medium- and long-term costs to pay.

Fontainebleau shared Wilson's aspiration that this peace would espouse both higher moral principles and more just practical arrangements than earlier settlements. Two areas of peacemaking highlighted by both Wilson and Fontainebleau, reparations and national self-determination, offer an interesting basis for an assessment of Lloyd George's achievement.

Wilson insisted that there should be 'no contributions, no punitive damages', in other words he opposed the idea of an indemnity.

His insistence on a higher moral value than 'to the victors the spoils' meant some other method had to be found to cover the costs of reconstruction. In the pre-Armistice agreement – the Lansing note of 5 November 1918 – the idea of compensation for civilian damage apparently fulfilled this need but as late as 23 March Kerr could still advocate 'as large a German indemnity as possible'. This, as Sally Marks has forcefully reminded us, highlighted the two key questions, 'who won the war and who would pay for it. … If the Allies, and especially France, had to assume reconstruction costs on top of domestic and foreign war debts, whereas Germany was to be left with only domestic debts, they would', she claims, 'be the losers, and German economic dominance would be tantamount to victory. Reparations would both deny Germany that victory and spread the pain of undoing the damage done'.[13]

Lloyd George had grasped both the geopolitical and the political importance of German payments and sought to maximize the British share. Yet his claim always was that, as a lawyer, he favoured the possible settlement rather than the pursuit of the unattainable figure that justice might suggest. In his quest to square the indemnity/reparations circle he scored a great triumph but the war-guilt clause represented a classic instance of a spectacular short-term success rich in unexpected and unintended consequences. At the time it provided a useful smokescreen for both Clemenceau and Lloyd George to disguise their inability to deliver the German indemnity that each had implied would be available to offset the costs of the war. Faced with Wilson's implacable opposition, Lloyd George had to find some way of securing significant payments from Germany even though he had agreed to the pre-Armistice agreement which appeared to limit German liability to that of civilian damage. Interpreted literally this would mean only minimal payments to Britain and Lloyd George told Wilson that this would be fatal to his survival as prime minister. While it would be fair to say that few, on the allied side, would have disputed the verdict of Article 231 that the war was the result of German aggression, it is clear that the delivery of an historical or moral verdict was not the motivation behind the drafting of the clause. Rather, it was to express an unlimited German liability to pay for the war in theory, a liability which would immediately be qualified by Article 232 setting out the headings under which reparations would be payable. John Foster Dulles's

suggestion proved an instant success with the embattled allied prime ministers but was to sow the seeds of a lengthy propaganda campaign by the Germans as they sought to undermine the whole moral basis of the Treaty. Dulles himself later expressed surprise that Article 231 'could plausibly be, and in fact was, considered to be a historical judgement about war guilt'.[14] But, like the wording of several other clauses of the Treaty, what the drafters meant and how their words were later interpreted were two (or more) different things.

Article 231 was supplemented by the highly dubious claim for war pensions and separation allowances and this allowed Britain to make a plausible case for 30 per cent of the reparations receipts. Here again Lloyd George had enjoyed success although he had strained his friendship with Smuts by using him to persuade Wilson with the unlikely casuistry that soldiers were merely civilians in uniform. Now the question arose of the extent of Germany's capacity to pay. Faced with the impossible task of naming a sum which his own (and the French) public would not denounce as too little and the German government as too much, Lloyd George has traditionally been given the credit for delaying any final judgement on this question and not inscribing a definite figure in the Treaty, instead relying on a Reparations Commission to fix Germany's liability two years later. This, his admirers claim, was designed to allow passions to cool and more rational counsel to prevail. He was undoubtedly unlucky when American withdrawal redrew the power lines in the Commission such that Italy would be drawn into the Franco-Belgian camp by virtue of their greater gravitational pull. Yet his rhetoric in 1918, his demands at the conference and his subsequent initiatives which were supposed to reduce the extent of German liability to manageable proportions, all cast doubt on his credentials as the great conciliator. In fact delegates suggested a bill substantially higher than the figure eventually produced by the Reparation Commission he had come to distrust. Tony Lentin has become more sceptical over the years, his earlier inclination to give Lloyd George the benefit of the doubt giving way, first, to the suspicion that the acceptance of the Lansing note may simply have been a *ruse de guerre*, and, later, to the view that Lloyd George's policy was not as disconnected from that of Cunliffe and Sumner (the 'Heavenly Twins') as Lloyd George would have had the country believe.[15]

Reparations certainly contributed to the poisoning of international diplomacy and to the cluttering of international finance in the 1920s, leaving a bitter legacy for the 1930s and a ready-made propaganda weapon for Hitler and the Nazis. Yet the reality was that Germany (though not necessarily ordinary German workers or taxpayers) received much more in loans from the United States than it paid in reparations to the allies. Stephen Schuker is blunt:

> Not only did the Reich entirely avoid paying net reparations to its wartime opponents; it actually extracted the equivalent of reparations from the Allied powers, and principally the United States. … The gross capital inflow amounted to an astounding 5.3 per cent of German national income during the entire period from 1919 to 1931. The net capital inflow, after subtracting all reparations transferred and making generous allowance for the disguised return of German funds, still came to a minimum of 2.1 per cent of national income over the same thirteen years.[16]

The more subtle interpretations of reparations policies that have emerged from some 30 years of archival research and the sophisticated economic theories that crack Keynes's apparently insoluble transfer problem have, on the whole, found their way neither into school textbooks, nor the public consciousness about Versailles.[17] In one sense, as Marks points out, that is less important than the historical reality that reparations became one of the great battlegrounds of diplomacy in the 1920s, generating much more heat than light, undermining Anglo-French solidarity and destabilising Europe.[18]

Whether there was much political leeway for a more radical and generous British policy and whether such a policy would have been in Britain's best interests are matters for speculation. Smuts believed there was an opportunity here but Lloyd George, while encouraging French ministers to confront their public with the truth about likely receipts, showed no inclination to take such a heroic stand himself. When urged by his Cabinet colleagues to reopen the question in the June revision of the Treaty, he remained curiously reluctant to do so. Lloyd George's claims for his moderation over reparations are much akin to the arsonist who seeks credit for summoning the fire brigade. There were sound moral and practical reasons for making a claim against Germany, but the manner in which it was stated and

pursued undermined its legitimacy and John Maynard Keynes' *Economic Consequences of the Peace* gave many a bad conscience.[19]

National self-determination is a further example of a principle that raised more hopes than it could satisfy. The warring parties were responsible for creating the national tensions within each other's ranks but the decisions taken by both sides to exploit the principle as a potential war weapon to disrupt the internal cohesion of the other (despite the potential threat of self-inflicted wounds) is a mark of the desperation each felt at some stage in the war. The British and French later found their hands forced partly by the insistence of Wilson and partly because the collapse of the old order in Eastern Europe left them bereft of any other acceptable basis for a new order in the area. The new recruits to the PID and the younger members of the Foreign Office staff had great sympathy with the aspirations of the 'New Europe' group, which championed the subject nationalities of Eastern Europe, particularly those of the Serbs and Czechs. The older members would have preferred the reform and survival of the Austro-Hungarian empire but its implosion robbed them of any alternative but to back the new national states that emerged from the Habsburg wreck. Smuts did make some attempts to re-assemble at least an economic heir to the empire but his ideas for cooperation in the area collapsed quietly in the spring of 1919. Lewis Namier suggested one reason when he pointed out that, should Czechoslovakia marry Austria, she would have Germany for a mother-in-law.

Lloyd George's record on national self-determination rests on stronger ground. He did have a consistent record of opposing, as far as was possible, the transfer of German people to the rule of other nationalities, leading the fight against French plans to detach the Rhineland, seeking compromises that prevented the outright transfer of Danzig to Poland or the Saar to France and supporting plebiscites in Allenstein and Marienwerder. He could be persuaded to reopen discussions where it appeared that an injustice had been done, for example, over Upper Silesia, though the problem of the longer-term costs of his actions may have returned to haunt him. Lloyd George was convinced by German protests, the misgivings of Headlam-Morley and the sentiments expressed by Cabinet colleagues, that the draft treaty was unjustified in assigning the whole of the province to Poland. He pressed the case for German self-determination, ironically against Wilson's opinion, and argued successfully for a plebiscite to

determine the fate of the area. The execution of the agreement required a commitment of troops and resources from Britain that Lloyd George was reluctant to make and yet he complained that the French troops, undertaking an occupation that their government had not wanted, were biased in favour of the Poles. The plebiscite itself provided a reminder that the interpretation of results was not a simple matter. Although there was an overall German majority, both the French and the Poles argued that the province should be divided, not assigned as a whole. Over two years after his success in the renegotiations in June 1919, and after much bitter Anglo-French debate, the matter was handed over to a League of Nations committee. Upper Silesia was another example of a short-term success with longer-term consequences that Lloyd George was not anxious to accept.[20]

Yet even Lloyd George was not able to create consistency and clarity from the ethnographic, economic and political confusion of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Deprived of whatever cohesion the old empires had offered, these areas did not conform neatly to national patterns. Nor did ethnic or linguistic boundaries necessarily create viable states or even coincide with the aspirations of the inhabitants. Almost the only constant was that viable defensive, economic or communications frontiers had little in common with each other and certainly none with the ethnic or linguistic patterns of the area. The eventual outcome of the First World War settlement was that the number of people living in states in which they did not constitute the dominant national group was cut from approximately 60 million to 30 million. National minorities in Eastern and Central Europe had been reduced from 50 to 25 per cent of the total population and, in the circumstances of the time and given the moral and practical constraints on the peacemakers, this was probably the maximum achievable. Ironically, the settlement at the end of the Second World War created a much more homogenous Eastern Europe by combining the legacies of Nazi genocide and Soviet brutality with an attitude that brooked none of the moral scruples entertained by supposed cynics like Clemenceau and Lloyd George about making people fit maps. By 1970, in seven east European states where, in the 1930s, national minorities had constituted 25 per cent of the population, the figure was now 7 per cent.[21]

In the last decade we have seen, in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, the chickens of Versailles coming home to roost.[22] The European state

system, which in 1989 Professor Michael Howard could accurately portray as essentially that of Versailles,[23] has changed considerably after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and as ethnic groups have exercised, or tried to exercise, what they see as their right of secession. It would be very difficult to imagine someone in, say, 1999, espousing the cause of national self-determination with the same optimism and enthusiasm as the Wilsonians of 1919, or even the anti-colonialists of the 1950s and 1960s, given in particular the effects of ethnic exclusivity and intolerance witnessed in the Balkans once more at the end of the century. The prediction of Wilson's Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, has sadly proved to be an underestimate, '… The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. What a calamity the phrase was ever uttered! What misery it will cause!'[24] Wilson's vision of the encompassing benefits of civic nationalism has, both in 1919 and in the ensuing years, repeatedly fallen victim to the exclusivity of ethnic nationalism.

Erik Goldstein has suggested that although the British delegation lacked an overall strategic view of the post-war world in 1919 it was equipped with principles derived from three schools of thought; 'the balance of power, the New Europe, and imperial expansion'. These, he claims, 'did not mutually contradict one another'.[25] It is difficult to see how the balance of power and the ideas of the New Europe group could be compatible, but Goldstein does reflect the contemporary aspirations (perhaps illusions) of liberals such as Headlam-Morley. The friend of R.W. Seton-Watson, the chief proponent of the ideas of the New Europe group, Headlam-Morley was a believer in the virtues of national self-determination and yet an opponent of exclusive nationalism. He believed in the new League of Nations but was reluctant to abandon the traditional policy of the balance of power and somehow hoped that collective security, the balance of power and the satisfaction of national demands for independence could all be amicably reconciled.[26] The fate of the settlement suggested that they could not.

Even though Lloyd George and Balfour achieved much of Kerr's pre-Fontainebleau programme, the Anglo-Saxon world lacked confidence in the Versailles settlement from the outset. The immense impact of Keynes' critique and the self-doubts of British and American liberal participants all furthered a process which contributed to the

fulfilment of Foch's gloomy prediction of a 20-year armistice. An embittered Robert Vansittart argued that the 'Germans got off lightly seeing the magnitude of their offence and the entirety of their defeat. War came again not because the treaty was severe but because it was broken',[27] but it is only in the last generation of historians that this view has received more sympathetic treatment. It will be interesting to see how the experience of the last years of the twentieth century and the early ones of this millenium affect the historical view of Versailles. There are already suggestions that it should not be seen in terms of a 20-year crisis between two wars but as part of an 80-year crisis revolving around ideological clashes between communism, fascism, national socialism and the Wilsonian principles of reformist capitalism and popular sovereignty.[28] A longer-term perspective suggests that Lloyd George and his colleagues may be responsible less for sowing seeds of discord and more for failing, under conditions of great pressure and complexity, to eliminate perennial European weeds. The more telling charge might have been that Lloyd George should have done more to preserve the war-time coalition and particularly the Anglo-French partnership which might have contributed to a happier outcome. But this was a charge that Curzon, given his attitude towards France and the French, was in no position to make.[29]

## Notes

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2. Erik Goldstein *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning and the Paris Peace Conference 1916–1920* (Oxford, 1991) p. 98.
3. Harold Nicolson *Peacemaking 1919* (Constable, 1937) p. 26.
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5. Roberta Warman The Erosion of Foreign Office Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy, 1916–18 *Historical Journal* vol. xv no. 2 1972, pp. 135–59.
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Never Was: Lloyd George and the Abortive Anglo-French Alliance of 1919, in Judith Loades (ed.) *The Life and Times of David Lloyd George* (Headstart History, 1991) pp. 117–18 and n4. Dockrill and Steiner The Foreign Office at the Paris Peace Conference, pp. 67–8.

7. Nicolson *Peacemaking* pp. 329–30.
8. Curzon's Lausanne memo, Mss Eur. F112/319; Harold Nicolson *Curzon: the Last Phase* (Constable, 1934) index p. 411. Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Smuts from A. Lentin *Guilt at Versailles: Lloyd George and the Pre-History of Appeasement* (Methuen, 1984) p. 126.
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10. Kerr, British Empire Interests 23.3.19 *Ibid*. F/147/3/2.
11. Some Considerations for the Peace Conference before they finally draft their Terms 25.3.19. Cmd 2169 *Papers Respecting Negotiations for an Anglo-French Pact 1919–1923* (HMSO, 1924) pp. 78 and 82.
12. Antony Lentin Several Types of Ambiguity: Lloyd George at the Paris Peace Conference *Diplomacy and Statecraft* vol. 6, no. 1 (March 1995) pp. 223–51, pp. 228–9.
13. Sally Marks, Smoke and Mirrors: In Smoke-Filled Rooms and the Galerie des Glaces, in Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser (eds) *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment after 75 Years* (German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 337–8
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15. Alan Sharp, Lloyd George and Foreign Policy, 1918–1922. The 'And Yet' Factor, in Loades *The Life and Times of David Lloyd George* pp. 137–9. Antony Lentin, Lord Cunliffe, Lloyd George, Reparations and Reputations at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* vol. 10, no. 1 (March 1999) pp. 50–86.
16. Stephen A. Schuker, *American 'Reparations' to Germany, 1919–1933: Implications for the Third-World Debt Crisis* (Princeton Studies in International Finance no. 61 July 1988) pp. 10–11.
17. Keylor, Versailles and International Diplomacy, Boemeke, Feldman and Glaser (eds) *Treaty of Versailles* pp. 502–4.
18. Marks, Smoke and Mirrors *Ibid*. p. 370.
19. Keynes published his book in December 1919 with Macmillan (now Palgrave).
20. F. Gregory Campbell, The Struggle for Upper Silesia, 1919–1922, *The Journal of Modern History* vol. 4, no. 3 (1970) pp. 361–85.
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22. Eric Hobsbawn *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (Michael Joseph, 1994) p. 31.

23. Michael Howard, The Legacy of the First World War, in R. Boyce and E.M. Robertson (eds) *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (Macmillan, 1989) p. 50.
24. Note 30.12.18, Robert Lansing *The Peace Negotiations: a Personal Narrative* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1921) pp. 97–8.
25. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace* p. 229.
26. Alan Sharp, James Headlam-Morley: Creating International History, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* vol. 9, no. 3 (November 1998) pp. 266–83.
27. Robert Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (Hutchinson, 1958) p. 220.
28. See Emanuel Adler, Condition(s) of Peace, *Review of International Studies* vol. 24, December 1998 Special Issue *The Eighty Years Crisis 1919–1999* pp. 165–91 and *passim*.
29. Alan Sharp, The Quest for Security: Anglo-French Relations from Versailles to Locarno, in A. Sharp and G. Stone (eds) *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2000).

# 4

# ‘Appeasement’ at the Paris Peace Conference

*Antony Lentin*

> Saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.
>
> *Jeremiah*, 6. 14.

## I

Eighty years on, the legend of Versailles as a doomed settlement dies hard. No amount of scholarly analysis seems able to shift the popular perception of the Treaty as a byword for harshness and injustice. But perhaps that is as it should be: for the perception itself was a decisive part of inter-war reality. General Smuts insisted that Versailles contained ‘the roots of war’ and would lead to war;[1] and his diagnosis became a self-fulfilling prophesy. The Treaty not being automatically self-enforcing, but dependent for its fulfilment on the will of the victors, what they thought of it, or came to think of it, was bound to affect and did profoundly affect its fate. Whether the Treaty was too severe or too mild, or ‘too mild for its severity’;[2] whether it was or was not ‘just’, may be academic in more than one sense, if it was understood by a large and influential number of Britons to be unjust. I therefore accept as a premise, as a given historical fact of the utmost import for the future of the peace, the sorry reputation which it acquired in Britain so soon after its conclusion. The question here is: how and why did this reputation come about?

As far as immediate public reaction is concerned, we need look no further than *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. Undoubtedly it was Maynard Keynes who, six months after it was signed, undermined and discredited the Treaty with his devastating polemic, and

gave powerful substance to 'appeasement' in the sense of a recognition of German grievances and a desire to address them. But while *The Economic Consequences* brilliantly distilled one man's personal disenchantment with peacemaking, his 'strictures', as Elisabeth Glaser crisply puts it, 'appeared more excessive than the others only in that he opted to make them public'.[3] Keynes' experience was far from unique. 'Even at this late hour', Smuts wrote to Lloyd George, 'I would urge that we revise our attitude towards Germany'.[4] The 'late hour' was 26 March, less than half-way through the conference. Five weeks later, on 4 May, he wrote: 'I wish fifty per cent of this peace treaty could be scrapped'.[5] Appeasement at Paris was even institutionalised. On 30 May, at the Hotel Majestic, the British delegation headquarters, was founded the Institute of International Affairs, a body implicitly critical of the Treaty. Chairing the well-attended meeting of British conference delegates, Lord Robert Cecil stated as a fact: 'There is no single person in this room who is not disappointed with the terms we have drafted.'[6] Harold Nicolson echoed this a week later: 'There is not a single person among the younger people here who is not unhappy and disappointed at the terms.'[7] Three weeks later James Headlam-Morley confirmed the common verdict on the Treaty: 'I have not found one single person here who approves of it as a whole.'[8] That appeasement was also recognised at the time as a political fact of the first importance is clear from the elaborate *apologia* which Lloyd George delivered in presenting the Treaty to the House of Commons. Time and again he turned to the moral, as opposed to the practical criticisms of the Treaty, to address the question: was it just?

Appeasement, then, was a phenomenon of the conference itself. The evidence is in the conference records and in letters and journals, published and unpublished; in spontaneous, contemporary reaction rather than in measured reminiscence; in Nicolson's diary, for example, rather than in his classic analysis, *Peacemaking 1919*, to which the diary is annexed (though *Peacemaking* itself, published in the fateful year 1933, is proof of the durability of the impressions received at Paris). The fullest and most striking record, however, of appeasement at the conference – a personal yet also a representative account – is, I believe, the day-by-day correspondence of General Smuts; and for that reason among others I place Smuts first among the appeasers. But appeasement was widespread: in one strain or

another it affected the British delegation almost to a man. In the later phrase of Robert Vansittart, who was also there and was himself not untouched, they were 'smitten by meaculpism'.[9] The very term 'appeasement' was part and parcel of peacemaking, a standard of judgement and of reproach. In *The Manchester Guardian* of 10 May 1919, we read C.P. Scott's call for 'a peace of appeasement'. Smuts, appealing to Lloyd George for generosity towards Germany, called for 'her appeasement now'.[10] Lloyd George himself assured a worried Archbishop of Canterbury of his hopes of 'early appeasement'.[11] The word twice finds its place in an official document, the allied reply to the German counter-proposals. This extensive commentary on and rationale of the Treaty, authorised and approved by the Big Three, while rejecting German complaints and refusing further concessions, invokes 'early reconciliation and appeasement' and 'that process of appeasement which all desire'.[12] Implicitly, then, the Big Three themselves conceded the truth of Smuts' charge, contained in the statement which he released on 28 June immediately after the signing of the Treaty, that 'the real work of making peace will only begin after this treaty has been signed'.[13] This view of Versailles was epitomised the next day in Garvin's editorial in the *The Observer*, headed 'Peace without Appeasement'; in a further statement by Smuts on 18 July regretting the 'failure of the peace conference to bring about the real and lasting appeasement of the nations to which we had been looking forward';[14] and in his still more striking assertion that 'in our policy of European settlement the appeasement of Germany [...] becomes one of cardinal importance'.[15]

Five distinct but connected stages may be traced in the evolution of appeasement at the peace conference:

1. Growing dissatisfaction with lack of progress in the first six weeks of peacemaking and with particular aspects of it, notably reparations.
2. These feelings accentuated in early March by the contrast between astronomical reparations demands on the one hand, and on the other, reports of starvation in Germany. The doubts spread. On March 8, Nicolson writes in his diary: '*Are* we making a good peace? Are we? Are we?'[16] Such feelings filter through to find reflection in Lloyd George's Fontainebleau memorandum, calling for reappraisal of many of the terms.

3. The presentation of the draft terms to the Germans on 7 May marks the moment when the victors for the first time see the treaty *in toto*; and signals the point of maximum shock and alarm: the treaty is perceived as 'impossible', almost as incredible. 'Everyone I have talked to', James Headlam-Morley records, 'agrees that the treaty as a whole is quite impossible and indefensible'.[17]
4. An increase in the volume and intensity of protests by the appeasers in May, brought to a head at the end of the month by the German counter-proposals, which, as Sir Henry Wilson admits, 'drove a coach and horses through our terms.'[18] These counter-proposals make a powerful impression on the British Empire Delegation and the British Cabinet, summoned in special session to consider them on the weekend of Friday 30 May to Sunday 1 June. Smuts takes the lead in urging radical change. Herbert Fisher notes in his diary: 'We all condemn the Treaty and agree that it should be modified.'[19] Smuts is only partly successful: but the delegation authorises Lloyd George to press for revision of Germany's eastern frontier, for a reduction in the length of the Rhineland occupation, and for Germany's immediate admission to the League of Nations.
5. Lloyd George's last-minute revisionism is only partly successful and not all wholehearted; and he virtually ignores his delegation's pleas for the immediate settlement of reparations. Failure to achieve radical revision leads to the final crisis of appeasement at the conference. Smuts dismisses Lloyd George's eleventh-hour modifications as 'concessions which I consider paltry'.[20] Keynes resigns to write *The Economic Consequences*. Smuts and Barnes threaten not to sign the Treaty, and though they do so in the end, Smuts issues his public statement, which in effect repudiates what he has set his hand to.

These then are the main stages of appeasement across the six months of the conference. But they are largely the artificial conveniences of historical periodisation: they were not seen as clear-cut at the time. Rather there was a gradual overclouding of initial high hopes, a sense of accumulated grievance, expressed in private meetings and correspondence, a mutual cross-fertilisation of discontent. Examples of this occur before and in the intervals of the crucial

sessions of the Empire delegation. Summoned from London by Lloyd George to discuss the counter-proposals – Edwin Montagu, Austen Chamberlain and Herbert Fisher study them *en route* to Paris. Montagu notes: 'We were all in agreement that the Germans had made out a case requiring considerable modification of the treaty.'[21] That evening the same three dined with Lloyd George, Birkenhead and Churchill; and, Montagu continues, 'the whole drift of the conversation was unanimous'.[22] Discussion in the same vein continued until midnight and resumed next morning at breakfast before the formal meeting of the delegation.

It is instructive to focus on the British Empire delegation, the body which having played its part in drafting the terms, was, together with members of the British Cabinet, charged with reviewing them. What is remarkable about this long debate on the terms is the difficulty of finding anyone with a good word for them. When called on individually by Lloyd George to comment, the Cabinet were almost uniformly negative. Churchill was earnestly in favour of meeting German objections half-way. Milner, Birkenhead and Austen Chamberlain said little, but that little was hostile to the Treaty. 'On the whole', Milner recorded, 'the opinions expressed were strongly critical of the peace terms'.[23] The question almost becomes: given the strength of anti-Treaty feeling in the British delegation, how did the Treaty come to be accepted at all? The answer is that by many, perhaps most, in the British delegation, it was *not* accepted in much more than a formal sense.

## II

The case of Keynes and Nicolson might suggest that appeasement, like the Spanish 'flu, afflicted the young, or at least the 30-somethings, with particular virulence. 'I really feel that this bloody bullying peace is the last flicker of the old tradition', Nicolson exclaimed, 'and that we young people will build again'.[24] Such embittered idealism certainly brings out the polarisation between these 'angry young men' and the 'terrible old men' incarnated in Lords Cunliffe, Sumner and Northcliffe. 'The fault is', Nicolson explained, 'that there is an old man called Lord Cunliffe and an old man called Lord Sumner, and they have worked away without consulting anybody, and the result is a treaty which isn't worth the *Daily Mail* it will be printed in'.[25]

Other like-minded young or young middle-aged appeasers included, from the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, Arnold Toynbee, Alfred Zimmern, Rex and Allen Leeper, Edward Hallett Carr, Philip Noël-Baker and James Barnes.

But, as has been suggested, guilt at Versailles spanned the generations. That was one of its strengths. Appeasers in their 40s, 50s and 60s included members of the Empire delegation, the Imperial War Cabinet and the British Cabinet, notably Smuts, Milner, Robert Cecil, George Barnes, Edwin Montagu and Herbert Fisher. Lord Milner had shown his colours even before the armistice, when his call for a moderate peace drew heavy fire from the Northcliffe press. On 23 March, 1919, looking back to the darkest crisis of the war, he noted dyspeptically in his diary: 'My birthday. I am 65. A year ago we were in the middle of the Great German Offensive. Now there is "Peace". But I am not sure that the outlook for this country and the world is not even blacker today than it was then'.[26] To Milner, among others, is attributed the world-weary description of Versailles as 'a peace to end peace'.[27]

The leading appeaser was Jan Christian Smuts. One of the two South African plenipotentiaries, together with Louis Botha, and a recent member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet, Smuts, almost alone of the appeasers, had the status and moral authority to confront Lloyd George and Wilson, and repeatedly to present his misgivings in terms that demanded a reply. Smuts was serious and singleminded and was taken seriously as a dissenting force in the Empire delegation. 'I have fought this peace from the inside with all my power', he told C.P. Scott.[28] He was also a conduit between officials such as Keynes, Nicolson and Headlam-Morley, and senior politicians such as Milner and Robert Cecil. He spread the word by circulating copies of his letters to Lloyd George among the delegates. 'I hope you will allow me to say', Headlam-Morley wrote in acknowledgment, 'how glad I am that someone has said what many are thinking'.[29]

At the advisory level just below the top political echelons, James Headlam-Morley himself provides a reliable barometer of opinion among the appeasers. Assistant Director of the Political Intelligence Department and head of the German section, an authority on German history, he had no illusions about German war-guilt, on which he had written the official account for the Foreign Office. 'Rational, detached, objective' in his daughter's words,[30] Headlam-Morley is in

his way more significant than Keynes and Smuts precisely because of his calm sobriety, his aversion, in the words of E.H. Carr, 'from any emotional indulgence'.[31] Keynes might be written off by the hard-headed men as Bloomsbury, neurotic and frankly disloyal; even Smuts might sometimes give the appearance of being holier than thou; Headlam-Morley, in and of the establishment, could not be faulted in terms of temperament. Yet Smuts remains the inspirational figure. His powerful statement of protest on 28 June prefigured Keynes' *Economic Consequences*, which Smuts indeed encouraged. It was Smuts who coined the damning description of Versailles which Keynes immortalised in his book – 'the Carthaginian peace'.[32]

Lloyd George too must be considered for his impact on appeasement, which was important, though oblique. His natural pride in the treaty coexisted with a receptiveness to the misgivings among his delegation, anxiety not to drive Germany into Bolshevism and fear of the consequences of a refusal to sign; this leading to his instigating some tactical revisionism once Britain's main demands had been met. Lloyd George was a catalyst of appeasement, both in what he said and did and in what he failed to do. His priority, he told the Empire delegation, was 'an absolutely just peace';[33] but having thus articulated the appeasers' chief concern, he then gravely disappointed their expectations. He spoke their language with fluency but he did not always mean the same thing, or perhaps anything at all. He reflected moral impulses which he fully understood but did not fully share. He was a carrier of appeasement, not a fellow-sufferer.

The appeasers were markedly critical of the French, Smuts the most hostile. 'There was far too much of the French demands in the settlement', he told the Empire delegation.[34] On this there was general agreement. Headlam-Morley, again, is a reliable gauge. He too considered that 'we depended far too much on French opinion; and whatever merits the French may have, that of understanding Germany does not seem to be included among them'.[35] Headlam-Morley thought his French counterparts narrowly opportunistic, grasping and vindictive. 'They seem completely defective in all sense of justice, fair play or generosity', he declared;[36] and he judged them responsible for some of the most objectionable aspects of Versailles. The French also trod on the appeasers' corns with their open scepticism towards the League of Nations; and French triumphalism in the Hall of Mirrors was much resented. 'The one

thing which was forced on one by the whole scene', wrote Headlam-Morley, 'was that it was the revenge of France for 1871'.[37] What has been said of anti-French sentiment applies in equal or still greater measure to the appeasers' attitude to Britain's other continental allies. Balfour recognised that 'the British representatives had been driven into a peculiar state of mind by the greed of France, Belgium and Italy'.[38] By 'a peculiar state of mind' he meant that counter-balancing disposition to sympathise with Germany which lies at the heart of appeasement.

There were few provisions of Versailles with which the British delegation did not find fault. Emphases differed; but there was something in it to trouble each and all of them. Smuts – and he spoke for most – was sweeping in his condemnation of Danzig, the Polish Corridor, Memel, the Saar and the Rhineland. 'I am simply amazed at all this', he wrote to Lloyd George on 26 March, 'Are we in our sober senses, or suffering from shell-shock? What has become of Wilson's Fourteen Points?'[39] Smuts struck a common note of incredulity and indignation at perceived violations both of the Fourteen Points and of the pre-Armistice agreement, essentially a British document, which underwrote the Fourteen Points as the contractual basis on which peace was to be made – 'a Wilson peace'. As Smuts repeatedly told the Empire delegation, 'he had always looked upon those declarations as bedrock and as governing any peace treaty which would be made'.[40] The draft treaty was thus 'a terrible outcome of all our professions'.[41] Adherence to those professions was to the appeasers the acid test of British good faith; and the transgressions – most shocking. 'The most shocking of all', Smuts told Lloyd George, was the Rhineland occupation. Occupation by French troops 'must shock every decent conscience'.[42] Smuts held Versailles to be a travesty of Wilsonism, both outside and contrary to the Fourteen Points; and he was not impressed by Lloyd George's sly assurance that Wilson himself was satisfied that it conformed with the Fourteen Points; for the President's credibility in the appeasers' eyes had long since plummeted.

To return once more to that defining moment in the crystallisation of appeasement: the Empire delegation's discussions across the long weekend at the end of May. Consider the significance of those meetings. Here, at the highest executive level, emerged a clear expression of misgiving and antipathy to the draft treaty. Excluding

Lloyd George and Balfour, there were present on 1 June: Smuts, Botha, the representatives of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, and seven leading members of the British Cabinet: Churchill, Milner, Birkenhead, Austen Chamberlain, Edwin Montagu, Herbert Fisher and George Barnes. They represented opinion across the Dominions and across the Downing Street coalition. The consensus was felt to be, and was, remarkable. Even before detailed discussion began, 'each member said that he was in favour of making some concessions'.[43] Smuts led vigorously with a root-and-branch critique of the terms, and struck a common chord in demonstrating their inadequacy, harshness and incompatibility with the Fourteen Points. Most of those present, certainly, were 'tactical revisionists';[44] and Smuts felt that he had failed to move them at the profound level of moral principle at which he sought change, warning prophetically against a settlement that might hereafter be morally repudiated by Germany. It is also true that Lloyd George shrewdly undercut the force of his colleagues' objections by reducing them to those important, but from the appeasers' view, minimal concessions which he was willing to urge on Clemenceau and Wilson. These were not the radical changes sought by the moral revisionists, 'the very drastic course' proposed by Smuts, 'that the peace treaty should be recast and transformed'.[45] This Lloyd George rejected as constituting 'such far-reaching concessions as to amount to a general reconstruction of the whole treaty'.[46] That was precisely the point. The gap between Smuts' demands and what Lloyd George was prepared to concede marks at its widest and clearest the measure of dissent and disappointment.

## III

The epithet 'pro-German' is a little crude. At the conference it was heaped on the appeasers by the hard men as a term of abuse. Lloyd George himself complained that the Empire delegation had 'erred rather on the side of consideration for the enemy'; while Balfour warned them not 'to fix the mind on the lamentations of the Germans and their misfortunes'.[47] His comment was shrewd. He noted as part of that fixation the uncritical conviction 'that Germany was repentant, that her soul had undergone a conversion and that she was now absolutely a different nation'.[48] The observation

pinpoints a certain loss of emotional and intellectual balance about Germany. Even Headlam-Morley believed the German revolution to be 'as thorough, complete and sincere as any revolution of which there is any record'.[49] Then there is Keynes' famous admission that during their face-to-face encounters he had fallen 'in a sort of way … in love' with his German counterpart, Dr Melchior.[50] No one else went quite that far, though few others took part, like Keynes, in the negotiations for the renewal of the Armistice and for famine relief, where personal contact with 'the enemy' formed the unique and transforming experience which made it impossible to continue to regard them as such. The absence at Paris of face-to-face negotiations and the virtual ostracism of the German delegates left their mark on the appeasers. Smuts and Botha, the Boer rebels of 20 years before, were already poignantly predisposed to identify with the late enemy. As Botha reminded the Empire delegation on 1 June, by chance the anniversary of the treaty of Vereeningen, 'he understood the position and feelings of the Germans because he also had had to make a peace'.[51]

The blockade aroused profound unease. The suffering could not be denied, since it was attested by military intelligence officers not prone to Germanophilia, by General Plumer of the occupying forces, and by experts like the veteran Berlin correspondent, George Saunders, now a member of the Political Intelligence Department. Saunders and the other German experts, Headlam-Morley, Edwyn Bevan and Alfred Zimmern, were stirred to their depths. Robert Cecil, formerly minister of blockade, was likewise 'oppressed', in his own word, by the enemy's plight; and in early April he begged Lloyd George to make immediate peace and lift the blockade.[52] He objected, he wrote six weeks later, to 'starving their children to force them to accept terms which, as you know, I am by no means sure about myself'.[53] Famine still worse in Vienna also evoked their distress, while their anger was aroused by the reparation demands made by the 'Twins' on a broken and impoverished Austria. Smuts and Nicolson saw the famine for themselves. 'Never in my life', wrote Smuts, 'have I seen such a load of despair'.[54] Nicolson begged his father to use his influence to promote famine relief, 'as it is the one way in which we can mitigate the moral responsibility of the blockade'.[55] On the streets of Vienna, he reflected, 'I feel that my plump pink face is an insult to these wretched people'.[56]

Then there was the cold-shouldering of the German delegation at Versailles. Headlam-Morley was troubled by the ostentatious flouting of diplomatic nicety. 'People will not realise how important it is to observe external forms in dealing with people like the Germans', he wrote.[57] There was shame at their confinement to a hotel whose grounds, at French insistence, were palisaded like a prison-camp. 'The wretched Germans are caged like criminals', Nicolson noted.[58] There was sympathy for them at the presentation of the draft terms on 7 May, notwithstanding the apparent truculence of Count Brockdorff-Rantzau in denouncing the war-guilt clause and remaining seated while he did so. A British military representative, Colonel Beadon, records that just before Brockdorff-Rantzau and his colleagues entered the building where the ceremony took place, there was discussion among the allied officers on duty as to whether the Germans should be saluted. The French refused outright. The others were in doubt. When the moment came, the British alone saluted. 'The most ordinary courtesy', wrote Beadon, 'demanded a salute to the vanquished foe'.[59] Despite the general show of indignation at Brockdorff-Rantzau's performance, Beadon confessed to 'a certain admiration for the manner in which they were endeavouring to "hold up their ends" under circumstances intended to humiliate them'.[60] Still more painful the final act in the Hall of Mirrors. Smuts regretted that none of the Big Three thought to speak to the two German signatories, isolated and ignored. 'No word of sympathy for them at the end', he wrote, 'when one little word from Clemenceau or George or Wilson would have meant so much'.[61] This is echoed by Sir Esme Howard, an experienced diplomat in the British delegation. 'They seemed to me intolerably lonely', he recalled. 'I felt then that I should have liked to get up and shake them by the hand'.[62]

## IV

For the historian of inter-war Europe, the geopolitical implications of appeasement at the conference are of the utmost significance. Revisionism necessarily meant changes in Germany's favour; but the appeasers' view, or at any rate Smuts' view, of Germany, went beyond that. He accepted as a fact of post-war life German predominance in Europe. He welcomed it. From the outset he called for the 'generous treatment of Germany as a vital factor in the restoration

of human civilisation'.[63] He spelled this out in his letter to Lloyd George of 26 March: 'Instead of dismembering and destroying Germany, she ought in a measure to be taken into the scope of our policy [...] She ought not to be despoiled and treated as an international pariah, but rather to be taken in hand by the Allies and helped to her feet again'.[64] He argued not only that German cooperation was essential to the succession-states, which could not survive 'without German goodwill'; but that 'her appeasement now' would make Germany a 'bulwark' of civilisation against Bolshevism.[65] There was no sense of Germany as a continuing or even a latent danger; or if there was, it was fear of the consequences if the Treaty were not revised. The Empire delegation's overriding fear was of being drawn by France into fresh hostilities through attempts to enforce the Treaty to the letter, and probably through some Rhineland imbroglio. Here, then, already, are the broad outlines of British foreign policy in the 1920s: a certain distancing from France, a distaste towards the eastern settlement, a stance which favoured Germany as a buffer against Soviet Russia and a half-hearted attitude towards 'the Carthaginian peace' in general.

How are we to explain the appeasers, their immediate failure so soon followed by general acceptance of their doom-laden view of Versailles? Keynes' book, of course; but it fell on fertile ground. The appeasers belonged to a social and intellectual elite with tenacious roots in British society. Members of the Edwardian establishment, they brought with them from the nineteenth century certain values and assumptions, cultural and ethical, clear-cut and durable, which permeated their responses to the Treaty, and which, once invoked by Keynes, found ready reflection in British society. Christianity, or at least Christian ethics, is relevant here. Headlam-Morley, son and brother of clergymen, was a practising Anglican. Cecil, the High Anglican among the appeasers, was deliberately sought out by the Archbishop, whom he encouraged to urge Lloyd George along the path of revision.

Here again, the transcendent, sage-like figure is Smuts. Smuts followed a spiritual creed of his own devising, which he named holism, eclectic but much influenced by Christianity and by his Quaker and pacifist friendships. From the first he called for Germany to be treated with 'pity and restraint'; and as for the Treaty – 'to eliminate from it all traces of petty spite and ill-feeling'.[66] He invoked

'the great Christian qualities' for the making of a true peace that should follow the efforts of the politicians.[67] The very cast of Smuts' mind and language was sometimes biblical, his communiqué of 28 June a sermon in prophetic vein. The hopes of the peoples, he declared, 'are not written in this treaty, and will not be written in treaties'. Quoting the Gospel of St John, he pronounced: ' "Not in this Mountain, nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth", as the Great Master said'.[68] He called for 'a new heart … a contrite spirit, a spirit of pity, mercy and forgiveness for the sins and wrongs which we have suffered'.[69] On the same day, his blood-brother, General Botha, after reluctantly signing the Treaty, was moved to write on his agenda-paper as if in a kind of sin-offering: 'God's justice will be done righteously to all peoples under the new sun; and we shall persevere in the prayer that it may be done unto mankind in charity, peace and a Christian spirit'.[70] Such exalted conceptions of peacemaking were half-cynically but accurately paraphrased by Lloyd George in the House of Commons. The appeasers' idea of peace, he said, was to dismiss German wrongoing with a simple *nunc dimittis*: *Go, and sin no more*.[71] It was more or less true. At a level only slightly less emotional than Smuts, religion, ethics and chivalry combined in Headlam-Morley, who stood for gentlemanly *punctilio* in peacemaking, and put in a nutshell the qualms of most appeasers: 'Ultimately the problem is not so much a question of what Germany deserves, *but of what it is consistent with our own respect and honour to do* […] There are certain elementary principles of humanity and Christianity which seem to me too much forgotten.'[72]

Disappointment in the Political Intelligence Department weighed the heavier because its members had spent the last years of the war preparing for peace, for a new diplomacy, for a New Europe. They believed that the task to which they had dedicated themselves, the studies in which they had made themselves expert, would enable the statesmen to go intellectually equipped to the conference and to reach decisions that were informed, rational and just. At a time of slaughter beyond imagining, they had looked forward to the conference as the vindication of the allied cause. They felt the times to be millenarian because of the scale of suffering. Only a regenerative peace, 'a Wilson peace', could hallow the carnage. And now the transcendant idea which had sustained them was exposed, in Toynbee's words, as a 'pathetic illusion'.[73] 'At times', we are told, Smuts

'wondered whether ten million lives had not been shed in vain'.[74] The sense of Versailles as a betrayal of the dead and a desecration of the cause was sometimes reflected in a bitter fatalism. Keynes, and even Smuts, cursed an indifferent destiny that played out its cosmic jest on their generation. Smuts wryly recalled the Kaffir prayer that it was time for God to come to earth in person, not send his son, as it was no time for children.[75] Something of this spirit is captured by the war artist William Orpen. In his well-known tableau of the signing, the participants, though individually differentiated, are depicted in a vein of sardonic detachment as insubstantial, hollow, trivial, dressed in a little brief authority, puppets dwarfed by the Hall of Mirrors and by the pall of immanent tragedy looming over them. And this was the official picture![76] In the hearts of the appeasers the Treaty was doomed indeed. In the beginning of Versailles was its end.

## Notes

1. 1 June 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*. Part II, Series I, M. Dockrill (ed.), *The Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, vol. IV, Chicago, 1989, pp. 98–9. Cf. A. Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles. Lloyd George and the Pre-History of Appeasement*, 1985, p. 97.
2. Jacques Bainville, quoted in Lentin, p. 132.
3. Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser (eds), *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment after 75 Years*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 381.
4. 26 March 1919, *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, W.K. Hancock and J. Van Der Poel (eds), vol. IV, *November 1918–August 1919*, Cambridge, 1966, p. 87.
5. *Ibid*., Smuts Papers, p. 144.
6. Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919*, 1933, p. 363.
7. 8 June 1919, Nicolson, p. 359.
8. 25 June 1919, James Headlam-Morley, *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference 1919* (ed.) Agnes Headlam-Morley, 1972, p. 161.
9. Lentin, p. 134.
10. Smuts Papers, 26 March 1919, p. 87.
11. 30 May, 1919, Randall Davidson War Box 27, Lambeth Palace Library.
12. Alma Luckau, *The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference*, New York, 1941, pp. 414, 418.
13. Smuts Papers, p. 256.
14. *Ibid*., p. 270
15. *Ibid*., pp. 271–2.

16. Nicolson, pp. 280–81.
17. 10 May 1919, Headlam-Morley, p. 103.
18. 30 May 1919, Lentin, p. 93.
19. 31 May 1919, H.A.L. Fisher Papers 8A, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
20. 2 June 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 212.
21. 4 June 1919, Lentin, p. 94.
22. *Ibid*.
23. 1 June 1919, Diary, Milner Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
24. 1 June 1919, Nigel Nicolson, *Portrait of a Marriage*, 1973, p. 143.
25. 28 May, 1919, Lentin, p. 133.
26. Milner Papers.
27. Dominic Hibberd, *The First World War,* 1990, p. 187.
28. 26 June 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 252.
29. 19 May 1919, Headlam-Morley, p. 118.
30. Agnes Headlam-Morley, introduction to Headlam-Morley.
31. E.H. Carr, *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays*, 1980, p. 166.
32. 19 May 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 171.
33. 1 June 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 109.
34. 1 June 1919, *loc. cit*., pp. 98–9.
35. 5 March 1919, Headlam-Morley, p. 43.
36. 10 May 1919, *loc. cit*., p. 103.
37. 30 June 1919, *loc. cit*., p. 179.
38. 1 June 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 108.
39. Smuts Papers, p. 85.
40. 1 June 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 98. Cf. Lentin, p. 94.
41. Quoted in Robert Cecil, Diary, 20 May 1919, Cecil Papers, British Library, Add Mss 51131.
42. 5 May 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 149.
43. 1 June 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 97.
44. I borrow this useful epithet from Professor Michael Fry to designate those who favoured amendments to the treaty to induce the Germans to sign, as opposed to the 'ideological revisionists', who favoured amendments that would make the treaty morally acceptable to the Germans. See *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment*, pp. 565ff.
45. 2 June 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 216.
46. Lloyd George to Smuts, 3 June 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 217.
47. 1 June 1919, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 108.
48. 1 June 1919, *loc. cit*., p. 107.
49. 25 June 1919, Headlam-Morley, p. 164.
50. Quoted in Lentin, p. 142.
51. 1 June 1919, *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, p. 114.
52. 3 April 1919, Douglas Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918–1919,* Oxford, 1997, p. 381.
53. 14 May, 1919, Lentin, p. 93.
54. 9 April 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 118.
55. 25 February 1919, Nicolson, p. 270.
56. 3 April 1919, *loc. cit*., p. 294.

57. 21 April 1919, Headlam-Morley, p. 84.
58. 15 June 1919, Nicolson, pp. 361–2.
59. R.H. Beadon, *Some Memories of the Peace Conference*, 1933, p. 172.
60. *Loc. cit.*, p. 175.
61. 28 June 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 255
62. Esme Howard, *Theatre of Life*, 1936, p. 389.
63. Quoted in J.C. Smuts, *Jan Christian Smuts*, 1952, p. 227
64. Smuts Papers, p. 85.
65. 26 March 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 188.
66. 22 May 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 188.
67. 18 July 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 270.
68. 28 June, 1919, Smuts Papers, p. 256.
69. *Loc. cit.*, p. 257.
70. Quoted in Smuts Papers, p. 286.
71. *Parliamentary Debates*, 117.H.C. 114 Deb.5s, 1219.
72. 17 March 1919, Headlam-Morley, p. 52. My italics.
73. 21 July 1919, quoted in Manfred F. Boemake *et al.* (eds), *The Treaty of Versailles: a Reassessment after 75 years* (Cambridge University Press 1998) p. 631.
74. J.C. Smuts, *Jan Christian Smuts*, p. 224.
75. Lentin, p. 97.
76. Bruce Arnold, *Orpen. Mirror to an Age*, 1981, pp. 377–8. In similar spirit Keynes quotes Hardy's *The Dynasts* in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*.

# 5

# 'That elusive entity British policy in Russia': the Impact of Russia on British Policy at the Paris Peace Conference

*Keith Neilson*

In the middle of May 1919, Lord Robert Cecil, the former parliamentary undersecretary at the Foreign Office and a leading member of the British delegation to Paris, noted that yet another decision at the Peace Conference depended on 'that elusive entity British policy in Russia'.[1] There have been a number of attempts to determine what was the latter.[2] There have been a much larger number of efforts to determine British policy at Paris.[3] There has not, however, been a study that looks at the two in tandem.[4]

This is unfortunate. British policy at Paris dealt with a number of issues upon which Russia directly impinged, and British policy with respect to Russia was not one that could be pursued independently of her erstwhile wartime partners – both Allied and Associated. In particular, the issues involving the borderlands of what had been the Russian Empire were intimately tied to what policy would be taken with respect to Russia. And the questions involved with the creation of (or whether there should be created) successor states were multifold. Answering such questions is more difficult than posing them. In fact, there is no answer to the central issue of what British policy towards Russia at the Peace Conference actually was. But looking at British policy in Paris through the lens of British considerations involving Russia is useful. First, it provides an insight into a number of issues that played upon British policy generally at the Conference and so adds to our understanding of that gathering. Second, it allows a better understanding of British policy towards Russia generally, and

so adds to our understanding of London's actions with respect to intervention against the Bolsheviks. Finally, by looking at the views of those experts who provided the policy alternatives for Britain's policy towards Russia, we gain an insight into the flux of ideas at Paris.

Before turning to this task, there are some general considerations and themes that need to be kept in mind. The Paris Conference was a peace conference, but there was war – both civil and interventionary – in Russia. The Peace Conference dealt with enemies and allies, but which of these was Russia? The twin impacts of Bolshevism and Brest–Litovsk made it difficult to know whether to consider her as friend or foe. The British were pledged to the idea of national self-determination, but committed – to a greater or lesser extent – to the support of Russian forces determined – again to a greater or lesser extent – to the recreation of a united Russia. The British wanted to have a just and lasting peace, but they were not necessarily willing to abandon their own interests in pursuing it. This was especially so with respect to Imperial policy, particularly to Imperial defence. Should Russia, in whatever guise, be treated as a necessary counterweight to Germany in Europe or as a threat to British imperial interests? And, if Russia remained Bolshevik, how great a threat would it be to European and world stability? All of these matters, often suggesting contradictory policies, need to be kept in mind when determining how and why Russia affected British policy in the crucial period from January to the end of June 1919.

Of course, Russia's impact on British thinking about post-war policy did not begin in January 1919. The British had fought the war with one eye warily fixed upon their Tsarist ally.[5] The patch that had been placed over Anglo-Russian enmity by the Convention of 1907 had been failing even before the war, and each country had been concerned that the other might steal a march, particularly in Asia, during the hostilities themselves. The events of 1917 brought matters to a head. Russia's effective withdrawal from the war and the incapacity of the French raised the unpleasant spectre that Britain might be faced with a compromise peace.[6] For some, that meant the need to concentrate British resources on the Western front; for others, particularly for those like George Curzon, a former Viceroy and a member of the War Cabinet, this meant that Britain needed to focus her efforts on ensuring that she gained a favourable extra-European post-war settlement.

When Russia dropped out of the war in March 1918, this consideration became even stronger for Curzon and those who shared his views.[7] Their concern was that Russia's collapse and the terms of the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk would result in Germany succeeding Russia as an Imperial rival in the Middle East, the Caucasus and on the frontiers of India.[8] In the Eastern Committee – a spin-off of the War Cabinet that dealt with the above broad arc of territory – Curzon strongly advocated a forward policy. Britain needed to move into Persia and Trans-Caucasia in order to forestall the German *Drang nach Osten* and secure the *glacis* of India. A similar need was perceived in the north. Here, the Russian collapse had resulted in the Baltic becoming a German lake, while German influence was paramount in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and powerful in Finland.[9] Only the unexpected military reverses suffered by the Kaiserreich in the autumn of 1918 prevented the British from having to face a situation in which, whatever happened on the Western front, Germany had achieved massive gains as a result of Russia's demise.

It was in this context that British policy towards Russia and its successor states was formulated late in 1918. The complexities were immediately evident. What was to be the guiding principle of British policy? That was decided quickly, and never wavered despite the efforts of various individuals to change it. At a conference held at the Foreign Office on 13 November, a small committee chaired by A.J. Balfour, the foreign secretary, concluded that the London could not 'embark on an anti-Bolshevik crusade in Russia' despite the wishes of British 'advisers on the spot'.[10] This decision was confirmed the following day by the War Cabinet. Beyond this fundamental choice, however, there were a number of contending and often conflicting visions.

One of the first points of contention had to do with the fate of Russia's border states. This was evident, even before the Armistice. In late October, the General Staff wrote a paper dealing with the Ukraine.[11] In it, they argued that, whatever the composition of the emergent Ukrainian state, 'there is no doubt that eventually some form of tie with Great Russia will be recreated'. This contrasted with the view of J.W. Headlam-Morley. The assistant director of the Political Intelligence Department (PID) of the Foreign Office contended that 'no feeling of desire to do justice to Russia should be allowed to divert us from the fundamental principle that in the future Russia,

like every other nation, must be based on the principle of nationality'.[12] Such a view was contested strongly in a memorandum written on 14 November, but without knowledge of the Cabinet's decisions, by Rex Leeper, another member of the PID. 'No mere formula, such as self-determination', Leeper asserted, could drive British policy with respect to territorial questions about Russia.[13] This result from the fact that:

> any premature decision in favour of independence [for border states] without careful examination on the spot and without consultation with Russia would only lead to grave discontent in the future when Russia had recovered her position as a great power.

A bridging position between Headlam-Morley and Leeper was held by Sir Eyre Crowe, then supervising the Western European Section of the PID.[14] While Crowe agreed with Headlam-Morley that policy must 'begin with self-determination', he was cautious about its implementation:

> In applying the principle, it will, however, be prudent to follow a course which may be calculated to cause the minimum of resentment and bitterness to a reconstituted Russia, and leave her no ground for complaining that the Allies had been taking advantage of her temporary weakness.

How this circle was to be squared was to bedevil British policy makers.

Nor was that the only problem about British policy with respect to Russia. Leeper's memorandum, cited above, touched on a number of others. These are worthy of careful consideration, for a number of them remained central until the end of the Peace Conference and beyond. Leeper's background was important for his ideas. An Australian, whose brother Allen was one of the PID's Balkan specialists, he was particularly well-informed about Russia, in close contact not only with the White Russian émigrés in London but also with the Bolshevik representative there, Maksim Litvinov.[15] Leeper detested the Bolsheviks:

> Russia in its present state of anarchy … is a grave menace to civilisation. Bolshevism in Russia is not a purely Russian affair, it is an

> international religion whose leaders are determined to introduce it everywhere by any means in their power no matter how sordid. If left undisturbed they will seize the opportunity to extend their influence and to subvert the existing order in every country. …

For him, the proper response was that Bolshevism should be 'put down by force … in the interests of European civilisation'.

Leeper's discussion of the alternative to intervention – 'ringing Russia round with armed forces so as to isolate Bolshevism and starve the Bolshevik government into submission' – pointed out the difficulties involved in that policy. Such a policy would ensure that the 'the opponents of Bolshevism would slowly perish of starvation', as the revolutionaries would use the existing food only for their own benefit. Equally, he believed that in the Baltic States there would be little national opposition to Bolshevism and that the Allies might find themselves having to provide all the necessary armed forces in these regions in any case, possibly finding the Bolsheviks supported by the Germans.

Another key matter was who was to represent Russia. The Bolsheviks, given that 'they openly denounce all the main ideas of the Allies for the future settlement of Europe', were clearly inadmissible. Instead, Leeper argued that it was necessary to recognise the All Russian Government at Omsk, its being 'as fully representative of the anti-Bolshevik forces in the country as is possible under existing conditions'. A failure to ensure that Russia was 'fully represented at the Peace Congress' would, in Leeper's view, 'cause grave discontent and indignation amongst all classes of patriotic Russians'. Here, Leeper's views were partially supported. At the meeting on 14 November, the War Cabinet decided to give support to the Omsk regime, but it did not recognise it as the being the official government of Russia.

Leeper's final position on all these matters was outlined in a memorandum written on 18 November, subsequent to the Cabinet's deliberations.[16] Leeper then suggested that 'a joint delegation' from the Omsk and South Russian governments should represent Russia at the peace conference; that the Bolsheviks should not be accorded any recognition; and that the 'future of the Ukraine would be determined when order had been restored'. In general, he argued that 'the Peace Conference should recognise as definitely part of the

future Russian State the whole of the former Russian Empire', excepting Finland, Poland, the Baltic States, Trans-Caucasia and parts of Central Asia. Leeper himself recognised that this policy would raise resentment among Russians.[17] Many of the latter, he feared, would see the British occupation of the Caucasus pending a peace settlement as a veiled grab for economic advantage. While the reality of this Russian sentiment was recognised, others in the PID did not accept its main corollary – that any settlement in that region must await the re-creation of a unified Russia. Arnold Toynbee, the PID's Middle Eastern expert, felt that the Russian claims were valid only in limited aspects: predominately Russian areas should not be detached from Russia nor should Russia be denied a share of the oil reserves at Baku and Grozny. However, he followed the line of national self-determination in insisting that 'Russia has no claim to hold in suspense the political settlement of non-Russian nationalities'. Both Toynbee and Headlam-Morley did not dispute that some of the Caucasus might decide to join some future federal Russian state, but both opposed any Russian right to determine either whether that would occur or what form such a hypothetical relationship would take.

There were other alternative futures for Russia put forward. Professor J.Y. Simpson, the PID's second Russian expert, saw a federal union of Great Russia, the Ukraine, Siberia and possibly Turkestan and Trans-Caspia, as the basic unit of the future.[18] On economic grounds, he suggested that the Baltic states might form a League, their relationship to Russia to be determined later.[19] Poland and Georgia he felt might be independent, while Armenia and Azerbaijan 'might be set up as independent units under British or international guarantee'. This latter reflected the earlier concerns of such advocates of Imperial defence as Curzon, Simpson noting that the two latter states 'constitute the highway to Persia and the Farther East'. But in the path of any such scheme stood Bolshevism, 'a tyranny and a conspiracy against civilisation' according to Simpson. This was a practical matter, and Sir Esme Howard, the British minister to Sweden who had been called back to London in November to head the Northern European Section of the Foreign Office's contingent at Paris, contended that the British might have to deal with the Bolsheviks 'if they continue in power for many months longer'.

Howard had his own views, particularly with regard to the Baltic, where his wartime experience in Stockholm had given him a certain expertise. Howard argued that the Baltic states had a good case for independence, based on ethnicity and the ability to govern themselves.[20] He rejected the arguments put forward by those such as Leeper and Alfred Zimmern (another PID member), who contended that the Baltic states were not economically viable, that they would gravitate either to Russia, Germany or Poland and that their existence would serve 'to foment a soured and aggressive nationalist movement' in Russia bent on forcing their re-absorption.[21] Howard saw these states as serving a particular and valuable function. 'It is moreover', he noted, 'in my opinion of great importance that Russia–Germany should not have contiguous frontiers as before'. This reflected his concern that the Russia of the future might be dominated by Germany to form a combination detrimental to British interests. This view, that Germany might be able (*pace* Brest–Litovsk) to win in the East what she had lost in the West, was to be another perennial issue when discussing British policy towards Russia.

Such arguments did not commend themselves to Leeper. On 30 November he attempted to rebut the proponents of unfettered (or even fettered) national self-determination.[22] His position was still based on his earlier assumption that 'before long Russia will again be a Great Power'. He argued that national self-determination was possible in only two cases: where the fledgling nationality was capable of defending itself (or could be defended by another country) and where the 'settlement is made with the mutual consent of the parties chiefly interested'. Neither of these conditions was satisfied in his opinion. To move ahead without Russia's consent, Leeper believed, was not only to ignore the moral requirement to support a war-time ally whose present difficulties had been caused by that conflict, but also to Russia's beginning 'her recovery in a spirit of revenge and the difficulties of a lasting settlement in Eastern Europe will increase rather than diminish'.

His arguments for practical policy were straightforward. He believed that 'every reasonable Russian' would accept the complete independence of Poland, Finland and Armenia. There was 'no question' of any Ukrainian separation. That left the Baltic states and the Caucasus. Here, Leeper advocated a Fabian policy. The Allies would recognise the *de facto* independence of these states, but without prejudice to

the nature of their future relationship to Russia. He hoped that a federal Russian successor state, 'based on justice and freedom for each of its members', would undertake a negotiated settlement with each of them.

Leeper's position was strongly attacked. E.H. Carr, who had been seconded from the Foreign Office to act as Howard's assistant, was scathing:

> The gist of the argument as to the small nationalities seems to be that some one else (i.e. Russia) is in a better position to judge what is good for them than they are themselves. This is a time-honoured argument for "benevolent" autocracy as against democracy, and for imperialism against the principle of nationality.

Howard himself agreed with Carr, and reiterated his argument about the necessity of preventing Germany and Russia having a coterminous border, which would only increase the likelihood of Russia being economically dominated by Germany. Leeper rejected both of these criticisms. He turned Carr's argument on its head, contending that not to pursue a policy considerate of Russian feelings would surely lead to a resentment and a recrudescence of both autocracy and imperialism. The same line of reasoning applied to Howard's strictures: 'We can only replace her [Germany, as the dominant economic force in Russia] by going to Russia ourselves & we can only do this successfully by keeping on friendly terms with her & thus exercising our influence'.

A final contending vision of the future of Russia was provided by the India Office.[23] It was shaped by the particular concerns of the sub-continent, and dealt with the particular case of the fate of Russian Central Asia. For the India Office, there were three considerations. The first was that unrest on the North West frontier was undesirable. The second was a subset of this: one source of unrest was that 'a general Moslem rising against Bolshevik excesses', might occur and spill over into the entire Moslem world, including Central Asia. This was to be avoided by keeping Central Asia isolated from the rest of Islam. The third was that 'Central Asia should not be in the possession of a great military Power pursuing imperialist aims'. How were these, particularly the latter two, to be achieved? Isolation of Central Asia required 'a strong and independent Armenia, the elimination of

all Turkish influence from Azerbaijan, and preferably the internationalisation of Baku'. The latter meant that Britain 'should not encourage the re-union of Russia, but that our interest is that Central Asia should look rather to Omsk rather than to Petrograd or Moscow as its focus'. The ideal would be an 'Asiatic Government in Siberia, controlling all the railway systems, holding Orenburg, and riding the Moslem States and populations on a loose rein'. In a minute on this paper, Toynbee pointed out that a policy of isolation also required Britain to control the route to Central Asia based upon the Black Sea, the Batum to Baku railway and hence to Krasnovodsk.

This was linked with other matters. Simultaneously with the discussions about policy to be adopted at the Peace Conference, the issue of Imperial defence was being thrashed out in the Eastern Committee.[24] Curzon told the Committee on 2 December that Britain wanted an independent Armenia to act as 'a palisade' against the Turkish influences feared by the India Office.[25] But, also in line with the India Office's concerns, it would not do that an Imperial power such as France held a mandate for Armenia.[26] And, as the Admiralty and the War Office pointed out, such an Armenia could be maintained only if the Black Sea were a British lake, which meant that Constantinople must at the very least be demilitarised and internationalised.[27]

Howard pointed out some other problems inherent in the India Office's evaluation. Not to encourage the re-unification of European Russia with Central Asia would be equivalent to supporting separatism in the latter, a policy that Howard thought 'would be sure to damage our position in European Russia and very likely not lead to the result desired'. Instead, he believed that it would be better to support the government at Omsk to maintain 'what order they can' in Central Asia. This view was also linked to the Far East, where British concerns were growing that Japan's intervention was solely designed to further its own interests.[28] Thus, Siberian separatism (likely sponsored by Japan) was not to be supported, and any Siberian government in favour of continued ties to Russia should be supported.

These, then, were the contending visions of the experts. Given Howard's position, it was his views that predominated. They were contained in a memorandum dated 11 December 1918.[29] In the chaos that was the situation in Russia, Howard admitted frankly that 'it would seem useless to lay down any settled policy as regards the country as a whole. We must wait on events and see how they

shape'. However, he was clear that the British government could not afford to support any Russian movement that had not agreed to some sort of land reform 'in unmistakable terms', as 'no permanent settlement of the Russia question' was possible without it. This being noted, Howard outlined three possible policy lines: armed intervention, the 'ring fence' and the establishment of relations with the Bolsheviks. The first had been discarded by the Cabinet on 14 November. The second had all the problems mentioned above by Leeper, but Howard, drawing on his own experiences in Macedonia in 1904, did not reject the possibility of using an international gendarmerie of volunteers to help carry this out. But it was the final policy that he dealt with at some length.

If the Bolsheviks remained in power for some time, Howard averred that Britain would be 'compelled to establish some sort of semi-official relations' with them. While he was careful to hedge this opinion about with conditions which the Bolsheviks would have to fulfil (but were unlikely to accept) in order to receive even this limited recognition, it reflected his earlier convictions. For Howard, it was 'inconceivable' that a country as rich as Russia could remain isolated indefinitely. What he wanted to ensure was that it would not be Germany that moved first to exploit Russia's 'immense natural resources'. In order to prevent this, Howard called for an encouragement of foreign – particularly British – traders to compete with Germans in Russia. More germane to the Peace Conference, he proposed the establishment of 'a line of buffer states between Germany and Russia' to decrease Germany's 'geographical advantage' in trade relations.

As to British policy towards Russia in the interim, Howard had differing suggestions for the differing regions of British interest. At Archangel and Murmansk, he advocated maintaining the British occupation, although he realised that domestic political pressure from Labour might force a change of policy. In any case, as was the case in Siberia, Howard felt that the safety of those Russians who had acted as Britain's allies must be ensured. In the Ukraine, while Howard disliked the pro-German Skoropadski regime that had been set up at Brest–Litovsk, he was willing to deal with it or any other government 'which is not frankly Bolshevik' in order to maintain order and protect British interests in the Black Sea. The Don Cossacks, the 'pivot of all our action for hemming in Bolshevism

in Russia', should be given all possible support in line with the War Cabinet decision of 14 November. Finally, in Russian Central Asia, separatism was to be eschewed (the India Office having been won over to this point of view), and British Imperial defence concerns dealt with by occupation of the Batum–Baku railway and Krasnovodsk.

These were the considered and varied views of the experts. But they were only advisers. The key to British policy were the views of the politicians. These were expressed fully at the Imperial War Cabinet on 31 December.[30] All were agreed that it was necessary to solve the Russian question at Paris. It was no use, as Churchill, the Minister of Munitions soon to be Secretary of State for War, remarked to 'come away from the Peace Conference rejoicing in a victory which was no victory, and a peace which was no peace'. None the less, only Churchill believed four square in armed intervention. George Barnes, the Labour minister without portfolio, contended that only large-scale intervention would be effective – 'it was no use merely poking with sticks into the kennel to infuriate the dog' – and that this was impossible with American help. He favoured, as did Sir Robert Borden, the Canadian prime minister, getting all sections of Russian political life to meet at Paris 'with a view to adjusting their own differences'.

Lloyd George, clearly intent on maintaining his own freedom of manoeuvre, was adamant on one point only: 'he was definitely opposed to military intervention in any shape'. He pointed out some basic facts. German war-time experience suggested that to deal with Russia militarily would require a force perhaps as large as one million men: 'Where were we to find the troops'? Even if Parliament were to authorise conscription to raise the men, Lloyd George was doubtful that 'the troops would go. Our citizen army', the Prime Minister asserted, 'were prepared to go anywhere for liberty, but they could not be convinced that the suppression of Bolshevism was a war for liberty'. What, then, should be policy? Lloyd George asked the Imperial War Cabinet for a mandate to oppose intervention at Paris. On the other hand, he left the idea of economic pressure an open issue, and favoured the idea of calling on the Russians to resolve their own matters. Cecil did not let the prime minister escape quite so freely. Cecil was quick to point out the British obligations to a number of groups in Russia and that these latter could not be left

'in the lurch'. Equally, it was possible that the Bolsheviks might be planning a war of aggression against their neighbours. In both cases, Britain would have to provide material aid. With this *caveat*, Lloyd George's position was approved by the Imperial War Cabinet, along with the general proposition that Britain's 'general policy should be that, as Sir J. Cook [the Australian Minister for the Navy] expressed it, of "walling off a fire in a mine" '.

Thus, on the eve of the Peace Conference, British policy towards Russia was fluid, but subject to conflicting pressures. These were multiplied by the attitudes of the Allies. The idea of effecting a truce in Russia, which the British circulated to the Allies after the Imperial War Cabinet, illustrated this. The French were adamant that they would have no dealings with 'le régime criminel des Bolcheviks'.[31] The American government also seemed unlikely to favour this proposal, although President Wilson's *éminence grise*, Colonel House, felt that the President would like the idea.[32] Only the Japanese, J.D. Gregory, the head of the Russian Department at the Foreign Office, noted were likely to support the British suggestion, and Curzon opined that 'the suggestion was I fear doomed to failure'.[33]

What was required was reliable information. Lloyd George had complained at the Imperial War Cabinet that 'Russia was a jungle in which no one could say what was within a few yards of him'. In order to clear away some of the undergrowth and at the Cabinet's request, Curzon had a memorandum prepared at the Foreign Office.[34] Written by Leeper and representing both his and Curzon's ('I am personally in agreement') anti-Bolshevik views, it consisted of two parts. The first was largely 'descriptive of the political situation in Bolshevik Russia and the Ukraine' but with a political twist: 'laying special emphasis on the militant aspects of Bolshevism and its determination to expand both towards Berlin and Kiev, as the two centres for attacking social order in Western and South-Eastern Europe'. The second concerned policy. The Bolsheviks could not be negotiated with because they were inherently untrustworthy and their aim was not only that of 'destroying Russia, but … if left alone, [to] destroy other parts of Europe'. In a veiled slap at Lloyd George's views, Leeper also dismissed the idea of trying to broker a deal between the Bolsheviks and the other Russian factions as likely to 'disgust all honest anti-Bolsheviks in Russia' and because 'there is no possible basis of agreement' between the two groups.

And how was the Cabinet's policy of providing moral and material aid to the anti-Bolshevik forces to be put into practice? Discussion of moral support allowed Leeper to deal with the key issue of representation. Leeper was adamant that Admiral Kolchak's Omsk government (under which General Denikin, the leader of the Whites in South Russia had placed his troops) should be recognised. Further, he argued that the Russian Political Committee (RPC), formed early in January 1919 in Paris under the leadership of the former head of the Russian Provisional Government, Prince Lvov, should be regarded as the representative of Kolchak's regime. Realising that giving the RPC a status equivalent to one of the Allies might not be within the bounds of political possibility, Leeper suggested that if this were not possible then its rejection should be paralleled by a simultaneous denunciation of the Bolsheviks. As to the material, Leeper called for the sending of Allied volunteers to Russia, although he had (barely) enough political acumen to realise that this should be kept as secret as possible to avoid 'acrimonious public controversy'.

While Leeper's views commanded respect from Curzon, some leading figures in the Foreign Office and at least one other member of the PID, they were not universally held.[35] Headlam-Morley preferred a third option for Britain: 'complete non-interference in Russian affairs combined with the refusal to recognise any Russian party as authorised spokesman for Russia'.[36] Instead, Headlam-Morley wanted both to strengthen and to support the anti-Bolshevik forces outside of Russia 'in what would in effect be an alliance against the danger of Russian aggression', so that any future conflict with the Bolsheviks would not appear as interference in Russia's domestic affairs but as legitimate defence. This approach found favour with Howard. He realised that a campaign of public education about the 'disastrous results of Bolshevik rule both for capital & *labour*' would be necessary before troops of any variety could be sent to Russia. Further, Howard was aware that giving the RPC full diplomatic status was unlikely. But the key matter was to establish policy. As Curzon told Cecil on 13 January: 'I hope you will soon tackle the Russian Question at Paris. Everything is hung up for lack of a policy …'.[37]

But this was easier said than done. On 12 January the question of Russian representation at the Peace Conference was raised in Paris.[38] Stephen Pichon, the French foreign minister, put forward the idea

that while the RPC could not be recognised as representing Russia, it should be allowed to put forward its views informally to the Conference. Lloyd George, who agreed with this, took the opportunity to make a much wider statement on Russian matters generally. The nature of his remarks was no doubt inspired by two things: first a meeting earlier that day, when a proposal by Marshal Foch, the French military commander-in-chief, to organise a Polish army with massive allied military support had been put forward and, second, by the support that this idea had garnered in the War Cabinet two days earlier.[39] Lloyd George had sidetracked this proposal until an Allied policy towards Russia had been reached. At the later meeting, the British Prime Minister wished to keep open his options. He pointed out that Prince Lvov and his associates 'represented every opinion but the prevalent opinion in Russia', and that the 'Bolsheviks were the *de facto*' Russian government. In the past, Britain had recognised the Tsarist government despite its being 'absolutely rotten' and now supported the governments at Omsk, Archangel and on the Don 'although none of them were good'. To refuse to recognise the Bolsheviks on purely moral grounds was thus inconsistent and to select the Russian representatives arbitrarily 'was contrary to every principle for which we had fought'. The prime minister stated that to do anything but allow the RPC to submit memoranda and give private interviews would be to create a false public impression that Lvov's group represented Russia. To ensure that the Allies accepted this position, Lloyd George raised it again the following day.[40]

The question also arose in other venues. Due to a leak put out by Wilson's press secretary, Lloyd George's suggestion that representatives of all the Russian factions should meet to discuss matters became public, causing substantial furore in the United States.[41] In London, it also met Leeper's objections, since he felt that it would give 'great moral prestige' to the Bolsheviks.[42] Any likelihood that some easy compromise among the Russians could be obtained was dashed by the position taken by Sergei Sazonov, the former Tsarist foreign minister and the dominant member of the RPC.[43] Sazonov's future Russia was one with a strong central government willing only to give 'strong autonomies' to its borderlands. The ex-foreign minister stated that Russia was 'not willing to surrender any territory and least of all any coast'. 'I gather', Lord Derby informed the Foreign Office in massive understatement, 'that Sazonof who has been so

long cut off from contact … in the Crimea had not fully realised [the] progress of [the] idea of self determination or [the] effect of American participation in the Peace Conference of which I warned him'. Esme Howard was appalled. Sazonov's position 'will hardly make for an easy solution of the questions arising out the present state of Russia'. Sir Charles Hardinge, the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, was more Olympian, contending that Sazonov will 'find circumstances too strong for him'. Balfour was contemptuous: 'It is a melancholy fact that all émigrés are fools'.

In these circumstances, Lloyd George attempted to distance himself from the suggestion of all-Russian consultation. On 16 January, he explained to the other Allies that his proposal had been 'misunderstood'. The British had never meant to offer Russia a seat at the Peace Conference, only to suggest that a truce might allow the various Russians an opportunity to work out their differences by sending representatives to Paris. He contended that this was the only logical alternative for the Powers to follow. Using the same arguments that he had deployed at the Imperial War Cabinet on 31 December, the prime minister demolished the case both for intervention and for 'the policy of encirclement'. That left only consultation, and Lloyd George was dismissive both of Sazonov's claim to speak for Russia and of the latter's current knowledge of Russian conditions. His argument was supported by Pichon and Wilson, and the meeting decided that, in an attempt to ascertain the state of affairs in Russia more accurately, they should listen to reports from Joseph Noulens, the French ambassador to Russia (who had just returned from Archangel) and Harald de Scavenius, lately the Danish minister at Petrograd.

While these matters were being discussed, at a less exalted level, there was little optimism about any useful result. From Paris, Allen Leeper wrote to his brother:

> Personally I don't know how the whole Russian affair will go but I am afraid there is little chance of the proposals even of moderate people like Bakhmetiyev [Boris Bakhmetiev, the former ambassador of the Provisional Government to the United States and a member of the RPC] … being accepted. I don't think Russia will be allowed any *representation* at all, though Lvov's committee will be invited to lay their views before the Conference. This you

> may take as quite definite. I'm afraid the Russians won't like it at all.[44]

In London, Simpson made an effort to ensure that the British were 'perfectly frank with ourselves' about the implications of their policy.[45] Professor Simpson noted that RPC was essentially a reactionary body, and that Sazonov's messages to Kolchak (which had to be sent courtesy of the British government and were therefore known to the latter) underlined this fact. 'The essential point' resulting from this he pointed out, 'is that as matters are at present constituted, all the assistance that we are giving to Denikin etc. to put down Bolshevism will eventually be used for the restoration of a monarchy, so long as the political leadership remains in the hands of the men indicated'.

In the afternoon of 21 January, after hearing Noulens' and Scavenius' strongly anti-Bolshevik reports, Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson and Orlando, the Italian premier, and their foreign ministers, returned to the issue of Russia.[46] Wilson suggested a modification of Lloyd George's earlier proposal. The American President proposed that all the Russian parties should be invited to 'some other place' than Paris to discuss their differences. Lloyd George seized on the idea, no doubt happy to be relieved of the burden of having been the progenitor of a controversial policy. When Italy protested that no one wished to hear the Bolsheviks, Wilson rejected the protest. The Bolsheviks, the Welshman retorted, 'were the very people some of them wished to hear'. When the Italians persisted that the correct policy was to fight the Bolsheviks, not to talk to them, Lloyd George was caustic. Would the Italians provide the men, money and supplies necessary to do so, he wondered? Given that Italy had been dependent on British supplies throughout the Great War and her post-war economy was parlous, this was a rhetorical question. Wilson's proposal, vague except that it proposed a ceasefire in Russia for humanitarian reasons when the talks were begun, was accepted. The following day, invitations were issued.[47] The Prinkipo (once that island in the Sea of Marmora had been decided upon as the final venue) proposal had been made.

The British experts were shocked by Prinkipo. Allen Leeper wrote to his brother that he would 'be horrified at the Russian decision. It seems to me incredibly short-sighted, but the War Cabinet or those

of them here seem obsessed by the idea'.[48] At the Foreign Office, Ronald Graham noted circumspectly that 'I must say, with all respect, that this seems a remarkable proposal'.[49] At Paris, Hardinge, who was in any case unhappy with the tendency of the politicians to carry on the workings of the Conference with little regard to the organisation provided by their officials, was blunt.[50] He described the Prinkipo proposal as 'the most fatuous decision of modern times'.[51] 'One cannot help smiling', he told Graham:

> at the idea of inviting the Bolsheviks, Esthonians, Sazonoff, and a few others all to go to the Princes Islands and to quarrel there amongst themselves while peace is to reign in Russia. I wonder if the Bolsheviks will go? I feel certain that the others will not go.

Hardinge's estimation and forebodings proved accurate. Over the next fortnight, the failure and repercussions of the Prinkipo proposal became evident.

The response of the RPC was swift. On 24 January, it rejected the invitation, denounced the Bolsheviks and deplored the calling of the conference.[52] This occurred despite an effort by Esme Howard, who called on Sazonov that same day in an effort to persuade the latter to agree to participate.[53] Sazonov's replies underlined why Prinkipo was doomed to failure. There was a sense of betrayal, both personal and national. Sazonov had been the most pro-British of the Russian foreign ministers, a man whose tenure in office had symbolised the war-time alliance.[54] As such, Prinkipo had 'cut him to the quick', particularly as he viewed it, despite Wilson's having issued the invitations, as a British initiative. Further, Sazonov, like most Russians of his class had suffered personal tragedies – the murder of his nephew and brother-in-law – at the hands of the Bolsheviks. As a result, it was 'quite useless to ask us to deal with these people in any way'. At a national level, Sazonov asserted, Prinkipo had crystallised the suspicions of those Russians who believed 'that there was a deliberate plan on the part of His Majesty's Government to prevent the reconstruction of Russia' to Britain's own advantage. Further, he believed that all negotiation with the Bolsheviks was futile, as past experience had shown that their word was worthless.

Similar objections came from other Russian Whites. The Archangel government echoed Sazonov's strictures about the nature

and reliability of the Bolshevik regime.[55] The Omsk government was dismayed, as previously they had believed that they enjoyed the support of the Allies against the Bolsheviks.[56] To be told that they were now to 'meet Bolshevicks [*sic*] amiably and settle their squabbles as if in the eyes of the Peace Conference all Russian factions were much the same' was demoralising.

It was not just the White Russians who rejected Prinkipo or felt betrayed by it. The border states could see little gain in any plan that promised the regeneration of Russia, and their position found some favour among the British experts.[57] Many of the latter were also bitter about the invitation, not just doubtful of its wisdom. Rex Leeper was 'depressed & anxious' about Prinkipo, while his brother could not 'conceive [that] it will come to any good'.[58] F.O. Lindley, who had served as the Foreign Office's representative in Russia since the departure of Sir George Buchanan, the former ambassador, early in 1918, was particularly dispirited. He had observed the Red terror from its beginning, and had supported the government's policy of aiding those who opposed the Bolsheviks. To him, Prinkipo was a betrayal:

> To those who, like myself, hoped that the Peace Conference would do something to infuse the true sprit of justice into the treatment of international affairs; to those who hoped that it would lend a helping hand to the diplomatists who have been striving to conduct the business of their country on the same principles as obtain amongst men of honour in their private dealings, and most, if not all British diplomatists are in this category; to all these the terms of the invitation have come as a bitter disappointment and humiliation.[59]

While this *cri de coeur* was dismissed rather cavalierly by Balfour – 'Arctic snow appears to produce on some temperaments the same moods of unmeasured violence that tropic heats do on others!' – it underscored the passions that infused Britain's policy towards Russia generally.[60]

Prinkipo was an unmitigated failure. Only the Bolsheviks agreed to attend, and their acceptance was, as Balfour put it, an 'insolent suggestion that we are to be bribed by [concessions regarding] mines & forests'.[61] But, before late February, when Prinkipo was judged 'dead', the whole issue of Britain's policy towards Russia was raised

again.[62] In part, this stemmed from military concerns, as Britain had troops in North Russia, South Russia, Siberia and throughout the Caucasus and Trans-Caspia. Further, the Royal Navy was active in the Baltic, providing support to anti-Bolshevik forces there. To deal with these disparate campaigns required some sort of overarching policy with respect to Russia.

All these points were raised at the War Cabinet on 12 February.[63] Churchill, now Secretary of State for War, called for the adoption of a definite policy: 'if we were going to withdraw our troops, it should be done at once. If we were going to intervene, we should send larger forces there. He believed that we ought to intervene'. Lloyd George immediately raised the spectre of the need for one million troops, and held out the alternative of providing material support for the Whites. This produced an immediate *caveat* from Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who warned about the difficulties of escalating costs.[64] Seeing an ally, Lloyd George called for the War Office to study the various alternatives, with an eye to the costs involved. After desultory discussion, this policy was adopted. The next day, however, in a secret session, the matter was discussed again.[65] Lloyd George spent the meeting trying to force Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), into committing himself as regards the likelihood of White Russian success. The wily Ulsterman, who had seen this tactic used by the prime minister during the war, refused to be drawn, noting that the 'nebulous' nature of the situation made predictions impossible. Churchill refused to let Lloyd George dodge the issue when the latter attempted to utilise Wilson's remarks to justify a policy of drift. Instead, Churchill turned the argument on its head, contending that many of the imponderables would be clarified if the British government would send a message 'of defiance' to the Bolsheviks. He further raised the spectre of what the result of a failure to support the Whites might be. For Churchill, Bolshevik Russia might turn to Germany and these two might link with Japan, creating the 'possibility of a great combination from Yokohama to Cologne in hostility to France, Britain and America'.[66] As had been the case the previous day, the Cabinet deferred any decision until the War Office could provide further studies as to the costs and effects of the various possible policies, and authorised Churchill to go to Paris to determine the views of President Wilson before the latter departed Paris for the United States.

At the Supreme War Council (SWC), on 15 February, Churchill attempted to push the assembled members into a decision. Pointing out that the Prinkipo policy did not seem likely to come to much, he asked the SWC for its views. Wilson's immediate response was that the Allies should withdraw all their troops, as they were 'doing no sort of good in Russia'. Churchill pointed out that this would mean 'destruction' for all those in Russia who had supported the Allies, and Wilson agreed that this was a 'cruel dilemma'. But Wilson then noted that his opinion was only a personal one, and that he would 'cast in his lot with the rest'.

This lukewarm commitment was all that Churchill needed. He immediately telegraphed Lloyd George, terming Wilson's position 'very satisfactory … I conceive that we are entitled to count on American participation in any joint measures'.[67] He also informed that prime minister that, in a 'special meeting' after the session of the SWC, he had suggested the creation of 'an Allied Council for Russian Affairs' to draw up contingency plans for action in Russia should Prinkipo prove abortive. This was too much for Lloyd George, who professed himself 'very alarmed' by Churchill's 'planning war against BOLSHEVIKS'.[68] 'Cabinet have never authorised such a proposal', the prime minister went on, 'they have never contemplated anything beyond supplying armies' with the necessary means of carrying on the resistance to Bolshevism. He emphasised both the fact that no amount of help was of any use if the Russians were not willing to fight effectively on their own: 'If Russia is pro-Bolshevik not merely is it none of our business to interfere … it would be positively mischievous'. He reminded Churchill of the costs attendant on action in Russia ('Chamberlain tells me we can hardly make both ends meet on a peace basis'), adjoured him not to be lured into action by the French (who were 'not safe guides in this matter') and warned him to keep in mind 'the very grave labour position' in Britain. Put into such fetters, Churchill was forced to pursue a more sedate line. At a meeting of the British Empire Delegation on 17 February, he merely outlined the three possible courses of action – intervention, withdrawal and material support – and made his own preference for the first alternative clear.[69]

This left policy in the air. This was evident to all. In a typically non-committal paper, Balfour outlined some of the facts.[70] He argued that, opinions to the contrary, the Bolsheviks were the

dominant military force in Russia and likely to be able to make 'a formidable, perhaps an overwhelming, attack' in the summer. Further, none of the forces opposing them were capable of doing so without Allied assistance, but were unwilling to accept any advice from their benefactors. Finally, British policy supported the national aspirations of many of the successor states, which was in direct opposition to the policy of the Whites. These, Balfour observed, were irreconcilable goals. He gave no suggestion as to how this should be dealt with, but merely expressed his irritation with what he termed the 'extraordinarily unreasonable' position of the Whites. 'Should we leave Russia to her fate', he concluded, 'it will not be for these gentlemen to criticise our actions'. This irritation was evident, even among the friends of the Whites, but so, too, was the need for policy.[71]

At the War Cabinet on 24 and 26 February, Churchill continued to press for a declaration of policy.[72] Lloyd George continued to stall, arguing that no policy could be had outside the context of Paris, that he had raised the issue there three times and that further discussion in Paris was necessary. Other pressures were mounting. At the Foreign Office, Curzon found the Admiralty pressing him for instructions about what action it could take in the Baltic and the War Office asking for guidance about the Caucasus.[73] The acting foreign secretary was quick to add his voice to the chorus demanding policy. Perhaps stung by this, and partially motivated by a call from Foch for a concerted attack on the Bolsheviks by the states in Europe bordering Russia, Balfour made his position clear.[74] Despite the logic of withdrawal, the foreign secretary argued that Britain must continue to support those forces in Russia opposed to Bolshevism. For, while their prospects did not look bright and they were awkward allies, to abandon them would be to concede victory to the Bolsheviks. Balfour would rather take the honourable course of supporting the Whites, while allowing the Bolshevik regime the opportunity of 'tumbling into ruins under its own weight'.

For the first fortnight in March no agreement was reached in Cabinet, despite Churchill's best efforts, other than a decision to evacuate North Russia as soon as practicable.[75] However, the situation in the Baltic, where German dominance in Finland and the Baltic states was growing, again raised the fear that Germany might establish a position in that area which would negate any losses that

she might suffer in the West at Paris.[76] This was particularly significant, as it tied Britain's Russian policy to two other British policy concerns: Germany and self-determination. The focus of this was the effort by General Nicholas Yudenich, a former Tsarist officer, to raise an army in Estonia and attack Petrograd.

The British were not optimistic about this proposed campaign. As early as 28 January, the Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) had noted the 'futility' of Yudenich's plan, and by March this opinion was commonplace.[77] However, there were also rumours that Yudenich's force might link up with the German troops still occupying parts of Latvia.[78] This was an ominous possibility, made more plausible by the fact that many prominent Russians, in Graham's words, 'cannot get over the Prinkipo proposal' and now believed that their future lay more with Germany than with the Allies.[79] As E.H. Carr noted on 11 March about this prospect:

> The danger of the Germans re-establishing their influence in the Baltic provinces appears for the moment to be as serious a danger as the spread of Bolshevism. As a matter of fact there is no real alternative to the Germans *or* the Bolsheviks until we are prepared ourselves to render effective assistance.

This of course spoke to the need for a policy. And, as a minute concerning a request by Latvia and Estonia for a loan pointed out, such matters had not been decided because 'we have considered that the question of such assistance was dependent on the policy as regards Russia as a whole which was being considered in Paris'.[80] With similar problems being encountered in the Caucasus, the need for policy was paramount.[81]

The issue was discussed at the War Cabinet on 17 March.[82] Curzon argued that the situation in the Baltic could not be discussed on its own: 'it was useless', he contended, '… to take a piecemeal decision with regard to military, naval and financial assistance to Russia until there was a definite Russian policy'. And, he concluded, such a policy 'could not be evolved in London: it must be framed in Paris'. Curzon's colleagues chimed in: Churchill reiterated his apocalyptic vision of triumphant Bolshevism threatening the world order and Chamberlain expanded on the dire state of the financial crisis.[83] Blame was apportioned to others: to those in Paris

(implicitly Lloyd George) for refusing to create a policy and to the United States for, in Chamberlain's words, refusing to 'untie her purse-string'. Curzon was then authorised to write a memorandum to be sent to Lloyd George in Paris, calling on the Conference to decide a policy for Russia.

This was done in the Foreign Office.[84] The memorandum argued as follows: no loan to the Baltic states on its own would achieve the goal of creating stable regimes in that region. The 'comparatively promising situation' in the Baltic depended on the fact that the bulk of the Bolshevik forces were deployed elsewhere, against Denikin, Kolchak and in North Russia. Should these armies collapse, the Bolsheviks would have no difficulty in sweeping away any force that might be raised in the Baltic. There were two possible courses of action: either to assist Denikin and Kolchak simultaneously with supporting the Baltic forces or that the Baltic situation should be regarded as 'independent of the large problem of Russia' and the Allies 'be prepared to discount adverse developments in Russia itself and to deal with any offensive action taken by the Russian Bolshevik Government on the Russian Western front'. The first policy required a 'definite pronouncement' both of policy and the Allied 'intention to support Admiral Kolchak and General Denikin'. The second required an obvious commitment of Allied forces.

The difficulties of both were evident. The first meant that the Allies would have to come to terms with the territorial aspirations of the Whites. The memorandum argued that the Powers should adopt the position that, while all territorial issues (except that of Poland) were to be 'determined ethnographically', no final solution could be 'settled in the absence of and without the consent of the Russian people'. However, as this would lead to prolonged uncertainty, in the interim the Allies would recognise the existing bodies in the borderlands as '*de facto* governments'. This, the memorandum concluded, was a compromise that both the Allies and the RPC could accept.[85] The second alternative not only involved a commitment of Allied forces 'to an extent which they may not be prepared to contemplate', but also meant dealing 'a great blow' to the White forces and creating a legacy of 'distrust and hostility' among them. Thus, the memorandum, not surprisingly given that it was composed by Rex Leeper and Selby (whose pro-White tendencies were manifest), plumped for the first option.

As 'the Paris Conference have for 2 months shown an inimicable reluctance to grapple with' these larger issues, Curzon chose not to raise them directly. Instead, on 28 March, he presented Balfour and Lloyd George with a series of rhetorical questions – did the Allies support a policy of 'the "cordon sanitaire"'?, did they purport to recognise the Baltic states and support them financially and materially? – designed to force the latter pair to confront matters themselves.[86] Balfour's minute – 'not very helpful' – reflected both his frustration and a certain chagrin that someone else had not found the answer for him.

But events would not let the matter ride. By the end of March, it was evident that the French forces at Odessa would soon have to be evacuated and there was continued pressure for a decision concerning Yudenich and the Baltic states.[87] Balfour was not the only frustrated individual. Hardinge, too, was dispirited about Russian policy: 'a solution of that question appears every day to grow more distant owing to the vacillation and drifting of the Allies'. In the absence of any decision, rumours abounded, including one that Lloyd George had advocated recognising the Bolsheviks, a policy that in fact found favour with some of his Cabinet colleagues, although causing consternation for the Leepers.[88] Other ephemera included the usual number of schemes proposed by various Russians to resolve matters, prompting Balfour to note that 'each Russian has his own panacea'.[89] Finally, on 11 April, the Supreme War Council decided that the growing dominance of the Germans in the Baltic had to be checked, but that the German troops there should not be withdrawn until the local forces were capable of defending themselves against the Bolsheviks.[90] But how this was to be done was left unclear, and the Council of Four was too busy working on the German settlement to decide on the matter.

Besides, there were hopes that all the conundrums in Britain's policy towards Russia might be solved by *force majeure*. Kolchak's military prospects, dim in January, were now in the ascendant as his spring offensive rolled westwards. This prompted a suggestion from the War Office that the British forces in North Russia should, prior to their evacuation, drive southeastward to Viatka, hence to Kotlas and effect a junction with Kolchak.[91] Kolchak's success also prompted Sir Charles Eliot, Britain's High Commissioner in Siberia, to suggest that the time had come to recognise Kolchak's government at Omsk.[92] This

was Curzon's opportunity. Seizing upon Eliot's suggestion, on 15 April, the acting foreign secretary made a strong plea for recognition.

Curzon painted an attractive picture. Kolchak's offensive would solve the British problem at Archangel: a link-up as envisaged by the War Office would allow for an orderly British withdrawal at the same time as providing 'an escape' route for the Russian forces now supporting the British in North Russia.[93] Recognition would make Kolchak's success more likely, since it would counter the moral blow of Prinkipo, infuse the troops with determination and raise Kolchak's prestige among the undecided. And, Curzon stated, Kolchak appeared to be free of any intention to attempt to restore the monarchy and re-absorb the border states. This latter contention was given greater impetus by the RPC, which, on that same day, declared to the Peace Conference, that its sole aim was to create a democratic Russia.[94]

This proposal quickly picked up momentum. In Paris, despite E.H. Carr's hesitations, Howard and Hardinge threw their support behind it.[95] So, too, did Henry Wilson, and the War Office was quick to provide further ammunition.[96] But any decision was deferred to later, as the Conference was in the throes of finishing up the German treaty. As Curzon informed Eliot, while the latter had 'been left somewhat in the dark' about Britain's policy towards Russia, the latter had been 'necessarily … subordinated to the results of the Paris Conference' and nothing 'concrete' beyond Prinkipo had 'yet been produced'.[97] In the meantime, there remained the question of Yudenich and the Baltic.[98] Given that many in Estonia were 'more afraid of Kolchak and Denikin' than the Bolsheviks, what were the British to do? At the Foreign Office, there was a strong inclination to adopt the policy of soothing the fears of the Baltic States as to Russian intentions by according them 'provisional independence' subject to economic concessions to Russia and to reach a final settlement sometime in the future, with the League of Nations acting as arbiter. However, the Foreign Office was well aware of the 'strong inclination in Paris to leave the Russian question to take care of itself'.

On 9 May, five days after the Allies had at last taken a definite step by formally recognising the independence of Finland, Balfour made yet another attempt to examine Britain's strategy.[99] He pointed out the 'essential inconsistency' of the two parts of British policy. On the one hand, through support for Kolchak and Denikin, the British were 'opposing the spread of Bolshevism'. On the other

hand, they were also supporting many of the border states. This second policy was 'not irreconcilable with the views of Bolshevist enemies, but as Sazonov's sharp reaction to the recognition of Finland had shown',[100] it 'is quite irreconcilable with the hopes of our Russian friends'. His memorandum concluded with no definite recommendations; simply with the bleak observation that 'the future of our Russia policy is full of difficulties'.

The last two weeks of May seemed to suggest that these difficulties might be surmounted. Kolchak's continued successes were matched by suggestions that his recognition might either be hedged in by provisions that it was conditional on his acceptance of the border states or simply confined to Siberia.[101] In the War Cabinet, there was hope that the Omsk government might be able to obtain a substantial loan from Barings, thus decreasing the financial barrier to supporting Kolchak and giving impetus to Curzon's call for recognition.[102] While such a limited approach to Kolchak was not enough for people like Rex Leeper, even his brother felt that he was perhaps too extremist and should be happy with the general direction of events. 'Frankly', Allen wrote to his brother on 14 May, 'I think you have adopted the Russian point of view a little too much. The reason is that you live in the idea of Russia & of opposition to Bolshevism'.[103] However, even with there not being any set Allied policy, and even with the fear that Yudenich's move on Petrograd might come to pass with German assistance, the hopes for Russia's future looked bright.[104] 'The resuscitation of Russia seems nigh', Allen Leeper wrote on 22 May, 'Slava Bogu [written in Cyrillic: 'Glory to God'].'[105]

On 26 May, the Conference finally defined and adopted a policy towards Russia.[106] It reflected everything that had animated British discussions of their Russian policy over the past months: the restoration of peace, the choice of Russia's style of government to be determined by a Constituent Assembly and the boundaries of Russia to be determined, where there were disputes, by the League of Nations. Further, the Conference declared that these aims could not be reached by means of dealings with the Bolsheviks. Kolchak, once he had agreed to the above (including recognising the independence of Finland and Poland), was to be accorded support in the form of 'munitions, supplies and food'. This was what Allen Leeper had been waiting for: 'The more I look at the Kolcak [*sic*] telegram the better I like it. K.[olchak] will be absurd if he jibs at it'.

In the event, Kolchak did not 'jib' at the conditions for his recognition, no doubt because had been carefully coached by Churchill to avoid doing so.[107] By 12 June, the Council of Four found his telegram agreeing to the terms 'acceptable'.[108] Kolchak had been recognised. The treaty with Germany could be signed. British thinking about Russia now turned towards the hope that the future government there would be some form of federation and that no White terror should follow a victory by the latter. Military events, without regard to the Paris Peace Conference, would now determine the future of British policy towards Russia.

Why was there no British policy about Russia at Paris? There are a number of answers. The first is that, as Lloyd George always insisted, it was impossible to send British (or Imperial) troops to Russia. This was due to a number of things. On the one hand, public opinion was completely opposed to intervention, for reasons varying from the simple desire to see the troops home again to a left-wing desire for a 'hands-off' Russia.[109] On the other were the military and financial obstacles trumpeted by Henry Wilson and Austen Chamberlain. With intervention out of the question, given that none of the other Allies were either willing (in the case of the United States) or able (in the case of Italy and France) to carry it out, this meant that, practically, only the policies of the 'cordon sanitaire' and support for various White groups were possible.

The second reason was less political and practical, but affected the remaining alternatives. It revolved around the concept of national self-determination. To a greater or lesser degree, the British were committed to upholding this idea at Paris. Such a commitment put a 'cordon' of another sort around Britain's Russian policy. To support the creation of independent states on Russia's borders, each created out of the former Russian empire, meant to oppose the policy of 'one Russia, great and undivided' that underpinned the White movements. As Balfour lucidly pointed out, this meant that to give support to the White groups was to work at cross-purposes to the intent to support the national aspirations of the emergent Baltic states, Finland and Georgia.

However, not to support the Whites carried with it frightening long-term possibilities. There were two equally bad alternatives. The first was that the Whites would triumph without British help and would, in resentment, become implacably hostile to Britain and the

Empire. The second was that the White forces, finding support from Britain lacking, would turn for succour towards defeated Germany. This would not only allow Germany to gain in the East what she had lost in the West (to use the British phrase) but also would create the spectre of Russo-German combination of the sort that had underpinned the Bismarckian system. And this was not just bad for Britain's European and foreign policy. For those, such as Curzon and Henry Wilson, whose thoughts were always with Imperial defence, such a grouping would be disastrous.

The range of opinion was wide. At one extreme were the avowed interventionists: Churchill, Rex Leeper and J.Y. Simpson. At the other extreme were those who rejected such a course in all circumstances: Lloyd George, Austen Chamberlain and E.H. Carr. Between them were those who supported limited policies. Esme Howard favoured continued support for the Whites because of the war-time obligations that he felt Britain owed; on the other hand, he supported the border states, particularly if they could act as a barrier between an emergent Russia and Germany. Balfour's position was similar, although his contempt for *and* dislike of the émigrés was evident. Henry Wilson simply wanted a defined policy that would allow him to plan for the defence of Empire; given the resources at his disposal, this meant withdrawal of British forces to defensible frontiers.

But, whatever policy the British tried to pursue at Paris with respect to Russia, they were damned if they did and damned if they did not. Lacking the will and ability to enforce a solution in Russia, no policy could satisfy both British interests and expectations. What was left was the compromise policy that was followed: limited support for the Whites and limited support for the border nationalities. In the final event, all turned on the course of events. The future of Russia was fixed by force of arms, not by treaties. British policy towards Russia remained 'that elusive entity'.

## Notes

1. Cecil's minute, c. 15 May 1919, on Tyrrell (FO) to the British Delegation, Paris, 8 May 1919, FO 608/185/592/1/2/9579. Cecil was more than his official position suggested: he was the former Minister of Blockade, the cousin of the British foreign secretary, A.J. Balfour, and the brother of the

Marquess of Salisbury. I have deliberately used the term 'Russia' in this chapter to refer to the country as a geographical, not a political, entity. As one of the major problems for the British was in determining just who, if anyone, represented the Russian polity (and if there was one), 'Russia' is used in an abstract sense.

2. R.H. Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917–1921* (3 vols; Princeton, 1961–72) remains the classic. Recent regional studies, for example, Houshang Sabahi, *British Policy in Persia 1918–1925* (London, 1990) and Manoug J. Somakian, *Empires in Conflict. Armenia and the Great Powers 1895–1920* (London and New York, 1995), while valuable, are not much concerned about Paris and British policy towards Russia there.
3. The best recent study is Erik Goldstein, *Winning the Peace. British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference 1916–1920* (Oxford, 1991). For an excellent introduction to this voluminous literature, see the contributions by Goldstein, Michael Fry and the editors' introduction in Manfred F. Boemeke, Gerald D. Feldman and Elisabeth Glaser, eds, *The Treaty of Versailles. A Reassessment after 75 Years* (Washington and Cambridge, 1998).
4. Neither John M. Thompson, *Russia, Bolshevism, and the Versailles Peace* (Princeton, 1966) nor Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles 1918–1919* (New York, 1967), despite their emphasis on the impact of Bolshevism at the Peace Conference, deal, except in passing, with British policy towards Russia in general.
5. See Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar. British Policy and Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 357–64; *idem*, For Diplomatic, Economic, Strategic and Telegraphic Reasons: British Imperial Defence, the Middle East and India, 1914–18', in K. Neilson and G. Kennedy, eds, *Far Flung Lines. Studies in Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (London, 1997), pp. 103–23.
6. See David French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition* (Oxford, 1995), p. 175.
7. See the excellent John Fisher, *Curzon and British Imperialism in the Middle East 1916–19* (London, 1999), pp. 156–94 and his 'On the Glacis of India': Lord Curzon and British Policy in the Caucasus *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 8, 2(1997), pp. 50–82.
8. Benjamin Schwarz, Divided Attention: Britain's Perception of a German Threat to Her Eastern Position of 1918, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (1993), pp. 103–22; also, John Darwin, *Britain, Egypt and the Middle East. Imperial Policy in the Aftermath of War 1918–1922* (London, 1981), pp. 143–61.
9. See Pertii Luntinen, *The Imperial Russian Army and Navy in Finland 1808–1918* (Helsinki, 1997), pp. 358–402.
10. 'Appendix', 13 November 1918 and WC 502, 14 November 1918, both Cab[inet Office] 23/8.
11. 'Russia and the Ukraine', General Staff, WO, 29 October 1918, FO 371/4355/PC 100.

12. Headlam-Morley's minute (14 November 1918) on 'Memorandum on Possible Territorial Policy in the Caucasus Regions', Eyre Crowe, 7 November 1918, FO 371/4352.
13. 'Russia', Leeper, 14 November 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 13.
14. 'Memorandum on Possible Territorial Policy in the Caucasus Regions', Crowe, 7 November 1918, FO 371/4352.
15. On the Leepers, see Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, pp. 70–1. The impact of Reginald (Rex) Leeper's anti-Bolshevism on British policy in the 1930s, when Leeper headed the News Department at the Foreign Office needs examination.
16. 'Russia and the Peace Conference', R. Leeper, 18 November 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 24 and minutes.
17. 'A Russian View of the Caucasian Settlement', R. Leeper, 25 November 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 58 and the minutes (26 November) by Toynbee and Headlam-Morley.
18. 'The Future of Russia and British Policy', J.Y. Simpson, 26 November 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 57 and Howard's minute (27 November).
19. On the concept of a Baltic League, see Marko Lehti, 'The Baltic League and the Idea of Limited Sovereignty', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 45 (1997), pp. 450–65; for the impact of Scandinavia generally, see Esa Sundback, '"A Convenient Buffer between Scandinavia and Russia" Great Britain, Scandinavia and the Birth of Finland after the First World War', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 42 (1994), 355; idem., 'Finland, Scandinavia and the Baltic States Viewed Within the Framework of the Border State Policy of Great Britain from the Autumn of 1918 to the Spring of 1919', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 16 (1991), pp. 313–34. These also serve to introduce the literature.
20. 'The Baltic Provinces and Lithuania', E. Howard, c. 28 November 1918, FO 371/4354/PC 67.
21. *Ibid*. and see Howard's minute (c. 1 December 1918), from which the following quotation is taken, on 'The Principles of Self Determination and Its Application to the Baltic Provinces', Zimmern and R. Leeper, 28 November 1918, FO 371/4354.
22. Russia and the Peace Settlement', R. Leeper, 30 November 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 75 and minutes by E.H. Carr (5 December), Howard (6 December) and Leeper (9 December).
23. 'The Future of Russian Central Asia', secret, India Office, 3 December 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 78 and Toynbee's minute (7 December); 'Russian Central Asia', Howard, 28 December, *ibid*.
24. See Neilson, 'British Imperial Defence', pp. 115–18.
25. Minutes of the 40th meeting of the Eastern Committee, 2 December 1918, Cab 27/24.
26. Minutes of the 42nd meeting of the Eastern Committee, 9 December 1918, 'Annex', Cab 27/24.
27. 'The Strategic Importance of Constantinople to the British Empire', secret, General Staff, WO, 22 December 1918, Cab 27/39/EC 2824; 'Memorandum by Admiralty', Admiralty, 21 Dec 1918, Cab 24/27/EC 2825.

This decision was reiterated later, see 'The Future of Constantinople and the Straits', Hardinge, 20 January 1919, Cab 21/139/WCP 103; the minutes (February 1919) in FO 608/195/602/1/3/416; and Curzon to L. Mallet, confidential, 13 March 1919, Curzon Papers, MSS Eur F112/213A, India Office Collection, British Library.

28. 'Russian Siberia and Japan', J.Y. Simpson, 3 December 1918, FO 371/4355/PC 80; 'Siberia', Howard, 20 December 1918, FO 371/4256/PC 120.
29. 'Russia', Howard, 11 December 1918, FO 371/4352/PC 83.
30. IWC 48, 31 December 1918, FO 371/2954/8934.
31. See the French ambassador's note, 6 January 1919, FO 371/3954/3253 and the minutes by Cavendish-Bentinck (8 January) and Curzon (c. 9 January) and Derby (British ambassador, Paris) to FO, tel 15, 4 January 1919, FO 371/3954/2404.
32. Barclay (Washington) to FO, tel 14, 3 January 1919, FO 371/3954/2389 and the minute by Graham (5 January).
33. Gregory's minute (9 January) on Greene (British ambassador, Tokyo) to FO, tel 7 urgent, 7 January 1919 and Curzon's minute, n 31 above.
34. This paper exists in two versions. One, entitled 'The Bolsheviks and our Russia Policy', and minutes is in FO 371/3954/7698; the other, entitled 'Russian, the Ukraine & the Peace Conference' and minutes is in FO 608/177/138 and represents an advance copy that was sent to Paris for the Peace Delegation's use before the printed version was available. The paper was written by Rex Leeper, the latter version is dated 7 January. Curzon wrote a preface (13 January) for the Cabinet on the first version.
35. See the minute by Ronald Graham on FO 371/3954/7698; 'Notes on the Russian Policy of His Majesty's Government', J.Y. Simpson, 8 January 1919, FO 371/3954/9598 and Curzon's minute (nd).
36. His minute (16 January 1919) and that of Howard (16 January) on Leeper's paper in FO 608/177.
37. Curzon to Cecil, confidential, 13 January 1919, Curzon Papers, MSS Eur F112/209.
38. 'Notes of a conversation held in Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay on Sunday, 12 January 1919', Cab 28/6/IC 104.
39. 'Minutes of the Supreme War Council, 12 January 1919, Cab 28/6/IC 103; minutes of WC 515, 10 January 1919, Cab 25/9.
40. 'Meeting in Pichon's Room, Monday 13 January 1919', Cab 28/6.
41. Barclay (Washington) to FO, tel 94, 13 January 1919, FO 371/3954/7771 and minutes.
42. See his minute (21 January) on 'Appreciation of the Internal Situation in Russia', General Staff, WO, 12 January 1919, FO 608/196/602/1/4/579.
43. British Embassy Paris (Lord Derby, British ambassador) to FO, tel 49, 14 January 1919, FO 608/188/598/2/1/118 and the undated minutes.
44. A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 16 January 1919, LEEP 3/8 Leeper Papers, Churchill College Archives Centre.
45. Simpson to Ronald Graham, 20 January 1919, covering 'Sir William Tyrrell. Points in Connection with British Policy in Russia', Simpson, 18 January 1919, FO 608/177.

46. 'Meeting in Pichon's Room, Monday 20 January 1919', Cab 28/6/IC 112; 'meeting in Pichon's Room, 21 January Tuesday at 10.30', Cab 28/6/IC 113; 'meeting in Pichon's Room, 21 January Tuesday at 15 hours', Cab 28/6/IC 114.
47. 'Meeting in Pichon's Room, 22 January 1919', Cab 28/6/IC 116.
48. A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 22 January 1919, LEEP 3/8.
49. His minute (23 January) on Balfour to FO, tel 104 urgent, 22 January 1919, FO 371/3955/11972.
50. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace*, pp. 110–14; Hardinge to Curzon, private, 11 February 1919, Curzon Papers, MSS Eur F112/212A.
51. Hardinge to Graham, 24 January 1919, Hardinge Papers, 40, Cambridge University Library.
52. Russian Democratic Block (i.e. the RPC) to Clemenceau, 24 January 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/689.
53. '*Memorandum*', Howard, 25 January 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/708; A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 24 January 1919, LEEP 3/8.
54. Keith Neilson, *Strategy and Supply. The Anglo-Russian Alliance 1914–17* (London, 1984), pp. 229–30; Neilson, *Last Tsar*, pp. 69–70.
55. Lindley (Archangel) to FO, tel 679, 25 January 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/679 and see Curzon's interview with Nicholas Chaikovski (head of the Archangel government and a member of the RPC), 4 February 1919, FO 371/3956/21560.
56. Alston (Vladivostok) to FO, tel 110, 27 January 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/1279.
57. See, for example, Georgian Delegation to British Delegation, 28 January 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/1017; a minute by Toynbee (24 January 1919) FO 608/179/591/1/1042.
58. A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 25 January 1919, LEEP 3/8.
59. Lindley to Curzon, disp 18, 1 February 1919, FO 608/179/591/1/6/3728 and Balfour's undated (c 7 March) minute. Lindley had earlier reported on the 'panic' that Prinkipo had caused among the Russians; see his letter to G.R. Clerk, 24 January 1919, Balfour Papers, FO 800/205, PRO.
60. These were widespread; see the reactions in Rennell Rodd (British ambassador, Rome) to Curzon, private, 2 February 1919, Curzon Papers, MSS Eur F112/214A.
61. The Bolsheviks' reply (of 4 February 1919) as found in *Le Matin*, 7 February, FO 608/179/591/1/6 and Balfour's undated minute.
62. Curzon's judgement in his minute (c 22 February 1919) on C. Nabokov (White Russian representative in London) to R. Graham, 17 February 1919, FO 371/3956/24244.
63. Minutes, WC 531, 12 February 1919, Cab 23/9.
64. This had been a theme for some time; see the minutes (c late January 1919) on FO 608/196/602/1/5; Treasury to FO, 8 February 1919, FO 608/180/591/4/1/4445.
65. Minutes, WC 532A, 13 February 1919, Cab 23/15.
66. Churchill had raised this same point at the War Cabinet on 12 February, WC 531, Cab 23/9.

67. Churchill to Lloyd George, secret and personal tel, 15 February 1919, FO 371/3956/26048.
68. Lloyd George to Churchill, tel 178, 16 February 1919, ibid. To ensure that Churchill did not simply ignore the telegram, a copy was sent to Balfour; see FO 608/177/591/1/1/2316.
69. Minutes of the 8th meeting of the BED, 17 February 1919, FO 371/3957/31956.
70. 'Memorandum on the Russian Situation', Balfour, 15 February 1919, Balfour Papers, Add MSS 49751, British Library.
71. A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 20 and 24 February 1919, LEEP 3/8; Curzon's minute of 25 February on 'Proposed Mission to Baltic Provinces and Lithuania', J.Y. Simpson, 20 February 1919, FO 371/3957/29701.
72. Minutes, WC 535, 24 February 1919 and WC 537, Cab 23/9.
73. FO to BD, tel 205 urgent, 24 February 1919, FO 371/3957/30843; FO to BD, disp 932, 20 February 1919, FO 608/195/599/3/1/3096.
74. 'The Russian Situation', Balfour, 26 February 1919, Balfour Papers, Add MSS 49751.
75. Minutes, WC 541A, 4 March 1919, Cab 23/15.
76. See 'Norwegian Susceptibilities', Carnegie, 29 January 1919, FO 371/4375/PID 83; Findlay's (Christiania) disp 22, 12 February 1919, FO 371/4375/PID 155 and Carnegie's minute (1 March 1919), FO 371/3475/PID 207; Latvian foreign minister to Balfour, 8 March 1919, FO 608/183/597/1/2/3986 and minutes; 'The Necessity for a Policy in the Baltic', Admiralty, 10 March 1919, GT 6969, FO 371/3558/43011, and the minute by Walter Long (First Lord of the Admiralty).
77. See the minutes by Selby (9 March) and Graham (10) on Nabokov to Graham, 4 March 1919, FO 371/3957/35984.
78. Latvian foreign minister to Balfour, 8 March 1919, FO 608/183/597/1/2 and the minute by E.H. Carr (11 March).
79. Kilmarnock (Copenhagen) to FO, tel 617, 6 March 1919 and Graham's minute (11 March), FO 371/3958/36738.
80. An untitled note by Selby, 11 March 1919, FO 371/3959/46884.
81. See Fisher, '"On the Glacis"', pp. 58–60.
82. Minutes, WC 545A, 17 March 1919, Cab 23/15.
83. Churchill's theme was also embroidered on by Henry Wilson; see 'Note by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff', secret, 14 March 1919, FO 608/177/591/1/1/5238.
84. Untitled memorandum, R. Leeper and Selby, nd (but c 24 March 1919), FO 371/3958/40687 and the correspondence and minutes.
85. Such a remark was clearly necessary. From Paris, Allen Leeper had warned his brother that 'People are extraordinarily suspicious of Dyenikin and have rather a childish suspicion that anything we do against the Bolsheviks means supporting the restoration of Tsarism. The chief trouble is always the Russians themselves, who are quite unable to think along new lines and are always reverting to the idea of Russian sovereignty over the whole of the old Russian Empire, excluding Poland'. Letter, 17 March 1919, LEEP 3/8.

86. Curzon to Balfour, disp 1757, 28 March 1919, FO 608/184/597/1/2/5896 and Balfour's undated minute (c 2 April 1919).
87. Minutes, WC 550, 24 March 1919, Cab 23/9; G. Spicer (for Curzon) to Balfour, 26 March 1919, FO 608/177/591/1/1/5385; 'Note on Movements in Finland Directed Against Petrograd', Military Section, BD, 27 March 1919, FO 608/177/591/1/1/5490; Tilley (FO) to Balfour, 28 March 1919, FO 608/186/597/1/4/5759.
88. Lloyd George to Reading (British ambassador, Washington), tel 31, 4 April 1919, FO 608/177/591/1/1/6532; minutes, WC 552, 31 March 1919, Cab 23/9; A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 31 March 1919, LEEP 3/8.
89. 'Notes on a Conversation with Savinkoff', Kisch (British Military Section, BD), 27 March 1919, FO 371/3959/55017; Untitled memorandum by Sazonov, 5 April 1919, FO 608/177/591/1/1/6611; 'Notes of a Conversation with Mr. Tchaikovsky', Simpson, 8 April 1919, FO 608/177/591/ 1/1/7061 and Balfour's undated minute.
90. Minutes, 56th meeting of the SWC, 11 April 1919, FO 608/184/597/1/2/7181.
91. 'The Situation in North Russia', secret, GS, WO, 15 April 1919, FO 371/3959/7670.
92. Eliot to FO, tel 338, 5 April 1919. This was sent, with a covering despatch (number 2285), by Curzon to Balfour, 15 April, FO 608/188/598/2/ 1/7649.
93. In fact, the WO had suggested to Kolchak that such a link was of major importance to Britain and, by inference, to continued British support; see WO to General Blair (Vladivostok) for Knox, very secret, 30 April 1919, FO 371/3959/78256.
94. Nabokov to Graham, 16 April 1919, enclosing the RPC's declaration of 15 April, FO 371/3959/60283.
95. Their minutes and that of Henry Wilson on FO 608/188/598/2/1/7649.
96. FO to BD, 1 May 1919, enclosing DMI to FO, 10 April 1919, secret and 'The Case of Recognition of Admiral Kolchak's Government in Siberia', P. de B. Radcliffe (WO), 11 April 1919, FO 608/188/598/2/1/9090 and minutes.
97. Curzon to Eliot, private and personal, Curzon Papers, MSS Eur F112/210.
98. The rest of this paragraph, except where otherwise noted, is based on Bosanquet (Reval) to FO, tel 24, 4 May 1919, FO 371/3959/71756 and minutes.
99. 'Notes on the Russian Situation', Balfour, 9 May 1919, Balfour Papers, Add MSS 49751.
100. Sazonov to Balfour, 9 May 1919, FO 608/187/598/1/3/9750.
101. Curzon to Balfour, tel 672, 11 May 1919 and minutes, FO 608/188/598/2/1/9699; Hardinge's undated minute on FO 608/188/598/2/1/7649, and 'The Recognition of the Koltchak Government', E. Howard, 20 May 1919, FO 608/188/598/2/1/10621.
102. Minutes, WC 567, 14 May 1919, Cab 23/10.

103. A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 14 May 1919, LEEP 3/8; see also *ibid*., same to same, 15 May.
104. FO to BD, 20 May 1919, FO 608/185/597/1/2/10490; FO to BD, 21 May 1919, FO 608/189/599/2/1/10599.
105. A. Leeper to R. Leeper, 22 May 1919, LEEP 3/8.
106. BD to FO, tel 957, 26 May 1919, FO 608/188/598/2/1/11024.
107. Eliot to Curzon, private, 30 May 1919, Curzon Papers, MSS Eur F112/210.
108. J.Y. Simpson to Tyrrell, private and confidential, 13 June 1919, FO 371/4380/PID 461.
109. See Erik Goldstein, 'Great Britain: the Home Front', in Boemeke *et al*., eds, *Treaty of Versailles*, pp. 147–66; Arthur Davidson to Hardinge, private, 11 January 1919, Hardinge Papers, 40; 'British Bolshevism at the Albert Hall Meeting', J.Y. Simpson, 10 February 1919, FO 371/4377/PID 115.

# 6

# The Treaty of Versailles, 'Never Again' and Appeasement

*Keith Robbins*

It was in 1943/44, with the prospect that the war in Europe might come to a successful conclusion in the not-too-distant future, that opinion-formers in Britain turned their minds to the problem of peacemaking. Inevitably, what was uppermost in their minds was the Treaty of Versailles and the foreign policy subsequently pursued by British governments in the 1930s. It became a commonplace that there were 'lessons to be learned' from such reflection but not altogether evident what precisely these were. A consensus developed among many writers, perhaps not surprisingly, that peacemaking was undoubtedly a very difficult business. Hence the need, it was felt, to start writing about the issues involved as early as was realistically possible so that, as far as possible, the 'mistakes' of 1919 would not be repeated. As the historians David Thomson, E. Meyer and Asa Briggs put it in their volume on patterns of peacemaking, begun in 1943, 'the last peace and this will be distinctive in their assumption that public opinion should play its part in the framing of the settlement'.[1] So far as the aftermath of war was concerned, there was little reason to expect that the mood would be substantially different. The proportion of the population affected by the strain of war might even be greater. So, looking back on 1919, there was 'little likelihood that a fundamentally different opinion will prevail next time'.[2] Indeed, the atrocities committed by the enemy had been on a vaster and more terrible scale than before. It would be folly, therefore, to suppose that the psychological and physical damage war brought with it could be dimissed as irrelevant. There was no prospect of a *tabula rasa*. E.H. Carr echoed that view and used what

he referred to as the 'rushed settlement' of 1919 as a reason for arguing in favour of delay in creating a political settlement. An enduring peace, he thought, could not be made by people who were still the victims of war-time psychosis.[3]

In August 1944, P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning) produced its book *Building Peace out of War*. It enthused about the new type of man which it believed was coming to the fore in every modern community: that is to say, the administrator, the organiser, the highly skilled technician. Their emergence reflected the fact that 'the technical conditions which made possible the co-existence of a patchwork of scores of completely independent, and theoretically equal, sovereign national states or "Powers" of varying size and strength' had passed once and for all. 'The attempt of the Versailles peacemakers', it was further argued, 'to give life to that system was in many respects a retrograde step which made its ultimate overthrow by violence inevitable. In sweeping it away, Hitler's armies were in a sense no more than the unconscious agents of the revolutionary forces; and any attempt to rebuild it a second time in its old form could only lead to the same result'.[4] To the degree that this point of view carried conviction, it followed in the view of P.E.P. that it was pointless to linger over this or that detail of the Versailles settlement or consciously to seek to avoid this or that mistake again. A whole new world was dawning which demanded the consideration of quite different issues. P.E.P. thought that it was scarcely worth thinking about the old world of Versailles at all. That view was echoed to an extent by E.H. Carr in his 1942 *Conditions of Peace* when he wrote 'The first moral for the victors in the present war is … not to look backwards in search of principles to guide the post-war settlement'. It was a precept which should be less difficult than it was in 1919 because, he claimed 'we are no longer blinded, as we were then, by the "old ways" of the pre-war world which we thought of as good ways'. There was a general conviction, he believed, especially among the younger generation, that 'the world of the past decade has been a bad and mad world, and that almost everything in it needs to be uprooted and replanted'.[5]

However, such enthusiasm for the bright new world of international executive agencies for specific purposes and of the primacy of economic reconstruction was by no means universal. A substantial body of Second World War writing still firmly believed that there

were 'lessons' which could be learned from the 20 years that had followed the signature of the Treaty of Versailles. There was, of course, at this time, no lack of proposals about how to restructure the world: Federal Union in Europe, a new United Nations Organization, an Anglo-American 'Partnership' and so forth, all of these schemes had prominent proponents in the press and in the academic and political worlds. One such enthusiast for Federal Europe was R.W.G. Mackay. A revised version – *Peace Aims and the New Order* – of his book *Federal Europe* had addressed what he too called the conditions of peace. Although in its territorial provisions the Treaty of Versailles had not been as bad as many people thought, nevertheless, when the next Peace Treaty came to be framed 'the Treaty of Versailles must be regarded as an example of what is to be avoided'. It would certainly be a mistake to make Germany record any admission of guilt. Further, it would not be sensible for a peace treaty to dismember Germany or provide for reparations and indemnities. It had apparently been demonstrated that punishment, however immediately satisfying to the victor, was of no value in long-term peacemaking. The Weimar Republic, it was argued, had never been given a chance. Hitler would never have gained power and the 1939 war would never have happened. If Weimar had been treated more generously, a democratic government would still have been in existence in Germany. The tragedy had been that the German people, humiliated by the Treaty, had not been given even a gleam of hope by the Allied Powers.[6] In his 1944 *Our Settlement with Germany*, H.N. Brailsford argued that 'One of the worst mistakes of the Versailles Peace was that it proposed to exact payments from Germany year after year through two generations. An eternal tribute cannot be levied, as much for moral as for economic reasons'.[7]

Thomson, Meyer and Briggs, commenting on the plethora of proposals for a 'New Order' which were emerging, suggested that the main differences between the ideas which were being put forward arose partly from psychological and partly from sociological considerations. At one extreme there were writers who propounded a long-range vision of what was desirable, with their minds fixed on ends rather than means, and at the other were those who stressed that it was only by short-range vision and a concentration on practicalities that a lasting settlement might hopefully be obtained. Utopians,

semi-Utopians, 'Drifters' and Realists contended for position in this debate. And the attitude adopted by participants towards the Treaty of Versailles played a very significant part.

The question boiled down to this. Was the 1919 settlement so great a disaster that at all costs there should be no attempt to regard it as in any sense a model? Or, on the contrary, was it, as peace settlements go, a reasonable solution in its time to certain intractable problems? Indeed, some believed that if it was the latter then there was still much to be gained from reflecting on its basis. It was argued that it was not so much the Treaty itself which had proved so unsatisfactory as the fact that ill-thought out condemnation of its clauses had had been a major factor in the development of 'appeasement'. It was the policy of appeasement which in part sprang from the desire for Treaty revision, rather than the Treaty itself, which had been so misguided and proved so disastrous. It seemed vitally important, ahead of another settlement, to be clear on this point when framing its terms.

Dr Lentin has put the point persuasively in his *Guilt at Versailles* when he states that 'Revisionism was explicit in the Treaty itself. Beneath its ebony surface, the worm of Appeasement lay dormant'.[8] The worm was given its immediate glow, of course, by the publication of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, a brilliant work which within a very short time had achieved a revulsion of opinion on the part of the public, or at least influential sections of it.

The breast-beating about Versailles on the part of high-minded British men and women was heartfelt. Honourable men came to feel that the British negotiators had departed from the straight and narrow path of rectitude. Had it really been for such a punitive, even vindictive, peace which reflected so poorly on the endemic kindliness of England, that so many brave young men had died? It was, of course, rather convenient that the absence of decency could be laid at the door of someone who was not English. Keynes was persuaded, however, to remove his earlier intention to refer to Lloyd George in his book as a representative of Neolithic Man.[9] That he was a Welshman was perhaps a significant enough shortcoming.

Skidelsky, in his biography of Keynes, argues that 'misery and rage' had been building up in Maynard for a long time. It was compounded, he suggests, 'of the moral strain of working for a war he did not believe in, and of the guilt at having prospered, while his

friends had suffered, for views which they had jointly held'.[10] The reaction to the peace of men outside his circle who had indeed been frequently excoriated for their war-time attitudes was predictably scornful of the settlement. Philip Snowden, for example, defeated in the 1918 General Election, denounced the Treaty as a disaster. It would become an urgent matter to revise its terms. Similar blanket condemnations are not difficult to find in the Union of Democratic Control (U.D.C.) and Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) circles. There seems no need to quote them at length here. Norman Angell was a more reflective figure and it is worth spending a little time on his writings – the more so because his *The Fruits of Victory* was followed in subsequent years by many further reflections. He subtitled this book 'A Sequel to "The Great Illusion"' (his pre-war bestseller) – something, one might say, which was true of everything he wrote, and he wrote a great deal. His analysis was derived from the insight which he claimed to possess into the workings of the public mind. It was not sufficient, Angell argued, to lambast the wickedness of the peacemakers. It was an awkward fact, but a fact nonetheless that 'A Treaty of the character of that of Versailles would never have been possible if men had not been able to justify it to themselves on the ground of its punitive justice'.[11] So, he claimed, the main defect of the Treaty was due to the pressure of public opinion which still laboured under the misapprehension that nations were persons and that their behaviour could be discussed as though they were. To go on ignoring the economic unity and economic interdependence of Europe was to refuse to face the needs of human life.[12] The important thing for Angell, however, as Bruce Miller puts it, was to emphasise that 'it was not so much a matter of the policies being wrong as of why they had been adopted'.[13] In various books in the 1930s, he was able to take advantage of the fact that he had been critical of Versailles to point out the simplicities of those who clamoured for Treaty revision as *the* solution to current problems. 'Revision' he wrote in *Must it be War?* (1939) was necessary, 'but revision depends upon the bringing about of conditions which go far beyond the particular defects of the Treaties. And let us remember that it was not the Treaty of Versailles which caused the world to drift into war in 1914'. To put Germany back precisely to where she was in 1914 – which was what some other contemporary writers appeared to advocate – would not give peace.[14] Such sharp comments,

stemming from someone who was an original Treaty critic, gave added force to his criticisms of what he thought appeasement had now become in the mid-1930s.

After the Second War did break out, the philosopher T.E. Jessop was so disturbed, looking back, by the swift erosion of support for the peace settlement which he had witnessed over the previous 20 years that he tried to put the issues in what he regarded as the proper perspective in a book published in 1942. He did so in the conviction that a general study of the Treaty of Versailles for the citizen interested in his citizenship was badly needed. An understanding of the last Treaty, he reiterated, was 'a necessary part of our preparation for determining the next one'. Without such preparation, public opinion would again be at the mercy of what he called 'glib propagandists and agitators'. He naturally had his own views on the Treaty but he saw his primary task as being to exhibit the 'facts' on which any judgement, one way or the other, ought to be based. He argued that British public opinion on the Treaty, whether its view was right or wrong, had 'not been built on knowledge but induced by propaganda'.[15] His analysis, however, went to the heart of the matter. He gave his book the title *The Treaty of Versailles: Was it Just*? It reflected his belief that there were profound issues of justice and injustice which were at stake and he returned to them late in the book after his discussions of the main facets of the Treaty. He believed that much of the impulse behind a great deal of the popular British condemnation of the Treaty, which in his opinion presupposed that the Treaty was severer than it really was, sprang from an alleged British national characteristic, 'our love of leniency'. He stated his own firm conviction that leniency was a virtue, but not unconditionally. He was of the view that a peace more lenient than the Treaty of Versailles 'would not have precluded, but would only have accelerated, a war of revenge, that the sooner Germany recovered, the sooner she would have struck again'. It was quite misleading to suppose that the German people after 1919 had in any fundamental sense changed. Defeat had only brought disappointment and bitterness, not that deep change of heart and mind expressed in the religious word repentance. It was absurd to suppose that any nation could shed its traditions and revise its values in a few years. So, 'the year 1939 is really a coarsened repetition of the year 1914, the reassertion, with conscious defiance and conscious

pride, of an unextinguished paganism in the German soul'.[16] In considering why the Treaty failed he concluded that the British people had 'blamed the *treaty* too much'. They had come very near to accepting the fateful German supposition that all the misfortunes of Europe since 1919, having followed the Treaty, were due to it. Such an elementary howler had had disastrous consequences. A particular mindset had led to Munich, and from Munich to the present war. 'It was not the *treaty* that failed, but the peoples – who aggravated its faults and dimmed most of its virtues'. It was for that reason that in the coming peace Treaty the quality of public opinion would be fundamental.[17]

Jessop's philosophical determination merely to 'exhibit the facts' does not perhaps altogether disguise certain underlying convictions on his part about the mind and soul of the German people. He stated quietly what Robert Vansittart stated vigorously. In publication after publication, the latter lamented that the Germans had succeeded in 'putting it over' that the Treaty of Versailles 'had been composed exclusively by fools and knaves'. He admitted that there never had been and never would be a perfect Treaty and Versailles was not without fault. However, it was 'certainly not open to many of the ignorant and German-inspired criticisms meekly repeated against it'. The point was that in Britain balanced judgement had been 'drowned in the Germanic conviction of our Scribes and Pharisees that the Germans, callously unrepentant of twenty million deaths, *were* the injured party'. British 'obscurantists' had helped land the country in the Second German World War by thinking more of German susceptibilities than of Truth. All of this reflected his belief that the Weimar Republic was but a breathing-space between the rounds. There was no such thing as Hitlerism. It was only a projection of nationalism and militarism, conducted on a lower and more popular plane.[18] It was a delusion to suppose that a milder Treaty would have buttressed the Weimar Republic and even if it had done, as has already been made clear, Vansittart saw no fundamental difference between it and 'Hitlerism'.

Jessop generalised about what had or had not constituted certain fundamental failings in the British mind. R.B. McCallum, historian student of politics at Pembroke College, Oxford, attempted to grapple with *Public Opinion and the Last Peace* in a more systematic fashion in a book published in 1944. It was to some extent novel in its

scope – and McCallum was to go on to be involved in the analysis of the 1945 General Election result and the genre of 'election surveys' – but the author did not disguise the fact that his book too was one with a message. He noted with dismay in his preface written in September 1943 that the cant of 'never again' was being succeeded by the cant of 'not like last time'. In his view, people asking how they could 'avoid the errors of Versailles' were at the same time planning a peace that would repeat 'and even accentuate the provisions made in the last settlement'. He firmly declared that from the moment the Treaty was signed he had been a defender of it – in which conviction he said that he had been at variance with most of his political friends [he was a Liberal] and with all of them who were younger than him in age.[19]

It is indeed not difficult to locate the existence of the sentiment to which McCallum refers in many places from 1919 onwards. Very strong reservations about the territorial aspects of the settlement – the Germans included within the new state of Czechoslovakia, for example, were to be found in the document *Labour and the Peace Treaty*.[20] It is likely that one of the minds behind the document was C.R. Buxton, a stalwart of the Union of Democratic Control and one of the erstwhile Liberals who made a transition to the Labour Party. His parliamentary career was not very successful, but he continued to write extensively on international issues. In his *The Alternative to War* (1936) he took as his opening chapter the theme that the *status quo* could not endure. The year following the Great War had been a year of illusions – that Germany would pay for the war was one classic example. However, in his view, the greatest and most dangerous illusion was that 'the so-called Peace Settlement, arrived at in Paris in 1919, represented a workable and durable distribution of the world's opportunities and resources' and that the main task of the League of Nations was to guarantee the *status quo*.[21] What was wrong, he considered, was the belief that salvation lay in reinforcing organisations of security. The alternative to war, in his view, as the international situation existed, was 'to take seriously those discontents which, rightly or wrongly, are the most widely and deeply felt'.[22] He advocated immediate action: 'Now is the accepted time. Delay simply means that the danger of an explosion grows greater – that we lose the driving force of an immediate crisis – that relatively small concessions which, if made now, would have all the advantage of proofs

of goodwill, are delayed indefinitely, and are made at last when they have all the appearance of being extorted by threats…'.[23] There could perhaps be no better exposition of a high-minded appeasement which stemmed from a loathing of Versailles.

A year later, Helena Swanwick, a pioneer with Buxton in the Union of Democratic Control, took a similar line in her *Collective Insecurity*. She focused particularly upon the 'War-Guilt' clause and was dismissive of any subsequent attempts to argue that its scope was quite technical in relation to reparations. It had been wrong to force the Germans to sign what they held to be the acceptance of a lie. The Allies ought to understand that and repair their error – and it need not prevent them from continuing themselves to think Germany the villain of the piece. 'All we need to do' she wrote 'is to declare that we do not hold *her* to the declaration we forced upon her in 1919. This would have an appeasing effect…'.[24] Even so, it would take years to win the complete confidence of Germany – an invalid which had to be nursed back to health – but there was no time to be lost. 'Let us get on with making peace. Too much importance has been given to alarmist talk about Germany; this has played into Herr Hitler's hands, helping his remarmament by making him the focus of attack'. She declared that she offered no defence of Naziism, but 'ill treatment has had the ill consequences which a few foresaw'.[25]

It is an emphasis upon the economic consequences of Versailles which we find paramount amongst those who advocated what we would now regard as a policy of appeasement, whether or not they used that precise word.[26] Aldous Huxley, in his *The Case for Constructive Peace* (1936), for example, was even prepared to say that 'The peace of Versailles was, ethnically speaking, a tolerably good peace' but economically 'it was a thoroughly bad peace'. So intense was the feeling of the peoples of three great countries that they had been treated unjustly 'that for great masses of these people war – even modern war – seems preferable to peace, as they know it to-day'.[27] There was, in his mind, no alternative to what he called 'constructive peace'. He advocated the immediate calling of a world conference 'at which the unsatisfied powers, great and small, should be invited to state their grievance and claims'. When that had been done, it would be possible, given intelligence and good will, 'to work out a scheme of territorial, economic and monetary readjustments for the benefit of all'. He conceded that such a gesture of

appeasement would not be easy and the greatest immediate sacrifices would have to come from those who possessed most. Such sacrifices, however, would be negligible in comparison with the sacrifices which would be required if another war were to occur.[28]

The direct link between the condemnation of Versailles and the need for appeasement almost by way of expiation is also very evident amongst church leaders of all denominations. In a sermon in Geneva before the Disarmament Conference in 1932, Archbishop William Temple strongly attacked the war guilt clause. It had to be struck out by those who had framed it. A year later he strongly criticised the Treaty because, by asserting that one nation was the only real culprit it had inevitably created in Germany a festering sore of resentment and directed all nations away from what was wrong with the civilisation which had led to war.[29] Hensley Henson was another bishop who had lamented the unworthy conclusion of the war which he had supported. He loathed the Treaty so that even if dictators clamoured for its revision it could not be said that revision was immoral.[30] A delegation of English church leaders to Germany on the tenth anniversary of the peace settlement called on its return for a redress of German grievances. One of the members of the delegation recorded in his autobiography that the Hamburg pastor and his wife who were his hosts militantly resented the wrongs inflicted by the Treaty of Versailles and added 'I was glad to be able to assure them that I had publicly condemned that treaty on more than one occasion'.[31] Many comparable quotations could be given. It is reasonable to agree with Catherine Cline's claim – though there are some exceptions – that 'Each step in Germany's destruction of the Versailles system was … greeted with episcopal cheers.'[32] The disapproval of the religious policy of the German government did not alter their conviction that the Versailles settlement needed to be revised.[33] The Baptist minister of the City Temple in London rejoiced on hearing of the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936. Phrases were used in the pulpit which suggested that Hitler and his regime were the supreme creation of the Treaty of Versailles. So pervasive were these opinions that French Protestant leaders were driven to protest. 'A great many sincere Christians' wrote one to an English friend 'while they admit that the Treaty which ended such a tremendous war was still war-like, are not at all willing to consent to see Versailles described as "a terrific denial of Christian principles."'[34]

In his 1944 book, McCallum concluded that it was not true to say that in the years after the war German propaganda skilfully converted British opinion to contempt and shame for the peace settlement that their statesmen had made. There were such efforts but they were not decisive. The change of opinion could only have occurred because the seed had fallen on fertile ground. It must have had an inner cause 'in our own mentality'. Some further examples of the 'after-life' of the Treaty in public debate and the assumptions, spoken and unspoken, have been alluded to in this paper, though necessarily in summary fashion. McCallum was made so disconsolate by his analysis of 'the retreat from Versailles' that he wrote this conclusion. The Treaty of Versailles had 'crowned one of the greatest and hardest fought victories in our history; it sought to ensure us against perils which we had by the smallest margin escaped, but yet, such is the instability of political moods, such is the perversity of the movements of political sentiment, that over this great instrument of peace is written one of the strangest epitaphs of human history, VICTRIX CAUSA DEIS PLACUIT SED VICTA VICTORIBUS'.[35] Reading this conclusion more than half a century later, one wonders whether he was far wrong.

## Notes

1. D. Thomson, E. Meyer and A. Briggs, *Patterns of Peacemaking* (London, 1945), p. 26.
2. Thomson, Meyer and Briggs, *Patterns of Peacemaking*, p. 28.
3. E.H. Carr, *Conditions of Peace* (London, 1942), pp. 238–9.
4. P.E.P., *Building Peace out of War: Studies in International Reconstruction* (London, 1944), p. 169.
5. Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. xxi.
6. R.W.G. Mackay, *Peace Aims and the New Order* (London, 1941), pp. 38–9.
7. H.N. Brailsford, *Our Settlement with Germany* (Harmondsworth, 1944), p. 152.
8. A. Lentin, *Guilt at Versailles* (London, 1984), p. 135.
9. R. Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: Hopes Betrayed 1883–1920* (London, 1983) p. 383.
10. Skidelsky, *Keynes*, p. 378.
11. N. Angell, *The Fruits of Victory* (London, 1921) p. 222.
12. Angell, *Fruits of Victory*, p. 284.
13. J.D.B. Miller, *Norman Angell and the Futility of War: Peace and the Public Mind* (London, 1986) p. 85.

14. N. Angell, *Must it be War*? (London, 1939), pp. 210–11.
15. T.E. Jessop, *The Treaty of Versailles: Was It Just?* (London, 1942) pp. v–vi.
16. Jessop, *Treaty of Versailles*, pp. 140–6.
17. Jessop, *Treaty of Versailles*, pp. 149–54.
18. Robert Vansittart, *Roots of the Trouble* (London, n.d.), p. 24 and p. 31.
19. R.B. McCallum, *Public Opinion and the Last Peace* (Oxford, 1944), pp. vi–vii: For a general survey, see Keith Robbins, *Present and Past: British Images of Germany in the First Half of the Twentieth Century and their Historical Legacy* (Göttingen, 1999).
20. For a general assessment, see The Peace Movement and the Peace Settlement in Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: the 'Peace Movement' in Britain 1914–1919* (Cardiff, 1976) pp. 176–91.
21. C.R. Buxton, *The Alternative to War* (London, 1936) p. 11.
22. Buxton, *Alternative to War*, p. 16.
23. Buxton, *Alternative to War*, p. 160.
24. H.M. Swanwick, *Collective Insecurity* (London, 1937) pp. 113–15.
25. Swanwick, *Collective Insecurity*, p. 7.
26. This is not the place for an extended discussion of the varieties of appeasement. I have outlined meanings of the term in K. Robbins, *Appeasement* (Oxford, 1997 edition).
27. Aldous Huxley, *What are you going to do about it? The Case for Constructive Peace* (London, 1936) p. 23.
28. Huxley, *What are you going to do about it?* pp. 28–9.
29. Cited and discussed in A.Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900–1945* (London, 1986), p. 92.
30. O. Chadwick, *Hensley Henson* (Norwich, 1994). p. 238.
31. A.E. Garvie, *Memories and Meanings of my Life* (London, 1938), p. 215.
32. C.A. Cline, Ecumenism and Appeasement; The Bishops of the Church of England and the Treaty of Versailles, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 61, no.4 (December 1989) p. 699.
33. See the introduction by Andrew Chandler to his edition *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis of German Protestantism 1933–1939* (Woodbridge, 1997) pp. 1–32.
34. See my 'Free Churchmen and the Twenty Years' Crisis' collected in K. Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London, 1993), p. 156.
35. McCallum, *Public Opinion and the Last Peace*, p. 86 and p. 125.

# 7

# Missions Impossible: General Smuts, Sir George Clerk and British Diplomacy in Central Europe in 1919

*Miklos Lojko*

The participants of the Paris Peace Conference were acutely aware of the degree to which the absence of the representatives of Russia detracted from the validity of the outcome of their deliberations. Therefore, in spite of their distaste for the new Bolshevik regime, and in parallel with offensive acts being carried out against the Bolsheviks at their instigation, they also initiated more conciliatory, probing gestures towards them. However, neither the truculent, nor the peaceful manoeuvres were to any avail. It was, therefore, all the more disturbing for leaders of the victorious nations gathered at Paris when they were informed that yet another country in the east had fallen prey to the communist scourge. On 21 March 1919, one of Lenin's disciples and former personal assistants, Béla Kun, had seized power in Budapest, and declared a soviet republic in Hungary.

Though the Western leaders understood that the events in Russia were not merely the result of the actions of a conspiring minority, that the war there had unleashed the long pent-up forces generated by social deprivation, and that similar conflagrations were feared in Germany and German Austria, warnings of a Bolshevist take-over in Hungary went unheeded in London and Paris. The proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet regime found the peacemakers unprepared and alarmed. It was a sign that the Russian example was spreading to Central Europe. Only gradually did they begin to appreciate that the events in Hungary, a newly independent part of the former Austro-Hungarian (Dual) Monarchy, were, besides being the result of

social discontent, to a large extent the manifestation of Hungary's intransigent resistance to the planned territorial settlement. The flurry of diplomatic activity occasioned by the recalcitrance of revolutionary Hungary towards the Paris Peace Conference occasioned an unprecedented period of direct Western, especially British, involvement in the affairs of Central Europe.

On 29 March the first of Béla Kun's several messages to the peace conference arrived in Paris. It was an aide-mémoire transmitted through Prince Livio Borghese, the head of the Italian mission in Hungary, to the Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, who read it for the Council of Four. In his message, Kun 'recognise[d] the validity of the Treaty of Armistice signed by the former government'. He went on to announce that by forging an alliance with Russia the new government did not mean 'to break all diplomatic intercourse with the Powers of the Entente, and still less [to issue] a declaration of war on the Entente'. The Russian connection was an '"entente cordiale", a natural friendship, based on the identity of their constitutions'. The Hungarian Socialist Party 'wishe[d] to organise a new social State, [where] every man will live of his own work, but [which] will not be hostile to other Nations'. Significantly, Kun's government, following the Russian example, was the first Hungarian administration which was not adamantly inflexible on the territorial issue. Albeit from a position of increasing military strength in breach of the Armistice, Kun was 'ready to negotiate territorial questions on the basis of the principle of self-determination'. To discuss the way forward, he 'would gladly welcome a civil and diplomatic mission of the Entente in Budapest'.[1]

Kun signed the note as 'Commissioner of the People for Foreign Affairs'. Although *de facto* head of the regime, he retained this formal title throughout the 133 days of the existence of the Soviet republic, showing the exceptional importance of foreign relations to the government. The underlying premise of the new regime was that Bolshevism would engulf Europe, and Hungary was an essential vehicle in this process. Without the universal conversion, the experiment was doomed. The nominal president of the Revolutionary Directorate, Sándor Garbai, was only a figurehead.

General Smuts, as the possible head of a mission to visit Hungary, broadly in accordance with Kun's wishes, was suggested by Lloyd George immediately after the receipt of the commissar's

communication. Sir Maurice Hankey, always present at the meetings of the Supreme Council as Secretary of the British Empire Delegation, informed Balfour on the same day about the recommended mission under Smuts in a covering memorandum enclosing Kun's aide-mémoire. Hankey also appended in a postscript: 'I meant to see you about this this evening, but had no time'.[2]

Thus, in spite of strong French resistance to,[3] and British Foreign Office scepticism about,[4] Lloyd George's softer line on Hungary, for a time the conference adopted the Prime Minister's policy. Lloyd George made it clear that he partly blamed the Western intervention for the constant radicalisation of Russian Bolshevism, and that he wished to apply the lessons learnt in Russia to Hungary. He said in the debate on 29 March: 'Let us not act in the way we did in the case of Russia: one Russia is enough for us'.[5] But apart from this, he may well have been prompted by a recent secret intelligence report warning about Bolshevist inspired mutinies in the British army. A Secret Service report, received on 25 March, revealed that 'discontent and mutiny in the English army become more frequent. [...] 8,000 men [were recently withdrawn from Germany for this reason.] When embarking the troops sang revolutionary songs, and carried red flags'.[6] Such reports were among the numerous arguments against dispatching British troops to sort out Hungary's problems.

General Smuts' train left for Budapest from Paris on 1 April 1919.[7] The mission was invested with wide powers to negotiate a positive outcome to the crisis in Central Europe. The direct issue at hand was the question of the so-called Neutral Zone, which had recently been established between Hungarian and Romanian forces.

On 21 February, in the temporary absence of all the 'Big Four', André Tardieu, Chairman of the Romanian and Yugoslav Committee of the conference, recommended the establishment of a neutral zone between Hungarian and Romanian forces to put an end to a stand-off, which had started when the Romanians crossed the Armistice line on account of alleged acts of provocation on the part of the Hungarians.[8] The Supreme Council endorsed the proposal on 26 February. The plan for the zone appears also to have served other, more ambitious projects. Marshal Foch intended at this time to organise an all-European offensive against the Russian Bolsheviks, for which it was essential that the Arad–Nagyvárad–Szatmárnémeti (in Romanian: Arad–Oradea–Satu Mare) railway line, which fell

within the planned Zone, be under Allied control.[9] The Supreme Council dropped Foch's plan in mid-March, but the resolution regarding the Neutral Zone survived. The line to which the Hungarian troops were to retire was reminiscent of the political borders promised to Romania in the secret wartime treaty of 17 August 1916.[10] The rumours of the plan caused disquiet in Hungary, exacerbated by the fact that the government was not officially notified about it for almost a month. The French Chief of the Allied Military Mission in Hungary, Lieutenant-Colonel Fernand Vix, received the 26 February decision from the Belgrade headquarters of General de Lobit on 12 March, but did not reveal it to the Hungarian authorities. On the morning of 20 March 1919, after changing the date on the document to 19 March, Vix decided to hand over the Allied note to the pro-Entente president of Hungary, Count Mihály Károlyi, without consulting his superiors.[11] While delivering the note, according to Károlyi, Vix said that the new line was 'not [another] demarcation line, but a temporary political frontier'.[12] Disputing this claim, Harold Temperley writes: 'Károlyi [...] thought fit to distort Colonel V[i]x's communication, and to launch on the Hungarian public a manifesto [of resignation]'.[13] No minutes were taken at the meeting. Whatever Vix said, the line was not meant, and indeed, did not finally turn out to be the final border. At the same time, by leaving the Ruthenian corridor unmarked, the note foreshadowed that territory's allocation to either Slovakia or Romania. Eventually Ruthenia became part of the Czechoslovak state. Vix also turned the memorandum into an ultimatum by demanding that it be accepted or rejected within 32 hours.[14] It was Vix who had delivered the French memorandum ordering the Hungarians to withdraw from the Slovak territories on 3 December 1918.[15] That evacuation adumbrated the new permanent borders. The Hungarian Cabinet met in emergency session. The following day Károlyi rejected the note and informed the Head of the Allied Mission of the resignation of the Hungarian administration. With the failure of constitutional politics in Hungary, the stage was set for radicalisation under the communists, who were ready to defy the Peace Conference by force if necessary.

The Smuts Mission's brief was primarily 'to examine the general working of the armistice' of 3 November 1918,[16] 'to explain to the Hungarian Government the reasons for which the [Neutral] zone

was established', but also to 'make any adjustments in the boundaries of the neutral zone [...] which he thinks will further the objects of the [Allies]'. Further, he was also 'to investigate the treatment of the Allied Missions in Budapest'. He had 'full discretion to proceed to any place whether in Hungary or elsewhere, and to take any steps which may enable him to carry out these objects or others closely connected with them'.[17] The day before the General left, he wrote a letter to Lloyd George in which he proposed, in order to 'give the mission a chance of even greater usefulness [, ...] that the Russians also should be invited to meet me at Buda-Pest'. He declared:

> unless Bullet[18] misread the Russian situation, I could make recommendations [...] which will also lead to peace with Russia and thus round off the work of the conference. [...] I might therefore be entrusted with a double mission.[19]

Leeper was grateful to Crowe that he let the two FO representatives leave with the mission, and was hoping that they might go on to Bucharest as well.[20] The ambitious expedition, the first high level Entente delegation to probe into the war-torn lands of Central Europe, was organised in the greatest secrecy. The Romanian Prime Minister, Ion Bratianu, only read about it in the papers on 4 April, and was anxious that the outcome might be detrimental to Romanian interests.[21]

The delegation arrived in Vienna on 3 April, where Harold Nicolson had his 'first sight of an enemy country',[22] and was devastated by the destitute state of Austria. They spent the day with discussions with the Allied Military Missions, and proceeded to Hungary on the next day.[23]

Smuts himself never left the train in Budapest, which stood on a siding of the Eastern Railway Station on 4 and 5 April, but allowed members of his entourage to accept invitations from Hungarian officials. The fact that the general could not be paraded through the capital disappointed the communist leadership, who first believed that by treating with them, the Entente recognised the new government of Hungary. The impression of a *de facto* recognition, in fact, could not be avoided. Lieutenant-Commander Frederick Williams-Freeman of the Royal Navy, the only British agent staying in

Hungary at the time, thought as much, as he drew the conclusion that the visit bolstered the self-confidence of the regime.[24]

Apart from members of the Revolutionary Directorate, Smuts received a number of unofficial visitors in the train. The first of them was Colonel Géza Dormándy, Williams-Freeman's Hungarian liaison officer. Freeman himself and the American Professor Philip M. Brown of the Coolidge Mission and the US Commission to Negotiate Peace followed in quick succession. In the meantime, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, later Conservative MP, who had arrived in Budapest after the take-over in search of material for his readers, and another journalist, H.H. Macartney,[25] correspondent of *The Times*, talked to Harold Nicolson. Therefore by the time Béla Kun arrived Smuts and his companions had the insiders' view of the situation in Hungary.[26] During the negotiations, Smuts was reticent and listened patiently to all that his visitors had to say. As in Geneva in December 1917, when he tried to negotiate a separate peace with Austria–Hungary, his message was conciliatory.

A vivid, often condescending, at times amusing, picture of the sometimes grotesque negotiations is provided in Harold Nicolson's memoirs, written 24 years after the event. Nicolson describes his first encounter with Béla Kun as follows:

> While Brown is still talking Lane comes into the dining-car which we use as an office to say that Bela Kun has arrived. I go to meet him. A little man of about 30: puffy white face and loose wet lips: shaven head: impression of red hair: shifty suspicious eyes: he has the face of a sulky and uncertain criminal. He has with him a little oily Jew – fur-coat rather moth-eaten – stringy green tie – dirty collar. He is their Foreign Secretary. Bela Kun is shown into Smuts' compartment … I tackle the Foreign Commissar in mine. He takes the high culture line. He speaks of Hume, Mill, Spencer. He quotes, with great irrelevance, 'I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs.' … He then discourses upon what Bolshevism will mean to Central Europe. Work and happiness for all, free education, doctors, Bernard Shaw, garden suburbs, heaps of music, and the triumph of the machine. I ask him what machine? He makes a vague gesture embracing the whole world of mechanics.[27]

On a more serious note, through a series of meetings with the communist leaders, General Smuts promised the lifting of the wartime blockade from Hungary and recommended that Hungarian representatives be invited to Paris to a special conference of delegates from the Successor States before the borders would be finalised to discuss the burning economic and territorial issues. Such a conference could also be held in Prague or Vienna. He stated that the Neutral Zone would be occupied by Western Allied troops, and pledged that the existence of the Zone did not prejudice the future of Hungary's borders.[28]

According to Nicolson, Smuts advanced to the Hungarian communists all the courtesy required of the head of a diplomatic mission at work:

> [Kun] sat there hunched, sulky, suspicious, and frightened. Smuts talks to him as if he were talking to the Duke of Abercorn: friendly, courteous but not a touch of any surrender of his own tremendous dignity.[29]

Nonetheless, possibly buoyed by the recent successes of revolutionary movements elsewhere in Europe, Kun made the tactical error of refusing Smuts' package, insisting that the Romanians withdraw to the original armistice line. On learning of this condition, Smuts abruptly discontinued the talks, and, without telling his interlocutors ordered the train to leave Budapest:[30]

> 'Well, gentlemen', he says, 'I must bid you good-bye'. They do not understand. He conducts them with exquisite courtesy on to the platform. He shakes hands with them. He then stands on the step of the train and nods to his A.D.C. They stand in a row upon the platform, expecting him to fix the time for the next meeting. And as they stand the train gradually begins to move. Smuts brings his hand to salute. We glide out into the night, retaining on the retinas of our eyes the picture of four bewildered faces looking up in blank amazement.[31]

Smuts' train proceeded to Prague, where the general discussed his plan for a special conference on the new dispensation for the former Habsburg lands with the Czechoslovak president, Tomáš G. Masaryk.

Masaryk appeared in broad agreement with this plan.[32] After further discussions with the German Austrian Finance Minister, Josef Alois Schumpeter, in Vienna,[33] the train arrived back in Paris at 9 am on 9 April.[34]

The officials of the Foreign Office were scathing in their criticism of the Smuts mission. Had the word *appeasement* attained its post-World War Two meaning in political parlance, they would no doubt would have used it in denouncing it.[35] They would not accept that Smuts was not seeking to conciliate the communists. Rather, acknowledging that the Entente lacked the resources to wage war against it, Smuts initiated a policy to wean Hungary away from Bolshevik Russia and militancy. As the dynamism of the military was central to the survival of the regime in Hungary, it is probable that if Smuts had succeeded with such a policy, it would have led to an early fall of the communists.

Smuts did not consider his mission to be a failure. In his final report he laid the main emphasis on his suggested mini-conference, 'under the presidency of a Representative of the Great Powers', where the genuine preliminaries of peace in Central Europe could be established.[36] On 13 April G.N. Barnes, a Labour member of the War Cabinet, commented positively on Smuts' mission, suggesting that he should be sent again, this time to try to establish contact with the Russian Bolsheviks through their Hungarian followers.[37] However, with work on the German treaty entering its crucial phase, and mounting anxiety about President Wilson's illness, Bolshevik Hungary was put on the back burner in Paris. Conveniently for Crowe and the Foreign Office team, Smuts' proposals died on the shelves of the conference archives. Only his agreement with Kun, guaranteeing the free movement and ownership of movable property by foreign subjects in Hungary, though not invariably adhered to, could be said to have had a long-lasting effect.[38]

Following the collapse of the 133-day-long Hungarian Soviet Republic on 1 August 1919, a downfall largely caused by the attack of the Romanian army, but also engineered by the Paris Peace Conference and by unofficial action on the part of British and French agents operating from Vienna, the Conference was unable to impose order on Hungary. Therefore, the end of Béla Kun's hold on power did not close the turbulent Hungarian chapter in the history of the peace conference. Neither did British involvement in Hungary's

internal affairs come to an end or diminish. If anything, it began to intensify.

The reins of power in Hungary were handed over to a wholly Social Democratic government, headed by Gyula Peidl. The members of the cabinet were appointed in accordance with the agreement reached earlier with Colonel Sir Thomas Montgomery-Cuninghame, the British Military Representative in Vienna. Kun escaped to Austria, where he was interned. Soon, however, the Romanian Army, in bizarre collusion with conservative Hungarian forces associated with Admiral Miklós Horthy and his Hungarian National Army, drove the Social Democrats out of office, and a period of chaos ensued in Hungary.

A few British officials, like C.K. Butler, appreciated that 'there is an enormous opening for the extension of British influence in this country',[39] but most saw the main purpose of the involvement in obtaining a situation in which the Hungarians could be made to sign a peace treaty, and thus be taken off the international crisis agenda. Between early August and December 1919 the British were engaged through naval, military, economic and diplomatic channels in the shaping of events in Hungary.

In mid-August, Admiral Sir Ernest Troubridge moved the headquarters of the Allied Danube Command to Budapest, and remained in full control of the fluvial communications associated with the Danube for the period of the Romanian occupation and beyond. As he had a flotilla of launches and their crews under his command, he retained more leverage over the military situation than any other Allied actor in the theatre. He refused a Romanian demand to hand over control of the Danube, limited Romanian military operations across the Danube, and assisted C.K. Butler in the distribution of food aid by river, which, due to the Romanian occupation, would not have been possible on land.[40] Butler, who arrived in Budapest on 12 August, took personal charge of the Allied food, medical relief and general revictualling operations in Hungary. His work, however, was hampered for many weeks because of the prolonged presence of foreign troops.

The assessment in Paris of the Romanian role in bringing down the communists in Hungary was equivocal. It was equivocal not only because by and large the French regarded the Romanians as promoters of their interests in the region, while the others did not,

but also because the Romanian role was genuinely difficult to evaluate. On the one hand, the Hungarian Red Army existed in violation of the Armistice and the Romanian invasion effectively defeated them down to the last resisting pockets in the west of the country in the Balaton region. A newly organised Hungarian police force was even 'working in pairs with Roumanian soldiers'.[41] On the other hand, the Supreme Council never authorised the Romanian seizure of Budapest, and within a few days the occupying forces seemed to have slipped out of the control of the Romanian government, and embarked on a policy of large-scale requisitions and other abuses of their powers. The Romanian government saw fit to extract heavy indemnities from Hungary in retaliation for the equally Carthaginian peace conditions imposed upon Romania by the German and Austro-Hungarian forces in May 1918. Together with the Romanians, Czechoslovak and Serbian troops also moved beyond their demarcation lines and occupied the northern and southern coal regions of Hungary. The Supreme Council had just raised the blockade against Hungary, but in these circumstances the relief materials could not reach their destinations. With the Romanian entry into Budapest, the problem of enforcing the will of the Conference upon an enemy turned into enforcing it on a refractory ally. This time, however, the Allies acted without delay. On 5 August the Supreme Council appointed an Inter-Allied Military Commission to Hungary. The Commission was headed by four Allied Generals: Brigadier-General Reginald St George Gorton (Great Britain), Major General Harry Hill Bandholtz (United States), General Jean César Graziani (France), and General Ernesto Mombelli (Italy). The generals were only accompanied by a handful of support staff.[42] They were expected to enforce their injunctions by recourse to the authority of the Supreme Council. Gorton and the American Bandholtz took a much stronger line with regard to the Romanians' conduct in Hungary than their French and Italian colleagues. Frank Rattigan, British Chargé d'Affaires in Bucharest, writing to Curzon, now Foreign Secretary, on 29 October 1919, criticised this, and expressed the view that, as Romania was one of the pillars of Britain's Middle Eastern policy, Britain should 'do all in our power to conciliate her and bring her back into the fold from which she is in danger of being severed'.[43] At least in August, Crowe and Allen Leeper in Paris backed Rattigan's disapproval of the unqualified condemnation of Romanian conduct in

Hungary by Gorton, Admiral Troubridge, and the American, Bandholtz.[44] By September, however, the Romanian action became a major obstacle to the work of the conference.

On 5 September, the Supreme Council commissioned Sir George Russell Clerk, former Head of the War Department at the Foreign Office, British Minister designate to Prague and a member of the 'New Europe' group, to proceed to Bucharest with wide powers to negotiate on its behalf. By this time, Clerk was a diplomat of considerable reputation. An expert on Middle and Near Eastern languages, Clerk's background and career up to the outbreak of the war offer no explanation why he should turn his attention towards Central Europe. Nonetheless, by 1915, he had become a member of a 'troika' with John Duncan Gregory and Eric Drummond, Foreign Office officials with special interest in Poland. Clerk was perhaps the first British diplomat to suggest cautious support for the Polish cause. These credentials and his known personal negotiating skills elicited broad support for his appointment both in Paris and in London.

Sir George Clerk carried a note from the Supreme Council, which argued that with the fall of Béla Kun there was no further need to occupy Hungarian territory, called on the Romanians to cease the expropriations, and surrender to the Allied Reparation Commission what had already been expropriated.

Clerk arrived in Bucharest on 11 September 1919. He was accompanied by Allen Leeper, a member of the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, and foremost British expert on Romania. On their arrival, the Romanian government of Ion Bratianu resigned. While the ex-prime minister assured Clerk of 'complete harmony', he declined to accede to the demands of the conference. Since about the middle of August, the Romanians had also been seeking a personal union of Hungary and Romania under King Ferdinand of Romania, and increased their territorial claims on Hungary.

Clerk could not obtain a speedy resolution of the impasse, as the Romanians presented him with an immediate government crisis. The official Romanian response was issued on 20 September, and contained preconditions. It demanded a government in Hungary acceptable to Romania and also laid claim to further Hungarian territory. Leeper was dispatched back to Paris on 24 September, where he submitted a memorandum for Sir Eyre Crowe expressing appreciation of

the Romanian position. Even the strongly pro-Romanian Leeper, whose association with R.W. Seton-Watson and the 'New Europe' group defined his political outlook, was scathing in his opinion of Romania's leaders. Leeper detected the Romanian intention to exploit any sign of discord between Britain and France with regard to the League of Nations, reparations and the peace in the Middle East. Armed with Leeper's expert advice, and sharing his convictions, Clerk and the conference decided not to budge on any of the issues in Clerk's original brief.[45] Therefore this mission to Romania, which ended on 29 September, resulted in failure. Before returning to Paris, Sir George decided to familiarise himself with the situation in Hungary. He arrived in Budapest on 1 October, and in a few days had talks with members of the Inter-Allied Mission, with Romanian representatives, and with Hungarian politicians, including Social Democrats.

To understand the manifold considerations that prompted Sir George Clerk over and above his formal remit during his missions in Central Europe, a brief discussion of the changed interests of Britain in the region is necessary. Although British interests in Central Europe and the northern Balkans had been limited in the past, informed politicians perceived that the drastic economic changes brought about by the war would have an effect on Britain's relationship with this region. The heavy burden of Inter-Allied debts made the restoration of trade an imperative. The discouraging example of the pre-war controversy between Imperial preference and Free Trade as well as the obvious economic supremacy of the United States required the complete overhaul of British overseas commercial strategy. For this reason, a Department of Overseas Trade, and within it a Development and Intelligence Section, was created in the Foreign Office in 1917. The D.O.T. had developed an excellent working relationship with the Treasury, which itself was to become a key player in the decision-making process of British foreign policy.[46] At the same time, it was obvious that a vacuum had been created in central, eastern and south-eastern Europe. For a time, neither Germany, nor Russia would be able to recover the pre-war trade links with their former dependent territories. The area was thrown open to British, French and Italian ambitions for economic, financial and concomitant political influence. Each great power had its own method and style of approaching this newly opened turf. The British

were likely to remain content to develop trade links and keep political involvement to a necessary minimum. The French, on the other hand, had a tendency to turn political influence into tutelage. The Italians, suffering from notions of the 'vittoria mutilata', were eager to exploit any opportunity to increase their gains, whether in Central Europe or elsewhere. Each of these powers had possible favourites among the successor states, which would serve as the axis for future influence in the region. That each great power couched this ambition in verbal support for various schemes of post-Imperial integration of the new states should not obscure their real purposes. The plans for integration reflected the interests of their Great Power progenitors, and were never likely to be espoused by all the successor states simultaneously. In this early period, these strategies were far from being clear-cut. The British, French and Italian governments each hedged its bets and continued to put out feelers.

Sir George Clerk's missions to Central Europe, therefore, must be seen in the context of narrowly defined British interests, as well as in the context of a job carried out on behalf of the peace conference. Only in this way can we understand his cautious approach towards Romania and Hungary. Apart from securing peace and justice he also tried to make sure that Britain should remain on good terms with both nations; otherwise one or the other government might turn to Italy, and particularly to France, for patronage. Such a balancing act, however, was difficult to achieve. Almost inevitably, Clerk's approach was condemned in Romania as being pro-Hungarian[47] and vice versa. In Budapest, Generals Bandholtz and Gorton heavily criticised Clerk for not denouncing the Romanian action in Hungary.[48]

In the course of Clerk's first talks in Hungary, the Hungarian socialist leader, Ernõ Garami, told him that in order to solve the Hungarian conundrum, the peace conference would have to discard its rigidity about non-intervention in Hungary's internal affairs. Clerk gained the impression that the longer the Romanian occupation of eastern and central Hungary lasted the more difficult it would be to re-establish normal economic life in the region, and the more entrenched the as yet uncontrolled extremist counter-revolutionary elements in Hungary would become. In his final report on his first mission, prepared in Paris on 7 October,[49] Clerk maintained an even-handed approach. While still not condemning the Romanians outright,[50] he underlined the Romanians' hope of

finding a more pliant Hungarian administration as one of the principal reasons for their continued occupation. The memorandum concluded that the Gordian knot would be best cut by the establishment of a viable Hungarian government. Ernõ Garami later recalled that Clerk had intimated to him that 'the Entente is about to switch from the policy of ultimatums and notes to a different method'.[51]

The gentry-based Friedrich group that took control of the administration in Hungary after ousting the trade union government had played little or no part in politics before. Nonetheless, it held on to office, if not to power, with stubborn tenacity. It was conceded by Western representatives in Hungary that public opinion had become prejudiced against all forms of socialism during the communist period, and was not averse to the ousting of the Social Democrats. However, even after the Archduke Joseph had abdicated his governorship,[52] the Allies did not regard the Friedrich group as being 'sufficiently permanent in character to justify making a peace treaty [with]'.[53] In forming this opinion, they were influenced by Philippe Berthelot, then Acting Director of Political and Commercial Affairs (later Secretary-General) at the Quai d'Orsay in Paris, who called the Hungarian leader 'the mask of the Archduke Joseph'. A number of reports from Budapest also suggested that the weakness of the government, the harshness of the Romanians, and the apparent inability of the Allies to influence the events created the danger of the recrudescence of Bolshevism.

Clerk's memorandum of 7 October turned out to be of decisive significance for the future of Central Europe, as the summarised account of his talks in Budapest persuaded the peace conference on 13 October to send him on a second mission, this time to Budapest.[54] He was sent to Hungary as a special diplomatic representative of the Supreme Council to procure the Romanian withdrawal and to bring about the formation of a Hungarian government representative of the popular will, that is, a coalition of the responsible political parties. The two tasks were interrelated; the success of one depended on the accomplishment of the other. As Crowe said at a meeting of the Supreme Council on 3 November: 'the Roumanian and Hungarian questions [...] involved each other'.[55]

Clerk's impending mission was not kept secret. The details of its objectives appeared in the Hungarian press, which allowed the various Hungarian political formations to prepare for it. The

Minister of the Interior, Beniczky, instigated the local governments to send delegations to Clerk from many corners of the country with the message that the Friedrich government represented the vast majority of Hungarians.[56] Sir George arrived in Budapest on 23 October, and began his talks on 24th. From General Bandholtz's account it would appear that he was initially prejudiced against the Hungarians, and only modified his viewpoint gradually. He immediately saw that there was a right-wing public relations offensive aimed at convincing him of the legitimacy of their cause. He was initially susceptible to this influence but by the time of his first major dispatch from Budapest on 1 November, he could no longer endorse the views of the Christian National Block, who grouped themselves around Friedrich, and under whose auspices an 'anti-Semitic crusade has grown to a great height'. Nevertheless, he wrote: 'I have seen Admiral Horthy. He inspires confidence'. Clerk accepted Horthy's assurance that if a new administration could be formed, he would 'keep his troops', many of whom were responsible for the retaliatory atrocities, 'in hand'.[57] On the strength of the Admiral's statement, Clerk gave his word to a socialist convention that order would be maintained. In putting trust in the commander of Hungary's only armed force of about 8000 men, whose stronghold was in western Hungary, where the Romanians had not reached, Clerk differed from the opinion of French representatives in Hungary. A French note to the Supreme Council, produced at the end of October, concluded that not only would Friedrich's government have to be made to resign, the Romanians made to withdraw, and a new police force be organised, but that Horthy's 'clique seems to favour a military dictatorship', and that his 'army of adventurers' would also have to be disarmed. The French envisaged the need for 'an Inter-Allied force of two divisions' for this task.[58] The French proposal was probably not fired by any serious concern for democracy in Hungary, but by the fact that Horthy's men were suspected of taking a revanchist line against the Successor States, a policy which contradicted French interests. Clerk's status as a plenipotentiary envoy, however, meant that his political manoeuvres and recommendations held sway over all other opinions at this stage of Allied relations with Central Europe. In his missive of 1 November, Clerk asked for authority from the Supreme Council to assure 'if necessary [...] new government' [to be

constituted] … to be granted … [the] 'provisional recognition of [sic by] Supreme Council'.[59] Clerk received this authority in a telegram from Paris, dated 5 November.[60] Clerk's assurances of the probity and reliability of Horthy satisfied Sir Eyre Crowe. On 4 November Crowe said in the Supreme Council:

> Sir George must have had serious reason for this opinion […]. Moreover, it was well known that the majority of the Hungarian population favoured the establishment of a conservative form of Government, [which would] not be democratic. […] There existed no right to prevent the Hungarian people from forming a government corresponding to its own tendencies, provided there were no question of restoring the Hapsburgs.[61]

As Horthy commanded the only sizable military force to be present in Hungary at the time of the envisaged elections, Clerk's appraisal of his intentions was very important. The conference originally intended to send an Allied force to replace the Romanians ensuring that no intimidation took place during the elections 'by the small army of Admiral Horthy [which is] openly reactionary'.[62] Such an Allied force would have to contain elements from the Successor States, that is, Hungary's new, clearly not impartial, neighbours. All Allied informants in Hungary, however, advised the Supreme Council in the strongest possible terms against such a move, and assurances were repeated by Clerk about 'Horthy's loyalty and sincerity'.[63] In the end, after the Romanians had withdrawn from Budapest on 14 November, Horthy's men moved in, and notwithstanding the welcome of cheering crowds, the Admiral promised to make the city 'atone for its sins'. The Romanian evacuation of Budapest followed a telegram communicated to Bucharest on 13 November, in which the Supreme Council, after making 'every effort' with 'indefatigable patience […] to bring about Rumania's compliance', threatened to break off relations with, and 'cease to sustain the territorial claims of, Rumania'.[64] By early December, following further pressure, the Romanian Army withdrew to the line of the River Tisza in the east of the Great Hungarian Plain after the new government of Alexander Vaida-Voevod had been installed in Bucharest. The full withdrawal from Hungary of all

foreign (Czech, Romanian and Serbo-Croat-Slovene) occupying forces was only completed in the late summer of 1921.

From mid-November 1919, therefore, the Romanian occupation of Budapest no longer obstructed Clerk's efforts in forging a coalition government for Hungary. It appears that he staked much of his personal prestige on achieving an acceptable compromise, and his possible fear of losing the momentum of the process may account for the fact that he grasped at the apparent reliability of Horthy, on whose National Army he planned to base the settlement. Clerk's house became a daily meeting place of representatives of the mainstream political parties. During these meetings, new groups and alliances crystallised and these would remain important in Hungarian politics through the inter-war years. It is unlikely that the Christian National Block would have talked to the socialists, or even the liberals, if Clerk had not made it a condition of his support that they do so. On 28 October *The Pester Lloyd*, a Hungarian liberal German-language newspaper, published a long interview with Clerk in which he emphasised his impartiality, and the wish to conclude an early agreement.[65] On 17 November he reported his 'meeting [with] about 40 representative Hungarians at my house', which 'lasted 5 hours'.[66] Formal negotiations were also held at the Zichy Palace in Budapest. As a result of these 'tedious and twisted negotiations which [Clerk] had to conduct', Friedrich resigned.[67] With Apponyi's[68] and Horthy's support behind him, Clerk managed to persuade the Christian Nationalist Bloc to get rid of Friedrich on the condition that someone from the same party was chosen as new head of government.[69] On 25 November, Clerk informed the peace conference that: 'I have given formal recognition of the Supreme Council to Huszar as provisional *de facto* administration of Hungary'. The new Prime Minister, Károly Huszár, was a relatively unknown figure. He had been Christian-Socialist Minister of Education in the Friedrich government.

It is highly significant in appraising Clerk's work and the subsequent British influence on the future political outlook in Hungary that the British diplomat (in sharp contrast to Crowe's earlier non-committal remarks about the inherent lack of democratic instincts among the Hungarian people) made it a condition of his extending recognition to the new Hungarian government that the Hungarians

gave a formal pledge to respect democratic civil rights. In his telegram to the Supreme Council, Clerk reported that:

> recognition is subject to the condition that the provisional government undertakes [among other things] to guarantee to every Hungarian national free civil rights including those of a free Press, free right of meeting, freedom to express political opinions and a free, secret, impartial, and democratic election based on universal suffrage.[70]

Both the left in Hungary and observers of Hungarian events in Britain, mainly former Liberals who had become Labour MPs, such as Josiah Wedgwood, Joseph Kenworthy or Robert Richardson, as well as the former arch-critic of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, R.W. Seton-Watson, would later judge the Horthy regime against the standards of the agreement signed with Sir George Clerk.[71]

The coalition partners in Hungary included the Christian-Socialists, the Smallholders, the National-Democrats (Liberals), and the Social Democrats. Friedrich remained as minister of war. Huszár accepted Clerk's conditions and promised early elections. The elections, because of their peculiar origins in the British-brokered agreement, came to be called the 'Clerk elections'. Significantly, Huszár assured Clerk that he was ready to send a delegation to Paris to receive the terms of peace as soon as an invitation was received. With this latter undertaking, the main aim of Clerk's mission to Budapest, which was among the most successful operations of post-war Allied diplomacy, had been achieved.

In his final report from Budapest, sent before his departure on 29 November, Clerk, notwithstanding his earlier criticism, commended the Inter-Allied Mission of Generals, Admiral Troubridge, and Admiral Horthy and his staff for 'the extraordinary smoothness and absence of disorder, which marked the departure of the Rumanians and the entrance of the Hungarians in Budapest'.[72] Clerk's report also contained recommendations for future British policy on the whole Central European region. It was, in fact, together with the economic arguments of earlier memoranda prepared by Sir William Beveridge,[73] General Smuts and Sir Francis Oppenheimer,[74] a possible basis for such a policy. Clerk proposed that the obligation of reparations be lifted from both Austria and Hungary. This would ease the process of reconstruction and trade throughout Europe, and would also help

prevent the inter-ethnic frictions which he anticipated in the wake of the breakup of such an extraordinarily complex state as the Dual Monarchy. He also submitted the sharply relevant and forward-looking idea of a Central High Commission to keep an eye on, or even possibly arbitrate in, the expected ethnic conflicts and revisionist claims. Clerk's involvement could perhaps be described as Britain's historical entry into the politics of Central Europe. With the temporary contraction of both Germany's and Russia's capacity to exert influence beyond their borders, the British (as well as the French and Italians) had every chance to maintain this initial momentum and play a defining role in the future political and economic life of the Danubian countries. Britain's economic supremacy in Europe made it a front runner among the contestants. Clerk's mission also demonstrated how quickly and effectively it was possible to make up for the lack of previous experience in dealing with Central Europe. For some, even at the highest level, Clerk's reports afforded the first insight into the international and intranational structures that had been created at the conference tables of Paris. On 7 December, Lord Curzon, minuted on Clerk's final report: '[Sir George Clerk's] Report is a valuable picture of S.E. Europe showing us in passing what brutes the majority of these little states we have created are'. On 1 December 1919, Clemenceau, in the name of the Supreme Council, invited the Hungarians to send their representatives to Paris. The 'Hungarian crisis' was over.

In terms of obtaining an uneasy formal acquiescence in the territorial settlement for Central Europe, Sir George Clerk's involvement must be seen as a success. However, as in the case of Beveridge, Smuts and Oppenheimer before him, his recommendations for an overall political–economic settlement for Central Europe were not taken seriously. His achievements in the democratisation of the political life of Hungary also remained restricted. Following the 'Clerk elections', the new regime in Hungary rapidly abandoned the commitments made to Clerk. This was overlooked in Whitehall until the accession to office of Ramsay MacDonald's Labour administration. The new Labour Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Ponsonby, prepared a memorandum on the situation in Hungary in February 1924. He plainly stated that:

> The political Constitution in Hungary is for the time being merely parliamentary in appearance. As a matter of fact the rule

> of the Bethlen Government is based on counter revolutionary methods. Even though article 13 of the fundamental law of 1920 lays down that the re-election of the National Assembly should be carried out under the same basis as that of the First National Assembly, Count Bethlem [Bethlen], by Order in Council issued in February 1922, ignoring this provision, deprived one-third of the electors of their right to vote and abolished secret ballot in rural constituencies. … As opposed to the agreement made with the Hungarian political parties, including the Social Democrats, by Sir George Clerk as representative of the Allied Powers in November 1919, according to which the form of Government should be decided by plebiscite [,] the National Assembly declared Hungary to be a kingdom.[75]

Ponsonby further enumerated other developments in Hungary that ran counter to the letter or the spirit of the conditions set by Clerk in 1919, including severe restrictions imposed on the trade unions, and virtual immunity from prosecution of perpetrators of indiscriminate retaliatory raids on civilians following the collapse of the trade union government in August 1919. Prompted by Foreign Office pressure, the British Minister in Hungary, Sir Thomas Hohler, a friend of Horthy from pre-war times and a supporter of the political *status quo* in Hungary, addressed these issues to the prime minister, Count István Bethlen on 26 March 1924. As expected, Bethlen, the architect of Hungary's post-war stability, was adamant that these questions were part of Hungary's internal affairs, and that Clerk's conditions could not be imposed on Hungary in perpetuity.[76] Foreign Office opinion concurred with this view. After reading Hohler's report, Charles Howard Smith, a member of the Central Department of the Foreign Office, minuted: 'Bethlen adopted the attitude we expected, which indeed was the only one he could take up, and he was very friendly'. Miles Lampson, the Head of the Central Department commented on Ponsonby's memorandum that:

> It is very questionable whether by agreeing to [Clerk's] condition it was ever contemplated that the Hungarian Government were entering into a servitude for all time … as to the nature of their suffrage law.[77]

Another minute on the same document suggests that 'the question of direct intervention by the British government opens a vista of so many complications that it would be well to consider the matter carefully before embarking on such a policy'.[78] Such a policy was never seriously contemplated by the British. As Lampson remarked in a minute on 2 April 1924:

> Incidentally not even in this country have we got universal suffrage. Perhaps the matter may now be allowed to drop? I do not think that we shall gain anything by pursuing it.[79]

On the same day, Sir Eyre Crowe added his initials with the words: 'I agree'. Five days later, Ponsonby himself concurred.[80]

This sequel to Sir George Clerk's diplomatic achievements in 1919 proved that British diplomacy could only have limited success in Central Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, and that, therefore, its objectives were also of a moderate nature. Given the lack of British experience in the region before the war, setting more ambitious targets for post-war British missions in the lands of the Danube would have been impossible.

## Notes

1. A.J. Balfour Papers, British Library (hereinafter: BALF), Additional 49704.
2. *Loc. cit.*
3. See Tardieu's 'counter-memorandum' to the Fontainebleau proposals in André Tardieu, *The Truth About the Treaty* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1921), p. 117.
4. Allen Leeper, on being informed that he would accompany Smuts on the mission, wrote to his brother that he had 'many misgivings as well as hopes; my hopes are that Harold [Nicolson] and I *together* may keep things straight'. A.W.A. Leeper Papers, Churchill Archives, Cambridge (hereinafter: LEEP) Folder 2.
5. Arthur S. Link. ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 69 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966–1994), vol. 56, p. 415.
6. FO 608/148, 484/1/1/8735.
7. Other members of the mission were: Colonel T.G. Heywood of Military Intelligence; Cyril K. Butler, the head of the British relief mission to Central Europe; A.W.A. Leeper and Harold Nicolson from the Foreign

Office; Captain E.F.C. Lane, a Financial Officer; Smuts' aide, Captain C. Grant; Dr Engelenburg, Smuts's medical attendant; Lieutenant L.S. Law, a cipher clerk; an American, a French and an Italian officer. PRO FO 371/3515, 55028.

8. Alfred D. Low, 'The Soviet Hungarian Republic and the Paris Peace Conference', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 53/10 (December 1963), pp. 1–91, p. 29.
9. Peter Pastor, 'The Vix Mission in Hungary, 1918–1919: a Re-examination', *The Slavic Review*, 29/3 (September 1970), pp. 481–98, p. 493.
10. See map of the Neutral Zone proposal in PRO CAB 21/129.
11. Pastor, 'The Vix…', p. 496.
12. Ernõ Garami, *Forrongó Magyarország* (Hungary in Revolt) (Leipzig–Vienna: Pegazus, 1922), p. 109.
13. H.W.V. Temperley, *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, 6 vols (London: H. Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton) 1920–24, vol. 1, p. 353.
14. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919, The Paris Peace Conference*, 13 vols (Washington, DC: United States. Department of State, 1942–47) (hereinafter: *FRUS*), vol. 12, p. 415.
15. Pastor, 'The Vix…', p. 486.
16. On 3 April, Hankey urgently sent amended instructions to Smuts, which also alluded to the Military Convention of Belgrade of 13 November. Hankey 'saw [the Convention] for the first time this morning', and judged that it made 'no substantial difference' to the mission (FO 608/16, 6113). This is debatable as the previous armistice, the Armistice of Villa Giusti (Padua) of 3 November, concluded with the whole of Austria–Hungary, allowed the occupation of parts of Hungary by Allied troops without the consent of Marshal Foch, whereas the Military Convention of Belgrade, signed with the representatives of the newly independent Hungary, required Foch's approval for such manoeuvres. The difference assumes significance because of the Romanian advance in the east. The question is further complicated by the fact that the status of Romania as one of the victorious powers was not unequivocally accepted in Paris.
17. FO 608/11, 6113.
18. Likely to be a reference to William C. Bullitt, a member of the American Peace Delegation, who was sent on a mission to Russia, February–March 1919. In W.K. Hancock, Jean van der Poel, eds, *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 7 vols (Cambridge: CUP, 1966–73), vol. 4, no. 927, the text here reads 'Butler', and a footnote suggests: 'Probably C.K. Butler'. This is a misreading of the somewhat blurred original document (now in the Lloyd George Papers), and a mistaken assumption, as Cyril K. Butler, the British Relief Commissioner in Central Europe, is unlikely to have been referred to by Smuts in this context.
19. Lloyd George Papers (hereinafter: Ll.G.) F/45/9/31.
20. LEEP, Folder 2.
21. Ll.G. F/57/8/5.
22. Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (London: Constable, 1933), p. 293.

23. General J.C. Smuts, 'The Mission to Austria-Hungary', FO 608/16 No. 56/1/1/6836.
24. FO 608/11, 46/1/2/7729. Also see Lord Acton (Berne) on the 'disastrous' impression that the mission apparently created: FO 608/9, 41/1/6/6671.
25. Brother of the historian, Hungarian specialist, C.A. Macartney.
26. Nicolson, *Peacemaking …*, p. 297; Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *The Tragedy of Central Europe* (London: T. Butterworth Ltd), 1923, p. 109.
27. Nicolson, *Peacemaking …*, pp. 298–9.
28. In early April the Roumanian–Yugoslav Committee modified the earlier Hungarian–Romanian border proposals in Hungary's favour. This makes some historians draw the conclusion that the communist outbreak in Hungary, rather than damaging Hungary's case at the conference, in fact helped it. See, for example, Lajos Arday, *Térkép csata után* (Map After Battle) (Budapest: Magvetõ, 1990), p. 175.
29. Nicolson, *Peacemaking …*, p. 301.
30. General Smuts, 'The Mission …', FO 608/16, 56/1/1/6836.
31. Nicolson, *Peacemaking …*, p. 304.
32. Ll.G. F/197/2/1.
33. General Smuts, 'The Mission …', FO 608/16, 56/1/1/6836.
34. Leeper to his brother, 9 April 1919, LEEP, Folder 2.
35. Leeper to his brother: 'the whole mission was bad but at least by going we prevented it ending in catastrophe'. LEEP, Folder 2.
36. General Smuts, 'The Mission …'. FO 608/16, 56/1/1/6836.
37. Letter to Lloyd George, Ll.G. F/4/3/11.
38. General Smuts, 'The Mission …', Enclosure no. 5, FO 608/16, 56/1/1/6836.
39. Butler to Sir William Goode, 20 September 1919, FO 371/3516, 135267.
40. FO 608/8, 36/2/1/19193; 608/14, 46/1/12/17901; E.L. Woodward, Rohan Butler, eds, *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939,* First Series, 1–27 (London: HMSO, 1947–1986) (hereinafter: *DBFP*) vol. 6, p. 158.
41. FO 608/14, 46/1/12/17656.
42. FO 608/8, 36/2/1/19193.
43. Harry Hill Bandholtz, *An Undiplomatic Diary*, Fritz-Konrad Krüger, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), pp. 377–82.
44. See, for example, FO 608/14, 17996.
45. Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference. The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 138–43.
46. John Anthony Hemery, 'The Emergence of Treasury Influence in British Foreign Policy 1914–1921', unpublished PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 1988, Part III: The Treasury and Postwar Foreign Affairs, 1919–1921, pp. 260–402, *passim*.
47. Frank Rattigan, the influential British chargé d'affaires in Bucharest, welcomed Clerk's initially nonchalant approach to the Romanian requisitions in Hungary.
48. Bandholtz, pp. 125–36.
49. Deák, pp. 503–12.

50. Clerk even wrote that 'The Roumanian who is after all a Balkan and therefore an Oriental and who has been pillaged and looted by the enemy and by his Russian ally sees here in the occupation of Hungary an opportunity which he will consider himself a lunatic to forego'.
51. Lajos Varga, *Garami Ernõ, Politikai életrajz* (Ernõ Garami, a Political Biography) (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1996), p. 323.
52. The Successor States organised an intensive campaign to have the Archduke removed, as they felt that any Habsburg holding public office in Hungary would pose a threat to their sovereignty. Francis Deák recalls that as late as 1935 Eduard Beneš told him that he believed that a Habsburg restoration would threaten the existence of Czecho-Slovakia infinitely more than any plan or move by National-Socialist Germany. Deák, p. 121.
53. *FRUS*, vol. 8, pp. 586–7; Bandholtz, p. 8.
54. Deák, pp.134–50, 473–512; H.W.V. Temperley, vol. 4, pp. 230–5.
55. *FRUS*, vol. 8, p. 909.
56. György Ránki, 'A Clerk-misszió történetéhez' (To the History of the Clerk Mission), *Történelmi Szemle* (Historical Review), vol. 28, Budapest (1978), pp. 174–5.
57. FO 608/17, 56/1/4/20105; *FRUS*, vol. 8, pp. 947–8.
58. *FRUS*, vol. 8, pp. 919–20.
59. *FRUS*, vol. 8, p. 948.
60. *FRUS*, vol. 8, p. 959.
61. *FRUS*, vol. 8, p. 939.
62. *FRUS*, vol. 8, p. 960.
63. *FRUS*, vol. 9, p. 138.
64. *FRUS*, vol. 9, pp. 154–7.
65. FO 608/17, 56/1/4/20148.
66. FO 608/17, 56/1/4/20527.
67. FO 608/17, 56/1/4/20785.
68. Count Albert Apponyi, one of Hungary's most respected, senior, politicians.
69. On a report sent by Sir George from Budapest on 19 November 1919, E.G.F. Adam of the Foreign Office minuted: 'A most interesting crisis in which Sir George Clerk, Count Apponyi & Admiral Horthy succeed in producing order out of chaos'. FO 371/3517/159121/f1193.
70. *DBFP*, vol. 6, p. 411.
71. See, for example, FO 371/9902/C3619/21; also see Gerald James Protheroe, 'Watching and Observing: Sir George Clerk in Central Europe 1919–1926', PhD dissertation, University of London, 1999, pp. 89–90.
72. Deák, p. 535.
73. Sir William Beveridge led a mission to Vienna, Prague and Budapest in January 1919 on behalf of the International Food Commission, and submitted a report in which he made recommendations for the future economic settlement of Central Europe.
74. Sir Francis Oppenheimer had served at the Ministry of Blockade during the war, was seconded to the Treasury and sent on a special mission as

British Financial Commissioner to Vienna in May 1919. In his report, he recommended lenient reparation terms for Austria.

75. Memorandum by A. Ponsonby, 16 February 1924, FO 371/9902/C2786.
76. Hohler to MacDonald, 26 March 1924, FO 371/9902/C5341.
77. FO 371/9902/C2786.
78. FO 371/9902/C3619.
79. FO 371/9902/C5341.
80. FO 371/9902/C5341.

# 8

# The Eastern Question: the Last Phase

*Erik Goldstein*

The Eastern Question was the great diplomatic conundrum caused by the gradual decline of the Ottoman Empire. It was an issue which took on different configurations depending upon a state's geographical perspective. The term 'Eastern Question' was first used by Habsburg officials, who had seen it in land-based terms while Britain, which later became deeply involved with it, saw it from a maritime perspective. Ever since Nelson defeated Napoleon's forces at the Battle of the Nile, Britain had been growing as a power in the Eastern Mediterranean and there is a continuum of intent that extends from the Battle of the Nile to Gallipoli, through Allenby's entry into Jerusalem in 1917 and culminating in that remarkable day in November 1918 when British ships sailed into the Golden Horn and British forces took part in the occupation of Constantinople. British arms in 1918 had achieved a victory that had eluded all of Europe, all of Christendom, during the Crusades. Britain now dominated the Eastern Mediterranean world, with Constantinople occupied, a veiled protectorate over Mesopotamia, the Caspian Sea in British hands, the Caucasus occupied by British divisions from the Black Sea to the Caucasus mountains, and Egypt, Palestine and Syria all under British control. Little wonder that the Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, would later exclaim, 'What other worlds have we to conquer? We are like so many Alexanders.'[1] It appeared that Britain now held the key to the Eastern Question. What then were British intentions, what was the object of British strategy in the eastern Mediterranean with the end of the First World War?

British aspirations evolved while the Eastern settlement was negotiated. The thinking of British strategists can be seen as going through three periods. The first stage began with Whitehall's war-time planning for the post-war order and lasted until the downfall of its key regional ally, the Greek leader Eleutherios Venizelos, in 1920. The second period was dominated by the rise of the Turkish nationalists under Mustapha Kemal (later surnamed Atatürk) and culminated in the Chanak crisis of 1922. Finally there was the *denouement* which resulted in the peace settlement reached at Lausanne in 1923. As Britain worked its way through the puzzle of what to do about the Eastern Mediterranean settlement three schools of thought can be discerned amongst those engaged in the peace planning and negotiations. First there were the old-style imperialists happy to grab any available territory; second, there were the imperial reformers, most of them associated in some way with the Milnerite Round Tablers and, finally, there were those who sought select strategic acquisitions; these were consolidationists who saw the empire as grossly over-extended.

At the heart of the debate lay the the issue of the identity of the British Empire. The British Empire in 1919 was the world's largest empire. It was also an empire of many identities. The issue of national identity is today a fashionable subject, but it is entirely relevant to understanding the events of 1919. Britain was variously a Christian Empire, the largest Muslim state and, since the Balfour Declaration, had even become the protector of the Jews. 'Mission' is a term often associated with descriptions of American foreign policy, but mission also played an important role to many who helped shape British foreign policy. Many who served the British Empire were clear on the issue of identity, and of mission – it was a Christian empire. Sir Arthur Hirtzel of the India Office believed that, 'The Empire … has been given to us as a means to that great end for which Christ came into the world, the redemption of the human race. That is to say, it has been given to us to make it Christian. This is to be Britain's contribution to the redemption of mankind.'[2] For these Christian men of Empire there could no greater sphere of activity than the historic cities of Christendon, now redeemed by British arms. This in turn dovetailed with those who supported Jewish aspirations. The Empire's involvement with Zionism was hardly new. There was an influential group that favoured, for strategic reasons, a British-controlled Jewish colony in Palestine.

Many in Whitehall, though, were concerned about the impact of Britain's role in the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, the world's largest Muslim state, the ruler of which was not only the sultan but also the caliph ul-Islam. Lloyd George undoubtedly startled his colleagues at the Paris Peace Conference when he once announced that he sat there as the representative of, '… the greatest Mohammedan power'.[3] The British Empire's Muslim population was estimated at 80 million. Indeed, by its recent acquisitions in the Middle East this position had been further enhanced, and Britain's relations with Islam would prove to be a critical question in the shaping of its future role in this part of the world. Anything dealing with the Muslim world was of concern to the British Empire and, especially, the India Office which ever since the Indian mutiny of 1857–58 had feared a reawakening of anti-British, Muslim sentiment. As Sir Eyre Crowe of the Foreign Office noted in late 1918, 'The govt. of India see red when the word Moslem is mentioned.'[4] London would have to balance its aspirations against the existing realities of Empire.

Britain had great ambitions in the Eastern Mediterranean. There were plans for a great new Middle Eastern Department, which was seen as potentially as important as the India Office, to administer this new addition to the Empire. As the Cabinet's Eastern Committee developed an ever-longer list of territories to be added to British rule one of the consolidationists, Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, observed, '… it would be very satisfactory if we could find some convincing argument for not annexing all the territories in the world'.[5] The demands for some sign of moderation led to the emergence of a scheme, entirely in keeping with Britain's Imperial traditions, to take control of as much of the region as possible, utilising a variety of mechanisms in order to minimise the potential risk of strategic overstretch. Suitable regional allies were to be developed as proxies for British power, such as Venizelist Greece which would become an Aegean power. Client rulers would be supported, such as the Hashemites who it was hoped would control the Arab lands, possibly with the caliphate being transferred to them to bring wider Muslim support. The Egyptian Khedive, now elevated to king, would rule Egypt with the assistance of a British high commisioner and a British army commander. Dependent groups reliant upon Britain for their existence would be utilised, such as the Jews who could be used

to colonise and take control of Palestine. Thus a vast new region would fall to British control without the necessity of undue direct involvement and would simultaneously block the traditional rival, France, and the increasingly irritating new regional player, Italy, while forming a bulwark against any resurgence of Russian interest in its new Bolshevik guise.

Francophobia was particularly endemic in policy-making circles, as Lord Curzon's view of France illustrates:

> We have been brought, for reasons of national safety, into an alliance with the French, which I hope will last, but their national character is different from ours, and their political interests collide with ours in many cases. I am seriously afraid that the great Power from whom we may have most to fear in the future is France, and I almost shudder at the possibility of putting France in such a position. She is powerful in almost all parts of the world, even around India .... France is a highly organised State, has boundless intrepidity, imagination, and a certain power of dealing with Eastern peoples ... the French are born intriguers, as we have seen in the Lebanon and elsewhere. I can only say that I should be most reluctant to lend a hand to a scheme which would place France in a position of authority in this region ....[6]

Sir Louis Mallet, Britain's last ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, suggested that if France received Syria, '... she will be astride the land communications between Great Britain and the British Empire in the East' and advised that Britain's aim should be to keep the region free of French intrigue.[7]

In debating the future of the Baghdad railway idea, during a very full discussion in the British delegation in February 1919, it was decided unanimously to oppose any non-British involvement, as it '... would be used by other nations to retain a political footing in our sphere. ... We might be forced, contrary to our political and strategic interests, to adopt alignments of which we did not approve'. There was little desire to be bound to France and it was concluded that:

> British interests cannot therefore be adequately safeguarded on the left flank of India unless the entire frontier of the territory

> under British control is pushed northward considerably beyond anything contemplated in the Sykes–Picot Agreement in order to afford adequate cover for the pipeline and lateral railway communication from Baghdad to the Mediterranean coast to connect with Egypt.[8]

This led Britain to try to exclude France from the region entirely. Lloyd George's nimble diplomacy, while seeking to avoid a French zone in Anatolia, finally led Clemenceau to exclaim in exasperation that 'Lloyd George is a cheat'.[9] The nadir of Anglo-French relations came on 21 May 1919, at a meeting of the Council of Four when Clemenceau, infuriated that Britain, as he saw it, was going to renege on a commitment for a French zone in Anatolia, challenged the British prime minister to a duel.[10] British antipathies, however, were not reserved for France alone.

There was a long tradition of anti-Turkish sentiment in British politics, which had its origins in the nineteenth century when the Christian nationalities under Ottoman rule began to struggle for independence. William Gladstone, who fought a notable election campaign which focused on reports of Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria, even went so far as to suggest that the Turks be driven, bag and baggage from Europe.[11] Such opinions did not abate over the years and the Ottoman Empire's entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers only fuelled anti-Turkish feelings. During the war, Arnold Toynbee, then employed in the Foreign Office, produced a book entitled *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks*.[12] He subsequently became the official who prepared the British negotiating brief on the fate of the Ottoman Empire. In 1919 Lord Hardinge, the permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, observed that, 'Here in this Office, we hold very strongly that the moment is opportune for turning the Turk out of Europe.'[13] Crowe favoured the total exclusion of the Turks from Europe observing that, 'The policy of allowing the Turk to remain in Europe is so contrary to our most important interests and so certain to involve the continuance of all the abomination associated with the Turks, that we cannot afford to treat this as a matter of just humouring Moslem feelings....'[14] Curzon, though sensitive to the needs of the Indian Empire and of Britain's Muslim subjects, was still unhappy with any continuance of Turkish rule in continental Europe.[15] In December 1919 he

advised the Cabinet that, '… he was in favour of an International Commission administering Constantinople and the Straits. If it were necessary to make concessions to Moslem and Indian sentiment, he would transfer the capital of Turkey to Asia Minor and leave the Sultan in a "Vatican on the Straits" '.[16] Lloyd George would not even accept this compromise, declaring that:

> If the Sultan was at Constantinople, his ministers must be there. He would then govern Turkey from Constantinople, where we could allow him only a small bodyguard. This would mean that he would be the creature of what was really a foreign junta. There was the danger that the French would always try to influence him … . Constantinople would become a source of infection and war.[17]

Curzon's, though, was an early voice in warning that Turkey might not be entirely down and out, speaking as early as April 1919 of the danger inherent of plans for the partition of Anatolia. He noted that the Allies planned not only, '… to decapitate the Turk, but to cut up and appropriate his corpse'. He went on to suggest that 'It is more than likely that the body will decline to be treated as a corpse at all'.[18] He also expressed concerns about the necessity to build a strong cordon around Soviet Russia.

At an important meeting of British Cabinet ministers at the Paris Peace Conference, in May 1919, just as the Greeks were about to occupy Smyrna, the prime minister announced that the Council of Four had been forced to abandon provisional proposals to divide Anatolia into a number of areas which would be held as mandates by one or other of the Great Powers. Britain had mixed motives for this decision. In part this decision was due to arguments made by those, such as Curzon, who were concerned about both the impact within Turkey and in the wider Muslim world. It was due in equal measure to mounting concerns about Italy's aspirations, in particular that Italy might defy the peace conference and seize a slice of Anatolia. This concern prompted the dispatch to Smyrna of Greek forces in May 1919, in order to pre-empt the Italians. Intended in part to block Italy, this manoeuvre resulted in exactly the reaction that Curzon had feared, providing the catalyst for a Turkish national movement. Curzon had opposed putting the Greeks in Smyrna.

He had preferred the idea of an Anatolian Turkish state, under a docile sultan, as the best solution.

Constantinople and European Turkey were another matter. On this issue there was virtually no support for a continued Turkish presence. Arthur Balfour, the Foreign Secretary, observed that, 'He would turn the Turk altogether out of Constantinople, and he was in favour of leaving the Greeks in Smyrna.' George Barnes, the Labour Party member of the coaltion who served as a delegate to the peace conference, stated that '… he was not an expert on the subject but he felt a bias in favour of turning the Turks out of Constantinople'. Curzon explained that he:

> had no desire whatever to deal gently with the Turks. The Turks had voluntarily sided with Germany; they had treated our prisoners with unexampled barbarity; they had massacred hundreds of thousands of their own subjects. They therefore deserved any fate which was inflicted upon them. He thought that they should be deprived of all their outlying provinces, that is to say Arabia, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria and Armenia. He was further in favour of their being turned out of Constantinople. … Above all unless we turned the Turks out of Constantinople the East would never believe that the Turks had been defeated in the war. The presence of the Turk in Constantinople was an outward and visible sign of his dominance. Constantinople, the ancient seat of the eastern Empire, was a military outpost of Turkey in Europe.[19]

It would appear that Curzon had in mind nothing short of the 'ethnic cleansing' of Turks from Europe, and that this view was widely supported.

What then to do with Constantinople if Turkish rule was to be terminated? In December 1918 Sir Esme Howard, the head of the planning section which included Russian issues, proposed the idea of Constantinople serving as the seat of the new League of Nations, and that it should be placed under United States administration.[20] In January 1919, Woodrow Wilson stated the United States would not take a Constantinople mandate. Wilson's rejection was not widely believed, as it was hard for many to imagine a power willingly refusing control of such a prize, a view reflected by Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, one of the British delegation's Middle

Eastern specialists, who noted in his diary that, '… I know for a fact that Wilson is moving Heaven and Earth to become Mandatory Power there.'[21] In May 1919, Curzon again supported putting Constantinople and the Straits under Washington as a League of Nations mandate. This view was shared by Lord Milner, Montagu and Winston Churchill. They knew that taking the city would not be acceptable to the other Powers, but they sought a solution which met their concerns. Alternatives that were considered included placing it directly under the control of the League of Nations, with the support services and administration being provided by Greece, in effect making it once again a Greek city. The fall of Venizelos in 1920 inaugurated a new phase. A non-Turkish Constantinople had inevitably meant some form of Greek Constantinople, but Greece now had a regime unacceptable to any of the Allies. This led Britain and the Allies to reassess their views of the so-far amenable Sultan who, in the wake of the Nationalist movement's growth, also now depended on the Allies to stablise his regime.

One of the major concerns for British thinking over what to do about the Sultan was the consequential impact of any change on the substantial Muslim population wihin the British empire. If it was felt that Britain had mistreated the caliph, Britain's Muslim subjects might be angered. One solution which was considered was transfering the caliphate to a suitable alternative candidate. During the war, Lord Kitchener had had plans to transfer the caliphate to the pro-British Arabs. The Sharif Husein of Mecca was the favoured choice, and his control of the holy cities and the Hashemites' descent from the prophet Mohammed seemed to provide adequate legitimation for such a move. Hirtzel and the India Office though had argued that, 'A strong Arab State might be more dangerous to Christendom than a strong Ottoman State, and Lord Kitchener's policy of destroying one Islamic State merely for the purpose of creating another, has always seemed to me disastrous, from the point of view no less of expediency than of civilization.'[22]

Neither the British administration in Baghdad nor the India Office were committed to Husein and were willing to see him go under in his contest with Ibn Saud for the mastery of the Arabian peninsula. Lord Allenby and Robert Vansittart of the Foreign Office, on the other hand, took a pro-Hashemite line, with Vansittart arguing that, 'Husein is not popular of course, partly because we made him. But

as we made him we've got to stick to him. Strength is the only thing they appreciate in the East, and if we were weak enough to let our man go under we shd. lose more than by seeing him through in spite of his popularity. The whole of our prestige is at stake.'[23] This option disappeared as relations with Husein and the Hashemites soured for a period, and their loss of Mecca to Ibn Saud finally quashed any such plan (one the Hashemites themselves had been promoting).

Regardless of the Hashemite gambit, Curzon and Hardinge, both former Viceroys, were, as Hardinge explained in December 1919, '… strongly of the opinion that it is very desirable to get the Turks out of Constantinople and thus to inflict a severe blow on the prestige of the Sultan which may in the long run lose him the Caliphate and will be a severe blow to pan-Islamism, which those who know must realise is a most serious danger in India. Now is the time to grasp the nettle firmly'.[24] In the changed environment after 1920, more moderate views began to gain ground. In 1921, Sir Horace Rumbold, the British High Commissioner at Constantinople, reported on the possibility of negotiating with the Nationalists and seeing the end of the Ottomans, 'In the Islamic world generally, we might easily be represented as having been parties to the overthrow of a Caliph, and the success of our present endeavours to conciliate Moslem opinion might be a good deal impaired.'[25] The India Office likewise argued for the necessity of keeping Muslim opinion calm by keeping the Sultan at Constantinople.

In the end it was the British who became the chief supporters of the weakened sultan–caliph, in the face of the rising Kemalist nationalist tide. The Turkish general, Mustapha Kemal, had succeeded in rallying the defeated Turks, in the wake of the May 1919 Greek landing at Smyrna, which occurred with Allied, and particularly, British support. This left the sultan to appear, as indeed he now was, the impotent captive of the Allies at Constantinople. The end of the second phase of British involvement is probably best marked by the end of the Ottoman dynasty. They had entered Constantinople in triumph in 1453 under Mohammed II the Conqueror and they now departed with his successor, Mohammed VI, in 1922 aboard *HMS Malaya*. This also marked the end of any British attempt to maintain a congenial government at Constantinople. In the Turkish part of the Ottoman Empire British policy did

not achieve its initial object, but it did find success in the non-Turkish regions.

Palestine was very much the pivot of British ambitions, an area where British interests converged. Britain was a maritime empire and in Palestine it could control a narrow coastal mandate, with more indirect control of an Arab administered trans-Jordanian hinterland. This would provide both a buffer for the Suez Canal and also bring under British control several of the favoured routes for the Baghdad railway project. The concept of a Jewish homeland suited multiple British interests. As the First World War neared its end, Britain was selecting key nationalities which it could use as regional proxies. There was advantage to be gained from utilitarian relations with local peoples. Lloyd George claimed a natural support for small states, observing that, 'I am a believer in little nations. I have the honour to belong to one myself…'.[26] He was, however, not just being sentimental, but pragmatic. An enlarged Greek state, for example, was to play this role in the Near East, and many favoured a similar role for the Jews, while some looked more favourably on the newly emergent Arabs. T.E. Lawrence summed up the thinking of those who thought that Britain's regional relationship should be with the Arabs:

> We could see a new factor was needed in the East, some power or race which would outweight the Turks in numbers, in output and in mental activity. No encouragement was given to us from history to think that these qualities could be supplied ready-made from Europe…. Some of us judged that there was latent power enough and to spare in the Arabic peoples (the greater component of the old Turkish Empire), a prolific Semitic agglomeration, great in religious thought, reasonably industrious, mercantile, politic, yet solvent rather than dominant in character.[27]

Britain had likewise made a commitment to a Jewish national homeland with the Balfour Declaration. In the end Britain attempted to accommodate both groups in the interests of its wider Imperial needs. This was the beginning of a tactical dilemma and debate that would bedevil British diplomacy in the region for decades to follow, forming a new Eastern Question for British policy makers.

Palestine was seen as playing an important role in imperial defence. A group of strategic Zionists had emerged in Britain, among whom was Winston Churchill.[28] In 1908 he had suggested that, 'The establishment of a strong, free Jewish state astride the bridge between Europe and Africa, flanking the land roads to the East, would not only be an immense advantage to the British Empire, but a notable step towards the harmonious disposition of the world among its peoples.'[29] These strategical pro-Zionists were to be found most commonly in the Imperial reform group the Milnerite Round Tablers, which included Leo Amery and Philip Kerr (later Lord Lothian).[30] The idea of a Zionist buffer to British strategic interests along the canal was congenial, particularly given the ongoing, if subdued, rivalry with France.

It is probable that the strategic imperative had become linked with the exponents of Christian ideas, leading to support for the idea of a return of the Jews to Palestine. Balfour told a friend, 'My personal hope is that the Jews will make good in Palestine and eventually found a Jewish State.[31] Similarly, his cousin and Foreign Office minister, Lord Robert Cecil said, 'Our wish is that the Arabian countries shall be for the Arabs, Armenia for the Armenians, and Judea for the Jews.'[32] Whatever its higher rationale, however, the first step on the road to support of Zionism was usually strategic. The Milnerite Round Tablers, such as Leo Amery, spoke of a 'Southern British World' consisting of Capetown, Cairo, Calcutta, Sydney and Wellington, for which Palestine was a key. When it came to policy it is clear that they saw Zionism as in the interests of the British Empire. Amery noted in his diary in July 1917, 'Our ultimate end is clearly to make Palestine the centre of western influence, using the Jews as we have used the Scots, to carry the English ideal through the Middle East and not merely to make an artificial oriental Hebrew enclave in an oriental country.'[33] Such a colony would help to block France and simultaneously safeguard the Canal. As he observed, 'I was keen on . . . establishing in Palestine a prosperous community bound to Britain by ties of gratitude and interest.'[34]

The old Imperialists were generally opposed to Zionist aspirations. The most prominent of this group was Lord Curzon, who was concerned that Zionist aspirations would conflict with British ones. As he told a Cabinet Committee in December 1918, 'They now talk about a Jewish State. The Arab portion of the population is well-nigh

forgotten and is to be ignored. They not only claim the boundaries of the old Palestine, but they claim to spread across the Jordan into the rich countries lying to the east, and indeed, there seems to be very small limit to the aspirations which they now form.'[35] The pro-Zionists indeed paid little attention to such details as population statistics and what to do with the local non-Jewish population. Curzon was concerned that the scope of Zionist ambitions might jeopardise Britain's position. His view, expressed in a note to Balfour in January 1919, was that Britain should preserve 'all we have won'.[36] In this Curzon was supported both by Allenby and Sir Alfred Money, chief administrator in Palestine, who both advised that Britain '… should go slow about Zionist aspirations and the Zionist state'.[37] They formed a school of strategical anti-Zionists, whose views were likewise motivated by what they saw as the interests of the British Empire. For them, Britain had wider ambitions in the Muslim world. British forces controlled Syria and London was at first reluctant to allow France a role. Britain only evacuated Syria in the autumn of 1919, after it was clear that Woodrow Wilson was in deep political trouble and that the alliance with the United States could not be relied upon. It was only in the light of those circumstances that it became important not to estrange France over the issue of Syria.

Since the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, that country had been the centre of London's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. Britain had consistently protested that its occupation of the country was only temporary. William Gladstone, the prime minister, had pledged this to be the case in 1882, and he and his successors reiterated this pledge 66 times between then and 1922.[38] As a result Anglo-Egyptian relations were already a tangled tale. While the peacemakers met at Paris, conditions deteriorated in Egypt, with what Egyptian historians refer to as the 1919 revolution and what British officials at the time called 'disturbances'. The British protectorate over Egypt, which had officially been proclaimed in 1914, was clearly under pressure. Lloyd George decided to terminate the protectorate in February 1922, largely because of the concurrent crisis over Ireland. Estimates of forces needed had indicated that if it was necessary to intervene in Egypt, it would require more soldiers than Britain could afford to deploy at the time. Britain, however, managed to retain a military presence and to exercise a high degree of control. The escalating crises of empire during 1919, with conflicts in

Egypt, Ireland, Afghanistan and India, stretched British resources to their limits, and all of this taking place against the backdrop of the financial exigencies brought about by the First World War. As a result Britain was forced to trim its expectations of East Mediterranean dominion, and in the last phase of the negotiations over the settlement, London sought to pursue only its key strategic objectives.

Britain entered the peace process dealing with the Eastern Mediterranean at the end of the First World War with a solution, and that solution was Britain. The concurrent crises, however, which suddenly confronted London, the collapse of Venizelos's government in Greece, the breach (albeit temporary) with the Hashemites, and the wider Imperial crises, all led to a shift in policy. Old-style imperialism was replaced by tactically selective imperialism that would later see some implementation of the ideas of the consolidationists, for example, with the exit from the Mesopotamia mandate in 1927. In the shifting sands of international politics in the years 1918–23, one returns to Billy Hughes' observation comparing the British empire to that of Alexander. Like Alexander, Britain found itself overstretched and in need of repositioning in order to maintain its power.

The 80 years that have elapsed since the Paris Peace Conference invite consideration about what has occurred in the footprint of the Ottoman empire. In 1919, British forces were deployed across the region. Eighty years later British forces are deployed, if in far smaller numbers, from Kosovo to the no-fly zones of Iraq, from the Adriatic to the Persian Gulf. Many of the issues resulting from the collapse of the Ottoman empire are still to be resolved, and it could well be argued that Britain is still engaged in the last phase of the Eastern Question.

## Notes

1. Imperial Conference, 2nd meeting, 21 June 1921. Minutes of the Conference are in RG25/2279/fileS/6/1, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. Minutes of the Imperial Conference are also in CAB 32/2, Cabinet Papers, Public Record Office, Kew, London.
2. Sir Arthur Hirtzel, *The Church, The Empire, and The World* (London 1919).
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5. Edwin Montagu, CAB 23/42/IWC44, 20 Dec. 1918.
6. CAB 27/24/EC 40, see also Erik Goldstein, British Peace Aims and the Eastern Question: the Political Intelligence Department and the Eastern Committee, 1918, *Middle Eastern Studies* 23:4 (1987): 419–36.
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11. Gladstone to the House of Commons, 7 May 1877. On this issue, see also Richard Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation* (Hassocks, 1975).
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17. CAB 23/44B, 12 (19) A, 10 Dec. 1919.
18. FO 608/83/342/8/4/7919, memorandum by Curzon, 11 Apr. 1919.
19. Meeting of ministers held at Rue Nitot, 19 May 1919. CAB 23/44B, papers from CAB 23/35 'S' Minutes.
20. Howard Diary, 12 Dec. 1918. DHW/1/4. Howard of Penrith Papers, Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle. See also letter to *The Times*, 13 Jan. 1919, p. 8.
21. Meinertzhagen Diary, 20 Jan. 1919. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.
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31. Quoted in Howard Sachar, *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York, 1976), p. 110.
32. *Ibid*.
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36. Curzon to Balfour, 16 Jan. 1919, FO 800/215, folio 91.
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# 9

# New Diplomacy and Old: a Reassessment of British Conceptions of a League of Nations, 1918–20

*Ruth Henig*

Within weeks of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, containing the Covenant of the League as its first 26 articles, the two British representatives on the League of Nations Commission, who had made a major input into the drafting of the Covenant, were attacking their political colleagues and government officials for lack of faith in the new League. In August 1919, Lord Robert Cecil told Colonel House that the British government were 'not favourable to any such League of Nations as the rest of us have in mind' but wanted one 'that will give some advantage to the British Empire'.[1] A month earlier, Smuts had confided to C.P. Scott, the veteran editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, that the diplomatists were 'all against the League' and would probably try to sabotage it.[2]

Such dark suspicions were shared at the time by many Liberal and radical politicians, and provided the foundation for Cecil's later accusations in his autobiographies *All the Way* and *A Great Experiment* that the League had failed because it had been opposed by bureaucrats, diplomats and militarists and because politicians who should have known better were at best lukewarm in their support of the new body. Frank Walters, a great friend and admirer of Cecil, drew the same conclusion in his influential and still definitive history of the League which was published in 1952.[3] The charge was clear: in the inter-war years, New Diplomacy, as represented by the League, was deliberately undermined in Britain by the skilled and cynical practitioners of Old Diplomacy who had set their faces

against open diplomacy, the pursuit of disarmament and the conclusion of collective agreements. The inevitable result was the outbreak of the Second World War.

Such critiques ignore both the unstable political and economic circumstances in which the League had to operate and the very real political problems which the creation of the League posed for British statesmen. They also fail to do justice to the complexity of attitudes towards the League held across the British political and official spectrum. Most politicians and officials could not be categorised as supporting either 'New' or 'Old' Diplomacy. Rather, these labels should be seen as typifying two extremes, with political groups and individuals ranged along a spectrum embracing elements of both new and old diplomacy.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, is firstly to examine in more detail the range of attitudes displayed in Britain towards the League concept by the end of 1918. As will be seen, the views of Lord Cecil at that time were not as radically different from those of his colleagues as he later tried to suggest. Inevitably, however, the Covenant which resulted from the labours of the League Commission was, as so much else at Paris, a compromise. While Cecil and Smuts had been successful in incorporating many approaches to peacekeeping first suggested in Britain, the Covenant also contained provisions which caused deep concern, not just to leading members of the Cabinet and the Foreign Office but also to Cecil as well. We will look briefly at two of them, the issue of membership and particularly of small states sitting alongside the Great Powers in the League Council, and the infamous 'guarantee scheme' of article 10. We will then examine the assumptions underlying League procedures for peaceful settlement of disputes and for promoting disarmament, roles which had strong support from all political parties in Britain.

As we now know with hindsight, the arch-apostle of New Diplomacy, Woodrow Wilson, was more successful in dragging his sceptical European counterparts into a new international body than he was in persuading the United States Senate to join. United States repudiation of the Treaty and of the Covenant inevitably reinforced British concerns about the extent of League obligations and about the nature of the peace settlement. This chapter will conclude by taking a brief look at the ways in which the failure of the United States to become a member of the League inevitably affected the British

Government's strategic approach to the new era of international organisation and tempered its tactics at Geneva. With the United States out of the League, its leading members Britain and France bitterly opposed over what role it should play, and Italy and Japan deeply disaffected by the peace settlement, there never was a realistic possibility that post-war British governments would or even could achieve their major foreign policy objectives through the League. But that is not to deny the growing importance in the late 1920s of Geneva as an international meeting place where both old and new diplomacy were practised and where slow but steady steps were taken towards new forms of international cooperation.

Let us first consider these two terms, 'Old' and 'New' diplomacy. They encapsulate a range of overlapping views which we can attempt to distinguish and to identify, starting with 'New' Diplomacy and moving along a broad spectrum to 'Old' Diplomacy. Needless to say, the most eloquent exponent of New Diplomacy was Woodrow Wilson himself, as outlined in his Fourteen Points, and subsequent principles and particulars. The main themes running through all such pronouncements were the construction of a new world order based upon open diplomacy, freedom of the seas, freedom and non-discrimination in trade, arms limitation, self determination and 'the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities'. Old diplomacy, according to Wilson, had been based on the principle of the balance of power, 'now for ever discredited' and was pursued through selfish and secret diplomacy which had brought all of Europe to war. The United States would disinterestedly lead the world towards future peace through the establishment of a League of Nations based on a guarantee of political independence and territorial integrity, working through a universal system of compulsory arbitration with enforced decisions if necessary, and promoting general disarmament. Here was New Diplomacy in its purest form.[4]

In Britain, Wilson's ideas were warmly received in Liberal and radical circles, where by 1918 thinking about an international body with a range of powers was well-advanced.[5] The Union for Democratic Control had been formed early in the war to press for open diplomacy and for parliamentary control of foreign policy. Its members supported Wilson's ideas and enthusiastically embraced many elements of his peace programme, but felt that it could not be successfully implemented until diplomacy was brought under full

democratic control. This theme was also taken up by the Labour Party and the TUC in February 1918 in a 'Memorandum on War Aims' which argued that international government would necessitate the democratisation of all countries as well as the limitation and international control of the instruments of war. While Wilson viewed the League as a covenanting alliance between governments who might have to resort to force, if necessary, to preserve international peace, many trade unionists and members of the Labour party urged that the League should represent peoples and not governments. And the use of force was not a tactic favoured by pacifist members of the I.L.P., though a majority in 1918 were willing to accept the idea of an international police force until 'absolute disarmament is possible'.[6]

In some important respects, British radicals had gone beyond Wilson in their thinking by the end of 1918. The Labour Party was the first to outline a system of mandates for colonial territories in their February memorandum; George Barnes, Henderson's replacement in the War Cabinet, agreed with Wilson's idea of a League based on guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity but added that it might need an international army and supranational powers over member states if wars were to be prevented.[7] H.G. Wells' League was firmly in control of armies, air forces and armament industries; J.A. Hobson's League was to have wide powers of intervention in economic matters and could draw upon the economic resources and armed forces of league members for the enforcement of its decisions.[8]

All these groups and individuals were assuredly supporters of New Diplomacy. They were willing to contemplate a League with sweeping executive powers and an international system which would replace traditional diplomacy with collective action, willingly entered into by democratic people's governments. This is in contrast to the more limited schemes of the Fabian Society, the Bryce Group and a range of Liberal politicians. Undoubtedly, the strongest League enthusiast and advocate of 'New' Diplomacy in government circles was the South African Defence Minister, Smuts, who, in his celebrated pamphlet *The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion,* elaborated on the mandates principle, albeit mainly for Eastern Europe, urged abolition of conscription and the nationalisation of munitions factories, and saw the League as a meeting place for statesmen

and for ordinary people, rather than for diplomats.[9] But Smuts wanted no superstate, and his League was based firmly on sovereign states working and consulting together under the leadership of the world's Great Powers.

This view of a more limited League was supported by the Fabian Society, as outlined by Woolf in his *International Government*, and by the group assembled under the presidency of a former ambassador to the United States, Lord Bryce. The schemes produced by these groups did not outlaw war, but built on existing diplomatic machinery and the greater use of arbitration to try to avert it. The League was to be based on sovereign states. Yet both groups, and the Phillimore Committee which followed, accepted the necessity of these states taking joint action through economic and even military sanctions to enforce League procedures if delay and conciliation did not serve to cool tempers. Lord Robert Cecil took a similar approach in grafting some elements of New Diplomacy onto an Old Diplomacy foundation. While he supported open diplomacy, a territorial settlement based on self-determination and sanctions in certain specified situations, and wanted the League to bring about arms limitation as one of its major objectives, his League was a League of Great Powers set up to preserve the social system at home and the reconstituted international system abroad. It was a consultative League, which relied heavily on good will and on the force of civilised public opinion.

In late 1918 and the early months of 1919 in Paris, Cecil worked closely with a range of officials in the Foreign Office to prepare a draft constitution for the League for discussion at Paris. While there were certainly hardened sceptics in the service, and senior officials like Crowe who could see insuperable obstacles to implementing schemes of armament limitation, many members of the Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service could see the utility of an enlarged and expanded Concert system of Europe, based on the acceptance by individual governments of clear rules and obligations. They welcomed machinery which would facilitate Great Power cooperation, especially with the United States, and shared with Sir Edward Grey the conviction that if an international body along the lines of the proposed League had been in existence in July 1914, the First World War might have been averted.[10] Thus in late 1918, many aspects of New Diplomacy were embraced even in the Foreign Office, though

not to the extent of subscribing to Wilson's belief that the establishment of a new world order would remove the necessity to pursue both in Europe and further afield a balance of power in the post-war world. The officials working with Cecil firmly agreed with him that the League would be an 'alternative way to settling disputes' and not a substitute for past procedures.[11]

Moving to the Prime Minister's entourage, we also find strong support amongst his closest advisers for the adoption of New Diplomacy albeit working firmly in tandem with more traditional diplomatic approaches. The young and idealistic Philip Kerr keenly supported a universal limitation of armaments and a system of international conferences, with a League of Nations operating as coordinator and helping to establish a set of world laws. He saw the proposed new international organisation as 'doing for the whole world what the British system now does for a quarter of it'.[12] In a wide-ranging and ambitious memorandum of 4 December 1917, Kerr suggested that the League should be based on a strong territorial guarantee, backed up by economic, military and naval sanctions and should host regular meetings of responsible ministers to discuss a range of international problems.[13] Meanwhile the more hard-headed secretary to the Imperial War Cabinet, Maurice Hankey, was pressing that existing allied war-time machinery, such as the Allied Maritime Transport Commission and, from November 1917, the Supreme War Council at Versailles, should furnish 'the nucleus of the machinery of a League Nation'. The Allied and Associated Powers could work through the Supreme War Council to conduct peace negotiations with the enemy and then transform and gradually enlarge it into a more universal peacekeeping organisation equipped to carry out a number of practical political and functional tasks. However, Hankey did not see the promotion of disarmament as being one of them – not only did he share Sir Eyre Crowe's views of the practical difficulties involved, but he was firmly convinced that 'public spirit' could be no adequate substitute 'for military spirit'.[14]

What of Lloyd George's view of the possible shape and functions of a League in late 1918? We need to be mindful of *The Manchester Guardian's* description of Lloyd George as a 'sort of coalition in himself' with 'diverse, even contradictory elements striving for the mastery'.[15] It is also important to note Hankey's diary entry of December 1918 that Lloyd George 'seems to have a sort of lust for

power; ignores his colleagues, or tolerates them in an almost disdainful way, and comes more and more to assume the attitude of a dictator. He takes but little advice and even Philip Kerr and I have few opportunities to coach him'.[16] His views on the emerging League were clearly going to be crucial. His book *The Truth about the Peace Treaties* paints him as a 'fervent believer in a strong League', encouraging the efforts of Smuts and Cecil to give practical shape to the new body, in contrast to Wilson's rather nebulous ideas and arguing that had a League of the kind envisaged been in existence in 1914, the First World War would not have broken out.[17] Lord Cecil, on the other hand, no friend of Lloyd George it has to be said, felt that he was incapable of taking the League idea seriously. He certainly wanted the League to promote disarmament, and was quick to see that it could be an indispensable ally in Britain's efforts to check a post-war American naval threat to Britain and to bring about the abolition of conscription. However, his League was very explicitly a consultative, flexible and rather limited League, to be driven by Britain, the USA and France, and to be based on the voluntary cooperation of self-governing states.

Lloyd George felt that only Bonar Law, of his Conservative colleagues, was fully committed to the creation of a League in late 1918. Yet even Curzon, Chamberlain, Balfour and Horne were prepared to contemplate a modest measure of New Diplomacy, given that in the Prime Minister's words, they were 'willing and anxious to see the experiment tried, provided it did not go too far in the direction of committing us to the use of force or of a measure of disarmament which would impair the authority and influence of the British Empire'. Similarly, Lord Milner was willing to accept that 'before any controversy becomes acute there should be a conference which could be summoned at any moment to deal with the dispute'.[18] Clearly, however, such views suggested considerable reservations about many aspects of New Diplomacy and about its capacity to protect British interests. The still nominally Liberal Churchill was as ever more explicit at a Dundee election meeting: though he was 'a friend of the League of Nations', it could be 'no substitute for the supremacy of the British fleet'.[19]

Moving firmly now into the unreconstructed Old Diplomacy camp we find a group of hard-headed and sceptical Conservatives and service department officials who argued vigorously that British interests

could only be upheld through the promotion of world-wide trade and the protection of a strong navy operating a blockade if necessary, through the skillful use of balance of power strategies and through continuing support for the British Empire. It was utopian to suppose that nations would place the pursuit of collective interests above individual ones or would not continue to try to dominate and bully their neighbours. There were practical difficulties which the Service departments felt could not easily be overcome. The War Office doubted that world peace could be secured by economic sanctions alone. They argued that the machinery of an armed alliance would be necessary to enforce it. The Admiralty, however, were adamantly opposed to the concept of binding covenants to prevent war. They claimed that these would involve accepting in advance the principle of military and naval sanctions 'without regard to the wisdom of the step as a purely naval and military proposition'.[20] Successful New Diplomacy would necessitate a change in human nature, according to Lord Sydenham, and this would take a long time to happen. Meanwhile League schemes were 'moonshine' according to Leopold Amery and 'futile nonsense' and 'rubbish' according to Sir Henry Wilson. Worse than this, many Conservatives feared that unscrupulous foreign powers would try to use a League to undermine British naval and imperial power. They would 'sap the sovereignty of Britain as an independent state' warned the right-wing *Morning Post*.[21]

Their fears were to some extent realised when Germany sued for peace on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points, which included the establishment of a League, along with the other tenets of New Diplomacy. Lloyd George, ever the astute politician, could see the dangers but also the opportunities posed by Wilson's peace programme and particularly by the priority he gave to the League. Lord Robert Cecil and Smuts could work on Wilson, and bring him round to a more British conception of a League, leaving Lloyd George free to negotiate on immediate and pressing priorities such as naval, colonial and territorial issues. Thus it came about that at Paris neither of the two British representatives on the League of Nations Commission were government ministers, or in a strong political position to sell the results of their labours to the Cabinet or to the House of Commons, though as we have seen they were both keen advocates of a League. Unfortunately, Wilson's political position was

even weaker; after the disastrous United States mid-term elections in November, Senator Lodge had secretly warned the Allies that the President's project for a league was 'hopelessly impractical in many respects' and would meet with 'great and probably effective opposition' in the United States.[22]

There is no space to examine in detail the discussions which took place in the League of Nations Commission.[23] Suffice it to say that the draft Covenant which was unveiled in mid February was the result of a series of compromises which were bound to arouse criticism in different quarters. When Wilson had to return to the United States to try, unsuccessfully, to pacify Senators and Congressmen, the temptation presented to Lloyd George to use the League as a bargaining counter for winning naval concessions from the United States or as a stick with which to coerce the Dutch into handing over the Kaiser proved irresistible. Cecil was shocked at Lloyd George's lack of commitment to the proposed new body, yet even he shared with the Prime Minister and his advisers deep concerns about some of the provisions in the draft covenant and at the same time some extremely optimistic assumptions about the extent to which League procedures and exhortations to disarm could be powered by the 'public opinion of the civilised world'.

Cecil and Lloyd George both had similar conceptions of the League as a collection of fully self-governing and sovereign states which would be steered by the Paris Big Five. In the Commission, Cecil beat off all attempts, spearheaded by the French and the Belgians, to turn the League into a supranational body. He also managed to get India included as a founder member, though it hardly fitted the French definition of a *pays libre* with democratic or liberal institutions. The compromise reached on membership was that any self-governing states or colonies enjoying 'full powers of self-government' could be admitted provided that they agreed to observe international obligations and any regulations on armed forces or armaments which the League might prescribe. Members of the Commission were very circumspect in making only passing reference to the extent to which fellow belligerents who would automatically become founder members of the League, such as China and Japan for example, had 'responsible governments' or were self-governing.[24] More seriously, there was no discussion at this stage of the extent to which such a large and diverse group of sovereign states spread across five continents would

be likely to share interests in common or to support collective action rather than their own national interests. A year later, however, Lord Sydenham posed the pertinent, if rhetorical question, 'What can [a] League of Nations composed of 30 or 40 nations really do when a difficult question comes up'?[25] What indeed . . .

One answer to this question was to argue that the League's leading powers would work together to coordinate an effective response. Cecil tried very hard to ensure that the five leading allied and associated powers at Paris should constitute the League's Executive Council. But here he ran into widespread opposition, which included the French and Italian representatives and even his fellow British Empire delegate, Smuts. He was forced to agree that four smaller powers should also be represented on the Council, and this compromise was one which enraged Lloyd George and caused him to view the *modus operandi* of the new League with increasing disquiet. Far from being organised on the same lines as the Versailles Council during the war, the League, Lloyd George fulminated, was to have an executive on which five Great Powers, representing roughly 700 million people, were to be joined by four smaller powers, representing 50 million at most.[26] Of course, tongue in cheek, one could have suggested that bringing in China as a so-called smaller power would greatly reduce the discrepancy in numbers – but it was not really the numbers which were bothering Lloyd George so much as the challenge which the new body was issuing to the authority of the Great Powers to run the affairs of the world. On this aspect in 1919 at least, both Lloyd George and Cecil preferred the model of Old Diplomacy to that of New. On the left in Britain, however, the emerging League was perceived by the UDC and by the Labour movement as a 'Holy Alliance', expressly constructed by the Great Powers to keep the ex-enemy states and particularly Germany in a permanent state of weakness. Under the flag of New Diplomacy, they demanded the admission to the League of all civilised states, and argued that the new body should represent peoples rather than governments in the League Assembly or, according to H.G. Wells, 'the Confederation of Mankind'.[27]

J.A. Hobson thundered that the League was threatening to become 'not a League of Peoples devoted to peace and international co-operation but a conspiracy of autocrats designed to hold down their enemies … and to exercise a dominance over the whole world'.[28]

There were other major ways in which Cecil sought, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, to bring into being the kind of cooperative and flexible League desired by the British Government. He successfully resisted sustained French pressure for a League with strong executive powers and with military forces at its disposal in peacetime as well as in war. He resisted Belgian pressure for automatic sanctions in certain situations and for measures of compulsory arbitration of disputes. But he was unable to remove from the Covenant what became article X, the guarantee provision which Wilson regarded as the bedrock of the League as a peace-keeping body. Cecil was undoubtedly right when he protested that 'things are being put in [to the covenant] which cannot be carried out literally and in all respects'[29] but his efforts to remove the offending article X were unsuccessful. What he did manage to do was to modify the way the guarantee was to work and to counter it with a rather vague provision allowing for an Assembly recommendation about the revision of treaties.

Within the British delegation at Paris, the undertaking to preserve the 'territorial integrity and political independence' of all League members was fiercely attacked, particularly by Canada, whose Premier demanded in early March that it should be 'struck out or materially amended'. By the end of April, Canada was threatenening not to join the League, on the grounds that the Covenant 'involved greater liabilities for Canada than those that had formerly existed under the empire'.[30] Billy Hughes of Australia was also fiercely critical of what he viewed as the 'supra-national features' in the Covenant, and argued strongly that the League should only be able to exercise powers of recommendation. These Dominion views reinforced the growing concern of Lloyd George, Hankey, Kerr and Balfour that the Covenant, as drafted, would impose new and onerous obligations on Great Powers like the British Empire rather than merely provide the means to 'minimise international quarrels and keep small states in order'.[31]

As peacemaking reached its final stages and the Treaty of Versailles was fully unveiled to screams of horror on the left and to moans of anguish amongst liberals, the prospect of a League working through article X to enforce the settlement attracted few supporters in Britain. Instead, a broad range of political activists, spanning the Labour left, trade unions, Asquithian Liberals, progressive Tories and coalition

Liberals pinned their hopes on the League's powers under article 19 to revise treaties. But the clause which Cecil had managed to extract from Wilson and from the French delegates was a mirage – offering the illusion of change, but in practice highly unlikely to win the requisite level of Assembly support required. Nevertheless, Lloyd George assured the House of Commons in April, 1919 that through the League 'we are setting up machinery capable of readjusting and correcting mistakes'.[32] And when the Treaty of Versailles was debated in the Commons in July 1919, the Prime Minister stressed that a vital part of the peace settlement was the League of Nations which could 'remedy, … repair and … redress – the League of Nations will be there as a Court of Appeal to readjust crudities, irregularities, injustices'. [33] Lloyd George was no doubt driven more by political expediency than by pure idealism in stressing this role of the League, but even so at this point in time he shared with Lord Cecil the perception of a League which could facilitate revision of the Treaty rather than its enforcement.

The two men were also adamant that the League had to be an association of sovereign states who, in the last resort, retained the freedom to participate or not in sanctions and to heed or not League advice on matters such as levels of national armament. Cecil was at pains to explain to the British delegation at the end of April that the League Council would act only on unanimous decisions and must include all parties interested in the issues under discussion. With regard to measures of disarmament, the British government would not be bound by anything to which it had not agreed.[34] So what would make the new League work effectively? Would its members choose to work together to restrain aggression anywhere in the world, and would states observe agreed procedures and adopt Council or Assembly recommendations on levels of armament? The answers given by Cecil, by Smuts, by Balfour, by Lloyd George and later by Austen Chamberlain, were remarkably similar: the League would respond to the force of public opinion. Peace would be preserved by periods of delay which would serve to cool tempers and to prevent disputes from escalating out of control; there would be reasoned, impartial reports, based on first-hand investigations, on the merits of disputes and an acceptance by the offending state and its population that aggression was not worthwhile. And weary post-war populations would demand reduced spending on armaments. As

Lord Cecil so memorably declared, in the House of Commons in July 1919, 'the great weapon we rely upon is public opinion, and if we are wrong about it, the whole thing is wrong.'[35] A year later, in the same place, Balfour stressed that the two main instruments of the League were not fleets, armies or air forces but 'delay and publicity and public opinion'.[36]

A British press statement issued on 28 April 1919 underlined this approach. The League was not a super state but a 'solemn agreement' between sovereign states which 'must continue to depend on the free consent … of its component states.' And a Government White Paper presented to Parliament in June concluded that 'If nations of the future are in the main selfish, grasping and warlike, no instrument or machinery will restrain them.'[37] The Covenant thus accepted the political facts of the present while trying to encourage an indefinite 'development in accordance with the ideas of the future'.[38]

The inter-war period was to demonstrate how optimistic, not to say misguided, such hopes were. Already in 1926, in a letter to *The Manchester Guardian*, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson was noting how often, even in Britain, what little public opinion there was on foreign affairs was 'chauvinistic and nationalist'.[39] The same, only more so, was to prove true in Germany, Italy and Japan. The period also witnessed a familiar post-war phenomenon, the falling out of former allies. But the League could only work effectively to prevent conflict when its leading powers were in full agreement about the merits of a dispute and this was to happen very rarely after 1920. Supporters of 'Old' diplomacy in Britain after 1919 were quick to point to some of the questionable assumptions on which the League was based, and to brand it as a League of Notions. Yet at the same time the First World War had thrown up visions of the future, in the field of weapons development, the potential of new technology and global communications and the growing ability of national leaders to coordinate and to finance their war and peace strategies across continents. Lloyd George, Smuts, Cecil and Balfour in their different ways were fully aware that the First World War had radically changed the political landscape and that was one major reason why they had all signed up to at least some of the tenets of 'New' diplomacy, albeit to different degrees.

Inevitably, just as the desire to establish closer relations with the United States had been a strong factor influencing British statesmen

to sign up to the League project, so the failure of the United States to join led to a reassessment in Britain of the value of the new body in the changed circumstances. The new United States Senate had shown itself unwilling to take on even the most minimal obligations entailed in League membership without significant reservations. Such a spirited affirmation of the tenets of old diplomacy was bound to reinforce scepticism about the new venture on the right in Britain and to increase concerns amongst Cabinet ministers about the extent and scope of international obligations to which Britain was now committed. Lloyd George, for one, could see considerable dangers in a situation where 'the League is to apply to every nation but America' and where America was free to continue to build up her navy without any restrictions.[40] Conservative worries about the extent of new burdens which League membership might impose on the British empire were greatly increased by, in Chamberlain's words, Wilson 'leaving his offspring on our doorstep'.[41] With the issue of the freedom of the seas still unresolved, any League naval sanctions would be bound to raise a host of problems between member states and the United States, as would any projected League action in South America. The prospect of an aggressive United States vigorously challenging Britain's interpretation of belligerent rights certainly reduced and probably removed altogether any possibility of Britain pursuing naval sanctions on behalf of the League. And even economic sanctions would be hazardous and most probably damaging to member states without American participation.

The League Council would now have equal numbers of great and lesser powers. And of the four remaining Great Powers in the League, two of them, Italy and Japan, had revisionist ambitions and the other two, Britain and France, became ever more desperate after the defection of the United States to steer the League in diametrically opposite directions, Britain towards an ever looser, flexible association of member states and France to a more unified, tightly knit organisation firmly upholding the peace settlement. Even strong supporters of the League were worried by this prospect. As Lord Grey wrote to *The Times* in January 1920, the 'success of the League depended on American adherence. Without the United States the present League of Nations' might become 'little better than a League of Allies for armed self defence against a revival of Prussian militarism … predominantly a European and not a world organisation'.[42]

Thus we have to recognise that a League without the United States threw up a cruel dilemma for the British government: could Britain remain a member without taking on increasing responsibilities and burdens, or should she follow the United States and abandon the great experiment? Could a League without the United States be reshaped to serve at least some British interests or would it offer the illusion of future peace without the capacity to bring it about? Xenophobic as ever, the *Morning Post* warned its readers on 6 February, 1920 that, in the new circumstances, the League's greatest danger was that it held out 'the appearance of safety' but none of its reality.[43] The dilemma was of course sharpened by growing public enthusiasm for the League. Cecil had been more effective in selling the virtues of the new League to the informed British public than to the Cabinet. The League of Nations Union was already strongly established by early 1920 with growing all-party support, and had a broad and influential membership which included newspaper editors, the churches, trade unions, schools and a host of articulate propagandists. And by the time the United States Senate rejected League membership for the second time, in March 1920, the League had come into being at Geneva and its new international secretariat was busily getting the Council, Assembly and associated committees organised and functioning.

In such circumstances, Britain's subsequent attitudes and policies towards the League would be shaped not by struggles between advocates of New Diplomacy and die-hard supporters of Old but by what cabinet ministers and diplomats believed could realistically be achieved as against what idealists like Lord Cecil hoped might be achieved. Cecil, Gilbert Murray and other League of Nations Union leaders desperately wanted the League to work – and accordingly shut their eyes to the unpalatable fact that the international environment in which it had to operate after 1919 and the conflicting interests of its leading members were real and almost insuperable obstacles to success. Only towards the end of the 1990s could we fully appreciate the significance of the first tentative steps that were taken at Paris and in the 1920s towards the organisation of international peacekeeping amongst states. It is true that the League failed to live up to the expectations of many of its early advocates, but on the left and amongst sincere idealists there was a stubborn refusal to accept that Britain and the other founder members were faced with unprecedented problems and very real and daunting dilemmas. Trying

to organise schemes of international security, drawing up multilateral arms limitation agreements, organising economic rescue packages, rehabilitating refugees, were all new and difficult endeavours. Lloyd George was right to warn in March 1919 that it would take generations for the League to develop serious authority over independent nations, and that to begin with it should focus on minimising international quarrels and keeping small states in order. Looking back now we can see that the League was one of the most important legacies of the Paris Peace Conference, and that British delegates played a central role in its construction. It is surely time that we look at its formation and subsequent development in a positive light and pay tribute both to the genuine commitment of British delegates at Paris to take on board a number of elements of New Diplomacy and to the not-inconsiderable achievements recorded by Britain and fellow member states at Geneva in the 1920s.

## Notes

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8. Winkler, H.R., *op. cit.*; Egerton, G.W., *op. cit.;* Miller, K.E., *Socialism op. cit.*
9. For a detailed analysis, see Hunter Miller, D., *The Drafting of the Covenant* vol. I (United States, 1928) pp. 34–9.
10. Yearwood, P., *op. cit.* pp. 87–8; Zimmern, A., *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918–35* (Macmillan (now Palgrave), London, 1936) pp. 189–208.

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14. See exchange of correspondence between Cecil and Hankey in Cecil Papers, Add Ms 51071, British Library.
15. Jones, Thomas, *Whitehall Diary vol. I, 1916–25* (ed. Middlemas, K.) (Oxford University Press, 1969) pp. 66–7.
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17. Lloyd George, D., Imperial War Cabinet, 24 December 1918. Cab 23/42. Quoted in *The Truth About the Peace Treaties* (Gollancz, London, 1938) vol. I pp. 632–4.
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26. Cecil Diary, 3 May 1919. Cecil Papers Add 51131, British Library.
27. Egerton, G.W., *op. cit.* p. 142; H.G. Wells writing in *Westminster Gazette*, 22 Sept 1923.
28. Miller, K., *Socialism op. cit.* pp. 88–92.
29. Hunter Miller, D., *Drafting op. cit.* vol. I p. 169.
30. Egerton,G.W., *op. cit.* p. 165 See also Glazebrook, B., *Canada at the Paris Peace Conference* (London, 1942) pp. 67–71.
31. Memorandum in Lord Lothian papers. Quoted in Egerton, G.W., *op. cit.* pp. 159–60.
32. House of Commons, 16 April, 1919.
33. House of Commons, 21 July 1919.
34. Egerton, G.W., *op. cit.* p. 166.
35. House of Comnmons, 21 July, 1919.
36. Balfour, House of Commons, 17 June, 1920.
37. Government White Paper on Covenant of League of Nations, 1919 Cmd 151.
38. Hunter Miller, D., Diary vol. 18 p. 50 (Privately printed, USA).
39. *Manchester Guardian,* 29 March, 1926.

40. Riddell, Lord G., *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After, 1918–23* (Gollancz, London, 1933) p. 118.
41. Egerton, G.W., *op. cit.* p. 172.
42. Letter to *The Times*, 31 January, 1920.
43. Quoted in Rose, I., *Conservatism op. cit.* p. 62.

# 10

# Before Gooch and Temperley: the Contributions of Austen Chamberlain and J.W. Headlam-Morley towards 'instructing the mass of the public', 1912–26

*Keith Wilson*

In December 1924 and again in February 1925 Sir Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary in the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin, informed his colleagues on the Committee of Imperial Defence about a meeting which he had manufactured for himself, in the spring of 1912, with the then Foreign Secretary in Herbert Asquith's Liberal government, Sir Edward Grey. The fullest account of this pre-war meeting, which owed much to the Agadir crisis of 1911 and the visit of the Secretary of State for War, R.B. Haldane, to Berlin in February 1912, is contained in the minutes of the CID meeting held on 19 February 1925. As Chamberlain put it:

> I will again refer to the years before the war when the danger was already imminent. I once went to Lord Grey in those days to urge that we had all the obligations of an alliance without its advantages; that we did not get the influence with France that a definite engagement would have given us, and therefore we did not get the control over her policy which such an alliance might have given; and yet, fatally and for our own interests, we should be forced to fight if war broke out. On the other hand, Germany, so clumsy in its diplomacy, was not convinced that we should

> fight, probably thought that we should not, and might at any moment blunder into a position out of which she could not get without either humiliation or war. In that case, her choice would be war, and in the last place, I added that we had, in fact, already once brought our people up to the very brink of war without a conception on their part of what their obligations were or upon what our own safety depended. Therefore, in our interest, I argued it would be for the peace of the world and in our own interest and was due to our own people that we should turn the Entente into a formal alliance.

Sir Edward Grey, said Chamberlain, had given him two objections: 'one that it might make the French too high-flown, and the other that the situation was so critical that action of that kind might just tip the scales on the side of war'.[1]

Grey's objections of 1912, to the making of an alliance with France, made an abiding impression on Chamberlain. The lesson he drew from them underpinned the policy upon which he embarked 12 years later, a policy which produced the treaties negotiated at Locarno in October 1925. The lesson was, as he put it to the Committee of Imperial Defence, that 'If you wait until the danger is imminent you are always open to the same objection, and very probably it will always be a vital objection. The only way of making a pact of this kind is to make it when the danger is not yet acute, not to leave it till the moment when it is almost as menacing and provocative an act as an act of mobilisation'.[2]

No less abiding was Chamberlain's conviction that it was not a good thing to leave the British public in ignorance of the imminence of war and without a conception of what British obligations were or upon what policy decisions or courses of action British safety depended. As he put it in *Down the Years*, published in 1935, 'it was dangerous to conceal the real position from the country and to attempt to ride a democracy in blinkers'.[3] Chamberlain's campaign to remedy this particular deficiency began shortly after the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. In the House of Commons in November 1914 he pressed Asquith to make public certain material relating to some of the pre-war negotiations between Britain and Germany.[4]

Chamberlain's question was handled, for the government, by F.D. Acland, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Acland sent Chamberlain a 20-page memorandum that had been drawn up within the Foreign Office in September. The memorandum dealt with the subject of 'the limitation of armaments and cognate matters'. Acland said that both Grey and Asquith would like to have Chamberlain's views 'as to the desirability of publishing it or something of the sort'. Acland himself was not very encouraging about the prospect of publication. For one thing, the same material had been given to Sir Edward Cook, one of the Directors of the Press Bureau, who had used it in a pamphlet published by Macmillan and Co., 'How Britain Strove for Peace: a record of Anglo-German Negotiations 1898–1914', a pamphlet which, said Acland, 'is having a large circulation and is doing good', but which rather queered the pitch for any official publication on the same lines. On the question of laying Papers before the House of Commons instead, Acland said that he had not seen all the material, but had been told 'that it is rather difficult to make a very clear case out of them'. He ended by saying, 'Personally I have this feeling about any publication, that while any proof that we made genuine efforts towards reduction of armaments may do good with the pacifists – who are not now a very influential section in the Country – it might expose us to attack, which, whether justified or not, would not be likely to have any good results, from the opposite section. If good would result from criticism it would be another matter'.[5]

Chamberlain obtained a copy of Cook's pamphlet and made a comparison of it with the Foreign Office memorandum. He then wrote to Acland as follows:

> My own feeling … is strongly in favour of official publication. At the same time I should hope that though the paper you sent me might serve as the basis for it, or as an introduction to it, the actual publication would be amply *documenté*.
>
> I am deeply impressed by our undeserved good fortune in carrying our people so unanimously with us. There had been nothing beforehand in official speeches or in official publications to make known to them the danger that we ran or to prepare them for the discharge of our responsibilities and the defence of our interests. Those who knew most were silent; those who undertook to instruct the mass of the public were ignorant, and our democracy with its decisive voice on the conduct of public

> affairs was left without guidance by those who could have directed it properly, and was misled by those who constituted themselves its guides. You may say that all this is past; but I think it has a very serious bearing on the present and even more upon the future. Now is the time, when people will read and ponder over these things, to form an enlightened public opinion which will support the Government through whatever sacrifices are needed in the weary months of war and will uphold them in insisting upon stable terms of peace. Now is our opportunity to lay the foundations in the minds of the public of a wise, responsible, and consistent foreign policy after the war is finished.

Accordingly, Chamberlain urged as strongly as he could, 'the publication of everything which can enlighten the public mind and form public opinion'. Anticipating that such publication would result in some criticism of the past action of the government, he encouraged Acland to view this positively. All governments were open to criticism, but criticism of the kind that might come might be useful, 'as it may help to guide us aright in our future course'. Chamberlain insisted that there was no disposition on the part of any section of his party to make capital out of the government's difficulties or to embarrass them in any way in their conduct of the war. He expressed the hope that Acland would lay his views before Sir Edward Grey, and his readiness to call at the Foreign Office in due course.[6]

Sir Edward Grey did not rise to the occasion as Chamberlain had hoped. Having mentioned the matter to the Foreign Secretary several times, Acland wrote on 20 January 1915 that Grey's view continued to be 'that we should not at present give the Germans fresh opportunities of misrepresentation and attack, by any publication of new material':

> He (Grey) feels that while we are still in the middle of the struggle and so far from seeing the issue, and with everyone here working at full strain, he does not wish to give himself or his department the extra strain of preparing papers and having to deal with all the questions which would at once be raised here and in neutral countries as soon as they were published.

All Acland could do was to hold out the prospect of publication at some future date: 'He (Grey) has not I think reached any decision

upon the question of publication later on, and it is difficult to ask him to decide upon such questions, as he would wish to wait and see how things go'.[7]

Grey's attitude did not change in the course of 1915. At some point in 1916, however, he relented to the extent of personally authorising a member of the staff of the propaganda organisation set up in Wellington House to commence working through the pre-war archives of the Foreign Office. In December 1916, the new Prime Minister, Lloyd George, replaced Grey with A.J. Balfour. On the day following Grey's replacement, the individual he had selected for the task of working through the documents wrote to him a letter which, amongst other things, revealed the extent of the progress made:

> May I venture to refer to the work which, with your permission, I have been doing at the Foreign Office in connection with the history of the years before the war. As was agreed when I saw you some months ago, I have been working through the papers dealing with the Annexation Crisis of 1908–9. I have almost completed this part of the work, and had been intending to put it forward officially to ask for a decision as to the definite form in which it should be put, supposing at any time it was determined to proceed to publication, and was hoping as soon as this had been decided, to go on at once to the other papers. I should have suggested that I should begin at the beginning with the establishment of the Entente with France and work straight on so as to get the whole material into such form that it could be available for immediate use at any time that it was wanted.

The writer was anxious that his work be not interrupted by the fact that Grey was no longer Foreign Secretary:

> I suppose that now, as I was working under immediate and personal authorisation from yourself, it will be necessary to have this confirmed by the new Secretary of State … I venture to ask whether you would be willing to write or speak to Mr. Balfour on the matter. There is so strong a natural and quite proper distrust on the part of those responsible for the care of these confidential documents, against their use by anyone not permanently

> connected with the Foreign Office, that I fear that my work might be made difficult unless it was known that the Secretary of State was personally interested in it.

He concluded by extolling the merits of the exercise thus far:

> I am sure that it is most desirable that as soon as this is possible a full and complete record of what was done during the ten years before the war should be issued. Even without this, the insight which I have gained has been of the greatest value to me and has enabled me, without any breach of confidence and without showing that I had any knowledge besides that available to anyone who has worked carefully at these matters, to help in getting a right view established. In particular, I may say that I have been asked to put together an answer to several books of German propaganda in America, which are very plausible and very dangerous, and in doing so, it makes all the difference that I know what really happened. …[8]

The writer of the above, James W. Headlam-Morley, was as persuasive here as he had been hitherto. Grey minuted 'Yes' on his letter, and sent it on to Balfour. On the next day Headlam-Morley received the following letter from Balfour's Private Secretary:

> Mr. Balfour desires me to say that he quite agrees with your continuing the work which you have begun but that of course you clearly understand that the Foreign Office must be consulted before any use is made of the confidential information which you have acquired from perusal of the archives here.[9]

In 1915, Balfour had been instrumental in securing access to the Foreign Office for the historian John Holland Rose, who wished to work on papers relating to the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. 'A general conception of the German policy which has led up to the present catastrophe is of public importance', Balfour had said, 'and Rose would do it well'.[10]

Headlam-Morley worked for Wellington House from early in the war until 1917, when he became Assistant Director of the Political Intelligence Bureau in the Department of Information. In 1918,

when the staff of that unit moved into the Foreign Office, he became Assistant Director of the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office. In March 1920 he was to be appointed Historical Adviser to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Headlam-Morley's coups in securing from both Grey and Balfour access to the archives of the Foreign Office represented, in effect, the staking of a claim by him to be the editor of any publication of documents that might be decided upon. He pushed the twin causes, of the publication of documents and, more subtly, his own editorship of them from within the Foreign Office, until that decision was announced (by Chamberlain) in December 1924. In doing so, his background in propaganda was always to be to the fore.

An encounter with the American historian Professor Shotwell, who was a member of the American Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, gave Headlam-Morley, who was a member of the British Delegation, his next opportunity to advance these causes. He reported to the Foreign Office that Shotwell had emphasised both the immense importance of bringing about a permanent better understanding between the United States and Great Britain, and the likely revival in America of the distrust with which Britain had traditionally been regarded. In Shotwell's view, 'there will be many people in America who will incline to the view that Germany has been purified, but that England has not been', and in this connection Shotwell attributed the greatest importance 'to spreading a better knowledge, not so much of the events accompanying the outbreak of war, but the history of the preceding fifteen years'. On Headlam-Morley's agreeing 'as to the extreme importance of a full publication explaining British policy before the war', Shotwell suggested that, with a view to its carrying conviction in America, some well-known American scholar should be allowed access to the Foreign Office records. Headlam-Morley undertook to put forward this suggestion, and did so:

> It is, I think, an important one. The whole question of the publication of records between 1900 and 1914 has been obliged to stand over owing to great pressure of other work. I think that if, as I hope will be the case, it could be put in hand very shortly, it would be necessary that more than one person should be associated with it, and if so, I should like to suggest for consideration that some American scholar should be invited to take part in the work.[11]

Shotwell's suggestion brought out the worst in some Foreign Office officials. Gaselee, the Librarian, minuted, 'I should have thought – and I am bound to say, hoped – that there would be no question of allowing anyone of alien nationality access to F.O. Records'. Tilley, Acting Director of the Political Intelligence Department, agreed 'that we should not allow any alien to have access to our recent archives… We could not allow him free access and to give him access to selected papers would be useless. Nor do I believe that if the most eminent American historian had access to our archives any real good would be done. His account of our diplomacy would not turn the hearts either of American–Germans or American–Irish. It is surely our current policy rather than our past policy which requires fair interpretation'. Lord Curzon minuted that the proposal was 'wrong in principle and would be unwise in practice'. So far as he was concerned, if the masses of official literature already published, together with two years of cooperation on the battlefields, had not taught Americans the truth, then 'no excavations in official arcana will ever do so': 'The real answer is a constant active propaganda in America, not facilities for research students here'. Lord Hardinge, the Permanent Under Secretary, agreed, maintaining the tone he had set when two years earlier he had resisted a call from a Member of Parliament for the publication of a specified Foreign Office paper with the words, 'It would be intolerable if Members of Parliament could call for secret memoranda drawn up in the Foreign Office and it would be fatal to create a precedent'.[12] Hardinge remained more interested in avoiding at all costs the setting of such precedents than in the merits or demerits of propaganda.

In the course of the Shotwell episode, Headlam-Morley had expressed his hope that there would be established in the Foreign Office a Historical Section.[13] The episode itself, however, had retarded rather than advanced the causes he had at heart. Later in the year, nevertheless, the Peace Conference having ended, he returned to these matters via the question of a Historical Section, one of the duties of which, he maintained, would be the publication of records:

> There does not seem at present to be any person whose duty it is to advise the heads of the Office on matters connected with this. The whole question of the publication of records is now of the

> highest importance. The whole policy of the Britain Government before the war has been for five years submitted to the closest analysis and criticism, both from friendly and unfriendly quarters. The treatment of this matter is of real and urgent importance, both as concerns public opinion in this and other countries, and, in particular, America. In this connection requests are from time to time received from outside the Office by historians and others for access to the archives.
>
> Now that the war is over it seems necessary that there should be the most serious consideration of the question to what extent there should be official publication from the records and the conditions as to which those outside the Office should be allowed to consult them. If official publication is determined on, then the nature and scope of any such publication will require careful consideration, and also its form.

His own suggestion was 'that the time has come when it might be possible to find some form of official or semi-official publication other than that of Blue Books and White Papers'.[14] On the following day the unfacilitative Curzon was appointed Foreign Secretary.

Headlam-Morley's next effort was made the following year in connection with the *Cambridge History of British Diplomacy*, to be edited by Sir A. Ward and G.P. Gooch. Headlam-Morley's opinion of Gooch was encapsulated in a minute of 1 May 1920: 'I entirely distrust his judgment; he has no real sense of the realities of things'.[15] It was all the more regrettable, therefore, that Gooch himself would be writing the chapter dealing with British policy from 1907 to 1914. Headlam-Morley, now ensconced as Historical Adviser, was not reassured when he met Gooch, who asked him what help the Foreign Office might provide, in July. He was afraid that 'the general result and impression produced by what (Gooch) will write will be on the whole unfavourable to the conduct of foreign affairs during the years which he deals with, and people will be left with the feeling that after all it was errors in judgment made by Sir Edward Grey that were very largely responsible for the state of things out of which the war inevitably rose'.[16] Asserting once again that while an enormous amount of confidential material had been published by Germany, Austria and Russia, practically nothing had been produced from the British side, and giving his own impression that among neutral and

impartial observers the tide had set against Britain to a far larger extent than was probably realised, Headlam-Morley suggested a pre-emptive strike:

> I think then that we ought to do all that is possible to enable (Gooch) to state the British case strongly and firmly. This can be done in one of two ways:
> (1) By anticipating his book, which may not appear for two years, by publication of documents, or
> (2) By allowing him, under proper control, access to portions of the records here.[17]

As to both alternatives, Headlam-Morley said he had definite proposals to put forward and offered to discuss them with Gaselee before sending them up to the heads of the Office. No call for his 'definite proposals', however, was made on this occasion.

The situation remained unchanged while Curzon was Foreign Secretary, despite Headlam-Morley's report of an interview with Grey (now Viscount Grey of Fallodon) in December 1922, at which the former Foreign Secretary said that he 'would have liked to have had a general publication of all the records immediately at the end of the war', under the supervision of an impartial tribunal. Grey had a clear preference for going back to 1906 or 1904 over Headlam-Morley's suggestion, which might be taken as indicating that he had already commenced, that it would be easy enough at any rate to begin the publication of the documents of the twelve days of the crisis of July–August 1914.[18]

Not until Ramsay MacDonald became his own Foreign Secretary in January 1924 was there decisive movement on the subject of large-scale publication of official documents. A question in the House of Commons by E.D. Morel on 20 February, and Ponsonby's positive reply to it, led to Headlam-Morley being asked for his views on the best means, or any possible means, of carrying out the course indicated. Gaselee's request was couched in a way to raise Headlam-Morley's hopes – 'I imagine that if we do come to any kind of publication, the Historical Advisor will be in charge of it!'[19] This was Headlam-Morley's chance, and he tried hard to seize it. He made his customary strong case for 'publication from the records', before addressing 'the practical question' of what should be done.

Here he stressed that the really important matter was 'actual publication for the first fourteen years of the present century, the period, that is, of the French and Russian Entente'. 'After most careful consideration', he went on, 'I do not think that anything would be really satisfactory except actual official publication. Simply to allow people like Mr. Spender [Editor of the *Westminster Gazette*] to use the archives does not meet the case. What historians want is a full record from which they can draw their own conclusions'. On the question of the particular form that publication should take, he brought back his idea of October 1919:

> It would of course be possible to issue a series of Blue Books in the ordinary way, entirely without note or comment. I am inclined, however, to think that it would be preferable to attempt some slight modification of this form so as to include a brief preface and occasional notes. Whatever form is adopted, I should press very strongly that the whole work should be done by and in the Foreign Office, and that no countenance should be given to proposals which have been made that the publication should be entrusted to scholars with no responsibility to the Foreign Office.

He thought it would probably be necessary temporarily to increase the staff in his section of the Office 'by engaging one or more well-equipped historical scholars' to help in the work, given the amount of it to be done – 'But if this were done they should, I think, be for this purpose regarded as part of the Foreign Office staff'.[20]

Ramsay MacDonald's response to this was to say that if a satisfactory proposal were presented to him he would be willing to urge the Treasury to agree, and to ask for a 'general idea of plan'.[21] Headlam-Morley provided his ideas of both in a memorandum of 24 May 1924. Under his plan, six major topics between 1904 and 1914 would be covered, some of them divided into sub-sections, in what would have to consist of at least seven volumes. In connection with one of these items, he did not forbear to say that a start had already been made by himself: 'Some years ago I did a good deal of preliminary work on (6)a. As far as I can see the papers of this section would form a substantial blue book of the ordinary type of about 250

pages'. So far as the 'Method of Publication' was concerned, he presented two alternatives:

> (a) that we should keep to the established practice and do nothing but collect the documents in the ordinary form and lay them on the table of the House. If this method were adopted, then the work would be done entirely by officials of the Foreign Office; no names would be mentioned. The work would be carried on under the supervision of the Librarian and myself, and all points on which the decision of the Heads of the Office was required would go up to them through us. If this method were adopted it would, however, be necessary temporarily to increase the staff of the Library. … We should have to find two youngish historical scholars who had shown a capacity for editorial work of this kind, but who would be willing to work as part of the staff of the Office under the ordinary official supervision and direction.
>
> In this case the official responsibility for the honesty and completeness of the work under the regular system attach to the Secretary of State; the Librarian and myself would, of course, be responsible to him.
>
> (b) Instead of the Parliamentary publication, we could have a series of volumes which could either (1) be published officially by the Stationery Office in the same way as are the British and Foreign State Papers or (2) be published in some other form similar to the publications of, for instance, the Camden Society and the Royal Historical Society. This procedure would make little change in regard to the preparation of the volumes, but presumably the names of those who took part in the editing would appear on the title page. We should have more scope for explanatory matter in the form either of introductions or very brief notes where they were called for. The latter is the scheme adopted by the recent German publications, but there the full editorial responsibility has been assigned not to the officials of the Foreign Office but to distinguished historians brought in from outside.

With the exception of the final sentence quoted above, it was a feature of both of Headlam-Morley's alternatives that the publications

envisaged would be edited and controlled by the Foreign Office. Moreover, he went on in a final paragraph to strengthen his case by drawing attention to certain problems in the selection of documents: there were certain despatches 'which could not possibly be published, because they contain very frank statements that concern, not us, but other countries…'; in addition, 'there would certainly be a great deal of trouble about inter-departmental minutes and memoranda'. The implication was that an 'insider' would be best placed and qualified to resolve such problems, whatever the system employed for producing *Die Grosse Politik*.[22]

The Librarian, Gaselee, decoded Headlam-Morley's message accurately, and immediately wrote about the necessity of finding 'some historian young enough to take the comparatively subordinate position indicated by Mr. Headlam-Morley…'. He suggested Kingsley Martin, whose book *The Triumph of Lord Palmerston* had just been published, as someone who might be willing to accept 'such a task as this, which would present a great chance for a rising young historian'; Gaselee could not think of anyone else, but thought 'there may be some young man at Oxford, or just down from Oxford, whom we could enlist'.[23]

Although MacDonald asked to see a copy of Kingsley Martin's book, the independent enquiries he also made led him down another path, and to the making of a decision which could not have been other than a personal disappointment for Headlam-Morley. For G.P. Gooch, MacDonald's selection, and H.W.V. Temperley, Gooch's choice as collaborator, were anything but the 'two youngish historical scholars' envisaged by the Historical Adviser.[24] When the decision was announced, in December 1924, a distinctly unencouraging phrase, from the latter's point of view, was used, namely 'these documents will be edited for the Foreign Office'.

For Headlam-Morley there was some consolation in that the documents which he had already compiled about the outbreak of war in 1914 were issued in 1926 as the first of the volumes to be published, and in that he was given the credit due to him as the editor of that volume. There was also to be a considerable resemblance between his proposed scheme of coverage and that adopted by Gooch and Temperley in the volumes subsequently edited by them. Headlam-Morley's disappointment showed, however, in 1928, in a memorandum for Chamberlain entitled 'The Publication of British

Documents on the Origins of the War'. Paragraph 4 of this memorandum reads:

> The suggestion was made in the Office that while it would be necessary to get in external assistance, the publication should be made officially by the Foreign Office and that the editors should be directly responsible to the Secretary of State. Mr MacDonald, however, determined to invite Dr Gooch, the well-known historian, to undertake the proposed publication on behalf of the Foreign Office.[25]

For Austen Chamberlain, who had become Foreign Secretary on 7 November 1924, and who personally announced MacDonald's decision through the publication in *The Times* on 3 December 1924 of an exchange of letters between himself and the historian R.W. Seton-Watson, celebration was less qualified. This announcement was made ten years almost to the day since his question to Asquith in the House of Commons. It marked the successful culmination of a sustained interest in the subject of the wider availability of official material for the enlightenment of public opinion. It may well have reminded him of, and caused him to place before the Committee of Imperial Defence, as from a fortnight later, on 16 December 1924,[26] his interview with Grey of spring 1912, when he was first inspired to raise some of the issues involved in the content and conduct of British foreign policy.

## Notes

1. Chamberlain at the Committee of Imperial Defence, 19 February 1925, CAB 24/172. See also Austen Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside: an Epistolatory Chronicle 1906–1914* (London, 1936) pp. 413, 425, letters of 13 and 24 February 1912. A.J. Balfour, the former Prime Minister and Conservative Party leader, suggested an alliance with France to Grey in June 1912: memorandum by Balfour 12 June 1912, Grey to Balfour 16 June 1912, Balfour MSS British Library Add. MSS 49731. See K.M. Wilson, *The Policy of the Entente* (Cambridge, 1985) pp. 41, 43, 48–9.
2. CAB 24/172. Chamberlain derived much support from Harold Nicolson of the Foreign Office, who in a memorandum dated 20 February 1925 put one of the advantages to be gained from the proposed policy as

follows: 'Europe will then know where she stands. It is doubtful whether even in 1914 Germany would have risked the Great War had she known for certain that the British Empire would come to France's assistance. If she is now assured that, by invading France she will inevitably incur the hostility of the British Empire, it is most unlikely that she will make any such endeavour.' *ibid*.

3. Austen Chamberlain, *Down the Years* (London, 1935) pp. 66–7.
4. *Hansard*, 5th Series, lxviii, col. 770, 23 November 1914.
5. Acland to Chamberlain 1 December 1914, Chamberlain MSS AC13/1/2. The F.O. memorandum is AC13/1/1; the Cook pamphlet is AC13/1/6.
6. Chamberlain to Acland 7 December 1914, *ibid*. AC13/1/3.
7. Acland to Chamberlain 20 January 1915, *ibid*. AC13/1/5.
8. Headlam-Morley to Grey 12 December 1916, Grey MSS F.O. 800/108.
9. Drummond to Headlam-Morley 13 December 1916, Headlam-Morley MSS box 34.
10. Cited in K.A. Hamilton, 'The Pursuit of "Enlightened Patriotism": the British Foreign Office and Historical Researchers during the Great War and its Aftermath', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* lxi (1988) p. 319.
11. Minute by Headlam-Morley 3 March 1919, F.O. 371/4378/PID 196.
12. Minutes by Gaselee, Tilley, Curzon, Hardinge 7, 14, 15 March 1919 *ibid*.; minute by Hardinge 28 March 1917, F.O. 371/2939/64992.
13. Minute by Headlam-Morley 12 March 1919, F.O. 371/4378/PID 196.
14. Memorandum by Headlam-Morley 28 October 1919, F.O. 371/4382/ ff. 294–6.
15. Minute by Headlam-Morley 1 May 1920, F.O. 370/116/L5.
16. Minute by Headlam-Morley 21 July 1920, *ibid*. f. 27.
17. *ibid*. ff. 28–9.
18. Note by Headlam-Morley of interview with Grey 6 December 1922, F.O. 370/194/L3894.
19. Minute by Gaselee 26 February 1924, F.O. 370/202/L792.
20. Memorandum by Headlam-Morley 29 April 1924, *ibid*.
21. Minute by MacDonald 1 May 1924, *ibid*.
22. Memorandum by Headlam-Morley 24 May 1924, F.O. 370/202/L2157.
23. Minute by Gaselee 28 May 1924, *ibid*.
24. See F. Eyck, *G.P. Gooch: a Study in History and Politics* (London, 1982) pp. 337–40.
25. Memorandum by Headlam-Morley, Gaselee, and Hankey dated 4 August 1928, and minute by Gaselee 15 August, F.O. 370/290/L5138. This is printed in full as an appendix to Ch. 8 of K.M. Wilson (ed.), *Forging the Collective Memory: Governments and International Historians through Two World Wars* (Oxford and Providence, R.I., 1996) pp. 250–62.
26. CAB 24/172.

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