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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ellen Towne Skidmore entitled "Pierre Cot: Apostle of Collective Security, 1919-1939." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

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PIERRE COT: APOSTLE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY, 1919-1939

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Ellen Towne Skidmore

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ABSTRACT

Pierre Cot was one of many Frenchmen who, throughout the interwar years, tried to solve the problem of French security by integrating it into a system of international order. Through the League of Nations he tried to develop arbitration, sanctions, and disarmament. Through Franco-German detente, he sought to conciliate many of Europe's outstanding problems. By the mid-thirties, however, economic and political crisis and the aggressive intent of the dictators to reconstruct the European state system to their own ends proved to be threats that the League of Nations was unable to meet. Faced with this failure, Pierre Cot sought new guarantees for France and her allies in coordinating a massive deterrent force to contain Nazi Germany. This dissertation examines the concepts of collective security developed by Pierre Cot, his attempts to implement them and the modifications that events imposed upon them.

Cot's activities indicate the roles he played. He was instrumental in shaping Radical-Socialist support for the foreign policies of Aristide Briand from 1928-1932. As Air Minister, in 1933 and again in 1936-1937, he helped shape French aviation policy. He was active in building the Popular Front in 1935 and 1936. He worked to find international support for Ethiopia, Spain, and Czechoslovakia when they were threatened by fascist aggression. And he tried to build a Franco-Soviet-British alliance to deter Hitler. In each case, his failure is as instructive to the historian as his success and brings into focus the influence that the continuing shift of his political thought

leftward had on the reception accorded his policies of collective security.

Pierre Cot was a man with magnified consciousness of the mystique of the French Revolution and intense commitment to its myths. Throughout his career, he was the advocate of individual freedom and democracy. Deeply influenced by a paternal heritage of republican defense, yet personally devoted to his Catholic mother, Cot early in life experienced the need to seek compromise among France's conflicting political traditions. Thus it was that Cot, the skilled and indefatigible advocate--eloquent, quick witted, and energetic--was an equally skilled and determined conciliator, willing and able to negotiate details of compromise. While he was a man who was inclined to seek political solutions and to rely on public opinion and popular mandate to implement these solutions, he had no personal taste for political power and failed to measure its necessity realistically.

This study is developed from primary and secondary source materials selected from the political and memorial literature of interwar France and draws most heavily from Cot's own work and from contemporary reports of his activities. These are found in Chambéry's Radical journal, Le Démocrat Savoyard, and in Paris journals, La République and L'Oeuvre; in the reports of the Radical-Socialist's annual congresses; in the debates of the Journal Officiel; the published documents of the French Foreign Ministry; and in testimony given to the Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry in 1946.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
INTRODUCTION		1
I.	PROLOGUE, 1918-1928	12
II.	CONCILIATION AND FRANCO-GERMAN DETENTE, 1928-1930	50
III.	CONCILIATION AND GERMAN NATIONALISM, 1930-1932	80
IV.	DISARMAMENT, SECURITY, AND NATIONAL DEFENSE, 1932-1934	110
V.	FASCISM, THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY, 1934-1936	138
VI.	THE POLITICS OF ANTI-FASCISM AND THE RESHAPING OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY, 1936-1938	170
VII.	PEACE OR WAR? 1938-1939	202
VIII.	CONCLUSION	237
BIBLIOGRAPHY		248
VITA		257

INTRODUCTION

Pierre Cot was born in 1895 in the Alpine region of eastern France. Still eighteen when war broke out, he served four years at the front, then returned to complete his legal education and to specialize in international law. Entering politics in 1924, Cot played a significant role as a Radical-Socialist deputy and cabinet minister in the complex world of French foreign and defense policy.

The Treaty of Versailles did not limit or penalize Germany as greatly as Frenchmen had hoped or thought it should; it did, however, contain all that the British and Americans were willing to permit and more than the Germans wanted to accept. Instead of a permanently secured frontier on the Rhine, the French were offered Wilson's dream of permanently organized peace through the League of Nations and an Anglo-American promise to France of a treaty of mutual assistance against German aggression. The United States failed to accept responsibility for either of these modes of guarantee. Great Britain was unwilling to undertake obligations of assistance to France alone. Britain's primary concern with continental affairs was to discourage shifts in hegemony that might draw Britain into an unwanted continental war or threaten her trade and sea lanes. From her position across the channel, Britain sometimes found France as easily suspect as Germany, and her policy after World War I was frequently directed at obstructing the organization of power on the continent rather than participating in it.

For France the issue remained one of security first. Although France was the strongest land power in Europe after 1919, Frenchmen

knew that this strength did not accurately reflect the realities of power demonstrated by the war. France had needed Allied support to defeat Germany, had been directed by Allied diplomacy in the conduct of the armistice and the peace, and continued to depend on Allied cooperation to impose on Germany the limitations and obligations of that peace. Moreover, France's capacity for growth was far less than the potential that existed in Germany, despite defeat and postwar crises. The carnage of the Great War had left Frenchmen, soldiers and civilians alike, no taste for victory at pyrrhic costs, and it raised wartime experiences to a level of general principles that directed military thinking for two decades. The focus of this experience was on the infantry: from it came the concepts of total war and general mobilization; of a citizen army, short-term trained and held in reserve; and of a continuous front, from behind which France might withstand the blows of Germany aggression.

Drawing on conclusions from her wartime experiences, France developed a defensive military posture that placed exceptional burdens on her foreign policy and diplomacy. No one wanted to fight--not the General Staff, not the politicans, and most certainly not the men who would fill the ranks. No preparations were made for limited military actions against Germany because it was believed that the only war with Germany would be total war. Coercive occupation yielded poor results in the early twenties; the peace movement pressed heavily on the public mind the immorality of all war; and the competition for budgeted revenue added other reasons against maintaining a ready fighting force that nobody wanted to use. And so it fell to the government and the diplomats to formulate and conduct a foreign policy that would at the same

time guarantee French security and her Great Power status, while it would also avoid war and permit the reduction of defense appropriations.

Cot's perspective of the place of France within the Versailles system led him to the single conclusion that France, in order to survive as a great power, had to find common ground with other powers from which to build a system of collective security with which to protect each and all from the natural conflicts and excessive ambitions inherent in the nation-state system. He first sought collective security in the League of Nations and its programs for arbitration, sanctions, and disarmament. After 1924 he also accepted the Locarno formula for regional security and the principle of treaty revision, subjecting both to the superstructure of the League. The rise to power of Hitler altered both the intent and the capability of Germany to repudiate the Versailles system and effect revision unilaterally. In these circumstances, Cot was forced to re-examine the effectiveness of the League as the agent of collective security and after 1936 to re-examine the Locarno formula. The force of events turned him toward a comprehensive system of collective security based on a coalition of military force, committed by alliance to mutual defense. Although he hoped at first that such a coalition would deter German aggression, it became increasingly evident to him that there was little chance of avoiding a general war. It was a tormenting conclusion that he reached in January 1939: "There can be no compromise between a Germany that wants to dominate the world and a France that wants to remain a great nation."[1]

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[1] Le Démocrat (Chambéry), 28 January 1939. Translations are the author's.

Events demonstrated to him that peace and security were integral, but neither condition was natural or automatic; both were dependent on the rule of law in its fullest sense, that is, not only the law itself, but also its adjudication, revision, and enforcement. When the rule of law failed to uphold either peace or security, both were jeopardized. An international order bereft of the rule of law and collective security fell prey to anarchy and brute force. Without collective security, France would stand alone against Germany; this, above all else, France must avoid. It was this conclusion that directed Cot's responses to the events of the interwar years. It is the purpose of this study to describe how Cot's perspective of international order and collective security took shape, how it was influenced and altered by the events of the interwar years, and how in the end it failed to save France.

Pierre Cot was a combat artilleryman turned pacifist, a specialist in international law turned politician, a Catholic turned laic, a bourgeois turned syndicalist. Above all else, he was French, a man whose ethical guides for public conduct and social purpose came from the French Revolution and the mystique of Republican defense. He was a man who believed in the intrinsic value of human life and the inherent ability of individual men to understand the task at hand and perform it; a man with great generosity of spirit who understood men's enduring efforts and their recurring failures and who recognized that triumph in the end lay not in single events or comprehensive systems but in ceaseless process, for whom progress was created from what was at hand and taken in small steps. He was a man of dualisms, of paradoxes and unreconciled complexities: a man of realistic perception and a man of myth;

a man of compromise and a man of categorical denunciation and approval; a man of legal precision and a man of sweeping, misconstructed generalizations; a man of clear principle and equally clear partisan loyalty and pragmatic choice; a man of quicksilver. He was a man of eloquence and of ceaseless energy, a competitor to the last.

There is no biographical study of Pierre Cot, although he is both an interesting and a significant historical subject. A list of the positions he held during the interwar years is itself reason to examine his career: deputy; prominent member of the Foreign Affairs Commission and later the Aeronautic Commission; delegate to the League of Nations and to the Disarmament Conference; special diplomatic envoy; expert advisor to party and government in matters of international law, foreign policy, and national defense; Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Ministry; and Minister of Air. To these many positions he brought a commitment to French security and world peace that he developed into a doctrine of collective security which he applied to both foreign and defense policies. In the very failure of collective security to maintain peace or save France, Cot and his career reflect and illustrate the dilemmas of France at this time, the dilemmas of policy selection and execution within a democratic context that is faced with serious dissatisfaction and radical change. All of this falls within the established topical and chronological limits of this study: the collective security focus brought by Cot to French foreign and defense policies during the interwar years. There is additional interest and significance in Cot's career during this period that lies beyond the scope of this study, but which should be noted. Following the collapse of France

in 1940, Cot examined the failure of collective security, and from his evaluation of the events and of the politics of the interwar years he established the foundation for the political posture for his postwar career as a progressiste. His decision to move further leftward, which established a close and lasting rapport with both French and Soviet Communism, was for Cot the direct, logical, and necessary step that had led from the conclusions he drew from the interwar period.

Cot himself wrote an apologia for his career and for the Popular Front, his defense against the charges brought by the Vichy government at Riom in 1942. It contains much useful information for the period after 1936 but reflects heavily his ideological and emotional state of mind following the collapse of France.[2] There is also a section of testimony from Cot in the procès verbal of the parliamentary enquiry conducted by the French government in 1947.[3] Both of these and three other works written by Cot in retrospect give his historical perspective of that time and his role.[4] All of these historical sources have been consulted, but they do not provide the major source of evidence for this study.

It is rather from contemporary sources that this study draws most of its evidence. Cot's own articles and reports from his many speeches

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[2]Pierre Cot, Triumph of Treason, trans. Sybille and Milton Crane (Chicago, 1944). This is the English edition of Pierre Cot, Le Procès de la République, 2 vols. (New York, 1944).

[3]France, Les Evénements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945: Témoignages et documents recueillis par la Commission d'Enquête Parlementaire, 9 vols. (Paris, 1947-1954). Hereafter cited as Evénements.

[4]Pierre Cot, "La Politique exterieure de la Troisième République," in Jean Benoît-Lévy, Gustave Cohen, Pierre Cot, et al., L' Oeuvre de la Troisième République (Montreal, 1943); Cot, "Marx," in Torch of Freedom,

are found in numerous contemporary journals but most frequently in the weekly journal of the Radical-Socialists in Chambéry, Le Réveil des Gauches and its successors, Le Démocrat Savoyard and Le Démocrat, for which Cot was the political director.[5] His ideas are also found in the procès verbal of the Chamber debates[6] and the Radical-Socialist party congresses.[7] Some record of his activities is found in the document collections of the French Foreign Ministry[8] and the League of

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eds. Emil Ludwig and Henry B. Kranz (Port Washington, New York, 1943); Cot, "Intervention sur la rapport de M. Pierre Renouvan," in Cahiers de la Fondation National des Sciences Politiques, No. 155. Léon Blum, chef de gouvernement, 1936-1937 (Paris, 1967). Hereafter cited as Léon Blum, chef de gouvernement.

[5]Le Réveil des Gauches (Chambéry), 25 February 1922-26 December 1931; Le Démocrat Savoyard (Chambéry), 2 January 1932-26 January 1934, and Le Démocrat (Chambéry), 2 February 1935-15 June 1940 were the same journal under different titles. See p. 31.

[6]France. Journal Officiel. Chambre des Députés. Débats Parlementaires. 1919-1940 (Paris, 1919-1940). Hereafter cited as J.O. Chambre. Débats. See also, Journal Officiel. Chambre des Députés. Lois et Documents, 1919-1940 (Paris, 1919-1940). Hereafter cited as J.O. Chambre. Documents.

[7]Parti républicain radical et radical socialiste. 24e Congrès du parti républicain-radical et radical-socialiste tenu à Paris, les 27, 28, 29 et 30 Octobre 1927 (Paris, 1927). Hereafter cited as 24e Congrès . . . tenu à Paris, les 27, 28, 29 et 30 Octobre 1927. See also, 25e Congrès . . . tenu à Angers, les 3, 4 et 5 Novembre 1928; 26e Congrès . . . tenu à Reims, les 24, 25 26 et 27 Octobre 1929; 27e Congrès . . . tenu à Grenoble, les 9, 10, 11 et 12 Octobre 1930; 28e Congrès . . . tenu à Paris, les 5, 6, 7 et 8 Novembre 1931; 29e Congrès . . . tenu à Toulouse, les 3, 4, 5 et 6 Novembre 1932; 30e Congrès . . . tenu à Vichy, les 5, 6, 7 et 8 Octobre 1933; 31e Congrès . . . tenu à Nantes, les 25, 26, 27 et 28 Octobre 1934; 32e Congrès . . . tenu à Paris, les 24, 25 26 et 27 Octobre 1935; 33e Congrès . . . tenu à Biarritz, les 22, 23, 24 et 25 Octobre 1936; 34e Congrès . . . tenu à Lille, les, 27, 28, 29, 30 et 31 Octobre 1937; and 35e Congrès . . . tenu à Marseilles, les 26, 27, 28, 29 et 30 Octobre 1938.

[8]France Documents Diplomatiques Française, 1932-1939. 1re série, 6 vols., 2e série. 12 vols. Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. Commission de Publication des Documents Relatifs aux Origines de la Guerre, 1919-1945 (Paris, 1963-1978). Hereafter cited as DDF.

Nations.[9] Interestingly, what Cot said about the events of 1928-1940 as they unfolded was what he said in the 1940s and, indeed, in 1971.

Contemporary journals also provide the most complete source of reactions to Cot.[10] These sources are supplemented by the reactions of some of his contemporaries: Alexander Werth, Genevieve Tabouis, and Jacques Debû-Bridel mention him occasionally.[11] Other contemporaries--Herriot, Paul-Boncour, Blum--whom one might expect to mention him, rarely do, nor do their biographers. Only the biographers of Marshal Pétain give any attention to Cot.[12] Cot is mentioned only in passing in the works of De Gaulle, Churchill, and Eden, even though we are

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[9]League of Nations, Official Journal. Special Supplements. No. 76. Records of the Tenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly. Plenary Meetings. Minutes of the First Committee (Geneva, 1929); League of Nations, Official Journal. Special Supplements. No. 75. Records of the Tenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly. Plenary Meetings. Text of Debates (Geneva, 1929). Hereafter cited as League . . . Minutes of the First Committee (1929) and League . . . Debates (1929).

[10]See Paris journals, Le Temps, L'Ere Nouvelle, L'Oeuvre, La République, Le Radical, Journal des Débats, L'Echo de Paris, Gringoire, L'Action Française. See also Times (London) and Manchester Guardian.

[11]Alexander Werth, France in Ferment (New York, 1935); Werth, Which Way France? (New York, 1937); Werth, France and Munich (New York, 1939); Werth, The Twilight of France, 1933-1940 (New York, 1942); Werth, "Le mouvement 'Jeunes Turc': un phènoméne radical de l'entre-deux guerres," Cahiers de la République, No. 2 (1956), 100-105.

Geneviève Taboius, Vingt Ans (Paris, 1958); Ils l'ont appelée Cassandra (Paris, 1949).

Jacques Debû-Bridel, L'Agonie de la Troisième République, 1929-1939 (Paris, 1948).

[12]General Laure, Pétain (Paris, 1937); Richard Griffiths, Marshal Pétain (London, 1970); Edouard Herriot, Jadis: D'une guerre à l'autre, 1914-1936 (Paris, 1952); Michel Soulie, La Vie politique d'Edouard Herriot (Paris, 1962); Joseph Paul-Boncour, Entre deux guerres: Souvenirs sur la III^{e} République. 3 vols. (Paris, 1945); Joel G. Colton, Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics (New York, 1966) deals with Cot's role in the Spanish Civil War.

told by contemporary evidence or Cot's later references that he did have personal and direct contact with them during the thirties.[13] Language and accessibility have excluded the use of German, Czech, Polish, and Russian sources. Foreign policy document collections in English, whether British and American, or translated from the German or the Russian, contain few references to Cot, who was not a career diplomat nor a head of government or minister of foreign affairs to whom references are regularly made and whose correspondence forms the bulk of diplomatic documents.[14]

There are innumerable articles and monographs, helpful studies that deal with related topics; some of them mention Cot, some of them do not. Those that do rely primarily on three sources for their evidence: Cot himself in Triumph of Treason and Evénements, Alexander Werth, and Jacques Dêbu-Bridel. Peter Larmour is an exception: in The French Radical Party in the 1930s, he uses, in addition to these sources, Le Démocrat Savoyard extensively for Cot's views. Larmour's focus, however, is on Radical politics, not foreign affairs, and he goes back no further than 1932.[15] John Dreifort in his biographical

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[13]Earl of Avon, Facing the Dictators: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden (Boston, 1962); Charles De Gaulle, Memoires de guerre, 3 vols. (Paris, 1954), vol. 1: L'Appel, 1940-1942; Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, 6 vols. (Boston, 1948), vol. 1: The Gathering Storm.

[14]See DDF. See also Germany, Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, Series C, 5 vols. (Washington, 1949 et seq.). Hereafter cited as DGFP. Great Britain, Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, Third Series, 9 vols., eds. E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler (London, 1946 et seq.). Hereafter cited DBFP. U.S.S.R., Jane Degras, ed., Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy, 3 vols. (London, 1953), vol. 3 (1933-1941). Hereafter cited as SDFP.

[15]Peter J, Larmour, The French Radical Party in the 1930s (Stanford, California, 1964).

study of Yvon Delbos as Foreign Minister mentions Cot on occasion.[16] Recently, scholars have begun to use French military and service ministry archives that were not available to this author when this study was being done. Robert J. Young's recent work has evaluated Cot's Air Ministry with helpful perception.[17] There is, finally, the invaluable multi-volume survey by Edouard Bonnefous, Histoire politique de la Troisième République, without which the study of the Third Republic is unimaginable.[18] Interviews with Cot are cited by Peter Larmour, 21 December 1960, and John Dreifort, 7 July 1969. The author interviewed Cot briefly in Paris, 9 June 1971.[19]

Throughout his long public career, Pierre Cot remained a very private person. In his own writings, he spoke only of his political ideas and occasionally of political activities. References to personal feelings, reminicences, anecdotes are absent, as if a juridical hand had applied a rule of evidence that removed every instance of irrelevancy. Only his public policy remains. There are no digressions into events behind the scenes or into the interplay of personalities, no journalistic reactions to atmosphere, no introspective memoire. Those who have written about Cot have not done so biographically, being preoccupied

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[16]John E. Dreifort, Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay: French Foreign Policy during the Popular Front, 1936-1938 (Lawrence, Kansas, 1973).

[17]Robert J. Young, In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978).

[18]Edouard Bonnefous, Histoire politique de la Troisième République, 7 vols. (Paris, 1956-1967).

[19]Larmour, Radical Party, 316; Dreifort, Delbos, 252; Interview with Pierre Cot, Paris, 9 June 1971.

either with public questions or with their own memoires. Occasionally, descriptive phrases appear but they are intended to praise or criticize, so that Cot's supporters point to his enthusiasm and energy while his detractors criticize his rashness. Brief official biographical statements provide some facts, early campaign biographies give some information about his youth, and the sister of his friend and colleague, Jean Moulin, makes us aware of a small group of close friends of long-standing with whom be shared skiing vacations in the winter and yachting in the summer.[20] News notices reported lapses and recoveries in his health, and in April 1938, his marriage. There is little more. In an interview with Cot by this author in June 1971, he maintained his silence with utter graciousness. He had found no reasons to alter or add to the public record, no inclination to make personal comments on matters long closed. What he said in 1971 was very close to his original statements, no more, no less.[21] Pierre Cot died 21 August 1977 at his home in Coise-Saint-Jean-Pied-Gouthier in Savoie.[22]

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[20]Laure Moulin, Jean Moulin (Paris, 1969).

[21]Interview with Pierre Cot, Paris, 9 June 1971.

[22]Le Monde (Paris), 23 August 1977; L'Humanité, 22 and 23 August 1977.

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE, 1918-1928

In the decade between 1918 and 1928, Pierre Cot brought together from widely different sources--his own experiences, the influence of many people, and the force of events--a foreign policy perspective that sought above all else security for France, and to this end called for arbitration, disarmament, and collective security through the League of Nations and allied cooperation through the Anglo-French entente. The formula of Locarno, eliminating independent action as a French security option, provided a working model for immediate regional security.

Cot entered public life in 1922, a bright and promising young lawyer, whose distinctions earned the attention of the premier, Raymond Poincaré. It was within the circle of Poincaré's influence that Cot witnessed the critical events that led up to and away from the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923; it was from this same circle that he entered the political battles of the 1924 legislative election campaign as a candidate within the Bloc national in the Hautes-Alpes. He was not elected in May 1924, and during the following year he began a significant shift in political perspective and alignment which altered his positions on foreign and domestic issues and led him into the ranks of the Radical-Socialist party. In 1928, he was again a candidate in the legislative elections, this time in Savoie, where as a Radical-Socialist he was elected. Cot had not entered public life as a politician or as a policy analyst but as a legal expert, a jurisconsul, appointed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In June 1928 Cot stood on

the threshold of a promising political career, in which foreign and defense issues would be prominently focused.

Family, War, and Education

Pierre Cot's ancestry and his early life established a strong provincial background with which he remained in contact throughout his life. His ancestors had lived in Savoie since the time of the first Napoleon.[1] Both his father and his grandfather had lived in the commune of Coise, where, in 1880, his grandfather had been its first republican mayor and his father, in his turn, had been both its mayor and the *conselleur d'arrondissement* from the canton of Chamoux. Cot himself was also mayor of Coise; elected in 1929, he served for over forty years. The post has passed on to the fourth generation, to Cot's son Jean-Pierre, who was elected in 1971.[2]

Cot was proud of the tradition of public service and republican defense established by his grandfather and his father during the first years of the Third Republic and in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair. However, it was not his father's republicanism but his mother's Catholicism that first influenced his education. The death of Léon Cot in 1900 left the care of five-year-old Pierre entirely in the hands of his "very pious" mother, who saw to it that her son received a Catholic

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[1]The following section on Cot's early life is drawn primarily from journals in the Hautes-Alpes and Savoie which covered his first two election campaigns. Quoted material from these sources is from Cot unless otherwise indicated. Some material is found also in Cot, *Triumph of Treason*, 24-26.

[2]*Who is Who in France*, 11e ed., 1973-1974 (Paris, 1973), 479; 14e ed., 1979-1980 (Paris, 1979), 397.

education. Cot himself said: "In my origins was that double tradition, the contradiction of which explains the history of the French people."[3]

The Cots were provincial petit bourgeois, not wealthy, sometimes even strictured, but generally comfortable. They were hardworking and among their compatriots they were respectable and respected, recognized for and proud of their integrity and public service. Cot grew up among the solid and the sober.[4]

The elder Cots, father and grandfather, lay buried near the family home and Cot, quoting an unidentified Latin poet, said; "'One's country is where one's dead sleep.' My country is Coise." There he spent his first years and was taught to read and write by the village schoolmaster. During his youth, after the family had moved to Grenoble, some fifty miles to the southeast, he returned to Coise each summer. Cot was in Coise in the summer of 1914, when war threatened. He enlisted in the Ninth Hussards at Chambéry and was called up in August. He spent the winter of 1914-1915 in the trenches at the Somme and remained at the front until he was wounded in 1918. Released from the hospital, Lieutenant Cot convalesced during the last months of the war. After the war, he maintained his reserve status with the Chambéry unit.[5]

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[3]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25; Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 March, 14 April 1928; Les Hautes-Alpes (Briançon), 26 April 1924. In his youth, Cot had belonged to the Catholic youth organization, Jeunesses Catholiques. See Le Réveil des Gauches, 14 and 28 April 1928; La Croix de Savoie (Chambéry), 25 March 1928.

[4]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25; Le Réveil des Gauches, 14 April 1928; Le Monde, 23 August 1977; L'Humanité, 22 August 1977.

[5]Le Réveil des Gauches, 14 and 21 April 1928; Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25; Moulin, Jean Moulin, 171; Le Démocrat, 30 December 1939.

Here in Savoie were his loyalties to family, to region, and to the republic. Here he learned about resisting royalism, clericalism, and reaction. Here was the source of his idealistic faith in France's common man, in his native intelligence and integrity, in his desire and ability for self-government. And here was the source of his observation that "Paris was not always France."[6]

Cot's education was both provincial and, at the outset, Jesuit in instruction. It began in Coise and was completed in Grenoble in the adjacent department of Isère. Jesuit training provided Cot's keen intelligence with sound and rigorous discipline, a fine preparation for France's demanding examination regime and for his later legal studies. Throughout, he performed with excellence and by virtue of this entered the mainstream of French legal education at the Sorbonne. There his superior performance won him recognition, honors, and entry into the professional ranks of government.

Cot prepared for the baccalauréat and, before the war, was admitted to the Faculté de Droit at the University of Grenoble, where he proved to be a particularly brilliant student. While completing his program at Grenoble after the war, Cot was encouraged by his professors to continue his studies at the Sorbonne, and in 1919 he left for Paris, "without contacts and almost without resources." With the aid of a small government scholarship and various "thankless" jobs, he managed to support himself through the completion of the doctorat in law and in political and economic science. A stipend from the Institut Thiers then permitted him to prepare for the agrégation, and in 1922 he was received

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[6]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 10 March 1934.

first in the concours d'agrégation, the youngest professor to that time to be admitted to the Faculté de Droit and only the third Savoyard since annexation. He was named first secretary of the Conférence des Avocats at the Cour de Paris, a prestigious position that had been held previously by Poincaré, Viviani, Paul-Boncour, and de Monzie.[7] Such a record commended him and he attracted the attention of Premier Raymond Poincaré, who appointed him a legal advisor to the judicial commission in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[8]

International Law and the League of Nations

It is probable that Cot was appointed to advise the French position in the controversy with Switzerland over the Free Trade Zones.[9] In this regard, his appointment might have been as late as March 1924, when France suggested that the two nations appoint jurists to draft a compromise to be submitted to arbitration, but probably it was earlier, since France had reopened negotiations in February 1923. Negotiations with the Swiss on the draft compromise, on the agreement to submit the issue of the Permanent Court at The Hague, and on a new treaty of compulsory arbitration and conciliation continued throughout 1923 and into

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[7]Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 April 1924; Le Réveil des Gauches, 14 and 21 April 1928; Le Petit Savoyard (Aix-les-Bains), 17 March 1928; Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25. For publications of his doctoral research see, Cot, Le droit de riveraineté: Contributions à l'étude de la houille blanche (Grenoble, 1920); Cot, La résponsibilité civil des fonctionnaires publics (Paris, 1922); See also, Jacques Marizis and Pierre Cot, Manuel juridique des travaux publics (Paris, 1925).

[8]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25.

[9]This involved areas in the departments of Savoie and Hautes-Savoie. See Annual Register, ed. M. Epstein (London, 1758 et seq.), (1923), 237-238; (1924), 232; (1925) 219; (1926), 230; (1927), 214; (1928), 200; (1929), 250-251.

the spring of 1925, that is, into the Herriot administration that took over in June 1924. It is, therefore, possible that Cot was retained by Herriot and, perhaps even, passed on to Painlevé and then Briand. A Savoyard journalist reported in 1934 that Cot had been a collaborator of Briand's in developing the Locarno accords.[10] Cot at no point confirms this bit of laurel, but if it were so, it had to take place between April and October 1925. This is conjecture. It is not conjecture that in August 1929, when France was preparing the brief on the matter of the Free Trade Zones for the Permanent Court at The Hague, it was Pierre Cot whose assistance to Paul-Boncour drew exceptional commendation and effusive praise from the head of the Geneva delegation.[11] In any case, whatever his assignment, Cot's appointment to the Foreign Ministry placed him in contact with people and events that helped shape his political career and his perspective on French policy regarding Germany and the League of Nations.

The years 1923 and 1924 were filled with events that were decisive for France and the League of Nations. Poincaré had struggled since January 1922 with the difficult problems of economic recovery on both sides of the Rhine, German compliance with the Treaty of Versailles, and the British entente. Finally, he set upon a course that led to the occupation of the Ruhr in January 1923. Passive resistance followed, then the Rhineland separatist fiasco in July 1923 and the crisis of the franc during the fall and winter. Financial experts began to meet in October 1923 and by April the next year had produced an acceptable

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[10] Le Democrat Savoyard, 28 April 1934.

[11] Le Réveil des Gauches, 3 August 1929.

reparations settlement, the Dawes plan.[12] In the meantime, the League of Nations took its first serious look at collective security. Between September 1922 and November 1924, the League accepted, largely under French initiative, two attempts to institutionalize mechanisms for the regulation of national conflicts. The first was a draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, which was accepted by the Fourth General Assembly in September 1923, but was rejected by the British Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald early in 1924. Direct negotiations followed between Herriot and MacDonald and produced a preliminary agreement for compulsory arbitration, which became the basis for the Geneva Protocol. Accepted by the Fifth General Assembly in September 1924, the Geneva Protocol fared no better than the Treaty for Mutual Assistance, for the initial support of MacDonald proved ephemeral; his government failed to sign it; and Conservatives Stanley Baldwin and Austin Chamberlain officially rejected it in November 1924. The inability of the French and the British to reconcile their differences on what was the proper function of the League blighted it from beginning to end.[13]

Among those in France who supported the League of Nations, there was a consensus as to its legitimate and primary security functions. Right and Left might disagree on the relationship of disarmament to

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[12]See Walter A. McDougall, France's Rhineland Diplomacy, 1914-1924: The Last Bid for a Balance of Power in Europe (Princeton, New Jersey, 1978) for a perceptive analysis.

[13]See Rudolph Binion, Defeated Leaders: The Political Fate of Caillaux, Jouvenel, and Tardieu (New York, 1960), 150-152; Salvador de Madariaga, Morning Without Noon: Memoires (Westmead, Farnborough, Hampshire, 1974), 52-54; Gordon A. Craig, "The British Foreign Office from Grey to Austin Chamberlain," in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., The Diplomats, 1919-1939, 2 vols. (New York, 1963), 1:40-41.

security, but few doubted that the purpose of the League was to guarantee the security of France. Cot was an early supporter of the League and a strong advocate of its security functions. His wartime experiences had left him with an abhorrence of war and created a fertile field for Wilsonian idealism and a hope for peace through international cooperation. Such idealism may seem unwarranted in retrospect; in fact, it appeared so to many at the time; but the enthusiasm was terribly genuine. "With all the ardor of youth," said Cot, "I believed . . . in the necessity and possibility of international collaboration. Those who have not lived through this period, who did not participate in the first efforts . . . of the League of Nations, cannot understand the enthusiasm which at that time animated . . . [us] . . . ."[14] It was in this vein that Pierre Cot, the young lawyer from the Quai's judiciary commission, and Henry Jouvenel, the French representative at Geneva, set about to establish late in 1923 an organization especially directed to university students, the Groupement Universitaire Français pour la Société des Nations. As the president of its central committee, Cot was instrumental in organizing a mass meeting in Paris in February 1924, which was both a memorial to the ideals of Wilson, who had died on 3 February, and a plea for League support.[15]

The work of propagandizing the League of Nations among youth was carried on throughout Europe; student sections were started in twenty-two countries, and in 1924 in Prague the International Federation for

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[14]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25.

[15]Journal des Débats, 16 March 1924. See also Carlton J. H. Hayes, France: A Nation of Patriots (New York, 1930), 326.

the League of Nations was created with the support of the International Confederation of Students. One of its many activities was the organization of courses on international affairs; some of these were taught annually at Geneva while the General Assembly was in session. Cot was one of many people who worked to train the next generation in what was believed to be the methods of peace. At Geneva he worked through the Bureau d'Etudes International, organized by Alfred Zimmern, and serving large numbers of students from the London School of Economics. At The Hague he was associated with the Institut de Droit Internationale.[16]

Politics and the Election of 1924

Cot's first responses to the political milieu of the 1922-1924 period were reformist, nonpartisan, and vaguely technocratic, but they were not apolitical; he wanted to use the political process as a means of reforming it. Through his Paris associations Cot became involved in the reformist activities of the Center-Right. Here, for a brief time, he was associated with the circle of men around Ernest Mercier, who were developing ideas of technocracy, that is, government by a technical elite.[17] Cot was one of many Frenchmen, who after the war, believed that the institutions of the French state needed serious reform.

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[16]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25; see also Madariaga, Morning Without Noon, 130-131; Hayes, France: A Nation of Patriots, 326; S. H. Bailey, International Studies in Modern Education (London, 1938), 245-250; League of Nations Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, Bulletin of the International University Information Office (Geneva, 1924, 1925).

[17]See Richard F. Kuisel, Ernest Mercier: French Technocrat (Paris, 1967). Cot's particular association was with Andre de Fels and Maurice Petesch, whose fathers both were close associates of Mercier and his projects.

He envisioned changes taking place through democratic action, that is, through the political process in response, not to party maneuvers, but to an aroused general opinion. Words were to be the keys to men's actions; rational argument--or rhetoric, as the case might be--would be the route to reform.

Early in 1924 with an eye to the May legislative elections, Cot and others, including Paul Renaud and André de Fels, organized Jeune France Républicain, a group with which they hoped to influence Parisian students to accept moderation in politics and to reject the extremist activities of the leagues of the Action Française and the Communist party. Through nonpartisan efforts they hoped to create a program that would reflect and utilize "student idealism." They called for "stability and authority in the exercise of political power"; they did not, however, advocate an expansion of the role of the state and rejected statism. Instead, they called for economy in government spending and the protection of individual liberties. They rejected "dictators," "miracles," and "revolution," and called on all "republicans" to defend France against all extreme partisanship. It was evident that "the parliamentary regime had certain defects, but it is ours," they said, "and one can find nothing to put in its place without serious crisis." They believed that better informed Frenchmen could and would cooperate in stabilizing the parliamentary regime and that specific reforms would follow logically upon this stabilizaton.[18] Cot, appearing on behalf of the organization in March, spoke on "The Crisis of the Parties," attacking the prewar

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[18]Journal des Débats (Paris), 2 March 1924; Jean Carrère and Georges Bourgin, Manuel des partis politiques en France (Paris, 1924), 114-115.

party system and the "equivocal" behavior of the Radical-Socialists since the war. He criticized bloc politics, accusing both the Bloc national and the Cartel des gauches of having divided France into two opposing partisan coalitions which obscured the central issues of reform and reconstruction.[19] Jeune France Républicain, through its very general and idealistic approach to reform, initially brought together men who later found, upon looking more carefully at specific problems, that their political ideas were, in fact, quite divergent and incompatible. The life of the group did not extend beyond the May elections.

Cot's decision to abandon non-partisan voter influence in order to seek a seat in the Chamber of Deputies was made quickly and with the encouragement of Poincaré himself. In April 1924, Cot decided to stand for the May election in the Hautes-Alpes, a department adjacent to Savoie. He later said that he had entered the race at the suggestion and with the encouragement of Poincaré; however, he had also discussed the possibility of his running for the legislature--albeit in the most general terms--as early as 1923 with Victor Blanchet, conservative deputy from Isère.[20] One may conclude that an interest in standing for election coincided with an open candidacy in the Hautes-Alpes, which Poincaré urged him to pursue. Cot entered the race within the ranks of the Bloc national, one of three on the liste d'action et défense républicain[21] who called themselves simply the "republican" candidates, as opposed to

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[19]Journal des Débats, 29 and 30 March 1924.

[20]Interview with Pierre Cot, 9 June 1971; Le Réveil des Gauches, 7 April 1928.

[21]La République Démocratique (Paris), 27 April 1924.

their adversaries of the Cartel des gauches, whom they called "socialists," although one was a Radical-Socialist, one a Republicain Socialist, and only one a Socialist (SFIO).[22]

Cot's first campaign was interesting and it helps us understand the development of his foreign policy perspective. First, it provides the first statements of his views on specific issues: the security function of the League of Nations, reparations and the Ruhr occupation, and the nature of the German problem. Second, it establishes his position on domestic economic issues, which themselves bear no relevancy to foreign policy but help to describe the shift to the Left that he made after the election. Third, it introduces Cot's style as a campaigner and prepares us to recognize that his basic position on issues was sometimes separate from his polemic use of them. Fourth, it provides a point of reference with which to compare the 1928 campaign when he was Radical-Socialist and the Bloc national, the opponent.

In his campaign, Cot spoke of world peace and the German question. He urged people to support the League of Nations. "Peace," he wrote, "is at this moment both the most indispensable and the most fragile." Europe would not again be able to withstand the agony of the Great War. Yet, lasting peace was not assured; militarism and nationalism still threatened. The League of Nations had to be given the authority with which to enforce the decisions of arbitration, to guarantee agreements, and to prevent national wars.[23] Germany remained the major threat to peace; for France, vigilance was the only salvation.

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[22]Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 April, Le Temps (Paris), 13 May 1924.

[23]Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 and 26 April, 9 [sic] May 1924.

In 1924, Cot considered reparations necessary, equitable, and legal. The war had devastated much of northeastern France, and at the end of the war, the cost of rebuilding this area, of returning it to productivity, appeared more than France herself could or should have to bear. German aggression in 1914 was seen by Cot in the immediate postwar atmosphere as simple and certain proof of guilt. Even if Germany had not been solely responsible for the general conditions that had led to the war, she had been responsible for her own choices of action. That all of the European states had failed to prepare for peace and had contributed to the climate of war through their participation in the arms build-up in no way absolved Germany from her clear responsibility as the aggressor in 1914. Reparations were an equitable means of meeting this responsibility. The Treaty of Versailles had established their legality and the Reparations Commission had defined the terms of payment. Reparations were "an obligation to which . . . [the Germans] . . . had subscribed . . . ."[24]

"Had the League of Nations had a military force at its disposal since 1919," Cot said, "it could have assumed the responsibility for holding Germany to her obligations." As it was, in 1923, there could be no question of permitting Germany to ignore these payments, of making concessions to Germany's resistance to the Treaty of Versailles, of indulging "an inopportune sentimentality that asked that Germany be treated as guiltless." France could fail to hold Germany to her obligations only at her own peril. Concessions which had no basis in law could be interpreted by Germany as French weakness, a condition that

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[24]Les Hautes-Alpes, 3 May 1924.

might well prompt Germany once again to seek her goals through aggression. Both the League of Nations collectively and Britain individually had failed to be concerned. France had had no alternative but to act, as the treaty permitted her to do. Cot supported Poincaré's decision to occupy the Ruhr not as the best but as the only practical course of action open at the time and as a reflection of Poincaré's "firmness" and "clairvoyance." The Socialists called for peace also, but their concept of peace was "an illusion of universal fraternity" that guaranteed nothing. The real hope for a stable and lasting peace lay not with Socialist internationalism but with a strong League, and lacking that, a determined France. There was no doubt that European peace depended on containing Germany and making German aggression impossible.[25]

Cot dealt with domestic policy primarily in terms of local economic needs. The Hautes-Alpes was a rural department, where traditional peasant proprietary attitudes ran deep and where poverty, underdevelopment, and depopulation were serious problems. The platform called for the general development of departmental resources: agriculture, industry, and commerce, and a resource of recent interest, tourism. Cot wrote of the "responsibility of the Republic," i.e., the state, to provide roads and railroads, irrigation and rural electrification, farm machinery and fertilizers. The platform called for expanded rural proprietorship (but left unspecified for whom and how ownership was to be increased), and Cot again pointed to the responsibility of the Republic, here to protect the peasant, whose cash income was very limited, "from the risks of his labor," through social insurance for instances of

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[25]Les Hautes-Alpes, 3 May 1924.

ill-health, injury, old-age, and unemployment. "We are above all a race of peasants," he said, and to fail the peasantry was to risk "the ruin of the entire nation." The platform proposed a general concept of ownership for industrial workers. "Capital must work and the worker must own," said Cot, who maintained that "justice demands that the worker own not only the tools and rewards of his labor but also that he share in the management of economic enterprise." Finally, the platform advocated bureaucratic reform from two directions: from one it called for simplified procedures and the elimination of unnecessary personnel; from another it called for increases in the salaries of "necessary" civil servants.[26]

Cot seemed to hope that he could convince socially and economically concerned voters to support these modest proposals for "republican" reform instead of the more precise and expansive program of the Cartel, while at the same time he reassured more conservative voters regarding proprietary guarantees. This required some maneuvering which included first, avoiding certain issues such as the tax implications of government programs and the role of syndicalism in determining economic reform, and second, focusing intensely emotional attention on a pseudo-issue, the threat of socialism.[27]

In discussing his opponents, Cot made no distinction between Radicals and Socialists, nor even between Socialists and Communists. All cartelists were attacked alike as advocates of both nineteenth century Marxism and the more recent Bolshevism. The true intentions of the

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[26]Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 April, 3 May 1924.

[27]Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 April, 3 and 9 [sic] May 1924.

Cartel, he assured his voters, were to be found not in today's campaign promises, which were only "election ploys," but in the ideas of the past, of Marx, Engels and Guesde, who were hostile to small landowners and peasants. No acknowledgement was made of areas where Radicals and Socialists might meet, of the trends of revision and social democracy and of the democratic and republican traditions of Jaurès. Socialism, said Cot, then and now promised the expropriation of property. A Cartel victory would, indeed, bring to France the fearful socialist experiment that had produced Bolshevism in Russia and the equally malevolent Fascist reaction in Italy. To vote for the Cartel risked the loss of individual property and the political principles of 1789 to civil war and "the elitist dictatorship of the proletariat."[28]

Cot very carefully avoided issues that were related to the sensitive church-state question; there was no mention of Alsace, of any educational issue, or of laicism in general, all issues over which the republican Center might divide.[29]

During the campaign, Cot's personal association with Poincaré was used by his advocates to recommend his candidacy. "It was as a result of his personal qualities that he became a colleague of Poincaré," said the editor of Les Hautes-Alpes. But neither the efforts of Cot, despite his "empassioned eloquence," nor those of his associates were sufficient to counter the force of the Cartel. Cot lost the election.[30]

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[28]Les Hautes-Alpes, 3 May 1924.

[29]Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 and 26 April, 3 and 9 [sic] May 1924.

[30]Cot ran at the head of his liste. Les Hautes-Alpes, 19 April 1924; Journal des Débats, 13 May 1924; Le Temps, 13 May 1924.

Cot's 1924 campaign illustrates a certain incongruity, or perhaps an uncertainty, about the political implications of the ideas that he held. This is less true with his foreign policy than with his domestic policies. The strength of Cot's commitment to the League of Nations (and his proclivity for Wilsonian ideals and myths) was probably much greater than that of his conservative colleagues. But he was comfortable with Poincaré's actions in the Ruhr and with the foreign policy of the Bloc national because he shared with them the underlying premises of the League's security function, the certainty of Germany's responsibility, and the necessity of enforcing obligations. He did not repudiate conciliation as such; he said that France ought not to make concessions to German resistance. His view for the future did not call for more coercion but for developing League mechanisms for conflict resolution, for building an enforcement capability for the League of Nations. This would guarantee collective security in the broadest sense. That the League would choose to use this capability, once established, remained an article of faith for Cot and a continuing problem. What he came eventually to understand was that both coercion and conciliation were methods, appropriate or inappropriate within a specific context, and generally effective in combination. Alone, neither one was ever very satisfactory. There was nothing in Cot's 1923-1924 position that was incompatible with successful conciliation, in which Germany met its obligations while security and the League were strengthened. It was precisely this course that was set in motion by demarches from both sides of the Rhine in 1924. No response from Cot other than approval for successful conciliation made any sense. His satisfaction with its

results and his new associations with its architects and political supporters developed together.

On the domestic side, Cot faced a wide variety of economic and social issues to which he replied in the most general terms. It appeared that his own preparation was limited, his understanding of problems and solutions too simple. In addition, his was a campaigner's approach to issues. What he said, intended to win votes, was selective and partisan; sometimes one wonders whether he believed what he said. Still, through the rhetoric, certain principles emerged and established Cot in a position, which, if pursued further, could have no other result except to separate him from the Bloc national. Modest statements in support of social assistance, administrative reform, regional development, and public works were in keeping with Center-Right reformist trends and were generally platitudinous. But their implementation would require funding in an amount that would demand radical changes in tax policies. Cot did not address this problem but any equitable redistribution of the tax burden would have separated him from the Right. The allusions to syndicalism, slipped in unobtrusively, were more than platitudes. They established premises, which, if pursued, had to lead Cot leftward. Two quotations warrant repeating: "Capital must work and the worker must own," and "justice demands that the worker own not only the tools and rewards of his labor but also that he share in the management of economic enterprise." Interesting, these statements were from a man whose campaign style pilloried all socialism unmercifully. It appears that these statements reflect an ethical position more than an economic or a political one; they are an expression of his moral certitude about democracy. It is the political implications of these ideas, once they

pass from ethics to economics, that he had not yet come to grips with. When he did, there was only one course open--to the Left. The shift, when it came, was made conspicuous and uncomfortable by his own campaign style.

The most striking part of Cot's campaign was his treatment of the Cartel. Around it, he established a categorical opponent--Bolshevism--to which he attributed all manner of broad and sweeping error, using variously exaggeration, myth, half-truths, and blatant falsehood. Then, assuming association between his opponents and the category, he denounced by association. In this way, Radicals and Republican Socialists stood condemned along with Socialists (SFIO) for the sins of all Marxists, imagined or real. It was an extraordinary polemic performance. Cot would not again be quite so indiscriminate or so incautious, although he would not abandon the technique of categorical opponent.

It cannot all be campaign rhetoric; some of it had to reflect Cot's uncritical acceptance of the prejudices and assumptions of his Right-wing associates. His anti-Marxism was undoubtedly genuine. When it began to change is uncertain. But, probably gradually and in response to events at the time, Cot found his own economic thought changing, and, recognizing that these changes brought him to a point of compatibility with Marx, he examined Marx in the light of his own conclusions and accepted that in Marx with which he agreed. The process probably continued over a decade. Cot's anti-Communism remained long after he had found broad areas of compatibility with Socialists and syndicalists and began to be modified by events only after 1934. His anti-Radicalism was probably a combination of campaign tactics and the uncritical habits and attitudes which he shared with his right-wing associates. It was

in his relationship with the parties of the Left that the greatest change took place after 1924, and it was they who had to accept his change in order to accept him.

Shift to Radicalism

Perhaps the hard-fought campaign itself played a part in facing Cot with the inconsistencies in his association with the Bloc national, certainly the events of 1924-1925 did. After the campaign of 1924, Cot's political position underwent a significant shift to the left, reflected both in his ideas and in his associations. In part it was a reaction to foreign affairs. Cot, who had earlier supported Poincaré in regard to reparations and the Ruhr occupation, quickly recognized the lessons of detente with Germany, which brought a resolution to the reparations crisis in the Dawes plan and steps toward the regularization of peace in the Locarno accords, German participation in the League of Nations, and the beginning of preliminary work for a general conference on disarmament. Poincaré himself accepted the shift as practicable, and Cot became an outspoken advocate of conciliation. In part his shift was a response to domestic political events during 1924-1925. Both the political activism of French cardinals, directed at defeating the laic policies of the Herriot government, and the financial obstructionism of banking circles, intent on discrediting its economic policies, disturbed Cot. He feared the mindless destruction of forces at work undermining republican institutions, which, although certainly imperfect, still represented the hallowed traditions of 1789.[31] In the period following

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[31]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 25; Le Réveil des Gauches, 13 March 1926, 25 February, 24 March, 7 April 1928.

the election, it was not the elitist reformism of the Redressement Français[32] but the democracy of the League of the Rights of Man that attracted him.

If one searches beyond these events and asks why Cot responded to them with this political shift, one finds only incomplete answers. It seems that in the last analysis one must accept Cot at his own word when he said that he moved to the Left in order to defend his pacifist and democratic principles.[33] It seems also that just as he had been drawn into the politics of the Bloc national by associations, so, too, associations probably played a role in his shift. One person who undoubtedly played a significant role was statesman and Senator from Corrèze, Henry Jouvenel, who combined ardent support for both syndicalism and collective security through the League of Nations. Over the years, one sees both his ideas and his methods of compromise appearing in the thought and work of Cot. And it is interesting that Jouvenel, whose own political career had been conducted heretofore as an independent, was so attracted by the leftward orientation of the Radical-Socialist program under the leadership of Daladier in 1927 that he would have run as a Radical-Socialist candidate had not Corréze Radicals been skeptical and disinterested in him.[34] The continuing close collaboration between Jouvenel and Cot until the former's death in 1935 warrants the serious conjecture that Cot was influenced by Jouvenel in making his shift. Cot's new associations with the men and the organizations of the Left

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[32]This was the Mercier organization, which founded in 1925. See Kuisel, Mercier.

[33]Le Réveil des Gauches, 25 February 1928.

[34]Rudolph Binion, Defeated Leaders, 169.

opened new avenues of contact with the Radical-Socialists of his childhood home of Savoie, aroused their mutual political interest, and led in 1928 to Cot's candidacy in the second district of Chambéry.

Republican union had long been a tradition in Savoie, where the strength of the Socialists was small and that of the Right significant. In 1919, the Right had been very successful in the legislative elections, and in October 1921, Savoyards of the non-Communist Left--that is, the Radical-Socialists, the Republicain Socialists, and the Socialists (SFIO)--had begun a concerted attack on the power of the Bloc national in departmental politics. Encouraged by their national leaders, Edouard Herriot, Paul Painlevé, and Pierre Renaudel, who had opened a similar effort in national politics,[35] the Savoyards organized a loose federation based on existing republican ties; their goals were to coordinate departmental election campaigns and to establish guidelines for the Union des gauches. In February 1922, a weekly journal was founded, the policies of which were to be directed by the Chambéry committee of the Union des gauches. It published a "Declaration of Principles," which called for adherence to the Declaration of the Rights of Man, defense of the Republic, separation of church and state, military defense based on a reserve army, peace through the League of Nations, opposition to imperialism, and the implementation of social justice, including labor reform and a progressive direct tax on capital gain. The editorial policies of the journal followed these principles closely.[36]

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[35]Carrère and Bourgin, Manuel des partis, 200-205.

[36]Le Réveil des Gauches, 25 February, 25 March 1922.

It was within this political milieu that Pierre Cot was invited in April 1925 by the League of the Rights of Man to speak at a meeting in Savoie. Reported in Le Réveil des Gauches, this speech was the first public indication of contact between the young lawyer from Paris and the political Left in Savoie. Later, it was reported that Cot proposed to Joseph Delachenal, a Savoyard politician of the Right and former deputy from Chambéry, that they meet in public debate to deal with questions of the League of Nations, the Locarno accords the Laic Laws and the "religious peace." Delachenal declined and, referring to Cot's association with the Jeunesses Catholiques as a youth and his earlier candidacy as a "Poincarist" in the Hautes-Alpes, said he did not choose "to pick up the challenge." Le Réveil des Gauches responded that Cot's political "evolution" could be judged only by the voters, "if and when Cot becomes a candidate."[37]

Under unscrutinized circumstances, private contact between Cot and the Radical-Socialists of Savoie developed during 1926 and 1927. The comment in Le Réveil des Gauches cited above indicates that someone in Savoie had thought of him as a candidate as early as the spring of 1926, perhaps even the spring of 1925. But more than a year passed before another mention of Cot as a candidate appeared in the press. In early October 1927, an election news report in Le Temps reviewed potential candidates for the legislative elections in April 1928. In Chambéry, it reported that Joseph Delachenal was expected to run for the seat he had held previously and lost in 1924, and that he would

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[37]Le Réveil des Gauches, 2 April, 5 December 1925, 13 March, 3 April 1926.

be opposed by "Pierre Cote, [sic] who would run either as a Radical or as a Republicain Socialist."[38] Le Réveil des Gauches, however, remained silent about Cot's candidacy until December 1927, when it began to report his appearances at the cantonal meetings of the Radical-Socialist militants. Behind the scenes, Cot conferred with the Radical-Socialist leaders of Savoie. One of the questions that they had to consider was Cot's former association with the Bloc national. The liability of this association was demonstrated in October 1927, when Cot tried to attend the Radical-Socialists' national congress in Paris as a delegate from the Federation of the Seine. The delegates from the Hautes-Alpes objected vehemently to his presence and brought the question before the congress. Cot himself resolved the controversy by not turning in his delegate's card. The incident was reported in Le Temps, but no mention of it ever appeared in Le Réveil des Gauches.[39] On 31 January 1928, Cot appeared before the Radical-Socialist executive committee in Savoie, answered their questions, and satisfied them as to the reasons for his political change.[40]

The Election of 1928

On 10 March, fifteen hundred delegates gathered at Chambéry for the meeting of the Republican Congress, at which Girard-Madoux, former deputy and long-time Radical-Socialist leader in Chambéry, presided.

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[38] Le Temps, 11 October 1927.

[39] 24e Congrès . . . tenu à Paris les 28, 29, 30 October 1927, 26-27, 96-98; Le Temps, 29 October 1927.

[40] Le Réveil des Gauches, 24 December 1927, 7 January, 4 and 25 February, 3 March 1928.

About Cot's candidacy he said: "a single question ought to be posed to the consciences of Republicans . . . that of knowing if he has been sincere." Girard-Madoux assured the militants that an investigation had been made. "We made inquiries. We went to the source of the rumors. We examined what he was . . . [and] what he is." Cot's "evolution" to radicalism reflected his serious and thoughtful recognition of the "justness of our ideas." That he did not hold these convictions in his youth must not be held against him now. And he concluded, "you know . . . it is not my habit to speak lightly of the Republic . . .. I declare before you all that I myself guarantee the republicanism of Cot." The congress accepted him unanimously.[41]

Cot conducted a vigorous campaign in which he spoke at local meetings throughout his constituency, discussing the issues and answering the challenges of his opponents. Each week he published articles in Le Réveil des Gauches, in which he developed his position on the issues. As a political campaigner, Cot fitted all issues, some with greater, some with lesser ease, into the dichotomy of Left and Right, the policies of the Left being benevolent, those of the Right, nefarious. From every conceivable angle Cot repeated incessantly to his electorate the ways in which the politicians of the Right had failed France since 1919.[42]

Cot's 1928 campaign, like the 1924 one, is of interest to this study because it helps to describe Cot's political shift. It illustrated

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[41]Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 March 1928.

[42]Le Réveil des Gauches, 25 February, 17, 24, 31 March, 7, 14, 21 April 1928; La Croix de Savoie, 18 March, 15, 22, 29 April 1928.

change since 1924 and indicated direction for the future. In foreign policy, he repudiated independent action as a security option for France. While he continued to call for arbitration, collective security, and disarmament through the League, he also fully accepted the Locarno agreements as a satisfactory agent of French security within the structure of the League. This formula remained the basis for Cot's collective security perspective until after 1936. On domestic issues Cot took a place on the leftward end of the Radical spectrum and demonstrated that he shared significant areas of compatibility with the Socialists which could permit political cooperation, even government collaboration (referred to as Socialist participation). In his campaign style, Cot retained his use of the categorical opponent, directing it now against the Bloc national and the Right. One of the characteristics most frequently mentioned throughout his career was Cot's oratorical eloquence. It had been noted in 1924 and was even more evident in 1928.

In later elections, those in 1932 and 1936, Cot's campaigning loses its importance for this study. Other forums were more important for policy enunciation. The importance of these later campaigns lay, first, in the focus of the campaign, peace in 1932 and anti-fascism in 1936, and, second, in the political configurations used to serve these issues, the Union des gauches in 1932 and the Popular Front. These reflected Cot's continued political shift leftward and the emergence of his central political doctrine, cooperation among all the forces of the Left.

In foreign policy, Cot explained why he supported Franco-German detente through conciliation and how he believed that it better served France's real security needs than had coercion. Regardless of what other foreign policy goal either Briand or Stresemann may have had or

what meaning each attached to the concessions that were made, it was through conciliation that France and Germany negotiated the Dawes plan, the Locarno accords and German membership in the League of Nations, and with these established an atmosphere of optimism on both sides of the Rhine.

These were lessons that Cot could not--did not want to--ignore. Not only did he revise his view of the Ruhr occupation and of reparations but also of the quality of German intent. It was the latter that made the work of conciliation seem reasonable to him. In retrospect, the Ruhr occupation had been a barren and provocative policy. Intended to compel payment from Germany, it had, in fact, produced only "very mediocre" financial results and disastrous political and diplomatic ones. It had left France alienated from favorable world opinion and isolated from her allies. In Germany, it had encouraged the popularity of the German nationalists and had created an image of "French imperialism" that "furnished our adversaries with their best arguments." French displays of militarism were at best irrelevant and at worst provocative. The hard facts of the relative strengths of France and Germany demanded their mutual cooperation and the support of Britain and the United States to maintain French security.[43]

The policies of conciliation had corrected the errors of misapplied force. Detente had restored harmony between not only France and Germany but also France and Britain. The scrupulousness with which Germany, under the Dawes plan, had met her new payment schedule was a sign of good faith. In the Locarno accords, France secured the principle of

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[43]Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 and 17 March, 7 and 14 April 1928.

arbitration in disputes with Germany, the recognition by Germany of the "consequences of the Treaty of Versailles" in terms of Germany's western frontiers, and guarantees from England and Italy that were "far better than either military alliances or national military strength." In addition, the entry of Germany into the League of Nations facilitated the work of international cooperation and, it was hoped, ultimately the success of general disarmament.[44]

Turning to domestic affairs, laicism was still an important issue in Savoie, even in the late 1920s. Combatting the "clerical menace" was a topic that appeared frequently on the front pages of Le Réveil des Gauches. Cot had avoided the clerical issue in the 1924 campaign. However, he had been a speaker at a meeting of Catholic prelates and lawyers in February that same year, where the topic was the state and the Associations. Cot's presence was testimony that he was respected in Catholic circles; what he said was testimony to his conciliatory attitude toward church-state matters, to his own tolerant laicism. Cot was quite willing to conciliate the church in its role as an institution of private religious belief, but the lines of permissible activity were drawn by the law of the Republic and the abjuration of politics. Cot thought that these lines had been violated by partisan French Catholics in 1925 and 1926 in regard to the associations and Herriot's Alsacian policy.[45]

"Laicism," said Cot, the radical campaigner, in 1928, "can still be the rallying cry of the Republic because it remains, despite all

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[44]Le Réveil des Gauches, 7 April 1928.

[45]Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 March 1928.

else, the touchstone of republicanism." The freedom to believe or not believe, to worship or not worship, had long been established and was hardly at issue in postwar France. The importance of laicism in 1928 lay in its vigilance against the influence of the church in secular politics, the threat that Cot called clericalism. Not all priests were, categorically, adversaries; some were "heirs to the tradition of the petit curé who had sat with the Third Estate in 1789." But he was adamant when he said, "what we will not agree to is the church putting its force in the service of a political party . . . a condition that transforms the priest into an agent for electoral propaganda."[46]

What Cot said in 1928 to electors who wanted their deputies to do battle with the church would not have been acceptable to his Catholic audience in 1924. They would have thought his position radically changed, and it was, but more in tone and political intent than in principle. The absolute sovereignty of republican law and the church's abjuration of politics remained constant; he had adjusted their use to the circumstances.

Cot's coverage of economic and social questions was broader than it had been in 1924 and reflected the position on issues established by the Radical-Socialist congress in October 1927 in its "Party Declaration" and the regional interests of Savoyards. In brief, Cot developed these lines of thought. The financial crisis had resulted from the misconceived financial policies of the Right, which had relied on loans rather than taxes on war profits and capital gain, and on the financial obstructionism of the Two Hundred Families and their associates. The

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[46]Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 March 1928.

program of redressment carried out by Poincaré since 1926 has been applauded by all, even the Socialists, but it had not gone far enough and more was needed. Free trade was preferable to protection, but France alone could not change the world's high tariff barriers, and as long as they existed they should serve agriculture as well as industry. Taxes, in their amount and in their collection, must be made more equitable and their use turned toward social amelioration rather than military uses. The government must take active steps to improve both economic opportunity and the quality of life in rural France. All levels of education should be open to all children of talent through the state subsidized ecole unique.[47] Veterans' needs should be given generous and immediate attention. And he endorsed the full "Minimum Program" of the CGT, including the eight hour day, unemployment and health insurance, retirement and social assistance.[48]

Since 1924, Cot's general interest in syndicalism had broadened and developed precision, submerging and co-oping any earlier technocratic influences. He never abandoned the reformist inclination or the reliance on the skill of experts, particularly in technical matters, but in the transition, the expertise of the technocrat was transformed into the experience of the syndicalist, and Cot moved, not toward an elitist bureaucracy, but toward a labor-oriented, administrative as well as political democracy. As an expert in public law, he had been engaged by the Ministry of Interior in a study of administrative reform. His

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[47]The ecole unique was a Radical plan for single tract secondary education supported by state scholarships.

[48]Le Réveil des Gauches, 10, 17 and 24 March, 7 and 14 April 1928.

conclusions and recommendations utilized the syndicat des fonctionnaires as the primary agent of reform and drew warm commendation from Léon Jouhaux and the CGT.

In Savoie in 1928, the Union des Gauches operated behind the scenes only. Cooperation between Radical-Socialists and Socialists muted direct attack by either against the other and provided republican discipline for the second ballot, but the Socialists ran their own candidates and the Radical-Socialists tried to win the support not only of the Left but of the Center-Left, from those who were sympathetic to Poincaré and might be convinced that he shared common ground with Radical-Socialists but who were not sympathetic to the Cartel of 1924. Cot ran as a Radical-Socialist. Responding sharply to charges that he was a cartel-liste. He said: "I am not a candidate of the Cartel . . . I present myself to the voters as a Radical-Socialist with the endorsement of my party and the confidence of 1,500 militants . . . ." He accused the Right of wounding him by association with past failure. "They bring out . . . the scarecrow to the sparrow."[49] Indeed, La Croix de Savoie, in a tactic we saw in the Hautes-Alpes in 1924, said that Cot and the other Radical-Socialist candidates, Carron, Borrel, and Falcoz, were all candidates of the Cartel, while "Delachenal and Richard, Jorioz and Rambaud are the only Republican candidates."[50]

In the second district, Cot's opponent on the Right was Delachenal, who still chose not to meet Cot in open debate; instead, his supporters, including a young industrialist from Paris and a local curé, appeared

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[49]Le Réveil des Gauches, 31 March 1928.

[50]La Croix de Savoie, 22 April 1928.

at Cot's meetings to challenge him. The Socialist candidate also generally attended Cot's meetings, where he frequently raised questions, to give "precision" to what Cot said, but not to oppose him. There was no controversy between Cot and the Socialists. On the extreme Left were the Communists, who, even though they commanded very little strength in Savoie, ran candidates. Although Cot was critical of Communism--"Communism and fascism are the two greatest dangers which menance liberty and the Republic"--he treated his Communist opponents with personal respect in public, pointing out only that Communism drew support from "malcontents"; it was the causes of popular discontent that must be removed. Le Réveil des Gauches paid them no attention. The threat was from the Right; the opponent, Delachenal.[51]

During the campaign, Cot's former association with Poincaré was made an issue. The Socialist, Papet, while stating that he was not criticizing Cot for his friendship with Poincaré, posed the question of choice, "only for clarification," he said. "If, tomorrow, you had to choose between your program and your friendship," he asked Cot, "how would you choose?" Cot answered unequivocally that his program, "precise and definite," was based on belief, not election maneuvering. "I will remain faithful to it even if it sacrifices the most precious friendship," he said. But he added that he was equally certain that Poincaré would never ask him to betray his principles.[52]

Despite his reference to program and principle, it is interesting to observe in Cot's "evolution" from Poincarist to Radical-Socialist

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[51]Le Réveil des Gauches, 24 and 31 March, 7 April 1928.

[52]Le Réveil des Gauches, 31 March 1928.

the influence of pragmatic opportunity and demonstrable success on his political choices. On one level, Cot was indeed guided by principle, by certain very broad feelings about the human condition. He was committed to the welfare of France, and in his own way was both a nationalist and a patriot. He was also an internationalist, committed to the peace of Europe and sincerely capable of seeing issues from other people's points of view. He was committed to individual freedom and to the equitable distribution of justice and prosperity. In the service of these broad goals, there were many options. A door closed; another opened. This flexibility in the pursuit of very general principles was more a response to events than to ideas. It was the successful results of Briand's diplomatic initiatives that attracted him more than the principle of detente. It was the opportunity to win an election that led him first to the Hautes-Alpes as a Poincarist and then to Savoie as a Radical-Socialist. It was his political associations that determined who his opponents were and how he interpreted political issues. "Circumstances have played a great part in my life," he said. "They have largely determined the general line of my development, and I owe more to them than to myself. Events rather than men have shaped me."[53] Indeed, circumstances did turn him one direction and another, though this does not discount the role of ideas, principle, and even of temperament in determining how he responded to events.

The 1928 election was a great victory for Pierre Cot. It also marked a high point in the strength of the Radical-Socialist party in

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[53]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 40. See also Cot, Le Procès de la République, 1:73 for translation variation.

Savoie, prompting Le Réveil des Gauches to state proudly that "the department of Savoie is probably the only one in which all the parliamentarians are Radical-Socialists."[54] The firm control of Savoie politics established between 1922 and 1928 by the Radical-Socialists though the Union des gauches gave Cot the constituency for his national career. The editorial policies of Le Réveil des Gauches gave him the political framework within which he would develop his own political ideas. By 1928, Cot's political evolution had led him to find common cause with the Radical-Socialists of Chambéry. They, in turn, had found in Cot a candidate who would defend their policies with articulate and energetic conviction. As Cot's national stature grew, the influence he personally exerted on the policies of the Savoyard Radical-Socialists increased. He became the political director of Le Réveil des Gauches and president of the Radical-Socialist group in Chambéry. But the base--peace and disarmament, social and labor reform, the regulation of capitalism, laicism, and the Union des gauches--was there, with or without Cot, and there remained in Savoie an indigenous source of support for these ideas, for which Cot became a national and international champion. The area in which he made the greatest contribution was foreign policy.

Perspective 1928

By 1928, Cot had brought together a perspective of French options within the Versailles system that reflected certain persistent assumptions regarding European peace, international law, and French security. These views were influenced by many things: the memory of his personal

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[54] Le Réveil des Gauches, 16 June 1928.

experiences at the front during the Great War; by his acceptance of the Wilsonian ideals for world peace through international organization; by his belief in the rule of law and the principles of justice and equity; by his temperamental humanitarianism that turned the pragmatic dictum of the greatest good for the greatest number into a new and secular commandment; by his optimism that accepted human society as potentially rational and benevolent; by his very practical awareness of the conditions and requirements for security; and by the personal influences of many men such as Henry Jouvenel, Edouard Herriot, Joseph Paul-Boncour, and Aristide Briand, who had developed ideas he came to share.

The war itself had left images imprinted on Cot's mind, images of the horrors of trench warfare, the endless and meaningless wasting of young lives, and the anguish of bereaved and displaced families. It all bespoke the "material and spiritual ruin" of a civilization gone beserk. The murder of a man was "an abominable crime," "the crime of Cain," and whether individual or collective, it was equally "odious." "Collective madness" was no less madness.[55] The Great War had demonstrated beyond any question that peace was indispensable if Europe were to survive. Cot had no doubt that should Europe be drawn into another such catastrophe--whether by folly or ignorance, stupidity or cupidity--European civilization itself would be the victim; there would be no victor; all would be among the vanquished. There was no rational alternative to establishing permanent peace.

Cot was certain that most people shared his desire for peace. He trusted the inclinations of prosperous people, given free expression

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[55] Le Réveil des Gauches, 17 March 1928.

through democratic institutions, to demand and support peace. Whether true or not, Cot believed that autocratic Germany had been more easily turned toward aggression in 1914 than had democratic France, and that postwar Fascist dictatorship and Communist revolution alike were more prone to make war than were democratic systems. There was, therefore, an essential connection between democracy, social and economic justice, and peace. This was a very popular concept, a myth among Wilsonians and most other peace advocates, and it served to fuel the engines of "democratic politics," in which the people were called upon to give their mandate for peace.

Cot did not think that the simple and popular desire for peace was enough, however. In the summer of 1914, an incident between two states had provoked a war that had engulfed all Europe because there had been no institutionalized means of regulating national conflicts, which were as inevitable in the histories of nations as they were in the lives of individuals. Cot also believed that the catastrophe of 1914 had been encouraged by the extensive preparations for war in which the European states had engaged before 1914. Military and diplomatic policies had reflected the adage that one secured peace by preparing for war. Cot rejected this premise as totally fallacious. To the contrary, one got what one prepared for, and in 1914 Europe was materially and psychologically prepared for war. Caught in the fever of arms escalation and alliance systems, Europe had responded to the incident at Sarajevo in terms of her preparation. These errors must not be repeated: Europe must establish the machinery to regulate national conflicts through arbitration and to prevent, through collective enforcement, the unilateral use of force.

Cot was not so naïve as to believe that conciliation and arbitration would work automatically. The League had to be more than a diplomatic forum; it had to have the authority and the capability of enforcement. Its effectiveness in rendering justice and enforcing its decisions depended on the willingness of member states to delegate to the League both the right and the means of enforcement. This willingness itself depended on the ability of the League to guarantee security and effectively control general disarmament. Only in a world where security was a collective responsibility, effectively enforced, could nations feel safe to disarm.

Cot thought that ideally French security ought to come from the League of Nations, but he recognized that in reality French security depended on the willingness of Great Britain to support France (and the League) and on France's own military posture. Because Cot believed that French force would never be adequate alone to restrain a rearmed and aggressive Germany, he also accepted the responsibility for national defense that fell to foreign policy and diplomacy. Whether one worked to limit Germany's ability to make war, which was the way of the hard-liners, or to eliminate her desire for war, which was the approach of the conciliators, the problem remained how best to secure and maintain a compliant Germany and a protective Britain.

In 1928 it appeared that these ends could be pursued best through further conciliation. The perspective with which Cot approached the work of conciliation was characterized by three strong commitments: to exclude independent action as a French security option and rely instead on the Locarno formula for immediate security; to establish arbitration, disarmament, and collective security through the League of

Nations; and to guard and extend allied cooperation through the Anglo-French entente. With these commitments and approaching his thirty-third birthday, Pierre Cot was admitted to the Chamber of Deputies in June 1928.

CHAPTER II

CONCILIATION AND FRANCO-GERMAN DETENTE, 1928-1930

In the summer of 1928, a general atmosphere of international good will and optimism pervaded Franco-German relations. Even where heavily laced with skepticism, there was support for the Kellogg-Briand proposals to outlaw war, and the signing of the pact in Paris in August 1928 presented both an atmosphere and an occasion for Stresemann to speak to the French about new concessions from France: a final solution to reparations, permanent evacuation of the Rhineland, and general disarmament. The warmth of the welcome that Paris accorded Stresemann, both officially and popularly, was a real and visible sign of the change that detente had brought to the French. It was this atmosphere rather than the substance of the pact that infected men with hope. It appeared as if hope might be justified when the Young plan and The Hague accords brought an end in June 1930 to two punitive conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. Toward the end of this period, however, disquieting events in Germany raised questions about the future. The death of Stresemann, the onset of economic crisis, and the radicalization of politics by Nationalists, Nazis, and Communists placed both Weimar democracy and detente in jeopardy.

When Pierre Cot entered the Chamber of Deputies in June 1928, he was named by the Radical-Socialist groupe[1] to the Foreign Affairs Commission, which considered the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Washington and

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[1]The term groupe refers to the party caucus in the Chamber.

London debt accords, the Young plan, and The Hague accords. Cot worked to secure the ratification of these. In his work as parliamentary advocate, Cot exhibited vigor and eloquence, a talent both for legal precision and for maneuverability within the law, a sense of progress taken in small steps, and a clear understanding of the dynamics of conciliation. Other people frequently misunderstood and misused conciliation, thinking it offered gratuitous concessions without concern for the negotiating process or the essential quid pro quo. Cot did not make this mistake; conciliating was horsetrading, in which both equity and reciprocity were essential. Conciliation was more than a willingness of attitude; it was a skilled diplomatic procedure in pursuit of specific goals within specific limitations.

In addition to his work in commission and Chamber, Cot was appointed to the French delegation to the League of Nations, where he established personal contact with world diplomats and political leaders, including Anthony Eden, Edouard Benes, and Maxim Litvinov. Believing that the force of popular opinion did influence the course of government policy, he undertook an active speaking schedule before party militants and public interest groups throughout France. His words were reported in both the press of the Left and the opposing journals of the Right, and in Savoie he wrote regularly for Le Réveil des Gauches. Throughout the 14^{e} legislature, the confidence of the Radical-Socialist leadership in the young legal expert from Savoie increased and his future appeared very promising.

During this same period, Cot's foreign policy perspective remained stable; he believed that Briand pursued the means of peace (that is, arbitration and conciliation, collective security, and disarmament)

through detente with Germany and the League of Nations. At this time there was no need to consider collective security apart from its integral relationship to the League and world order. Concurrently, Cot saw defense policy as serving and being served by foreign policy; that is, he assumed that while detente and concilation with Germany were functioning, France's defensive posture would be enhanced by diplomatic measures that lessened Germany's intent and restricted her capacity to make war, the first by removing the cause, the second by imposing arbitration and collective security against violations of peace. He based his perspective on the assumption that current levels of French military preparation were more than adequate to defend the nation's security and so left a margin for use in negotiations. In 1928 and 1929, Cot was his party's spokesman on the floor of the Chamber in the debates on funding frontier fortifications. Throughout the period, he freely criticized the organization and administration of France's military programs, believing that better planning and more effective execution would bring France greater security for her franc.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact

During the summer of 1928, diplomats and government circles were occupied with the terms of the pact to outlaw war, the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Briand had approached the United States in 1927 to engage it in bilateral treaty commitments to non-aggression. While constituting no security, except from each other, such an agreement might open a way to renew United States commitments to European peace keeping. The United States, for its part, had shifted the agreement to a general and multilateral statement renouncing war "as an instrument of national policy."

France agreed to the renunciation of war, but she was hard put to preserve a wording that did not restrict the right of legitimate self-defense or obligations of mutual defense for which commitments had been made. A satisfactory wording was reached finally, and Briand accepted the pact for what it was, a symbol of popular good will.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact came before the Foreign Affairs Commission in January 1929 and was released to the Chamber for ratification in February. There was little danger that it would be defeated, yet Cot, who was its rapporteur,[2] presented a vigorous defense. The reason is not difficult to discern. The Chamber debate opened a forum for him, and as he spoke of the strengths and weaknessess of the pact at hand, what he was really setting out was a criterion for peace through international law. On the one hand, he spoke of legal mechanisms for the League of Nations (compulsory arbitration, precise definitions of aggression and legitimate defense, and automatic sanctions). On the other hand, he spoke of the role of the United States. Clearly, he had passed beyond the Kellogg-Briand Pact itself and placed its value not in what it did, but in what it might lead to. It was reported in the Times that Cot, "one of the best speakers in the Chamber, . . . was listened to with patient attention."[3]

Cot endorsed the ideal of outlawing war but he thought that it had no practical value if expressed in general rather than specific

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[2]The term rapporteur refers to the commission member responsible for formulating the defense for a piece of legislation and presenting it to the Chamber.

[3]J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14[e] (1929), 677-681; Bonnefous, Troisième République, 4:340-346; Times (London), 2 March 1929.

terms. The general interdiction of all war was a concept that Cot found "seductive." The renunciation of war should be "precise," particularly in regard to the right of legitimate defense and the right, indeed the obligation, to maintain preexisting treaties of guarantee, such as the Locarno accords. Even the concept of "defensive war" could be dangerous without further precision, for "all soldiers," he said, "fight a defensive war, or at least they believe they do." Legitimate war, Cot suggested, was waged to enforce the decisions of arbitration or against a power that refused to arbitrate; that is, legitimate war was the application of military sanctions within an established structure of international law, or, if sanctions failed, by forces committed through regional agreements to collective security.[4]

Cot said that in matters of arbitration and sanctions, the pact could strengthen the League Covenant. The signers of the Treaty of Versailles were already committed to the principle of peacefully regulating conflicts. Legal conflicts were put before a tribunal of arbitration, the decisions of which were binding. Political conflicts, however, were put before the Council of the League, the decisions of which were binding only if unanimous. Without unanimity, all parties recovered freedom of action after three months and could then legally resort to war. If, however, powers whose conflicts were submitted for arbitration were also signatories of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, they would have no legal recourse to war, even if a unanimous decision were not taken in the Council. If war were undertaken in such a case, the League

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[4]Le Réveil des Gauches, 1 January 1929; J. O. Chambre Débats. 14[e] (1929), 677-681.

could impose sanctions. Cot believed that closing this legal loophole to war was extremely important because it gave clear authorization for the use of sanctions.[5]

Cot also hoped that the pact carried with it the implication of American willingness to participate in European peace keeping.[6] Washington consistently and categorically rejected such commitments, but the influence of U.S. diplomatic personnel and of American economic and financial interests made the U.S. a frequent and often determinant factor in western European affairs. To Europeans who were committed to peace and democracy the logic of American participation was self-evident, even when the weight of American economic influence was a source of apprehension. This was in part encouraged by individual and prominent Americans in high diplomatic, governmental, and financial places who expressed their agreement with the European logic. Europeans failed to understand, however, that the popular support for isolation was genuine and the political costs to any administration of altering that consensus prohibitively high. Yet, Europeans, looking for solutions to their own recurring crises, looked across the Atlantic for changes in administration and policy that would bring official American commitment to European peace, economic stability, and political moderation. When Cot said, "America has sanely returned to a concern in European affairs after having abandoned the Treaty of Versailles and the League," it was not so much a statement of fact as a call for repentance.[7]

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[5]Le Réveil des Gauches, 1 January 1929.

[6]Le Réveil des Gauches, 2 March 1929; J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14e (1929), 677-681.

[7]Le Réveil des Gauches, 28 August 1928.

Perhaps not quite candidly, Cot and other advocates, including Joseph Paul-Boncour, offered the renewal of U.S. participation in Europe as reason for supporting the pact.

Cot urged the Chamber to ratify the pact, but he knew that passing laws and declaring war outlawed did not, in fact, eliminate war, and he urged France to go beyond the Kellogg-Briand Pact: to accept the General Act of Arbitration, which provided the mechanism to implement compulsory arbitration under Article XII of the League Covenant; to determine a precise definition for legitimate defense; and to establish specific sanctions in support of the pact. Only by excluding war as both a legal and a practical option could world peace be assured.

In 1929 Cot looked to the League of Nations to establish that legal order. Henry Jouvenel, French delegate to Geneva and author of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance (1923), had long worked to strengthen the security features of the League. He expressed great satisfaction with the manner in which, "by skillful transition, Cot reattached the Pact of Paris to the Pact of Geneva,"[8] and in September 1929 Cot was appointed to the French delegation to the League. There he was assigned to the First Commission (matters of constitution and law), which undertook to reconcile the pact to the Covenant. Before the commission, Cot said that the wording of the two needed to be brought into line, not for legal but for political reasons. The Kellogg-Briand Pact went further than the Covenant; "the man on the street . . . must not be faced with the paradox of a League of Nations whose members in 1928

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[8] Le Réveil des Gauches, 23 February 1929.

solemnly declared that they absolutely renounced recourse to war and whose charter, notwithstanding, still permits recourse to war."[9]

The dual threads of collective security, promising not to engage in war and promising to defend in case of war, were clearly evident in Cot's treatment of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. In the Chamber, his insistence that France be free to defend and be defended was fully consistent with French thought generally, with his own conceptualization of peace as a condition of quality that someone had to be willing to defend, and with the actual conditions of the international scene at the time. This was not in contradiction to the first, for the promise not to engage in war could become truly meaningful only when effective responsibility for collective security had been assumed by the League of Nations, making other forms of security unnecessary. Now the League had the opportunity to take a step toward closing out legal options for national uses of war. It was a small step, to be sure, but that was how Cot viewed progress, in small steps.

The General Act of Arbitration

Another single step offered during this same period was the General Act of Arbitration. Arbitration treaties were common between European states. France had them with various states, including one with the United States and one concluded with Switzerland at the time of the Free Trade Zones negotiations in 1923-1924. The General Act of Arbitration resulted from the work of the Committee for Arbitration

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[9]League of Nations, Offical Journal. Special Supplements. No. 75. Records of the Tenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly, Plenary Meetings, Text of the Debates (Geneva, 1929), 167-168.

and Security, created by the League Assembly in 1927, to provide models for nations wishing to enter into such agreements with each other. From this, they moved to creating a comprehensive treaty of arbitration that removed disputes from the League Council, that is from political decisions, and placed them either in the hands of the Permanent Court of International Justice, which was given jurisdiction in all legal cases, or in the hands of Conciliation Commissions and Arbitration Tribunals, which were the instruments of first instance and final determination for non-legal disputes.[10]

Cot had followed the work of the Committee for Arbitration and Security with great interest, believing that each success in this area brought the climate for disarmament closer. After the Assembly passed the General Act of Arbitration at the end of its Tenth Session in September 1928, Cot said that France must sign the act. He pointed out that signing committed France to no new obligation beyond what she had already accepted in principle in Article XII of the League Covenant. Signing did give France the opportunity to endorse and participate in the implementation of peace, however, and Cot felt that arbitration, security, and disarmament were so closely related that "to resolve one was to prepare the resolution of the others."[11]

The Chamber took the matter under consideration in June 1930, but it did not draw much attention at the time. Cot spoke for the Radical-Socialists along the lines that he had developed earlier, and the Chamber

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[10]Alfred Zimmern, The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918-1935 (New York, 1939), 384-387.

[11]Le Réveil des Gauches, 29 December 1928.

ratified it 578-12.[12] One difficulty did arise. The Chamber attached a reservation, reflecting its mood at the time of the evacuation of the Rhineland, that endorsed the continuance of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Germany, which by this time was thinking ahead to territorial and economic revisions in that treaty, refused to sign the General Act of Arbitration so long as the French maintained their reservation. Consequently the procedures for arbitration that were intended to facilitate peaceful treaty revision where warranted became the first battle and a stalemate in that struggle. Cot understood the pressures coming from both sides of the Rhine, but he thought that neither of them justified putting arbitration in jeopardy.[13] For it was arbitration that established the legal criteria for sanctions and collective security.

Cot's League activities and his support for the General Act of Arbitration were closely related to his advocacy of Franco-German detente as a means of strengthening the international order and establishing collective security. In Paris, the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, 27 August 1928, presented both an atmosphere and an occasion for Stresemann to speak to the French about further conciliation in regard to reparations and an early evacuation of the Rhineland. In September, Briand and Poincaré reached agreement with the Germans and Belgians to undertake talks, which resulted in the Young plan and The

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[12] J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14[e] (1930), 2459-2460.

[13] "Conference de M. Pierre Cot, député: le désarmement, l'arbitrage et la securité." Unpublished typed script held by the Bibliotheque de la Fondation National des Sciences Politiques (Paris, n.d.).

Hague accords. The experts began their negotiations in January 1929. Slowly, deliberately, they worked in closed sessions to prepare the financial details of the Young plan to submit it with a proposal for the evacuation of the Rhineland to The Hague Conference in August 1929.

Allied War Debts

The question of reparations was a very sensitive one to Frenchmen. It remained the most important factor in the French measure of German compliance with the Treaty of Versailles, and it complicated the already difficult relations between France and the United States over the issue of French war debts. While the experts put their last efforts on the new reparations settlement to be submitted to The Hague Conference in August, the French government had to bring its own debt accords with the United States and Great Britain before the Chamber for ratification in July. These accords had been negotiated and signed in 1926 but had never been submitted for ratification because of the political liability of their great unpopularity. Now in the summer of 1929, a payment was due in August and ratification had to be faced. While the question of interallied debts was not directly related to either collective security or Franco-German detente, Cot thought that ratification was important because the decision would reflect to the world the attitude of France toward the sanctity of treaties, would affect the broad question of U.S. response to Europe, and might influence the negotiating position of France at The Hague.

Unlike the case of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, ratification of the debt accords was not at all certain. The government called for

ratification without reservations, but without some reservation, passage was doubtful. Cot's special role was devising a legislative formula that satisfied both the legal obligations of France to her creditor and the will of the Chamber to make the debt payment dependent on reparations. In the Foreign Affairs Commission Cot proposed two articles: one that ratified the Washington accord and a second, entirely independent of the debt accord, that stipulated that funds for the payment of the United States account would come from German collections. The second was identified technically by Cot as "an internal matter" which could be of no "official concern" to the United States. In addition, Cot emphasized that this position, even if unilateral, might have a certain "juridical value," should arbitration arise later.[14]

For Cot, the primary question was that of the sanctity of contract obligations, as binding on the signature of a nation as an individual. The international legal order depended on the maintenance of this principle, as did honor and trust. "The issue of law is clear," he said. The French debt had been contracted without any stipulation regarding German reparations, and even though many Frenchmen assumed that one would pay the other, there was no legal relationship between the two. Should France default in payment, the issue was equally clear. France was a party to treaties with the United States that made arbitration obligatory in cases of conflict. Should this issue reach arbitration, both legal and practical considerations would operate against France. The network of debtor-creditor relationships that involved all Europe made it virtually impossible that an arbitrated decision would release

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[14] L'Oeuvre, 2, 3, 4 July 1929.

France from legally established obligations. Yet, in case of conflict, France could not refuse to arbitrate without repudiating the entire diplomatic fabric of international law. To refuse to arbitrate would not only dishonor France, it would also leave her isolated.[15]

Cot concluded that France must responsibly subject herself to the legal order, but that order could be revised through conciliation. Cot suggested that France, after the present payment was made in August, pursue a modification of the Franco-American accord that would permit France to raise the question of the payment of German reparations in regard to the American debt in the future.[16]

In Cot's party, opinion was divided. Daladier, the party leader, said that "under no pretext, and not for any reason, will we ever admit that France can be brought to pay America and Britain one sou more than what is received from Germany"; he wanted the reserve clause included in the text to the law. Reactions to this statement were not wholly favorable and he rephrased his position. In the Radical-Socialist groupe a resolution was passed subordinating ratification to two conditions: 1) that the government formally accept the position of paying America only what was received from Germany, and 2) that it accept a statement endorsing what the Socialist leader, Léon Blum, called a "general liquidation of the war." It did not insist that the reservation be a part of the text of the law.[17]

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[15] Le Réveil des Gauches, 6 and 20 July 1929.

[16] Le Réveil des Gauches, 6 and 20 July 1929.

[17] L'Oeuvre, 3 and 4 July 1929. Blum's phrase referred to ending the conditions of indemnity and other penalties established by the Treaty of Versailles that maintained Germany as a defeated power.

In the Chamber, debate continued for ten days. It was with Cot's formula for a reservation separate from the text of the accord that Poincaré and government spokesman Paul Reynaud defended ratification. But when the final vote came, Cot voted, not on the issue and so with the government, but with his party and against the government. By the same token, many members of the majority, opposed as they were to ratification in principle, voted their loyalty to the Poincaré government. The government won in a vote of confidence by the precariously small margin of eight votes.[18] The entire affair demonstrated three different things about Cot's approach to policy and politics: he was conscious of principle; he was able to maneuver within the law to adjust principle to practical need; and he was willing to subordinate his personal position to party position. If there is a final summation of this issue, perhaps it lies in the fact that Cot was able to serve both principle and party. He provided the means by which Poincaré's government secured the passage of a measure he approved, while he himself stood loyally with his party in its opposition to the government.

The Young Plan and The Hague Accords

While the French Chamber argued the question of war debts, the technical work proceeded on reparations. The Young plan reduced the amount and extended the schedule of payments and commercialized the remainder of the debt. Cot spoke before the Foreign Affairs Commission and the Radical-Socialist groupe in June in defense of the plan.[19]

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[18]Bonnefous, Troisième République, 4:352-358.

[19]La République, 15 June 1929; L'Ordre, 30 March 1929.

In the early twenties, Cot had concluded that reparations were necessary, equitable, and legal, but by 1929 the conditions surrounding this issue had changed. Since 1924, Germany had scrupulously met the payment schedule set by the Dawes plan. Reconstruction had advanced more rapidly than most Frenchmen had thought possible. In 1929, Cot was willing to make additional, reasonable financial alterations in the terms of payment, although not in the principle of reparations. The obligation remained; the terms were negotiable.

More important than the financial adjustment, however, was his gratification that, under the terms of the Young plan, a return to a policy of force as a means of collecting reparations was no longer legally possible. Even if Germany defaulted, France would not longer have the right to occupy German territory, a condition that Cot believed improved the climate for peace and disarmament. Instead, a question of default would be placed before the League Council. "The guarantees of the juridical process have replaced those of force," he said with satisfaction. As is the case of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, Cot saw closed another loop hole where war might result from unilateral action.[20]

Cot also applauded the commercialization of the debt; with this, "victor and vanquished become creditor and debtor." It was this commercialization that established the basis for the German claim that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles had been fulfilled and that, therefore, under the provisions of Article 431, the evacuation of the Rhineland was in order. Cot agreed that there was "justice" in the German

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[20] J. O. Chambre. Débats, 14[e] (1930), 1415-1418; Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 April 1930.

contention that, with the fulfillment of the Young plan, Germany would have executed her responsibilities under the treaty. Cot recommended an early evacuation and explained the legal and practical advantages of this course of action. Legally, Article 428 of the Treaty of Versailles provided for the evacuation of the Rhineland by zones in 1925, 1930, and 1935. In addition, in Article 431, the treaty had provided for an earlier completion date, should Germany satisfy her responsibilities under the treaty. Practically, the German desire to "satisfy her responsibilities" in order to regain control of the Rhineland before 1935 offered France an excellent opportunity for fruitful conciliation.[21]

On the one hand, it served no purpose for France to hold on to the Rhineland. "It is shocking, contradictory, and absurd," he said, "to want to conserve a regime of security through military occupation," from which France had much to lose and nothing to gain. Not only did occupation place an unnecessary economic burden on France, it also "seriously obstructed the spirit of rapprochement." In the long run, it gained for France no real security. "Does one truly believe," he asked, "that continuing occupation until the 1935 deadline will dissuade the idea of revenge, if that is what Germany wants?" Not French occupation but the Locarno treaties guaranteed "the inviolability of the Rhineland frontier."[22]

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[21]Le Réveil des Gauches, 8 September 1928; La République, 5 July 1929.

[22]Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 April 1930.

On the other hand, France could benefit from negotiating an early evacuation by securing something in exchange. France ought not to give up the Rhineland without a quid pro quo. "If the time has come to treat with Germany on an equal footing, there is no reason to make her a present." Any agreement should reflect "a basis of mutual and reciprocal concessions and not a basis of gifts." It was "perfectly legitimate to negotiate . . . the evacuation of the Rhineland," and from that negotiation to secure for France a better guarantee of security than occupation had become: perhaps internationally controlled disarmament, even international control of the Rhineland after 1935, but something of value to France.[23]

Both matters, the Young plan and the evacuation of the Rhineland, were submitted to the powers for discussion at The Hague in August 1929. At a second conference in January 1930, accords were reached. Debate on these took place in the Chamber in March 1930. During the preliminary debate in the Foreign Affairs Commission, a question was raised concerning the interpretation of the phrase "liberty of act," that is, under what conditions might France no longer be bound by the agreement and regain her liberty of action. Tardieu assured the commission that he understood the phrase to mean action only within the context of international law; however, in response to a specific clarification on the Rhineland, he said, "the liberty of action of France remained entier, that is, absolute.[24]

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[23]Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 April 1930.

[24]Bonnefous, Troisième République, 5:29-33.

The Radical-Socialists were divided in their responses to Tardieu's initiative to secure passage of the accords as quickly as possible. Briand was still at the Quai d'Orsay and support for him within the party remained stable, but opposition to Tardieu was considerable and the party tried not to agree with him on anything. Cot, on this occasion, tried to keep the issue at hand separate from the party's quarrels with the premier. In this he shared his position with the Socialists, who decided to support ratification with the clear understanding that it in no way implied support for the Tardieu government. The Radical-Socialist groupe, meeting the day before debate opened in the Chamber, voted to support ratification (the vote was 33-11 with 15 abstentions, which means that only about half of the voting strength of the party, 125, took part), but they also voted unanimously to propose adjourning debate until Briand returned from London.[25]

The debate in the Chamber, which began on 27 March, was intensely partisan and prompted L'Oeuvre to report that it "honored no one--neither Parliament nor Government."[26] On the last day of debate, Cot, who had commented throughout, took the floor in an attempt to reconcile differences among potential supporters of ratification, especially between Herriot and Tardieu who were still arguing over the interpretation of the phrase "liberty of action." Cot said that he was in full accord with Tardieu and he felt that Tardieu was in accord with the Radical-Socialists, that is, "liberty of action" was intended to make use of international law, not to avoid it. The dispute between Herriot

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[25] L'Oeuvre, 27 March 1930.

[26] L'Oeuvre, 28 March 1930.

and Tardieu at that late date was an unnecessary revival of an issue that had already been settled. The vote to ratify was 527-38.[27]

Ratification of The Hague accords in March 1930 opened the way for the final evacuation of the Rhineland. During the long course of the negotiations, the right-wing press had cried hysterically that the early evacuation of the Rhineland was nothing less than the liquidation de victoire, the loss of everything for which France had fought and died, but in the end, practical men, even of the Right, realized that France gained no real advantage in holding the Rhineland only temporarily, whatever the date of evacuation. In giving it up, however, France secured none of the additional advantages for which Cot had hoped, that is, a quid pro quo in the areas of arbitration, collective security, or disarmament. On 17 June 1930, Briand announced the evacuation of the last zone. In a very real sense, both the quality and the momentum of detente developed by Briand and Stresemann through conciliation since 1924 had come to an end.

The evacuation of the Rhineland carried with it certain not unforeseen military consequences. It had been felt that the ability to move French troops into the Rhineland quickly and decisively gave France a factor with which to exercise some control over Germany. But the occupation had always been a temporary factor. Separatism had died a grotesque death in 1923. And France moved toward defensive military and diplomatic postures that made offensive movement against Germany less and less likely. Once the Rhineland was evacuated in 1930, France never

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[27] J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14[e] (1930), 1415-1418.

seriously developed any contingency plans to return to it apart from general mobilization.

National Defense

The ease and good conscience with which Cot urged the evacuation and the internationalization of security commitments reflected the certainty with which he viewed France's military posture. In the first place, he believed that the size of the French army was greater than it needed to be to perform its essential function, to defend the frontiers and protect the colonies.[28] Therefore, France could, for a quid pro quo, make concessions within reason. However, and in the second place, French strength would eventually diminish in proportion to German. Therefore, to be able to negotiate from a position of strength, France had to reach agreements on a system of international security before the advantage of her strength was lost. For these reasons, Cot viewed French defense policies during 1928-1930 primarily in their relationship to the diplomacy of detente and disarmament.

When Cot entered the Chamber in 1928, the nature and direction of France's defensive posture had already been established. Short-term reserve service, small corps of professional officers, strategies based on material rather than effectives, and frontier fortifications had all been accepted in principle. Short-term service had been created by steps; the term of service was reduced from two years to eighteen months in April 1923 and was reduced further to one year in January 1928. For good or ill, France had created "a training force not a

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[28] Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 March 1928.

fighting force."[29] The military had attached conditions to each reduction in service time to maintain the professional officer corps at adequate levels, but civilian politicians on the Left still thought there were too many professional soldiers, particularly field grade and general officers, and morale and numbers continued to present a persistent manpower problem. A problem for the future was the diminished number of men who would be available for each class between 1933 and 1938 because of the lowered birthrate during the last war. Shifting from an army based on effectives to one based on material had not yet begun. Anticipating the manpower crisis and the early evacuation of the Rhineland, military planners sought vast financial commitments to regional fortifications along the eastern frontier in the 1929 and 1930 budgets.[30]

The concept of frontier fortifications had been envisioned since the end of the war, but plans for their design and construction had been delayed by controversy within the Conseil superieur de guerre (CSG) over their strategic use. General Pétain had originally supported a plan for a continuous line of small fortifications utilizing terrain strategically. Generals Joffre and Guillamat wanted a plan for heavily

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[29]Philip Bankwitz, Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), 41.

[30]On the 1928 military system, see Laure, Pétain; Judith M. Huges, To the Maginot Line: The Politics of the French Military Preparation in the 1920s (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971); Richard D. Challener, The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939 (New York, 1955); General André Beaufre, "Liddell Hart and the French Army, 1919-1939," in Michael Howard, ed., The Theory and Practice of War: Essays Presented to Captain B. H. Liddell Hart (London, 1965); Jean Vial, "La défense nationale: son organisation entre les deux guerres," Revue historique de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, No. 18 (April 1955), 131-141.

fortified regions. Encouraged by Minister of War Paul Painléve to break the deadlock, Pétain eventually gave qualified support to a plan for regional fortifications with the anticipation that a continuous line could be developed from these later. Once committed to the regional plan, Pétain drew up the specifications with great care and attention to the terrain, and apparently in doing so changed his mind about a continuous front, concluding that the smaller installations could not provide adequate protections for the reserve troops who would be asked to defend them. In the meantime, the continuous front had found another champion in the CSG, General Degoutte, and the public debate continued. When the first request for funding was included in the 1929 budget, the plan and specifications drawn up by Pétain had not yet been approved by the Ministry of War or the Council of Ministers.[31]

In November 1928, Cot was selected by his party to study the question and to speak for them in the budget debate. In his speech before the Chamber, Cot asserted categorically that the principle of frontier defenses was not an issue. "All are in accord that frontier defenses must be maintained in time of peace." In addition to the obvious military justifications, there were also diplomatic and popular reasons for establishing these defenses. "They illustrate," he said, "the clearly defensive nature of the French security system . . . [which] . . . has no goal other than the defense of her own soil." They also establish "a feeling of security among the people of the region." The questions that he raised were those of funding and design. He opposed general funding for a program the specific design of which had not yet been

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[31]Laure, Pétain, 346-350.

authorized and the cost of which was therefore undeterminable. "We do not know, even approximately, how much it will cost to execute the entire plan." Financial experts said that the French economy could not support unlimited defense credits, and Cot was concerned that if everything were spent on an excessively expensive program of frontier defenses, there would be nothing left to accomplish the transition from men to material .[32]

Apart from the need for careful financial planning, there was also the question of technical effectiveness. "It is a secret to no one that the technicians are not in agreement," he said. Furthermore, many men who had fought in the last war were dissatisfied with the plan, which presently proposed large, permanent fortifications with fixed weapons emplacements, with a limited firing range beyond which the enemy might move freely. On the other hand, "there was another concept for frontier defense, that of the continuous line of fire," that is, small bunkers, dug into the natural terrain, located irregularly. Such defenses would be "susceptible only to zone firing." From this debate, Cot became recognized as the spokesman for la thèse des combattants, and he urged Painléve to "listen to the men who commanded and fought at the front," and to base the Ministry of War's position on their experience rather than on the theories of "authorities." "One mustn't confuse authority with competence," he said. Despite the popularity of this idea in some quarters and the support it received politically

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[32]Le Réveil des Gauches, 28 November 1928; Le Temps, 30 November 1928; J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14e (1928), 2970-2972.

for being "democratic," it was the original regional fortification plans that were authorized and funded in the budgets for 1929 and 1930.[33]

There is no reason here to consider the military merit of either the programs Cot supported or those he opposed (they both had their defenders and their critics and the success of either depended as much on execution as on conceptualization). What is important to consider is how Cot's position was related to French security, international order, and collective security. First, Cot was deeply interested in questions of defense and security and his party thought him sufficiently expert to assign these to him. Second, Cot accepted a defensive posture for the French army as militarily necessary and diplomatically effective. Third, his criticisms of military programs were based on estimates of defensive needs and French strengths that were less and more respectively that the estimates of the CSG. And fourth, Cot's criticisms generally fell into one of two categories, those things that were unnecessary and those that were ineffective. In his own mind Cot believed he was serving the best interests of both French security and collective security.

Traditional left-wing suspicion of the military establishment aside, Cot genuinely believed that the policies he proposed were superior to those he was criticizing: that policies of material were superior to those of effectives and that the reserve army, properly trained and organized, was France's most workable defense force. He thought that the term l'armée de metier should rightfully refer not to men who pursued

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[33] Le Réveil des Gauches, 28 November 1928; J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14e (1928), 2970-2972.

"military careerism," but to those who were trained in their combat roles, whether reservists or men of long-term service.[34]

Cot believed that the key to developing a modern army for effective security lay in the relationship between reserve training and the technology of material. The Great War had demonstrated to him that the initial training of a reservist could be accomplished in less than a year, but maintaining a reservist's technical competency over many years during peacetime required subsequent reserve training. Unfortunately, Cot thought that the reserve program fell short of these technical needs. Speaking before the Chanber in 1929, he said, "most reservists arrive at camp with the best intentions," ready to update their skills and knowledge. Instead, they were subjected to drills and parades, to makeshift facilities and substandard conditions, to routine rather than training, to programs that were obviously ill-conceived, ill-prepared, and wasteful of time and money. He urged the Chamber to exercise responsible control. Effectiveness was not automatic but required preparation and perpetuation.[35]

When Cot said, "I have always been a partisan of national defense,"[36] he was being honest. His criticisms of the military establishment were compatible with his view of national defense; he saw no conflict between his demand for reducing military appropriations, on the one hand, and French security, on the other. In his view they were mutually supportive. The key was less money, better spent, for greater security. In

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[34] J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14e (1929), 4216-4221.

[35] J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14e (1929), 4216-4221.

[36] Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 December 1931.

addition, he never forgot the responsibility that the French military had delegated to the diplomats and the realization that French security lay as much with the international order and France's diplomatic posture as with her army. Cot believed that it was general and controlled disarmament, not armed force, that guaranteed peace.

From June 1928, when Cot entered the Chamber, until June 1930, when France completed the evacuation of the Rhineland under the terms of The Hague accords, the route to disarmament appeared to lie through the conciliation of German dissatisfactions with the Versailles system. After the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Young plan and The Hague accords had done just this, or so Cot thought. Each had removed some area of national behavior from arbitrary and unilateral action by establishing the legal conditions under which acts of war, refusals to arbitrate, payment of reparations, and demilitarization of the Rhineland were subject in theory to juridical settlement by the League of Nations. But theory was not practice, not yet, and Cot was painfully aware of the absence of an enforcement capability. Without it, the rule of the law was meaningless. Residing as it did then in the Council of the League, it was subject to the politics and the unanimity of the member nations. Cot hoped eventually that arbitration and sanctions both would be made automatic and the League given a military capability for enforcement. But these things could come only through further agreement among sovereign nations. This made the continuation of Franco-German detente of paramount concern to Cot.

Crisis in Germany

Detente had relied on the good will and good sense of Weimar democrats to be responsible as to the extent and tempo of the changes they proposed in the Versailles system and to exercise restraint on rabid nationalism, keeping the German political system out of the hands of extremists. But behind the optimism of detente, the intransigence of German nationalism and industrial conservatism lay unchanged. Nationalists, Junkers, the Reichswehr, industrialists--many among these sought to reverse not only the peace settlements but, Weimar democracy as well. The victory of Germany's Social Democrats at the polls in 1928 and the coalition that supported Hermann Müller were threatened almost immediately by divisions and shifts all along the political spectrum, and the struggle within Germany over the issues of social democracy did not admit of immediate solution. During 1929, changes began to take place in the conditions that had supported detente. Tremors of resistance had been felt all along from vocal nationalists and their industrial and military collaborators on both sides of the Rhine. In Germany their efforts became a crusade after the 1928 elections. The weakening of prosperity began to be seen early in 1929. The death of Stresemann in October and the American stock market crash put both the government of Germany and the economic-political crisis it faced in the hands of Heinrich Brüning in April 1930.[37]

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[37]See Erich Eyck. A History of the Weimar Republic, 2 vols. (New York, 1970); S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy: A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933 (New York, 1946).

Within Germany, the fight against the Young plan had been far more bitter and intense than in France. When the last French soldier left the Rhineland on 30 June 1930, German responses were arrogant and hostile. They indulged in the myth that this was an action that rightfully should have come in the mid-twenties after Germany had been admitted to the League but had been withheld by French obstinance. There were anti-French demonstrations by Stahlhelm troops in the Rhineland itself and an official government proclamation on 1 July 1930 wholly ignored any mention of Stresemann or the policies of conciliation and detente he had built. Observation by Britain's ambassador, Sir Horace Rumbolt, while reflecting his own prejudices, expressed feelings shared by many Frenchmen: "The manifesto appears to me to exemplify two of the besetting weaknesses of the German character, ingratitude and tactlessness."[38] For either Frenchmen or His Majesty's representative to have expected gratitude from Germans at this time was an arrogant misreading of human nature. For Germans to fail in tact at this crucial point was equally arrogant and, whether mistakenly or not, led to the conclusion on the other side of the Rhine that Germany had lost interest in serious conciliation and detente.

Among Frenchmen, especially among conciliators, there was profound disappointment in the German reaction. Some Frenchmen were disillusioned; some said "I told you so." André Tardieu, who had been premier since November 1929 and had worked hard for both the Young plan and The Hague accords concluded that conciliation had reached its outer perimeters and that conditions supporting further concessions from France

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[38]Quoted in Eyck, Weimar Republic, 2:263.

no longer existed. Pierre Cot did not agree. He was not yet ready to abandon conciliation or Weimar democracy. To the contrary, he contended that conciliation was more important than ever now if peace and democracy were to be saved.

In 1930, Cot still regarded collective security as the broad purpose and general result of international organization. The instruments of collective security were in the first instance legal and only secondly military: international law supported by an enforcement capability in the League of Nations. The hope that Cot had held at the time he urged the ratification of the Kellogg-Briand Pact was that an atmosphere of conciliation would produce agreement on arbitration, sanctions, and disarmament. This hope had not been fulfilled. The terms of the Young plan and the resulting early evacuation of the Rhineland, viewed by Frenchmen as concessions, were accepted by Germany instead as rightfully due and only the beginning of a program of revison in the Versailles system that would, in fact, restore Germany to a pre-1918 position. Continuing conflict over war debts and expanding economic crisis served to complicate the search for political and diplomatic solutons to the problems of League jurisdiction, the German question, and disarmament. The dual threads of collective security--the promise not to engage in war and the promise to defend in case of war--were maintained without conflict by submerging them in the search for a disarmament agreement. Cot believed that such an agreement would minimize the chances for war and give the nations of Europe the opportunity to seek solutions to the various economic, territorial, and ethnic questions over which wars might be fought and to establish the mechanisms for preventing war. To Cot at this time, preventing war was collective

security; he made no distinction between them but absorbed them both into his broad concept of organizing peace. In the end, war could be eliminated only by comprehensive European solutions and League effectiveness. For the moment, however, avoiding war still meant controlling Germany. Cot remained convinced that the best way to do this was to support German democracy with reasonable conciliation. The key to Europe's future lay in a satisfied Germany, but success depended on the cooperation of France.

CHAPTER III

CONCILIATION AND GERMAN NATIONALISM, 1930-1932

By the fall of 1930, it was increasingly apparent that the French and Germans held different views of the concessions made since 1924. The French had undertaken conciliation in the hope of maintaining the Versailles system; the Germans, in the hope of revising it. Each thought they were succeeding. Economic and political crisis in Germany in 1930 brought their differences sharply into the open and demonstrated that their expectations for the future were widely different. The intent of German policy, under the direction of Brüning, was "national freedom"[1] to end reparations, revise the Polish frontier, and reach an arms agreement that accorded Germany equality. Colonial and commercial revision awaited in the background. The method, pace, and extent of these goals were left uncertainly dependent on the future of Germany's political leadership. Brüning spoke only of peaceful method, but economic and political crisis spawned the threat that Weimar democrats might be replaced by insistent, impatient, and anti-democratic nationalists and militarists. Throughout 1930 and 1931, Cot worked to bolster the increasingly uncertain popular support for the continuation of conciliation. Despite the rumblings of German nationalists, in fact because of them, he continued to advocate conciliation as the best means of assimilating and stabilizing German demands and thereby protecting peace and security.

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[1]Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, 453.

During this period Cot was recognized, nationally and internationally, as a foreign affairs and defense specialists, an orator par excellence, and a spokesman for the left-wing of the Radical-Socialist party, a man the Times referred to as "the Radical party's expert on foreign affairs."[2] Writing voluminously and speaking throughout France, he demonstrated the need to assist Weimar democrats in countering the threats of crisis within Germany. At the Radical-Socialist party congresses in 1930 and 1931, Cot made the foreign policy report. That official Radical-Socialist support for Briandism remained strong during this period may be credited in large part to Pierre Cot.

In France, issues were increasingly dramatized in terms of Right and Left, to create a necessity for choice: "Briand or Tardieu!" Cot's rapport with Tardieu, which was always very thin, deteriorated and he was not reappointed to the Geneva delegation in September 1930. Pierre Laval, on the other hand, who became premier in January 1931, benefited from Cot's illusion that he was a man of the Left.

The diplomatic crises that broke upon France repeatedly during 1931 threatened to alter the status quo radically, and by the end of 1931, the future of detente, German democracy, and collective security all hung in the balance. Throughout these crises, Cot viewed France as still having a margin of military superiority with which to negotiate disarmament without posing a threat to the nation's security, and it was on this premise that Cot crusaded for peace through disarmament. As France prepared for the opening of the General Conference on Disarmament in February 1932 and the legislative elections in April and May,

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[2]Times, 11 June 1932.

Cot sought a broad popular mandate for disarmament in the 1932 election, a peace ballot. With this Cot hoped to salvage detente and German democracy and to reestablish the momentum for collective security through the League of Nations.

Crisis in Germany

On 14 September, Germany went to the polls and sent 107 Nazis to the Reichstag, where before there had been only twelve. Cot believed that the political Right in France bore some responsibility for the increased popularity of nationalism in Germany. "Without doubt," he said, "M. Briand does his best," but too frequently the majority worked at cross-purposes with him, advocating conflicting policies and coming to sound "more and more like the Action Française." In the case of the September election, Cot thought that Briand had been undermined by the military, which had conducted maneuvers along the Rhine frontier at the same time as the election, "a deployment of military forces as imposing as it was inopportune." The results should not be a surprise. "The German nationalists found in those acts and words material to sustain their propaganda." Our men of the Right are, in part, responsible for the triumph of Hitler."[3]

In October 1930, Cot was invited by the Comité Franco-Allemand[4] to speak in Berlin, where he observed first-hand the changes within

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[3]Le Réveil des Gauches, 4 October 1930.

[4]The Comité Franco-Allemand de Documentation et d'Information was formed in 1926, one of several organizations seeking to encourage understanding and detente on both sides of the Rhine. See Anthony Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936-1939 (London, 1977), 281-282, 297; Hayes, France: A Nation of Patriots, 335-336; Kuisel, Mercier, 72.

Germany, which the September election had signaled to the world. "Europe's future will be settled in Berlin this winter," he said. The danger lay in hunger and unemployment, in economic chaos, in the "collapse of democratic Germany." Economic suffering, particularly among young, middle class Germans was severe. "The success of Hitler and the Communists needs no other explanation . . . empty bellies make rebels, not soldiers."[5]

The success of either Hitler or the Communists would menace the peace of the world. German democracy "must master the forces of revolution"; Germany had to find solutions to its economic problems. Cot proposed a number of ways in which France could provide Germany with immediate economic relief: direct capital investment, encouraged by government regulation and guarantees;[6] large purchases of Germany's industrial product for much needed internal improvements (transportation, recreation and health facilities, industrial decentralization, and colonial development); and the controlled importation of German labor. "France has capital and equipment needs. Germany has labor, technical skills, and products." Anticipating resistance to the presence of German labor in France, he said, "a half a million German laborers spread over France and the colonies is far less a threat than those same laborers left unemployed in Germany to be aroused by Hitler."[7]

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[5]Le Réveil des Gauches, 25 October 1930; see also, Cot, "Retour d'Allemagne," La Revue des Vivants, No. 11 (November, 1930), 538-546.

[6]French capital had already been invested in Germany but indirectly, largely through British channels.

[7]Le Réveil des Gauches, 25 October 1930.

French action was important in providing both real relief and moral support to the faltering Weimar regime, but the economic crisis went well beyond the perimeter of Franco-German relations. "Let us acknowledge," he said, "that the work accomplished in 1919 was frankly bad from the economic point of view." Many of the problems of reparations, exchange, markets, and protectionism resulted from the economic and territorial terms of the peace. The peace itself could not be reconstructed; new and independent states and increased miles of economic frontiers could not be remade, but relief from high customs walls might be found in a European customs union that would permit rationalization of production and expansion of markets. The resistance of private economic interests to these solutions made it a political problem as well as an economic one, and, although European federation presented a rational vehicle for solving the economic problems, there was no possibility of such a plan being implemented at the present time. Europe had to have "a less perfect but more immediate solution . . . ." In order to reach this, France had to be willing to consider treaty revision.[8]

Treaty Revision

Cot thought that the French attitude toward revision was as important as the substantive changes. "We must be open to considering all questions, even though we may not be able to respond to all specific demands." To deny Germany all hope by refusing to enter discussions would be counterproductive; it would encourage Germany to abandon the

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[8] Le Réveil des Gauches, 25 October 1930.

machinery for revision in the League Covenant and to seek redress through some other means. Cot, the legalist, could not sanction unilateral violation of treaty obligations. Treaties, the terms of which became inapplicable or inoperative, should be revised, in part, to safeguard the very concept of law and, in part, to provide justice which was essential to peace.[9]

Cot himself dealt with the principle of revision, not its substance; he championed no specific German demands, although he did acknowledge that changes might have to be made in regard to central and east European frontiers, commercial outlets, and colonial mandates. The thing that was most important to him was that the procedure of revision be confined to the provisions of Article XIX in the League Covenant. There must be no bilateral negotiations and no attempt at general revision: the treaty could not be re-negotiated. Revision must come through the interpretive use of existing machinery, and he pointed out that there were ways--Poincaré had suggested them--by which to use the provisions for procedural decisions by the majority of the members of the Council present to reach agreement outside the condition of unanimity imposed by Article XIX. The moral weight of such preliminary decisions would lead, he thought, under pressure from world opinion, to official unanimity. For France to reject all treaty revision was to invite isolation and to weaken the League, two things that worked against her ultimate security.[10]

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[9]"Conference de M. Pierre Cot, député: le désarmement, l'arbitrage, et la sécurité."

[10]"Conference de M. Pierre Cot, député: le désarmement, l'arbitrage et la securité."

A careful examination of Cot's conclusions regarding conciliation and treaty revision shows that he had not abandoned legal caution for broad, unspecified revision. The point is that France must enter negotiations, she must demonstrate willingness to approach the subject. It was this that Cot hoped would give Weimar democracy an edge against the nationalists. He did not suggest that France gratuitously make concessions to Germany's revisionism, and he was not even certain that Germany could be brought to an adequate quid pro quo. What was needed at the moment was time--time to work out the problems of economic crisis and League authority--time that required democratic government in Germany--time that he hoped could be secured by engaging Germany in talk about revision. It was a bit of gamesmanship, perhaps, to keep the play open. For Cot, the immediate goal of concilliation and treaty revision was to salvage Weimar democracy. The long-term goal and the quid pro quo for revision was the strengthening of collective security in the League: arbitration, sanctions, and disarmament.[11] Disarmament came increasingly to be both the symbol and the currency of collective security.

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[11]See unsigned memorandum to Secretary of State from Paris mission, 19 December 1932, 851.00/1208, General Records of the Department of State Relating to France, 1919-1939, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington. Hereafter cited as State, R.G. 59, N.A. Somewhere between the immediate and the long-term, lay the very thorny problem of Poland, a French ally whose control of the Corridor was at question. The American attaché in Paris observed that Cot spoke in Germany in favor of treaty revision and in Poland in support of the Corridor; he concluded that Cot was "brilliant but erratic," and so the combination appeared to the Americans, and to the Germans and Poles. But in Cot's own mind, it was not impossible, it was not contradictory. His task was to get people to the negotiating table; what they did when they got there was another matter. He hoped that in negotiations the Germany and Poles could work out their differences.

Disarmament

At Geneva, the Preparatory Commission worked to complete a draft convention and to set a date for the opening of the General Conference on Disarmament. The German position contended two things: (1) that the Allied Powers were committed to general disarmament by intent in the preamble to Article V in the Treaty of Versailles and by confirmation of intent in the Clemenceau letter of 16 June 1919; therefore, (2) if the Allied Powers did not agree to general disarmament, Germany was morally released from her commitment to maintain the military restrictions established in Article V.[12] Although Cot believed that France and the other powers had made a moral commitment to seek general disarmament never, under any circumstances, did he accept the legality of German rearmament. He was convinced, however, that without general disarmament, Germany would eventually pursue rearmament, legal or not, and under those circumstances, who was to stop her?[13]

Establishing a basis for general disarmament had eluded the European powers; in part, because of Franco-British differences in their concepts of security, and, in part, because of the unresolved controversy between France and Germany over the question of equal status. In 1930, the demand for both equal status and treaty revision was general throughout Germany. Political differences existed not as to these goals but the methods of reaching them. The Nazi success in the September 1930 election was a comment on the degree to which Germans were

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[12]See John Wheeler-Bennett, The Pipe Dream of Peace (London, 1954).

[13]Cot, "Preparation au désarmement," L'Europe Nouvelle, No. 665 (8 November 1930), 1598-1599.

ready to abandon the methods of Stresemann. No German representative at Geneva after 1930 could accept anything less than equality. The French were just as adamant that they would consider no disarmament convention which did not include a reaffirmation of Germany's acceptance of the arms limitations established in the Treaty of Versailles. Finally in October 1930 the Preparatory Commission reached agreement on a draft treaty to serve as a basis for discussion at the General Conference on Disarmament which was set to open in February 1932.

While Cot urged France to take initiatives in disarmament, he never abandoned the shelter of control--control first. Whatever he recommended in the way of restrictions and limitations, it was always, in the end, subject to the entire security package. And there lay the dilemma in disarmament. Above all else, Cot wanted to prevent German rearmament. This, he thought, could be accomplished if the German demand for equality of status were met by some reduction of French arms that indicated an acceptance of the principle of equality in restriction. From this, Cot hoped three things would follow: an arms race would be avoided, international support for the French would be increased, and time could be gained for Germany's government to resolve the real problems, which were economic and political. To refuse this course assured that Germany would abandon the Versailles restrictions and seek equality through rearmament. In the arms race that would follow, France must lose, international support for France would be alienated, and German nationalism would be strengthened. Those that thought there was a third alternative--that France could chose to maintain the status quo--were in error. French arms superiority could not be maintained at current levels. Her options lay in choosing how it was to be altered: either by

abandoning it voluntarily and, hopefully, with concessions from Germany for controls, or by escalating it and eventually becoming outmanned and outarmed.[14]

Radical-Socialist Congress, Grenoble, 1930

In October 1930, Cot carried his battle for conciliation to Grenoble, where the Radical-Socialists were meeting in annual congress. As rapporteur for foreign affairs, Cot laid before his party a program of economic aid to Germany, treaty revision, and disarmament, in which he urged serious French initiative. Despite the disquieting events in Germany, he told them that conciliation was still France's best hope for peace. Even though the international scene might "incline one more to vigilance than to optimism," it was imperative that Europe not embark on an arms race. "Both law and security demand that Germany remain disarmed." However, if general disarmament were not reached and Germany chose to ignore the limitations of the treaty, what was France to do? "Will you ask of the country a new military and financial effort?" He did not believe that France had the resources to do so. A policy based on French military self-sufficiency, which Cot called a "policy of prestige," was "bluff," because France would not be able to sustain it if Germany decided to rearm. What was needed was not counter-provocation but conciliation in regard to Germany's legitimate demands.

Specifically in regard to disarmament, he warned against arranging the questions of arbitration, security, and disarmament "in three

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[14] 27e Congrès . . . tenu à Grenoble 9, 10, 11, et 12 Octobre 1930, 192-213.

steps to be taken one after another," as Premier Tardieu was proposing. Security and disarmament must exist together, "synchronized"; otherwise one is condemned "to turn in a vicious circle," resolving neither problem. France, to escape the circle, must submit two proposals simultaneously to the Disarmament Conference, one for security, the other for disarmament.[15]

The debate that followed showed that the Radical-Socialists were far from united. They disagreed on disarmament, on the principle of equality, and on the issue of French initiative. They disagreed most bitterly on treaty revision. Herriot, re-elected president of the party at the congress, categorically rejected it and had it removed from the agenda. Eventually the congress reached agreement on continuing conciliation with "an adequate program of national security."[16] The battle had not been lost but neither had it been won. From Grenoble in 1930 to Paris in 1931, Cot invested his energy and his skills in the task of convincing France that its best interest lay in applying methods of conciliation to the full spectrum of crises.[17]

Austro-German Customs Union

The question of whether or not the Chamber would continue to support Briand in conciliation was debated in November 1930 and again in

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[15] 27e Congrès . . . tenu à Grenoble les 9, 10, 11, et 12 Octobre 1930, 192-213. See also, L'Ere Nouvelle, 10, 11, 12, 13 October 1930; L'Oeuvre, 10, 11, 12, 13 October 1930.

[16] L'Oeuvre, 13 October 1930.

[17] When Le Réveil des Gauches published the "Party Declaration," it offered the following editorial comment, 18 October 1930: "Certain timid people found the ideas of Pierre Cot a little bold; it is unnecessary to add that we here approve them fully; France must give an example to disarmament. . . . The irrevisability of treaties . . . is a myth . . . Bergery exaggerated . . . we must move to peaceful revision."

February 1931. Endorsement, though extended with reservations by some, was broad and gave Briand what he called a position of "moral authority." This harmony was sharply disrupted at the end of the month when the proposal for an Austro-German customs union was made public. Once again the whole of Briandism was brought into question. The Chamber, reconvened after the Easter vacation, began debate on 3 May. Briand defended his policies: "I regret nothing, absolutely nothing." Herriot, speaking for the Radicals, defended Briand and rejected the Anschluss.[18]

Cot had long been aware of the economic factors in Europe's disorder. When Briand's proposal for European union was announced in September 1929, Cot spoke of the primary need for economic union. When he discussed national minorities, it was with the understanding that new frontiers at the end of the war had created economic dislocation.[19] When he talked about the causes and solutions for economic crisis in Germany, it was within a European, rather than a strictly national, context. The possibilities for such a European economic order were, if anything, worse in 1931, while the need for it was greater. Protectionism had multiplied, crisis had deepened. It was these very things that made Cot believe that such a union had to be pursued. Of course, opening the door to economic union also opened the door to treaty revision. Cot had already demonstrated his willingness to entertain treaty revision. He had left no margin for uncertainty, however, about acceptable method. It could only be through established League procedures.

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[18]Bonnefous, Troisième République, 5:79-83. For the unfolding crisis in Germany and the problems faced by Brüning, see Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, 447-460.

[19]Le Réveil des Gauches, 10 August 1929.

Never did he suggest or condone preemptive action from Germany. Establishing a bilateral customs union between Germany and Austria, no matter how warranted by economic conditions, was thought by most Frenchmen to be preemptive and in violation of the Treaty of Versailles.[20] One would have thought that Cot would have had something to say on this matter. He did not. In the Chamber, the Radical-Socialists, led by Herriot, voted with the government in rejecting the customs-union. Cot voted with his party.[21]

One may surmise that his silence may have reflected some ambivalency in his own thought: he could not avoid concern for German's economic plight and the precariousness of her democratic government on the one hand and the unquestioned sanctity of treaties on the other. From a practical view, Cot desired to foster commitment in both France and Germany to immediate bilateral economic cooperation and to initiatives for seeking a broader European economic order. Controversy over the Austro-German customs union could not have come at a worse time. He may have chosen to remain silent in a debate, the outcome of which in France was certain to be repudiation, and to conserve himself and his support for the battles to come. Certainly the actions he took subsequently demonstrated his desire to place French responses within

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[20]Germany and Austria claimed that the customs union made no political or territorial changes and so violated neither the Treaty of Versailles nor the Treaty of Saint Germain. But popular sentiment in Germany considered it happily a step toward Anschluss and most Frenchment unhappily thought so too. For this crisis in Germany, see Eric Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, 2 vols. (New York, 1970), II: 299-349. For the French response, see Geoffrey Warner, Pierre Laval and the Eclipse of France (London, 1968), 29-44.

[21]J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14[e] (1931), 2679-2681.

a broader European context. In June, he asked to interpellate the government regarding "the measures the government planned to take in order to avoid the economic isolation by which France was menaced and to substitute for a policy of disorder and demagogic protectionism a European policy leading to the organization of production and the distribution of goods."[22] Within two weeks, however, President Hoover preempted European action and offered a moratorium on all payments of reparations and war debts for one year.

Hoover Moratorium

During the spring, Germany's financial crisis had grown worse; beyond the view of the public, negotiations continued, pressures were applied and evaded, no solution seemed certain; and in Germany it became increasingly evident that the Young plan payments could not be met. On 20 June 1931, President Hoover proposed a one-year moratorium on all international debts. Cot, above all else, was concerned that the proposed moratorium become a part of a plan for European economic reorganization. It was not by what financial details the Young plan could be fulfilled that was important but "whether or not France was going to continue a policy of international collaboration." France could not refuse to accept the moratorium, as some suggested. Nor could France refuse to enter negotiations; the question was "on what basis will we negotiate?" The form of the Hoover proposal had "shocked" the French government, but Cot said that it ought not to be responded to

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[22] J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14[e] (1931), 2819. The term interpellate refers to the parliamentary procedure through which a member of the Chamber requests to deliver a formal question on policy to a cabinet minister for a response.

as an ultimatum. France had to continue to pursue the establishment of broad economic cooperation through which various problems, including aid to Brüning's Germany and allied debts, could be solved in a way that facilitated the solution of the most important problem--disarmament.[23]

Within the government, Laval and Tardieu disagreed; Tardieu wanted to reject the proposal but was prevailed upon to accept a compromise that asked the Germans to pay only the annuité inconditionnelle.[24] Laval, who was concerned lest France be left isolated in Europe, assured the Chamber that "the Young plan was a part of The Hague accord, which had been ratified by Parliament, and no infraction of that accord, no modification would be accepted by the government without the ratification of the Chamber." In the night session of 26-27 June, Laval read his response, in which France accepted the moratorium but not a change in the annuité inconditionnelle. Some in the Chamber wanted to attach reservations; Louis Marin wanted guarantees. Others wanted to postpone any discussion, but Laval wanted the Chamber's position established before he began conversations with U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Mellon. Herriot, speaking for the Radicals, said that his party would not support the government's response because it did not deal with the American disassociation of war debts and reparations. The Socialists,

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[23]J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14[e] (1931), 3229, 3399-3401.

[24]The Young Plan had commercialized the debt; within the annual payment, there were different credit features; the annuité inconditionnelle was the fixed annual charge.

however, decided to vote for it. Although most of the Radicals voted against the government, some, including Cot, abstained.[25]

Cot saw his vote, in which he said he had been "separated for the first time from . . . Radical-Socialist friends," as significant enough to warrant explanation in Le Réveil des Gauches. He thought that, like the Socialists, he "did not have the right to vote against the government" while it attempted to include France in "an operation of international solidarity." Savoyards, said Cot, had elected him to support peace, and he concluded: "I voted for peace."[26]

The crisis deepened during July. On the thirteenth, the German government closed the stock exchange. On the eighteenth Brüning and Curtius came to Paris to seek direct aid. The French were willing to extend credit but only if Germany would guarantee the note with her customs receipts and, in addition, would abandon for the term of the note, ten years, any discussion of treaty revision. The terms were unacceptable. In London, the conference of experts worked on the details of Germany's financial needs. In August Germany prohibited the export of capital. In September the Germans announced abandonment of the customs-union with Austria, only days before the International Court at The Hague ruled 8-7 against it.

The Manchurian Crisis

During the fall of 1931, economic crisis continued to deepen in Europe, beyond the control of any single political leader, be he Laval,

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[25]Bonnefous, Troisième République, 5:90-92; J. O. Chambre. Débats. 14e (1931), 3432.

[26]Le Réveil des Gauches, 4 July 1931.

Hoover, or Brüning. Beyond Europe, an incident in Asia brought home to Cot the dreadful importance of successful conciliation and raised serious questions about the authority of the League of Nations for collective security. Japan's aggression against Manchuria in September fell within the perimeter of League jurisdiction--both China and Japan were members--but the League took no decisive action. Cot called it "a crisis of confidence . . . a default of courage." The failure of the Council to act was inexcusable. It was a matter in which the law was clear and the procedures were well established in the Covenant. Whether or not there was merit in the Japanese demands, the responsibility of the League in regard to treaty violations was unambiguous. Even less relevant to the maintenance of law than sympathy for the Japanese case were the issues of Japan's role in European commerce and in Pacific defense. Japan had violated international law and for this, must be condemned. In addition, sanctions must be applied to end the violation. Cot believed that diplomatic and economic sanctions, fully utilized, would create sufficient pressure, but he also believed that their success required that there be serious military sanctions behind them, not as bluff, but as a guarantee that the authority of the League was real. Cot suggested that the French fleet be put at the disposal of the League in the Pacific, but Premier Tardieu "had laughed."[27]

Cot saw in the Sino-Japanese crisis a lesson to France regarding Germany and to Europe regarding the defense of law. In regard to Germany, it was an illustration of the need to act before the German

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[27]"Conference de M. Pierre Cot, député: le désarmement, l'arbitrage, et la sécurité."

question, too, became non-negotiable, for negotiations for revision could not be undertaken while treaty violations were flaunted. In regard to law, Cot thought it was a sad illustration that the League had not established, in over a decade, any initiative independent of its Great Power members and their own self-interests. Without League authority, the work of peace was hopeless. Cot preferred that if sanctions failed, it was because Japan refused to be influenced by them or even because other powers refused to honor them--in these cases one could see where violations lay--but not because the League itself was weak, self-seeking, or afraid to act. International authority was essential to world order, and world order, to French security.[28]

The implications that the Manchurian crisis held for Europe in regard to both collective security and conciliation were clear to Cot, but the certainty of the results of the League's failure was not so clear, for Cot did not assume that this one failure condemned the League never to succeed. Manchuria did not demonstrate to Cot the weakness of the principle of collective security, only the failure of its execution, and he still accepted the League as the agent of collective security. The problem was to make it work and that rested with the intentions of the Great Powers. It was not assumed in France or by Cot that the unfavorable postures of American isolation, British obstruction, or German ambition, not to mention French intrasigence, were fixed forever and beyond modification. There was always the hope that

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[28]"Conference de M. Pierre Cot, député: le désarmament, l'arbitrage, et la sécurité."

a case could be made to bring change, and it was for this change that Cot worked.

Saving German Democracy

During the fall of 1931, the crisis in Germany deepened. The obviously precarious position of the Brüning government prompted Cot to speculate on what might be expected if the Nazis did secure power. He did not believe, in 1931, that Hitler could resolve the economic crisis, but that he would himself be devoured by the same crisis that brought him to power. Hitler would not be able to put the unemployed back to work, for that required credits that Hitler would find even more difficult to secure than Brüning had. It would not be the Nazis who would be in power, he concluded, but the Communists.

> If Hitler comes to power tomorrow and the Communists the day after, the entire European social order will totter . . . and neither the bayonets and cannons of Maginot, nor the tariff policies of Tardieu, will save us.[29]

It seems evident that Cot was not fully aware of the impact of the Harzburg Front, which was forming in Germany in October and combining the forces of "all right-wing elements in a common drive to oust the Brüning cabinet and set up a 'truly national government.'"[30] Hitler's Dusseldorf speech was almost four months ahead in the unknown future. Cot had not accepted an inevitability about Brüning's fate, but he was feeling a tremendous pressure of time. These things did not have to happen. They could have already been prevented; they could still be prevented.

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[29] Le Réveil des Gauches, 17 October 1931.

[30] Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, 466.

It was this hope, that it was not yet too late, that prompted Cot to continue to press for conciliation in regard to reparations and disarmament and to build a strong popular mandate for them.

By late 1931 Cot had abandoned any support for the efficacy of continuing reparations. The questions that had been important at the end of the war and throughout the twenties were totally irrelevant to the crisis facing Germany and Europe now. There was no advantage to France in continuing the old policies; there was a chance, not a certainty but a chance, that abandoning reparations now would strengthen the Weimar government against the Nazis.[31] Cot sought to bring this advantage to the Brüning government. But most important was disarmament.

Defense and Disarmament

The general question of disarmament posed a problem with two faces to Cot. One called for responses to the defense policies of the French military; the other, for proposals for French inititatives in disarmament. While the military themselves did not engage in political battle, their desire in 1931 to return to two-year service provided an issue that fueled the campaigns of both those politicians who opposed disarmament and those who supported it. The army, under the leadership of General Weygand, chief of staff of the CSG, claimed that the number of men under arms had fallen below the level of security and would be diminished even further after 1933, when the wartime birthrate would be felt. Cot not only rejected the two-year proposal but expressed

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[31] Le Réveil des Gauches, 24 October 1931, 9 January 1932.

grave concern that the army was, in fact, sheltering irregular increases in funds. He urged the Chamber to exercise a more responsible supervision.[32]

Cot's position on defense had changed little since 1928. He still accepted the army's theories that the defense is superior to the offense and that France was secure behind the Maginot line. For himself, he still assumed that the Locarno accords guaranteed the Rhineland and that keeping Germany disarmed was more important than the size of the French army. He did not think his position in any way threatened French security, and he found no conflict in presenting at the same time his demands that "not a sou more"[33] be spent for the military and his ideas about national defense expressed in the following statement:

> I have always been a partisan of national defense. As long as the League of Nations is not sufficiently strong itself to assure the execution of its own decisions, as long as states do not submit their sovereignty to a principle of international justice, we must take the precautions necessary to guard against all surprise. The situation in Europe is sufficiently troubled that we ought not relax our obligation of vigilance and prudence.[34]

The key to continuity for Cot was still his belief in a small standing army, well trained and prepared to mobilize a massive reserve army, also well-trained, both of which in time of war would constitute a military machine based on technology and material, and which, faced with the ultimate challenge of German attack, would not fail in the defense

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[32] Le Réveil des Gauches, 3 and 10 January, 28 February 1931. See also Bankwitz, Weygand, 83-84, 87.

[33] La République, 22 November 1931.

[34] Le Réveil des Gauches, 11 July 1931.

of France. Between the present state of affairs and this ultimate challenge lay the hope that the challenge might be avoided. It was this on which Cot concentrated.

Questions of a German attack on France and the preparation of French defenses brought Cot back to his central thesis: to insure the future with diplomatic premiums paid to the Weimar democrats now in the currency of reparations (mentioned above) and disarmament. The General Conference on Disarmament was to open in February 1932. As that time approached, Cot's demand for reductions in French military appropriation showed an increasingly insistent tone; his arguments against military expenditures and for disarmament became less and less distinct; and one could almost say, during the fall of 1931 and the winter of 1932, that Cot's defense policy was disarmament. Cot brought his views on this matter before the Radical-Socialist congress in Paris in October 1931 as the single subject of his report on foreign policy.

A Mandate for Peace and Disarmament

Taking its name from the location of the meeting at the salle Wagram in Paris, Cot's Wagram program called for the general reduction and limitation of armaments; for these to be implemented progressively and simultaneously; and for them to be in rapport with the development of international security. He proposed that France introduce two plans at Geneva, one for disarmament as described above and one for security to include the implementation of arbitration and sanctions under the League and the organization of an international armed force to be at

the disposal of the League. In addition, he called for the internationalization of commercial aviation and the transfer of military aviation to the League force; the internationalization of railway and navigation facilities that might serve to mobilize and transport troops; and the interdiction of all private manufacture of arms. For all of these proposals, there must be working system of international control.[35]

To have implemented all of these proposals would have constituted a revolutionary change in the European order and in the sovereign character of the nation-state, but it is the implicit insistence on the entire disarmament package that provided the guarantees for French security that would permit her disarmament in the first place. Cot must have recognized the slimness of success, but it was that infinitely narrow margin that stood between peace and war, and his was the grand effort of one who truly believed that the fate of the world rested with what could be done with a popular mandate for disarmament in the May 1932 legislative elections.

Throughout 1931, Cot shared with his mentor and collaborator, Henry Jouvenel, a deep and thoughtful concern for building both popular sentiment and practical programs for resolving the economic crisis, stabilizing German democracy, and encouraging disarmament. Beyond their concern, they shared a commitment to act. Frequently speaking together from the same platform, they also collaborated in two efforts in the summer of 1931. In July, an organization called the Cartel de la Paix

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[35] 28e Congrès . . . tenu à Paris les 5, 6, 7 et 8 Novembre 1931, 370-388. See also L'Oeuvre 6, 7, 8, 9 November 1931; and L'Ere Nouvelle, 6, 7, 8, 9 November 1931.

was formed to provided coordination for a wide number of different organizations which had an interest in Franco-German relations, disarmament, and peace.[36] At Chambéry, Le Réveil des Gauches said, "Never has the effort . . . of all pacifists been more necessary." To them, "we open our journal . . . we are a party journal, but the need for union . . . is so important that if we find ourselves beside men who we fought yesterday . . . we offer our hand and assure our support . . . ."[37]

Behind the scenes, Cot and Jouvenel worked with Radical-Socialist Henri Fougère and Socialist Charles Spinasse to establish contact with leaders of the French economy and the syndicats and devise a plan for a Franco-German committee of governmental and industrial experts. Laval, who was to go to Berlin with Briand in September, agreed to work for a liaison.[38] While they were in Berlin, Cot observed with relief that both were "realists, who saw the future not in terms of declarations of intent but in terms of concrete action." He had faith in Laval but reservations about his government:

> I know Pierre Laval and I don't doubt his sentiments. He knows that the policy of Briand, and it alone, can permit us to organize peace . . . [but] one need only mention the speech made recently by Maginot to point out the duality of purpose present in his government.[39]

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[36]Binion, Defeated Leaders, 171. Le Réveil des Gauches, 15 November 1930, 4 July, 1 August 1931; La République, 1 February 1931; Le Radical, 2 August 1931. For earlier references to Jouvenel, see pages 19, 32, 56.

[37]Le Réveil des Gauches 4 July 1931.

[38]Le Réveil des Gauches, 3 October 1931.

[39]Le Réveil des Gauches, 3 October 1931.

Both Cot and Jouvenel also gave special attention to veterans organizations, both French and international,[40] and in November 1931, they joined with Lord Robert Cecil to organize a gigantic, week-long peace rally at the Trocadero in Paris. The last night of the rally was to bring to the platform a long list of speakers from among the prominent, including Herriot, Salvador de Madariaga, Jouvenel, and Cot. Instead, a melée, organized ahead of time, was triggered when Colonel de la Roche, leader of the recently formed Croix de Feu, demanded to be heard.[41] Cot was appalled by the spectacle but could only offer the consolation to his constituents in Savoie that "the nationalist attitude was specifically Parisian."[42] But, in fact it was not, as Cot would see demonstrated in his own re-election campaign in Savoie, which opened after the first of the year.

The Election of 1932

The interest for this study in Cot's 1932 campaign does not lie in what he said, as it had in 1924 and 1928. His position on the issues was already clear; nor did it lie in his style as a campaigner, which did not change. The campaign was of interest because Cot's economic thought had shifted further to the left during 1930-1931, bringing him closer to the Socialists and to supporting Socialist participation in a Radical-Socialist government, not as an election ploy but as a serious

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[40] Le Réveil des Gauches, 26 September 1931; Binion, Defeated Leaders, 151.

[41] Binion, Defeated Leaders, 151; Madariaga, Morning Without Noon, 183-185.

[42] Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 December 1931.

proposal; because in Savoie the election was a peace ballot on which the Radicals and Socialists could collaborate; and because Parisian nationalists sent a candidate into Savoie to defeat Cot.[43]

In July 1930, Cot had made a statement on private property and capitalism, matters that concerned the cartel relationship between Radicals and Socialists. Cot used the terms "capital" and "capitalism" to refer to income and profit from invested wealth and to great wealth in general, not to wages and income from productive labor. Those who tried to separate Radicals and Socialists on these issues missed the point, he said. Their positions were not identical, but they were not incompatible.

> The question is not of knowing if one is for or against private property. It is knowing if one thinks that in the present state of the economy, one is for or against the socialization of the means of production, for or against the capitalist regime.

In response to his own questions, he continued:

> In order to resolve that problem, the Radical-Socialists take a point of view wholly different from that of the Socialists. The basis of the Radical-Socialist doctrine is individualism. If the Radical-Socialist is a partisan of individual appropriation of the means of production, it is because he sees in that appropriation a means of assuring the respect and the liberty of the individual. It is, therefore, in the measure where the possession of the means of production permits the individual to be free . . . and develop himself that the Radical-Socialist is a partisan of private property. On the other hand, in the measure where that possession permits the oppression of the individual, the Radical-Socialist opposes it.

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[43]Cot's journal changed its title from Le Réveil des Gauches to Le Démocrat Savoyard, 2 January 1932. For Cot's campaign, see Le Démocrat Savoyard weekly from January through April 1932.

Cot said that Radical doctrine defended property, but with conditions: that property result from labor and protect the individual.[44]

Cot attacked "the excesses" of capitalism, which "everywhere menaced the liberty of the individual, the interests of the consumers, and the independence of the state." He compared the growth of monopolistic capitalism to that of collectivism, saying that "it had all the inconveniences . . . without the advantages." And taking his party's program literally, unlike most other Radicals, he called for the immediate nationalization of monopolies, especially the banks, in accordance with the program endorsed by both the Radical-Socialist party and the CGT.[45]

The reactions to Cot's economic position were varied. The Socialists were skeptical about whether his were, in fact, Radical ideas. The Socialist Savoyard wondered if the Radical orthodox might not accuse him of "Socialist heresy."[46] And, eventually Cot did become involved in controversies over his ideas with both Radicals and Socialists. In September 1931, he was under fire from both Emile Roche and O. L. Frossard and was forced to defend his radicalism. "I am a Radical-Socialist,"[47] he wrote, but at the same time he was also advocating a directed economy.[48] Cot and those immediately associated with

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[44]Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 July 1930.

[45]Le Réveil des Gauches, 26 July 1930.

[46]Le Réveil des Gauches, 9 August 1930.

[47]Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 September 1931.

[48]Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 September, 26 December 1931.

le Démocrat Savoyard who believed in the gauche unitaire and said "we consider the Socialists our natural allies." They were ready to support a cartel government after the May 1932 election results; however, a majority of Radical-Socialists resisted Socialist participation in governing.[49]

Cot's opponent in the election was Jacques Debû-Bridel, political director of the right-wing Paris journal L'Ordre, journalistic protegé of Emil Buré, faithful political follower of André Tardieu, and vehement anti-Briandist who not only opposed the direction of Briand's policies but also criticized his personal character. Only in retrospect did Debû-Bridel come to understand the place of peace in the 1932 campaign; his postmortem gives us some understanding of the temper of Cot's constituents:

> In February 1932, during a pre-electoral meeting in Chambéry, I had, as usual, directed the attention of my popular audience to the progress of the National-Socialists in Germany and affirmed vehemently "war is coming," repeating the slogan begun by Franklin-Bouillon. After the meeting, one of its organizers, an excellent patriot and veteran, believed it necessary to take me aside. Unhappily he said to me, "what have you done? It is foolish . . . I beg of you, don't speak of war . . . Everyone here believes in peace. All the popularity of Pierre Cot comes from that . . . if you talk about the possibilities of war, you are done for . . . Believe me, don't claim Poincaré and Maginot too much, and certainly not Franklin-Bouillon . . . No one wants to hear about the army any more."[50]

On 1 May, Cot won on the first ballot by a margin even greater than in 1928, and across the nation election results overwhelmingly

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[49]Le Réveil des Gauches, 4 January, 1 February 1932. See also Larmour, Radical Party, 105-116.

[50]Debû-Bridel, L'Agonie, 133-134.

returned the parties of the Left. Whether their victory was because of their foreign policy or because of their successful use of republican discipline or because the effects of the depression were now being felt in France, it appeared that the majority of Frenchmen had, indeed, endorsed peace and disarmament. Cot had spoken of disarmament as Europe's "last card"[51] for peace. He hoped to be able to translate the election mandate into government policy and that into substantial results in Geneva, but the peace ballot had come too late.

Cot had entertained the hope in 1930 that, by pursuing practical and immediate goals in relation to the German question, crisis conditions in Germany might be dissipated, democratic government ensured, and the way held open for constructing a functional world order. In the balance, however, there was very little success in either immediate or long-term solutions. Attempts at massive economic aid and visible diplomatic success for Germany had come to nothing, and events had demonstrated that constructive treaty revision, broad economic settlement, and international authority were illusive. Although Cot had not abandoned commitment to world order, the future for it was not very promising. Detente, German democracy, and League authority, each had fallen prey to its own inner contradictions. Franco-German differences as to what constituted acceptable tempo and ultimate goals for changing Versailles system were fast becoming insurmountable. German democracy, already hanging precariously by the thread of constitutional decree powers and protected only by the personal authority of President Hindenburg, was dealt a terminal blow in the removal of Chancellor

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[51] Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 December 1931.

Brüning in May 1930. The generous approach that Cot had made since 1928 was gradually replaced by a new kind of diplomatic gamesmanship in which conciliation no longer anticipated real solutions but was used to determine who would be charged with the responsibility for failure.

CHAPTER IV

DISARMAMENT, SECURITY, AND NATIONAL DEFENSE, 1932-1934

Cot interpreted the election results in May 1932 as a mandate for peace, disarmament, and conciliation, but two things demonstrated that implementing that mandate would be difficult. The dismissal of Brüning a week later altered the context for diplomatic negotiations at Geneva, and the government formed by Edouard Herriot in June 1932 did not include Socialist participation as the election results might have permitted. Nor did it include the young left-wing members of his own party. They remained in the Chamber, where their voices, in the groupe and commissions, were strident and critical of Herriot's handling of reparations and disarmament. There is a dualism, perhaps some uncertainty, about Cot's posture during this time. On the one hand, Cot, who was rapporteur for disarmament on the Foreign Affairs Commission, was marked as one of these dissidents and, indeed, he did not fully agree with Herriot's policies. On the other hand, he served the Herriot government loyally and well. Appointed to the delegation to the League and to the Disarmament Conference, he also worked with the premier in preparing for the World Economic Conference that met in Lausanne in June 1932, and later in developing the disarmament plan that Paul-Boncour submitted to the Disarmament Conference in November 1932. At the Radical-Socialist congress at Toulouse later that month, Cot's report on foreign affairs was an endorsement of this plan, and he defended it before the Radical-Socialist groupe and the Chamber. In December, he was again on the floor of the Chamber, defending Herriot's unpopular recommendation that

France meet her current debt payment to the United States, the defeat of which signaled the reversal of the Herriot government.

In the very brief government of Joseph Paul-Boncour (18 December 1932-28 January 1933), Cot was appointed for the first time to a cabinet post. As Under Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs he was designated to supervise matters dealing with the League of Nations, the Permanent Court of International Justice, and the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Immediately, he implemented a plan for reorganizating the foreign information service within the Quai d'Orsay and appointed Pierre Comert to direct this work. On 23 January, Cot went to Geneva to represent France at the League of Nations, but before the work of either the Council or the Disarmament Conference could get well under way, the Paul-Boncour government was reversed on the budgetary issue. Cot, who was named Minister of Air by Daladier 30 January 1933, returned to Geneva in mid-February to represent France briefly but vigorously at the Disarmament Conference.

In March 1933, Cot returned to Paris. From then until 6 February 1934, he directed his energies, not to disarmament, but to the work of the Air Ministry. Cot's appointment as Air Minister came as a result of the combination of factors. He had served in the previous government, with undeniable logic, in charge of League Affairs. His interest in national defense matters was also recognized. He had become a major advocate of plans for internationalizing the control of aviation and for transferring military aviation to the control of the League. When Paul Painlevé, who had been Air Minister since June 1932, was prevented from continuing in that post by illness, Cot was selected as a man who

might be counted on to serve both the needs of the Air Ministry and those of disarmament.

During his time at the Boulevard Victor, Cot attempted to prepare French aviation to meet the threat of an aggressive Germany. Given the paradoxical threads of defense and disarmament, military preparation and peace programs, it should be remembered that a clear point of continuity had always existed in Cot's views on disarmament and military preparation--that factor was security. It was security that directed both his work on disarmament in 1932 and as Air Minister in 1933. His pursuit of international control, on the one hand, and a French strategic aviation capability, on the other, demonstrates clearly that Cot's perceptions of collective security were determined by contingencies. These two separate options were not the result of inconsistency, confusion, or ambivalency but were choices, each clearly tenable within its own context, for two different contingencies: one if disarmament should succeed, the other if it should not.

French Plans for Disarmament

The program for implementing disarmament proposed by Cot indicated quite clearly that he was not suggesting that France simply lay down her arms. Security was always the first consideration. Cot wanted to recognize the principle of equality for Germany without abandoning substantive advantages for France. Clearly, equality did not call for identical military conditions; that, in fact, would be most unequal, for it would fail to take into consideration essential differences of geography and responsibility. And the restrictions and limitations he accepted for France were carefully selected: the qualitative restriction

of certain caregories of weapons, by their nature agreed to be offensive (tanks, bombers, submarines);[1] some quantitative reductions in effectives but none that would take France below the level necessary to maintain the couverture;[2] some budgetary limits; and international regulation of aviation, both military and civilian. These would serve to establish juridical equality for Germany, demonstrate to world opinion the defensive posture of France, and begin the organization of an arms authority for the League. In addition, Cot insisted on the prohibition of the private manufacture and traffic in arms and munitions.[3]

When the General Conference for Disarmament opened in February 1932, it had before it the draft convention, which had been completed by the Preparatory Commission in November 1930. Pushed through under pressure, it satisfied few, and there should have been little surprise that the delegates, taking it only as a basis for discussion, proceeded to reconsider all the old controversial issues: the French, their tenacious search for guarantees of enforcement; the Germans, their equally tenacious insistence on full and immediate equality; and the Anglo-Americans, their categorical rejection of responsibility. Throughout 1932, debates continued, while the political crisis in Germany moved toward a nationalist solution.

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[1]Cot included submarines, although there was not agreement among the major powers as to their offensive classification.

[2]Cot intended that France's colonial forces to be excluded from the count of effectives for disarmament purposes.

[3]Le République, 1 January 1928; 28e Congrés . . . tenu à Paris, les 5, 6, 7 et 8 Novembre 1931, 370-388. See also Le Démocrat Savoyard, 17 September, 22 and 29 October 1932.

The basis for the French negotiating position lay in two plans, each with its maximum and minimum criteria: one was submitted by Tardieu at the beginning of the conference in February, and the other, by Herriot in November.[4] In the interim, changes occurred in the governments of France and Germany, reparations were abandoned at Lausanne, President Hoover submitted an American plan that resulted in reviving Franco-British cordiality to the disgruntlement of almost everyone else, and the German delegates ceased attending the conference until equality was established to their satisfaction.

The plan presented by Tardieu on 5 February reflected multiple purposes: the French concept of security first, the diplomatic need for a French initiative, popular fears of air war against civilian populations, and the self-interest of the C.S.G.[5] The entire plan was a single proposal; that is, none of its limitations could be required without the security provisions being in effect. Cot's reactions reflected cautious approval of the principles represented, careful identification of essential omissions, and skepticism regarding the willingness of Tardieu's majority to support the logical consequences of the

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[4]The working texts of these plans, both maximum and minimum, are found in DDF, 1re série, 1:439-462, 509-525, 631-641.

[5]The plan proposed (1) internationalizing and regulating the tonnage of civilian aviation, (2) placing offensive weapons at the disposal of the League of Nations, (3) establishing an international police force at the disposal of the League to prevent war and provide the initial defense against aggression, (4) establishing international machinery for compulsory arbitration, defining aggression, and guaranteeing international control of arms agreements, (5) establishing rules for protecting civilian populations, and (6) developing the Covenant provisions for mutual assistance. See also Maurice Vaisse, "Le procès de l'aviation de bombardement," Revue historique des Armées, No. 2 (Special, 1977), 41-61.

plan. Although it did not go as far as Cot would have liked, it was headed in the right direction and was the best one could expect from a government whose support came from the Right.[6]

At Geneva, the French plan met resistance and annoyance; no action was taken on it or on the British and German plans. Legislative elections in France in May altered the political component of the French delegation, and while everyone awaited France's new government in June, Cot spoke of the preliminary alterations made by Herriot in the French position to bring it into conformity with the Radical-Socialist program.[7] Cot expressed satisfaction that the French position now included reductions in military budgets, the interdiction of private arms manufacturing, and the prohibition of certain offensive weapons. Herriot had abandoned the international police force, but Cot thought that the internationalization of aviation would serve as a bridge by which to return to it later.[8]

The problem that continued to disturb Cot was the position of isolation into which France had been moved at Geneva and the difficulty that France might have in finding support for her plan. Whether the criticisms were warranted or not, "we cannot impose our conceptions . . .

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[6]Cot particularly approved the provisions for internationalizing aviation and Tardieu's recognition of the necessary role of the United States. Cot would add, within the context of the security and control provisions, provisions for reducing the levels of all national armaments, interdicting all offensive weapons, and prohibiting private manufacture and commerce in arms. Le Démocrat Savoyard, 13 February 1932. See also La République, 19 February 1932.

[7]This was the Wagram program, based on Cot's report to the party congress, Paris, November 1931. See p. 101-102.

[8]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 21 May 1932.

on a world, if the entire world believes we are wrong." French initiative had to find a first step in disarmament which international opinion would judge reasonable and which would deny Germany any "pretext for rearmament." Success would depend on the skill of the French diplomats on their determination to reach some agreement.[9] But above all else, the future rested with how realistically the French perceived their own program. "It is necessary to measure with coolness, without demagoguery, what reductions are possible in the present state of international guarantees in order to reach a first step . . . ."[10]

The Hoover Plan for Disarmament

European initiative was preempted in June 1932, when President Herbert Hoover submitted, unexpectedly, a plan for disarmament. Although the disadvantages of the Hoover plan precluded its acceptance by the other Great Powers, Cot saw a number of advantages in it, gave it credit where he could, and urged that it be accepted as the needed first step.

Most important, the Hoover plan accepted and assumed the continuation of the level of disarmament established for Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. Accepting the Hoover plan would give new international force to the disarmament clauses, much as the Locarno agreements had endorsed the territorial clauses for Germany's western frontier. It

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[9]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 4 June 1932. To make the task of the diplomats a little less difficult, a program of reorganization of the foreign information service of the Quai d' Orsay was begun in June and put into effect by Cot in January 1933. See Le Temps, 31 December 1932; La République, 4 January 1933; Le Démocrat Savoyard, 7 January 1933.

[10]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 21 May 1932.

would also "settle" the equality issue without opening it for international discussion and would end any public sympathy for Germany's right to rearm, should the conference fail. Cot did not admit any legality to the German arguments for rearmament, but preferred not to risk discussion when it was possible to avoid it?[11]

To maintain the level of German disarmament established in 1919, France would have to make other adjustments in the Versailles system and in the military posture she had developed to defend it. The final question lay in "knowing whether we can consent to these reductions without risk to our national defense." Cot thought that, generally, the Hoover plan was compatible with French security, but he carefully specified certain clarifications and modifications.[12]

First, reductions in French effectives were not to be applied to the forces defending the frontiers or to the colonial forces, that is, not to national defense needs. Second, Hoover had failed to count the German forces of the Schutzpolizei, which, Cot said, added 150,000 effectives, 60,000 of them on active duty; their existence called for an additional adjustment in the French figure. Cot believed that the adjusted figure would permit France an adequate force to guarantee the couverture, train reserves, and carry out mobilization, particularly if the reductions were taken as an opportunity to reorgaize military personnel and administration and remove what he thought were excessively high numbers of officers and career soldiers. To accommodate this reorganization, the reductions were to be extended over a five-year period.

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[11]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 13 and 27 August 1932.

[12]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 13 and 27 August 1932.

Cot accepted the reductions in material called for by the Hoover plan with two provisions: he insisted that naval artillery be reduced in the same manner as that which defended the coast and that suppression of tanks and heavy cannon be subordinated to an effective control in regard to their manufacture and inventory.[13]

With these conditions, he urged that the Hoover plan be accepted as a first step, but then with Cot's conditions, it was not the Hoover plan. This illustrates, in an interesting manner, Cot's conciliating technique. He took whatever proposals were offered, pulled from them what he found acceptable, then proceeded to qualify and reinforce what he found inadequate or unacceptable--accept what one can, work with the rest.

Despite statements from the American State Department made concurrently with the Hoober plan that rejected all commitments to mutual guarantees, Cot interpreted the plan as one more small, but real, increment in increasing the involvement of the United States in European peace-keeping. He had not overlooked "American indifference" to the responsibilities of peace or her insistence on the "false myth of neutrality," but he found no other way to involve the United States, except little by little, wherever possible. France could not count on Britain alone to prevent German rearmament; the American influence was necessary.[14] Here, as with the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928, Cot's evaluation of the American position was manifestly, overly optimistic and reflected hope more than reality.

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[13] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 13 and 27 August 1932.

[14] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 13 and 27 June 1932.

But, in fact, the Hoover plan was not accepted, and the resolution of 13 July, concluding the first phase of the Disarmament Conference, was disappointing. An exchange of notes in September between Germany and France indicated that Germany would no longer attend sessions of the conference under unequal status. Cot praised Herriot's response to the German note of 11 September as "dignified and prudent." The position of the government was absolutely correct in refusing to admit Germany's right to rearm under any circumstances. Nor could the dilemma be resolved in a Franco-German accord; the problem was international. But one way or another, France was going to have to accept "an equality of law, if not an equality of fact." By this, Cot meant accepting the principle of reductions but not identical quantitative levels. He said that there was no point at all in even considering a reduction in the French army to match the German; that, he called "inadmissable." What had to be accepted immediately was juridical equality, affirmed by a twenty percent reduction and the intent to move toward equality in fact, as conditions permitted "under the authority of the League." There was the magic phrase, for "under the authority of the League" meant to Cot an "international organization . . . sufficiently developed that each must, in every circumstance, accept the authority of the League." And in addition, it "supposed a complete organization of arbitration and a serious control of the actions of nations having renounced unrestricted sovereignty." It was, in fact, the whole of the security package.[15]

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[15] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 17 September, 22 and 29 October 1932.

Herriot's Constructive Plan for Disarmament

During October, Britain tried to organize a Four-Power meeting to resolve the problem but without success. The French, in the meantime, were preparing a new plan, which was debated in its general principles in the Chamber 28 October and submitted at Geneva early in November.[16] Throughout the remainder of 1932 Cot worked to influence Herriot's Constructive Plan and win support for it. In the press, before the Radical-Socialist groupe and the Foreign Affairs Commission, in the Chamber, and at the party congress at Toulouse, he argued forcefully for its principles and provisions.[17] The key to this new plan lay in its proposal that short term militia service serve as a uniform standard for all land forces. With this, France offered Germany equality of status. However, as with previous plans, concessions were contingent on the security and control provisions, which included the usual ones for controls, mutual assistance, compulsory arbitration and sanctions; those internationalizing aviation; guarantees from the United States; and the exclusion of forces for overseas colonial control from general

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[16]The formulation of Herriot's Constructive Plan took place against a doubly troubled background. On the international scene, whether from genuine conviction or diplomatic convenience, world opinion was charging France with obstructionism, leaving her perilously isolated at a time when German rearmament was closer to realization than ever. At home, the army and the Socialists, supported by some left-wing Radical-Socialists, were locked in a budget battle. Somehow, Herriot had to satisfy the German demand for equality, the Left's demand for reduced military appropriations, and the army's demand for effectives to meet a rearmed Germany.

[17]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 22 and 29 October, 12 November 1932; La République, 28 October, 6 November 1932; L'Ere Nouvelle, 1 December 1932; J. O. Chambre. Débats. 15e (1932), 2915, 2925; 29e Congrès . . . tenu à Toulouse, les 6, 7, 8 et 9 Novembre 1932, 389-415.

consideration. The Germans were not satisfied, but they agreed to return to the conference sessions after the beginning of the year.

In December, Cot sought support for the French plan in eastern Europe, where he spoke publicly in Poland and travelled throughout the area.[18] In private meetings with Colonel Beck and Edouard Benes, late in January, Cot tried to ascertain what France might expect from these two when the Disarmament Conference reconvened.[19] On 30 January, Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, brought to power by a combination of traditional national, financial, and military forces, which hoped to harness his mass support for their own ends. In February, Cot himself was briefly at the head of the French delegation, executing faithfully the policies of the Daladier government and Paul-Boncour at the Quai d'Orsay. Saying later that he had wished to force Hitler's hand, Cot presented two issues with notable forcefulness: standardization of militia service and the internationalization of aviation. The most controversial was that of the militia force.[20]

The Maximum Plan, decided on by the C.S.D.N. in January 1932, had permitted substituting a militia force for the national standing army under working international conditions of security. However, under pressure from General Weygand, Premier Tardieu had personally deleted

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[18] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 26 November, 3 December 1932. An important personal result of this tour throughout eastern Europe was the impact economic conditions had on Cot's perception of international relations, and he concluded that without basic economic solutions, the political and diplomatic ones would, in the end, prove unsuccessful. See also La République, 19 November 1932.

[19] DDF, 1re série, 2:519-524.

[20] Cot, Triumph of Treason, 29.

this from the proposals he made at Geneva. When it was revived by Herriot as a means of limiting Germany's standing army while offering equality, Weygand was beside himself.[21] Unalterably opposed to any restrictions on effectives, whether by budget cuts, term of service, substitution of material, or disarmament agreements, he found the militia force beyond his comprehension. Cot, in response, had said:

> I am convinced that an army of fewer men, better trained, devoted entirely to the instruction of recruits, to the preparation of mobilization, and to the couverture of the frontiers would be the best and would cost less than the instrument, ruinous and mediocre, with which we are endowed by a general staff devoid of imagination.[22]

On 17 February, Cot addressed the General Commission on the subject of effectives and presented the French proposal for the gradual and controlled substitution of uniform militia service for standing armies. He acknowledged that Germany would have to make a "transformation" in its military organization but he thought that the equality it carried would be worth it. He made it forcefully clear that there could be no combination of militia and professional forces, for this would "yield the strongest possible offensive force." Nor could there be any continuation of paramilitary forces. The suggestion that Germany was encouraging such forces brought indignant protest from the German delegate, Herr Nadolay. Cot was less clear about colonial forces, but he said later that forces devoted to colonial control could not be

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[21] See Bankwitz, Weygand, 58-69.

[22] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 22 October 1932.

brought under the militia regime.[23] The inclusion of a statement of French intent, given adequate security and controls, to reduce her own term of service to eight or nine months enraged the French military, its political lobby, and its journalistic supporters. The Echo de Paris demanded his recall, as did General Weygand.[24] The French Left and the British were impressed with both the substance and the manner of Cot's conduct at Geneva. The Times called it "conciliatory" and "constructive" and spoke of "a new life" and a "turning point" in the conference.[25]

The optimism expressed by his supporters was, however, unfounded. The German reply, coming a week later, side-stepped the entire proposal by attempting to reverse the conference decision to consider effectives before material. Responses to Cot's aviation proposals were no more encouraging. In conversations with the British it was reported that Cot had said:

> France was quite prepared to say total abolition of military and naval aircraft was the ultimate aim, but that it must be made subject to two conditions (1) effective control of civil aviation and (2) establishment of International Air Police.[26]

But he was altogether unwilling to agree to France first cutting back its air force to the British level (not unless the British were willing

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[23] La République, 17 and 18 February 1933; Le Temps, 18 February 1933; Times, 18 February 1933. Cot's presence and his statements at the Disarmament Conference were carried in the major journals during the remainder of February and the first week in March 1933.

[24] L'Echo de Paris, 20 February 1933; Cot, Triumph of Treason, 29.

[25] Times, 23 February 1933.

[26] DBFP, ii, 4:496-497.

to cut their navy back to French size).[27] At Geneva he offered plans for internationalizing civil aviation and urged the establishment of an international air police. Work in the air commission, however, became deadlocked.

Early in March, Cot left the French delegation at Geneva. His last official duty in regard to disarmament came in April, when he prepared an evaluation of the British plan, submitted by Ramsay MacDonald, to be used by Herriot on a mission to the United States.[28] But, by this time, disarmament and conciliation had little, if anything, practical to offer French policy. What had developed since the dismissal of Brüning was a diplomatic game in which the object was to negotiate in such a way as to demonstrate to world opinion that failure--which was a foregone conclusion--was the responsibility of one's opponent. Both France and Germany shared in the view that it was necessary to demonstrate the assignment of responsibility for the outcome of negotiations. While France thought that being able to prove Germany responsible for the failure of disarmament would result in other nations strengthening their alliance ties in support of France, Germany sought to reverse the roles of responsibility, to prove France responsible, to avoid the very strengthening of anti-German alliances that France hoped for.[29] Cot had played the game vigorously and perhaps a bit too well, for his political opponents in France never understood his conciliatory offers and never forgave him. In truth, Cot as a government

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[27] DBFP, ii, 4:496-497.

[28] DDF, 1re série, 3:223-226.

[29] DGFP, series C, 1: 18-20, 22-24, 37-38, 42-44, 48-49, 51-52, 56-57.

advisor and as a negotiator during this period was a much harder bargainer than Cot the polemicist would have had either Frenchmen or Germans believe in the period before 1932. Cot did not repudiate disarmament after March 1933. He continued to speak of it. Peace advocates still insisted on hearing it. It remained a goal for the future. Realistically, however, Cot pursued world order, disarmament, and conciliation within the context of actual circumstances and the practical and immediate responses that they demanded. The posture of Nazi Germany demanded military as well as diplomatic alertness. Cot saw his responsibility as that of building a strong and flexible military aviation capability for France.

At the Boulevard Victor

As a member of the government during the first year of Hitler's regime in Germany, Cot refrained from public comment on Germany's new regime and French policy. Instead, he turned his full attention to the work of the Air Ministry.[30] At the time he came to the Boulevard Victor, 31 January 1933, it was recognized by all that French military aviation had drifted into a condition of serious crisis. An independent Air Ministry, which had been created by decree only as recently as September 1928, was immobilized by its battles with the other service ministries over matters of orgaization, command, and material.

Within the Air Ministry and among the general officers of military aviation, there was strong support for creating an independent air force;

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[30]Cot held the portfolio for Air through four successive governments until 7 February 1934.

however, there was even stronger resistence within the other services and their ministries to relinquishing control over their own aviation needs. The point around which this issue was argued was the théorie de l'emploie, the doctrine directing the use of aviation in combat. The army advocated a theory of "cooperation," that is, of tactical support for ground forces. Aviation officers supported theories of strategic use, independent of ground forces, such as those of "air battle" and retaliatory air strikes. These tactical and strategic theories were not necessarily mutually exclusive. A nation, willing to spend the money, could have had both. That this was not the case in France resulted from a combination of factors: the théorie de l'emploie became caught, fixed, and lost in the service rivalry over organization and command; the constant pressure to cut military funding left little for innovation and development; and the popular imagination, which had loved the heroic individuals who had battled one-on-one high in the sky during the Great War, was terrorized by fears of massive air attacks against civilian populations in the next.[31]

Locked into controversies over organization and command, unable to agree on a theory of combat use, limited in funds, and monitored by the peace lobbies, the Ministry of Air and the Ministry of War had

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[31]For background on French military aviation, see General J. Hébrard, Vingt-cinq années d'aviation militaire, 1920-1945, 2 vols. (Paris, 1946), vol. 1: La genèse du drame aérien de 1940; General Christienne and P. Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," Revue historique des Armées, No. 2 (Special 1977), 9-40; Griffiths, Pétain, 152-149; Laure, Pétain, 241-246; Col. P. Le Goyet, "Evolution de la doctrine d'emploi de l'aviation française entre 1919 et 1939," Revue historique de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, No. 73 (January 1969), 3-41; Vaisse, "Le procès de l'aviation de bombardement," 41-61; Lt. Col. Bourdes, "La creation de l'arme aéroportée française," Revue historique des Armées, No. 2 (Special 1977), 62-86.

postponed decisions for the renewal of aviation material. As a result, aviation production had been neglected and the crisis had been permitted to deepen. The fact was that, regardless of how the services decided to use aviation, French planes were outdated and in short supply. France had fallen behind in research, development, and production. French military aviation, which had been the best in Europe in 1918, had ceased to be competitive.

The technical responsibilities of a service ministry, new to Cot, were monumental, but he brought to his work his energy, enthusiasm, initiative, and his determination to get things done. He recognized the importance of expertise and was open to the experience and technical advice of others; he recognized the role of compromise in government and applied his characteristic willingness to accept progress in stages to the work of the Air Ministry. Cot faced two serious obstacles: the low level of funding allotted aviation and the determined obstruction of the general staff of the army of an independent air force. Nevertheless, he was able, in a year's time, to accomplish significant change and progress. In cooperation with the air chief of staff, General Denain, and the ministry's technicians, he put into operation new programs that created an independent air force, introduced a plan for prototypes and production, and established an independent officer training program to meet the technical needs of the air force and establish an essential esprit de corps.[32]

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[32]As Air Minister, Cot was responsible for civilian aviation as well. During 1933 he completed the airport facilities at Le Bougere, created Air France, and encouraged the development of provincial air port facilities and sports aviation.

The French Air Force

The first thing that Cot did was to see to the restoration of funds that had been cut from the ministry's budget in December 1932. In fact, the air budget had been cut three times during 1932. During the first week in February 1933, the finance commission restored 130 million of the 400 million francs it had previously cut, but the general level of funding was still critically low, a fact that Cot reported to a press conference 13 February.[33]

Cot was a willing advocate of both an independent air force and a strategic strike capability. It seemed to him that these were a logical complement to the static defensive posture of the army, which he endorsed. Not only did such a strategic capability enhance France's military options but it strengthened her diplomatic position in selling collective security to her allies.

At meetings of the Haute comité militaire in March 1933 Air Minister Cot proposed to create an air force capable of meeting a German surprise attack. "The next conflict," he said, "could open with massive air attacks unleashed against us by surprise and even perhaps without prior political tension." Defense in this case lay in massive and immediate pursuit and counterattack against enemy bombers and home targets. Such action could not be improvised at the time of attack but had to be prepared carefully during peacetime. In order to do this, Cot called for the return to the control of the air force all aviation units not

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[33]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 18 February 1933; Le Temps, 10 February 1933.

"absolutely necessary" to the army and navy, including all united "specializing in weapons of air combat."[34]

General Weygand opposed Cot's proposals and intimated that, should the air force succeed in removing air units from the command of the army, the army would have to build its own, an explicit threat to pursue the battle with the air force through the budget. Cot was not in disagreement with the principle of tactical ground support, nor did he oppose the need for coordination. What he objected to was the absorption of all air activity into the army's role of tactical support, leaving nothing with which to fight the crucial battle for air supremacy or to respond to French alliance commitments. "What," he asked Weygand, "would the aviation of cooperation do in the case where Germany attacked Poland?"[35]

Under pressure from Marshal Pétain, a compromise was reached, accepting in principle three functions for the air force--independent air operations, operations in cooperation with the army and navy, and the operations of air defense--while requiring ministerial counter-signatures for implementing proposals. The statute was a compromise; it reflected "reality," said Cot. Although it by no means satisfied the proponents of full independence for military aviation, it went well beyond what the army wanted to concede. A statute of some sort was essential at this time to permit the Air Ministry to organize air defense, stabilize the morale of its personnel, and rebuild France's air fleet.

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[34]Le Goyet, "Evolution de la doctrine d'emploi," 1519; Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," 16-21.

[35]Le Goyet, "Evolution de la doctrine d'emploi," 15-19; Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," 16-21.

This statute was one that the air force could work with; it permitted forward direction. It was functional.[36]

Out of the compromise for the organization of the air force came the guidelines for selecting prototypes and a program of production. Cot supported the theory that it was not the number of planes a country had stockpiled during peacetime but the competitive edge in technology that determined a nation's strength in wartime. The basis for maintaining an adequate air force in the face of rapidly advancing technology was to invest in research and development and in industrial preparation, so that prototypes would reflect the most advanced technology and industry would be ready to put them into mass production when the time came. This position was indicated by his assumption that any war with Germany would be a long war during which industrial production of war material would determine the outcome.[37] Unfortunately, bringing French aviation production to a level capable of executing this theory was a task of such proportion as to be virtually revolutionary and far beyond the competence of a single year's time.

Cot believed that he had to make a start. France in 1933, had no inventory, no new technology, no modern industrial plant for aviation production, yet it was essential that some prototype be put into production immediately to replace long outdated models and provide the equipment for the new air force. Cot supported General Denain in a

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[36]Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," 21-23; Laure, Pétain, 231; J. O. Chambre Débats. 15e (1933), 1280-1283, 4166-4167; J. O. Chambre. Documents. 15e (1933), 3601-3606.

[37]J. O. Chambre. Débats. 15e (1933), 1321-1332.

plan to put 1,000 multi-functional planes, designated BCR (bomber-fighter-reconnaissance) into the line by the summer of 1936. Domestic politics postponed the approval of the Denain Plan (also called Plan I), until the summer of 1934, when Denain himself was Minister of Air.[38]

Another essential part of Cot's new air force program was officer training. Existing programs put aviation officers through the service schools, either the army's or the navy's, where they received aviation training and flight experience only at the end of their preparation. Cot proposed an air force service school in which he foresaw the creation of an esprit de corps unique to the air force, shared by a new, young, vigorous, and skilled command, who kept the enthusiasm associated with the mystique of the wartime escadrilles but accepted the discipline and organization necessary in an increasingly technical service with sophisticated combat roles.[39]

Franco-Soviet Rapprochement

While Cot was Minister of Air, he ceased to comment on matters of foreign policy that did not fall within the responsibility of his own ministry. We must assume that he did not abandon his interest in foreign policy, but there is no evidence to describe what position he took on issues, either in the Council of Ministers or in the private communications among members of the government. On only one matter, the

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[38]Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aèronautique militaire française," 23-26; Truelle, "La production aéronautique militaire française," 92-94.

[39]Cot's ministry created the Academie de l' Armée de l'Air and the Ecole de l'Air. See Cot, L'Armée de l'Air, 176-182. Cot himself earned a pilot's license and flew his own plane on his frequent trips and tours of inspection. Times, 3 June 1933.

development of a Franco-Soviet alliance, did his role of Air Minister involve him in diplomacy after March 1933.

Cot appeared to be a willing collaborator, but he was not the initiator of this policy. Among Radical-Socialists, it was Herriot who had championed Franco-Soviet rapproachment since 1924. It was also Herriot who made the first French visit to the Soviet Union in 1933. Preceeding Cot by a month, Herriot's trip in August did not carry the sanction of an official visit, as Cot's did.[40] Within government and diplomatic circles, policies of rapproachment had begun to take shape during April, 1931 and had developed by that summer into proposals for commercial and non-aggression agreements, which were worked on during the following year. Cot's involvement came in 1933. A letter of 4 June 1933 indicated that Cot had been approached by the Soviet consul in Paris after an opening had been established between the French ambassador in Moscow and the Soviet government. Cot's primary interest lay in his speculation that the French aeronautic industry might be stimulated by significant Soviet purchases of French equipment and that exchange could be made through oil. He showed no indication of having considered anything other than the most general strategic and diplomatic aspects of an alliance and none of the political. He was, as Air Minister, trying to promote French aviation.[41] The commercial basis of Cot's visit was given a strategic perspective by the Soviets, who invited Cot and the members of the air force staff accompanying him to

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[40] See William F. Scott. Alliance Against Hitler (Durham, N. C., 1962).

[41] DDF, 1re serie, 3:645-646.

attend Soviet air maneuvers and to view a demonstration of their newly developed airborne tactics.

In September 1933, Cot undertook his much publicized mission the Soviet Union.[42] What he saw in Russia impressed him greatly and convinced him that French security demanded Soviet military cooperation. The manpower, industrial development, and vast interior areas of the Soviet Union could counter any threat that Germany might pose. The Soviet air force was particularly impressive and its airborne tactics interested both the French air force and army.[43]

Cot had not been the architect of Franco-Soviet reapproachment. Correspondence between Cot and Paul-Boncour indicated that Cot did not continue to advise the Foreign Ministry in the formation of the alliance, and he did not appear to have any further contact with the Soviet Union until 1936.[44] He was an instrument in one stage of the development of the alliance and he remained its advocate. Press attention to his trip had made quite a production of it. He piloted his own plane, was photographed at the various stops he made en route, and was widely quoted on his impressions of the Soviet Union and Soviet military strength, which he reported to the Chamber commission on his return. In the mind of the public, such visibility attached him permanently to the alliance and made him an easy target for its critics.

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[42]Tabouis, Vingt Ans, 158-160, and Cassandra, 168-170; see also, La République, 13, 14, 15, September 1933; L'Oeuvre, 13, 14, 15, September 1933; Times, 14 September 1933. See also DDF, 1re série, 3:645-646; 4:425, 427, 432-433, 568-572, 613-614, 631-632, 732; 5:24-26, 79-80, 316; 6:121-122, 201-202.

[43]Bourdes, "La Creation de l'arme aéroportée française," 62-86.

[44]DDF, 1re serie, 4:371-372.

Riots of 6 February 1934

Cot's time at the Boulevard Victor came to an end in February 1934. The parties of the Left had been unable to turn their popular victory at the polls in 1932 into a workable and stable governing coalition. Since June 1932, the Chamber majority had invested, then reversed, six consecutive and similarly constructed Radical-Socialist governments. Beclouded by the Stavisky scandal, charges of partisan collusion and corruption, and uncertainty regarding the reliability of the army general staff, Edouard Daladier, faced violence and protest in the streets of Paris. Fearing civil war, he chose to resign rather than risk further bloodshed. The government of France returned to a Centris majority, within which the Radical-Socialists continued to participate but did not exercise control. Cot's role in the 6 February crisis and in Daladier's decision to resign is not wholly clear, but it appears that his first reaction was to urge Daladier, who had a parliamentary majority, to stand firm, and, to this end, Cot alerted the air units in the Paris region for a possible national emergency.[45] However, as Daladier himself hesitated and others urged him not to provoke a confrontation, Cot acquiesed and offered no public resistance to his government's decision to resign. The silence that Cot maintained in 1934 on this matter has never been broken. Cot appeared on this occasion and on others to observe a self-imposed respect for his party's unity and leadership. Throughout his career Cot maintained a marked loyalty, a generosity of

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[45]Moulin, Jean Moulin, 213. Refers to a report by General Denain.

spirit, and circumspection of criticism toward those with whom he worked and shared responsibility.

Between 1932 and 1934, Cot's prominence on the French political scene increased tremendously. In addition to the wide and controversial press attention given to his disarmament program, his air force policies, and his report on the Soviet Union, Cot was constantly before the public's eye during 1933, inspecting air force units, opening airport facilities, promoting sport aviation, and creating Air France. Some found Cot refreshing, innovative, and sensible in the policies he pursued. Others found him rash and lacking in judgment, his pilot's activities a demonstration of immaturity and showmanship. And there were a few who charged him with treason and called him assassin. For the remainder of his career, whatever he did, Cot, at best, carried the weight of constant press attention and controversy, and at worst, the wounds of press character assassination.

One of the most striking characteristics of Cot's work and one that drew considerable attention was its administrative tempo. Cot responded to responsibility and its problems with immediate and unhesitating action. His decisiveness was supported by his ability to use other people's skills (technically and administratively); his willingness to compromise in order to get something started; and his own personal energy level, which was exceptional.

Cot's responsibilities from 1932 to 1934 had permitted him to exercise a direct influence--as advisor, negotiator, and minister--in foreign and defense matters that went well beyond that of earlier years. Of the two, foreign affairs and defense, he was better able to realize

results that reflected his own policy options in defense. At the Air Ministry, he initiated programs that reflected his continuing commitment to France's basic defensive posture, to a modernized military force dependent on technology and material rather than manpower, and that limited its standing forces to a small, skilled corps, of young and superbly trained men who maximized material. Although the needs of the air force did not require the extensive reserve programs demanded by the army, Cot conserved the principle and applied it to programs introduced to encourage and expand popular aviation. In addition, the uniqueness of air power expanded his basic defense premises to include the possibilities of a mobile counter-attack force utilizing strategic bombing, air artillery, and air infantry (airborne). One of the things that was not permitted him in the time he had was the reorganization of aviation production. The great inadequacies in French military aviation that emerged in 1936 were directly related to the inability of French industry to meet the accelerated challenge of the Luftwaffe.

By contrast in foreign affairs, Cot's policy options met virtually no success. Indeed, this period brought to an end any practical hope for effective conciliation. The potentiality for failure had always been present in the dichotomized goals of France and Germany. Conciliation, like any other form of compromise, is generally a second choice imposed by circumstances and is most attractive when options for unilateral success are absent. Who does not prefer to have things all one's own way? That is why Cot was so insistent on enforcing the rule of law. As long as the European powers upheld the Versailles system as law, there was incentive to meet changing realities with equitable

and reciprocal adjustments through conciliation or arbitration. Failure to uphold the system, however, opened the option of unilateral action and the threat of force. Under those circumstances, conciliation, at best, was meaningless; but worse, if it was misunderstood, it might become unwarranted appeasement. Cot understood that the Hitler regime had brought both disarmament and conciliation to an end, at least until an effective collective counter-force were established to deny Hitler successful unilateral action. Until 1932 Cot had viewed collective security as the logical result of successfully implementing League authority in matters of compulsory arbitration, the definition of agression, the application of sanctions, disarmament and an internationalized police power. He had hoped that peace-loving and democratic nations could gradually, with good will, perseverance, and popular support, reach these goals. The events of 1932-1934 demonstrated the weaknesses of these premises. The growing threat fascism to democracy and peace demanded revision in the approach to collective security to provide immediate and sufficient deterent force to prevent Germany's dismantling of the Versailles system.

CHAPTER V

FASCISM, THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS, AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY, 1934-1936

Events during the last six months of Cot's ministry served to illustrate the rising menance of fascism and the new shape which the events of 1934-1935 gave to collective security. Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations in October 1933, Cot visited the Soviet Union in September 1933, and anti-government riots in Paris on 6 February 1934 brought down the Daladier government.

Hitler's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and from the League of Nations in October 1933 provided a dramatic focus for a problem that had been evident for some time. The League powers were unable to agree either on disarmament itself or on the necessity of additional security functions for the League. During 1934 and 1935, Cot reevaluated the roles of both the League and disarmament, and reassessed the magnitude of the fascist threat in Europe. Slow to abandon the League despite its weakness, Cot eventually came to see the need for direct and comprehensive commitments to contain the expansive ambitions of Nazi Germany, and by 1936 he had begun to reshape his concept of collective security to meet that need.

Cot's trip to Stalin's Russia was one of several steps that led eventually to the signing of the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance in May 1935 and to the decision by the Comintern that same summer to direct the Parti communist français, the PCF, to collaborate in the Popular Front. For Cot, contact with Soviet officials and the PCF did not so much change his political position on Communism and democracy

as it established personal ties with Communists leaders. Only much later would these ties take on political significance.

The crisis of 6 February 1934 opened a period of political struggle in France, marked by radicalization, polarization, and violence. Both the Left and the Right believed that what they held to be the essence of France was threatened. Each entered the struggle, not to seek compromise, but to destroy the opponent. During 1934 and 1935, Cot became a driving force on the side of the anti-fascists. Citoyen, en garde! became his watchword, both to citizens of the world and of France. Little by little the multifactionalized political Left submerged its many other differences in the single bond of anti-fascism and in July 1935 formed the Popular Front, an electoral coalition, including the Communists, with which to wage the 1936 election campaign.

Unencumbered by cabinet position throughout 1934 and 1935, Cot commented freely on foreign affairs and national defense policies and remained a prominent voice in Radical-Socialist opinion. As a parliamentarian, he worked through the Air Commission[1] and the Radical-Socialists groupe and on occasion was mandated to speak before the Chamber. As a party member, he carried his views before the executive committee and in October 1934, for the fourth time since 1928, he was rapporteur for foreign affairs at the Radical-Socialist congress, where, once again, the party delegates accepted his ideas for their official program. As a journalist, he pressed these ideas before readers of various Radical

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[1]Cot did not return to the Foreign Affairs Commission, of which he had been a member from June 1928 to December 1932. He remained on the Air Commission from February 1934 to June 1936 and from April 1938 to June 1940. He served as its president from June 1935 to June 1936.

journals. In addition to his political and journalistic roles, Cot worked through private groups organized to influence public opinion. On frequent trips outside France he maintained contact with diplomats, politicians, and peace advocates in Britain and Europe, giving him what he considered first hand knowledge of international issues.

All of these things were what one might have expected from the energetic and eloquent Radical-Socialist deputy from Savoie. But there were indications of change in his political posture. His campaign against fascism and the leagues made him their target and he became the object of both their verbal and physical attack. In the Chamber, he found himself frequently the critic rather than the advocate of the government's foreign policy, even though there were Radicals in the government. His association with those who had formed the Parti socialiste de France[2] and the Parti Camille Pelletan,[3] and his willingness to cooperate with SFIO and the PCF made him suspect within some Radical-Socialist circles. The decision of the Radical-Socialists to join the Popular Front for the election of 1936 restored him to prominence but in doing so acknowledged that his political value was on the extreme

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[2]The Parti Socialist de France was founded in December 1933 by dissident Socialists, led by Pierre Renaudel and Marcel Déat, who had withdrawn from the SFIO over the issue of support for defense appropriations. André Pringolliet, long-time Savoyard Socialist, who had collaborated with the Union des gauches and Le Réveil des Gauches from their beginning in 1922 and who had been elected deputy from Albertville-Moutiers in 1932, followed Renaudel out of the SFIO and became the present of the Chambéry section of the Socialists de France.

[3]The Parti Camille Pelletan was founded by a very small number of dissident Radical-Socialists after the extraordinary party Congress at Clermont-Ferrand failed to take a sufficient militant left-wing stand. It was led by Gabriel Cudenet, outspoken critic of Herriot since the 1932 Congress.

Left. His own career became tied to the success or failure of the Popular Front. Even more important, the fate of France was tied to the success or failure of collective security.

Security Factors and Nazi Germany

A single premise had directed French thinking regarding collective security since 1919: that France could not fight Germany alone. Cot shared that premise, and he identified four factors upon which French security rested: the League of Nations, the Locarno accords, the French army, and the posture of Germany. He recognized that without compulsory arbitration, automatic sanctions, and an independent enforcement capability the League's security functions were grossly incomplete. He accepted the Locarno accords as an adequate guarantee of security for the moment without probing its complexities (the diffusion of authority into regional areas, the potential for conflict between alliance commitments and League authority, and the implicit acceptance of the impermanence of the status quo in central and eastern Europe). He accepted the intelligence of the deuxième bureau[4] and the conclusions of the general staff that German rearmament for offensive capability would not be complete until 1936. France still had the strongest land force in the world and frontier fortifications of the most remarkable technical advancement. Since 1924, Germany had accepted the role established for her by Stresemann, had been unarmed, and had represented no threat. This changed with the rise of Hitler to power. No longer satisfied with Stresemann's plan for revision through conciliation, Germany

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[4]French military intelligence.

set out to rearm and to repudiate the Versailles system. This change in Germany brought into question the other security factors, the League, Locarno, and the effectiveness of the French army.

Cot never suggested trusting Hitler. He knew that French policy had to rest on something more reliable than the word of the Nazi dictator. But he continued to believe that, ultimately, permanent peace in Europe could be found only in the League of Nations. Therefore, in the light of an uncertain future, Cot tried to keep the Nazi regime and the German people separate. He knew what Hitler threatened; all the same, in the hope that collective security would meet that threat and conciliation could be resumed, he chose not to abandon all continuity with the Weimar past or with the methods of diplomatic negotiation. Whatever the internal government of Germany, France ought to pursue policies that strengthened the international order so that Germany, contained today, might be included tomorrow.[5]

Cot saw the Nazi threat clearly. He did not doubt that, rearmed, Hitler intended to expand Germany, not just beyond its 1918 limits, but beyond its 1914 ones as well, southward and eastward into the lands of the Hapsburgs and Romanovs. Eventually, France, too, would become a target. Yet, as he watched Hitler's repudiation of the Versailles system unfold step-by-step, he continued to call for disarmament,[6] a fact that confounded his opponents and leaves the historical observer confused, unless certain things are remembered. First, whenever Cot spoke about disarmament, he was not talking about a general unarmed

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[5]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 9 and 30 June, 7 July 1934.

[6]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 12 May, 23 June, 21 July 1934.

condition, but about a carefully supervised, regulated, controlled, and enforced condition of arms limitation. Second, Cot placed this condition of limitation within the larger framework of League security which demanded operating and effective compulsory arbitration, automatic sanctions, and League enforcement. Internationally guaranteed through the League of Nations, disarmament and collective security meant virtually the same thing. Third, he continued to rely on the diplomatic and military guarantees of Locarno.

To Cot, collective security was not a precisely defined principle or a specific method of organization. It was a result and the means were adjusted to the circumstances. Collective security could be broad and inclusively international, like the League of Nations Covenant, the unsuccessful Treaty of Mutual Assistance (1923) and Geneva Protocol (1924), or Cot's own plan for the internationalization of aviation.[7] It could take the form of regional structures, like the Locarno accords. It could be bilateral alliances of mutual assistance, such as those France had with Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.

What was at stake in 1934, and Cot understood this despite the confusion his words might cause, was whether or not existing structures for collective security, the League and Locarno, could be made to contain Germany. If they could not in their present state, then that state had to be changed or new alliances found, for France could not face Germany alone. Cot tried to keep the concept of collective security and French alliances within the legal and conceptual framework of the

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[7]For Cot on the internalization of aviation, see Congrès . . . tenu à Paris les 5, 6, 7, et 8 Novembre 1931, 370-388; and Cot, "An International Air Police," The Spectator, 153 (14 December 1934), 917-918.

League of Nations. It was hard to brush aside fifteen years of international law and morality. For Cot, maintaining the League structure was a link both to the past and to the future. He was unwilling to abandon the dreams of 1919. Unable to use them in dealing with Hitler, he projected those dreams into an undetermined future.[8]

For the present, Cot faced the necessity of ordering conflicting priorities. The principles of international law and justice and the needs of collective security had at one time seemed a part of a coherent whole, a synthesis of peace. Now they turned at cross purposes, for there was no coherent whole, no synthesis, no effective authority. In response to the events of 1934-1936, Cot gradually reorganized his priorities around the principle of anti-fascism, but the process was tortuous and uneven.

Louis Barthou and Regional Security

The first initiatives in reshaping the guarantees of collective security for France were taken by Louis Barthou, who took over the Quai d'Orsay in February 1934. Barthou was a member of the prewar generation, a close friend and political colleague of Raymond Poincaré, and a man of traditional and conservative politics. Both Barthou and General Gamelin, chief of the general staff, wanted to expand the French alliance system to include the Soviet Union and Italy. They agreed also that rearmament was necessary to support these extended commitments. Barthou set out to construct a plan for regional security in eastern Europe, an Eastern Locarno, which would include Germany,

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[8] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 21 July 1934.

Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and the Baltic states. In addition, there was to be a bilateral mutual assistance alliance between France and the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union was to join the League of Nations. By early June agreement had been reached with France, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, but Poland and Germany balked. Eventually, the idea of an Eastern Locarno was replaced by simple bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union, and separately, with Italy. Germany, unwilling to cooperate, would be contained.[9]

Throughout the spring and summer, Cot raised serious objections to Barthou's diplomatic initiatives. He criticized what he called Barthou's disregard for the sensibilities of the British alliance, France's League associations, and world opinion. In part it was a matter of style: in March, Barthou's diplomatic demeanor at Geneva had been abrupt, even rude. It was also a matter of Barthou's ignoring the nuances of internationalism and striking an independent course for French security. Cot feared that Barthou's negotiations in eastern Europe would be interpreted by Germany as hostile and encircling. Whatever the benefits of the eastern alliances might be, Cot said they were not worth provoking Germany, nor were they a substitute for the British connection. The timing of all this, Cot thought was particularly unfortunate, for it came when he believed that the British were finally coming to understand the French position in disarmament.[10] The temper of Cot's criticism of Barthou may in part genuinely reflect a moment of fanciful hope that things might have been different had France not

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[9]See Young, In Command of France, 52-73.

[10]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 5 May, 9 June 1934.

announced her intention to look after "the conditions of her own security."[11] The origin of his criticism appeared political, however, and closely paralleled that expressed by Léon Blum.[12]

Cot's obvious partisanship was one factor. His concern with the fate of the British alliance and the fate of the League of Nations and disarmament were another. In addition he also was some concerned that a too clearly anti-German diplomacy might fail to take advantage of changes that might occur within Germany. Into the summer of 1934, Cot hoped that Hitler might be removed by disaffection within Germany. Solving Germany's economic problems required the cooperation of non-German capital and resources, which Cot did not think Hitler could get. If the economic crisis were not resolved, Hitler's support might split and his methods of terror and repression might prompt resistance rather than submission. Cot thought that support for Hitler from Germany's military was "tenuous." Whether Hitler was removed soon or later and whether a monarchial restoration, predicted by some, followed immediately or not, Cot believed that by the end of the decade, the Communists would come to power in Germany.[13] He underestimated Hitler's ability to deal with the traditional sources of power and overestimated the ability of the proletarian masses to rise against the full impact of Gleichschaltung. Crisis in Austria at the end of July added a new

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[11]This is a reference to the French note of 17 April 1934. Cot inaccurately assessed Barthou's role and the British reaction to it. See Young, In Command of France, 57.

[12]Bonnefous, Troisième République, 6:247-251.

[13]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 7 July, 8 August, 9 September 1934.

dimenson to Hitler's ambitions and forced Cot to reexamine options for resisting Hitler.

Austrian Crisis

Since the spring of 1933, Hitler had been trying to establish National Socialist control in Austria as the precondition for Anschluss when the proper time came. The measure of his failure was the resistance of the Austrians, the unsuccessful coup d'etat of 25 July, and the determined show of force by Mussolini.

In the Nazi-provoked Austrian crisis, which resulted in the assassination of Chancellor Dollfuss on 25 July 1934, Mussolini demonstrated the effective use of counterforce, a diplomatic lesson that added credibility to the Franco-Italian detente that Barthou had been working on quietly since May.[14]

To Cot, the Austrian crisis demonstrated the accumulated results of economic error. Austria's immediate problems might appear to be nationalistic, but they were first economic. "The Austria created in 1919 was incapable of sustaining itself," and it was in the resulting economic chaos that fascism found advantage. Dollfuss had failed to understand that he could not oppose the Nazis without the help of the Socialists. Instead of making peace with them, he had "made buckshot out of the best defenders of democracy." His use of fascist methods against the Socialists had "cost him his life." His successor would meet the same problem and, without the support of the Socialists, he, too, would fail.[15]

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[14]Young, In Command of France, 52-73.

[15]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 4, 11, and 18 August 1934.

Cot's sympathy for the Social Democrats was both genuine and partisan and probably accurate. But it did not acknowledge the dilemma that Dollfuss faced. The exclusion of the Social Democrats and the Heimwehr's attack against them was Mussolini's price for support against Hitler. And while Mussolini had no intention of permitting Germany to take over Austria, he might, if Dollfuss proved too uncooperative, turn to direct negotiation with Hitler. The balance between Italy and Germany was very delicate. Dollfuss wanted to be controlled by neither. Failure to play both very carefully might lead to Mussolini and Hitler ignoring Dollfuss altogether and finding their own solution to the Austrian crisis.

Cot did not think the threat to Austrian sovereignty had ended in July. The demand for Anschluss would reappear. In the present situation, Germany had been stopped and war avoided because German military preparation was incomplete and Italian determination had presented the threat of immediate counterforce. If it came to Austrian independence defended by Italian arms, however, the Austrian Socialists liked Mussolini no better than Hitler. And Cot did not think that Yugoslavia would permit Austria to fall to Mussolini unchallenged.[16]

Was it too late to find a solution? Cot, visiting among diplomats vacationing at the eastern spa of Bled in the summer of 1934, was not optimistic. The economic crisis, which was bad in Austria, was worse in Bulgaria and Rumania. But treaty revision was not possible as circumstances stood. "We have let time escape us," he said. "Treaty

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[16]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 18 August 1934.

revision now would only add to the sources of conflict and ought not to be attempted." Cot continued to look to the League of Nations for a solution. He thought that the best possibility for avoiding war still lay in establishing an international organization that was capable of "imposing its will on the states" and bringing about a general and controlled disarmament.[17] Two things are interesting. First, is the element of Jacobin-like coercion itself--it will reappear in other contexts. Second, is the practical futility of applying it to the League where no such force existed. Gradually, between the summer of 1934 and the summer of 1936, Cot came to recognize this futility and to look for other sources with which to deter fascist ambitions. In the meantime, however, Cot was slow to abandon old formulas.

The Radical Congress of Nantes, October 1934

In October 1934 Cot once again presented the foreign policy recommendations to the Radical-Socialist congress that met in Nantes. His report called on Radicals to demand restrictions on both German rearmament and the aggressive potential offered by modern aviation in warfare. The public mind was ravaged by the fear of being bombed and by the thought, worse still, that those bombs might contain not only explosives but poison gas. Cot continued to call for an end to national air forces and the creation of an international air police. He demanded the prohibition of the private manufacture of arms and their commerce. The 1934 program was not much different from the Wagram program in 1932. It was an indication that neither Cot nor the Radical-

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[17] Le Démocrat Savoyard, 11 August 1934.

Socialists had wholly come to grips yet with the need for new policy to face Hitler.

There is no better illustration of this than the opposition which was raised against the two-year-service law. Faced with the need to rearm, the French general staff proposed to do so by increasing the number of effectives by extending the time of service from one to two years. This, it was said, was necessary to bring the army up to minimum strength during the "lean years." It was the same program that Weygand had called for in 1931 and essentially it was met by the same criticisms, though more thoroughly developed by now. Cot insisted that it was a totally meaningless attempt by the army general staff, caught in antiquated theories, to solve problems of military deficiencies with added service time rather than spending the same monies for technical innovation. This policy would give France very little military advantage, while it would give Germany a technical excuse to accuse France of rearming. Cot took this opportunity to repeat his own views on organizational reform for the army and for appropriating monies to make a full transition to an army of material. Cot's premise continued to be less money, better spent, for more security.[18]

Cot's arguments for efficiency and effectiveness had merit but were lost or ignored in the political context, for Cot made his stand against the two-year law in the company of those left-wing Radicals

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[18] 31[e] Congrès . . . tenu à Nantes, les 25, 26, 27 et 28 Octobre 1934, 113-134. See also Le Démocrat Savoyard, 22 December 1934. The program for a mobile assault force proposed by Colonel de Gaulle and championed by Paul Reynaud at this time, was never fully considered on its merits by either the army or its political opponents. Instead, it was the issue of a professional army, l'armée de métier, that caught the attention of the army's opponents. See Bankwitz, Weygand, 152-154.

and Socialists whose traditional fear of the military establishment led them to obstruct any program that might enlarge or strengthen it. This was one manifestation of the contradictions within the broad spectrum of left-wing political cooperation that Cot had worked so hard to establish in support of the peace movement. A deterent force in the hands of the League, nonviolent pacifism, and revolutionary defeatism were hard pressed to agree on anything more specific than the simple desire for peace. And those who did not trust the military establishment were hesitant to increase its effectiveness.

Within the same context of old left-wing premises, Cot was slow to adjust his attitude about alliances to the realities of Hitler's ambitions. Even as he recognized the effectiveness of Mussolini's counterforce in the Austrian crisis, he continued to reject Barthou's alliance diplomacy. He did endorse the alliance with the Soviet Union, but what was most important to him here was that the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in September 1934. Later, during the winter of 1934-1935 Cot reexamined the German situation, the diplomacy of alliances, and collective security. The appointment of Pierre Laval to the Quai d'Orsay after the assassination of Barthou in October had much to do with this. Cot still thought of Laval as a Briandist and he noted with favor that Laval spoke of reestablishing Franco-German detente. In fact, the alliance diplomacy pursued by Laval was an extension of initiatives which he had rejected a year earlier under Barthou's direction. Cot's partisanship cannot be ignored.

Laval's Alliance Diplomacy

Early in 1935, Laval opened diplomatic negotiations with Italy and Britain; these led in April to the meeting of all three powers at Stresa in northern Italy. Cot followed the course of this diplomacy with satisfaction and some optimism. What he hoped for was a diplomatic structure with which to contain Germany. In his own mind he had not abandoned the League or its security functions. German rearmament presented Europe with an extraordinary threat, which called for an immediate and effective response. Cot sought, in Locarno fashion, alliance commitments that would supplement League security and he reconciled the two by arbitrarily including the alliance structure within the conceptual and legal framework of League authority. The dilemma that was inherent in this situation, the ordering of priorities that would be demanded if a vital alliance ran afoul of League authority, had not yet arisen in regard to Locarno and was not considered by Cot at this time. It should be added that at this time there really was no dilemma for Cot to consider, at least not one of choice. He automatically put League authority first. He might regret the results but he could make no other choice.

Cot's responses to Laval's Italian diplomacy demonstrated the confusion that events might impose on priorities, in this case, a conflict between alliance commitments and League authority. In January 1935, Cot spoke of Laval's trip to Rome as "a happy voyage," one in which concession to Italy had "served the interests of peace and consolidated the international position of France." These concessions, in Cot's words, were "serious, tangible, and immediate," as, indeed, they were, including territory in North Africa, privileges in Tunisia, and "a free

hand with Ethiopia."[19] Cot said that such concessions were warranted by the needs of Italy, "a great nation . . . in full development . . . in need of outlets." It was to the interest of France "to understand these needs." And further, "if we [France] can, by giving up territory we do not need, aid Italy to practice a reasonable policy, I see only advantage in Franco-Italian reapprochement."[20]

The "reasonable policy" that Cot hoped for was Italian support for an international arms agreement, Austrian independence, and Danubian cooperation. And, indeed, the Rome accords did include Italy's commitment to the principle of Danubian settlement and to Franco-Italian guarantees of Austria until such an agreement came into effect. Nothing further developed along these lines, although an Franco-Italian military convention was reached in June 1935.[21]

Even as early as January 1935, Cot said he had seen it suggested that Italy might take a "Manchurian" course in regard to Ethiopia. He

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[19]In Africa, Italy renounced all interests in Tunisia and received in exchange desert area adjacent to the southeastern edge of Lybia, a coastal strip in Eritrea, and stock in the Addis-Abba-to-Djibouti Railroad. In Europe, Italy agreed to support a Danubian settlement, which would include Germany. Until it was in effect, France and Italy agreed to guarantee Austria and to consult in cases of direct attack or significant German arms build-up. The last, "the free hand in Ethiopia," was a matter of interpreting a verbal and non-official understanding between Mussolini and Laval. Laval insisted he had agreed only to peaceful action; Mussolini, that Laval had understood his full intent and had raised no objections.

[20]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 12 January 1935. Italics in the original.

[21]A second series of Franco-Italian military meetings took place 9-12 September 1935, but these negotiations, although they were secret, became untenable in November and December 1935 when British hysteria and coercion forced France--for no reciprocity--to commit herself to Britain's defense in case of an Italian "mad dog attack." See Young, In Command of France, 82-84.

found that possibility "scarcely reassuring," but he fell back, without further conjecture or analysis, on the guarantees of Ethiopia's League membership. All in all, he concluded: "We may have paid a little high, but no matter, I congratulate Laval."[22] At this time, Cot did not appear to think that Ethiopia, much less the League, stood seriously threatened. By June, the threat had become real and Cot had to face the question of priorities, but in the meantime, he continued to follow the path set by Laval from London to Stresa.

Between these two meetings, disquieting events in Germany further undermined French security. In March Germany announced her intentions to develop an air force and to introduce conscription. These announcements were orchestrated by Hitler to exploit maximum advantage from France and Britain's own modest rearmament efforts. A British White Paper of 1 March was used to postpone a state visit by British Foreign Minister Sir John Simon to Berlin until after the announcement of the Luftwaffe, and the announcement of conscription came the day after the French Chamber passed a two-year service law on 15 March. German rearmament made Cot more insistent than ever that France must not engage Germany in isolation, either militarily or diplomatically. Circumstances must not be permitted to develop into a Franco-German confrontation. France, in all cases, must deal with Germany only from the security of a collective front. He found confirmation of this view in "the echoes of the Stresa conference."[23]

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[22]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 12 January 1935.

[23]Le Démocrat, 13 April 1935.

Cot agreed with the British that permanent European security must eventually include Germany, too; but he did not anticipate that Germany would be ready to join such a collective system in the immediate future. Therefore, the system needed to be created without Germany, though not, he insisted, against her. Cot never ceased emphasizing that France's alliances must come within the League structure. It was in Geneva that alliances were open to all and directed only against lawlessness. Germany could not logically complain of encirclement by alliances that were undertaken within the League structure and were held open to her. It was not encirclement that disturbed Cot, but Germany's ability to prove encirclement to a judging public. It was a bit of gamemanship. Once again Cot called for the implementation of League security features: the definiton of aggression, the establishment of automatic sanctions, and general and controlled disarmament. He thought that if such systems were established, Germany eventually would join: "She cannot remain forever apart from the world." In the meantime, Cot hoped that the Stresa Front would serve two things: one, to contain Germany, and two, to bring the Soviet Union into the collective security system. In May, Laval did conclude and sign the Franco-Soviet alliance. The price of Italian cooperation, however, proved prohibitively high.[24]

Ethiopian Crisis

Rumblings of Italy's Ethiopian adventure, which had begun in December 1934, were felt in Europe during the summer of 1935. Cot's response to the Ethiopian crisis was based clearly on his perception of the

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[24]Le Démocrat, 20 April 1935.

principles involved. Although he continued to recognize the facts of Italian need, Cot never equivocated on the matter of Ethiopia's integrity or on that of the law of nations. Regardless of how legitimate Italy's needs might be, she could not "pursue a policy that is against the League." The interests of peace were more important than the colonial interests of Italy, and peace demanded the maintenance of the rule of law. If France accepted Italian violations of the League Covenant, for whatever reasons, she would undermine the entire structure of collective security. Here, however, the ambiguity with which Cot had earlier approached the Stresa Front came home to him. Was collective security, if the choice had to be made, a function of Great Power cooperation defined by alliances or League authority? In the Ethiopian crisis, Cot clung to the latter, but in doing so he sacrificed the Stresa Front. Cot, himself, suggested that in order to salvage Italian friendship it was to the interest of France to find a ground for a compromise with Italy that would both satisfy her needs and maintain the law of nations. "It is necessary to aid Italy," he said, and he went so far as to suggest that "if France and England surrender some mandates inherited from Germany in order to satisfy Italy, if peace costs that, then why not?"[25] But no ground for such a compromise was ever found.

As the matter developed before the League at Geneva in September 1935, Cot's concern increased, for although he was willing to accommodate Italy in some way, he was never willing to make Ethiopia, a sovereign state and a League member, the means of that accommodation. It was not

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[25] Le Démocrat, 31 August 1935. See also Franklin D. Laurens, France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-1936 (The Hague, 1967).

a question of whether or not Ethiopia should be a member of the League as some argued; she was.[26] Nor was it a question of the comparative values of Latin and Ethiopian civilization as others argued; such racism had no place in the League of Nations. It was a question of the sovereign and territorial integrity of Ethiopia. He denied that there was any comparison between French colonial development in the nineteenth century and Italian ambitions in the twentieth; the first, whether for good or ill, did not justify the second. If a comparison was possible, it was not with the past but with the future, with the threats that might come from Nazi Germany against her neighbors to whom she claimed to be racially superior. By no measure could the League or civilized men accept the conquest of one member by another.[27]

In October 1935, when Italy launched a full scale attack against Ethiopia, Cot called for sanctions. The reticence with which that policy was met in France brought Cot's worst fears into focus, fears that a precedent was being created which Germany would use against France in the Rhineland. France's own security demanded that she work for the full application of collective sanctions--diplomatic, economic and military. "If we hesitate," and Germany chooses to move in Europe, "will England, too, hesitate?"[28]

Cot disagreed with Laval, who suggested that sanctions might mean war. Mussolini had made war. To stop his aggression, even by force

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[26]Ethiopia had been admitted in 1923 with the help of Henry Jouvenel.

[27]Le Démocrat, 31 August, 14 September 1935.

[28]Le Démocrat, 12 October 1935.

if that be necessary, was not to make war but to end it. To say otherwise was the same as denying the gendarme the right to use his weapon in arresting an assassin.[29] Clearly, Cot made a distinction between the legal use of force, that is, police action in defense of the law, and war. It was a distinction of both purpose and scope. The use of police force, in this case on the international level, risked the lives of the policemen in the course of their duty and of the aggressor forces, should they resist the policy force, but this was not war, not morally and not in practice. The police action assumed the aggressions would be brought quickly to an end, that the police action was limited. It also assumed that it would not involve the population of the "policing" states, either in mobilization or in combat. When Cot spoke of war, he meant total war, nations mobilized and pitting against each other their total resources.

Having established the legitimacy of military sanctions and their distinctions from war, Cot also established that diplomatic and economic sanctions, if seriously and effectively used, had a very good chance of achieving the desired end without making military sanctions necessary. No country in the modern world could maintain a war in economic and diplomatic isolation. The need for resources demanded commerce and foreign exchange. Italy particularly needed oil. Modern war "was not made with men but with material." Yet behind economic sanctions there had to be a willingness to use arms for enforcement, such as in a blockade. Cot called himself a "pacifist" and said that he "trembled" to think of the use of military sanctions, but he knew that without

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[29]Le Démocrat, 12 October 1935.

the will to use them, economic sanctions would prove ineffective.[30] This was not a new or a changed position for Cot. It had been behind his concept of collective security through the League from the beginning. It had prompted his suggestion that France put her navy at the disposal of the League at the time of the Manchurian crisis. But it was the first time that the issue had been brought so close to the European states. Believing that the League itself was at stake, he staked all on the League.

It does not appear that Cot agonized over his choice in the Ethiopian crisis. He was distressed that Italy had chosen aggression and concerned lest this action, unchecked, provide a precedent for Germany in Europe. His sense of morality and international law was genuinely outraged. These appear honest and unstudied responses. Cot never discussed the practical problems presented by this action--to Franco-Italian relations, to Danubian diplomacy, to French Alpine and Mediterranean security, and to France's eastern commitments. In a sense, he did not have to make a choice, his principles made the choice for him. And the resulting disengagement from Italy made it easier to present fascism as the categorical opponent in the political battle being waged in France.

The Radical-Socialsts were divided not only over the Ethiopian issue but also over what course to take in regard to the Laval government. The divisions did not coincide.[31] At the party congress held

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[30] Le Démocrat, 12 October 1935.

[31] Daladier, who was preparing Radical-Socialist participation in the Popular Front, wanted the party to withdraw but for political reasons, not because of the Ethiopian crisis. Herriot, on the other hand, who was

in Paris in October, the Ethiopian crisis was side-stepped. Herriot, for an undisclosed reason, personally asked Cot not to speak, a request with which he complied.[32] The report on foreign affairs was made by Paul Bastide, a member of the French delegation at Geneva. His report and the party declaration expressed general opposition to Italian aggression but made no specific recommendations, leaving, in characteristic Radical fashion, all options open.[33]

Not long after the congress, however, the party executive committee took up the matter in anticipation of the upcoming debate on foreign policy in the Chamber. There, Cot made clear his stand for sanctions, and when the matter came to the floor of the Chamber in December, it was Cot and Yvon Delbos, who presented the Radical-Socialist case against Italian aggression and won Chamber support for sanctions.[34] The sanctions themselves, however, proved ineffectual. Non-League states were not bound by them. Neither France nor Britain were prepared to execute military sanctions successfully and so were reticent to insist on oil sanctions which might provoke Italian violence. And in Europe other events were demanding attention.

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in open disagreement with Laval's Ethiopian policy, chose to remain in the government rather than make the Radical-Socialist ministers responsible for its failure.

[32]Alexander Werth, The Twilight of France, 58.

[33]Congrès . . . tenu à Paris, les 24, 25, 26, et 27 Octobre 1935, 523-524.

[34]L'Oeuvre, 14 November 1935; La République, 14 November 1935; J. O. Chambre. Débats 15e (1935), 2820, 2848, 2854-2856.

Rhineland Crisis

For Cot, the relationship between Italian agression in Ethiopia and German remilitarization of the Rhineland lay in his continuing attempt to see the authority of the League of Nations established as an effective agent for collective security. Whether or not Cot should have sustained this hope, he did. Whether or not it was warranted by circumstances and logic, Cot and many others, including Anthony Eden, who had taken over the British Foreign Office on 22 December 1935,[35] continued to work for League authority and international agreement with Germany. To have done otherwise would have been to accept the inevitability of an arms race and war. They understood the probability of these in any case, but they were not ready to take the psychological step from probability to certainty that abandoning all hope in the League constituted.

That Germany was preparing to test her position in Europe had been evident for some time. That the target would be the Rhineland and the issue, the Franco-Soviet pact had also been released for diplomatic reactions months before. Hitler's address at the Nazi rally at Nuremberg in September 1935 was ominous, and intelligence reports and diplomatic communiques from Berlin and London left little doubt that a German initiative was being planned.[36] No attempt was made, however, in Paris or London, to stop Germany.

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[35]For Eden during this period, see Avon, Facing the Dictators, 353-443; Aster, Eden, 39-42.

[36]Gerhard L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936 (Chicago, 1970), 239-263; Young, In Command of France, 119-129.

When Germany sent troops into the Rhineland on 7 March 1936, Cot did not call for sanctions against Germany. And after several days of uncertain tension in which the French cabinet considered its options and consulted with the British, neither did the French and British governments.[37] Cot said that the circumstances were not the same as they had been in Ethiopia: that the Rhineland was a different kind of situation; that the British position on sanctions was different; and that the threat of war was more certain and more dangerous.

While the violation of law in the Rhineland was as clear as it had been in Ethiopia, there was a difference. The Rhineland was a part of sovereign Germany. The maintenance of its demilitarized condition was by agreement, the original condition established in the Treaty of Versailles and restated in the Locarno accords (1925) and the Hague accords (1930). Germany was violating international agreement, but she was not violating another nation's sovereign territory. While the violation of law was itself clear--Cot called the German action "a brutal repudiation"--the context was less certain. The legacy of inaction and failure in regard to reaching an arms agreement with Germany based on a condition of equality of rights in no way justified Germany's action but it made it more understandable.[38]

While Cot saw the violation of law as clear, he saw the British position on sanctions, or more accurately, the decision not to use them, as different. In the Ethiopian crisis, Britain had called for economic

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[37]Weinburg, Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, 239-263; Young, In Command of France, 119-129.

[38]Le Démocrat, 14 March 1936.

sanctions through the League of Nations. War was a contingency that Italy might resort to in retaliation but not something that the League powers would initiate. If economic sanctions required military support in the Ethiopian crisis, it was a naval maneuver that Cot envisioned, not a European land war. In March 1936, on the other hand, it was military sanctions under the terms of the Locarno accords, not economic sanctions under the League, that were considered and rejected. Such action, Cot said, would call for general mobilization, which he opposed, and would "signal an appalling war." To take such an action in order to prevent war in the future was, said Cot, "unthinkable."[39]

Implicit in his rejection of the use of sanctions in the Rhineland was Cot's understanding of the French military posture. It was here that the threat of war became more certain and more dangerous, for what was being considered was not a naval operation to embargo commerce but a military operation along the Franco-German frontier, a land war in Europe. Under these circumstances, the exclusively defensive posture of the French army was a determining factor. There was no small, special force with offensive capability for police action in front of the Maginot Line. France was prepared to fight only one kind of action--a long, defensive war of attrition--total war or no war at all. This was a fact that the diplomats could not change and had to work with.[40]

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[39] Le Démocrat, 14 and 21 March 1936.

[40] The question of why this was so, why there was no police contingency, is a special problem that lies beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that the army presented no such contingency plans in 1930, when the Rhineland was returned to Germany; it did not present

All of these things--differences between Ethiopia and the Rhineland--were true. It is also true that Cot did not appear very surprised by either the German action or the French and British response. He seemed to have been awaiting them and his comments explained why France had made the decisions to ratify the Franco-Soviet alliance whatever Germany might do, and to respond to the remilitarization of the Rhineland, when it came, with diplomatic maneuver rather than sanctions or police action. At most, perhaps, Cot hoped to salvage something for the future from a situation in which France and Britain were patently unprepared to act.

When the crisis came, Cot took care to explain that the treaty to which the Germans were raising objection--the Franco-Soviet alliance signed in May 1936--in no way constituted the threat to Germany that the Nazis claimed. It did not bar the way to future conciliation, as even the British feared.[41] It was "a commitment to mutual assistance," directed at no one, established within the framework of the League of Nations and the Locarno accords, and was open to all. Germany had been

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any in 1934 when Hitler was rearming and Gamelin was calling for expanded programs of French rearmament and alliance commitments; it did not offer any after the Rhineland crisis; and it had not done so in September 1938 at the time of the Czech crisis. It would appear that after 1930, the French army wished to avoid having to respond to this kind of contingency.

[41]The British government had demonstrated some interest in Anglo-Soviet rapprochement in 1934 and 1935. It approved the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations in September 1934 and sent Eden on an official trip to Moscow in March 1935. Others in the government did not share his enthusiasm or optimism, however; and when France signed an alliance with the Soviet Union in May 1935, British uneasiness was pronounced and encouraged the conclusion that the Anglo-German naval agreement, reached in June, was indeed appropriate. The French case that the Franco-Soviet alliance did not encircle Germany was made as much for the benefit of the British as for the Germans.

asked to join but had refused; she was still welcome. At the same time, no one in France could ignore the rearmament of Germany and the increasingly aggressive tone of her foreign policy. France, which alone could not guarantee her own security, was compelled to expand and strengthen her ties for collective security.[42]

Cot offered no hint of criticism of the British, no suggestion that they had abandoned their Locarno commitments. He chose to see the March crisis as a "non-flagrant" violation for which recourse to the League of Nations Council was appropriate. (In "flagrant" violation, direct action was permitted, but definitions for "flagrant" and "non-flagrant" were open to interpretation.) Rather, Cot expressed gratification and optimism at the strength of the British friendship. Such a conclusion was a little premature, since Eden's Commons speech was a fortnight away, but since Cot himself was in London to consult on the March crisis, he may have had preview of Eden's state of mind.[43]

What Cot appeared to be seeking with British support was a moral and a legal advantage at Geneva. The real danger lay, he said, not in German soldiers in the Rhineland but in German rearmament and in the absence of any international arms control. What was needed was substantive international agreement. The first action which ought to be taken at Geneva was the condemnation of Germany; without that, "international law is dead" and the legitimacy of the Franco-Soviet alliance remained challenged. Beyond that, however, "we must . . . see to it that stronger and more serious guarantees are substituted for

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[42] Le Démocrat, 14 and 21 March 1936.

[43] Le Démocrat, 14 and 21 March 1936.

the guarantees of Locarno." Cot suggested an agreement for the control of arms, an aviation agreement that included automatic sanctions against the aggressor, perhaps the international control of the Franco-German frontier, even the demilitarization of both sides. What was wanted, he said, was "a regime that does not rest with the good will of M. Hitler . . . but which puts Germany in such a position that in violating its commitments or starting a war she would risk facing a coalition of all the League powers."[44]

In both the Ethiopian and the Rhineland crises, Cot desired to see the League of Nations strengthened, but the specific goals and the means were different. In the Ethiopian crisis, sanctions were intended to prove the League an effective authority and force for collective security (and for international justice as well). In the Rhineland crisis, the intent was to strengthen the League by adding to its international agreements. It was not to remove German arms from the Rhineland but to use their presence as leverage with which to move Britain to increase its support to France (hopefully with the long-sought military alliance) and to bring Germany to a general European settlement, including an arms agreement.

In neither case were France and Britain successful in strengthening the League, and in the process the Locarno accords were also lost. A factor that Cot never stated as such but which was clearly important was the shift in the Italian position. In 1925, Britain and Italy both had committed themselves to guarantee the Rhineland in the Locarno accords, but in 1936, it was obvious that Italy, at best, would play no

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[44]Le Démocrat, 14 and 21 March 1936.

part and, at worst, would support Germany. There was another link between Ethiopia and the Rhineland. Cot, in applying the principle of law to Italy, had to accept the alteration of the power alignment; had he maintained the Stresa Front, he would have had to abandon principle. Apart from Cot's position on the matter, Italy began to move into the Rome-Berlin Axis.

For Cot, these events prompted a reexamination of collective security and a reevaluation of French options. The rearmament of Germany had presented the Versailles system with a mortal challenge. During two years of uncertainty, Cot had attempted to meet threats to the Versailles system with the system itself, the League and Locarno. His left-wing premises, which assumed that traditional alliances and rearmament created a climate for war,[45] placed him at odds with right-wing attempts to enhance French security through alliances and effectives.

In fact, a fear of praetorianism was a part of the politics of anti-fascism. While Cot maintained good opinions of many officers with whom he worked, including Marshal Pétain, he distrusted Weygand and those who expressed compatibility with the rightist leagues, such as the Croix de Feu. The ease with which Cot had committed himself to the development of military aviation in 1933 seems to stand in conflict with his opposition of the two-year law in 1934 and 1935. However, aviation programs represented to Cot the best opportunity to develop military programs of technology and material with which to support a reserve army. Doubt about the political reliability of the general staff of the army during the crisis of 6 February simply confirmed old

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[45]See page 47.

prejudices. Cot, the air minister, and Cot, the Radical politican, illustrate a dilemma of authority and democracy.

As for alliances, only gradually, and then under the illusion of Laval's Briandism, did Cot pursue the possibilities of the Stresa Front, only to find its hopes illusionary. Italian aggression in Ethiopia and German remilitarization of the Rhineland demonstrated that neither League authority nor strong alliances existed to impede aggression and that France's military posture and preparation were in no way capable of either limited or unilateral action. Cot had identified four sources of French security: the League, Locarno, the French army, and Germany's posture. After German rearmament and the Ethiopian and Rhineland crises, none was effective. The Versailles system, indeed, had come to an end. If Hitler was to be prevented from establishing his own European order, a re-ordering of priorities was needed. Cot found his answer in three principles: anti-fascism, mutual assistance, and deterrence. The force that drew it all together was anti-fascism, for the first priority was to protect democracy from the outlaws who threatened it from within as well as from without. The Popular Front became as much a part of his defense structure as did deterrence and mutual assistance. Europe must be willing to fight for democracy and peace.

But the political support that Cot sought to carry out new policies for collective security contained sources of its own failure. The Popular Front, by combining all of the Left in a monumental anti-fascist crusade, brought together disparate views on peace and war. The Socialists were never comfortable with either the Radicals or the PCF. Either genuinely pacifist or revolutionary defeatist, they found mutual assistance and deterrence in support of a capitalist, even if democratic

regime, difficult to support. They found cooperation with the PCF even more difficult. The Radicals, on the hand (all but their extreme left wing) were susceptible to the anti-Bolshevik hysteria that conservatives felt when faced with the very magnitude of a Popular Front that included the Communists. In the period after 1936, the political struggle between anti-fascism and anti-Bolshevism took precedence for many over mutual assistance of deterrence, as the tragedy of Spain would show.

CHAPTER VI

THE POLITICS OF ANTI-FASCISM AND THE RESHAPING OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY, 1936-1938

The events of 1934-1936 had demonstrated to Cot in retrospect the need for deterrence and mutual assistance. In June 1936, when he returned to the Boulevard Victor in the Popular Front government of Léon Blum, he was put in a unique position to develop these concepts of collective security. During his second Air Ministry, he constructed a plan for comprehensive alliance cooperation and military coordination with which to deter the aggressive ambitions of Nazi Germany. His fundamental premise was that Anglo-Franco-Soviet cooperation could be achieved. On that rested both the fate of his plan and the direction of his own career.

Between the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 and the Anschluss in March 1938 any hope of restoring rapport with Italy in support of the eastern alliances faded as the Rome-Berlin Axis became more pronounced, and both Cot and the French government faced major decisions regarding France's military programs, the British entente, and the Soviet alliance. As had been the case in 1933, Cot's residence at the Boulevard Victor allowed him little contact with foreign policy per se and no opportunity for independent public comment on matters that were not directly related to the work of the Air Ministry. But his commitment to collective security was so great that one must assume and infer the efforts he made privately among government circles. On only two matters did his work overlap that of the Quai d'Orsay: aviation

aid to the Spanish republicans and military coordination for mutual assistance with France's allies and friends: the Soviets, the Czechs, and the British. In defense matters, Cot took up the ceaseless fight for credits and new programs to make the French air force, woefully deficient and desperately in need of rearmament, a viable deterrent force.

During his tenure at the Boulevard Victor, Cot became one of the targets of a bitter, cruel, and slanderous campaign of press vilification. The press law that was passed in December 1936, after the suicide of another target, Interior Minister Roger Salengro, curtailed some of the worst abuse, but the epithets remained in use and the press campaign was resumed in 1938, when the state of French aviation became increasingly controversial. Even within his own party, his support for the Popular Front, the Spanish republicans, and the Soviet alliance raised criticism from the Jeunesses Radicaux[1] whose tone and temper were not too different from other militant leaguers turned politicians. The politics of anti-fascism had created a great counter-force and both Cot and his plans for collective security fell its victim. The Popular Front was intended literally to overwhelm fascism in France with a great outpouring of democratic strength and to mass the democratic forces of Europe against Axis aggression. But the Popular Front was limited by the factors of its own formation.

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[1]A Radical-Socialist organization, nominally under the authority of the party hierarchy, it exhibited a propensity for activism and violence and maintained its own officers and direction.

Popular Front and the Election of 1936

The crisis of 6 February 1934 brought to an end the left-wing parliamentary majority established by the election of 1932. Daladier, in refusing the offer of Léon Blum from the floor of the Chamber to form a cartel government to stand against the violence in the streets, opened the way for a return to a Center-Right majority, supporting first the "truce" government of Gaston Doumergue and then the governments of Pierre Etienne Flandin, Pierre Laval, and Albert Sarraut. While concentrationists among the Radical-Socialists maintained a tenuous and frequently ambivalent support for these governments, the left-wing led the party into collaboration with the Popular Front, an expanded electoral coalition of the entire Left, including the Communists and the social Catholics. Within it each party retained its own identity and autonomy but subscribed to a common minimum program and to the observance of republican discipline on the second ballot.

Pierre Cot found the concept of the Popular Front satisfying from various points of view, providing a vehicle in support of at least four different goals: a defense against Fascism, an extension of the Union des gauches as a basis for democratic political action and government, a force for economic reorganization and reform, and a force for collective security through the Franco-Soviet alliance. His interest appeared early and his support grew throughout 1934 and 1935 as possibilities for political organization took shape.

For Cot and his colleagues of the Left, the crisis of 6 February served as a reminder and a symbol of the anti-parliamentary violence that fascism and the radical Right encouraged in French politics. Their traditional political war with the Right took on a new urgency as the

activities of the rightist leagues increased. The Left sought nothing less than the disbandment of the leagues; the leagues, the end of the democratic republic; the battle was fought both in the press and the streets. Cot, for his outspoken anti-fascism, his unceasing war against the leagues, and his affinity for the Soviet connection, became one of the most vilified targets of the radical Right.[2]

The tradition of the Union des gauches had long been and continued to remain strong among Radical-Socialists in Chambéry, who consistently advocated Socialist participation in government, supported the Socialistes de France after November 1933, and were quite willing to see the traditional coalition expanded. As early as March 1934, there appeared in Le Démocrat Savoyard an editorial statement rejecting the assertion made in Le Temps that the country would not support a tri-part union among the Socialists, Communists, and Radical-Socialists.[3] Le Démocrat Savoyard charged Le Temps with confusing reality with its own desires and concluded that even if such an assertion were true in Paris, "Paris is not France." At the same time, there was also expressed an

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[2]Cot, besides being the topic of frequent abuse in the rightist press, was the object of an attack from the Camelots de roi, who threw acid in his face as he prepared to address a meeting at Aix-les-Bains, 29 May 1935. Fortunately, Cot's injuries were minor; they did not prevent him from completing his speech (although they did leave him with a partial hearing impairment); but the incident demonstrated the intensity and the planning with which the radical Right fought him. This was not an attack of spontaneous violence like that which almost took the life of Léon Blum in Paris in February 1936, but a prepared attack. Le Democrat, 1 and 8 June, 6 July 1935; La République, 2, 3, 9 June 1935; Times, 31 May 1935. Five men of the local Camelots de roi were charged, tried, and convicted of this attack. For the attack on Blum, see Colton, Blum, 114-117.

[3]Cot was political director of the journal at this time and president of the Radical-Socalist party in Chambéry, which exercised direction over the editorial committee of Le Démocrat Savoyard.

attitude of sympathy with Marc Sanger's Jeune République based on common goals.[4]

The desire of the Radical-Socialists in Savoie to see the Union des gauches strengthened and expanded reflected the fact that their position in both local and national politics depended on the successful execution of republican discipline. Cantonal elections in October 1934 demonstrated that the Radical-Socialists might expect disaster if the parties of the Left went into the 1936 legislative election pitted against each other. In addition there were municipal elections in May 1935 and senatorial elections in October. In all instances Cot was at the head of the campaign for the Union des gauches.[5]

Cot's desire to see a broad based majority of the Left elected in 1936 was reflected his conviction that parliament must undertake major economic reorganization and reform. Cot, who had concluded that traditional liberal economic mechanisms were outdated, called for rational planning, democratic participation through syndicats, and state regulation of financial and economic exploiters, that is, the banks, the media owners, and the special interests. If a label is necessary, Cot was a modern Jacobin whose defense of the individual right to private property was based exclusively on labor and who cast government in the role of protecting the right to work through rational planning and regulation.[6]

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[4]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 10 March 1934.

[5]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 22 and 29 September, 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 October 1934; Le Démocrat, 27 April, 4, 11, 18 May 1935. On 2 February 1935 Le Démocrat Savoyard became Le Démocrat.

[6]Le Réveil des Gauches, 12 September 1931, 15 September 1932; Le Démocrat Savoyard, 24 March, 26 May, 7 July 1934; Le Démocrat, 15 June 1935.

Cot's own anti-capitalism made collaboration in the politics of anti-fasicsm with Socialists and Communists easier.

At the end of March 1935, Cot called for a Plan commun, a common program that would draw together the political efforts of the Left--the Radicals, the Socialists, neo-Socialists, la Jeune République, and the démocrats populaires; it did not include the Communists but informal contacts did exist with the PCF in Chambéry. In mid-June, Cot spoke of the need for a rassemblement démocratique and he repeated a warning, which had been made first in May 1934 to Radical-Socialists leaders: "The old leaders of our parties do not seem to understand . . . [the need for cooperation]. It is too bad for them. The republican state is in peril. Its defense must be placed above all other considerations."[7]

On 18 June, Le Démocrat announced that a Popular Front for Liberty was formed in Chambéry, conforming to Cot's previously expressed desires and to the intent of representatives of three national movements--Amsterdam-Pleyel, the Committee of Vigilance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, and the League of the Rights of Man--who had met in Paris the previous day. Preparations were made for a grand rassemblement anti-fascist for 30 June in Chambéry, at which local, regional, and national leaders of the participating organizations spoke.[8]

In mid-July, the executive committee of the Radical-Socialist party, following the preemptory response of Edouard Daladier to a Communist initiative, announced its adherence to a vast Bastille Day demonstration

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[7]Le Démocrat, 30 March, 20 April, 15 June 1935.

[8]Le Démocrat, 18 June 1935.

of solidarity, from which the electoral alliance was formed. Cot, who appeared alongside Léon Blum and Maurice Thorez in the parade in Paris on the fourteenth, became an active member of the inter-party mechanisms that organized the Popular Front and worked unceasingly to promote it within all interested groups.[9]

In the 1936 election, Cot himself was opposed by Georges Riond, director of Le Pays de Savoie, a right-wing journal. Riond had led the assault against Cot in February and March 1934, attempting to link him with the Stavisky scandals. Cleared of any suspicion by the commission of inquiry, Cot still spent many weeks that spring responding to Riond's charges and shepherding his own constituency in Chambéry. The election campaign that opened in April 1936, in this respect, had been going on for two years. The battle was waged across the entire breadth

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[9]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 82-87. Although the Popular Front, when it was finally organized in July 1935, included some twenty different organizations, the key to its formation was the role of the Communist party. In response to the riots of 6 February 1934, a general swell of popular demonstrations and vigilance committees captured the imaginations of the Communist and the Socialist rank and file, prompting spontaneous local cooperation despite the refusal of the party politburo to abandon its policy of "class against class" and its war against the Socialists. Finally, in June 1934, the Comintern, for its own reasons, instructed the French party to abandon criticism of the Socialists and effect a Front commun with them. In October 1934, Communists and Socialists cooperated in republican discipline in the canton elections; both parties benefitted at the expense of the Radical-Socialists, but the Right was the greatest winner, threatening to polarize French politics further. New initiatives for change came from Moscow in May 1935, when reversals in Soviet policy permitted, indeed, demanded a redirecting of the French Communist party position: the decision by Stalin to withdraw objections to national defense appropriations was prompted by the single desire to reinforce the Franco-Soviet pact and opened the way, intentionally, for the French Communists to cooperate with the Radical-Socialists as well as the Socialists. The formation of the Popular Front followed. See, Daniel R. Bower, The New Jacobins: The French Communist Party and the Popular Front (Ithaca, New York, 1968), 31-99. See also Le Démocrat Savoyard, 17 February, 25 August, 20 October 1934; Le Démocrat, 18 May 1935.

of domestic and foreign issues. Unlike his compatriots in the other three districts of Savoie, Cot won handily on the first ballot.[10]

The importance of the 1936 election in understanding Cot's career lies not in what he said or in his campaign style, as it had earlier, but in the politics of anti-fascism. The climate of political activism and violence that accompanied it was important for it placed Cot and his policies at the center of a storm of hate. The opening of legitimate contacts with the PCF was important because he established personal relationships with Communist leaders that would long outlast the Third Republic. But most important were the assumptions made about the Popular Front victory at the polls. It was assumed that a Popular Front mandate could be translated into diplomatic success, that it could bring about collective security. It could not. It was assumed that the Popular Front supported peace and resistance to fascism. It did not. It was divided. And the men who came to govern in the name of the Popular Front found that the victory at the polls was elusive and of uncertain meaning.

The national success of the Popular Front in the 1936 election resolved the question of Socialist participation that had plagued the party since the days of Jaurès and Guesde and had nullified the cartel election victories of 1924 and 1932. Léon Blum, having won the "exercise of power" for which he had been waiting, formed a government with the Radical-Socialists which had the support but not the participation

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[10]Le Démocrat Savoyard, 24 February, 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 March, 7, 14 April, 5 and 12 May 1934; Le Démocrat, 23 February, 15 June 1935.

of the Communists and the support of all the Popular Front groupes in the Chamber.[11]

This did not, however, resolve differences between the Socialists and the Radical-Socialists, nor did it provide a permanent resolution to the problem of the Communists. Events, which were no more gentle with the Popular Front than they had been with the Union des gauches and the Cartel des gauches, only accentuated these differences. Cot's observations about the impossibility of concentration as a governing combination applied equally to the Popular Front, whether its adherents admitted it or not. It was difficult for men to govern together, he said, when their ideals might sound the same but when, in fact, their programs and their manner of implementation were quite different, even hostile, and represented "different classes and interests."[12] This was demonstrated painfully in the controversies over the Spanish Civil War, which broke out in July against the background of serious economic crisis and labor violence and which faced the Blum government with major decisions regarding the British alliance, German strength, and the Soviet connection.

The Spanish Crisis

When the revolt of the Spanish generals broke out on 17 July 1936, Cot, as Minister of Air, was in an historically unique position. One of the few men in France in a political and administrative position to

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[11]For Léon Blum and the Popular Front, see Colton, Léon Blum, 201-232.

[12]Le Réveil des Gauches, 14 December 1929.

provide immediate military aid to the Spanish government, he was also one of the few political leaders committed to this aid. His response was taken without hesitation; aware of the forces determined to prevent delivery on the purchases requested, he "hastened to live up to France's agreements," and provided delivery of "everything we could." He attempted to make the transfer of airplanes discretely, unobserved, but the right-wing press followed his moves with disturbing closeness, and their sensational exposures embroiled both Cot and the issue of aid to Spain in emotional public debate.[13]

While the Minister of Air implemented the transfer of planes to the Spanish republic, the Quai d'Orsay and the government looked with apprehension at the violence of the reactions to the Spanish issue. The open sympathy of the French Right for Franco and its opposition to aiding the Loyalists raised the fear of civil war in France. Clear proof of Italian and German aid to Spain raised the fear of a European war, should France support the republicans. The hostility of British Conservatives to the popular and legal but extremely left-wing government of Spain raised the fear that Britain might not honor the Locarno accords, should French aid to the Loyalists result in a war with Germany. Alexis Leger, General Secretary of the Quai d'Orsay, the CSG, and Foreign Minister Yvon Delbos all wanted to see the Spanish war as a noncrisis, which should not be permitted to engage France in war, interfere with the work of bringing Britain into an alliance, or interject further violence into domestic politics. For these reasons, the Quai d'Orsay supported a policy of non-intervention and hoped that, by securing the

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[13]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 336-347.

adherence of all the European powers to it, the Spanish war might be kept a Spanish concern. The decision for non-intervention was made in the Council of Ministers between 25 July and 8 August.[14]

Within the Council of Ministers, Cot led the fight for aid to the Loyalists, for he saw Spain as a real and critical issue of both strategic and political impact. Spain's location and the threat which fascism as a doctrine posed to democracy made the outcome of the war vital to France. That the revolt of the Fascist supported generals might succeed against the legal republican government of Spain was unthinkable to Cot. "The triumph of the rebels will be, for our country, a catastrophe." The Pyrenees frontier, the western Mediterranean, and North Africa were critical to France. A third of the French army was stationed in Algeria and Tunisia. Returning troops to metropolitan France in time of crisis could be hindered by an unfriendly Spain. In addition, Cot assumed that Franco's success would put Hitler in control of the Mediterranean and Atlantic approaches to France and would permit him access to Spanish air bases. "France would be encircled" and in international councils would lose the cooperation of a sister democracy.[15]

The possibility that the Spanish war might develop into a broader European conflict was not a matter that Cot took lightly, but he thought the dangers of a fascist victory were, at the moment, greater than those of general war. He pointed out that Germany's rearmament was not yet

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[14]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 340-347; Dreifort, Delbos, 31-54.

[15]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 346-347; see also Jean Savoie, "France-Spain," Le Démocrat, 1 August 1936.

complete, and Italy's forces were exhausted from Ethiopia; both might be stronger later. Although British support was uncertain, Cot thought that the combination of French-Czech-Soviet forces was, at that time, more than an adequate match for the fascist powers. (Cot thought Britain would probably join the democratic coalition in war, if only for self-interest, but, of course, he could not be certain.) His decision to aid Spain reflected his acceptance of the possibility but not the probability of war, the risks of which he calculated within a coalition he believed strong enough to permit victory.[16]

From a political point of view, the risks of French involvement in Spain were greater and the outcome more doubtful. Although the Popular Front in France had won a victory at the polls in May 1936, the country remained divided, and opposition to the Popular Front continued to be violent, determined, and supported by large financial resources and media influence. The monumental tasks of social and economic reconstruction were in no way guaranteed by the electoral victory. Each step was a bitter battle. Hostile and fearful reactions to the labor demonstrations that had broken out in July in France created a climate susceptible to panic and manipulation. Delbos said that he did not want France to embark on an ideological crusade,[17] but Cot believed that France already had and the question now was who would win. The Popular Front had been created as the symbol and rallying point of anti-fascism in France. Its very success at the polls made it vulnerable to counterattack. The Spanish Civil War provided a dramatic

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[16]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 346-347.

[17]Dreifort, Delbos, 35.

rallying point for the anti-Bolshevik forces and opened the counter attack. The division within France was no longer a political one between democratic opponents but rather as a determined struggle to purge France of internal enemies. Cot, speaking later about the collapse of France in 1940, said: "We lost the first battle of the war in Spain."[18]

Léon Blum's initial response to the Spanish request for purchase authorization was the same as Cot's and he took part in the meetings with the Spanish representatives.[19] But he was forced by the reactions of others to consider the apprehensions of bourgeois Frenchmen recoiling from domestic violence and the fear of foreign war, the pressures of British Conservatives opposed to intervention and Bolshevism, and the problem of division within his own majority. Some of Blum's Socialist advisors urged him to force a showdown in the Chamber, but political opposition existed not only on the Right and in the Center but also among Radical-Socialists.[20] Resignation or reversal would only serve to jettison the domestic programs of the Popular Front and give France a government of the Right. Although Cot continued to oppose non-intervention until the last bitter defeat of the Loyalists in the spring of 1939 and to evade its restrictions as best he could from the Air Ministry, he recognized that in July 1936 the Blum government had no better choice. "Rightly or wrongly," he said, non-intervention had to be given a tentative trial. If it worked, it had some advantages.

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[18]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 349.

[19]Blum, chef de gouvernement, 135. Cot, Triumph of Treason, 345.

[20]Blum, chef de gouvernement, 136; Cot, Triumph of Treason, 345; Dreifort, Delbos, 36-38, 46-47.

Without aid from Germany and Italy, it was doubtful that Franco could win. If the fascist states did not observe non-intervention, then France might restore her freedom of action. In the meantime, aid to republican Spain could continue so long as the Control Committee saw no violation of the agreement and efforts could be made to change the minds of the British. Cot felt great respect for Léon Blum and great sympathy for him in the dilemma he faced.[21]

After the decision for non-intervention was made in August, Cot continued to aid the Loyalists. "Ingenious devices were invented to furnish Spain everything compatible with the rules of non-intervention--even a little more," said Cot, who continued to implement the delivery of planes to Spain in a variety of ways.[22] Cot acknowledged that the figures used by the Franco committee in London in the campaign against him were as accurate as any--"129 planes, 83 of them war planes." The figures that appeared in the French right-wing press were much higher, and Cot only wished that they had been accurate. In addition to the transfer of planes, Cot also facilitated other kinds of aid to Spanish aviation: training facilities and instructors were made available; Spanish planes that made navigational "errors" were permitted to use French airports for refueling; and an aerial navigation society called

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[21]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 345.

[22]Sports planes, transports, and training planes were not classified as war material; war planes were sent to third parties which were not participants in the non-intervention agreement, for example, Mexico and Lithuania; the destinations of pilots authorized to leave French airports were not checked nor were certain foreign planes (probably Soviet) which crossed France and used French airports. As a result of these practices, a number of planes reached the Loyalists. See Blum, chef de gouvernement. Cot, Triumph of Treason, 351-354.

"Air Pyrenees" was created in the Air Ministry, which Cot "understood" was very helpful "to the cause of liberty."[23]

Did Blum know about these activities? Cot and Blum's personal advisors Jules Moch and André Blumel, said yes. Cot also said that Yvon Delbos reproached Cot after the fact. "I always bowed before the judgment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs--after the deed, but I had a tendency not to consult him before taking action," he said. Delbos "jokingly" called Cot a "smuggler"; Cot himself said he was a "jurist," "demonstrating application of the common law on contraband." And, in fact, Cot reconciled his own actions with those of his country's legal commitment to non-intervention by using the letter of international public law and by carefully attending to his own job. "My ministerial functions," he said, "did not make me the policeman of the London Committee," and since France was commended by that committee for her observation of the rules of non-intervention, Cot chose to assume his actions were correct.[24]

In addition to his use of common law interpretations in regard to contraband and its transportation, Cot also worked to change the British policy toward non-intervention. There were those in Britain who had from the first understood that it was "principle not interests" that must be defended in Spain. The International Peace Conference, for which Cot shared the presidency with Lord Cecil in 1937,[25] provided an organizational structure for popular propaganda, as did various League

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[23]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 351-354.

[24]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 353-354; Blum, chef de gouvernement.

[25]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 354-355.

associations. Labor leaders also helped. But there were others who Cot wanted to reach, particularly Conservatives Anthony Eden and Winston Churchill. Cot, who was in Britain several times during 1937, approached Eden through mutual friends. (To have approached the British Foreign Secretary directly with a position contrary to the official position of his government would have been a grave breach of protocol.) On the other hand, he could approach Churchill directly and discussed Spain with him "on several occasions." Cot was in London at the end of April 1937 when the reports of Guernica began to come in. These, he said, did much to change Churchill's view of Franco.[26]

In June 1937, based on his contacts in Britain, Cot submitted a report to Blum and Delbos in which he made suggestions as to how France could aid Spain "without compromising our friendship" with Britain. And, indeed, they did initiate changes, accepting an interpretation of "relaxed" non-intervention, but, too late, said Cot. "Blum, a premier resigned to non-intervention was overthrown by the Senate and replaced by Chautemps, a determined partisan of non-intervention."[27]

The Spanish crisis was a lingering tragedy, a constant reminder of the depths of filial barbarism and the intensity of ideological struggle. Through it all, the French government maintained its policy of non-intervention, not always happily but never able to find an alternative it liked better. Cot, for his part, continued to call for the raising of non-intervention. In the end, fascist aid sustained Franco against the republicans and gradually prepared his last victory

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[26]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 354.

[27]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 355. Italics in the original.

in March 1939. Not Cot, nor La Passionaria, nor Nehru could save the Spanish Republic,[28] but with French recognition of Franco and Pétain's service as ambassador, neither did the strategic danger materialize. Would that the British and the French had been as skilled as Franco in negotiating with Hitler.

Security Contingencies

The on-going drama of Spain served to remind Cot of the imminence of the fascist threat and the need to prepare for defense, deterrence, and mutual assistance. It had become clear to him that France ought to prepare for two contingencies. Against direct attack and in a general war, France had prepared the couverture and relied on the support of allies and time. But against piecemeal strategic takeovers, those that did not offer a direct attack against France but a cutting away of the perimeter of containment, France offered no deterrent. Cot considered the diplomacy and the strategy of both contingencies and concluded that an expanded and an offensive capability for aviation and the military cooperation of the Soviet Union were necessary for both French security and collective security.

The Maginot fortifications had focused the probable area of contact with the Germans in the field in the northeast. The Belgians, who had refused fortification construction in any case, withdrew into neutrality in 1936. While the French general staff continued to assume that they would be fighting Germans in Belgium, there was no certainty as to coordination and early deployment was most doubtful. The

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[28]Louis Fischer, Men and Politics: Europe Between the Two Wars (New York, 1969), 537-538.

British would come in if France were directly attacked. Eden's speech to the Commons, 26 March 1936, which promised this, was well received in France. Still, the British resisted military staff coordination. The shift of Italy to the Axis required France to prepare new Alpine and Mediterranean defenses and the Fascist threat in Spain raised the uncertainty of the Pyrennes. Even without the demands of collective security in central and eastern Europe, Frances's defensive posture was more complicated in June 1936 than it had been a year earlier. Cot recognized this and offered expanded air capabilities to supplement France's ground forces and the couverture.

On the other hand, France had made no preparation for deterrence. To respond to this contingency, to meet French alliance obligations in central and eastern Europe, Cot again offered the air force, to be used in coordinated military planning with Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Poland was omitted from Cot's planning at this point. Since it had responded to Nazi Germany's bilateral overtures in 1933, Cot had come to rely on a defense line that ran from Paris to Prague to Moscow and which had the support of the Little Entente (although he did not count on it for military effort beyond its own defense). Still, France had an alliance with Poland, even though the military convention was out of date. The Polish problem would return to plague Cot and the entire concept of collective security later. During this period, Cot was concerned with implementing the Soviet alliance.

While Cot was preparing new roles for French aviation, he was sadly aware that the present condition of the air force did not even let it perform its old roles adequately. Since Cot had left the Air Ministry in February 1934, he had maintained contact with its programs through

the Air Commission in the Chamber.[29] In addition, sympathetic rapport continued between Cot and General Denain, who succeeded him as Minister of Air. During 1934 and 1935, progress on the programs initiated in 1933 was slow, often halting. Funding continued at a low level; programs for organization, recruitment, and training were left to drift; and most significant, production schedules for Plan I fell badly behind.[30] Even if production had been completed on schedule, however, the BCR[31] was already obsolete. The ambitious and successful development of the Luftwaffe had put French programs out of date and had left French aviation competitively underdeveloped. The gap between French and German aviation seemed impossible to fill. This threatening posture, demonstrated with exceptional color and dramatic force by Germany's Reichsmarshall for Air, made preparation for crisis the central factor at the Boulevard Victor during 1936 and 1937.

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[29]Cot was elected president of the Air Commission in June 1935. Usually an uncontested election, in this case, Cot won a majority against two other contenders. Le Démocrat, 22 June 1935.

[30]The most serious problem lay in the absence of organization in the aviation industry. Statistics vary, but it is certain that its capacity to produce fell far short of the orders it accepted, by at least 40 percent. See Robert Frankenstein, "A propos des aspects financiers du réarmament française, 1935-1939," Revue historique de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, No. 102 (April 1976), 1-20; Jean Truelle, "La production aéronautique militaire française," 75-109; François Boudot, "Sur des problèmes du financement de la défense nationale, 1936-1940," Revue historique de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, No. 81 (January 1971), 49-72; Jean Marie d'Hoop, "La politique française du réarmement: d'apres les travaux de la commission d'enquête parliamentaire," Revue historique de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, No. 14 (April 1954), 1-26.

[31]Bomber-fighter-reconnaissance plane, see page 123.

The Air Force and Deterrence

At the Air Ministry, Cot undertook the reorganization and implementation of new programs for personnel, for the use and deployment of aviation, and for the production of planes. The goal of these programs was to create a military arm that was in a permanent state of readiness--"to be prepared in peacetime, to operate without delay, to be in combat formation at all times, to respond in an hour to surprise."[32]

Cot was deeply concerned with the preparation and the morale of air force personnel and with the critical need for manpower. To meet new personnel needs, Cot returned to programs he had conceived in 1933, but which had been largely neglected since then. New officers were recruited from the non-commissioned ranks. Their training was prepared in aviation schools that emphasized the new and necessary technical expertise and gave preparation for air operation rather than army command. The maximum age for staff command was lowered by implementing a 1934 statute lowering the retirement age by three years. To provide a pool of reserve manpower, Cot delegated to his chef de cabinet, Jean Moulin, the development of sports aviation, what the French called "popular" aviation. Besides the original recreational value of providing "a rich man's sport" to the populace, the major purpose of this program after 1936 became, in Cot's words, "premilitary and paramilitary."[33] Young men, trained to fly in sports aviation, would provide a ready pool of manpower at the time of mobilization. Cot was determined to

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[32]Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," 29-32.

[33]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 318-320; Cot, L'Armee de l'Air, 142-143; Moulin, Jean Moulin, 152-154.

give France the skilled pilots and energetic leadership with which to develop the strategic potential in military aviation.

Cot supported the general staff of the air force[34] in asserting its command independence and its desire for a strategic offensive capacity, and at the outset of his ministry, there were new and apparently successful moves to implement these policies. New statutes of organization for the air force were submitted and a revised Instruction was prepared by Cot's military chef de cabinet, Colonel Henri Jauneaud.[35] The French army maintained two, parallel structures of organization: one for peacetime preparation and the other for wartime mobilization and command. The new air force statutes abandoned the dual peacetime-wartime structures and substituted a single organizational structure based on large air units and a common reserve. It included airborne units (air infantry) and the potential for aerial bombardment.[36] The new proposals were intended to make the full force of French aviation

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[34]The chief of staff of the air force changed frequently between May 1930 and June 1940--ten times, in fact--and reflected the political choice of the government. In June 1936, the position was held by General Pujo (26 December 1935-15 October 1936). He was replaced by General Féquant (15 October 1936-22 February 1938), and he, by General Vuillemin, who held the post through the armistice.

[35]Henri Jauneaud had been General Buat's adjutant when the general had been chief of staff of the army and had issued the original Instruction sur la Constitution des Grandes Unités Aériennes du Temps de Paix (9 October 1923). As a Lieutenant Colonel he had been Cot's military chef de cabinet in 1933. The Instruction sur l'emploi tactiques des Grandes Unités Aériennes appeared 31 March 1937. See Griffiths, Pétain, 144-148.

[36]After January 1938, Guy La Chambre, the new Minister of Air, returned to the earlier dual structure and to viewing aviation as an arm of cooperation only. The airborne and the bomber units were disbanded.

available to respond to any enemy assault, whether it called for ground battle, naval engagement, or air combat, and they included the strategic strike force that had been lost in the 1933 negotiations with the other services and Pétain's air defense.[37]

Cot tried to support research and development for new uses of aviation, such as the dive-bomber and air-tank support. Without the support of the CSDN, however, full development was not possible, and this body exhibited little interest in innovation, particularly where an independent air command was involved. By the end of 1937, a change had become evident in Cot's statements regarding the aviation of cooperation. Whereas, in December 1936, he had asserted that none of the decrees and laws establishing the air force had specified an "aviation of cooperation," in September 1937, he placed a new emphasis on the integral participation of aviation in general battle. "The pursuit of air battle for itself, of the systematic destruction of the opposing air forces, independent of the general battle, fatally leads the command to engage almost all the air force in uncertain objectives." It seemed that the army had won its long battle for control, as Cot assured the Minister of National Defense that the army would have, "in all cases, the air formations of which it has need." He offered Daladier his full cooperation, called for suggestions from him, and concluded that "the air force holds itself ready to engage integrally in the cadre forces of general battle."[38]

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[37]Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," 29-32; DDF, 2e série, 4:65-67.

[38]Madeline Astorkia, "Les leçons aériennes de la guerre d'espagne," Revue historique des Armées, No. 2 Special (1977), 145-168.

Cot never evaluated this change; he never discussed it; he never acknowledged that he had made a change. Evidence confirms that his basic view of the organization and use of French military aviation had not changed. In December 1937, he was again pounding on the door of Premier Chautemps, seeking funds for airborne and strategic bombing programs.[39] What appears to have come into play in his relationship with the CSDN and the Minister of Defense was his sense of the practical, of the achievable. His primary concern was, as it had always been, the adequate defense of France; other considerations took second place. Perhaps what had changed was not his view of strategy but of administrative reality, his perception of the service rivalry that thwarted so many of his programs. Cot really had no stake in who commanded; he had no special interests, no fiefs, no clients to protect. What appears to have happened was that he abandoned the struggle to maintain an independent air force command as an end in itself and as a source of independent strategy and that he accepted the principle of integral cooperation and ground support to lessen the resistance of the army to the development of aviation. After all, tactical bombing, air defense, and even air-tank support, not to mention air-infantry, could all be developed within the concept of cooperation, if the army did not oppose it. It seems that Cot had accepted that in order to have anything at all.

The opposition of the CSDN was not the only problem that Cot faced. Both funding and the productive capacity of the French aviation industry

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[39]"Report from the Minister of Aviation (Pierre Cot) to the French Premier (Camille Chautemps), 6 December 1937" in Cot, Triumph of Treason, 399-406.

were also critical problems. In the end, the measure of comparative success or failure for a European air force, short of combat, was its planes--their number, speed, distance, bomb load, night capability, and maneuverability. The multipurpose plane of Plan I was no longer adequate, even if there had been more of them. France had to have new planes with specialized functions.

In August 1936, Cot proposed new prototypes and new production schedules. Plan II provided a 50 percent increase in new planes, raising the number to 1,500, and introduced a new priority, giving first line bombers precedence over reconnaissance planes by roughly three-to-two. It required no new monies, only the allocation of existing funds, but in September, just two weeks after its approval, the CSDN cut appropriations to the Air Ministry from fourteen to five billion francs. Plan III (December 1936) for air defense, and Plan IV (June 1937) for new units for cooperation with the army and navy met similarly drastic funding limitations. Attempts to supplement French production with Canadian industry and American motors were discouraged and obstructed by the Quai d'Orsay and the Minister of Finance.[40]

At the beginning of December 1937, Cot submitted a report to Premier Chautemps, in which he summarized the programs which had been rejected by the CSDN and by the Minister of Finance since December 1936, and set out a new program that could increase the number of planes by three fold, modify priorities, develop industrial productivity, and

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[40]See Christienne and Buffotot, "L'aéronautique militaire française," 28-38; Frankenstein, "Réarmament français," 3-20; Truelle, "Production aéronautique militaire française," 75-109; Cot, Triumph of Treason, 311-316; Cot L'Armée de l'Air, 145-162; "Report from Minister of Aviation," 399-406.

supplement low-yield French production with American purchases. Budget factors postponed the immediate consideration of this plan, and it was not until after Cot had left the Air Ministry at the end of January 1938 that the new Air Minister, Guy La Chambre, received approval and funding for Plan V. In principle, it was Cot's proposal, but General Vuillemin, the new chief of staff of the air force altered the priorities significantly, and removed bombing and airborne programs.[41]

Nationalization

A key factor in the success or failure of these or any aviation programs was the productive capacity of the French aviation industry. Its past performance had been demonstrated inadequate between 1934 and 1936, when it had been unable to deliver the planes called for in Plan I. In August 1936, the Blum government nationalized the French aviation industry and Pierre Cot at one stroke introduced a program of centralized planning and decentralized production. The agents of this program were four companies, jointly owned by the state and the private sector, the state holding the controlling share. No one in France, whether for or against nationalization, thought that France could outdistance Germany in productive capacity, but Cot, for one, believed that a planned and regulated aviation industry that both rewarded private initiative and organized untapped labor and regional resources could maintain an acceptably competitive position.[42]

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[41]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 311-316; "Report from the Minister of Aviation," 399-406; Boudot, "Financement de la défense nationale," 49-72; d'Hoop, "La politique française du réarmement," 1-26.

[42]Cot, "Le parti radical et la nationalisation de la fabrication des armes" (n.p., n.d.); Cot, "Nationalizing the Aeroplane Industry,"

Everyone agreed that there was a productive problem in the French aviation industry; not everyone agreed that nationalization was the solution. Still, there were precedents for state industry. Munitions industries had been state owned in France since the seventeenth century. The creation of Air France by Cot in 1933 for French transport aviation provided a civilian guide.

That nationalization was not able immediately to reverse the disorder and slowness in the aviation industry has been used to prove its responsibility, in both principle and practice, for the condition of French aviation in 1940. It is a simplistic escape route for a much more complex failure. Certainly strikes and the eight-hour day did not increase production, but neither were they a major or an extended factor in slowing it down. Labor troubles were brought under control rather quickly, and the continuing problems lay in technology and the methods of mass production.

The results of the 1936-1937 aviation program fell short of Cot's intent in every way. Service bickering hampered effective cooperation; cuts in appropriations left air defense, tactical bombing, air-tank support, and the airborne woefully undeveloped; nationalization did not resolve the problems of productive capacity; and the new personnel programs could not control accidents of personality and points of view in the existing command structure that introduced elements of defeatism.

Current History, 45 (January 1937), 103-104; Cot, Triumph of Treason, 320-330; Cot, L'Armée de l'Air, 169-199; Telford Taylor, Munich, The Price of Peace: The Definitive Account of the Fateful Conference of 1938 (Garden City, New York, 1979), 485-502.

Finally, political and diplomatic resistance to the Soviet alliance invalidated much of Cot's theory for collective security.

Alliance Cooperation and Mutual Assistance

In Cot's mind, the ultimate effectiveness of the whole of the French defense system lay in three factors: the couverture, allied aid, and time. Victory would depend on all three; in the end, time would be decisive, if the balance of forces were not altered. Only in a long war could Germany be worn down for defeat; and only with allied aid could pressure be made sufficient to bring about the wearing down. But only by initially stopping the German assault, by ending their war of movement on the French frontier, could the other two factors be brought into operation. Although France could not expect to win a short war against Germany, she must not lose the first engagements. Initial German victories of any strategic value would, in fact, give her the victory of a short war. The couverture must hold. That was the first function of the French army and of the air force, too.

However, another contingency became increasingly possible after 1936: Germany, by gaining strategic advantage, first one place, then another, without engaging France in battle, would alter the balance of forces and resources, placing in doubt not only the outcome of a long war but also the ability to withstand a German attaque brusquée (blitzkrieg). To prevent this latter contingency, France had to organize a deterrent effort, utilizing the combined military forces of all those who would join against Hitler. Relying primarily on the Franco-Soviet and Franco-Czech alliances for land forces, he hoped to bring the

British into a military alliance also. The need for a deterrent force made allied military coordination critical.

Cot argued insistently that modern war could not be improvised and that allied coordination and French defenses had to be prepared and maintained ahead of time. The British, even without an alliance, remained the most important ally in the French defensive system. It was hoped, after the Rhineland crisis and Eden's commitment to French defense, that Britain would finally agree to establishing military coordination in support of an alliance, but British reticence to make such commitments returned quickly. During his tenure at the Boulevard Victor, Cot was more successful than the Minister of Defense in establishing contact with his British counterpart, but the absence of full alliance commitments kept the exchanges very general. During 1937, Cot and his military advisors met several times with Lord Swinton, Britain's Secretary for Air. Some information was exchanged, including intelligence on bombing targets in Germany.[43] Cot retorted that there was little substance: "The Englishmen were cordial but reserved. We came up against the wall of their polished manners each time we broached . . . the organization of a defensive coalition."[44] Still, Cot never wavered in his belief that Britain was France's first ally. What he wanted was to add Soviet coordination to it.

Cot believed the Soviet alliance was critical to the defense of France. First, Russia could provide essential aid in a war against Germany; should she reach agreement with the Nazis instead, she would

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[43]Young, In Command of France, 146-149, 163-165.

[44]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 299.

pose an even greater threat. In both cases the key was the rapidly expanding Soviet industrial and military potential. Soviet reorganization had made Russia the largest industrial power and, next to France, the largest military power in Europe, and Soviet air power was the strongest in the world. In addition, her size safeguarded her air bases and industrial centers, thus maximizing her strength in a long war. It was the Russian position, Cot concluded, that would determine the balance for or against German agression.[45]

To the Soviet Union he assigned the offensive land action that France herself was not prepared to take in the east. It may have been this strategy of coalition that permitted Cot, in good conscience in 1937, to acquiesce to the demands of the army for full aviation support for the couverture, for within his concept of coalition, Cot did not abandon important strategic roles for aviation but only reassigned them. The importance of striking Germany from the east and of attacking her air bases and sources of supply was not lost but given to the Soviet air power, "the strongest in the world," he said. The territorial link, as well as the alliance connection, was through Czechoslovakia. What it came to was Soviet men and material, Czech bases and frontier access, and French leadership.[46]

In June 1936, Cot established contact with his Soviet counterparts in order to begin implementing the military cooperation for which the Franco-Soviet alliance provided and without which its effectiveness

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[45] Times, 28 February 1936; Le Démocrat, 16 February 1936; L'Oeuvre, 24 December 1934, 26 January 1935.

[46] Cot. L'Armée de l'Air. The News Chronicle (London), 14 July 1938.

would be seriously impaired. There was little support for such cooperation, however, and great amount of deepseated opposition. Cot proposed to make a personal tour through eastern Europe to promote cooperation with the Soviet Union in a system of collective security, but Daladier and General Gamelin were opposed both to the cooperation and to Cot's involvement in military negotiations. Gamelin did not want to "lose control of these talks to the air ministry," and Daladier proposed talks with the Soviet military attaché in Paris instead.[47]

Attempts by Cot to begin the exchange of technical information with the Soviet air force were opposed, thwarted, and then stopped. Henri Kerillis opened a violent campaign of propaganda in July 1936. Attacking Cot on the floor of the Chamber, he accused him of sharing classified information with the Soviets. This marked the beginning of sensational press attention to the scandal of the "Canon 23."[48]

In 1937 reports from Benes to Blum suggested that the exchange of military information with the Soviet Union was not safe, that it might find its way into the hands of the Germans. Apparently this was based on the rumors, which were currently explaining the Soviet purge trials, that the Soviet Union's military leaders had plotted treasonably with the Germans. In the spring of 1937 talks were ended with the Soviet

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[47]Young, In Command of France, 148.

[48]The "canon 23" was the name of an aviation artillery weapon, the Swiss patent for which was held by the French air force. The Russians already had purchased the French plane for which it was designed and Cot made the specifications for the canon available also. See J. O. Chambre Débats. 16e (1936) 1898-1906. See also L'Oeuvre, 19 July 1936; Times, 11 July 1936; Gringoire, 20 July 1936, Candide, 23 July 1936, July 1936; L'Echo de Paris 19, 20, 24 July 1936.

military attaché. They were not broken off; they simply were never resumed.[49]

Cot was acutely conscious of the political and diplomatic difficulties faced by the Blum government. The Soviet alliance was as bitterly opposed in Britain as it was in France. The purge trials and the execution of the generals in June 1937 were a source of additional uncertainty. Rather than risk compromising Blum's search for British support, a cause which Cot fully endorsed, he sought indirect ways of implementing the Franco-Soviet alliance for the moment. Instead of direct military exchanges, he developed a link through Czechoslovakia, which had alliances with both powers.[50]

Cot had tried to resolve the conflicts in the use of the Soviet alliance by maintaining a low profile in support of it, by supporting Blum in his British emphasis, and by cultivating the Czech connection. He hoped that time and circumstances would improve Blum's credit with the British and alter the British resistance to a Soviet alliance. Although there was no question in his mind that the British alliance had to be maintained above all else, he never abandoned the hope that France could have both a British and a Soviet alliance. It was on this fact that he based his own concept of collective security. Had he accepted the impossibility of military coordination with the Soviet Union in 1937, logic would have demanded that he reconsider either the resistance to German expansion or the French military posture; it was the

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[49]Young, In Command of France, 149. See also Ulam, Stalin, 452.

[50]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 298-299, 354-365. See also Ulam, Stalin, 452-456.

hope that successful military coordination could be achieved with both Britain and the Soviet Union alliance that permitted him to pursue both unchanged.

The whole focus of Cot's second air ministry was on collective security. Spain, strategic capabilities and personnel reform for the air force, popular aviation, nationalization of aviation production, military staff coordination with French allies and friends--each played a role in the scheme of prepared deterrence and mutual assistance that Cot developed to meet fascist aggression. In his mind, the plan was clear. The massing of all anti-fascist forces against any new threat to international law or sovereign territory must be made. In theory, at least, the uncertainties of the 1934-1936 period had been removed. Europe must be willing to resist Hitler. But in execution, Cot's plans remained undeveloped. Funding, army and Defense Ministry opposition, political criticism, production difficulties, and allied reticence--all worked against Cot's plans. When he left the Boulevard Victor in January 1938, French aviation was little better prepared to fulfill the roles of deterrence and mutual assistance than it had been in 1936, not because Cot had not tried but because the obstacles were insurmounable. He was disappointed but not defeated, and he left the Air Ministry determined to carry on the battle for collective security.

CHAPTER VII

PEACE OR WAR? 1938-1939

Pierre Cot left the Boulevard Victor in mid-January 1938. In April he left the government.[1] Freed from the obligations of ministerial solidarity and the silence which government membership had imposed on him since June 1936, he threw himself into the fight for collective security. The democracies must make aggression impossible or be ready to raise the entire force of the civilized world against it.

Since 1919, collective security had been an integral part of Cot's view of the international order. Without it the Versailles system and the League of Nations were meaningless, and France's defensive military system was incomplete. Without it, France could neither hope to defend the status quo nor to find reasonable revisions to it. For Cot, collective security had been a general concept of great breadth and many forms that brought security to France at various times through the League of Nations, the Locarno accords, and bilateral treaty commitments. In response to Hitler, Cot had gradually given collective security a specifically deterrent purpose. Abandoning Italy and Spain

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[1] On 18 January 1938, Premier Camille Chautemps, in conjunction with Defense Minister Daladier, undertook a reorganization of the service ministries in which Cot was moved from Air to Commerce. See the Times, 19 January 1938. At the beginning of March, it was reported that Cot was "in the country recuperating from the effects of overstrain," but he continued to hold the portfolio for Commerce in the government formed by Léon Blum on 13 March 1938 during the anschluss crisis. See the Times, 4 March 1938. On 10 April, Daladier formed the government that he would head until 20 March 1940. Cot was not included in it, nor was Paul-Boncour, who was replaced at the Quai d'Orsay by Georges Bonnet.

reluctantly to fascist collusion, Cot proposed to mass the combined military strengths of France, Great Britain, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, supported by Poland, Roumania, and Turkey, to meet any threat of force with greater force.

Even as he faced with the increasing probability of war, however, he did not wholly abandon his ideals for world order. While he urged Europe to meet fascist aggression in central and eastern Europe with military deterrence, he knew that permanent solutions to the problems of this area lay beyond deterrent force in a comprehensive settlement of economic, territorial, and ethnic concerns. Unfortunately, Europe was able neither to raise a deterrent force nor reach comprehensive settlement. Sadly, desperately, Cot watched as the fascists collected one strategic advantage after another--Austria, Czechoslovakia, Memel, Albania, the Soviet alliance, Poland--until finally it was France's turn.

The Czech Crisis

In May 1938 the front pages of Le Démocrat reverberated with the return of Cot's energetic and optimistic editorial direction. From then until September 1938, Cot moved as best he could within the divided political climate of France, urging determined and prepared resistance to Hitler's ambitions in Czechoslovakia.

The Czech crisis was a series of political and diplomatic initiatives and responses played out against the background of German threat and intimidation.[2] It began after the Anschluss in April 1938, when

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[2]From among the works on Munich, see recent studies, Taylor, Munich; Adamthwaite, France; Young, In Command of France, 192-220;

Germany demanded that Prague agree to the conditions of autonomy called for by Czech Nazi, Conrad Heinlein, in the name of the Sudetenland Germans, and continued into mid-March 1939, when Nazi Germany completed the absorption of Czechoslovakia. There was no inevitability in this outcome. It did not have to end as it did, and Pierre Cot was among those who tried to make it end differently. Throughout the crisis, he was a man with a mission.

When Nazi agitation against Czechoslovakia first began in the spring of 1938, it was met by strong verbal commitments from Paris and London to support the Prague government; at the end of May Nazi demands receded. They were resumed in the summer against a background of German military gamemanship, in which Göring treated the French air chief of staff, General Vuillemin, to his best showmanship and convinced him of the invincibility of the Luftwaffe.[3] In both France and Britain, popular

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see also, Robert J. Young, "French Policy and the Munich Crisis of 1938: A Reappraisal," Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers (1970), 186-206; Edmond Taylor, The Strategy of Terror: Europe's Inner Front (Boston, 1940), 1-52.

[3]While all of France's military leaders were impressed with the results of Germany's rearmament, air force chief of staff General Vuillemin appeared to have been overwhelmed. Convinced that the French air force would be wiped out in a matter of days, he shared the conclusion of Charles A. Lindberg, made during the same 1938 time period and under the same German influences, that the Luftwaffe was invincible and deterrence impossible. In 1944, Cot was kinder in his assessment of General Vuillemin than his British colleagues in the Battle of France. Cot said of Vuillemin, who came to staff command not through staff assignments but from command in the African bush: "He had all the gifts a leader of men needed, but none of the qualities required of a chief of staff. . .. It is one thing to lead troops in combat and another to plan maneuvers." Vuillemin, he said, accepted the doctrine and direction of the army without question. Cot, Triumph of Treason, 304-305. Alistair Horne reports the assessment of General Vuillemin by Churchill's representative during the Battle of France, General Edward Spears: "he 'just looked on with the bewildered washed out eyes of an ancient celluloid doll floating on the opaque waters of the bath it seemed

and governmental opinion was bitterly divided over how to respond to Hitler's latest challenge. On one side, there was a strong current of anti-Czech feeling, some genuine sympathy for the Sudeten Germans, and an all pervasive fear of permitting an "incident" to unleash a general war. On the other, there was genuine regard for the sanctity of treaties and the fear that the Sudetenland was only a ploy in Hitler's conquest of Europe.

Cot described the problem as having three parts. First, there was the Sudeten problem itself, a problem of minority rights and national self-determination. Then, there was the longstanding need for comprehensive economic organization in Central Europe and the Danubian basin, which would probably require some treaty revision. Third, there was the problem of the Czech fascists led by Conrad Heinlein, a force small in numbers but disruptive of democratic process. The Czech crisis became sinister and threatening to all Europe in the hands of Adolf Hitler, who already had demonstrated in the Rhineland and in Austria his ability to make studied use of the dynamics of crisis to win strategic advantages for Germany and so move toward the realization of Mein Kampf. Whatever solutions might appear warranted by the substance of the problems of the Sudetenland and the Danubian economy, they must not permit Hitler to exploit the crisis into a strategic victory for Germany.[4]

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bewildered to find itself in.'" Horne, To Lose a Battle, 546. For General Vuillemin's trip to Berlin, see Horne, To Lose a Battle, 80-81; Adamthwaite, France, 238-240; Young, In Command of France, 210, and "French Policy and the Munich Crisis," 197-200.

[4]Le Démocrat, 17 September 1938.

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, on the other hand, in whose hands British policy rested, cared little for the substantive problems of the Sudetenland or the Danubian economy. He was, instead, greatly preoccupied with the idea that Anglo-German detente based on gratuitous concessions could provide the basis for a stable peace from which Britain would benefit. To this end he was willing to use Czechoslovakia to appease Germany. In France, Foreign Minister Georges Bonnet was frightened. He did not really have a picture of European design for his country, one that matched the Third Reich or the pax anglo-germanica. Perhaps this was because his immediate vision was filled with the terrors of modern war visited on France by the German Juggernaut, images created by the reports of General Vuillemin and American pilot Charles Lindberg, who dined with Bonnet and Premier Edouard Daladier and Ambassador William Bullitt on 8 September.[5] What Bonnet desperately wanted was not to have to go to war, even if it meant sacrificing Czechoslovakia.

The desire to trade concessions for peace seemed to create a common denominator between Bonnet and Chamberlain; and, in fact, it was largely through the combination of their efforts that the Munich settlement took the shape that it did. To these men, Pierre Cot's insistence that the only way to preserve peace beyond the present moment was to stop Hitler, with force if necessary, appeared insane.

During mid-September, a wave of confusion and panic engulfed the diplomatic process. At Nuremburg on 12 September, Hitler harangued Czechoslovakia and demanded self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. Riots followed in the Sudetenland, where the Prague government responded

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[5]Adamthwaite, France, 210, 240-241.

with troops and martial law, and Heinlein fled to Germany, where he called for annexation of the Sudetenland to the Reich. In Paris, against a background of reports from the French military attesting to the nation's abject unpreparedness, particularly in its aviation, the cabinet discussed mobilization, could not agree, and took no action. At the Quai d'Orsay, Leger, Bonnet, and Daladier discussed the possibilities of a three or a four power conference, while privately Bonnet confided to Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador to France, that Germany must be prevented from invading Czechoslovakia at any cost. In London, Chamberlain, acting on his own, wired Hitler to arrange a meeting, then instructed his embassy in Paris not to inform Daladier until the announcement had been released to the press in London.[6]

On 15 September, while he awaited the results of Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler at Bertschesgaden, Cot, who himself had been in Prague and Warsaw recently,[7] offered his own observations on the crisis. There was never any doubt in Cot's mind that Czechoslovakia had to be defended: treaty obligations and strategic factors both demanded it. France was committed unequivocally to Czechoslovakia. To fail in that commitment could encourage further fascist aggression and give Britain

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[6]This is not the place to try to sort out the charges and countercharges that passed between London and Paris over issues of consultation and secrecy during the interwar years, but merely to point out the state of mistrust that existed between the two powers at this moment of most serious crisis. Adamthwaite, France, 210-211.

[7]Le Démocrat, 17 September 1938. See also, Tabouis, Cassandra, 353. Cot reported that Benes had said to him: "We are counting on France; but what if France should lead me on only to betray me at the last minute? That would be terrible. I understand these things. I can understand even betrayal. All I ask is that France will let me know frankly what she intends to do."

an excuse to ignore her obligations to France. Both the strategic location of Czechoslovakia and her military and industrial strength made her vital to French security. Precarious as its position was since Anschluss, Czechoslovakia alone gave the allies a strategically contiguous flank against Germany. Czech geography, military preparation, and national will all worked to the advantage of resisting Germany from that flank. The loss of Czechoslovakia would not only diminish allied strength appreciably but would increase that of Germany and open the way to the Ukraine. In addition, Czechoslovakia was at the center of the Franco-Soviet alliance, both partners of which were committed to her defense. Those who cried that the Sudetenland was no affair of the French had not looked at the facts or a map. Cot never suggested, however, that France could undertake the defense of Czechoslovakia alone. The guarantee had to be presented to Germany collectively. Britain had to concur. Cot believed that if the risk of collective resistance were certain, Nazi Germany would back away from Czechoslovakia and permit the Sudeten problem to be solved through negotiation.[8]

Cot commended Chamberlain for establishing direct negotiations with Hitler. "Such action . . . is a sign not of weakness but of the commitment of a great nation to peace." And he did not assume nor did he anticipate that direct negotiations automatically meant appeasement. To the contrary, here was the opportunity to convince Hitler of the seriousness of purpose of the democracies. First, Germany must be made to understand that, although the Sudeten question had to be adjusted,

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[8]Le Démocrat, 28 May, 17 September 1938; News Chronicle (London), 14 July 1938; Cot, "Air Power in Europe," The Living Age, 354 (August 1938), 504-506.

it could not be done by force. Force applied to Czechoslovakia would be met by force; attacked, she would be defended; the risk of general war lay with Germany. Second, Czechoslovakia must be given international aid immediately to relieve the tensions in the Sudetenland, not because the Czech army could not hold the streets but because martial law only increased the incidents of conflict and postponed reconciliation. Contingents, similar to those used in the Saar and including American observers, should be flown in to work with those already there with the Runciman commission. Third, the status of the Sudeten Germans must be settled by international negotiation and, if necessary, arbitration. Cot suggested a settlement that utilized broad administrative autonomy for the German cantons, while "conserving to the Czech state all territorial integrity and its independence in questions of interior politics." He suggested that a permanent international commission under the League act as trustee for police power in the German cantons. This appears to be a significant limitation to Czech independence, but perhaps a necessary one that could be reached through arbitration. He would bolster the specific Sudeten settlement with non-aggression pacts signed between Czechoslovakia and her neighbors (with the stipulation that these not restrict mutual assistance commitments). Last, he would seek a general conference settlement for regional organization of the Central European and Danubian economy. The precondition for all these negotiations was the agreement not to seek an alteration in the integrity or independence of Czechoslovakia.[9]

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[9]Le Démocrat, 17 September 1938.

On 18 September, London and Paris reached agreement on a plan for the Sudetenland based on Chamberlain's meeting with Hitler at Bertschesgaden. It transferred to the Reich areas of 50 percent or more German population and established the principle of an as yet undetermined guarantee for the remainder of the Czech state. Cot was not at all satisfied, either with Chamberlain's performance or with the Anglo-French proposal. It gave too much, without negotiation and without clear international guarantees, and it ignored a comprehensive regional economic settlement. France and Britain had retreated "before the blackmail of war," each blaming the other. In doing so they had added to the danger. It was time to say "no" to Germany. In this position he associated himself with British and French conservatives in their common desire to resist fascist aggression.[10] The ties with Churchill, Eden, and Cecil were of old standing; those with Tardieu, Kerillis, and Marin were unique, in fact, unthinkable in most contexts, and were an extraordinary comment on the strength of Cot's feelings, as well as on the breadth of his tactical maneuverability.

Munich

During the days that followed the second meeting between Chamberlain and Hitler at Godesberg on 22 and 23 September, the situation changed and a will to resist appeared to be developing in France and Britain. Hitler's demands at Godesberg for immediate German military occupation of the Sudetenland sent a shock through public and governmental circles. Preliminary measures were taken toward mobilization in both countries.

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[10] Le Démocrat, 24 September 1938.

In Paris, Cot made a last prodigious effort to bring the weight of the Radical-Socialist party to bear on Daladier. Framing a resolution which confirmed France's commitments to Czechoslovakia, he secured its adoption by the parliamentary groupe, then headed a delegation of fifty Radical-Socialists who met with Daladier. After the meeting, Cot reported to the press that he had been authorized by the premier to say that France would stand firm, that she would agree to no more concessions, and that she would honor her commitment to Czechoslovakia if the Czechs were attacked by Germany.[11] The French position in London on 25 September seemed at first to reflect this new firmness, but firmness on both sides of the channel was subject to erosion.[12]

Chamberlain, still set on his predetermined course, moved through an intermediary toward another meeting with Hitler. Bonnet in Paris worked to undermine and counter firmness in Daladier. And on 26 September President Roosevelt offered his efforts to arrange an international conference. Instead, on 29 September Chamberlain, Daladier, Mussolini, and Hitler met at Munich. Even as the four assembled, Cot tried once again to reach Daladier, to stiffen his resolve. With Lord Cecil, Cot sent a telegram to Daladier and Chamberlain at Munich in the name of the Rassemblement universal de la paix saying it was hoped that the conference would "contribute to reestablishing and reinforcing international law as the only certain basis of peace," and it concluded:

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[11] L'Oeuvre, 24 September 1938; see also DBFP, iii, 2:508, for the British report.

[12] Adamthwaite, France, 217-225.

"It is clear that all new concessions to violence and threats will be contrary to that result."[13]

Cot was committed to collective security as the proper response to Germany in the Czech crisis. He said that he was prepared to offer resistance to German aggression, even to fighting a general war if it came to that. In such a war in the Sudetenland, Czech forces would have carried the brunt of the fighting. Effective participation of the other east European allies was uncertain, and French mobilization was not planned to aid Czech forces in the field but to hold down German forces along the French frontier. However, French aviation could be used from Czech bases, the British navy could effect a blockade, and contingents of soldiers from many League nations could reinforce the Czechs. These things were possible, even without Soviet land access, if the democratic powers would but commit themselves.

Cot had been in Czechoslovakia in September 1938; he had consulted with Benes; he had seen the Czech military preparations; and he returned home to urge Paris and London to stand firm behind Prague. It is clear that Cot did not agree with the chiefs of staff of the army and air force that France was incapable of an adequate defense against Germany at that time. Cot himself made no attempt to translate the broad lines of his collective security policy into working directives for mobilization and combat; this he left to the professionals, but he did not doubt that it could be done. Cot never doubted that France could and would meet the challenge of war when it came. Officers, soldiers, labor, government--all would respond with the solidarity of the Union Sacrée,

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[13]Le Démocrat, 1 October 1938.

the boldness of the Marne, and the death-defying tenacity of Verdun. Asked what he would do should war come, he said he would go to the front with his artillery unit. It appears that we must almost certainly accept Cot at his word and believe that he was ready to commit himself and his country to defend Europe against Fascism in September 1938, as a part of a system of collective security.

As Cot awaited the results from Munich, his thoughts ranged. About the conference itself, he was dissatisfied and uneasy. It ought to have been held in a neutral city, as Roosevelt had suggested, and it ought to have included all the interested parties, especially Czechoslovakia. As it was, he expected little good to come from it. "The present crisis will serve only to aggrandize Hitler's empire, reinforce his prestige, eliminate the Czech army from the French security system, and facilitate the future expansions and the next aggression of Germany." He concluded, "We simply postpone war." In that vein, he turned to collective security, saying that "only it can free the world from war and violence."[14]

A week after Munich, with the full force of the capitulation clear to him, Cot poured out his anger and his apprehension. "30 September is a day more ill-fated than Sedan," he said. Those who "rejoice in peace" must not forget the price of its purchase or be deluded into thinking it will last for long. The cost of peace was for Cot the human tragedy of the Czechs, whose country had been "mutilated" and sacrificed," of the "lines of people moving into exile and misery," of those who will go to concentration camps "simply because they are Jews,

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[14]Le Démocrat, 1 October 1938.

Catholics or Democrats." Of what crime are these people guilty, he asked rhetorically. "Of having had confidence in us." Apart from morality and law, the strategic losses to France were disastrous: Czech fortifications, arms, men, and the confidence of the people of central Europe were all lost. And what France lost, Germany gained. "In six months," he said, "Hitler has erased the German defeat of 1918."[15]

Within France, the crisis left a residual shock factor. The nation had had a generous portion of Hitler's "strategy of terror,"[16] and the announcement of the Munich agreement had brought a wave of immediate relief. Peace, for the moment, seemed more important than honor or tomorrow's problems. Opinion remained divided, however. Munich changed few minds, generally reinforced existing views, and established a permanent division between munichois and anti-munichois. In the Chamber, the vote calling for an endorsement of the government's Munich policy came on 4 October. Henry Kerillis brought his opposition to the floor; so did the Communists, but debate was brief. Daladier assured the Chamber that the agreement reached at Munich was the best that could be obtained from Hitler, and Radical-Socialists offered no dissent. The Chamber--Pierre Cot included--voted its confidence 535 to 75.[17] For Cot, this was a political vote, which neither reflected nor influenced his actual views on foreign policy but took cognizance of the general atmosphere of grateful relief in the nation and sustained

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[15]Le Démocrat, 8 October 1938.

[16]Edmund Wilson, The Strategy of Terror, 1-52.

[17]Bonnefous, Troisième République, 6:352; J. O. Chambre. Débats. 16e (1938), 1596.

the Daladier government for party reasons. He said later: "Having made my reservations and told my constituents of . . . my apprehensions, I did not believe it right to vote against the accords which had, in the eyes of public opinion, the great merit of having avoided war."[18] Much as he disliked the Munich settlement, he did not consider repudiating it or the government of his party.

It was characteristic of Cot not to dwell long on the past but to look ahead to the future. He was concerned about what France could and must do now. In his own mind, he had not abandoned his party or his nation to appeasement. He hoped that Daladier and the Radical-Socialists would yet lead France (and Britain) into full participation in collective security agreements with which to stop Hitler. Cot believed that the loss of Czechoslovakia put new and great pressure on France and Britain to establish a working military alliance and economic coordination and together to extend this preparation to the Soviet Union. This remained the central issue in his search for a system of collective security with which to defend France. To it he added, as circumstances prompted him to, cooperation with Poland, Roumania, and Turkey. In support of it, he maintained a desperate optimism regarding ultimate, if not immediate, U.S. support. The construction of such a system was no easy task. Some people were opposed; many more, merely uncertain, but together they created an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion that proved obstructive to both collective security and to Cot's own career.

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[18] Le Démocrat, 18 March 1939.

Attacks Against Cot and the Congress of Marsailles

Cot had been under attack in the right-wing press since the early thirties. His position on disarmament, the crisis of 6 February 1934, Ethiopia, Spain, and the Soviet alliance had all drawn venomous comment. Throughout the Munich crisis, his reputation had been assailed with increasingly vicious attacks. Derision and invective came from opponents of collective security in British diplomatic circles.[19] Hitler himself attacked him.[20] In France, the followers of de la Roche, Doriot, and Maurras ridiculed him and accused him of cowardice.[21] In October 1938, attacks in the Catholic press prompted Jean Moulin, then prefect of Averyron and Cot's long-time friend and former chef de cabinet, to protest to the editor the "pure calumny" of the inferences that Cot was a coward.[22]

After Munich, many major journals took up, in one fashion or another, charges against Cot as Air Minister, which ranged from incompetence to criminal negligence. A nation that had just abandoned its treaty commitments to Czechoslovakia and had been told it had had no choice because its air force was so inadequate felt it was owed some answers. Those who defended him, and Cot himself, did not deny that between 1936 and 1938, and despite efforts to expand, the military capability of the French air force had not been made fully adequate for

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[19] DBFP, iii, 1:580-581.

[20] Cot, Triumph of Treason, 356.

[21] See Paris journals, l'Echo de Paris, l'Action Française, Gringoire, Flambeau, Je suis partout. See also Le Démocrat, 5 and 19 November, 3 December 1938.

[22] Moulin, Jean Moulin, 170-172.

the nation's defense. The plans for expansion (Plan II), which Cot had proposed at the beginning of his ministry in August 1936, were found in less than a year to be far short of what was actually needed. While the Luftwaffe continued to grow, new French programs were denied funding. Cot and his supporters concluded that appropriations determined the relative strengths of European air forces and would continue to do so.[23] There was more behind the attacks against Cot than the controversy over his direction of the Air Ministry. His continuing support for the full Popular Front, for Republican Spain, and for the Franco-Soviet alliance had ranged all of the anti-bolsheviks against him; to his position on Munich, all of the appeasers and integral pacifists. In addition there were old scores: with the Action Française, the leaguers the Parti Social Française, and the Cagoulards.

The difficulties that plagued Cot throughout 1939 were forecast at the Radical-Socialists' annual congress at Marsailles in late October 1938. There, the party, which might have been reunited against fascism if that had been the only issue, was caught in a wave of hostility toward the PCF that affected both domestic and foreign policy.[24] And Cot, whose policies and integrity were under attack from several different points, found his position in party councils diminished in influence. When Cot rose to speak on the floor of the congress at Marsailles,

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[23]Le Démocrat, 11 June, 23 July, 22 and 29 October, 5 and 19 November 1938, 11 March 1939; L'Oeuvre, 7 July 1939; Le Populaire, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25 October 1938; Cot, L'Armée de l'Air. Evenements, 1:263-286.

[24]35[e] Congrès . . . tenu à Marsailles de 27, 28, 29 et 30 October 1938, 456-458. See also Tabouis, Cassandra, 376; Le Democrat, 5 Novembre 1938; L'Oeuvre, 28 October 1938; Bonnefous, Troisième République, 6:354-355.

he was met by much applause but also by some catcalls, which gave him the opportunity to point out in full polemic form that even in the halls of France's great republican party, one was not entirely safe from the practices of fascist corruption.[25] The attacks against Cot did not end at Marsailles; they continued, leaving an acrid residue of malaise even after the verbal dust had settled. Charges of criminality, incompetence, and cowardice were refuted by all those who looked at the facts, but the sound lingered and reverberated. Jean Valadier, senator from Eure-et-Loire, spoke ominously of "the shadow of Pierre Cot."[26] And without really being able to explain why, the esteem and confidence that had surrounded him in earlier years waned and wore thin. Even in Savoie, the political climate was changing.[27] These things affected Cot in his search for a system of collective security in 1939.

Collective Security After Munich

This search for collective security involved a number of issues: Hitler's intent, the kind of war he must wage, and the kind of war that France must prepare for, the place of Poland the Soviet Union in the diplomacy of collective security, and the role of the United States. (Although Cot kept a careful eye on Italy, the Mediterranean, and Spain,

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[25] 35[e] Congrès . . . tenu à Marsailles . . ., 456-458; L'Oeuvre, 28 October 1938.

[26] Moulin, Jean Moulin, 172.

[27] Cot struggled to keep the local Radical party in rapport with other Popular Front parties and opposed Daladier's anti-Communism. The Savoyard Socialists, on the other hand, had strong Fauriste leadership, which opposed Cot's demand for deterrent force. The two, politics and collective security, worked at cross purposes. See Greene, Crisis and Compromise, 283.

and was concerned by the role of Italian ambitions in the scheme of fascist expansion, he shared with Daladier and Leger a confidence that if collective security covered Germany and the east, France could handle Italy.)[28] Cot's interpretation and his use of these issues was determined by the unfolding of events.

During the winter of 1938-1939, a wave of rumour in France hinted at an immiment German attack into the low countries and at the Channel ports. Canadian scholar Robert J. Young has credited to this atmosphere the British decision to establish the military alliance with France that Paris had wanted but London had avoided since 1919.[29] Pierre Cot was a part of this campaign. Whether he was the creator or simply the purveyor of these ideas, taking again the role of advocate that he had played so well throughout his career, he picked up and embellished the images of la guerre de prise de gages[30] and the attaque brusquée[31] and built them into his strategy for collective security. Writing in the columns of L'Oeuvre and speaking before audiences in Chambéry, Cot described the kind of war that Hitler must fight if he hoped to win, a war of massive frontal assault, unleashed with surprise and concentrating

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[28]Young, In Command of France, 230-231. Le Démocrat, 10 December 1938.

[29]Reports identifying the French army's deuxième bureau as the source of these rumours came to London, 12 October 1938. Further references were reported 7, 9, 16 January 1939, and references to Leger's role in propagandizing the issue, on 27 February 1939. The British initiative regarding an alliance was taken on 4 February; the French reply was delivered 24 February. Young, In Command of France, 220-226, 302-303.

[30]strategic victories.

[31]blitzkrieg.

an extremely high proportion of his nation's total force on selected strategic targets, the capture of which would alter the basic balance of forces in an ensuing long war. Such a war had been made possible by the technology of aviation and motorized transport. It was made necessary by the potential strength of a coalition of forces against him. "Our national defense ought to be dominated by a single thought," he said about France, that is "to prevent the totalitarian states from winning a short war by securing the strategic locations necessary to the conduct of a long war." Three things were called for to guard against what he called blitzkrieg: the immediate arrangement of military and economic accords; the securing of agreements in the east that guaranteed a two-front war against Germany; the strengthening of the French frontier defenses, which were the couverture not only for France but for the entire coalition.[32] Attitudes and responses in both Britain and France were influenced by this line of thought.[33]

Throughout the spring of 1939, events told the story. The absorption of what remained of Czechoslovakia, the conquest of Memel, the campaign of agitation against the status of Germans in Danzig, the belligerent demand of Mussolini, and his conquest of Albania left little

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[32] L'Oeuvre, 25 February 1938.

[33] The reality of the nature of the threat was separated from the false intelligence that suggested such an attack was imminent. Cadogan acknowledged this before the British initiative for an alliance was made. General Gamelin said about the attaque brusquée at a CSG meeting on 13 March: "Until now I was skeptical, now I believe that it could become dangerous." And the deuxième bureau sent a report to Daladier, 17 March, in which it said: "Once this operation is underway, Holland and Belgium could be overrun within one or two days--before their defensive measures had any effect--and our own northern defenses engaged." Young, In Command of France, 228, 303.

doubt as to what was ahead. Those who thought that they could still deal with the dictators, that an understanding could be reached with them, were wrong. Those who argued that forming ties of collective security put in jeopardy reasonable hopes for dealing with Hitler and Mussolini did not understand the dictators or what was at stake. "I have such a horror of war," said Cot, "that if I thought it possible, by appearing to make concessions, to achieve international reconciliation, I would be at the side of those who want to yield." He concluded:

> I know that in yielding we fortify the totalitarian states without satisfying or appeasing them. We furnish them new means of power and action. If we surrender Djibouti and Tunisia, Toga and the Cameroun today, it could be necessary tomorrow to surrender Corsica and Savoie, Alsace and Lorraine.[34]

Cot believed it was Hitler's intent to isolate and encircle France and ultimately to dominate Europe. Where he would move after Czechoslovakia would be determined by events, but he would move: the pattern and the goal were clear. Therefore, Hitler could not be permitted to detach and absorb anything else a piece at a time. The next threat had to be faced with the full "barrier" of collective resistance. Only the combined resources and the multi-front strategy of collective security could stop Hitler now. This full "barrier" included France and Britain; the eastern allies--Poland, Roumania, Lithuania, Greece, and Turkey; the Soviet Union; and the United States.[35]

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[34] Le Démocrat, 4 March 1939.

[35] Le Démocrat, 4 March, 8 April 1939.

While the dictators made their moves, one after another, Cot urged France to find ways of resolving the practical problems of the reticence of Poland and Roumania to accepting passage of Russian troops to the German front, the absence of full Franco-British Soviet military agreement, and the refusal of the United States to abandon the full embargo provisions of its neutrality. On the one hand, he seemed to feel that these difference would disappear if general war actually came; on the other hand, he feared that, even if they were resolved eventually, they would not be resolved in time to act as a deterrent to war, or worse, defeat.[36]

Poland and the Soviet Alliance

Cot's concern with the place of Poland in a two-front war against Germany was expressed early, in March before the Anglo-French guarantees had been given.[37] Cot had maintained frequent contacts with Poland during the previous decade; most recently he had been in Poland during the Czech crisis. Firsthand, he observed what he considered both the pretentions and apprehensions of the Poles. In March 1939, the role of Poland in collective security appeared critical, so much so that Cot urged France to deal with Poland, not on the merit of her demands or the person of Colonel Beck, but solely on the needs of collective security.

The problem was the attaque brusquée: "If tomorrow Germany masses all its forces to cross Holland and Belgium, it could, by an audacious

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[36]Le Démocrat, 4 and 25 March, 1 and 15 April 1939; L'Oeuvre, 9 and 19 April 1939.

[37]L'Oeuvre, 13 and 23 March 1939.

and rapid campaign, outflank our positions, occupy the ports of the North Sea, and render impossible, slow, or difficult, the intervention of [the] British . . . ." The solution was the two front war. To guarantee this, France must be perceptive enough to see where Polish ambitions and fears lay and use these in concluding a military agreement. He pointed out that Poland had great power pretentions and colonial ambitions that France should consider, helping Poland to "play a . . . role the measure of its ambitions." One wonders what snares might have arisen later from such indulgence, a question to which we shall return. Cot also said that France might not like Beck, but "we ought to understand him. . . [and] his desire to construct a barrier of states determined to resist the advances of Germanism as well as Slavism." This last reference to the Soviet Union makes one wonder what feat of legal precision would have been required to reach that compromise.[38]

It is clear that Cot saw the Polish question as one requiring immediate and expedient solution. New problems arising from the contingencies of that solution would have to be faced as they appeared. Some Frenchmen resisted dealing with Beck; others, with Stalin. Cot said that in the present circumstances it would be criminal to refuse to deal with either of them. "If the Pope and the Devil both want to help, accept them both," he advised.[39] Cot was not dealing with abstract justice but with survival, but it was just this careless kind of indiscriminate choice that had led to endorsement, then rejection of Mussolini's interpretation of the Rome accords in 1935. Perhaps he had come to

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[38] L'Oeuvre, 23 March, 9 April 1939.

[39] L'Oeuvre, 9 April 1939.

realize that, if there had ever been any good choices, they had been lost before 1932.

The Polish negotiations were difficult and more than a little confusing.[40] At issue throughout were two things: first, Poland wished to have the status of Danzig recognized as a "vital interest" in a secret protocol to accompany the general guarantee to Poland; and second, Poland categorically refused Russian passage across Polish territory. Neither question had been settled when Germany attacked Poland and France and England declared war.[41]

So it was that the difficult Polish negotiations greatly influenced the equally difficult negotiations with the Soviet Union. The guarantee by the Soviet Union of a two-front war against Germany was critical to France; it was of no intrinsic value to Stalin. He was perfectly willing to aid the states of Western Europe in a common effort against Hitler if that effort destroyed Hitler and kept war out of Russia itself. If, however, cooperation with the western coalition threatened to bring the war into Russia, then the picture changed. It was the refusal of Poland (Rumania, because of the logistics involved, was secondary) to permit Russia to use the Polish-German frontier for its own front line that opened the possibility that Poland, unable to

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[40]The British and French were negotiating separately, and among the French, communication between General Gamelin and the Quai d'Orsay was uncertain.

[41]Young, In Command of France, 232-236; Adamthwaite, France, 317-324.

hold against Germany, would leave open the road to the Russian frontier. This Stalin was determined to prevent.[42]

Russian ambitions in tsarist Poland were another question altogether. Polish fears of Russia were quite legitimate and so their refusal was logical within that context. What France was unable to deal with was the irreconcilability of her two allies and her inability to choose one or the other. France wanted to keep and use them both in a security screen against Germany. She gave priority to the Polish refusal of passage, yet tried to convince the Soviets to agree to military cooperation without the assent of Poland.

France, which already had an alliance with the Soviet Union, initiated negotiations for a military convention in April 1939. Proposals were exchanged, but no progress was made. On 4 May 1939, Maxime Litvinov was replaced as Commissar for Foreign Affairs by Vyacheslav Molotov. This change in the personnel of Soviet diplomacy, whether intended or not, was both symbolic and prophetic. The policies of western orientation that Litvinov had supported since 1932 were abandoned, and Stalin sought very shortly to make his own peace with Germany, temporary as it might be, in order to be assured of his primary goal, which was to avoid any war on Soviet territory. Although Cot never remarked about the change publically, one may surmise how greatly he regretted the dismissal of the man for whom he had great personal liking and with whom he had shared much common ground in regard to collective security.[43]

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[42]Ulam, Stalin, 467-468, 491-492.

[43]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 34. See also, Ulam, Stalin, 508.

It became increasingly evident in July 1939 that the negotiations with the Soviet Union were in trouble. Soviet insistence that the Baltic states be included in their defense perimeter and that French and British defense commitments be given to indirect as well as direct attack were both sources of contention. Stalin, for his part, temporized, and in France, both the opponents of the Soviet Union and the integral pacifists, encouraged by German propaganda, speculated that Stalin hoped to emerge from the approaching crisis as the arbiter of the entire situation, (this was not a wholly unfounded assumption).[44]

Cot, who had published no articles since the end of May, wrote two in mid-July for L'Oeuvre about the failure of negotiations with the Soviet Union. His commitment to collective security was as central as it had even been, but the tone and the context had changed. It seemed almost as if he were running out of steam, or at least out of alternative solutions. The Soviet alliance was critical beyond estimate, yet the diplomats did not seem to be making any progress. He was angry and annoyed and, looking for a reason for failure, wondered if the diplomats themselves weren't to blame. On 13 July he explained why he believed that Hitler would strike against Danzig in August. Agreement reached in Moscow immediately might turn Hitler away from aggression, but the negotiations to date did not indicate that such an agreement could be reached. With nothing else to fall back on, he concluded with a vague statement about opposing Nazi doctrines of space and race with "a doctrine of reason and wisdom," and he spoke of what the great masses of peace-loving people might still do:

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[44]Le Démocrat, 15 July 1939.

> They must define how they intend to organize the international life of a Europe, pacified, reconciled, and disarmed . . . . Then they will raise in the world a great enthusiasm. They will be loved not only because they stand against racist barbarism but because they carry to the entire world the message of liberty that it awaits.[45]

It was a strange, striking, and unexplained contrast from what had preceded and what was to follow it. Perhaps it was a testimony to a moment of utter despair, a feeling that many must have had in the summer of 1939.

Ten days later, Cot was still talking about great popular support for peace and a new effort at collaboration against Fascism, but now he was referring to the meeting Rassemblement universal pour la paix, which had been held in Paris in the meantime and which, indeed, had been attended by a wide spectrum of supporters from throughout the world.[46] Cot spoke of attempting to reorganize "all the democratic energies . . . disconcerted by current events," and of providing a point of ralliement for men who had formerly been partisans of different policies (those who had taken opposite sides on non-intervention, Munich, and collective security). "All agree that a solid barrier must be raised against future conquest." Despite his call for a new approach, Cot quickly returned to the theme of impending war and the old and familiar

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[45] L'Oeuvre, 13 July 1939.

[46] The Rassemblement pour la paix had been founded in 1935 by Cot, Lord Robert Cecil, and other peace advocates and anti-fascists, to organize public opinion and influence world leadership to resist fascist aggression. Annual congresses were a part of its work. Sir Robert Cecil had won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1937. See J. Alvarez del Vayo, The Last Optimist (New York, 1950), 321; Viscount Cecil, A Great Experiment: An Autobiography (New York, 1941), 189; Louis Fischer, Men and Politics: Europe Between the Two World Wars, 537-538.

solution, the Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance. To bypass "the war of nerves" being played by the diplomats, he urged summit negotiations. Herriot and Churchill should be given carte blanche to deal directly with Stalin, or, short of that, a meeting of the chiefs of staff of the three armies should decide on technical conditions for collaboration. Cot's last admonition was for speed. If war broke out--and he thought it would come in August--he thought an alliance would form from the necessity of the struggle, but he grieved the loss of men and cities and time that delay now would mean then. Better prepare now "before the ides of August," he said.[47]

And in fact, an attempt at a military solution was made. With the political issues only partially resolved, it was decided to suspend the political negotiations and to move on to military talks. These opened in Moscow on 12 August. Two questions were raised by Voroshilov, War Commisar and Soviet negotiator in the military talks: were the French and British authorized to sign a treaty? and had the Poles authorized Russian troop passage to the German frontier? These two questions demonstrated that Cot's call for summit diplomacy was irrelevant. The problem in the Soviet negotiations was Poland. The person who needed to be included was Beck. And the point where pressure was needed was not in Moscow but in Warsaw, where Ambassador Noel and General Messy, the military attaché, were highly suspicious of the Soviet Union and extremely protective of their own position with the Poles. And to change this, one had to go back to Paris and London. Neither Herriot nor Churchill, with or without carte blanche, could have committed Poland

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[47] L'Oeuvre, 23 July 1939.

nor could they have abandoned Poland without consent from Paris and London. A survey of Soviet contacts with Berlin during the week that followed 12 August showed their dissatisfaction with the responses they received from the French and the British. On 23 August, Ribbontrop and Molotov signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression pact; on 25 August, Voroshilov suggested to the western military mission that there was nothing more to discuss.[48]

The Nazi-Soviet Pact and War

On the same day in Paris, men sought desperately for some last minute way to salvage the Soviet connection for France. At 4 p.m. Roger Genebrier, head of Daladier's military cabinet, approached Minister of Education, Jean Zay, "on his own initiative," it was reported. He urged that Pierre Cot be sent to Moscow to resolve the crisis, but no one considered this option seriously. Even Cot himself did not mention it in his conversation with Zay two days later, and there is no evidence of any direct line of communication existing between Cot and Stalin.[49]

The Nazi-Soviet agreement came to many Frenchmen as a surprise but it should not have. Such a possibility had been rumoured and discussed since Munich. Ambassador Coulondre in Moscow had reported then that Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Potemkin had said to him: "My poor friend, what have you done? For us, I see no other

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[48] Young, In Command of France, 238-240.

[49] Jean Zay, Carnets Secrets de Jean Zay (de Munich à la Guerre), publiés et commentés par Philippe Henriot (Paris, 1942), 171-172. Philippe Henriot added his own comment. Referring to "Derrière Roger," he pointed to the "narrow perspective of the incurable dreamer" who refused to abandon "love for the Soviets." But Cot's preoccupation was not with the Soviets for themselves but for collective security.

outcome than a fourth partition of Poland."[50] And the logic of such an arrangement for the Soviets was one of the factors that had made some men in the west hesitant to pursue negotiations in which vital military information would be revealed. Whether the Nazi-Soviet agreement was surprising or not, Cot did not believe it had been inevitable. He said much of the failure of France and the Soviet Union to come to an agreement was owing to the "improbable clumsiness"[51] of the French negotiators, but he also blamed Stalin for seriously miscalculating the benefits of an agreement with Germany. In Cot's only publication before the outbreak of war, he explained Stalin's errors.

In attempting to avoid war with Hitler, Stalin had made war more certain, in the west immediately, for Russia eventually. There had been only one hope of avoiding war with Germany: that had been to face Hitler with such a massive coalition of powers on all fronts that he would have been dissuaded from war. The Soviet presence on the eastern front in that coalition was essential. Without this coalition there was little hope of avoiding war, either in the west or in the east. France and Britain could not fail to stand and fight Hitler's next aggression. Despite the fact that France had depended heavily on the assumption of Soviet aid in the east, Stalin had underestimated the ability of the democracies to survive without the Soviet Union. The war would be harder and longer for them, but they would not be defeated, said Cot, "because the French army is the couverture of that block: its glorious role is to permit Britain and the United States

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[50]Adamthwaite, France, 264.

[51]Zay, Carnets secrets, 171.

to mobilize their inexhaustible resources and throw them into the balance." In this long war, Germany would eventually have to turn eastward for resources to feed her own war machine. So, in the end, Stalin would have war with Hitler after all.[52]

With Russia gone, the hopes that Cot had entertained that the United States could be brought to support a coalition against aggression became more important. Cot relied on the United States: first, as a moral and diplomatic force against fascism, and second, as a source of material with which to supply the economic and productive needs of the long war. In both instances it was the posture of individual Americans, particularly President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull, rather than the collective intent of its Congress that encouraged him to believe that American would not let Europe fall to fascist hegemony.[53] Throughout the uneasy months of 1939, Cot returned to the theme of U.S. support, always with some optimism, even though he recognized that the influence of Ambassador Bullitt on Daladier was a force against collective security and U.S. involvement.[54] One must judge Cot's optimism as having been an expression of his irrepressible hope as well as another example of his habit, as frequent as his genuine optimism, of stating things for public hearing the way he wanted them to be.

Finally, we must confront Cot's faith in the French army. To the French army, Cot assigned a single role: "to hold the land, whatever

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[52]Le Démocrat, 26 August [sic] 1939. This date is misprinted in the journal. The actual date was 2 September 1939.

[53]Le Démocrat, 11 February, 4 March, 22 April, 6 June 1939; L'Oeuvre, 17 April, 1 May 1939.

[54]Cot, Triumph of Treason, 357.

the cost." The land to which he referred was France and the adjacent areas of Holland, Belgium, and the Channel ports without which British and overseas support could not be maintained. He accepted the army's defensive posture and relied on its general staff to plan and coordinate this posture with the air force and with the British forces, believing that they understood, as he did, the kind of attack that Hitler must launch (the blitzkrieg) and the mortal responsibility of the French army to hold against it. His faith in the quality of leadership in the general staff was exceptional, and, as the ultimate sign of his faith, he assigned to it the role of allied leadership in the war of coalition:

> Of all the states able to participate in a coalition . . . against the totalitarian aggressors, France is the only one which possess a general staff equal to or superior to the German general staff.

France was to furnish the coalition with its command.[55]

As Cot waited, with the rest of France, for the blow from across the Rhine through the long winter and spring of 1940, economic preparation concerned him, but not military; it never seriously occurred to him that the French army might fail to hold the frontier or that her political and military leaders might accept defeat rather than subject France to the long war for which her army had planned since 1919.

An emergency appendectomy and slow recovery removed Cot from public life from mid-October 1939 to February 1940. Thereafter, his concerns were focused on economic mobilization and the preparation of peace aims,

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[55]Le Démocrat, 20 May 1939, reprinted in L'Oeuvre, 19 July 1939. See also L'Armée de l'air.

but there is very little record of his activities during these last three months of the Third Republic.[56] His votes reappeared in the Chamber in February and a few articles appeared in L'Oeuvre during the spring, but war and censorship altered public expression of political opinions for all Frenchmen. At the end of May, against the background of German military advances and the confused attempts of Daladier to use the offices of Mussolini to reach an agreement with the Germans before the Germans reached France, Cot was involved in another last chance futility, an attempt to have him meet with Stalin in Moscow. Ambassador Bullitt reported with derision to Cordell Hull that the Soviet government had refused Cot a visa until the French government had released an Isvestia employee. Georges Mandel, the Minister of Interior, "has taken charge of this matter with a view to giving satisfaction to the Soviet government," he reported. Nothing came of this; one could not seriously have expected it to at this point.[57] When the Chamber met in July to abandon the Third Republic to the leadership of Marshal Pétain, Cot was recorded as having "abstained," but, in fact, he was not there. On 17 June, Pierre Cot had sailed from Bordeaux for London.[58]

Unable to establish rapport with de Gaulle and the Free French there, he crossed the Atlantic with his American wife to spend three years of exile in her homeland, watching Britain and the United States

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[56]Le Démocrat, 9 March, 16 May 1940; L'Oeuvre, 21 February, 25 March 1940; Taylor, Strategy of Terror, 82.

[57]Bullitt to Hull, 31 May 1940, 761.62/669, State, R.G. 59, N.A. The origin of this plan has not been identified.

[58]Harvey, ed., Diaries, 393. See also New York Times, 21 June 1940.

slowly, painfully build the coalition that they had refused to support when it might have deterred war. One of the questions that occupied him during his exile was why the powers had not been able to agree on collective security before it was too late.

The Failure of Collective Security

Cot had assumed that, against Germany, France could hope to win only a long war and a war of coalition. Time and blockade alone would redress the balance of initial advantages held by Germany and Italy and permit the allies to build their arsenal while Germany's reserves dwindled. Victory, when it finally came, would not be as much the result of decisive French action as of having absorbed the blows of the enemy until Germany had nothing more with which to strike. To withstand these blows, France had to have a successful couverture, the support of allies, and the benefit of total and rational preparation.

Conversely, he had assumed that the Germans recognized these same facts and, realizing the disadvantages of a long war against a broad coalition, would turn to other options: to a short war of total victory, a blitzkrieg, or to a series of initial strategic victories that would change the composition of the coalition, shift control of raw materials, and alter the balance in a long war. Cot believed that the diplomacy of coalition itself could prevent the first option. If Germany were faced on all sides by French allies, blitzkrieg would be difficult to execute and probably would be rejected by the German general staff. If, on the other hand, Germany could, by any means, weaken the resolve of those who opposed her, undermine their resistance, sow panic and dissention, and so remove one factor at a time from the total array

of forces that faced her, then the balance against her might be shifted in a long war. So it was that Cot saw pattern in Hitler's moves against Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, and in agreement with the Soviet Union, a pattern defined by the events themselves. At each point of crisis, Cot urged France and her allies to prevent the territorial balance in Europe from shifting further in favor of Germany. However, division prevented cooperation.

There were those who agreed with Cot that Hitler's intent was to dominate all Europe and that neither France nor peace could survive under fascism. To these men, resistance through some form of collective security appeared to be the only way to contain German expansion. These men did not want war, hoped not to have a fight one, but were convinced that they had to be willing and prepared to fight Hitler if they were to stop him. Only then could Europe enjoy peace. Others started from another point, from the premise that France could survive only if there were no war at all. France could survive within a fascist Europe they believed, but she could not survive a war with Germany. These men, like Georges Bonnet, found no price for peace too high. Rather than resist German ambitions, they proposed to appease them and live with them. Between these two, those who did not believe they could deal with Hitler without force and those who thought they could, there was little understanding, great suspicion, and animosity that reached fanatic levels.

France was also divided on another issue that complicated French responses to the German problem: the role of the Soviet Union in East European affairs. Many Frenchmen who might have been anti-fascist or who were opposed to German expansion were unable to forget the full

intent of Marxist premise or Stalin's revolutionary use of power; nor were they able to forget the control which Stalin exercised over the French Communist party. Their fears of Bolshevism in any form prompted them to discount and oppose a Soviet alliance. Those who found a practical, if temporary, advantage to France in such an alliance either did not share these fears or postponed their consideration until later. But they found themselves, like Cot, isolated and discredited by the overwhelming force of anti-Bolshevism.

In the last analysis, it was Poland that made war inevitable and collective security, as Cot proposed it, impossible. Cot did not resolve this dilemma at the time of the Czech crisis nor during the ensuing Polish crisis. And the reason he could not resolve the dilemma was that he could not guarantee central and eastern Europe against the revolutionary goals of Soviet Communism. For central and eastern Europe, domination by either Germany or Russia, whatever their politics, was unacceptable. Cot, on the other hand, ultimately made his choice. If it was necessary to risk Soviet hegemony in order to defeat fascism, then he would take that risk.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Following the course of collective security through the career of Pierre Cot may not provide a full picture of collective security options during the interwar years or a total picture of its failure, but his conceptualization of collective security and his approaches to its implementation reflect the problems faced by those who sought both peace and security between the two wars. Cot's concept of collective security was broad and flexible, permitting him to adjust its form to circumstances. In all instances, its intent was to guarantee both peace and security; its form was both legal and military; it was made necessary by the implicit premise that Germany remained the enemy; and ultimately it demanded a choice between peace and security.

In the period before 1934, collective security was an integral part of the international order established in the Versailles system and entrusted to the League; it was found also in the guarantees of the Locarno accords and in France's eastern alliances, but it was incomplete and untried. It was Cot's desire to absorb both the German question and collective security in a comprehensive expansion of League authority to regulate national conflicts: arbitration, sanctions, treaty revision, disarmament, enforcement. The atmosphere established by Franco-German detente in the mid-1920s led Cot to hope not only that German demands for revisions in the Versailles system might be contained within that system but also that Britain might be brought to support strong

security functions for the League which would permit disarmament. It was these hopes that prompted Cot during the critical years between 1930 and 1932 to call upon France not to abandon conciliation but to support Weimar democracy with negotiations for a quid pro quo in treaty revision and disarmament. Cot believed that the greatest source of security vis à vis Germany lay in maintaining the disarmed condition established for Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. To do this, Cot was willing to accept some reductions in French arms. He justified this with his belief that less money better spent would give France a modern and technically competitive armed force.

The collapse of Franco-German detente, German democracy, and League authority after 1932 altered the perspective for both collective security and French defense requirements. Germany's step-by-step dismantling of the Versailles system replaced the concerns of international law with those of military deterrence and survival. Throughout 1934 and 1935 Cot was slow to abandon his reliance on the League and uncertain about what to put in its place, but by 1936 he had begun to construct a comprehensive system of deterrence and mutual assistance. Much in the same way that his system of arbitration, sanctions, and disarmament had been composed of interdependent parts and had relied on diplomatic cooperation, so, too, his new system for collective security relied on diplomatic cooperation. Despite the mortal danger that France faced, Cot was no more able to bring agreement among Germany's neighbors in support of deterrence than he had been to create support for League authority. In both instances, the conflicting interests of many states were involved, but the obstructive role of Britain remained the same. The British did not want to be drawn into a

European war, but neither did they want to be excluded from any form of European consortium. French conservatives, for their part, were not at all sure that defeating Germany was wise, for it might open the gates to a Red torrent throughout Europe.

The failure of collective security came in steps: in Ethiopia, the Rhineland, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and after the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression pact, in Poland, the Phony War, and in countering Germany's moves to secure her Baltic and North Sea flank. In each case, deterrence was never given a full trial and mutual assistance failed piecemeal. In 1940, collective security failed to save France.

Pierre Cot had believed that French security could be guaranteed by integrating it into a broader European context, whether through the League of Nations or a coalition for deterrence. However, the complexity and interrelationship of the problems that faced Europe following the Great War were monumental. Thorny national conflicts and dissatisfaction with the Versailles settlement remained and their resolution was influenced by many factors: Anglo-American attitudes toward Europe; the potential hegemony inherent in German strength; the ambitions of many states; the fanaticism of European Communism and the survival of revolutionary Marxist-Leninism in the Soviet Union; the emergence of equally fanatic fascism; the development of totalitarian techniques of governing; and world economic crisis. Anyone of these was difficult; all of them together, overwhelming. A large part of the failure of Cot's plans for collective security, therefore, lay with these circumstances, with the events of the interwar years, factors that lay well beyond the control of individual men or even separate national governments.

Part of the failure also lay within the French political system, for it was through the political process that Cot sought to build support for collective security. The ineffectiveness of the Third Republic's parliamentary regime was acknowledged by all who knew it. Looking at France in the 1930s, Cot saw institutions that had lost touch with the true spirit of the Revolution and no longer met the real needs of France. He attributed this state of affairs largely to the dominant position of a single class, the bourgeoisie, who had once led the fight of the Third Estate against the forces of privilege, but who had since become themselves the conservators of privilege. Controlling the key positions in government, the civil service, education, the army, and the economy, they had repeatedly stood in the way of the extension of democracy, making a mockery of the sovereignty of the people and the Third Republic a democracy in name only.

But the sweeping reforms that were necessary to wrest from the bourgeoisie their monopoly could not be expected to spring up spontaneously. It was the function of the political party to mobilize the masses and provide programs for change. But French political parties, the Radical-Socialists included, were in little better condition than the government. Clinging to old interpretations of principle and to old hostilities, they, too, had failed to adjust their programs to the changing realities of French society. Thus the first step in national rejuvenation was the revitalization of political parties, and Cot urged his own party to lead in this rejuvenation by adopting a clear program of reform that would attack the monopoly of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist order and extend the economic equality without which political

equality was meaningless. It was to serve these ends that he constantly urged Radicals to cooperate with Socialists in the Cartel des Gauches and looked with hope on the Popular Front. And it was from the Cartel des Gauches and its politics of peace and the Popular Front and its politics of anti-fascism that Cot sought support for collective security.

In assessing Cot's development of collective security policies, one needs to consider his personal role and to look at the nature of his logic and his method. Cot appeared to build a logical case for collective security but it rested on premises that were often hypothesis or myth. Nations were not ready to abandon sovereignty to the League of Nations. Britain continued to see her interests served by obstructing the organization of European power. Alliance with the Soviet Union could not go beyond Communist ambitions or east European national conflicts. Cot's logic was that of an advocate, a trial lawyer constructing a brief. With a predetermined end in mind, Cot built as convincing a case as he could with which to influence public opinion. He relied on public opinion to establish a mandate for the cause he championed and depended on democratic governments elected by this mandate to implement it in simple, direct lines. The mandate, however, was never unanimous; there was always opposition within the democratic process.

Both the peace movement and the anti-fascist movement were seriously divided, not only over many other political issues, but also on the critical issue of collective security. The peace movement was divided into at least three factions: those who would organize peace and enforce it; those who would simply proclaim it; and those who

opposed war for reasons of Socialist doctrine. The differences among the various peace supporters and war resisters might be passed over in mass meetings and election campaigns but they became very important in the legislature when support for foreign and defense policies was being determined.

Cot's own commitment to pacifism--and he did call himself a pacifist--was clearly to the organization and enforcement of peace. In this, he found no theoretical conflict between pacifism and national defense. Someone had to be prepared to defend peace. He preferred that guarantees rest with the League of Nations, but he never suggested that France abandon her own defense. And while he was Air Minister, he was wholly committed to building an effective air force. His conflicts with the military establishment arose over specific programs and over the political reliability of military professionals, not over the principle of national defense.

The anti-fascist movement was even more deeply divided than the peace movement. Cot, who was already an anti-capitalist, found cooperation with the PCF in support of anti-fascism and collective security simpler than dealing with the Socialists, who were constantly plagued by doctrine, division, and discipline. But for most Radicals, the PCF threatened a Bolshevism that few were willing to risk. The Socialists, for their part, managed to maintain, though not without dissent, their party's earlier tendencies for both anti-war pacifism and anti-Communism. As a result, the entire weight of the Popular Front was never committed to a single policy of collective security.

Neither the politics of peace nor those of anti-Fascism were able to provide any French government with clear and unified support for

concrete policies that would either organize peace or deter war. Cot was a victim of his faith in popular mandates, staking his policies on a unity that did not exist and could not be created.

With the formation of the Popular Front, Cot moved closer to those who were already committed to international Communism and the PCF. His own anti-capitalism and long time association with the Socialists, in addition to his new association with the PCF, raised resistance to anything he proposed. Cot's increasing association with the Left created opposition to collective security where it might not have existed otherwise.

In the face of political opposition, Cot had no power base, no credit of political favors. He was preoccupied with program and with policy. He had little interest in the mechanics of power and spent no time or effort in building a power base within the Radical-Socialist party. Up to 1934, Cot's ideas reflected the majority opinion within his party; he was prominent and effective. When opposition to Cot became a political issue after 1934, he had nothing to fight with but the strength of his own arguments. The majority of his party developed reservations about his leftward direction, and he became an individual voice.

Beyond the complexities of the international scene, the difficulties of French politics, and those of Cot's own temperament, the final failure, was the one he least expected and had not prepared for; that was the military collapse of the couverteur. In this sense, it was not collective security that failed France but France that failed collective security. Everything else was meaningless before the military defeat.

Not until 1941, when the United States and the Soviet Union, were both under attack, did they finally join in alliance with beleagured Britain, and form the force for which Cot had called. They had waited until catastrophe had already struck. Faced with defeat, they were more successful than Cot had been. But like Cot, the authors of this alliance mobilized support for a democratic crusade against fascism. And like Cot, they projected its legal and moral purpose into a new world order, United Nations.

In June 1940, as French resistance crumbled before the advancing Germans, Cot left France. After a brief stay in London, he moved on to the United States, where he remained from October 1940 to November 1943. The government at Vichy early marked Cot as one of those to be tried at Riom for the collapse of France. While in the United States, Cot was involved in the partisan struggles that dominated the French émigrés. Although his relationship with de Gaulle was difficult and tenuous, Cot became active in the work of France Forever, an American organization that supported de Gaulle's Free France. (There was some brief speculation within the Roosevelt government that Cot might provide an alternative to de Gaulle, but this was never a serious option.) By 1943, as the Americans were trying to decide which Frenchmen to support in North Africa, Cot had become a clear supporter of de Gaulle. With the establishment of the Provisional Government, Cot entered a brief period of close collaboration with the Gaullists, in which he worked to guarantee the inclusion of all the democratic forces of the Left in the new government. In February 1944, Cot undertook a five month fact-finding mission to the Soviet Union for de Gaulle. Cot now found himself increasingly in sympathy with the Communists, whose goals

he supported, whose rhetoric he believed, and whose methods sometimes seemed to be the only practical way. Recognition of the work of the French Communists in the maquis after 1941 confirmed to Cot their loyalty to France.

Cot was particularly unwilling to return to the pre-war pattern of partisan exclusion of the Communists. Unity, particularly unity of the Left, should be the essential ingredient of the Fourth Republic. Progressisme was born at the end of the war out of two currents: that of Resistance unity and that of Radical idealism. By April 1945, the exclusion or resignation of several Radicals from the party and the adherence of several members of the Resistance who did not wish to exclude the Communists from future political action established the foundations for the Union progressiste. Pierre Cot was one of these men.

Cot served as a Progressiste in the Chamber until 1958, first from the third constituency in Savoie (not his former seat) and then from Herriot's old seat in the Rhone, won after the elder Radical had resigned. In 1967, he returned to the Chamber for one term from the Communist held thirteenth arrondissement in Paris. Throughout, he was committed to the union of all of the parties of the Left and to the very unique role that he held for the Progressistes in that union. Cot's goals as a Progressiste were still found in the myths of th French Revolution--liberty, equality, fraternity--but, he said, "experience and history demonstrate that without social equality, political liberty is only a vain word and fraternity an illusion. . . ." In the struggle for social equality, "Marxism has completed, and in a certain measure, corrected the ideas of the French Revolution." In the realm of practical politics, Cot was very concerned that the principles of liberty

and justice be applied to the colonial world. He was equally concerned that France remain unaligned and undominated by either of the Cold War blocs. As for domestic concerns, he said, "Only, or almost only, in our country, the Communists work for the destruction of social inequality." For this reason the Progressistes "are naturally led to join with them," even if not always for the same reasons. But the Progressiste philosophy went far beyond rapport with the Communists; its goal was "a union of all the forces of progress and of movement--Communists included--against all the forces of reaction." Cot himself said, "the logic of progressisme is the Union des gauches and the Front populaire." In the union of all the forces of the Left Cot saw the Progressistes as a group whose special role was to exert a moderating force against excess. "It will be well that on the side of the party of the working class are found men, who while having resolved to take the measures which the public welfare impose, understand the voice of conciliation." That is why Cot said he was a Progressiste.[1]

In the end, Cot's progressisme crystalized what he had always been, a man deeply committed to issues--democracy, economic justice, national self-determination, and Third World development--and functioning to influence power, but not to control or exercise it, an advocate relying on the power of rational argument to moderate excess. Always keenly conscious of the evolutionary nature of life, Cot saw in governing a condition that required of man, not that he change his principles but that he be willing and able to adjust their application to changing conditions. Events had altered his view of what was rational and what

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[1]Cot, "Je suis Progressiste." (Paris, n.d.)

was excessive, but temperamentally he remained committed to goals that were defined by applying the myths of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution--updated by his own perceptions of Marx--to contemporary events.

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