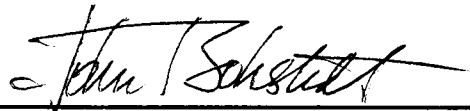


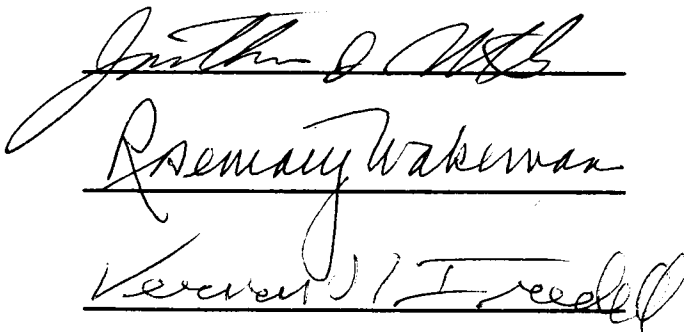
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Donald Louis Lanza entitled "The Geneva Protocol of 1924: British Rejection of League of Nations Covenant Reform." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.



John Bohstedt, Ph.D, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

THE GENEVA PROTOCOL OF 1924: BRITISH REJECTION OF LEAGUE OF
NATIONS COVENANT REFORM

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Donald Louis Lanza
December 1991

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife

Patricia Lanza

who worked as hard, or harder, than I so that all
of this could come to pass.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

My area of research for this project has been British policy toward the League of Nations in the 1920s. I went to England in the summer of 1990 and looked at materials in the Public Records Office and the British Library, both in London. At the P.R.O. I examined a wide variety of documents from the various branches of the British government: Foreign Office, Cabinet, Committee of Imperial Defense, Dominions Office and private papers (Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain and Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald). At the British Library I examined several sets of private papers of individuals involved with my topic. Back home I also looked at microfilm of three British Newspapers (London Times, Manchester Guardian, Daily Herald).

I found in my research that the British government offered a wide variety of criticisms for a plan devised by the League of Nations to prevent aggression. The plan, the Geneva Protocol of 1924, sought to institute a mechanism which would have been set in motion automatically when an aggression occurred against a League member anywhere in the world. The Conservative British government which took office late in 1924 objected to this proposal on the grounds that it might involve Britain in wars worldwide since it had the largest fleet of any League member.

I set out to find the complex of reasons and motivations which led Britain to reject such a peace plan as the Protocol. I found that British Conservative leaders, who manned the departments of the British bureaucracy, feared loss of control over their respective departments to

League influence and dreaded change of any kind. Their philosophical world lay in the 19th century when the Great Powers controlled diplomatic relations. I also found that British leaders, for economic reasons in the wake of a ruinous world war, wanted to limit their commitments as much as possible to an area which they considered within their vital interest rather than to risk wars worldwide. The rejection of the Protocol represented a repudiation of experimental peace plans in favor of treaties, such as Locarno, which limited commitments to Western Europe.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE GENESIS OF THE GENEVA PROTOCOL AND BRITAIN'S ROLE	10
3. BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1920S	32
4. THE REJECTION BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT	76
5. THE SEARCH FOR SUPPORT	129
6. FROM THE PROTOCOL TO LOCARNO	178
7. CONCLUSION	217
BIBLIOGRAPHY	226
VITA	233

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The League of Nations Assembly wanted the Geneva Protocol in order to "fill gaps" in the League of Nations Covenant. Committees of the Fifth League of Nations Assembly drafted it in September of 1924. It had two goals: to provide a definite plan for disarmament (a desire among many nations and individuals in the wake of a destructive war), and to provide mutual security and a means of arbitrating disputes while disarmament progressed. States on the continent of Europe, where the Great War took its biggest toll, wanted to prevent a future war, but national interests affected the way each wanted to go about solving the problem. France and many of the new states in Eastern Europe embraced the Protocol because it offered a solution to the problem of a potential German aggression.

Specifically the Geneva Protocol provided for collective security through a system of automatic responses to aggression which would be coordinated by the League Council. It also provided for arbitration of disputes by an appeals process through the League Council and the World Court, an organ of the League, by which aggrieved states could seek settlements of arguments before they reached the stage of aggression. And finally the Protocol provided for disarmament through an international conference to be held, probably in Geneva, in June 1925 if the Protocol was ratified. For reasons which will be examined in this work, the British rejected all of this in favor of a limited commitment to guarantee borders from aggression in Western Europe only, a group of treaties which we know today as Locarno.

The rejection of the Geneva Protocol represented a repudiation of experimentation in British diplomacy. Without making a judgement on whether or not the Protocol would have actually worked to prevent war if it had been accepted and implemented, one can still identify the rejection as a move away from the insecurity of the unknown toward the certainty of the tried. After officially rejecting the Geneva Protocol in March 1925, the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin went on to accept the Locarno Treaties in October of the same year. Even though the Locarno Treaties were somewhat of a departure in European international relations in that they abandoned competing alliances and accepted the idea of arbitration of disputes, they limited the sphere of commitment to Western Europe where another war threatened. The Protocol on the other hand might have involved them in minor wars worldwide including volatile Eastern Europe where Britain felt it had no interest. After all a minor war in the Balkans had led to British involvement in the Great War, and they did not want a repeat of that situation. Their security concerns did not lie in the Americas or in Asia or even in Eastern Europe.¹ Another war in Western Europe would affect Britain directly and that is where war threatened because of the French and German rivalry. Imperial protection was a concern but not as urgent as this Franco-German rift since no major wars possibly loomed on the horizon except in Europe.

¹In reference to Asia, Japan had been a concern after the war but the Washington Naval Conference in 1922 solved the problem of a naval buildup. As part of the agreement at Washington Britain was allowed to build a base at Singapore, but it was not completed until 1933. This was because of budgetary constraints in part, but it was also because of lack of concern over Japanese intentions until the early 1930s. A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (New York, 1965), 230; F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-1939 (New York, 1967), 289-290; Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981), 260.

The Protocol on the other hand offered the potential for involving Britain in wars worldwide. It did not matter to the Baldwin government in Britain that the Protocol's successful implementation might have prevented wars by the very threat of collective action. Britain had its own commitments and concerns, such as economic recovery from the war, keeping the Empire together and making it profitable, and making sure another devastating war did not erupt in Europe. It did not want to have its attention diverted from its main concerns and in the process making new commitments worldwide by accepting what amounted to a near-universal defensive treaty. An example of this flight from entanglements was the British dissolution of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in 1922.

The Protocol episode, which lasted from September 1924 when the Protocol was drafted to March 1925 when Britain formally announced to the League Council that the Protocol was unacceptable to Britain, also signified an effort to repudiate a League agreement which British policy makers saw as a threat to their way of conducting business. The Whitehall bureaucracy (i.e. the various government departments such as the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, the Board of Trade, etc.) and the Cabinet scrutinized the Protocol with a wary eye. The Protocol seemed to endanger the bureaucratic, committee style of government that the British had employed for at least two hundred years and threatened to put in its place a system of international relations governed by the League. The League Council under the Protocol could have made decisions on the conduct of war and even whether or not a war would begin or end. True, Britain had a veto on the Council but what if world opinion were against it on a particular issue? Could Britain safely go against the majority? Could it be forced to continue in a

collective action long past when Britain thought the need for the action had ceased? According to the Protocol the Council would vote on this type of question with a free veto arrangement. In theory one of the member states could veto cessation of hostilities almost indefinitely.

Put in this fashion it is not difficult to understand why the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin decided to reject the Protocol. But it is not so simple. The French were willing to risk threats to their sovereignty in order to accept the Protocol. Why? Czechoslovakia and other new states in Eastern Europe also thought it worthwhile. Why would they be willing to accept the Protocol and not the Conservatives in Britain? Why would even another British government, the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald in 1924, be willing to accept the Protocol? Did the British Conservatives not see that a sound system of collective security might deter aggression? From this perspective it appears that Stanley Baldwin's government was the "dinosaur" in the process - wanting to impede progress toward a safer world.

Do we then lay the blame for the next war, World War II, at the feet of the British? Not unless we can somehow prove that the Protocol would have worked. We do know from history that the alternative, Locarno, did not prevent another war. The main question I want to ask is if the Protocol might have worked toward preventing another war then why did the Conservative government in Britain not want to try it? At first glance it seemed odd that an instrument designed to prevent war should have been rejected by an apparently peace loving people such as the British. That was the initial impulse which drove my desire for further inquiry. I assumed that the Geneva Protocol would work because it provided a mechanism for

responding to aggression. Simply "turn on the machine" when an aggressor strikes and the rest would take care of itself. After beginning the research I soon realized how utterly simplistic that was. In reality states have their own interests and those interests may not include protecting the sovereignty of every other state in the world. This was a British concern, but on the other hand France liked the idea, not out of concern for the international community but to protect itself from Germany.

When I began reading the secondary literature looking for references to the Protocol, I found that the explanations offered for its rejection were terse and superficial. P.J. Noel-Baker wrote the only book exclusively concerning the Protocol and that was in 1925! Noel-Baker was a member of the League of Nations Union, the League support group in Britain, and he was a colleague and confidante of Sir Robert Cecil, the president of the L.N.U. and supporter of collective security. Noel-Baker's book, simply entitled The Geneva Protocol For The Pacific Settlement Of International Disputes (the formal name for the League instrument), did little more than describe the Protocol in detail and offer arguments for its acceptance. After finding no more works on the Protocol itself I began to think that more needed to be said about it. It seemed significant to me that a state, Great Britain, which had a large stake in peace in the wake of a devastating war, would reject this plan. What motives might the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin have had in not accepting the Protocol? What international pressures would they have had to either accept or reject? What role would Britain's Empire, especially the self-governing Dominions, have had in the rejection? (I already knew that the Dominions were putting pressure on Britain for more independence.) What significance does this rejection hold

for current efforts to make the United Nations function as a peace keeping body? Since nationalistic attitudes were rife back in the 1920s maybe we can learn something which would help in ensuring security today. It seemed that if I could discover the meaning of this rejection I could understand better the motives of any state, or individual for that matter, in refusing to go along with plans for the prevention of war.

As I read the secondary literature the answers did not come. The various books and articles said little about the Protocol itself much less the reasons for its rejection. F.P. Walters offered the earliest explanation in 1952 in his two volume work on the League. He used Chamberlain's rejection speech to the League Council as a basis for his explanation. He said Commonwealth opposition, fear of trouble with the U.S., reluctance to get involved in Eastern Europe and Foreign Office disdain for arbitration of disputes were the motives.² This is obviously a good starting place but certainly the explanation goes deeper than Chamberlain's words to the Council.

Later explanations did not add much. A.J.P. Taylor says: "Chamberlain ... rejected the Protocol - partly on the ground that the Dominions were against it." He does not tell us what the rest of the explanation is. League historian George Scott thinks problems with the U.S. over implementation of sanctions caused the rejection. Michael Gordon's explanation is somewhat unique. He writes about Labour foreign policy and says the Conservatives' rejection of the Protocol was really a rejection of Labour foreign policy and

²F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations Vol. 1 (London, 1952), 284.

its emphasis on internationalism rather than nationalism.³ Where is the complexity and depth in these answers? Why did the Dominions not like the Protocol? Why was there a fear among the British Conservatives over a potential conflict with the U.S.? And why did the Conservatives believe in nationalism and Labour in internationalism and what did this mean specifically for the fate of the Protocol?

Other explanations center on British rejection of broader commitments in favor of limited ones. W.N. Medlicott mentions several of the specific causes already cited, such as Dominion objections and Foreign Office concerns, but in the end he says the British favored Western European commitments over worldwide commitments. F.S. Northedge asks the question in his summation: "... could not Britain explore once more the possibilities of a guarantee [to the French over fears of German aggression] without undertaking the wider commitments of the Protocol?" His answer, and the Conservative's too, was yes! Paul Kennedy asserts that Britain rejected the Protocol because of Conservative and Dominion dislike for "binding and universal pledges." And Donald Birn, in his book about the League of Nations Union, claims that rejection occurred because the Conservatives abhorred the idea of strengthening the League Covenant and thus giving more power to the League.⁴ These explanations also accept

³Taylor, English History, 221; George Scott, The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations (New York, 1974), 112; Michael R. Gordon, Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965 (Stanford, 1969), 51-57.

⁴W.N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles 1919-1963 (London, 1968), 73; Northedge, Troubled Giant, 248; F.S. Northedge, The League of Nations: Its Life and Times (Leicester, 1986), 119, 259; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 268; Donald S. Birn, The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945 (New York, 1981), 60.

Chamberlain's rejection speech at face value. Certainly the British disliked wider commitments, but why? And were there other factors?

Dick Richardson has provided perhaps the most detailed treatment of the Protocol in recent years in his 1989 book about British disarmament in the 1920s. He mainly argues that the rejection of the Protocol was a rejection of its emphasis on disarmament but claims that Locarno satisfied Britain's immediate problems on the continent without the disarmament aspects of the Protocol. He describes the rejection process in about half a chapter and links the demise of the Protocol to the acceptance of Locarno and to the idea of a limited commitment on the continent.⁵ Richardson offers an excellent short description of the rejection process in the British bureaucracy but in such a brief space could not do the whole rejection and its myriad causes justice, nor was that his goal!

All of these explanations are perfectly valid. That is they are not incorrect. They do not seem to me to tell the whole story, however. What motivations drove the Conservatives in their rejection? What specific values and assumptions underlay the Conservative foreign policy? Moreover what international realities focused Conservative policies on Western Europe and limited their interest in broader commitments? This is basically my problem with what I have read about the Protocol. No complexity exists in the scholarship about a subject which seems worth examining in more detail. If indeed the British rejected the Protocol for all of the above reasons and accepted Locarno instead, then inter war diplomacy would revolve at least to some extent around this episode. It represented a move

⁵Dick Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s (London, 1989), 29-44.

away from the experimentation of the League idea and its focus on international cooperation back toward Great Power politics and its attendant focus on national competition. The latter of course never went away after the war, but the demise of the Geneva Protocol and the acceptance of Locarno represented a rejection of League efforts to devise mechanisms for preventing another war.

The whole blame for this rejection of broad international cooperation must not be laid at the feet of the British of course. All of the European states must accept responsibility for limiting the scope of the final agreement, Locarno, to Western Europe. Locarno replaced the Protocol and Hitler trampled on it in the 1930s. As I indicate several times throughout the text we have no idea whether or not the Protocol would have been more effective than Locarno. All we really know is that the Great Powers, especially Britain, were not ready for its experimental nature in the 1920s. Why? This is the question which I will attempt to answer in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

THE GENESIS OF THE GENEVA PROTOCOL AND BRITAIN'S ROLE

Introduction

One antecedent of the Protocol lay in the French desire for security from another German attack. With the United States out of the League because the Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles; and with the British subsequently backing away from a treaty of guarantee which would have required the U.S. and Britain to come to the aid of the French if attacked by Germany; the French began to call for revisions of the Covenant in order to make it more difficult for an aggressor (meaning Germany) to go to war. The designers of the Covenant, as it turned out, did not want it to be coercive though the French did their best to make it so, even suggesting that an international army be formed under the aegis of the League. During the Paris Peace Conference when representatives drafted the League Covenant, the U.S. and Britain vetoed any notion of making the League a coercive institution, especially because of the British fear that the League would become an instrument of French political ends on the continent. In addition both Britain and the U.S. later came to view a strong League as guardian of a Treaty (Versailles) which they had come to regard as undesirable in its effect on the defeated states.¹

France had two separate but interrelated problems in the 1920s. As we have said it feared another German attack, but it also had serious

¹ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981), 264; F.S. Northedge, The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1945 (Leicester, 1986), 89-90, 44.

monetary problems. The franc had become practically worthless after the war because of all the debts the French government had incurred trying to rebuild the area in the north which had been devastated by the war. The French, the government and the people of France, were adamant about German reparations payments. These payments (both in cash and in kind) would aid in the recovery of France. The government of Raymond Poincaré went so far along these lines in early 1923 that it sent troops (along with Belgium) into the Ruhr valley in Germany to collect defaulted reparations payments. This action worried both Britain and the United States enough to stage a conference in the summer of 1924 in London to solve the reparations problem. The Dawes Plan emerged from this conference and regularized payments and tied them to the fortunes of the German economy. So the French had a twofold purpose in the 1920s toward Germany. First France wanted to force Germany to pay for war damage in the north of France, both for the recovery of France and to the detriment of Germany, in the process making future German aggression less likely. The other French goal was to isolate Germany, much as Bismarck had isolated France in the late 19th century. The French saw the League of Nations as a grand alliance against Germany. The problem was that the Covenant did not work as well as France wanted it to. It had loopholes.²

The main French concern was that the Covenant under article 12 allowed two parties to go to war after a waiting period of three months, subsequent to an arbitral ruling by the League Council. This cooling off

²Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 265; Philippe Bernard and Henri Dubief, The Decline of the Third Republic, 1914-1938, trans. by Anthony Forster (Cambridge, 1985), 80-83, 93-94.

period was in no way enforced by the League and the only powers which either the Council or the Assembly had were advisory or suggestive in nature. No firm mechanism was in place to stop an aggressor, to the chagrin of the French. Thus the French desired some kind of strong, enforceable system of collective security, one which would bring the wrath of the world community down on an aggressor and stop any future German aggression.³

The desire among League delegates and supporters for disarmament also ultimately led to the Protocol. By disarmament they meant the reduction of arms to a level which would provide for domestic safety but not permit aggression. Many of the delegates to the League of Nations (if not necessarily their home states) wanted to limit arms in the wake of a destructive war. Moreover the Treaty of Versailles provided that the victors of the war at least try to disarm. The League Assembly struggled with the question of disarmament and how to implement it at every session in the early 1920s. It had created a Temporary Mixed Commission (literally a short-term committee made up of people from various states) in 1920 to study the question. The T.M.C. offered the so-called Esher Plan the following year, but it was rejected by the Assembly because it did not provide for the compensation of victims of aggression.⁴

By 1922 disarmament and collective security had become firmly linked together in the minds of League delegates. They passed Resolution XIV which proclaimed that disarmament could not come about without a system of mutual protection for states as they disarmed. As a result the T.M.C. devised in 1923 the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance which provided for

³Northedge, League of Nations, 89-90.

⁴*Ibid.*, 113, 117.

security arrangements continent by continent. In other words, all of the states on a particular continent would provide for the security of each of the other states. France liked this idea, as did many of the smaller states of Europe (i.e. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, the Baltic States, and Finland) all of whom feared aggression from neighboring states. The other member states objected to the Treaty on a variety of grounds and wanted more time for reflection. The Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald in Britain rejected the idea from the beginning. MacDonald wanted disarmament but felt that too much of the burden of continental security would be placed on Britain under the draft treaty since Germany and Italy were both economically devastated after the war and France was recovering as well. Britain was the least touched by the war of all of the major European states but was attempting to implement its own recovery program and could not afford to take on the burden of policing Europe. MacDonald also felt that more, not fewer, arms would be required to implement the Draft Treaty. Moreover MacDonald objected to the very idea of collective security, a significant part of the Treaty, on the grounds that it would cause war rather than prevent it. MacDonald would later object to the completed Geneva Protocol on the same grounds. He envisioned the Protocol as stressing disarmament and arbitration of disputes more than it eventually did.⁵

Nonetheless MacDonald wanted disarmament. So after conferring in the summer of 1924 with French Premier Edouard Herriot (who was more interested in an easing of tensions with Germany than his implacable

⁵Dick Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s (London, 1989), 13-15; Michael R. Gordon, Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965 (Stanford, 1969), 38-40; F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, Vol. 1 (London, 1952), 225-227.

predecessor Poincaré had been) both men agreed to speak to the September session of the League Assembly and exhort it to come up with a plan to replace the Draft Treaty which would link disarmament and collective security, close the gaps in the Covenant which left war as a legitimate option after a waiting period, provide for the peaceful settlement of disputes, and not, MacDonald hoped, place the burden of continental security on the shoulders of Britain. The three main features of what would eventually come to be called the Geneva Protocol came together in these ideas put forth by MacDonald and Herriot: disarmament, collective security, and arbitration. Gradual disarmament, backed up with a plan for arbitration of disputes to make a war less likely while states disarmed, was MacDonald's goal; and collective security backed up with sanctions against an aggressor, was Herriot's goal.⁶

The League Assembly assigned to committees the task of devising this document and the work began. By the end of September the finished product was presented to the Assembly whereupon nine member states including France signed it. The delegates of the other forty seven member states, including the British delegates, were instructed by their governments to withhold signature until the document could be inspected. Ramsay MacDonald was pressured by departmental objections in the British government to closely examine the Protocol before signing it. Then in October the Labour government fell to the Conservatives who immediately began scrutinizing the Protocol with a cautious eye.⁷

⁶Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 18; Walters, History of the League, 268-269, 272; Sally Marks, The Illusion of Peace: International Relations In Europe 1918-1933 (New York, 1976), 53.

⁷Walters, History of the League, 275-276.

And thus the drama began. The Conservative government decided to reject the Protocol in favor of what Austen Chamberlain would call "special arrangements". These arrangements would eventually be called the Locarno Treaties and would satisfy French demands for security in Europe but would ignore the security of the rest of the world, something for which the drafters of the Protocol had wanted to provide. And so underlying the question of how and why the Conservative British government of Stanley Baldwin rejected the Geneva Protocol lies the question of why it accepted Locarno, an agreement which could have been open to similar objections. To understand the difference between the Geneva Protocol and Locarno will shed light not only on the exact nature of British foreign policy in the 1920s, but also on the process of how that policy emerged.

Supporters of peace and disarmament in Britain

Britain lost three quarters of a million men in the Great War; the Empire lost another 200,000. To make matters worse, the United Kingdom lost about 300,000 people a year to emigration in the years following the war, mainly to Canada and the United States. And even though the home islands suffered little damage either in life or property during the war, Britain's really serious long term damage was financial. It lost forever its pre-war status as a creditor and became a debtor nation because of the money it had borrowed, mainly from the United States but also from its Dominions, in order to prosecute the war. The victors of the Great War were pyrrhic victors. And in the end the Treaty of Versailles caused more problems than it solved, with discontent on the part of Germany over the harshness of the settlement, and on the part of Italy over division of the spoils, and on the part of France because the treaty was not harsh enough on

Germany. The peace settlement, in the words of M.L. Dockrill and J.D. Goold, was "a peace without promise." In other words, the victory was no real victory and the peace settlement was no real peace settlement. British leaders unsuccessfully tried to mediate these differences during the peace conference and throughout the early 1920s but with little success. As a result of these casualties, economic dislocations, and unresolved disputes caused by the war, the tenor of public opinion in the years after the conflict, not only in Britain but all over Europe and in the U.S., was in favor of disarmament, and was positive toward the League of Nations as a peacekeeping body. Moreover, there was a group of important statesmen including Sir Edward Grey in the Liberal Party, and Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson, both Labourites, who were passionate about disarmament; that is, the limitation of arms to a level which would permit defense but not aggression.⁸

Another force in Britain operating for disarmament and peace was the League of Nations Union. This organization was founded in 1918 in order to push for the creation of a League of Nations. The L.N.U. reflected the views of Edgar Algernon Robert Cecil, Viscount of Chelwood (as of 1923), who worked long and hard for the League idea. Cecil was the third son of the Third Marquess of Salisbury, who was Conservative Prime Minister three different times between 1885 and 1902. That status gave weight to Robert Cecil's otherwise minority view in Conservative cabinets in the 1920s.

⁸A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (New York, 1965), 120-123; W.N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy since Versailles, 1919-1963 (London, 1968), 65-66; Donald Birn, The League of Nation Union, 1918-1945 (New York, 1981), 6; Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 1; Gordon, Conflict and Consensus, 13; M.L. Dockrill & J.D. Goold, Peace Without Promise: Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-23 (Hamden, Ct., 1981), 258.

Cecil had a strict religious upbringing but became known at Eton for his progressive ideas. He attended University College, Oxford, where he read law, and was elected as Conservative M.P. for East Marylebone in London in 1906. His beliefs more closely paralleled the Liberals, being a moderate free-trader and a supporter of women's suffrage, but his inside track to politics lay with the Conservatives because of his family connections. Cecil had an intense and intellectual character which allowed him to draw and hold the attention of large audiences. He cared little for the material trappings of life and was basically a modest individual. Cecil's abilities were respected by Stanley Baldwin, and he served in the Cabinet of both Baldwin premierships in the 1920s. Baldwin entrusted Cecil with League affairs, and thus he became the League advocate (and later the Geneva Protocol supporter) in the Cabinet.⁹

The L.N.U. was mainly composed of Liberals and Labourites, but it also had its Conservative members, including Austen Chamberlain (even though his vision of the League was not as grandiose in its peacekeeping role as that of many L.N.U. members). Its membership at its height in the early 1930s was somewhat over a million, with only half that number in the mid-1920s. Donald Birn, in his history of the L.N.U., described the organization as "very much a middle-class do-gooder movement, high-minded and respectable, basically moral in content and attractive to 'liberals' of all parties." Birn further claims that "the group as a whole - even where it advocated disarmament or internationalism [as opposed to nationalism],

⁹Birn, League of Nation Union, 1-3; E.T. Williams and Helen M. Palmer, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1951-1960 (London, 1971), 199-201.

which could have been radical causes – was so cautious in its advocacy that it remained thoroughly safe and respectable.”¹⁰

The main advocates in Britain of disarmament and internationalism, twin purposes of the League of Nations, were the L.N.U. and the Labour Party. The Liberal Party tended to be anti-war and anti-imperialist, but its main interests were free-trade and individual liberties, not the internationalism of the Labour Party. The Conservatives were more geared toward traditional Great Power diplomacy and national and imperial interests; and while they supported the League, they saw it as a debating forum and not as some kind of super organization designed to force peace through collective action. So, the Labour Party in the early 1920s, along with the L.N.U., became the advocate in Britain for some kind of scheme to reduce armaments and ensure peace.¹¹

Labour Foreign Policy

The Labour Party's overall approach to foreign policy lent itself to the internationalist and cooperative aspects of the League of Nations. Labour foreign policy in the 1920s was idealistic, naive to some extent because of lack of government experience, disdainful of 'traditional' diplomacy, internationalist, anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, supportive of international working-class solidarity, and socialistic (i.e. seeking cooperation and social justice for all). Labour rejected the traditional foreign policy of the Conservative Party with its emphasis on national

¹⁰David Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics (Bolton, 1985), 240; Birn, League of Nation Union, 4, 64, 184.

¹¹Taylor, English History, 17, 65; Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London, 1970), 128-129.

interests, protection of the imperial and commercial network, and balance of power on the continent.¹²

Both Labour and the Conservatives supported the League of Nations but for different reasons. The Conservatives saw it as a 'debating society' in which international problems could be discussed; a place where differences could be aired and disputes debated, but not as an organization which coerced its members into certain avenues of action, whether they be forced arbitration to settle disputes or mandatory participation in a military action against an aggressor. Labour, on the other hand, saw the League as a means for international cooperation for the active pursuit of peace; an organization which would force states to do what was necessary to prevent war. Some Labourites viewed forced arbitration and collective security (sanctions and military action) as natural duties of the League. Others saw these as extreme measures which might or might not be necessary in order to limit arms and prevent war. Most in the Labour party probably agreed more with the latter approach simply because they refused to see war itself (i.e. collective security) as an acceptable method to stop war. For Labour the League was not a means of maintaining the status quo as the French viewed the organization but a means of avoiding war.¹³

All of these philosophical attitudes of the Labour Party made it disposed toward active use of the League to avoid war through promoting disarmament and, as a means of achieving the latter, compulsory arbitration

¹²Gordon, Conflict and Consensus, 1-44.

¹³Medlicott, British Foreign Policy, 326; Gordon, Conflict and Consensus, 1-43; Elaine Windrich, British Labour's Foreign Policy (Stanford, 1952), 9, 258; W.R. Tucker, The Attitude of the British Labour Party Towards European and Collective Security Problems 1920-1939 (Geneva, 1950), 35.

of disputes through the League. Moreover the Labour Party itself derived its support from the new electorate which was enfranchised in 1918. Many of these new voters were mobilized and influenced in their vote by unions, which preached Labour ideology to them. Working-class voters and their relatives and friends had been on the front lines during the Great War and had no intention of repeating the experience. This voter sentiment coupled with Labour's bent toward peaceful use of the League provided strong motivation for the Labour government to seek a peace plan.¹⁴

Other pressures on the Labour Party came from the Trades Union Congress, one of the main sources of organizational support for Labour. The T.U.C. pressured the Labour government in 1924 to take positive steps in the direction of peace. In March 1924 an Advisory Committee of the T.U.C. on International questions issued a memo stating that it "... strongly recommends that the Government make a declaration adhering to what is called the Optional Clause in the statute of the Permanent Court of International Justice established by the League (Article 36)." This clause provided for the submission of all justiciable cases (those which could be solved by existing international law) to the World Court at the Hague. This Optional Clause would eventually find its way into the Geneva Protocol.¹⁵

Thus the Labour Party gradually identified itself in the early 1920s with disarmament, internationalism, arbitration of disputes, and ultimately with the League of Nations. Along with Robert Cecil and the League of

¹⁴Ross McKibbin, The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924 (London, 1974), xiii-xviii; Windrich, Labour's Foreign Policy, 21.

¹⁵Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.), F0371/10573/W2855/338/98, Labour Party and Trades Union Congress, Advisory Committee on International Questions, memo to government, March 1924; Windrich, Labour's Foreign Policy, 21-27, 49.

Nations Union the stage was set for Britain's role in the attempt through the League to outlaw war and provide for the peace which was so desperately desired by the common people of Britain and of Europe as a whole.

The Draft Treaty

In 1920 the League of Nations Assembly had created a Temporary Mixed Commission which was charged with the task of coming up with a disarmament plan. By 1922 the job of the T.M.C. had changed somewhat because the Assembly had become convinced that no true plan of disarmament could proceed unless accompanied by a security plan, one which would protect states as they began to destroy their armaments. In the autumn of 1923 the T.M.C. presented the Assembly with the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, which was the brainchild of Robert Cecil. The proposal was a complex plan which encouraged states to voluntarily disarm (actually to limit arms rather than to completely disarm). If states did so they would be ensured protection by other states on their own continents but from nowhere else. The plan encouraged regional security arrangements thereby keeping the threat of a general war to a minimum. Thus if France disarmed it would be provided protection from Germany, or any other potentially hostile state, by Britain and the other League members in Europe. Of course this particular scenario could have led to another general European war, and the treaty's opponents pointed this out.

The Draft Treaty ran into problems from the very beginning. The only state which firmly supported it was France, desperate for any guarantees of help against a possibly resurgent Germany. By early 1924 the Labour government, which had taken over the premiership in January, began receiving input on the Draft Treaty from various pressure groups. These

criticisms set the tone for objections to the next big effort through the League to limit arms and prevent war – the Geneva Protocol.

The Trades Union Congress in conjunction with the Labour Party itself declared in May 1924 that there was no clear definition of what constituted aggression in the treaty, hence Britain should not commit itself to such a vague obligation and risk the possibility of getting involved in another European war. Moreover many in the Labour Party hated collective security to begin with because they did not like the idea of relying on war to stop war. The T.U.C. also pointed out that the regional alliances authorized by the treaty were simply other forms of competing alliances which had led to the Great War; and that no serious disarmament could come out of such a vague notion of allowing each state to disarm on its own. Canada also refused to support the Draft Treaty because it seemed to be a blank check which imposed "future obligations to take specific actions in circumstances incapable of present definition...."¹⁶

The British military services, particularly the Admiralty, complained that "the British Navy would certainly always be the first force to be called upon..." in case of a war. Other complaints by the military concerned the potential difficulty of appointing a High Command over an international force, time lost in preparing for a conflict while the Council decided who the aggressor was, and general problems of collaboration with the

¹⁶P.R.O., PR030/69/241 (Ramsay MacDonald Papers), memo, Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, May 1924 ; P.R.O., F0371/10569/W5046/134/98, telegram from Governor-General of Canada, Lord Byng, June 12, 1924.

militaries of other countries. All of these complaints foreshadowed those which would later be voiced by the services concerning the Protocol.¹⁷

So, the first Labour government in British history decided to reject a plan designed to aid in disarmament, an avowed goal of the Labour Party. Ramsay MacDonald's government, backed by the Foreign Office and the military services, claimed that the burden of resisting aggression on the continent of Europe would fall disproportionately on Britain and would necessitate an increase in armaments rather than a decrease. If France were attacked by Germany, for instance, would an economically bankrupt Italy or the tiny new countries in Eastern Europe, come to its aid? MacDonald was aware, however, that the treaty's rejection would infuriate the French, so an alternative had to be found. By the autumn of 1924, MacDonald thought he had the solution.¹⁸

MacDonald and Herriot Speak to the League Assembly

James Ramsay MacDonald came from humble beginnings. He was born in 1866 in a fishing and farming village, Lossiemouth, in the lowlands of Scotland. His mother was unmarried and it is not certain who his father was. He had a modest education but took advantage of the school library and became an avid reader. He spent much of his youth unemployed and upon reaching adulthood decided to join the Fabian Society, a British socialist organization, in order to help other disadvantaged people. He then became active in the Independent Labour Party when it was founded in 1893. He was elected to Commons in 1906 and became leader of the Labour party in 1911.

¹⁷P.R.O., PR030/69/155 (Ramsay MacDonald Papers), minutes, C.I.D. meeting 183, March 3, 1924.

¹⁸Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy 15-18; Northedge, The League of Nations, 93.

He was active in the international socialist movement and was very interested in foreign affairs, becoming passionate about disarmament in the wake of the Great War. MacDonald became the first Labour Prime Minister in British history in January 1924, and from the first wanted to use his time in office to push for international peace. He even appointed himself as his own Foreign Secretary, not trusting anyone else with something so important. He spent most of his time, however, with French demands for security on the continent.¹⁹

MacDonald's French counterpart was Edouard Herriot, the former Radical mayor of Lyon, who assumed the premiership in May 1924. (A Radical in French politics in the inter war years resembled a British Liberal, stressing individual liberties.) Like most Frenchmen in the 1920s he feared a resurgence of Germany, but unlike his predecessor Poincaré, Herriot did not think France could go it alone. He wanted British friendship. He also, like MacDonald, believed in discussion and compromise and wanted ultimately to mitigate the harshness of the Treaty of Versailles. Herriot had no intention of taking the aggressive path of Poincaré, who had occupied the Rhineland in early 1923 to force the Germans to pay defaulted reparation payments.²⁰

The League Assembly invited MacDonald and Herriot to speak at the autumn session of 1924. Herriot, who had supported the Draft Treaty, called for a renewed effort to come up with a plan to identify and act against an aggressor. He said France would concede to arbitration and disarmament but

¹⁹L.G. Wickham Legg, ed., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940 (London, 1949), 562-569; Gordon, Conflict and Consensus, 12-13; David Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald (London, 1977), 331.

²⁰Marquand, MacDonald, 338.

only if a system of sanctions accompanied them. MacDonald (who actually spoke before Herriot) sounded a somewhat different tone, but essentially called for a renewed effort for a plan to replace the Draft Treaty. He called for the appointment of "a commission that will prepare for the Armaments Conference, and let us see to it that even before we rise, before the assembly breaks up, some substantial progress shall be made in ... producing ... some measure of agreement and consent."²¹

MacDonald also warned the Assembly to stay away from military alliances since this was one of his criticisms of the Draft Treaty. He insisted that the League work as a unit: "The British Government has no wish to reduce the authority of the council. It rather wishes to extend the authority of the council consistently with the continued existence and the prosperity of the League." He went on to say that he was in favor of arbitration: "If we cannot devise a proper system of arbitration, then do not let us fool ourselves that we are going to have peace." To this end he suggested that the optional clause of the Permanent Court forcing arbitration be "carefully examined." "It is the desire of the British Government to sign undertakings like the optional clause of the statute of the Permanent Court, but before so great a step is taken, it is proper that the clause should be drafted in the most specific form possible."²²

Ramsay MacDonald was an idealistic, and often inexact, speaker. His words in the speech before the Assembly could easily have been, and actually were, misinterpreted. It was obvious that he wanted disarmament,

²¹P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 538-B, Ramsay MacDonald to the League Assembly, Sept. 4, 1924.

²²Ibid.

but how? Arbitration of disputes represented one path, but to what extent should the delegates go along this path? There should be a strong Council, but how strong? In the end MacDonald found that he could not accept the instrument the Assembly devised, the Geneva Protocol, at least not at first. He disliked the Protocol for the same reason he disliked the Draft Treaty - the burdens of continental protection which he thought it would place on Great Britain, since the continent was the place most likely to produce another devastating war. He later came to support the Protocol when he became aware of the plan which the Conservative government had in mind to replace it. That plan would eventually be called Locarno and was essentially a collective security arrangement for Western Europe alone.

Robert Cecil, a member of the Temporary Mixed Commission and a member of the Conservative government which succeeded Labour in November 1924, confided by letter to Austen Chamberlain that MacDonald had admitted to him that he would not have signed the Protocol as it appeared after being drafted. MacDonald said, according to Cecil: "We do not incur new obligations [under the Protocol], but all our old obligations are very much tightened up and rendered more precise and specific."²³ Is that not what MacDonald wanted? How else would arbitration, disarmament and an extended authority for the Council appear other than for obligations to be "tightened up and rendered more precise and specific"? Unfortunately MacDonald himself was not more precise and specific in his speech.

²³British Museum, Additional Manuscripts 51078 (Robert Cecil Papers), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Robert Cecil, June 19, 1925; P.R.O., F0800/256 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Robert Cecil, Nov. 19, 1924.

The Drafting of the Protocol

MacDonald and Herriot delivered their speeches to the Assembly on September 4, 1924. The rest of the month of September was spent in the drafting of the Protocol. There were two committees of the Assembly which worked on the drafting. One committee was chaired by Edouard Benes, the Czech Foreign Minister who dominated Eastern European diplomacy in the inter war period. He is said to have coined the phrase 'collective security' and was very active in insuring Czech security against the large, former aggressive states in the east, Germany and Russia. Benes' committee was concerned, appropriately, with sanctions (or collective action) against an aggressor, and with disarmament. The other committee was chaired by Greek Foreign Minister Nikolaos Politis. Politis was a jurist and specialized in international law. His committee was charged with the aspects of the Protocol dealing with arbitration of disputes.²⁴

The document presented to the Assembly for approval at the end of September attempted to synthesize the ideas put forth by MacDonald and Herriot in their speeches: disarmament, collective security, and arbitration of disputes. A disarmament conference was scheduled for June 15, 1925, assuming that the Protocol was ratified by the Assembly and the member governments. The drafters of the Protocol believed that disarmament could not proceed unless a secure atmosphere was first achieved in the world. In order to do this they included in the Protocol an enhanced system of arbitration and collective security. MacDonald, Herriot, and the drafters of

²⁴Taylor, English History, 299; Marks, Illusion of Peace, 66-67; Walters, History of the League, 270-272.

the Protocol considered the Covenant as not sufficient for preventing war or reacting to an aggressor.

The Geneva Protocol also required that all signatories sign the Optional Clause of the World Court, an organ of the League. This Optional Clause declared that all international disputes which might be decided based on current international law could be referred to the Court for a ruling. If the Court could not make a ruling, if there was no international law concerning the dispute, or if either party did not like the ruling, then the League Council would attempt to arbitrate the dispute. If one side decided to resort to war in spite of these efforts, the other League members would automatically impose sanctions (an embargo of whatever materiel the Council decided should be withheld from the aggressor). The Council would operate in most cases as it did under the Covenant, by unanimous vote. But in a couple of important instances (stopping sanctions and collective action) the Protocol did not specify how the vote would work, leaving the British fearing that they might be outvoted on stopping a League action. For instance if a collective action were under way against Germany (either an embargo or a war to contain an aggressive act), a majority of involved states could in theory keep the action in progress against British wishes. Or even if the free veto were in effect (i.e. one state could oppose an action and it could then not go forward), the British feared that France for instance could veto a termination of the action even though the rest wanted the action stopped. Logically one might assume that if the Protocol did not specify the method then it would work as it did under the Covenant, by unanimous vote; but the Protocol was silent on this and thus British fears were aroused.

The British Foreign Office kept an eye on the proceedings in Geneva during the month of September. There were regular dispatches between London and Lord Parmoor, the chief of the British delegation to the League. Parmoor (born Charles Alfred Cripps) was trained as a lawyer at Oxford and had served in Parliament before the war as both a Liberal and Conservative. The Great War changed him and he gradually began to lean toward the Labour philosophy in international affairs. He supported the League of Nations and in 1924 accepted a position in the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald, becoming the head of the British delegation to the League. Parmoor supported the Geneva Protocol and defended it when the Foreign Office began criticizing it during the drafting process.²⁵

Even Ramsay MacDonald, who was Foreign Secretary as well as Prime Minister, became concerned that Britain would commit itself prematurely to this new document before he and the rest of the officials at Whitehall would have a chance to inspect it. MacDonald ordered the Foreign Office to send a dispatch to Lord Parmoor in Geneva: "Cabinet wishes to make clear that in accordance with agreement between French and ourselves the findings of the Commissions and the Assembly should come only as recommendations to the Governments without committing them and you are urged to make clear that any signature you may give, if signatures are unavoidable, will carry no more meaning than that you are agreeing to make such a recommendation to your Government."²⁶

²⁵L.G. Wickham Legg and E.T. Williams, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950 (London, 1959), 186-187.

²⁶P.R.O., CAB23/48 (Cabinet Conclusions), 51(24)3, telegram, Ramsay MacDonald to Lord Parmoor, Sept. 29, 1924.

So, even before the ink was dry on the Geneva Protocol criticism was flying back in London, some from the man who proposed it in the first place. This was only a harbinger of things to come as each of the departments in the British government would have their say about this document which emerged out of the Fifth Assembly of the League of Nations in the autumn of 1924.

The Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance had been rejected by the summer of 1924, and Ramsay MacDonald and Edouard Herriot wanted a document to replace it. For British support the new document would need to be geared toward disarmament not continental alliances as the Draft Treaty had been. MacDonald and Herriot outlined all of this in their speeches to the Assembly in September 1924. Arbitration of disputes and sanctions could be included in the document but with disarmament as the goal for MacDonald and continental security as the goal for Herriot.

The drafting committees presented the Protocol to the League Assembly on October 1, 1924. Seventeen countries including France signed it and the criticisms, especially in Britain, began. Lord Parmoor complained to MacDonald on October 2 that the English press was hostile to the Protocol but attributed it to the upcoming election in November which would topple the Labour government.²⁷ The Labour government's friendly policy toward Soviet Russia brought it increasing criticism. Labour's Liberal allies began to defect over this question, and MacDonald would be forced to call an election. Labour would lose that election, and the demise of the Protocol

²⁷P.R.O., FO800/400 (League Papers), letter, Lord Parmoor to Ramsay MacDonald, Oct. 2, 1924.

would begin as Whitehall and the new Conservative government started to pick it to pieces and began to search for an alternative. It became the job of Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain to find that alternative and present it to the Cabinet. Why was an alternative even needed? What world view did the Conservatives hold that would not allow them to consider an instrument which promised to prevent war? We turn now to those issues.

CHAPTER 3

BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1920s

Introduction

Historian Paul Kennedy identifies several trends in British foreign policy in the 1920s. He says that British policy makers did not feel that any decline in the British position in the world had resulted because of the Great War, and thus they saw few restraints on their actions. Restraints came from many sources, however. The huge debt which Britain had incurred in the war forced successive governments to be frugal. The rise of the Labour party to prominence also put pressure on the Cabinets and Parliaments after 1918 to put more emphasis on domestic reform, thus making it difficult to emphasize foreign policy to the degree it had been before the war. Public anti-war sentiment, especially among those who had felt personal losses in the war, had grown. British deaths had totaled 750,000 in the recent conflict, more than would occur in World War II. All political parties in Britain, and even the general public, viewed the League of Nations as an acceptable institution for peacefully resolving disputes, but each party viewed its role in a slightly different way. The property-owning middle classes feared Bolshevism and when the Labour Party tried to open diplomatic relations with Russia in 1924, it got them ousted from the premiership in October of that year. Imperial defense and the issue of Dominion independence plagued Britain because it felt that it needed the Empire to bring it out of the economic doldrums. Thus the Dominion push for more self-government worried British policy makers. And the decision-by-committee style of foreign policy (actually not much changed since before

the war) kept the British from being as decisive and prompt in decision-making as some continental governments were.¹

Kennedy goes on to say that one of the main driving forces behind British policy in the interwar years focused on the idea that they had much to lose and little to gain by being involved in a war. Peace, he concludes was the "greatest of national interests," and accordingly, British policy makers pursued three main policies: appeasement of the United States because of war debts and fear of a naval race; the avoidance of extremes on the continent of Europe between isolationism and binding agreements; and the reintegration of Germany into the association of European nations in order to have another industrialized trading partner.²

Little difference existed in these overall goals between the Conservatives and Labour, the two parties which dominated British politics in the 1920s. The goals were the same but the methods differed. Labour saw the policies toward the United States, the continent, and Germany specifically in the context of international peace. That is, if disarmament (or limitation of arms to a level which would prevent aggression but still allow for defense) occurred then the other problems would take care of themselves, because then war would be far less likely. Labour represented a new and different approach to foreign policy.³

Conservatives on the other hand believed in a traditional foreign policy linked to the nineteenth century and were only gradually beginning to

¹ Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981), 223-257.

² Ibid., 257-312.

³ Michael R. Gordon, Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965 (Stanford, 1969), 1-5, 38-43.

change because of the effects of the Great War. Many in the party possessed nonetheless a "yearning for the relatively free hand of the pre-war days." And some of the more conservative Tories, W.N. Medlicott holds, believed goals could be attained "by courage and political flair."⁴ F.S. Northedge goes so far as to suggest a kind of *naiveté* in the Conservative outlook on world affairs. He points out two basic elements: a 19th century liberal notion of national sovereignty and a desire to maintain this state through the avoidance of entangling alliances (reinforced by experiences in the Great War); and a notion that everyone (or every country) has a self-interest which would keep them from doing anything self-destructive, such as going to war for aggressive reasons.⁵ So the Tory foreign policy was based on a nineteenth century idea of national self-interest, and all one needed to do was rationally discuss problems in an international forum (such as the League of Nations) and all situations could be easily solved. Thus war would be an unwise undertaking since it would upset the general peace from which all benefitted.

Dick Richardson, in his recent book on Britain and disarmament in the 1920s, basically supports the above notions. He says that successive British governments in the 1920s "assumed that the experiences of 1914-18 had demonstrated the futility of war and believed that acceptance of this axiom by international politicians would inevitably lead states to the path of peace." Richardson claims: "This was a misconception. Some states believed that war brought advantages." He goes on to say that "consciously or

⁴ W. N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy since Versailles 1919-1963 (London, 1968), xvi, 326-327.

⁵ F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-1939 (New York, 1967), 619-622.

unconsciously, successive British governments based their policy on the nineteenth century liberal theory of an international 'harmony of interests'. They assumed that each nation had a common interest in peace, that the common interest was compatible with the pursuit of individual national interests and that wars arose primarily from misunderstandings." This attitude shaped British, especially Tory, policy toward the League as a forum for the discussion of world problems rather than a coercive institution which would force policy on member states.⁶

Bernard Porter adds another element which he claims helped to determine British policy in the immediate post World War I period. A group in the Conservative party which Porter calls 'imperialists' had formulated before the war, and carried on through it, a policy "to preserve Britain as a great power by uniting and exploiting the colonies: consolidating the Empire into a single economic unit, big enough to hold its own against Russia and the United States."⁷ Harold Nicolson, a well-respected Foreign Office secretary during the early 1920s who had served on the delegation to the Paris Peace Conference and whose father had been permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs before the war, penned a memo which lends credence to Porter's interpretation. In outlining imperial defense needs Nicolson listed the following as important: "(1) The defence of the individual Dominions. (2) The defence of the sea communications between Great Britain and the individual Dominions. (3) The defence of Great Britain

⁶ Dick Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s (London, 1989), 16.

⁷ Bernard Porter, Britain, Europe and the World 1850-1982: Delusions of Grandeur (London, 1983), 91.

itself, being the heart of the Empire."⁸ This attitude illustrates the importance of the Empire to British policy makers and helps us to understand why British governments did not want to get involved any more than necessary in continental squabbles. It also helps to explain the importance of the Dominions in the rejection of the Protocol. The Dominion governments wanted to stay out of European problems while Britain did not want to alienate member states in the Empire. Moreover British policy makers saw the Empire as the focus of attention and thus problems in Europe or elsewhere in the world only served as diversions from the main area of interest.

Apparently Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary in the Tory government which replaced Labour in November 1924, agreed with Nicolson's memo and with its emphasis on the Empire rather than the continent. In reference to that memo Chamberlain wrote: "... it represents not only the personal opinion of the Secretary of State, but the considered view of the Foreign Office as a whole and the very able and experienced body of officials who advise me."⁹ Chamberlain was to play a significant role in the rejection of the Protocol.

Appeasement and Decline

Even though it is difficult to tell by listening to the people who were living through the events in the 1920s, Britain had begun a long process of

⁸ Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.), F0371/11064/W1560/9/98, Harold Nicolson, British Foreign Policy memo, Feb. 20, 1925; E.T. Williams and C.S. Nicholls, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1961-1970 (London, 1981), 793-794.

⁹ P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1560/9/98, Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 19, 1925, comment on Nicolson memo (see note 8). There is a slight discrepancy on the dates of Nicolson's memo and Chamberlain's comments. The former is dated 2-20-25 while the later is dated 2-19-25! I cannot explain the error in dating, but there is no doubt that Chamberlain was referring to the memo in question.

decline. Beginning in the last three decades of the 19th century, industrial competitors arose which began seriously to challenge the British lead in manufacturing which it had enjoyed since the 18th century. Germany, France, and the United States were latecomers to the game and had the advantage of jumping into an endeavor which had been pioneered by Britain. The Industrial Revolution began in Britain in the late 18th century and most of the trial and error of machine design had already been done. Also by 1850 manufacturers were using new sources of energy, electricity and oil, to power a new generation of machines. British manufacturers, whose industrial infrastructures were aging, found themselves faced with the choice of starting over or continuing to enjoy a lead, even though that lead was slipping. They chose the latter because it was more profitable, in the short run at least, to retain older proven processes and equipment than to invest in new ones. They made this decision even though it became evident they were up to the task with the industrial retooling they accomplished during the Great War. That war, however, virtually bankrupted Britain as it had the other European powers. Much trade was lost to the United States, Latin America, and the British Dominions, all of which were untouched by World War I, at least when compared to continental European powers and Britain. As a result of this decline, by the 1920s Britain had begun a policy designed to mitigate the hostility of its rivals overseas, especially the U.S.; and to sooth the tensions on the continent, especially between France and Germany, to prevent another war which Britain could not afford.¹⁰

¹⁰Sidney Pollard, Britain's Prime and Britain's Decline: The British Economy 1870-1914 (London, 1989), viii-xii; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 226-227, 259.

Avoidance of war was the basis of the policy. To appease in its most basic sense means to make peace. Appeasement had in the 1920s none of the negative connotations which the term has acquired since Munich. British Conservative leaders in 1924 saw the Geneva Protocol as not avoiding war but as making it more likely. It might involve Britain in wars world-wide since Britain had the largest fleet and more troops stationed abroad than any other power. Again we must remember that we are referring to Conservative policy in the rejection of the Protocol, but this policy of appeasement was common to all of the political parties in Britain.

Martin Gilbert, in his book The Roots of Appeasement, writes at length about the policy of avoiding war at all costs. Gilbert says that for Ramsay MacDonald the policy of appeasement "was an essential part of the restoration of European political sanity and economic progress."¹¹ Of course MacDonald believed in the Protocol as a means of avoiding war rather than a potential cause of war. The main difference between MacDonald (including his Labourite followers) and his Conservative opponents was in means not ends. As a general principle of foreign policy appeasement was, says Gilbert, "not a silly or treacherous idea in the minds of stubborn, gullible men, but a noble idea, rooted in Christianity, courage and common sense."¹² Even Winston Churchill supported the notion: "The aim is to get an appeasement of the fearful hatreds and antagonisms which exist in Europe and to enable the world to settle down." Even after Munich, Churchill defended the policy: "Appeasement in itself may be good or bad according to the circumstances. Appeasement from weakness and fear is alike futile and

¹¹ Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London, 1966), xi.

¹² Ibid.

fatal. Appeasement from strength is magnanimous and noble, and might be the surest and perhaps the only path to world peace."¹³ So avoidance of war in the 1920s was very important to British statesmen.

Roland Chaput describes Britain's limits in appeasing adversaries in his 1935 book on disarmament. He explains this limit in terms of equilibrium (an absence of war in which the existing order is not being changed through armed force), which he says is really what British statesmen were seeking in the 1920s. "Great Britain has always endeavored to maintain this state of equilibrium in order that she might profit from her world-wide commerce"¹⁴ And, I might add, that this protection of commercial networks was extremely important in the 1920s in the face of economic decline. Chaput goes on to say that when this equilibrium is threatened then Britain, historically, has been willing to use force to impose order. I would also add that Britain's ability to use force in the 1920s was limited because of lack of funds so it was necessary that their battles be chosen carefully. If war could be avoided through a pact (such as Locarno) which required little commitment, then that must be tried first. Bernard Porter in his book on the British Empire basically agrees with this assessment: "Britain's best hope ... was to create a situation where peace was guaranteed in the world, but without the need for too much effort or commitment to secure it on Britain's part."¹⁵ This was one of the guiding

¹³ Ibid., ix (quotes by Winston Churchill: first quote, at the Imperial Conference, July 7, 1921; second quote, in the House of Commons, Dec. 14, 1950).

¹⁴ Roland A. Chaput, Disarmament in British Foreign Policy (London, 1935), 17-18.

¹⁵ Porter, Britain, Europe and the World, 96.

principles for Austen Chamberlain in his drive to reject the Protocol and work on a more limited (i.e. European) solution.

Imperial demands

Conservative British policy makers began increasingly in the 1920s to look at the Empire as the last bastion of British might. If they could maintain and defend and use the Empire to increase British fortunes then maybe full recovery from the Great War could be effected. So British Conservative statesmen looked to the Empire as something to be defended and saw the Empire's fortunes in terms of British success or failure. If parts of the Empire were lost, alienated (in the case of the independence-minded Dominions), or subjected to attack, then this would be a blow to the mother-country. Thus the focus of Conservative imperial policy was defense, not involvement of the Dominions or colonies in wars to keep world peace, a prospect they saw as accompanying the implementation of the Geneva Protocol.

Austen Chamberlain was himself convinced of the paramount importance of the Empire to Britain. In December 1924 he explained to the Italian ambassador to Britain his problem with a simple acceptance or rejection of the Protocol: "British policy must now be the policy of the British Empire and not of Great Britain alone." And he claimed that this placed him as Foreign Secretary "under disadvantages for purposes of immediate decision which had been unknown to my predecessors even a short time ago."¹⁶ These disadvantages consisted of the necessity of consulting with the Dominions before taking certain actions which might

¹⁶ P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10746/134/98, conversation between Contarini (Italian ambassador to Britain) and Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 7, 1924.

impinge upon them and also the necessity of considering imperial defense at large and not simply the defense of the home islands.

This symbiotic relationship was outlined by Miles Lampson, later first Baron Killearn and head of the Central European Department in the Foreign Office in the mid 1920s. Lampson had served on the British delegation to the Washington Conference of 1922 and would help coordinate the Locarno negotiations in 1925. He wrote: "The safety of the Mother-country is the safety of the Dominions -- and they know it -- if only on account of the protection afforded by the British fleet." Furthermore, he claimed that the British people as well as those who resided in the Empire as a whole were aware of this security relationship between Britain and its possessions and Dominions.¹⁷

Sir Harold Nicolson, Foreign Office secretary and former assistant to Sir Eric Drummond (League Secretary-General), echoed in a memo this same notion. Referring to the potential wide-ranging involvement which could accompany the Protocol, he said "... it would be unsound for the Governments of the Empire to commit Great Britain and the Dominions to responsibilities which are not direct necessities of Imperial defence, and of which the people of the Empire would not approve."¹⁸ Thus the main goal of foreign policy would presumably be defending Britain and its empire and not playing policeman in every conflict that cropped up in the world, unless that conflict impinged on imperial security.

Statesmen in Britain were not alone in this attitude about imperial cohesiveness and security. John Rushworth, first Earl of Jellicoe, Governor

¹⁷ P.R.O., F0371/W2035/9/98, minute by M.W. Lampson, Jan. 29, 1925.

¹⁸ P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1560/9/98, Harold Nicolson, Foreign policy memo, Feb. 20, 1925.

General of New Zealand from 1920 to 1924 and naval hero at the battle of Jutland, felt very strongly about the link between Britain and the Empire. He wrote in a dispatch to Colonial Secretary J.H. Thomas in March, 1924 (before the Protocol was even proposed) that he believed that "the Empire will stand as long as Britain holds the supremacy of the sea." Jellicoe also responded to the Labour government's desire to make the League of Nations a cornerstone of foreign policy. He wrote that "it may turn out to have been a pity that the League was ever brought into being if the defence of the Empire is to depend upon [it] only." Only the British navy and an enhanced infrastructure of bases (particularly the proposed base at Singapore) would provide the needed defense. Jellicoe did not hate the League. He simply wanted the British Navy to be the focus of Imperial defense, not the League.¹⁹

So, the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin had other things in mind rather than getting involved in wars which would contribute nothing to its two main goals: defense of the home islands and the defense of the Empire.

British Continental Policy

In his book on British foreign policy in the interwar years P.A. Reynolds claims that "the United Kingdom's aims in Europe were to remove the grounds for disputes or peacefully resolve them, to avoid wide commitments that might involve too great an allocation of her extended resources, and to promote the economic restoration of Europe as part of her

¹⁹ P.R.O., C0532/275 (Dominions Original Correspondence - New Zealand), dispatch, Jellicoe to J.H. Thomas, Mar. 11, 1924.

own economic recovery."²⁰ The Conservative government which took office in November 1924, and the bureaucracy at Whitehall (Foreign Office, Admiralty, etc.) saw the Geneva Protocol as a serious threat to all of these goals. The Protocol might have satisfied the first aim (resolution of disputes), but such a wide-ranging instrument as the Protocol would have clashed with the other two aims. Conservative policy makers were certain that it would be expensive to aid in collective security worldwide, especially since Britain had the largest fleet of any League member. Thus Britain, they reasoned, would be called upon more frequently to enforce sanctions.²¹

The Conservative government was interested in issues concerning Britain and its empire and little else. Britain did have an interest, however, on the continent of Europe. Harold Nicolson, who would throw his lot in with the anti-appeasers in the late 1930s, outlined British continental policy as it related to national defense. Britain's interest on the continent, according to Nicolson, was mainly centered around defense of the British Isles. He wrote that the British continental goals were: to prevent any single power from occupying (or being in a position to occupy) the Channel and North Sea ports (that is, those in France, Belgium, Holland and Denmark); to avoid hostility between any of the above mentioned countries and Germany, lest conditions should emerge by which a hostile country would be in a position to dominate the Channel ports; to prevent any power at war with France or Belgium (these two being the closest to Britain across the Channel) from dominating the ports; and to reach an understanding (probably some kind of

²⁰ P.A. Reynolds, British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years (London, 1954), 12.

²¹ Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 29-30.

treaty) with France and Belgium which would help protect the Channel and North Sea ports.²² These ports, such as Antwerp, Cherbourg, and Calais, were of obvious concern to the British and had been since the days of William the Conqueror. If these ports were dominated by a hostile power then invasions could easily be launched against Britain. And with the emergence of air power in World War I the prospect of bases being established along the Channel or North Sea from which to bomb the island was a real possibility.

British Labour and Conservative policy makers in the 1920s all recognized that France presented a security problem on the continent. It was France, not Germany, which caused concern. Economic historian David Kaiser supports this notion: "During the 1920s the British government seemed more disturbed by the prospect of French hegemony on the Continent than by the more distant possibility of German predominance." After all Germany was in no condition to wage an offensive war in the wake of the Great War. France on the other hand was so concerned about a future German aggression that if it had its way it would further sap the German economy through the insistence on full payment of reparations or through an invasion [as occurred in early 1923] to force payment. The British wanted German recovery not its further slippage into an economic abyss. Britain could not trade with a poor Germany nor did it want be locked out of continental trade by a hegemonic France.²³

²² P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1560/9/98, Harold Nicolson, Foreign Policy Memo, Feb. 20, 1925; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 286.

²³ David E. Kaiser, Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930-1939 (Princeton, 1980), 11; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 264-272.

In August of 1924, Edouard Herriot, the French Prime Minister, sent a summary of French security demands to British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. They included: the completion of German disarmament, the right of France to investigate in the Rhineland to ensure demilitarization, the continuance of the French occupation of the Rhineland, a defensive pact between France and England, a nonaggression guarantee from Germany, and an organization of mutual assistance under the League of Nations against states guilty of aggression.²⁴ The British, both Labour and Conservative governments, were cautious however about guaranteeing the security of France. Ramsay MacDonald made an uncharacteristic 'realpolitik' assessment instead of his usual platitudes about international cooperation. He cautioned that "there was the danger that, if we made France secure, thereby we would give her a free hand to work out her own political and economic policy in Europe and relieve her of all military implications which might result from her policy."²⁵ Harold Nicolson and R.H. Campbell, both career diplomats in the Foreign Office and both sons of former Under-Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs, outlined the same concerns in a joint memo in January 1923: "The French dread of Germany is hereditary and inevitable, nor would we wish to see it entirely removed. Within limits, it serves as a corrective to the enterprising vanity of the French character which, if unchecked, would undoubtedly bring our two countries into serious conflict."²⁶ Nevertheless, MacDonald agreed in principle to a protocol at the

²⁴ P.R.O., CAB 4/11 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 516-B Enclosure, Herriot to MacDonald, Aug. 11, 1924.

²⁵ P.R.O., CAB 2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 188th Meeting, Ramsay MacDonald, Oct. 2, 1924.

²⁶ P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2035/9/98, Foreign Office memo, Harold Nicolson and R.H. Campbell, Jan. 23, 1925.

September 1924 League Assembly in order to allay French fears of Germany, only to be disenchanted with the final result (the Geneva Protocol) because it relied too heavily on collective security to forestall aggression rather than arbitration of disputes and disarmament. Ultimately the Conservative government would reject the Protocol in favor of a pact (Locarno) that would guarantee German as well as French security.

The new Conservative government in November of 1924 began to follow a policy not of guaranteeing the security of France but of revision of the Versailles Treaty. One way of revising Versailles was to work toward the reintegration of Germany economically and politically into the European state system, thereby creating markets and lessening the chance of war. Germany could thus be a British trading partner on the continent and also serve as a counterweight to French domination of continental affairs. In a letter to Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, Lord D'Abernon, British ambassador to Berlin and a Francophile interested in the security of France, stated: "... the adhesion of Germany to the League, if not a necessary preliminary, is an absolutely essential condition of any pact...".²⁷ The "pact" he had in mind was a nonaggression agreement between France, Germany and Britain. And Chamberlain, himself a Francophile, in February 1925 proclaimed that "I am vitally afraid that the whole situation [a pact] would be poisoned and even ruined by the French remaining ... in Cologne."²⁸ The French had occupied Cologne after World War I as part of the Versailles Treaty.

²⁷ British Museum Additional Manuscript (hereafter BM Add mss.) 48926A (D'Abernon Papers), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Lord D'Abernon, Apr. 2, 1925; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 235-236.

²⁸ P.R.O., CAB 2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 196th meeting, Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 19, 1925.

Perhaps the sentiments of career diplomats Harold Nicolson and R.H. Campbell sum up best the Foreign Office, if not the British, conception of the continent. "All our late enemies desire to recover what they lost; all our late allies are fearful of losing what they won. One-half of Europe is dangerously angry; the other half dangerously afraid."²⁹ It is no wonder that the British would want to remain aloof from such a volatile situation if they could have. But the British could not ignore the Continent. J.W. Headlam-Morley, historical advisor to the Foreign Office, tells us why. Headlam-Morley was considered by many at the time as an expert in German history. He had attended the University of Berlin and had studied under the eminent historian Treitschke. Headlam-Morley thought the continent should be the focus of British policy because of the volatile nature of relationships there, especially the French and German rivalry. He said: "Our interests in the Empire must not lead us to neglect our European interests; on the other hand, we should always attempt, if possible, to localise a European conflict and not confuse it by merging it in wider issues."³⁰ In other words a Franco-German squabble should not call for a universal plan to end war (i.e. the Protocol). So the Conservative maxim was: pay close attention to the continent; do not let any one power dominate it (especially the Channel ports), but do not get involved in any conflict which is not absolutely warranted.

To sum up, the British wanted to maintain peace, be it on the Continent or in the Empire. The British government (and this broadly can

²⁹ P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2035/9/98, Foreign Office memo, Harold Nicolson and R.H. Campbell, Jan. 23, 1925.

³⁰ P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1252/9/98, Memo by J.W. Headlam-Morley, Mar. 11, 1925.

apply to both Labour and Conservative) wanted a form of machinery which would regularize inter-state co-operation and would allow for peaceful change on occasion. Only in a peaceful world could Britain attempt to regain the 'normalcy' of the Victorian and Edwardian periods in which it had prospered so well. The League was seen as a good mechanism for this but on an informal basis, although Labour put more stock in the League's potential to force disarmament through creating an atmosphere of security than did the Conservatives. In comparison, the French wanted to use the League to enforce the Versailles Treaty; and this meant literally by force if necessary.³¹

Thus in order to maintain this much desired peace Britain had to appease France and Germany who were hostile toward each other over circumstances resulting from the Great War. Germany resented reparation payments and lost territory (Alsace and Lorraine), and France feared future German aggression over these problems. By November 1924, when the new Baldwin government was formed, the problems on the continent from the British perspective seemed to center around French fears of Germany and the uncertainty of what the French would do. According to a Foreign Office memo of November 4: "Anglo-French relations in Europe have in the main, since entry into force of the Treaty of Versailles, turned on three great questions - the settlement of reparations, the settlement of inter-Allied debts and the settlement of security." The memo went on to conclude that security was the only outstanding problem. The reparations had been settled [temporarily as it turned out] by the Dawes Plan the previous summer. This

³¹Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 265.

plan keyed the reparation payments to the fortunes of the German economy. The debts were currently being discussed by the Allied Finance Ministers [even though a lasting solution would not be found]. The security problem seemed uppermost in the minds of British policy makers in late 1924.³²

The other British concern centered specifically on Germany. The British wanted Germany rehabilitated. They felt increasing guilt over the harshness of the Versailles Treaty, and they also wanted Germany as a fully industrialized trading partner. Ideally Germany should be brought into the League so that a true meeting place to discuss problems would exist which would include all of the Great Powers.³³ When the question of German entry into the League began to circulate in 1924, German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann wrote to League Secretary-General Eric Drummond in December of that year requesting that if Germany did join the League special consideration should be given to the German situation. The German military had been so reduced by the Treaty of Versailles that Stresemann felt Germany could not carry its weight as a full member of the League when it came to enforcing sanctions. One of his goals was to get Germany into the League but he knew special allowances must be made. Stresemann, when he became Foreign Minister in late 1923, embarked on a program of fulfillment of the Versailles Treaty, not to make the undesirable treaty work, but in order to dismantle it. He reasoned (correctly as it turned out) that if Germany became less truculent then France would be willing to give in on certain aspects of the post-war arrangement. For instance one of

³²Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.), CAB24/168 (Cabinet Papers), C.P. 481(24), memo, no author given, Nov. 4, 1924.

³³Northedge, Troubled Giant, 171; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 264-265.

Stresemann's goals was to have French and Belgian troops removed from the Rhineland. This was achieved under Locarno. Another goal was to have Germany join the League as a full Council member. This was also achieved by Locarno.³⁴ Britain supported both of these German goals for the reasons mentioned above.

Thus the British could not ignore the Continent. France had to be reigned in; Germany had to be brought back into the economic and political fold; and most of all war had to be averted.

The men

The issues are only half of the story. What was the world view of the men who made policy for Great Britain in 1924 and 1925? Not everyone who sat on the Cabinet spoke out on the subject of the Protocol. Also one important objector to the Protocol did not even sit on the Cabinet. Arthur Balfour actually held no government post during the Protocol episode until he replaced Lord Curzon as Lord President in the Cabinet upon the latter's death in late March 1925. Balfour sat on the Committee of Imperial Defense, the defense advisory body to the Cabinet, prior to joining the government and was considered an elder statesman whose advice was valuable. The other members whom we shall profile (as well as Balfour) were Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister; George Curzon, Marquess of Kedleston (Lord President); Leo Amery, the only member of that Cabinet not to be knighted or to be born into the aristocracy (Colonial Secretary); Robert Cecil, Viscount

³⁴p.R.O., F0371/11064/W372/9/98, note from Gustav Stresemann to Sir Eric Drummond, Dec. 12, 1924; Sally Marks, The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918-1933 (New York, 1976), 64.

of Chelwood (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster); Winston Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer; and Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary.

All of these men, except for Leo Amery, were either born into the British aristocracy or inducted into it as knights.³⁵ Even before their induction into the aristocracy, Chamberlain, Churchill, Balfour and Baldwin had the aristocratic outlook and were on the track from a fairly early age toward the aristocracy. And even Leo Amery, though never knighted, was educated at the "right schools" (Harrow and Oxford) and had the "right attitude" (was an ardent imperialist) to be considered an insider. So why is this "aristocratic factor" important? In many ways it is what made these men conservative. They wanted to maintain the status quo or supported slow change at most. The Conservative Party had long been one of the aristocracy though some from the Liberal Party, especially the large industrialists, defected to the Conservatives beginning in late 19th century because of an increasing fear of "Gladstone liberalism" and because of the Liberal Party's espousal of Irish home rule in 1886.³⁶ In other words all of these men were in the upper echelons of British society and had a stake in the continuation of the status quo. Conduct of an independent foreign policy by those with a conservative, aristocratic outlook, and continuation of Britain's insularity were both part of that status quo. The Geneva Protocol threatened that independence and insularity.

³⁵It could be debatable whether or not knights should be considered as part of the aristocracy. J.V. Beckett, in his recent work on the British aristocracy, assumes that they are. Others, notably David Cannadine, are silent on the subject. J.V. Beckett, The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914 (Oxford, 1986), 26-27, 110, 115, 485.

³⁶Robert Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill (London, 1970), 124, 98, 159.

This aristocratic conservatism continued in Britain (not unabated of course) after the Great War while it disappeared to a large extent on the continent with the toppling of the big empires in Central and Eastern Europe. The British aristocracy survived largely because it was capable of coopting the industrial and manufacturing interests in the country.³⁷ Nevertheless the British aristocracy began witnessing a fall from its prominence in the late 19th century. These people in the aristocracy became more aware of their conservatism and more wary of making any kinds of change. A host of things caused this decline: criticism from the Liberals over the poor handling of the Crimean War in the 1850s; voting reforms in 1867 and 1872 which made it more difficult for the aristocracy to control balloting; intransigence in the House of Lords over the Irish question; increased agricultural imports, lowering domestic prices (landowning was one of the main marks of the aristocracy); and the rise of the Liberal and Labour Parties.³⁸ All of these factors tended to make the men who made the decisions in the Conservative Cabinet in the mid-1920's very wary of change and anything else which might weaken their position in Britain or Britain's position in the world.

There were five basic marks of the British aristocracy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: birth, education, landholding, titles, and public service. If one did not possess all of these it was still possible to enter the aristocracy through public service, wealth, or marriage. The aristocracy was not closed in Britain as it was on the continent but it was

³⁷Arno Mayer, The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War (New York, 1981), 10.

³⁸Beckett, Aristocracy in England, 12-14.

still not easy to enter.³⁹ Birth simply meant that one was born into an aristocratic family, either as the eldest son which meant inheritance of the land and title, or as a younger son which made it easier to be accepted into aristocratic society. Education meant that one matriculated at one of the private secondary or "public" schools such as Eton, Rugby, Harrow or Sandhurst, and then went on to either Christ Church College (or maybe Balliol College) at Oxford or Trinity College at Cambridge.⁴⁰ Landholding was also one of the key requirements for entry into the aristocratic class. J.V. Beckett writes: "Property, in particular land, was the key to status and position in English society, underlying the subtleties of the graded hierarchy."⁴¹ And finally, again according to Beckett, "because landowners had a stake in the country it was widely accepted that they had the best qualification to govern, and part of the aristocratic ethos lay in [public] service."⁴²

The seven men in the Cabinet and the C.I.D. who were most vocal on the Protocol fit into four basic categories in aristocratic British society: those who inherited titles and land; those born into the aristocracy as younger sons who were later inducted; commoners who were inducted; and a commoner who was never inducted. Note how each of the men (except Robert Cecil) fit the pattern of having an aristocratic and conservative outlook.

The first category contains only one person, Curzon. George Curzon inherited the title Marquess Curzon of Kedleston and with it the family

³⁹Ibid., 91-128.

⁴⁰Barbara Tuchman, The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914 (New York, 1966), 20-21.

⁴¹Beckett, Aristocracy in England, 2.

⁴²Ibid., 5.

estate, Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire. He was educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. Curzon traveled widely in his youth and in 1899 was appointed viceroy of India. He was also a member of Lloyd George's War Cabinet during the Great War as Lord President, and then was Foreign Secretary from 1919 to 1922. He was again Lord President in Stanley Baldwin's government during the Protocol episode. He died on March 20, 1925, shortly after the Protocol was rejected by Britain. Foreign Office secretary Harold Nicolson wrote of Curzon, "he will live as a man of great ambition, and some egoism, who was inspired by a mystic faith in the imperial destiny of his country...."⁴³

Those in the second category (younger sons who were later inducted) include Winston Churchill and Robert Cecil. Much is already known about Churchill especially his later career, but his early life is less discussed. Winston's father was the third son of the Duke of Marlborough. The young Churchill was educated at Harrow and later Sandhurst, the military academy. He entered landed society when he bought his estate, Chartwell in Kent, in 1922. He served as a journalist during the Boer War and became very interested in the Empire and its defense. He was made First Lord of the Admiralty in 1911 and served in that capacity during the Great War. He was responsible for the planning of the failed Gallipoli campaign and received much criticism (possibly unjustified) for it. Winston's early political career was as a Liberal but he switched to the Conservative Party in the mid-1920s over monetary policy (preferring a tight money policy). He served in Baldwin's Cabinet during the Protocol episode as Chancellor of the

⁴³J.R.H. Weaver, ed., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-1930 (London, 1937), 234.

Exchequer. It was not until 1953 that he received the Order of the Garter (i.e. knighthood), but Winston was firmly in the aristocratic class long before that with his pedigree, property and education. Churchill knew his place in society and was well aware of his goal for Britain's place in the world. Sir Isaiah Berlin wrote of Churchill in 1949: He "knows with an unshakable certainty what he considers to be big, handsome, noble, and worthy of pursuit by someone in high station.... Mr. Churchill is one of the diminishing number of those who genuinely believe in a specific world order."⁴⁴

Robert Cecil was also an aristocratic younger son. He was the third son of the Third Marquess of Salisbury who was Conservative prime minister three different times between 1885 and 1902. The Cecil family could trace its service to the Crown back to the 16th century. Robert built a country house at Chelwood in Sussex in 1900 and was made Viscount Cecil of Chelwood for his work at the Paris Peace Conference and on the League of Nations. He actually produced the first draft of what would become the League Covenant. He also served as the president of the League of Nations Union (a League support group in Britain) from 1923 to 1945. He was educated at Eton and at University College, Oxford. Cecil was a Conservative, but a progressive one, and is the one big exception in the Baldwin Cabinet of 1924 to 1929 - he supported the Geneva Protocol! Cecil had been shocked by the bloodshed of the Great War and felt that "the worst part of it is that it seems to herald an era of destruction." Cecil did not feel that the Protocol was the best replacement for his Draft Treaty of Mutual

⁴⁴Above two quotes in Williams and Nicholls, eds., DNB, 1961-1970, 215.

Assistance, which relied more on collective security than did the Protocol, but he thought it better than the old alliance system which had led to the Great War. Cecil spent many hours in meetings, as we will later see, attempting to convince his Conservative colleagues to consider the Protocol rather than a Treaty with France.⁴⁵ Cecil, as best as I can tell, was a lone voice in the Conservative government and bureaucracy at Whitehall. There were some Labour and Liberal members of Parliament who supported the Protocol and we will discuss them in the next chapter when public opinion is examined.

The Cabinet also contained commoners who were elevated to the aristocracy. Austen Chamberlain, Arthur Balfour, and Stanley Baldwin were in this category. Austen Chamberlain was the son of that ardent supporter of British imperialism, Joseph Chamberlain, who had served as Mayor of Birmingham and had made his fortune in manufacturing. Austen was also the half brother of the man who would later give appeasement a bad name, Neville Chamberlain. Austen was educated in the "right" schools for a career of public service - Eton and Trinity College, Oxford. He later attended school for a time in Paris, becoming in the process a Francophile. He inherited the family home, Highbury in Birmingham, and was granted the Order of the Garter in late 1925 for his work on the Treaty of Locarno. Chamberlain was in Lloyd George's coalition government during the war, serving in several capacities until 1922 (India Office, Exchequer, and Privy Seal). He was Foreign Secretary in Baldwin's Cabinet during the Protocol episode. His biographer, Charles Petrie, wrote of him, "[a]s foreign

⁴⁵E.T. Williams and Helen M. Palmer, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1951-1960, (London, 1971), 199.

secretary he was above all else a great realist; he never hankered after the unattainable, but he did his best with the tools that he had."⁴⁶ It was this "realist" who worked hard to replace the Protocol with the Treaty of Locarno.

Arthur Balfour was the eldest son of James M. Balfour, who had made his fortune in the North British Railway. The younger Balfour's mother was the daughter of the second Marquess of Salisbury, giving him an "inside track" into the aristocratic set. He was a cousin of Robert Cecil and thus could also trace his family service to Britain, through his mother, back to Elizabethan times. The elder Balfour bought the Whittinghame estate in East Lothian in Scotland and the younger Balfour eventually inherited it. James Balfour sent his son to Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Arthur was made the First Earl of Balfour in 1922 for his service in foreign affairs during and after the Great War. He is famous for the Balfour Declaration in 1917 committing Britain to support a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and for the Balfour Definition of 1926 outlining Britain's new relationship with the self-governing Dominions. He was also Conservative prime minister from 1902 to 1905. Balfour had an overriding concern for Britain and its Empire and was a thoroughgoing Burkean Conservative. He proclaimed: "Conservative prejudices are rooted in a great past and Liberal ones in an imaginary future." League of Nations historian F.P. Walters claims that he sees the "master hand of Balfour" behind the rejection speech which Austen

⁴⁶L.G. Wickham Legg, ed., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940, (London, 1949), 163-168.

Chamberlain delivered to the League Council in March 1925. For good reason too since Balfour indeed penned the original draft of that speech.⁴⁷

The Conservative Party Prime Minister during the Protocol episode was Stanley Baldwin. Baldwin had Shropshire yeoman ancestry and his father was a businessman in Bewdley who also served in Parliament for a time. Stanley was a well-read youth and was sent to Harrow and then to Trinity College, Oxford. As with the other commoners we have discussed Baldwin entered the aristocratic circle through education and then public service. He took over his father's seat in Parliament in 1906 as a Conservative. For his service as Prime Minister throughout much of the 1920s and 1930's he was made First Earl of Bewdley in 1937. To round out his aristocratic profile he purchased Astley Hall in Worcestershire in the west country near Wales. Conservative Party historian Robert Blake captured Baldwin's character as Prime Minister perfectly: "He was peace loving at a time when Britain hated the memory and dreaded the prospect of war. He was insular at a time of political isolationism, conciliatory in an age of compromise. He was easygoing at a time when his fellow-countrymen wanted nothing so much as to be left alone. If he misconstrued the European situation so did most others. If he evaded realities, the nation was glad to follow."⁴⁸ This is a perfect profile of the man who left foreign policy to his Foreign Secretary.

⁴⁷Kenneth Young, Arthur James Balfour: The Happy Life of the Politician, Prime Minister, Statesman and Philosopher, 1848-1930 (London, 1963), xi; F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London, 1952), 284.

⁴⁸Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, 216.

Leo Amery was the only man who was not officially inducted into the aristocratic "club" but who was nevertheless an aristocratic "insider". Amery was born in India of a British father (in the Indian Forest Department) and a Hungarian mother, who strove to make sure that her sons were well-educated. Young Leo was educated at Harrow and at Balliol College, Oxford. He witnessed the Boer War as a journalist, becoming "a passionate advocate of British imperialism" in his support of the British subjects in South Africa versus the Boers. He attacked disarmament and hated the League because of its potential to meddle in national affairs. He thus hated the Protocol as well.⁴⁹ Amery served as first Lord of the Admiralty (1922-23), Colonial Secretary (1924-29), Dominions Secretary (1925-29), and Secretary for India (1940-45), all during Conservative governments.

It was not in the philosophy of these men in the Baldwin Cabinet (except maybe Robert Cecil) to accept change easily, and certainly not drastic change. Robert Blake, in his history of the Conservative Party from the 1830s to the 1950s, characterizes this conservative attitude. There was among Conservatives in Britain a distrust of Utopian panaceas; a "dislike of abstract ideas, high philosophical principles and sweeping generalizations"; a "readiness to accept cautious empirical reform if a Conservative government said it was needed"; and a "reluctance to look far ahead or worry too much about the future." Also says Blake as late as the 1950s the Conservative Party was still one of landed interest, though by 1900 it had generally become the party of the rich, as many upper middle class people

⁴⁹Williams and Palmer, eds., DNB, 1951-60, 17-18.

joined its ranks seeking the security of the status quo. In addition, by Disraeli's time in the late 19th century, the Empire and its extension and preservation had become a Tory cause. This imperial bent was linked to the fact that the Conservative Party was also the "party of English nationalism." This represented a basically defensive attitude oriented toward preservation of the status quo and constitutional structures such as Parliament, Common Law, and the Monarchy, as well as imperial ascendancy.⁵⁰ The Protocol clashed with many of these ideas, because it was internationally oriented rather than national. Also it was simply not easy for the Conservative Party to accept the possible drastic changes which the Protocol might bring, such as accepting rulings by a tribunal of foreign judges.

The Foreign Office in the 1920s

The Foreign Office, with Austen Chamberlain at its head in the Baldwin government, was also a conservative institution and it played a major role in the rejection of the Protocol. The Foreign Office had been a preserve of the aristocracy throughout the 19th century and into the 20th. It was thought that cosmopolitan and patrician virtues of *savoir-faire* and grace were the qualities needed for a diplomat in dealing with delicate matters with representatives of foreign, and sometimes hostile, governments. The majority of new recruits were of landed background and the Foreign Office retained an atmosphere of an exclusive club. Historian David Cannadine called these people "mandarins" and said of them that they "formed a small, separate, and exclusive enclave - detached, superior,

⁵⁰Blake, Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, 271-277.

understated, unflappable." Before the Great War every major overseas embassy was headed by a senior or junior member of a landed establishment family; and this continued, altered only slightly, into the 1930s. This state of affairs stemmed from two basic causes. Before the war and the mass communications ushered in with the 1920s, and before the more centralized control by the Cabinet (pioneered by Lloyd George's War Cabinet), diplomats were expected to make on-the-spot decisions. These men had to be chosen carefully from that segment of society which was educated enough and graceful enough to carry out these duties. Secondly, the aristocracy saw the foreign service as one of the last bastions of the nobility and apparently tried to make sure it remained that way by recruiting from 'Oxbridge', Eton and the like. All of these factors tended to make the Foreign Office conservative and protective of its status as an important policy making arm of the government.⁵¹

This attitude and state of affairs continued well into the 20th century but in a somewhat altered condition. Reforms were carried out in the wake of the Great War, changes which had been called for as early as the 1880s by the wealthy middle class who wanted a larger role in government. The result was that by 1900 some professional upper-middle class individuals with public school backgrounds were admitted to the ranks of the Foreign Office. People such as William Tyrrell and Eyre Crowe (whom we shall meet shortly), were allowed into the department and became influential. Both of these men became Permanent Under-Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs. The actual effects of these changes, at least in the

⁵¹Peter Hennessy, Whitehall (New York, 1989), 28-29, 78-79; David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy (New Haven, 1990), 280-293.

inter war period, were more apparent than real. The Foreign Office until World War II continued to see itself as a special institution which would not accept outside suggestions for change, especially if those changes threatened the Foreign Office's exclusive role in the diplomatic field.⁵²

An alternate view of this state of affairs comes from Sir Victor Wellesley, who was in charge of Far Eastern affairs in the Foreign Office from 1920 to 1936. Wellesley claimed in 1944 that diplomacy after 1918 had too many constraints on it. It could not, he wrote, continue to operate in isolation and to formulate foreign policy without the scrutiny of the Cabinet and Parliament as it had done in the 19th century. He claimed that tighter Parliamentary control, the necessity of consulting with the Dominions, and public opinion all put shackles on the Foreign Office, as the title of his book, Diplomacy in Fetters, indicates.⁵³ With the exception of consultation with the Dominions, which figures prominently in the story we are examining, I found little evidence that the Foreign Office felt many constraints at all. The story played itself out in the halls of power, and one of those halls was the Foreign Office.

As a matter of fact, the department worked in virtual isolation from the other departments of government. Its only link to the rest of the government was the fact that the Foreign Secretary was also a member of the Cabinet and thus had to account for his actions in that forum. In addition the Office was actually administered by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Sir Eyre Crowe held this position in the early 1920s. Crowe was born in 1864 in Germany of a German mother. His father was Sir Joseph

⁵²Cannadine, Decline and Fall, 294-295; Hennessy, Whitehall, 78-79.

⁵³Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., The Diplomats (Princeton, 1953), 47.

A. Crowe, the historian of painting, who was knighted but was not of aristocratic blood. The younger Crowe was educated in Germany but came to England in 1885 and entered the Foreign Office. Although, or perhaps because, Crowe was born in Germany he was a fiercely patriotic Englishman. His German background led him to respect the Germans and to push in the years prior to the Great War for a hard line against Germany. He wanted to gain the respect of Germany and prevent a confrontation. This attitude may help to explain his coldness later toward the Protocol, which would have excluded Germany (as a non-member of the League) and would have helped France form a virtual alliance against Germany. Crowe achieved a longtime goal in 1920 when he became Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He died in April 1925 shortly after the Protocol was rejected by the British government. Crowe looked down on Secretaries of State and regarded clerks and secretaries as the really important people in the department. As a matter of fact Crowe was instrumental in a reorganization of the Foreign Office in 1904-05 which increased the responsibilities of the junior staff. The clerks, secretaries and councillors of the department were encouraged to state their views in the minutes (comments on incoming dispatches) before sending them to their superiors; and it is evident from many of the responses by Crowe, or even Ramsay MacDonald or Austen Chamberlain (Foreign Secretaries for the Labour and Conservative governments, respectively, in 1924 and 1925) that these opinions were highly respected. This junior staff by the 1920s contained many middle class individuals, but some were younger sons of the aristocracy. Crowe himself was middle class and was only knighted in 1912. Crowe did not like intruders and considered

even members of other departments as encroaching upon the turf of highly skilled professional diplomats.⁵⁴

The career diplomats in the department viewed the world in terms of past experience instead of new possibilities. Their solution to continental problems of peace and war was not grand schemes of the nature of the Protocol but something more akin to the alliance system of the late 19th century in which sovereign states contracted with other sovereign states concerning spheres of influence, trading rights, and defensive arrangements. Zara Steiner, in his book on the Foreign Office to 1914, describes a department which resembles what I saw in my research on the mid-1920's: "The Foreign Office saw the world in static terms and applied traditional solutions to new problems. It was assumed that all questions could be solved through rational discussion and officials repeatedly underestimated the erratic and emotional factors in foreign relations." Steiner goes on to say that these people knew well the world into which they were born (the late nineteenth century): "[T]hey spoke to each other or to those similarly placed 'in society'. They operated in a closed circuit and tended mainly to hear each other's voices."⁵⁵ The diplomats in the Foreign Office in the 1920s were all born in the late 19th century and I maintain that we are dealing here with a department of the British government which had changed little in the wake of the Great War.

Steiner also claims that as of the late 19th century diplomatic business had become more complex thus increasing the power of the civil

⁵⁴Zara S. Steiner, The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914. (Cambridge, 1969), x, 109, 210; Weaver, ed., DNB, 1922-1930, 219-221.

⁵⁵Steiner, Foreign Office, 210.

servants in the Foreign Office. Along with this complexity came an aura of secrecy which increased the distance between Whitehall and the man in the street.⁵⁶ If diplomacy was more complex before the war then it must have been even more so after it. Of course one of the things which made it more complex was public opinion. Policy was not made in Whitehall based on that opinion, but policy makers felt the need to demonstrate to Parliament and the press that their interests were being considered. I maintain that in the 1920s policy was being made in the halls of power just as it had been before the war. And what follows concerning the rejection of the Geneva Protocol was debated in the Foreign Office and the decisions on its rejection came from the Cabinet not from Parliament or from the streets of London. The overriding concern in the general election that autumn of 1924 in Britain was the possibility that the Labour government was becoming too cozy with the Russian Communists, not that the Geneva Protocol would be accepted or rejected.⁵⁷

Thus the Foreign Office was also, like the Cabinet, aristocratic and conservative. As we will later see jealousy reigned in the department over its role as the clearinghouse for contact with foreign states. The League of Nations threatened that role and so did the Geneva Protocol.

British attitudes toward the League

George Egerton in a 1974 article outlined the two major concepts of internationalism which were current in the 1920s. The first, which he calls liberal internationalism, was the philosophy of Woodrow Wilson and Robert Cecil (a Conservative British statesmen, but with different ideas from his

⁵⁶Ibid., 211.

⁵⁷Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 58.

fellow Conservatives). This kind of approach to international affairs stressed collective security and cooperation through a strong international organization such as the League. This approach was the guiding philosophy behind the League Covenant as it was drafted after the war. The other approach, which Egerton calls conservative internationalism, reflected how states actually conducted foreign affairs during the 1920s – the reality versus the ideal. This conservative approach stressed national defense and Great Power diplomacy, basically the same style which was used in the period before the Great War. The goal was not worldwide cooperation but control of world affairs by the Great Powers working in concert as they had done in the period after Napoleon's defeat. Conservative and Liberal British statesmen, such as Winston Churchill, Arthur Balfour, and David Lloyd George, approved of this latter approach.⁵⁸

This conservative concept of internationalism shaped Tory attitudes toward foreign policy and toward the League of Nations and is crucial in our understanding of why the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin rejected the Geneva Protocol in 1925. Historian Paul Kennedy gives us an overall sketch of how the British Conservatives viewed the League of Nations in the 1920s. He says Britain wanted to use the League to regularize interstate cooperation, to foster peaceful change, to lessen national tensions, dissolve pre-war alliance blocs and to bring Germany back into the concert of the Great Powers as a counterweight to France on the

⁵⁸ George W. Egerton, "The Lloyd George Government and the Creation of the League of Nations," American Historical Review. 1974, 79(2): 419-444.

continent.⁵⁹ All of these things would, in theory, create a world safe for commerce, help protect the Empire, and aid Britain in its recovery from war.

Conservatives rejected the French concept of the League as a means of ensuring the Versailles Treaty and as an alliance against Germany. This French approach would have entailed collective action against an aggressor.⁶⁰ Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary to both the Cabinet (since 1916) and the Committee of Imperial Defense (since 1912), was influential in political circles and outspoken on policy issues.⁶¹ He wrote that the effect of the Geneva Protocol "would be a considerable advance towards the French conception of a League of Nations which was rejected by the British and United States of America Delegations at the Paris Peace Conference." Hankey continued by asserting that the British and American delegations wanted to keep the Covenant "as mild as possible" and therefore "cut down the provisions with regard to security to the lowest point...."⁶² The Protocol would have been, of course, the direct opposite of this approach.

The report by the Committee on the League of Nations (formed in 1918 to help formulate policy toward the League) reveals an even more pronounced penchant for staying away from binding relationships. They reported that "... we have ... rejected [the plan for a kind of European Confederation with a supernational authority], feeling that international opinion is not ripe for so drastic a pooling of sovereignty ... " and that a

⁵⁹ Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 265.

⁶⁰ The French couched their desires for an anti-German alliance in notions of international cooperation against any aggressor; *Ibid*.

⁶¹ see Hennessy, Whitehall, 64-66, for an account of Hankey and his influence.

⁶² P.R.O., CAB 4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 558-B, memo by Maurice Hankey, Dec. 23, 1924.

better method "is by way of cooperation or possibly a treaty of alliance on the lines of more recent schemes [i.e. the Concert of Europe]."⁶³ There would be no "pooling of sovereignty" for a Britain jealous of its abilities to decide its own fate. The report also illustrates that the British, after the war, had no intention of breaking out of the old pattern of doing business by limited alliances and treaties rather than through an international organization.

Bernard Porter asserts that the Tory conception of the League harked back to what he calls the "balance idea". He claims this approach consisted of the notion that "if every nation agreed to resist aggression then no nation would be able to aggress, because if it did then it would have all the others on its neck; and at a minimal - because shared - cost to all." Porter writes that this approach to the League was a return to rational ways of conducting international relations for the British: "ways that were based ... on the premise that war was bad for all." This idea sounds suspiciously like collective security but it differs because the assumption was that all of the other states were rational as well, and therefore no resort to war would actually be needed. Tory statesmen in the 1920s could not imagine any state going to war after having seen the results of the Great War.⁶⁴

Conservative British statesman Arthur Balfour held very definite views on the League of Nations, some rather surprising, but illustrative of British policy toward the League in the 1920s. Balfour was related to the Cecil family through his mother, the second daughter of the second Marquess of Salisbury. The Cecils were an old aristocratic clan which dated its

⁶³ P.R.O., CAB 1/26(14) (Miscellaneous Records), report, Committee on the League of Nations, Mar. 20, 1918.

⁶⁴ Porter, Britain, Europe and the World, 96; Richardson, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 16.

service to the crown back to the 16th century. Balfour's conservatism rested on the idea of preserving Britain's predominance in the world. We should keep in mind that the 1920s was mainly a Conservative decade in Britain and that Balfour was an elder statesman in his mid-seventies during that time, well-respected and consulted frequently by his younger colleagues. He became the first Earl of Balfour in 1922 for his long service in government, including the premiership from 1902 to 1905. Balfour was also a member of the advisory body to the Cabinet on defense matters, the Committee of Imperial Defense, in 1924 and 1925, when the rejection of the Protocol took place. He was the person who drafted the speech to the League Council which announced British rejection of the Protocol. Kenneth Young, Balfour's biographer, tells us that "... in [Balfour's] view the weapons at [the League's] disposal were not fleets and armies but 'delay and publicity.'" (In other words, not collective action but collective acting!) The League could be a forum for a demonstration of Great Power resolve and world opinion. Balfour said that "[the League] cannot be a complete instrument for bringing order out of chaos ...", but only a tool in the process. Interestingly enough, he also called the League "the most promising effort in the direction of the renewal of civilisation which mankind has ever yet made."⁶⁵ Surprising words from a firm believer in national sovereignty! But Balfour had no intention of surrendering sovereignty to a superstate.

Balfour was also typically conservative in his desire for slow change, evolution rather than revolution. In referring to the World Court, a branch of the League, he said that it was necessary to build public confidence slowly -

⁶⁵Young, Balfour, 418-419; Weaver, ed., DNB, 1922-1930, 41-56.

but "if in a spirit too hasty and too impetuous you try and force into this mould ... the result will be that the mould itself will break"⁶⁶ In other words, go slow and maybe something of value will be created.

Balfour penned a lengthy memo in May, 1922, concerning his attitudes toward the League.⁶⁷ It would be worthwhile to quote extensively from that document. A general statement concerning his overall conception of the League appears at the beginning of the memo: "The League is nothing more nor less than an Association of sovereign States which have accepted certain minimum obligations for their international conduct, and which have agreed to co-operate together through common machinery in certain matters which they all agree to be of common international concern." This does not sound much like a super-state! Rather it sounds like an organization which should be controlled by the states themselves. He goes on to say that "... the League as an entity apart from the States which are its Members does not exist. By itself and apart from its Members it can take no action...." Moreover, "... [the League] can impose no decision on its members, nor can it force them a step beyond the point to which they may feel it right to go. The League is simply a mechanism for co-ordinating the views of the body of states and securing their consent to common policies...."

Balfour also reiterates in the memo the sentiment stated above by his biographer Kenneth Young: "[The League] is an international clearing house, an international conference table, where these forces which are working for ordered development in the conduct of international affairs ... can rally the

⁶⁶ P.R.O., CAB 4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda) 538-B, Annex 2, Arthur Balfour to League of Nations Assembly, Dec. 13, 1920.

⁶⁷ P.R.O., FO800/400 (League Papers), memo by Arthur Balfour, May 29, 1922.

public opinion of the world to their support...." Public opinion was important to Balfour. It put the stamp of legitimacy on international actions.

Balfour concludes his memo with some fairly weighty praise of the League: "... it is the next inevitable step in the political development of the human family...." The purpose of the League, he says, should be "... as a meeting place for the whole family of nations, dependent entirely on their goodwill ... [and] ... spirit of cooperation...." The phrase "meeting place" fairly well sums up Balfour's attitude, and British Conservative attitudes in general. The League should be a forum for discussion and possible solution of international problems not a super organization which would usurp national sovereignty.⁶⁸

The foregoing was not meant to imply that Balfour was a 'typical example' of these attitudes. There are other examples. Leopold Amery was Colonial Secretary in the Conservative government which took office in November of 1924. Amery was a passionate advocate of British imperialism, this attitude having been formed while he was covering the Boer War as a journalist. He made the following statement in a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defense, the defense advisory body to the Cabinet: "... [the League] is a standing conference, a meeting-place where views can be exchanged, where the public opinion of the world can be exercised to create an atmosphere of security...."⁶⁹ And Foreign Office secretary Harold Nicolson declared in a memo that "as a clearinghouse for international disputes, the League of Nations is a wholly admirable institution." But Nicolson also

⁶⁸ All of the foregoing are from the memo in note 48.

⁶⁹ P.R.O., CAB 2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 195th Meeting, Leo Amery, Feb. 13, 1925; Williams and Palmer, DNB, 1951-1960, 16-17.

wrote that the League's authority is presently (1925) not "sufficient to restrain a Great Power in any case in which that Power considers its vital interests to be at stake."⁷⁰ In other words national sovereignty was still very much intact, especially among the Great Powers.

Winston Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new Conservative government in 1924, only held out moderate hope for the success of the League. Churchill's patriotic, if not necessarily imperialistic, bent had also (like Amery's) been forged as a journalist during the Boer War. He wrote to his mother once: "It is a pushing age and we must shove with the best." Churchill also said in December, 1924: "... the preservation of peace could only be attained by the maintenance of good understandings between various groups of Powers, possibly arrived at under the auspices of the League of Nations." Presumably these "good understandings" would come about in Balfour's "Association of sovereign states" or Amery's "standing conference". Churchill also declared that it was necessary to "... work in stages by means of regional agreements under the League of Nations to protect special points of danger...", and that this would be much more preferable than something as binding as the Geneva Protocol.⁷¹

The upshot of these attitudes was that amendment, especially along the lines of strengthening the League and the Council (something the Protocol would do) was undesirable in the eyes of Conservative British statesmen. Balfour was opposed to changes in the Covenant, "not because I

⁷⁰ P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1560/9/98, Harold Nicolson, Foreign Policy Memo, Feb. 20, 1925.

⁷¹ P.R.O., CAB 2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 190th Meeting, Winston Churchill, Dec. 4, 1924; Williams and Nicholls, eds., DNB, 1961-1970, 193.

think the Covenant is good, but because I think it is the best we can get for the present."⁷² He did not like the Covenant (remember, it represented Liberal internationalism, or universal collective security), but he did like the way the League had been used thus far - as a forum to discuss international problems.

British public opinion in the early 1920s contrasted to some extent with this Tory attitude toward the League. The British public, and people all over Europe, saw the League as a hopeful possibility to keep another war from occurring. These people did not bother themselves with questions of collective security or arbitration of disputes; they simply hoped their leaders would make use of the institution to prevent war. When, as their leaders told them in 1925, a better solution appeared, the British public became enthusiastic over the prospects of Locarno as the solution to prevent war. By contrast entrenched institutions in the British government, such as the Foreign Office, could not be so sanguine and felt that they had to scrutinize the League more closely. Indeed the League looked promising, but it also possibly threatened British sovereignty or even Foreign Office prerogatives in conducting foreign policy. The British public was not necessarily gullible; it simply trusted that those who had traditionally conducted foreign affairs would make the correct decision this time after the horrible lessons learned from the Great War.⁷³

So the Conservative government which took office in the autumn of 1924 had no intention of accepting an instrument, the Geneva Protocol,

⁷² P.R.O., CAB 2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 196th Meeting, Arthur Balfour, Feb. 19, 1925.

⁷³ Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 64-69; Jon Jacobson, Locarno Diplomacy: Germany and the West, 1925-1929 (Princeton, 1972), 3.

which would have enhanced the powers of the League. The League was performing the job these statesmen thought it should perform - as a place to discuss international problems. According to their logic it should not serve as a superstate which could usurp the sovereignty of the member states. The French would have to find another method of dealing with a potentially aggressive Germany. The only problem was Britain also had a stake in continental peace so Britain would have to aid in that search for a solution to the problem. The Baldwin government could not simply reject the Protocol without attempting to satisfy the French, who were extremely concerned over an eventual German retaliation to regain Alsace-Lorraine or to get out from under the stiff reparation payments which the French insisted be paid in full. The Continental situation was volatile and the British knew a solution must be found. If not the Protocol, then what?

The Protocol in its European context

It seemed to the new Conservative government in the autumn of 1924 that the drafters of the Protocol, led mainly by the French and by some of the small states in eastern Europe (such as Czechoslovakia), were trying to couch their fears of German aggression in lofty ideals of a general prevention of war. J.W. Headlam-Morley, historical advisor for the Foreign Office, wrote that "what is in the minds of the authors of the protocol is not general security throughout the world, but the particular situation now existing on our own continent." He goes on to say that "instead of avowedly centering attention upon this European problem and enquiring whether it might not be susceptible to special treatment, they have set out to find formulas and phrases which in appearance are to be equally applicable to South America, to the Pacific and the the Far East." He says this lends a

"sense of unreality" to the document.⁷⁴ Foreign Office secretary Harold Nicolson put it bluntly: "... we must base our policy, not on possible tendencies, but on generally recognisable facts. We must be direct, simple and explicit."⁷⁵ We will see as this drama unfolds that that is exactly what Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain attempted to do.

Thus Conservative British policy makers were more interested in specific circumstances than in general approaches to world peace and disarmament. They were concerned with several specific problems: the possibility of French or German aggression, and the possibility that Britain might be drawn into another European war; with the actions and opinions of the United States, a non-member of the League; and with the problem of the Empire and the possible economic recovery it represented. Moreover the Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin saw the League of Nations as helping in these threats, not as a supernational body which should ensure world peace by concerted action, but as a forum for discussion of these problems. The Geneva Protocol, they figured, could not help and might even hurt the possibility for peace. Moreover the Protocol dealt with possibilities rather than realities.

⁷⁴ P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1252/9/98, Memo by J.W. Headlam-Morley, Mar. 11, 1925.

⁷⁵ P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1560/9/98, Harold Nicolson, Foreign Policy Memo, Feb. 20, 1925.

CHAPTER 4

THE REJECTION BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

Between September 1924, when the League Assembly drafted the Protocol, and December when the Committee of Imperial Defense (the defense advisory body to the Cabinet) began its review of the Protocol, the various branches of the British government made their views known on the League instrument. The Admiralty and the other military chiefs objected to possible League control of British military forces which the Protocol implied; the Foreign Office objected to arbitration of disputes and strengthening of the Covenant in general; the Treasury and the Board of Trade warned of the costs of the many wars in which the Protocol might involve Britain; and finally Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain began his assessment of the Protocol and in the process decided that a replacement must be found in order to satisfy the French.

The Admiralty, the Air Ministry, the Treasury (headed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but administered by a departmental Permanent Secretary) and the Board of Trade, were all represented at the Cabinet-level under the Conservative government which began its tenure in November of 1924. Each had its objections to the Geneva Protocol. (The Air Ministry and the Board of Trade were not Cabinet-level posts under the 1924 Labour government, since the Prime Minister decides the makeup of his Cabinet in any particular government.) Military department heads (i.e. Secretary of State for War and the Chiefs of Staff of the Services) and other non-Cabinet ministers (such as advisors to the Board of Trade) also voiced their opinions.

All of the offices and departments listed above are self-explanatory except possibly the Board Of Trade. The Board of Trade was created in 1696 by William III and became a permanent committee of his Privy Council. This Council was later replaced by the Cabinet as the central policy making body of Britain. The purpose of the Board of Trade was "to examine and to take an account of the state and condition of the general trade of England and of the several particular trades into foreign parts..."¹ Its general purpose was to enhance trade for Britain, and its job had become more complex with the growth of the Empire and especially since British trade had already been damaged by the Great War. Much British trade had been lost to the U. S. and even to Britain's own Dominions. A brief boom in demand occurred after the war for British manufactured goods but Britain's productive capacity quickly outstripped the continental states' purchasing powers. The situation looked more grim for Britain as the 1920s progressed.²

It should be noted that all of the following comments concerning the Protocol were not in the form of proclamations of policy but were suggestions, concerns, or even demands by these branches of the government directed at the Cabinet or the Committee of Imperial Defense, the defense advisory body to the Cabinet. The Cabinet aided by the C.I.D. made foreign policy decisions, but the Foreign Office and its personnel heavily influenced policy during its formulation.

¹Peter Hennessy, Whitehall (New York, 1989), 24.

²A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (New York, 1965), 145.

The Armed Services and the Protocol

In the early 1920s many in the Services thought that alliances such as those which had precipitated the Great War were ill advised. A memo from the War Office General Staff in 1923 cautioned against the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance (a forerunner of the Protocol), because "the aim of the French [in supporting the treaty] is not so much general assistance, still less reduction of armaments, but purely and simply a military defensive alliance with England."³ The Services were therefore unlikely for this reason and many others to look favorably upon the Geneva Protocol (which was also seen as a French tool for gaining allies) since the Services had counselled rejection of the Draft Treaty. It is interesting that in late 1925 the Services supported the Locarno Treaty which certainly could have gotten Britain into another war. At the time, however, Locarno was seen as a safe way to prevent a war, perhaps because it got guarantees of nonbelligerency from both France and Germany, the two potentially belligerent continental powers.

The armed services' other major concern was loss of control over military actions to the League of Nations. Article 12 of the Protocol stated that "... the Council shall draw up through its competent organs ... plans of action for the application of the economic and financial sanctions against an aggressor State...." In other words the plans which would be used to enforce sanctions would be devised by the League Council not by the militaries of the member states. The British services were not prepared to hand over this kind of authority to the League. As with the Foreign Office the Services

³Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.), F0371/10568/W637/134/98, memo by the General Staff, War Office, Oct. 10, 1923.

were largely aristocratic and conservative. Each department, whether it was the Admiralty, the Air Force, or the Army, were accustomed to conducting business without much interference. In the 19th century the majority of army and navy officers were recruited from the landed aristocracy. The landed class was still seen as a warrior class, and it had the wealth needed to devote its time to a relatively low-paying occupation. By the inter war years members of the upper middle class, as a result of their performance in the Great War and the fact that many of the aristocratic officers had been killed, began to consider the services as a career. This wealthy upper middle class also had the money to make the military a career option. The notion, however, of the League of Nations having any kind of control over the British services was equally appalling to these upper middle class officers.⁴ In reality this could not possibly have been a serious threat since British leaders would never have allowed it; but it was apparently real to a class of military leaders who had been used to controlling British military actions.

The complaints began during the drafting of the Protocol in September 1924. The Admiralty Lords were absolutely furious that they had not been consulted during the process. The department sent a memo to the Foreign Office which was the only government agency communicating with the delegates in Geneva during the drafting. The Admiralty reminded the Foreign Office that in 1921 an attempt had been made to add a clause into the League Covenant which would have required the Council to decide which

⁴Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences On British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981), 226-231; David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy (New Haven, 1990), 264-280.

League member would be able to most effectively conduct a blockade against a covenant-breaking state. The Protocol, the Lords claimed, raised this specter once again. Article 11 of the Protocol stated that the Council would call upon member states to apply sanctions. The wording in the Protocol reads: "Those obligations shall be interpreted as obliging each of the signatory States to co-operate loyally and effectively in support of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and in resistance to any act of aggression, in the degree which its geographical position and its particular situation as regards armaments allow." A little further down in the same article it says: "... to take all measure in their power to preserve the safety of communications by land and by sea of the attacked or threatened State." The Admiralty pointed out that the British fleet, being the largest of any League member, would be the one called upon to enforce these sanctions. They also protested that in order for this to be carried out the British fleet would have to operate in or near the home waters of the aggressor and/or the attacked. It was bad enough for the British fleet to be the force most likely to be relied upon in this instance, but to put the Navy in such jeopardy for a cause, which might or might not be of vital British interest, was unconscionable. The Lords used an example of Japan attacking China (rather prophetic!). They pointed out that the British fleet would have to operate in the Sea of Japan and actively control the Tsushima Straits and could conceivably end up engaging the entire Japanese fleet, which could result in a disaster of great proportions.⁵ In other words the British Admiralty

⁵P.R.O., F0371/10572/W11030/134/98, minute by G.H. Villiers, Dec. 16, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8013/134/98, memo from Admiralty to Foreign Office, Sept. 22, 1924.

considered a war on that side of the world between those two powers not to be of vital British interest.

The Admiralty also objected strenuously to compulsory arbitration through the World Court. This would have become mandatory for Protocol signatories. The Admiralty sent a stern note to the Foreign Office, which was charged with communicating with the League delegates, warning that "...compulsory arbitration should not be enforceable on a belligerent [i.e. any warring country] in matters of maritime law, whether the action is being taken by the belligerent on behalf of the League of Nations *or not*." [their emphasis]⁶ In other words the Navy did not want to be restricted in its actions during a war no matter on which side it fought. If the Navy had to worry about whether or not its actions would be brought before the World Court necessary maneuvers during a war might need to be curtailed or altered significantly; the boarding of a ship, for instance, which might be carrying contraband. This type of action was carried out frequently during the Great War.

Concerning this same question the Admiralty wondered if an action taken by the League in response to an aggression amounted to a formal declaration of war. For instance if communications of the attacked state were being protected by the British fleet and a naval action or boarding of a ship occurred, would this be in the context of a declared war or not? The Admiralty noted that "it must be remembered that the Navy has no rights of visit and search or control of commerce, except in war. Navies only acquire international law rights of action from the fact of belligerency."⁷ The

⁶P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8232/134/98, Admiralty Memorandum, Sept. 26, 1924.

⁷Ibid.

Admiralty feared the possibility of being brought before the World Court by the injured party. How reasonable was this objection? If the action was sanctioned by the League, would this not be a good defense before the Court? This type of situation is not dealt with either in the Optional Clause of the World Court or in the Protocol. So the Admiralty's concern might have been justified simply on the premise that the Protocol would have been so ambiguous and would have exposed Britain, or any other state, to too many uncertainties.

Also in September 1924, the Admiralty dispatched another concern to the Foreign Office. Article 7 of the Protocol stated that while a dispute (in which no actual aggression has taken place) is being arbitrated by the League Council, no measure (military, industrial, etc.) should be taken by any party which would extend the dispute. The Admiralty took this to mean (and the clause is rather vague) that no ships could be maneuvered while the dispute was in arbitration. A note to the Foreign Office laid out the Admiralty's position: "...nothing in the Articles [should] preclude a movement of the Fleet in self-defense, [because] the inability of the Fleet to move to a strategic position might involve the destruction of the Empire." And what would happen if the aggressor state had not signed the Protocol - would they be free to maneuver and not Britain?⁸

The Admiralty worried about this question of freedom of movement (i.e. lack of control over their own ships). It was also a 'self-contained' department of the government with a representative on the Cabinet. It was attempting to defend its prerogatives against what it perceived as foreign

⁸Ibid.; P.R.O., CAB 4/11 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 527-B Naval Staff Memorandum, Oct. 29, 1924.

influence - the League Council and the World Court. Could we view this attitude as simply reflecting an unwillingness to cooperate internationally and covering it with cries of loss of sovereignty? I do not think so. If Britain signed the Protocol it would obligate them to abide by it. If a conflict occurred between Panama and the United States for instance, Britain would be obliged to come to the aid of a fellow League member, Panama, just as with any other alliance. After all the League was a defensive alliance. In this particular case Britain would have to enforce an embargo against the United States and risk action between the two fleets.

Imagine a less serious situation not involving the Great Powers - a border dispute between Panama and Colombia, both League members. Under the Protocol the World Court would take up the case. If it could not settle the dispute or if one party refused to bargain, then the League Council would attempt to arbitrate. If the Council were unsuccessful and the war continued one of the parties would have to be declared an aggressor (probably the one which initially attacked or the one refusing to bargain). Sanctions would be imposed by the League and these impositions would have to be backed up by naval and land forces with plans for action being drawn up by the Council. If furthermore the negotiations were ongoing and the situation were a delicate one the Protocol required that no military moves should be made by any party which might break down the negotiations. The Admiralty read this clause to mean (and it is not entirely an unreasonable one) that the British fleet in proximity to the troubled area should not maneuver in any way. This seems to constitute at least a measure of outside control. If we put ourselves in the minds of these aristocratic individuals in the British military we might understand how Britain's signing of the

Protocol would represent the possible submission of their forces to situations of undetermined nature which might cause problems with the international community. Even if Britain refused to carry out the plans of the Council friction would arise between it and the other League members. If there was an alternative to the Protocol, the Admiralty might have pleaded, by all means let us explore it!

Even the Admiralty representative on Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Cabinet during 1924 was concerned about the Protocol. Frederic Thesiger, Viscount Chelmsford, was Oxford-educated and had served Britain mainly in overseas posts. From 1905 to 1913 he was governor of Queensland, then New South Wales in Australia. While serving as Viceroy of India from 1916 to 1921 he obtained the passage of the India Act, which would set that country on the road to independence. When he returned to Britain after the war he had no party affiliation and thus accepted the Admiralty position from Ramsay MacDonald when the latter was putting together the 1924 Labour government. Chelmsford, possibly because of his tenures overseas, had a broad concept of the operation of the British Navy. It is perhaps ironic that a member of MacDonald's own government questioned the Protocol so strongly but Chelmsford was no Labourite. He came from the same aristocratic stock as those in the Conservative Party and reflected those same views of country and Empire first. He said of the Protocol and its possible threat to limit naval movement: "... the inability of the Fleet to move to a strategic position might involve the destruction of the Empire."⁹ Thus Britain could be

⁹P.R.O., CAB4/11(C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 517-B, Annex, memo by Viscount Chelmsford, Sept, 27, 1924; L.O. Wickham Legg, ed., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940 (London, 1949), 854-855.

faced with the choice, certainly not a difficult one but indelicate, of either breaking the Protocol or defending the Empire. Again why put oneself in this situation if an alternate solution to Britain's main concern, continental security, could be found?

Chelmsford further cautioned that the British Navy operated world-wide and it would be dangerous to allow its ships in one area to operate freely at the same time that those in a potential war zone would be restricted while a dispute was being settled. (And beyond that, he warned, 'dispute' is not even properly defined in the Protocol!). Reflecting his tenure in the colonies Chelmsford saw the Empire as a whole and warned that Britain needed to be concerned about the non-signatory states, those which refused to sign the Protocol. What, he asked, would be the result of the application of sanctions against the United States, or even Japan if the latter decided not to sign the Protocol? "These two countries" he warned, "seem to me so situated, so strong, and in certain circumstances possibly so stubborn in their assertion of their rights that they would, and could, disregard the sanctions of the Protocol." And what about the burdens which would be placed on the British Navy? Certain "professional neutrals," as he called them, such as the Scandinavian states would "contract out of the obligations of the Protocol and a larger burden may morally rest on Great Britain."¹⁰

Sir Samuel Hoare, the Cabinet representative for the Air Ministry in the new Conservative government in November of 1924, also agonized about

¹⁰P.R.O., CAB 4/11 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 517-B, Annex, memo by Viscount Chelmsford, Sept. 27, 1924; 541-B, memo by Chelmsford, Oct. 27, 1924; P.R.O. F0371/10571/W9762/134/98 (C.P. 478/24), memo by Chelmsford, Oct. 27, 1924; P.R.O. CAB 24/168 (Cabinet Papers), C.P. 478(24), memo by Chelmsford, Oct. 27, 1924.

the Protocol. Hoare, Viscount Templewood, was Oxford-educated. He had advocated at the end of the Great War, along with Chief of Air Staff Hugh Trenchard, an independent air force. He was also the first British official to use air travel extensively in an age when most still went by boat. Hoare also worried about the limitations which the Protocol seemed to impose upon the armed forces of the signatory states in Article 7 (which prohibited actions that might extend or exacerbate a dispute while it was under arbitration). He cautioned about "the consequent loss of the initiative with an essentially offensive arm [the air force], when delay of a few days, or even hours, might bring irreparable disaster." Should the British air force stay immobile while those of France or Germany, whichever one was the aggressor, were maneuvering for better position? Moreover he warned that if Britain would play such a large role in the defense against aggression, then its air force would have to be increased. Since this was impracticable under the current budget restrictions, and since the limitations on movement mentioned above were too dangerous, then the Protocol should not be ratified he suggested. Instead he preferred, as did many other Conservative statesmen, a tripartite pact with Belgium and France in order to maintain security on the continent.¹¹

As Foreign Secretary in the 1930's Hoare for a time supported collective action under the League against German and Italian aggression, but he gave in to French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval in the ill-advised Hoare-Laval Plan of 1935 which advocated appeasement of Italy over Ethiopia. The plan was made public and Hoare was forced to resign. The

¹¹P.R.O., CAB4/11 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 542-B, memo by Samuel Hoare, Dec. 1, 1924; 560-B, memo by Samuel Hoare, Jan. 4, 1925.

episode demonstrated Hoare's willingness to play international politics the way it had always been played - secretly and with the Great Powers at the helm. His lack of support for the Protocol fit this same mold.

The Chiefs of Staff of the Services also sent a lengthy memo to the Committee of Imperial Defense in October 1924. The Chiefs consisted of Earl David Beatty (Navy); Frederick Lambert, Earl of Cavan (Chief of the Imperial General Staff - Army); and Viscount Hugh Trenchard (R.A.F.). Each had seen considerable military action in their careers and approached the problems presented by the Protocol from a pragmatic, combat-oriented perspective. Beatty was on the Nile with Kitchener in the 1890s, in China during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, and had served under Jellicoe at Jutland. Cavan fought in the Boer War, and on the Somme and in Italy (where he distinguished himself) in the Great War. Trenchard had fought in the Boer War and the Great War, having joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1913 and emerged from the war as the Chief of the Air Staff.

Beatty, Cavan, and Trenchard complained that they had not been consulted about a document such as the Protocol which could possibly have a huge impact on defense and the fighting services in general. The Chiefs warned that the Protocol "would be fraught with grave danger" because it imposed obligations impossible to fulfill. They claimed that the Navy was under strength because of budget restrictions and because of the limitations accepted by the negotiators at the Washington Conference in 1922. They said that ground forces were only sufficient for Imperial needs, and the air force was below the level required for national defense much less a possible offensive endeavor which might accompany the Protocol in the imposition of sanctions. They warned: "A State which like the British Empire honestly

fulfills its obligations may find itself compelled to employ its forces in any and every war." Moreover what would the Protocol do to Britain's relationship with the Dominions? Would imperial matters be treated by the Protocol as domestic or international? Before the Great War this question need not have been asked, but the Dominions were demanding more independence in the 1920s. Moreover how would the demands of the Protocol affect imperial defense?¹² In short how would the Protocol affect the Services' ability to defend Britain and its Empire?

The Chiefs also raised a question in their memo about the definition of aggression. The Preamble of the Protocol calls aggression an "international crime." If this "is likely to involve penal consequences to individuals, [then] the Services object." As soldiers they obviously worried about liability for individual actions in wartime. Article 1 of the Protocol conferred powers of making decisions concerning aggression upon the League Council and Assembly. Would this mean that the other powers in the League could request an unfair amount of the fighting load to be placed on Britain, thus altering the balance of power? Would Articles 7 and 8 limit the fighting services' range of action too much? (These two articles prohibited actions which might escalate a dispute.) Would Article 13 (which would give the Council power to make decisions with a two-thirds majority) mean that the British Services might have to carry out actions against their wishes or the wishes of their government? And would Article 14 make the Council the only body which could terminate hostilities? And finally would Article 17 require Britain to become involved in a disarmament conference

¹²P.R.O., CAB4/11 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 527-B, Joint Memorandum by the Chiefs of Staff, Oct. 29, 1924.

before it was ready? Cavan summed up these objections in a letter to Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the Cabinet and the C.I.D.: "It is the idea of compulsion that is so distasteful to a virile people..."¹³

Certainly all nations want to maintain control over their militaries, but why did Britain protest so strongly while France and the Eastern European states seemed so willing to accept these aspects of the Protocol? Apparently the latter states' feared Germany and Russia strongly enough to accede to such prospects of control by the League. The British have lived an insular existence and their fears of invasion have never been as strong as Continental countries. The French and the Germans for centuries have lived in dread of invasion from their neighbors. Apparently British jealousy of their insularity drove these concerns about meddling in their internal affairs.

Objections of the Treasury and Board of Trade

Many in the British government were concerned about the costs which might accompany the Protocol. The inter war Treasury and Board of Trade were very powerful institutions, able to have their views heard when necessary. The Treasury had gained tremendous policy making capabilities during the war under Lloyd George's War Cabinet, and with the budgetary constraints after the war this power continued. Also with loss of trade in the 1920s the Board of Trade with its emphasis on promoting commerce made its proclamations required reading at Whitehall.¹⁴

¹³Ibid.; CAB 16/56 (Geneva Protocol Committee), letter from Earl of Cavan to Maurice Hankey, Dec. 22, 1924.

¹⁴Hennessy, Whitehall, 68-70, 59-60; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 230-236.

The Treasury (represented on the Cabinet by the Chancellor of the Exchequer) and the Board of Trade (also represented by a Cabinet-level position in the new Tory government in late 1924, but not in the 1924 Labour government) both objected that the Geneva Protocol would impose immeasurable burdens on the British economy and would result in serious losses of trade. The economic branches of the government saw the danger in allowing the League to order the British Navy to impose sanctions (enforced by blockades) on British trading partners, such as the United States.¹⁵

In November 1924, after the new Tory government came to power, a memo was sent to the Committee of Imperial Defense by the Treasury. The C.I.D. advised the Cabinet on defense matters. The memo speculated about the possible nature of economic and financial blockades (the former being against contraband, the later against transfers of money). The memo indicated how difficult it would be to implement prohibitions of such things as postal, telegraphic, telephonic and wireless communications; prohibitions of all transit of persons and goods to an aggressor; prohibition of all financial assistance (e.g. credits, loans, etc.); and the blocking of all balances, credits, etc. belonging to residents of an aggressor state (either nationals or not).¹⁶

The Treasury memo went on to say that Britain was "the great trading and financing nation, with substantial interests in almost every country in the world. The economic blockade of almost any country in the world means therefore far more to us than to any of the other members of the League."

¹⁵F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations. Vol. 1 (London, 1952), 284; Dick Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s (London, 1989), 30.

¹⁶P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 537-B, memo by the Treasury, Nov. 26, 1924.

While France, Italy and Japan (other League members) did not have the financial and trade interests which Britain had, they were still British competitors. Why should these countries not have to run the same risks as Britain in alienating a trading partner in a blockade, the Treasury wondered? Moreover, "it would be specifically dangerous to this country to accept contingent restrictions on banking and financial transactions [e.g. embargo of balances in banks] which are not universal in their application or at least are not accepted by other great banking countries, such as the United States." And on the subject of the United States, would it be wise for any of the European countries to alienate the U.S. in a blockade, since most rely on them for food and raw materials, and all were in the process of repaying huge debts to the U.S. incurred during the Great War?¹⁷

Was the Treasury offering realistic objections? Was Britain indeed still a financial and trading giant? Britain was in the mid-1920s still a major player in the world economic game, but its position had slipped significantly. The British had lost millions of tons of shipping during the war, and this hurt their merchant marine and thus their ability to trade. Moreover the U.S., Japan, and the British Dominions had usurped much of the trade England had had before the war. Japan and the U.S. were rivaling British textile exports; electricity and gasoline were replacing British coal; and the U.S. was replacing Britain as the financial center of the world. Britain was not the mercantile and financial giant it had been in the 19th century; and its position was more precarious after the Great War. British statesmen, factory owners and financiers had much to worry about. Considering all of this it seems that the Treasury couched (consciously or

¹⁷Ibid.

subconsciously) their objections in such a way as to deny the economic problems confronting the country. Was Britain a strong country wanting to protect its leadership position, or was it a weak country afraid of losing more? The truth was probably somewhere in between. Nevertheless Britain certainly could not afford to be the world's policeman, nor could it afford to alienate its trading partners or its creditors. Britain was actually better off in the mid-1920s than most other countries in Europe financially, but British statesmen perceived the problem from the position of a country that very likely might be called on to carry the lion's share of collective security.¹⁸

Philip Cunliffe-Lister, the first Earl of Swinton, was the President of the Board of Trade in the new Conservative government in November 1924. He worried about the burden that Britain might have to bear under the Protocol. Cunliffe-Lister had had a long and distinguished career in business law (specializing in mining law after graduating from Oxford) and in public service since 1920 both with the Board of Trade and in the Department of Overseas Trade in 1921. He had taken up the cause of protecting British trade and was very interested in Empire preference (i.e. relying on, and developing, the Empire for raw materials and trade). He objected to the Protocol for two basic reasons. He thought that Britain would be called upon in a disproportionate ratio to stop aggression or enforce blockades. He worried that "if we use the fleet for this purpose, the memory of our intervention will remain and will prejudice our trade for years to come in the country we have blockaded." Cunliffe-Lister's other objection perhaps reflected his long career associated with business. He did not profess to be

¹⁸Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 226-230.

a free trader, but he was concerned about government interference with trade, a 19th century Liberal fear. He warned that none of the actions which Britain was to take in compliance with the Protocol would be easily gotten through Parliament. And none of the sanctions, he said, could be enforced without an act of Parliament. But suppose the act was passed; how would it be enforced rapidly? He warned, "no act would be more unpopular than one giving [the] Executive an almost unlimited power to interfere with trade. Would it be possible to persuade the country to vest such powers in the government in advance?"¹⁹ The memory of the War Cabinet under Lloyd George was still fresh in mind. And while this control and central organization of the economy was deemed necessary at the time of the Great War no such emergency existed in 1924.

Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, the Chief Economic Advisor to the Board of Trade, pointed out further difficulties with the Protocol and its potential impact on trade. He had been on the Board of Trade staff since 1893 after graduating from Oxford, and served as Chief Economic Advisor to the government from 1919 to 1927. Smith, a Quaker, had been at the Paris Peace Conference in the economic section and throughout the 1920s worked on economic committees for the League of Nations. His main concern in 1924, however was the impact which the Protocol would have on British economics. Smith figured that almost certainly goods would have to be intercepted during a blockade which were either in transit to or from a neutral country (possibly even the United States). These intercepted materials might even be vital to the economy of the neutral. How would

¹⁹P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 536-B, memo by Philip Cunliffe-Lister, Nov. 24, 1924; Lord Blake and C.S. Nicholls, The Dictionary of National Biography, 1971-1980 (London, 1986), 201-204.

claims from these countries be handled? Should a tribunal be established which would hear cases of neutrals who felt that their rights had been transgressed? Should this be an international tribunal or should each state handle cases against itself separately? And a very important question for the British concerned sanctions against a Dominion or colony. Would Britain support sanctions against South Africa for instance? Smith also pointed out that neutrals would certainly not stand idly by while their economic interests were compromised. Moreover as long as neutrals, especially important ones such as the U.S., remained outside the League and the Protocol system aggressors could easily get what they needed from these neutrals.²⁰ So Smith asked, was the Protocol really workable in practice? Would it cause more problems than it would solve? Some such as Smith, who were very interested in peace, saw the necessity of avoiding war but wondered if the Protocol was the route to take. He offered no alternatives, only serious questions to be considered before adopting this League instrument.

Thus the economic objections to the Protocol centered on the potential ramifications of a blockade and sanctions. Was it in Britain's best interest to be the instrument of such actions if it would hurt the British economy? In other words did the benefits outweigh the costs? The Treasury and the Board of Trade representatives thought the risks were great in imposing sanctions because of an erosion [a further erosion?] of British economic interests around the world. The avoidance of war was important

²⁰P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 536-B, memo by Sir H. Llewellyn Smith, Nov. 24, 1924.

but not at the risk of losing trading partners and incurring liabilities from angry neutrals, especially the United States.

Foreign Office objections

Eyre Crowe, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and administrative head at the Foreign Office, resented the League of Nations from the very beginning. He disapproved of the Covenant and apparently resented that it was rushed through at Paris under Woodrow Wilson, that consummate internationalist. Crowe was also suspicious of the organization in England which most supported the League, the League of Nations Union. The president of this organization was Sir Robert Cecil (one of the drafters and early supporters of the Covenant). He also sat in the new Conservative government as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the autumn of 1924, but was a supporter of the Protocol, a lone voice in the Cabinet. Crowe mistrusted the L.N.U. and even once advised Prime Minister Baldwin not to meet with a delegation from the organization, because they would simply "misuse the occasion for their own propaganda."²¹ Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain also would not suffer idealists and League enthusiasts. He made it clear that he supported the League and was even a member of the L.N.U. himself, but he threatened to drop his membership in June 1925, if the L.N.U. did not stop its members from demonstrating all over the country for the Protocol. Chamberlain had by that time been

²¹British Museum Additional Manuscripts (hereafter BM Add mss.) 51071A (Cecil Papers), letter, Robert Cecil to Arthur Balfour, Dec. 5, 1924; Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.) F0371/10572/W10126/134/98, minute by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 26, 1924.

working toward the Locarno Treaty for several months and he did not want that policy upset.²²

This attitude toward the League went deeply into the structure of the Foreign Office and was evident on a number of issues surrounding the League and the Protocol. Harold Nicolson had been a first secretary in the Foreign Office since 1920. His father was Lord Carnock who had been Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs before the Great War. Nicolson was knighted in 1920 for his work at the Paris Peace Conference. He was a hard worker in the Foreign Office and had imbibed its spirit of exclusivity and specialness. His colleague was R. H. Campbell, a Foreign Office clerk since 1907 whose father, Sir Francis Campbell, had been Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1902 to 1911. Campbell was knighted in 1936 for his service in the Foreign Office. Campbell also, like Nicolson, relished the special role the Foreign Office played in the making of foreign policy. Nicolson and Campbell proclaimed in a joint Foreign Office memo that one could not "hide the fact that a sense of security cannot, in any vital matter, today emanate from Geneva." They continued: "As a clearing-house for international disputes, the League of Nations is a wholly admirable institution." But, "the essence of the [continental security] problem lies in the attitude of Germany and in the attitude of France." Nicolson had even briefly served in 1920 as assistant to Sir Eric Drummond,

²²BM Add mss. 51078 (Cecil Papers), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Robert Cecil, June 19, 1925; P.R.O., FO800/256 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Eric Drummond, Dec. 23, 1924.

the first Secretary-General of the League, but had not become a convert to the League as a panacea for world problems.²³

Further examples abound of this attitude toward the League. There was an incident in late 1924 in which Professor Gilbert Murray, one of the British delegates to the League in Geneva, had apparently intervened in a controversy between Greece and Serbia concerning minority rights. The Greek representative persuaded his government to accept the minority position based on an argument by Murray, saying that the professor was speaking in the name of the British government. William Tyrrell, Assistant Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, proclaimed that this "is only another instance of the very false position we have drifted into abroad by being represented by delegates who are not really speaking and acting on behalf of the Government."²⁴ Eyre Crowe added that "what we must see to is that in future British Delegates are not allowed to act on their own impulsive initiative in this way."²⁵ Tyrrell and Crowe were both examples of middle class men who had reached pinnacles of power in the Foreign Office, and they apparently became converts to the attitude that the Foreign Office should be the exclusive source of foreign policy.

It should come as no surprise that this question of who should represent the government in foreign policy matters should be a concern in this conservative, aristocratic department. Foreign Secretary Austen

²³P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2035/9/98, Foreign Office memo, Harold Nicolson & R.H. Campbell, Jan. 23, 1925; E.T. Williams and C.S. Nicholls, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1961-1970 (London, 1981), 793-796; E.T. Williams and Helen M. Palmer, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1951-1960 (London, 1971), 182-183.

²⁴P.R.O., F0800/256 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), letter, Austen Chamberlain to W.G. Tyrrell, Dec. 1, 1924.

²⁵P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), minute by Eyre Crowe, Jan. 6 1925.

Chamberlain was concerned that the man appointed by Prime Minister Baldwin in 1924 to be in charge of League affairs, Robert Cecil, would be treated as Foreign Secretary and any pronouncements by Cecil would be taken as representing the view of His Majesty's Government. Chamberlain warned that Cecil "must make it clear that there is only one foreign policy and only one authorised exponent of it...."²⁶ Chamberlain viewed the League as an organ of international diplomacy, not as a separate entity which operated outside the state system, and somehow above it. The Great Powers pulled the strings of the League, not vice versa. It therefore became very important for Chamberlain that the League should not get out of hand and appear to be making policy decisions which should be made, in Chamberlain's view, by the British Government. And the foreign policy of the government should come out of the Foreign Office not the League.²⁷

Chamberlain was not the only one in the department who was concerned about this potential usurpation of authority by the League. Foreign Office clerk R.H. Campbell, in his zeal to protect departmental prerogatives, complained about the growing influence of the League delegates in Geneva. He lamented "the unsatisfactory arrangement by which the League is allowed to constitute committees, such as the so-called Temporary Mixed Commission, the members of which are not appointed by and do not represent their respective governments, and yet are called upon to formulate schemes of the most farreaching political effect...."²⁸ You will

²⁶Ibid., letter, Austen Chamberlain to JEM, Jan. 2, 1925. I could not determine exactly who JEM was. It was probably Sir James William Jamieson, Consul-General of China.

²⁷P.J. Beck, "From the Geneva Protocol to the Greco-Bulgarian Dispute: The Development of the Baldwin Government's Policy Towards the Peacekeeping Role of the League of Nations, 1924-1925," *British Journal of International Studies*, 1980, 6(1): 67-68.

²⁸P.R.O., F0371/10568/W637/134/98, minute by R.H. Campbell, Jan. 25, 1924.

remember that the Commission Campbell mentions was set up by the League Council to investigate ways of effecting disarmament, and in 1923 it proposed the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance. Campbell certainly exaggerated for effect. The T.M.C.'s proposals were just that, proposals not policy. They had to be reviewed, discussed in endless meetings by the Cabinet, and submitted to Parliament before becoming policy. One must wonder exactly what Campbell had in mind here. Was it simply resistance to change or a serious attempt to keep policy making powers in the government? It seems that there was a genuine fear that League delegates would usurp the policy making role of the Foreign Office.

This hostility in the Foreign Office toward the League of Nations also translated into hostility toward the Geneva Protocol. Lord Parmoor, chief British representative to the League and a member of the team appointed by the League Assembly to draft the Protocol, complained to Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ramsay MacDonald that "the attitude of the Foreign Office Officials towards the League has made my position a very difficult one.... They especially oppose any representation of our Party; this is quite wrong."²⁹ Thus, at least from Parmoor's perspective, the opposition from the Foreign Office was both anti-League and anti-Labour.

It was apparent from the first that Foreign Office officials were wary of this new instrument designed to strengthen the League Covenant, which they already disliked. The Protocol was unveiled by its drafters in Geneva on October 1, 1924. A couple of weeks later Eyre Crowe was begging that Britain not commit itself any further to the Protocol until His

²⁹P.R.O., PR030/69/200 (MacDonald Papers), letter, Lord Parmoor to Ramsay MacDonald, Aug. 12, 1924.

Majesty's Government should have more time to consider it. A few weeks later Austen Chamberlain cautioned that the French had agreed that the new amendments to the Covenant should not be accepted until it had been referred to the governments and the parliaments of the powers represented. And Gerald Hyde Villiers (a Foreign Office counsellor) proclaimed that "anything beyond generalities and sympathy with the objects of the protocol would hardly be safe."³⁰ Whether these were true suggestions for caution or whether they were stalls until the election was over and the Conservatives were back in power is difficult to tell. Subsequent behavior of Foreign Office officials, as we will see, would indicate that they had no intention of accepting this strengthening of the League Covenant which the Protocol represented.

One interesting episode surrounding the ratification of the Protocol illustrates the difficulty the Foreign Office would have had with the finished product. A problem developed concerning Egypt, which was still being occupied by British troops and was considered a British Protectorate (mainly because of the necessity of protecting the Suez Canal). League Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond, the Earl of Perth, requested from the British government permission to send the Protocol to Egypt for approval. (Apparently a request had been made by certain Egyptian officials). Drummond had served as private secretary to several Prime Ministers and was chosen to head the League for his administrative abilities and his matter of fact personality. In this instance, he was apparently trying to be

³⁰P.R.O., F0371/10571/W9654/134/98, minute by Eyre Crowe in response to dispatch by Sir Cecil Hurst, Oct. 17, 1924; P.R.O., F0256(Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Robert Cecil, Nov. 19, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10360/134/98, minute by G.H. Villiers, Nov. 24, 1924.

objective and not a British patriot in dealing with the Egyptian request. The request was denied by the British government. If Egypt ratified the Protocol it would have to be considered as a member of the League, and thus an independent state! If the Protocol had been ratified and if Egypt had been one of the ratifiers, Britain could actually have been declared an aggressor in an independent state! All of this prompted Eyre Crowe to respond: "The position of Egypt ... involves issues of such importance to the Empire that we must guard as carefully as we can against any danger of prejudicing our vital interests by rushing along this Geneva road without the fullest consideration." Crowe suggested (and it was done) that the Protocol should not be communicated to Egypt, and thus the danger of Egypt being declared an independent state was avoided.³¹

Crowe also worried about the ratification of the Protocol for other reasons, not the least of which was the removal of what he called the vagueness of the Covenant. Should a more rigid system of sanctions be installed? After all it had been easy for the British (and for other countries for that matter) to slip through the loopholes of the Covenant (in Egypt, for instance). Moreover it was the very rigidity of the Covenant to begin with that drove the United States away. Was it advisable to make it more rigid and remove any chance at all of getting the U.S. to join? "It is difficult not to believe" Crowe wrote, "that the misgivings aroused by the original commitments of the Covenant which allowed of a mollifying interpretation will be revived and reinforced by the more explicit and definite obligations to be incurred under the Protocol." He would have thought, he claimed, that

³¹P.R.O., F0371/10571/W8945/134/98, minute by Eyre Crowe, Oct. 17, 1924; Egypt finally did become a member of the League but not until 1937; Williams & Palmer, DNB, 1951-60, 314-315.

Britain should be working for just the opposite: an attenuation rather than a strengthening of the Covenant. He also thought that the absence in the Covenant of a definition of "aggressor" had worked for Britain's benefit, because the government had been able to take care of imperial business without the interference of other countries or the League.³²

Austen Chamberlain admitted that changes in the Covenant might have been desirable but certainly not of the scope of the Protocol. Most British statesmen (including many of the Labour Party who saw it as a sop to the French) figured that the Protocol was harmless and would never be used. Chamberlain feared that it might be, and that is why he was so adamantly against it.³³

Thus there was a general feeling of aversion in the Foreign Office against the Protocol which these people saw as limiting the freedom of action of both Britain in general and of the department specifically. Diplomacy should be handled in the "old fashioned way" by professional diplomats and not by some international organization. Also the dangers to Britain in its own "backyard" (the Empire) were rampant. Britain, they thought, must have its own way in its own jurisdiction and the Protocol threatened that.

The Foreign Office also objected to the collective security aspects of the Protocol. Collective security is the opposition to aggressor states by

³²Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 30; P.R.O., F0371/10571/W9974/134/98, minute by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 17, 1924; P.R.O., CAB4/12(C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 538-B, minute by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 17, 1924.

³³F.S. Northedge, The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1945 (Leicester, 1986), 93; League of Nations, Secretariat, Information Section, Monthly Summary of the League of Nations. Geneva. Vol. V, no.3 (Apr. 15, 1925), excerpt of speech by Austen Chamberlain before the League Assembly, March 12, 1925.

the rest of the international community - the halting or reversal of aggression by collective action, in this case by members of the League of Nations against members or non-members of the League. This method of containing aggression had been utilized in Europe since the Italian Renaissance city-states used it to keep any one of their number from getting too powerful. It was used to contain Louis XIV in the 17th century and Napoleon in the early 19th century. It was the idea which drove the Concert of Europe after Napoleon and worked well until the balance of power was upset by a unified Germany in the late 19th century. The creators of the League looked back to all of these examples as models for their attempt to keep a fresh round of aggression from occurring in the early 20th century. The drafters of the Protocol thought that the collective security mechanism of the Covenant needed enhancement (in other words it was not rigid enough to keep aggressive wars from occurring), so they wanted to install a "trip mechanism" in the Covenant which would make collective security automatic.

Even if the League did not respond to an aggressor with hostilities, the Protocol would have required sanctions - an embargo, blockade or any other means by which the aggressor might be halted. The Covenant also called for sanctions but by suggesting that course of action to member states not by mandating it. The main concerns for Britain were its relationships with its colonies (and especially the increasingly independent Dominions) and its relationship with the United States. Was it conceivable under the Protocol system that Britain could be forced to implement sanctions or go to war with its Dominions or the United States? What if the U.S. sent troops into a Central American country to stop a disorder or to gain

concessions as it had in Panama? Would Britain have to enforce sanctions against the United States? Or what if South Africa decided to send troops into the neighboring territories owned by Portugal, either over a border dispute or to involve itself in an insurrection which threatened the stability of its borders? Would Britain have to send its fleet to South Africa to force withdrawal of the troops of its own Dominion and risk a confrontation?

Eyre Crowe shuddered at the thought of either of these scenarios. Moreover he claimed that the obligations under even the Covenant, much less the Protocol if it had been ratified, were to some extent nullified since the United States did not join the League. The British joined the League and signed the Covenant with the understanding that the U.S. would be a member. Now the U.S. was free not to follow League proclamations (such as sanctions against a particular country), and the British would then have to be in opposition to a large trading partner and one whose fleet was equal to the that of the British.³⁴ Crowe observed that "It would indeed be an irony of fate if a fresh war of great magnitude should break out between two powerful kindred nations as a result of unsuitable machinery [the Protocol] having been set in motion for preventing a perhaps minor war elsewhere...."³⁵ In other words could Panama be another Serbia which would spark off another major conflict, this time between the U.S. and Britain? What would make this even worse is that Britain had no real interests in Panama but might be forced by the Protocol, and by world opinion in the League, to get involved there anyway. How justified this fear was for Crowe

³⁴The Washington Conference of 1922 created the following formula: fleet strengths of Britain, U.S., Japan, France, and Italy - 5:5:3:1.67:1.67; P.R.O., CAB4/12(C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 538-B, minute by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 17, 1924.

³⁵P.R.O., F0371/10571/W9974/134/98, minute by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 17, 1924.

is debatable since Britain, as a sovereign state, could refuse to get involved in an area where Britain had little interest. Was Crowe more concerned about getting involved in Panama or losing diplomatic prerogatives to League delegates? The latter I would think.

Crowe further complained that it would be virtually impossible to get all member states to cooperate in sanctions but then quickly pointed out that the same problem existed with the Covenant. Department clerk R.H. Campbell saw the main problem lying with public opinion. Would the British people stand for Britain getting involved in a war between China and Japan, or Poland and Russia [his examples] in which Britain had no interest. And even if sanctions were somehow made to work, Campbell further reasoned, the main burden would fall on the Great Powers, especially Britain, since she had the largest fleet of all the League members and was well deployed throughout the world for action virtually anywhere. This would, in effect, absolve the smaller members from having to take much action if any in defense of League principles while conferring on them all of the benefits (i.e. protection from aggression).³⁶

Foreign Office historical advisor, J.W. Headlam-Morley attempted to fit these attitudes toward the Protocol into some kind of historical framework and explain them in light of British history and political institutions. Headlam-Morley was considered to be an expert on central European history, and he was also an advocate of Britain focusing its attention on the continent where a fresh war could break out. He claimed that the British do not like to be locked into a course of action. A certain

³⁶P.R.O. CAB 16/56 (Geneva Protocol Committee), minutes, 5th meeting, Dec. 29, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10151/134/98, minute by R.H. Campbell, Nov. 20, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2753/9/98, minute by R.H. Campbell, Apr. 1, 1925.

isolation is necessary in order to keep its hands free for any contingency. Each situation should be judged on its individual circumstances and policy should reflect immediate interests, not those determined on a previous occasion under different circumstances. And in order to fit his points into the current situation concerning the Protocol, Headlam-Morley claimed that this peculiarity of decision-making style "arises from the control exercised over the Executive by Parliament and our party system; this makes it very difficult for any Administration to enter into any engagement which will bind their successors and bind a new Parliament."³⁷ In other words Labour supported the Protocol and in doing so went out a proverbial limb which the Conservatives had no obligation to honor.

So collective security, and especially the way it would work under the Protocol, laid out a plan of action which might or might not fit current circumstances, or so some Foreign Office personnel thought. Being locked into a scheme which might require breaking existing obligations (say to the U.S. or the Dominions) was not acceptable. Nor was it acceptable that Britain should bear the largest burden in any action.

The Foreign Office also worried about arbitration of disputes - a practice which might further undermine the department's role in conducting foreign affairs. Signatory states to the Geneva Protocol were required by Article 3 of that document to accept the Optional Clause of the Permanent Court of International Justice located at The Hague, Netherlands. The Court was set up as the legal wing of the League in 1922 and was meant to serve as a legal advisor to the League Council. In other words, questions of international law could be referred to a body of experts who would aid the

³⁷P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1252/9/98, memo by J.W. Headlam-Morley, Mar. 11, 1925.

Council in making decisions concerning international disputes brought before it. The Court's charter contained an Article (*36) which stated that the Court's jurisdiction "comprises all cases which the parties refer to it" and all treaties and conventions currently in force. Acceptance of this so-called Optional Clause meant that, in effect, the Court would become a kind of supreme court, one of last resort. If one Protocol signatory decided to refer a dispute to the Court then any other involved signatory would be obliged to accept arbitration by the Court and any subsequent ruling. As it was, without the Protocol, both parties to a dispute had to agree to submit the problem to the Court. Eyre Crowe's major problem with this aspect of the Protocol was very simple - the Optional Clause would no longer be optional as agreed when the Court was established.³⁸

Crowe asked also how such an arbitral award would be implemented. In other words suppose that Britain lost in a ruling before the Court. The result would not automatically go into effect unless it were a relatively simple matter. If it were a graver matter, say one concerning the British relationship with a colony, a law might even have to be passed by Parliament which would allow the ruling to be put into effect. Suppose for instance that New Zealand, a League member and a British Dominion, requested through the League that a British naval base be removed from the islands. This could not be done immediately without a discussion and vote in Parliament. Furthermore Crowe warned it would be doubtful if Parliament would even pass the law if it represented a detriment to the interests or the honor of the country. He went on to point out that it would be practically

³⁸P.R.O. CAB 4/12(C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 538-B, minute by Eyre Crowe, July 13, 1924.

impossible to seat a group of truly impartial judges. Each judge would hail from a particular country. Could they completely shrug off any vital interests of their home countries in order to make an impartial ruling? To anyone who might say that Crowe was being overly cautious or using excuses to sidestep important issues, he asked if it was wise to trust national interests to an as yet unknown tribunal, or to simply say that an adverse ruling is unlikely to come along. What does one then do when the actual case does arise and paper guarantees vanish? Crowe warned that "it is hiding one's head in the sand to be blind to this. Is it either safe or proper to enter into engagements which are not reconcilable with the real world of facts?" Moreover he went on to say that some questions are simply not suitable for arbitration: "There are issues so deeply interwoven with national history, tradition and sentiment that no foreign tribunal can be trusted truly to understand and appreciate what is at stake."³⁹ Crowe gave no examples of the kind of action he feared by the Court. He seemed to be cautious of a nebulous requirement such as the Optional Clause which might have put Britain at odds with the international community over an as yet unforeseen vital situation. This attitude indicates nebulous fears over a nebulous clause but represents real fears in the minds of an entrenched bureaucracy over potential loss of control about how foreign policy is determined. Would the League and the Court have greater powers in determining British destiny under the Protocol than under the Covenant?

This of course is the risk in any international endeavor in which states are asked to take into consideration situations which could threaten

³⁹P.R.O., F0371/10571/W9974/134/98, minute by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 17, 1924; P.R.O. CAB 4/12(C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 538-B, minute by Eyre Crowe, July 13, 1924.

their own interests. It is the problem with which democracies have had to deal domestically - the minority giving in to the majority on important issues. It is, of course, debatable whether Britain really cared about world opinion, but the fact that Britain chose to participate in the League of Nations would indicate that discussion, if not the solution, of international problems in an international forum was desirable. It would have been difficult for any of the Great Powers to simply submit to a ruling, even though that ruling might have been supported by the majority of countries in the world, when they could have fairly easily ignored the ruling. But would Britain be forced at some point in the face of world opinion, or even by a coalition of other countries, to submit to an adverse ruling on some domestic or imperial matter? Austen Chamberlain mused during a Committee of Imperial Defense meeting about this very problem. He asked: "Does it not seem to you that there are questions so vital to the existence of a State that, whatever document it may have signed, it will never submit them to arbitration because an adverse decision would be the end of the State; and even if it had signed a document compelling it to submit those questions to arbitration, do you think that it would submit to the award, if it was adverse, without fighting?"⁴⁰

Are all of these arguments against arbitration sincere concerns about possible outcomes or are they smoke screens sent up to cloud more basic attitudes concerning protection of sovereignty and, in particular, Foreign Office prerogatives in policy making? British relations with its colonies and Dominions were becoming more complex rather than simple because of the clamor for independence in some (mainly the Dominions) and unrest in

⁴⁰P.R.O. CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 192nd Meeting, Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 16, 1924.

others (such as Egypt and India). The question, however, devolves onto a fairly simple matter of international cooperation. The Great Powers had the luxury of being able to set the agendas and determine much of the direction of international relations through their large militaries and through their places on the League Council. As long as the Great Powers agreed on a matter, the smaller powers (such as those in eastern Europe) mattered little. But was it really fair to ignore the wishes of the smaller powers? Did world opinion matter in the 1920s? Was it not inherently the 'correct' thing to do to submit disputes to a legal body such as the World Court rather than simply proclaim unilaterally that "our position, while not necessarily correct, is a matter of vital national interest"? To British policy makers, including those in the Foreign Office, these questions were apparently irrelevant. Britain had the power to ignore rulings by the Court. And as long as it could use diplomacy in its relations with the other Great Power, why should it submit to arbitration? The French themselves were not particularly interested in arbitration. They wanted a system of collective security to protect them from German aggression. It was the British Labour government which had wanted arbitration in order to make war less likely while disarmament progressed. As Austen Chamberlain said above, Britain had much to lose and little to gain in submitting disputes to a tribunal of judges who might or might not have ruled in Britain's favor.

Thus in the end a conservative, aristocratic Foreign Office rejected an idealistic Labour foreign policy in favor of a more traditional policy based on alliances with the other Great Powers. Changes obviously do not come easy for an entrenched establishment. Even though in the 1920s middle class individuals took up their places in the Foreign Office it seems that

they imbibed the Conservative air (for that is the tradition they learned at the public schools and universities) rather than instilling notions of change. Change did come to the Foreign Office, but it would take World War II to start the process on the fast track.⁴¹

Chamberlain Assesses the Protocol

Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary inherited the Protocol when the Conservatives took over the government in November 1924. The new government saw the proposal as a diplomatic problem which should be dealt with through the Foreign Office. Chamberlain never seemed to have considered the Protocol as a serious proposition. From the beginning of his tenure as Foreign Secretary he assumed that the Protocol would not be accepted by Britain and began searching for an alternative. He did think the problem of continental security was an important one but he simply did not consider the Protocol as a viable option. He became convinced originally that a defensive alliance with France was the solution but by January 1925, he had turned his attention to German Foreign Secretary Gustav Stresemann's Rhineland Pact proposal (which would later in 1925 be transformed into the Locarno Agreements). This new plan would tie France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, and Italy together into an agreement which would guarantee security along the volatile Franco-Belgian-German border. This would, at least in theory, solve the problem of French aggression over which Britain was just as concerned as German aggression.⁴²

Chamberlain's leanings toward a French treaty at first came partly from his assumptions about how foreign policy should work (*ad hoc*

⁴¹Cannadine, Decline and Fall, 294-295; Hennessy, Whitehall, 111.

⁴²Walters, History of the League of Nations, 285.

solutions for specific problems), but he also had exhortations from various quarters. As of late November 1924, Chamberlain was being urged away from the Protocol and toward an agreement with the French and the Belgians. Viscount Burnham, the manager-proprietor of the Daily Telegraph, prodded Chamberlain toward a treaty with France. Burnham was a former Liberal who had broken with the Party over Irish home rule and became a Unionist. His main concern in 1924, however, was European peace. He supported a regional agreement between France, Belgium, and Britain, and in a letter to Chamberlain in November 1924, speculated that rejection of the Protocol would not anger the French if Britain replaced it with a defensive treaty aimed at potential German aggression. In other words France's main concern, Burnham claimed, was not the Protocol but protection from Germany.⁴³

Another journalist, Charles á Court Repington (the military correspondent for the Daily Telegraph), urged Chamberlain in a letter in December along a similar road but suggested that the Dutch should also be included. Repington was born to an upper middle class family. His father was a member of Parliament for Wilton, and his mother was the daughter of a banker. He had attended Sandhurst, the military academy, and had seen action in Afghanistan, Burma, and South Africa in the late 19th century. He had gained international fame for a series of articles on the Russo-Japanese War which he wrote for The Times. He also initiated the phrase "first World war" in reference to what everyone else in the 1920s called the Great War. He wanted "to prevent the millenian [*s/c*] folk from forgetting that the

⁴³P.R.O., F0800/256 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), letter, Viscount Burnham to Austen Chamberlain, Nov. 20, 1924.

history of the world is the history of war." His view of international relations was in the traditional 19th century mold of Great Power politics.⁴⁴ Repington wrote to Chamberlain in early December 1924 that a pact between Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands was the route to take. "The four greatest Colonial Powers" Repington advised, "would then be knit in a common assurance which would not only cover the German case, but also the Mediterranean and the Pacific as well, and I do not know what Power would care to challenge such a combination."⁴⁵ Repington's suggestion to Chamberlain to include the Dutch in a treaty was consistent with British fears of the vulnerability of the Channel ports. It also would have provided the most protection against a resurgent Germany, something about which defense-minded Repington was greatly concerned.⁴⁶ Support even came from inside the Foreign Office itself for a French entente and a concentration on the Channel ports rather than support for a far-reaching and general agreement such as the Protocol.⁴⁷ Thus Chamberlain's attention began to gradually turn from even the possibility of accepting the Protocol toward a more traditional solution - a treaty of some kind. Once this decision had been made by late 1924, Chamberlain was well prepared to listen to Stresemann when he proposed the Rhineland Pact in early 1925.

⁴⁴J.R.H. Weaver, ed., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-1930 (London, 1937), 717-718; Taylor, English History, 2.

⁴⁵P.R.O., F0800/256 (Private Papers - Austen Chamberlain), letter, Charles á Court Repington to Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 1, 1924.

⁴⁶Ibid., letter, Charles á Court Repington to Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 1, 1924; Weaver, DNB, 1922-30, 717-718; David Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman In Politics (Bolton, 1985), 238-239.

⁴⁷P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2035/9/98, Foreign Office Memo, Harold Nicolson & R.H. Campbell, Jan. 23, 1925, and minute by Eyre Crowe, Jan. 31, 1925.

On November 28, 1924, the French began the ratification process for the Protocol in the Chamber of Deputies. Further evidence however served to support Chamberlain's views that the Protocol was unacceptable. Chamberlain wrote to the British Ambassador to Poland, Sir W. Max Muller, that the Polish Ambassador to Britain had visited him in London. Chamberlain reported that the ambassador told him that he "could well understand that it might be impossible for [Britain] to sign the protocol or to obtain the consent of the self-governing dominions to its acceptance. In that case [Ambassador Skirmunt] wished to point out how keenly Poland was interested in any decision that [Britain] might take as to a pact of guarantee with France and Belgium...."⁴⁸ Thus Chamberlain was receiving signs from Eastern Europe that the real concern there was not the Protocol but with any specific security arrangements which were being considered. Poland's true worry was possible aggression from its two large neighbors, Germany and Russia, and its main reason for supporting the Protocol would have been protection from these historically aggressive powers. If the Protocol was unacceptable to the Great Powers then Poland would take what guarantees it could get.⁴⁹

To further turn Chamberlain against the Protocol Sir Ronald Graham, ambassador in Rome, reported in early December that Signor Mussolini hated the plan. Graham was particularly interested in maintaining cordial relations between Italy and Great Britain because he became, during his stay

⁴⁸P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10443/134/98, dispatch, Marquess of Crewe to Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 1, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10465/134/98, Austen Chamberlain to Sir W. Max Muller (Warsaw), Dec. 1, 1924.

⁴⁹Sally Marks, The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918-1933 (New York, 1976), 30.

in Italy, acutely aware of the bitterness of the Italians over their failure to receive the territory they had expected to get after the Great War. Graham reported to Chamberlain that "[Mussolini] found the whole protocol objectionable: indeed, he would characterise it as '*stupido*.' Its intentions" Graham wrote that Mussolini had said, "were excellent, but it went much too far and impinged upon the sovereign rights and attributes of the States concerned." Mussolini would, Graham claimed, sign the Protocol only if Britain and Japan did as well.⁵⁰ // *Duce* wanted to continue his foreign policy of making the Mediterranean into *Mare Nostrum* and probably feared the Protocol would get in his way. Chamberlain, on the other hand, found a continental leader who was also worried about encroachment upon national sovereignty!

By early December then Chamberlain had begun to think in terms of a replacement for the Protocol. The Genevan instrument would not be acceptable as long as there was a more traditional approach - a treaty. Chamberlain would find general support for his position in the Committee of Imperial Defense.

The review by the Committee of Imperial Defense

The next step in this evaluation of the Protocol required that the Committee of Imperial Defense review it. The C.I.D. acted as an advisory body to the Cabinet on defense matters. All of the Cabinet members sat on the C.I.D., though all were not necessarily present at each meeting. Also on the C.I.D. were any *ad hoc* members whose special expertise were needed

⁵⁰P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10620/134/98, dispatch, Sir R. Graham (Rome) to Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 5, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10677/134/98, dispatch, Sir R. Graham (Rome) to Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 6, 1924; L.G. Wickham Legg and E.T. Williams, The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-50 (London, 1959), 313-314.

(for example, representatives of the military services or the diplomatic corps). The C.I.D. had to review the Protocol because it was intimately linked to French security and thus to the peace of Europe and to British (including imperial) security.⁵¹ If war broke out on the continent another round of horrific bloodshed and trade interruption could have occurred. It was fairly obvious from the beginning, however, that the members of the C.I.D. were not well disposed toward the Protocol. Indeed they wanted to avert war but not by increasing the coercive power of the League Council. Lord Balfour (as quoted by Sir Eyre Crowe) reported how "difficult it was to discuss the Protocol usefully [in a C.I.D. meeting] when there was not a single person inclined to say one good word for it."⁵² Balfour was probably referring to the meeting on December 11, 1924, at which Robert Cecil, a supporter of the Protocol, was not present. Cecil was the Protocol's only defender in the C.I.D. meetings. All of the others hated the idea of strengthening the League Covenant.

The first C.I.D. meeting which discussed the Geneva Protocol took place on December 4, 1924. This first meeting mainly reviewed and assessed the objections from the various departments of the government. There is little doubt where the C.I.D.'s sympathies lay. Lord Curzon complained that "[a]ll sorts of obnoxious duties would be placed upon [the Navy's] shoulders; it would begin by being the watch-dog, and would end in all probability by being the scapegoat, of the world...." He agreed with the Armed Service staffs that "far from reducing armaments, which is the

⁵¹Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.), CAB63/37 (Hankey Papers), M0(25)1, draft report on the Protocol, Feb. 20, 1925.

⁵²P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10864/134/98, memo, Eyre Crowe to Austen Chamberlain Dec. 12, 1924.

object for which the whole thing is ... designed, the result will be ... almost inevitably an increase." He agreed with the Treasury and the Board of Trade that sanctions "must involve great injury to British trade; that they would be attended with grave financial danger to the country; that they could not be put into effective operation without the cooperation of the whole world and more particularly of the [U.S.]..." He also warned that British sovereignty could be compromised because League Council voting was unanimous (and the Protocol did not specifically alter the Covenant in this regard except in certain circumstances). He further complained that sanctions could only be ended by Council vote (Protocol article 14). Curzon observed that "it will be in the power of any one State represented on the Council - it might be a small State, or ... it might be a great State - by refusing its assent, indefinitely prolong hostilities."⁵³

Leo Amery, an Empire enthusiast, expressed his concern that some of the portions of the Empire might accept the Protocol and others might not since all of the Dominions were independent members of the League. He suggested that a decision be put off until the Dominions had looked at the document (which is exactly what was eventually decided). Arthur Balfour was concerned about Britain's image in the world if the Protocol were rejected outright. He warned that "it would be inadisable to publish to the world even a tenth of the arguments which had been put forward by the various Departments against [the Protocol]." He suggested that Britain simply announce that it could not accept a proposal "of such an experimental nature unless the United States of America became a member

⁵³P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 190th Meeting, Lord Curzon, Dec. 4, 1924.

of the League of Nations."⁵⁴ This was not going to happen and Balfour knew it, so we can safely assume that he was counseling the Protocol's rejection forthwith.

Lord Robert Cecil, the only League enthusiast and Protocol supporter on the Cabinet or the C.I.D., suggested that Britain could not simply reject the instrument but must eventually address "the whole principle as to whether disarmament could be achieved by international agreement...." Curzon quickly added that he was not suggesting outright rejection but possibly amendment. Amery and Hoare (Air Ministry) agreed that some alternative must be put forth lest Britain be accused of not addressing the vital issues before them (i.e. disarmament and peace).⁵⁵

The December 11th C.I.D. meeting centered around the question of disarmament and its feasibility. Balfour wanted to make it clear that any disarmament plan coming out of the Protocol "would in reality be a plan for the reduction of armaments of other nations, since we had already reduced our own armaments to the lowest possible limit."⁵⁶ This is a fairly accurate statement. Britain felt after the Great War that it could afford to reduce its arms more than the other Great Powers since neither Britain itself nor its Empire were directly threatened by a hostile power.⁵⁷

Colonial Secretary Leo Amery expressed concern about the possibility of success of a disarmament conference (since one would be called automatically if the Protocol were ratified). He reminded his colleagues "that the success of the Washington Conference [in 1922, which included

⁵⁴Ibid., Leo Amery and Arthur Balfour.

⁵⁵Ibid., Robert Cecil, Lord Curzon, Leo Amery, Samuel Hoare.

⁵⁶P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 191st Meeting, Dec. 11, 1924, Arthur Balfour.

⁵⁷Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 16-17.

Britain, Japan and the U.S.] was due to the fact that only three big naval Powers were involved; that these Powers were situated at great distances from each other and that none of them had anything to fear from naval aggression by a near neighbor. Obviously" Amery continued, "a ... conference which affected all the States in Europe would raise much greater difficulties."⁵⁸ He got no disagreements on this point. Thus C.I.D. members felt no real compunction to disarm any further nor did they feel disarmament would work with so many states at the table. In fact while the League sponsored two large disarmament conferences in the late 1920s and early 1930s neither were effective in reducing armaments significantly.

So by mid December the British government had in effect rejected the Geneva Protocol. None of this had been made public and would not be until March 12, 1925, when Chamberlain would formally announce to the League Council, to the world, and even to the British people that the British government had rejected the League peace plan. By then, however, they would have a replacement in hand, Locarno. But the problem which the Baldwin government faced over the next several months was how to manage the process of rejection and what would the replacement be, for German Foreign Minister Stresemann had not yet suggested his proposal which would eventually lead to Locarno. We will deal with that process in the next chapter.

Special interest groups, the press, and public opinion

Let us pause briefly and see how the British public, the press, and interest groups viewed the Geneva Protocol. We have seen what British leaders thought, now what about other interested parties?

⁵⁸P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 191st Meeting, Leo Amery, Dec. 11, 1924.

The Geneva Protocol was not a major press event although many stories did appear concerning its drafting and then its demise in March 1925. It is difficult to gauge public interest in the Protocol since we have no guarantees that people read the stories which were published about it. One way of discovering who was concerned about the Protocol is to look at letters to the editors of newspapers. In October 1924, when the League Assembly presented the Protocol to the world, scores of letters were sent to the editor of The Times, four to the editor of the Manchester Guardian, and none to the editor of the Daily Herald concerning the Protocol. The Guardian appealed to Liberal readers, the Herald was a Labour paper, and The Times was read by a cross-section of Britain's elite and upper middle class population. These generalization are born out by the nature of the letters sent to them and by the editorial policies of the papers themselves.

On October 3, 1924, two days after the Protocol was presented to the League Assembly, The Times ran an editorial which neither committed itself to the instrument nor rejected it. The paper had been owned by Lord Northcliffe until his death in 1922. Northcliffe bought the paper mainly as a financial enterprise and worked at increasing its readership. It was purchased upon Northcliffe's death by the son of Viscount Astor and by John Walter who carried on the practice of making the paper appeal to a wide audience. The Times apparently was not out to stir up controversy but to report the news in an interesting way.⁵⁹ Its editorial on October 3, cautioned that "the Protocol must be carefully analyzed." It said "the whole enterprise has hopeful elements and deserves the closest consideration."⁶⁰

⁵⁹Taylor, English History, 186-194.

⁶⁰The Times, editorial, Oct. 3, 1924, p.13.

The letters which the paper received during October and November represented a wide cross section of British middle and upper class society. G.N. Barnes, Labour politician and founder of the International Labour Organization (a branch of the League) claimed that the Protocol represented "an enormous advance." Retired naval commander, Carlyon Bellairs cautioned that it might endanger relations between Britain and the U.S. Eustace Percy, Baron of Newcastle and former assistant to Robert Cecil during the Paris Peace Conference, feared that "compulsory arbitration will alienate the U.S. and the Dominions." Baron Sydenham of Combe, a member of the Royal Engineers (a branch of the military), warned that "the Protocol is more dangerous than the [Draft] Treaty of Mutual Assistance." Several letters from members of the League of Nations Union, the League support group in Britain, offered varying opinions: Professor Gilbert Murray, chairman of the Executive Committee of the L.N.U., urged ratification; Valentine Chirol, Vice President of the Chelsea L.N.U., claimed that it might drive the U.S. away from possibly joining the League; Captain Reginald Berkeley, an L.N.U. member who had served on the League Secretariat for a time, wrote that the Dominions must be consulted.⁶¹ So even the League support group was split on whether to accept the Protocol or not. This would continue to be the case after the Baldwin government decided to reject the Protocol in favor of a more traditional treaty, Locarno. Some in the L.N.U. supported Locarno and others continued to support the Protocol.

Others who wrote to The Times demonstrated this wide variety of opinions: Lord Parmoor, one of the drafters of the Protocol, wrote in

⁶¹ Ibid., letters, Oct. 8, G.N. Barnes; Oct. 14, Gilbert Murray; Oct. 17, Carlyon Bellairs; Oct. 20, Eustace Percy; Nov. 14, Valentine Chirol; Nov. 19, Baron Sydenham; Nov. 24, Reginald Berkeley.

support; Baron Charnwood, philosopher and biographer of Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt, scoffed at the idea that friction would occur with the U.S.; Professor Treub, President of the International Union of League of Nations Societies (the parent organization of the L.N.U.), claimed that the problems with the Protocol were not insurmountable; and G.E. Buckle, former editor of The Times and biographer of Disraeli, warned that it would be unwise to expand Britain's obligations under the Covenant.⁶²

The Manchester Guardian was the Liberal voice in Britain. Its coverage of the Protocol was much less extensive than that of The Times. The Guardian generally supported disarmament, but its coverage of the Protocol was surprisingly straight-forward and dispassionate. It reported the presentation of the Protocol to the League Assembly with stories on pages eight and nine on October 1, and then followed them up with a page eight story on the next day. Also surprisingly only four letters arrived at the editor's desk concerning the Protocol in the days following its presentation. Three letters, two from a Mr. Roth Williams and one from a Mr. Shipley Brayshaw, stressed that Germany must join the League before any peace could be effected. Vice Admiral Drury-Lowe claimed that the Protocol was not dangerous to British sovereignty because Britain, or any other state, would only give what assistance it deemed it could afford. And finally, Professor Gilbert Murray, an executive of the L.N.U., in an interview said

⁶²Ibid., letters, Oct. 15, Lord Parmoor; Nov. 27, Baron Charnwood; Nov. 28, Professor Treub; Nov. 29, G.E. Buckle.

that the Protocol would allow for peaceful change.⁶³ Thus the general thrust of Guardian coverage and letters was supportive, but not overly so.

The Daily Herald was a socialist paper which supported the Labour Party. In October several stories appeared which demonstrated the paper's support of the Protocol. On page one on October 1, a story claimed that the Protocol would put a "stop to any first shot," that the "day of no more war [is] nearer." It then went on to praise Ramsay MacDonald's role in the Protocol's birth. On October 13, the Herald called the Protocol "a peace plan that is foolproof," and that it would "close every avenue" to war. It was obvious that the editors of this Labour newspaper were excited about the prospects for peace.⁶⁴ Interestingly enough not one letter to the editor appeared in the Herald in the month after the Protocol's presentation to the League Assembly. Do we make of this that there was no interest among Labourites or union members? Or does it represent the lack of literary skills and education among the readership of the Herald? That is probably too rash a judgement. But it is interesting that no support for the Protocol came out of the very populace which was supposed to be so concerned about another war.

So who was interested in the Protocol based on newspaper coverage and letters? Well, the conclusion pretty much bears out Donald Birn's contention in his book on the League of Nations Union, that the members of British society who were active over concerns of peace and war were

⁶³Birn, League of Nations Union, 70; Manchester Guardian, article, Oct. 1, pp.8,9; article, Oct. 2, p.8; letter, Oct. 4 & 11, Roth Williams; letter, Oct. 6, Shipley Brayshaw; letter, Oct. 7, S.R. Drury-Lowe; interview, Oct. 17, Gilbert Murray.

⁶⁴Daily Herald, articles, Oct. 2, p.1; Oct. 13, p.3; Oct. 14, p.1.

mainly middle class and upper class.⁶⁵ Almost all of the letters were from people whom I could identify either from Who's Who or the Dictionary of National Biography, and they tended to be men of letters, political activists, military men, and/or aristocrats.

Was the Protocol widely scrutinized? We have no good way of telling, but we do know that those who showed interest through their letter writing appear to have been educated at the university or military school level and seemed moderately or very wealthy, not a majority of British society. Did those in government listen to these people who were interested in the fate of the Protocol? There is no evidence that they did or did not; but based on my research, the discussions in the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defense seemed to have taken little or no account of the public sentiment in the press, and this sentiment was never mentioned in the meetings. The foreign policy decisions in Britain were still being made in the halls of power, apparently little affected by the discussions in the press.

Pressure on Chamberlain and the government came from other quarters however. The League of Nations Union (the League support group in Britain) and some Labour and Liberal M.P.'s were putting pressure on the government to come up with a peace plan which would do more than simply mollify the French. Chamberlain wrote to Lord Crewe, his ambassador in Paris: "Public opinion in [Britain] is intensely suspicious of any particular undertaking [i.e. a pact], and both the Liberal and Labour Parties in their present mood [having both lost seats to the Conservatives in the 1924 general election] are ready to start on the warpath at the first indication that I could be contemplating a regional pact." Chamberlain continued: "The

⁶⁵Donald S. Birn, The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945 (New York, 1981), 4.

League of Nations Union is equally on the alert and equally predisposed against partial and particular arrangements."⁶⁶ This public opinion Chamberlain mentioned was not widespread however. Immediately after the Great War the British public paid close attention to international affairs, but by 1924 no issue was garnering much public scrutiny. Perhaps this is why so few letters made it to the editorial desks concerning the Protocol. Donald Birn claims that "World War One had aroused an interest in international affairs that was hard to sustain in peacetime." A minority, consisting of Liberals but mainly Labourites, were actively against traditional diplomacy and its leanings toward alliances, and most of these were members of the L.N.U.⁶⁷

The L.N.U. apparently had assumed that Britain would have signed the Protocol by December, because it seemed the best solution to threats of war. In reality though the leadership of the L.N.U., especially president Robert Cecil, did not think that the Protocol was the best solution to world peace. Cecil still clung to his Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance which the Protocol had replaced, because he and many other L.N.U. members were cautious about arbitration of disputes for the same reason the Conservative government was - its possible detriment to British sovereignty. Cecil thought that an effective system of collective security would be sufficient to forestall aggression. The L.N.U. and Cecil, however, saw the Protocol as a better solution than a system of alliances. The L.N.U. Executive congratulated the 5th League Assembly for "the great advance towards

⁶⁶P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers - Austen Chamberlain), dispatch, Austen Chamberlain to Lord Crewe, Jan. 16, 1925.

⁶⁷Birn, League of Nations Union, 28.

permanent peace achieved by the general recognition that arbitration, security and disarmament go hand in hand."⁶⁸

Tory newspapers such as the The Daily Telegraph were spreading stories in the autumn of 1924 that the Protocol would transfer control of the British navy from the government to the League Council and that sanctions would cause Britain immense economic problems.⁶⁹ In a pamphlet entitled Some Questions on the Geneva Protocol (published in December 1924), the L.N.U. offered answers to these gloom and doom predictions. The pamphlet claimed that the British Navy would have an easier time not a harder one under the Protocol. After all, the ships of all other signatory states would be added to those of Britain. The pamphlet further countered that an aggressor probably would not try to attack the combined navies of its adversaries; that operations on land would relieve some of the burdens of a blockade by putting pressure on the aggressor; that in Europe land operations would be predominant, and only against Japan and the U.S. would fleet activity be necessary (an unlikely set of circumstances, the pamphlet consoled); and finally, the aggressor would be deterred by the prospect of having to pay reparations (provided by article 15 of the Protocol). On the subject of an American response to a blockade, the pamphlet comforted the worriers by pointing out that the League would have the moral authority of the world behind it: "It is therefore, unlikely that American public opinion

⁶⁸P.R.O., PR030/69 (Ramsay MacDonald Papers), pamphlet, Some Questions on the Geneva Protocol, pub. by League of Nations Union, Dec. 1924; Birn, League of Nations Union, 57-59.

⁶⁹Walters, History of the League, 276; George Scott, The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations (New York, 1974), 107.

would allow its citizens to assist the aggressor in disturbing the peace of the world, and in continuing the international crime of aggressive war."⁷⁰

The L.N.U. pamphlet further claimed that the Protocol was needed to settle problems of changing existing borders. Some critics, such as the Irish, assumed that the Protocol was designed to protect existing borders. The L.N.U. asserted that "... since war is the worst of all possible methods of effecting such changes some alternative peaceful method must be found." That method would be the discouraging of aggression by the threat of collective action. Finally the L.N.U. chided the critics of the Protocol who claimed that war with the U.S. would result when sanctions were enforced. It claimed that "the only case in which the Protocol could involve [Britain] in war with the U.S.A. is that in which the U.S.A., rejecting all methods of pacific settlement, resorts to aggressive war against Japan." The pamphlet concluded that the U.S. would not engage in aggressive war.⁷¹ I must admit that the logic of this last argument escapes me, as I am sure it did the Protocol's critics. How could one simply assume that the U.S. would never feel threatened enough to take action to safeguard its interests. And why would Japan be the only potential problem for the U.S.? Granted, the Japanese navy was the only real threat to the U.S. in the Pacific, but one could not be so certain which power might threaten U.S. interests. And the other two arguments (certitude of the success of collective security and the need for a peaceful settlement of border disputes) were little better. Both were basically unverifiable arguments and were certainly not convincing

⁷⁰P.R.O., PR030/69/111 (Ramsay MacDonald Papers), pamphlet, Some Questions on the Geneva Protocol, published by the League of Nations Union, Dec, 1924.

⁷¹P.R.O., PR030/69/111 (Ramsay MacDonald Papers), pamphlet, Some Questions on the Geneva Protocol, , pub. by the League of Nations Union, Dec. 1924.

enough to sway members of the Conservative government. Nor were they apparently convincing enough to sway sizable portions of the public.⁷²

As we will see by late January 1925 Austen Chamberlain was forced by Cabinet pressure in favor of the German proposals for a Rhineland pact to alter his direction somewhat away from a simple pact with France and Belgium to one that would include all of the major states of Western Europe. Many in the L.N.U. would support this move (which evolved into the Locarno Treaties) as a step away from contending alliances, but mainly with the understanding that the League would continue to be strengthened. Instead the League was increasingly ignored as traditional diplomacy took the lead in the late 1920s. The trend was away from collective security and more toward regional agreements.⁷³

Thus by late December 1924, the British government had in effect decided that a replacement must be found for the Geneva Protocol in order to satisfy French demands for security. The Committee of Imperial Defense would continue its discussion of the Protocol and Austen Chamberlain would continue his search for a replacement, all out of view of the public eye. What kind of replacement would be found for the Protocol, but more importantly how would the Baldwin government engineer the rejection of the Protocol itself? How would the Dominions and the United States figure into the problem? And how would Chamberlain soothe the nerves of the French and the other Continental supporters of the Protocol?

⁷²Richardson, *Evolution of British Disarmament Policy*, 201.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 61-62

CHAPTER 5

THE SEARCH FOR SUPPORT

The Baldwin government had a fundamental problem by mid-December 1924. It had decided not to accept the Geneva Protocol but did not know exactly how it would manage breaking the news to the French or to the other Protocol supporters in the League. A replacement for the Protocol had to be found, even if it turned out to be a modified version of the League Assembly effort. Britain simply could not appear to be the only holdout in the effort to prevent war. Besides, British policy makers worried about the French and German rivalry on the Continent. Something had to be done to put the French at ease over their worry about another German attack. British leaders knew that the French might not be above attacking Germany in a preemptive attack or to invade the Rhineland again, as they did in 1923, to force German payment of reparations.

Moreover British leaders had another concern. How could they involve the Dominions in the rejection of the Protocol and a possible replacement? After all the Dominions were League members as well as members of the Empire. Also the Baldwin government did not want to alienate the Dominions on which Britain depended for trade and raw materials.

Also could Britain somehow use the United States' hatred of the League as an excuse to reject the Protocol and seek a replacement? British leaders feared the U.S. response if the Protocol were accepted, since the U.S. could conceivably be the object of League collective action in, say Latin America; and Britain had no desire to go up against the American fleet even in defense of a League member.

The Continent

The pressure to accept the Protocol would not go away. The urgency to placate France was driven home by Lord Crewe, ambassador in Paris: "...if the protocol and the prospects of a Disarmament Conference fall to the ground, France will be the less easy to deal with on the question of the 'supplementary permanent guarantees.'"¹ In other words France would still want guarantees of her protection from potential German aggression, even more so if the Protocol were not in place as a guarantee. Crewe was a skilled diplomat and it appears that he was simply attempting to make Chamberlain aware of the possible consequences of a British rejection of the Protocol. There is no evidence that Crewe actually supported the League instrument. Also at this same time [in November 1924], Sir Robert Cecil, the only Protocol supporter in the new Tory Cabinet, was urging special consideration of the Protocol rather than simply a review by the Committee of Imperial Defense. Cecil cautioned that "[i]t is really a broad matter of policy much more than a technical matter of defence."² Cecil supported disarmament, was the President of the League of Nations Union, and he apparently wanted the government to view the Protocol as a new direction in policy rather than a routine defense matter.

On December 8 and 9, 1924, Chamberlain was in France in route to Rome for the League Council meeting at which he would ask for a postponement of the discussion of the Protocol until March 1925, in order to give Britain a chance to consider the matter. He met with French Premier

¹P.R.O., F0371/10571/W9781/134/98, dispatch, Marquess of Crewe to Austen Chamberlain, Nov. 12, 1924.

²British Museum Additional Manuscripts (hereafter BM Add MSS) 51078 (Cecil Papers), letter, Robert Cecil to Austen Chamberlain, Nov. 21, 1924.

Herriot and future Foreign Minister Aristide Briand. (Briand would take over in April 1925 in time for the Locarno negotiations). Herriot was a Radical and thus more interested in republican government than in the staunch nationalism of his predecessor Poincaré. He worried nevertheless about French security. He admitted (according to Chamberlain) that he had signed the Protocol because he feared German and Russian aggression not because of any broader questions of war and peace. Chamberlain said of his conversation with Herriot that "he left me with the strong impression that even if the protocol were signed, the question of a mutual pact [between Britain and France] would still arise." Then the next day Chamberlain met with Briand and claimed to have gotten the distinct impression that the Frenchman did not like the idea of arbitration of disputes as was embodied in the Protocol.³ Chamberlain seemed to have gathered evidence in the very center of what he had considered to be a hotbed of support for the Protocol that the League instrument might not be completely acceptable or not sufficient in itself. We must ask, however, how accurate this "evidence" was? Was Chamberlain simply reading into Herriot's and Briand's words what he wanted to hear? Was Chamberlain so convinced that the Protocol was bad for Britain that he imagined that the Frenchmen were willing to conspire in the Protocol's demise? It is true that Herriot and Briand were mainly concerned with stemming possible German aggression and might have taken any deal they could have gotten. On the other hand Briand attempted to resurrect the Protocol during the summer of 1925 when the Locarno negotiations were at a stalemate. It is my assessment that Chamberlain

³P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10854/134/98, conversation between Edouard Herriot and Austen Chamberlain, Paris, Dec. 8, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10867/134/98, conversation between Aristide Briand and Austen Chamberlain, Paris, Dec. 9, 1924.

was looking for reinforcement for his own negative view and found more than was actually there, even though Herriot and Briand were willing to listen to alternatives to the Protocol.

The reparations settlement at the London Conference the previous summer (1924) had satisfied the new French government under Herriot to a large extent. The new plan put payments on a regular schedule and the amount of the payments were linked to the health of the German economy. Many Frenchmen looked east with fearful eyes nonetheless especially since the German economy was improving by late 1924. The French people viewed the prospect of a resurgent Germany with ill ease.⁴ This could not have lost on Herriot and Briand. And indeed we will shortly see the frightful reaction Herriot had upon hearing about the British rejection in March 1925.

Two days later (December 11), after meeting with Herriot and Briand, Chamberlain was in Rome for the League Council meeting where he had the opportunity to talk with one of the original architects of the Protocol, Edouard Benes. Benes was the Czech Foreign Minister as well as the delegate to the League from Czechoslovakia. He had an overriding concern for Czech security since his country was between two former aggressive powers, Germany and Russia. Benes had chaired one of the two committees which had been responsible for drafting the Protocol. His committee was responsible for developing the parts of the document which dealt with sanctions and collective security. He was considered to be somewhat of an expert in these matters because of his diplomatic efforts to ensure the security of his

⁴Sally Marks, The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1018-1933 (New York, 1976), 61-62.

country in the volatile atmosphere of Eastern Europe in the 1920s.⁵ Even so Benes seemed, at least according to Chamberlain, to be very understanding of Britain's position. Chamberlain reported that Benes "could understand that what suited a small Power placed in the conditions of Czechoslovakia might not be so equally suitable for a great Power in totally different conditions." Chamberlain said that Benes "described the haste with which he had been forced to act when asked to draw up a formula [for the Protocol], and the difficulty which he had found in reconciling the views of M. Herriot [who wanted collective security, mainly against possible German aggression] and Mr. MacDonald [who wanted peace through disarmament]."⁶ This conversation could easily have further convinced Chamberlain that the Protocol was neither practical nor the best possible instrument to deal with European security. Again though, how much was Chamberlain reading into Benes' words? Eastern Europe was later virtually left out of the Locarno Treaties, and Benes would continue to work for the security of Czechoslovakia. It is difficult to believe to some extent that he would have been so cavalier about the Protocol to Chamberlain. Perhaps he was simply giving in to a possible British rejection and trying to retain the friendship of Britain when the Protocol would no longer be a possible solution to Eastern European security problems.

A few days later (December 16) Chamberlain was back in London at a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defense. This meeting set the policy which His Majesty's Government would follow at least until the March

⁵F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations Vol. 1 (London, 1952), 271-272.

⁶P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10866/134/98, conversation between Eduard Benes and Austen Chamberlain, Rome, Dec. 11, 1924.

meeting of the League Council. Chamberlain had indeed gotten an extension for Britain from the Council so that discussion of the Protocol would be postponed until the March meeting. But even still the conclusion of the 192nd meeting of the C.I.D. stated that "the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs [Chamberlain] should consider the desirability of warning foreign nations that His Majesty's Government, while expediting to the utmost its examination of the Protocol in concert with the Dominions and India, may find it impossible to give their final answer on a question involving such momentous issues, at the meeting of the Council of the League arranged for March 1925."⁷ Were they simply stalling? I think not. The C.I.D. meetings were secret and minutes were not published, so to what audience would they have been playing? What I see here is a group of men coming to the realization that they were being called upon to make a decision for which they know they would not be ready. These men realized that Britain could never have accepted the Protocol, and in that sense they might have been deferring the inevitable - telling the world community that Britain wanted peace but not with the obligations of the Protocol. They seemed to genuinely fear the possibility of having to go to war, which they could ill afford; or to have to refuse this obligation and risk resentment from the other League members. What would be the alternative?

At the end of December 1924, Chamberlain received one more piece of evidence for support of the British position. His man in Bucharest, Sir Herbert Dering, reported a conversation which he had with the Rumanian Foreign Minister Duca. Dering was the second son of Sir Henry, the 9th Baronet of Dering. The younger Dering was educated at Eton and then joined

⁷P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 192nd meeting, conclusions, Dec. 16, 1924.

the Diplomatic Service in 1892. After serving in several overseas posts he joined the Foreign Office and served in Italy, Siam, and Bulgaria before being posted as ambassador to Rumania in 1920. Two years later he received the Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of Rumania after winning the trust and confidence of Rumania's leaders. Sir Herbert was well respected both at home and in his diplomatic post. Foreign Minister Duca confided to Dering, and Sir Herbert reported to Chamberlain, that "Roumania at present did not feel able to welcome the plan of disarmament owing to the ever-present threat of Soviet aggression in Bessarabia" Dering continued, "Monsieur Titulescu [League delegate and future Foreign Minister] ... urged [Duca] to sign [the Protocol] at once, but he had declined, preferring to wait and follow the lead of the Great Powers and ... particularly of Great Britain."⁸ Rumania was one of the new Eastern European countries with the most to lose by aggression from its neighbors, and yet the Foreign Minister was saying that he was not necessarily going to support the Protocol! Rumania had worked hard throughout the early 1920s to forge alliances. It was active in the League but apparently did not see it as sufficient. It had a treaty with Poland and it was a member of the Little Entente along with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. It would in 1926 also sign a pact with France. Pre-war diplomacy was alive and well in eastern Europe and I am sure that this was not lost on Chamberlain. Why would a Protocol be needed when alliances and pacts were seemingly doing the job? And if Rumania (and possibly Italy and Poland) was willing to follow Britain's lead this offered Chamberlain latitude to negotiate a replacement for the Protocol.

⁸P.R.O., F0371/11064/W123/9/98, letter, Sir H. Dering to Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 30, 1924.

On January 14, 1925, Chamberlain basically delivered the *coup de grâce* to the Protocol. He wrote in a Foreign Office memo: "It is evident that in face of the devastating criticism directed against the Geneva Protocol by both the Civil and Military departments [of the British government], His Majesty's Government will be obliged to refuse their signature." He outlined his reasons: "As long as Security is absent, Germany is tempted to prepare for the Revanche. 'The Day' will still be the national toast and with far more reason, whilst French fears, goading France to every kind of irritating folly, will keep alive German hatred and lead us inevitably, sooner or later, to a new catastrophe."⁹ Chamberlain had yet to hear Germany's plan for a Rhineland pact which would guarantee existing borders along the Rhine, and he seemed to be on the verge of suggesting a pact with France (and probably Belgium) to replace the Protocol.

The United States, The League, and Britain

Another area of the world with which the British wished to avoid conflict or misunderstandings was across the Atlantic. In many ways the United States and Britain were kindred spirits when it came to the European situation. The U.S. also wanted to rehabilitate Germany and bring it back to the society of nations as a fully industrialized trading partner. The volatile European political situation, especially the rift between France and Germany, worried U.S. policy makers. They also did not want another war, and beyond that the U.S. had a stake in European economic recovery – the outstanding loans from the Great War that had yet to be repaid by European countries. But the U.S. still desired to remain aloof from European controversies and only attempted to play an intermediary role when

⁹P.R.O., F0371/11064/W244/9/98, minute by Austen Chamberlain, Jan. 14, 1925.

appropriate, as in the Dawes Plan of 1924 for instance. The U.S. certainly had no desire to get involved in another European war nor did it want European states interfering with its trade or its other interests in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁰

The United States, as early as the Washington Naval Conference in 1922, objected to the idea that the League of Nations could implement sanctions against an aggressor and in the process interfere with U.S. commerce. This interference, the U.S. charged, could prevent them from doing business with a trading partner which also happened to be an aggressor state; or sanctions could actually be imposed against the U.S. itself.¹¹ The United States, of course, was not a member of the League and therefore would have been outside of any direct action taken by it, unless the U.S. attacked a League member. Thus the U.S. did not want to be affected by an institution in which they were not a member. In fact according to historian David Burks both Charles Evans Hughes and Frank B. Kellogg (U.S. Secretaries of State in the 1920s) regarded the Geneva Protocol as a "new Holy Alliance." The implication was that the Protocol represented an alliance of states which could try to impose their will on those states outside the League. Burks even claims that it is possible that the U.S. was the reason for the demise of the Protocol. Many American statesmen strenuously objected to the Protocol and, Burks contends, the British and the Commonwealth countries might have decided to reject it because of fear

¹⁰Melvyn P. Leffler, The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933 (Chapel Hill, 1979), 362-363, 114-115.

¹¹Paul Kennedy, The Realities Behind Diplomacy: Background Influences on British External Policy, 1865-1980 (London, 1981), 263.

of declining relations with the U.S.¹² These concerns certainly constituted part of the problem for Britain but will not serve as a complete explanation, as we will see.

The U.S. as a non-member of the League could be directly affected by League or Protocol actions only if it were an aggressor against a League member, or if it somehow supported such an aggressor. According to article 11 of the Covenant, the League worked as an alliance which would come to the assistance of a League member that had been attacked, but which would not interfere with non-members unless they threatened members of the alliance. For example if the U.S. attacked Panama, a League member, then the other League members would come to its aid. Burks says that in this latter respect, the U.S. worried about the Monroe Doctrine. Would the doctrine be ignored when an aggression occurred somewhere in the Western Hemisphere (even if it did not involve the U.S.)? Would intervention by League of Nations members occur in response to a call engendered by the Covenant? Furthermore, Burks says, U.S. leaders feared the nullification of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine which stated that the United States had the right and the duty to intervene to stop interference into the Western Hemisphere by states from Europe or elsewhere.¹³

British officials respected these U.S. attitudes and were well aware of the hatred of the League across the Atlantic? Sir Esme Howard, British ambassador to the United States and first Baron of Penrith, had served in many diplomatic posts including Switzerland and Spain and was an

¹² David D. Burks, "The United States and the Geneva Protocol of 1924: 'A New Holy Alliance?,'" American Historical Review, 64:4 (1959), 891.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 897-898.

experienced ambassador. He advised Chamberlain that he had "thought for a long time that the main reason why they are so nervous over here about the League of Nations and the Protocol is more on account of their fear that the League of Nations may drive a wedge between them and South America than for any other reason." Howard went on to point out that domestic politics also came into play, because the President did not want to alienate the Senate irreconcilables (those opposed to U. S. involvement in the League) thereby splitting the Republican party. British and U.S. relations had already been strained over the naval race which was settled at the 1922 Washington Conference by allowing parity between the two navies. London did not want further tension over the League.¹⁴

All of these U.S. fears and misgivings concerning the League were also not lost on the Conservative government which took office in the autumn of 1924. Austen Chamberlain and Stanley Baldwin viewed the situation differently than did the Americans, but nevertheless were aware of the problems over neutral rights which the Protocol could have exacerbated. The British were unconcerned about the Monroe Doctrine or the Roosevelt Corollary simply because the British had no intention of intervening in any situation which would have infringed upon U.S. interests. To be sure Canada, New Zealand and Australia were, along with the U.S., concerned about questions of domestic jurisdiction, such as immigration policies, but the Conservative government in England was mainly interested in not alienating the United States for several reasons. Apart from cultural ties British statesmen knew that the security of the Empire relied, at least to some

¹⁴ P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers - Austen Chamberlain), dispatch, Esme Howard to Chamberlain, Feb. 13, 1925; Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 259-263, 149.

extent, on the good will of the other major naval power in the 1920s, the U.S. They also knew that Europe relied on the U.S. for economic recovery in the wake of the war, either for loans or for debt settlement. Britain needed to sooth U.S. fears of the League, not exacerbate them with schemes such as the Protocol.¹⁵

Finally Britain and the other great powers in the League, according to Burks, "needed the passive friendship if not the active cooperation of the United States in solving disarmament and reparations problems. These powers would not have risked American disfavor by backing the League in the Western Hemisphere, because they had nothing to gain thereby." Burks points out that none of the Great Powers intervened in either the Tacna-Arica dispute in 1920 or the Panama-Costa Rica incident in 1921.¹⁶ So U.S. fear of at least some of the possible effects of the Geneva Protocol were probably unfounded, but this did not change the Conservative British government's stance that the Protocol was unacceptable in part because of U.S. misgivings.

Austen Chamberlain saw another good reason not to clash with the United States on the Protocol issue and thereby risk a rift between the two countries. He claimed in a letter to Sir Esme Howard, British ambassador to the U.S., that "we have to remember that when trade or financial interests are touched, [the] U.S. govt. has invariably shown itself to be insistent upon the pursuit of a purely national policy, without any regard to those larger interests or general principles of generous equity in the international

¹⁵ Burks, "United States and the Geneva Protocol," 900; F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-1939 (New York, 1967), 280.

¹⁶ Burks, "United States and the Geneva Protocol," 900.

sphere of which American orators are apt to claim almost a monopoly when only the interests of other countries are concerned."¹⁷ In other words the U.S. was practicing enlightened self-interest just as was Britain; and Chamberlain, and Britain, would prove it in 1925 when they signed Locarno and in the process ignored the broader security concerns of the rest of the world. Nevertheless the unmistakable impression which Chamberlain had gotten from his American 'cousins' across the Atlantic was one of American intransigence over economic matters, a message which Chamberlain certainly passed along to his colleagues in the Cabinet, the C.I.D. and in the Foreign Office.

Chamberlain further reported in his letter to Howard that American Congressional opinion was split over the Protocol, but most were leaning well away from accepting it or from looking upon it favorably if it were ratified by League members. As a matter of fact its passage would, Chamberlain wrote, "render more remote than ever American participation in the League." There were some, such as Senator William E. Borah (Republican from Idaho), who were interested in disarmament but not through the League. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes even claimed that he would not even send observers to the disarmament conference called for by the Protocol.¹⁸

Earlier (in November) Howard had reported to Chamberlain that Hughes advised him that the U.S. would attend a disarmament conference "provided it was clearly understood that they were in no way committed to the

¹⁷ P.R.O., F0371/10572/W11199/134/98, Austen Chamberlain to Esme Howard, Dec. 22, 1924.

¹⁸ P.R.O., F0800/256 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Esme Howard, Dec. 22, 1924.

provisions of the Protocol...." Hughes claimed, according to Howard, that getting the consent of the Senate for the Protocol would be impossible.¹⁹ Howard had plenty of ambassadorial experience (to Crete, Switzerland, Sweden and Spain) and was good at reading the "mood" of a country. In a lengthy dispatch to Chamberlain four days later (Nov. 28) he reported on the anti-League press in the U.S.: "This violent antagonism to the League and all its doings has indeed become almost an obsession with certain otherwise quite respectable ... papers, ... for instance, the 'Boston Transcript'." This antagonistic press had reported, Howard wrote to Chamberlain, that President Coolidge was hoping that the League would be discredited over the Protocol and he then could send out invitations to a disarmament conference hosted by the United States!²⁰

Sir Ronald Graham, British Ambassador to Italy, sent further news of this negative U.S. opinion of the Protocol in early December. The U.S. ambassador to Italy told Graham "that Mr. [Charles E.] Hughes views with considerable apprehension [the] possibility that [the] United States might be declared [an] aggressor to [the] League and the attempt might be made to enforce sanctions against them." Graham was very much an old style diplomat, having been in the Foreign Office since 1892 and very much interested in maintaining the Foreign Office dominance of diplomacy and in minimizing the role of the League.²¹

¹⁹P.R.O., F0371/10572/W10124/134/98, dispatch, Sir Esme Howard to Austen Chamberlain, Nov. 24, 1924.

²⁰P.R.O., F0414/254 (Confidential Print: America, North), dispatch, Sir Esme Howard to Austen Chamberlain, Nov. 28, 1924.

²¹P.R.O., CAB24/169 (Cabinet Papers), C.P 538(24), decipher, Sir R. Graham (Rome), to Stanley Baldwin and Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 9, 1924; L.G. Wickham Legg and E.T. Williams, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950 (London, 1959), 313-14.

So the U.S. represented a pressure on the Tory government to reject the Protocol over questions of debt, possible clashes over Latin America, and U.S. fear of interference over neutral rights. The Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin apparently saw their relationship with the United States as important enough to specify U.S. opposition as one of their reasons for rejection of the Protocol.

The new year (1925) began with an effort by the Foreign Office (possibly ordered by Chamberlain but we do not know) to ascertain the exact position of the United States toward the Protocol. This overture presents somewhat of a mystery. If, as we saw from the departmental objections and the concurrence by the C.I.D. by December 1924, that the Baldwin government had virtually decided not to accept the Protocol, at least as it stood; then why would it matter to the Baldwin government what the United States thought? Moreover we have already established that Britain assumed, from all signs, that the U.S. response to the Protocol would be negative anyway. Why then did the British Ambassador in Washington, Esme Howard, approach Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes in January? Hughes had been secretary since Harding took office in 1921 and himself was a moderate internationalist and supporter of the League and had worked after the war to get the U.S. to join. He was instrumental in getting the naval agreement which came out of the Washington Conference in 1922, and even supported U.S. adherence to the principles of the World Court. He was forced by his rivals in the U.S. Senate (the so-called 'Irreconcilables') and by isolationist public opinion in the U.S. to shun the League and the Protocol. Perhaps the Foreign Office feared that Hughes would begin leaning toward the League and the Protocol and they simply wanted to sound him out on the

subject. Or maybe Chamberlain, aware that the U.S. and Britain had similar goals in Europe (i.e. economic recovery, German rehabilitation, prevention of war, and aloofness if possible), wanted documented proof of U.S. dislike of the Protocol to use as ammunition against its supporters.²² We simply do not know for sure. Nevertheless the following conversation is an interesting one.

Ambassador Howard approached Hughes in early January with a proposition: "I asked him ... whether he [Hughes] thought it would tend to disarm criticism and hostility in his country to the Protocol and consequently to the League, if the various Governments of the British Empire ratified the Protocol with the express reservation that the Empire should not be bound to enforce any sanctions imposed by it until after consultation and agreement with the United States, so that we should not ... be compelled to a conflict with them." Howard reported that Hughes replied, "speaking privately, he thought this would have the desired affect [*sic*] but he added that it should not be done as if it were by agreement with the United States Government but entirely and absolutely on our own initiative." Hughes further warned that "any hint of such an agreement would at once raise a storm in the country and an agitation would be started against the Government on the grounds that it was secretly aiding and abetting the Protocol." In the end Hughes simply told Howard that in any case the U.S. would have to insist on maintaining its rights of neutrality, Protocol or no.²³ Isolationist sentiment was still strong in the U.S. and it was feared

²²Leffler, Elusive Quest, 362.

²³P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1174/134/98, conversation between Esme Howard and Charles E. Hughes (Washington), Jan. 5, 1925; Walters, History of the League of Nations, 284; United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (Washington, 1925), 18-19.

that the League might intervene in the Western Hemisphere. The Protocol only enhanced those fears, because it enhanced the League!²⁴ The Foreign Office (and Chamberlain) had its answer. The U.S. would not support the Protocol even with the guarantee of prior consultation. It is interesting to speculate though what Chamberlain would have done if Hughes had agreed to a prior consultation arrangement. Would Britain have then accepted the Protocol? It is doubtful. I think the purpose of this particular episode was to sound out the U.S., but surely the Foreign Office was certain what Hughes' answer would have been.

The United States apparently stood squarely in the British corner concerning the Protocol. Britain could use the U.S. as an "excuse" in rejecting it. As a matter of fact Chamberlain, as we shall see, claimed in his rejection speech to the League Council in March 1925 that U.S. opposition to the Protocol constituted one of the reasons for the British rejection.

The Dominions and the Protocol

In order for Britain to be fully justified in rejecting the Protocol it had to have the concurrence of its Dominions. The Dominions played a somewhat contradictory role in this process, because they had reasons to both accept and reject the Protocol. On the one hand some such as Australia and New Zealand, who worried about possible Japanese aggression, had legitimate security concerns with which the Protocol could help. On the other hand all of the Dominions (but especially Canada) feared alienation of the United States just as Britain did. Another problem arises in the nature of the Dominion rejections. Were they influenced in their opinion of the

²⁴Burks, "The United States and the Geneva Protocol", 897-898.

Protocol by the Baldwin government's active search for support? The Dominion League delegates seemed relatively satisfied with the Protocol during the drafting process in September 1924, but then by early 1925 the Dominion governments sent scathing notices to the Colonial Office denouncing it. Why this change of heart? And most importantly what relationship existed between Britain and its Dominions by 1924 which even called for consultation with them in the first place? Let us begin with the latter question.

By the 1920s the British government had been forced to create several "special colonies" called Dominions. These were self-governing and all were dominated (but not necessarily populated dominantly) by the descendents of white British settlers. These white colonists had pressured the British government to allow for more self-government in the "white" colonies. Certainly, these settlers reasoned, whites could govern themselves. The Dominions consisted of, by the 1920s, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ireland (except for Ulster, which remained a part of the United Kingdom).²⁵

These "special colonies" were recognized as different during the 19th century since they were dominated by whites, thus the British government gave them a different status - self-governing Dominions. Each of the Dominions had its own prime minister who was an elected official in the Dominion and thus responsible to the people of the Dominion. Each Dominion also had a governor-general, appointed by the Crown and responsible to the Crown. As we will see, the governor-general often became more of an

²⁵Ireland is actually a special case. Even though it was officially made a Dominion in 1919, Ireland, exclusive of Northern Ireland, never recognized itself as such. It finally became totally independent in the 1930's after repeatedly refusing to profess loyalty to the king of England.

advocate for the Dominion itself rather than a representative of Britain. The third type of official which appears in our story is a High Commissioner. This was the equivalent of an ambassador from the Dominion to Great Britain. Often these officials, since they were in Britain already, were appointed as delegates to the League of Nations, as with New Zealand's Sir James Allen and South Africa's Sir Edgar Walton.

A Dominion Office was created in mid-1925, recognizing the different status of the Dominions as opposed to other colonies. In 1926 at an Imperial Conference the Dominions received the right to conduct their own foreign policy independent of Britain. Prior to this British foreign policy was Dominion foreign policy. For instance when Britain declared war on Germany in 1914 the Empire was also at war with Germany. The Dominions and colonies as a whole responded with overwhelming military support. Then in 1931, in the Statute of Westminster, Parliament formally declared that no Parliamentary act would be binding on the Dominions. In effect they were virtually independent and all that remained was a loose tie with Britain which still exists today in all but Ireland and South Africa. (The former left the Commonwealth in the 1930's, the latter in the 1960s). The Queen is still the nominal head of state in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but she is not the head of government.

When the Great War ended the Dominions were represented as virtual independent states at the Paris Peace Conference; and when the League of Nations was created each of the Dominions was admitted as a charter member (including Ireland but not until 1923). Paradoxically though, the Dominions were listed in the Covenant under the heading British Empire - not fully sovereign in the eyes of the League but nevertheless members. As a

result of this new-found status the Dominion governments began to insist that they be treated the same as other League members, with the ability to make their own foreign policy.²⁶ Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs Eyre Crowe, however, was proclaiming as late as December 1924 on the question of the British response to the Protocol "that it is the British Empire, and not the United Kingdom or Great Britain, which is the Member of the League."²⁷ Crowe's bent for protecting Foreign Office prerogatives again surfaced, this time for the purpose of retaining the Foreign Office's position as foreign policy maker for the entire Empire. Less than a year later, however, Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain virtually gave away this Foreign Office right by stipulating in the Locarno Treaty, which replaced the Protocol, that no Dominion government was bound by the treaty unless its government formally approved.²⁸

In order to fill out the story though let us go back to early 1924, when the Labour government was considering the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the forerunner of the Protocol. The Cabinet decided that the Dominions had to be consulted before a decision was made to accept or reject. An interesting paradox had emerged. The Dominions were members of the League of Nations, but were also listed as members of the British Empire. So since the Draft Treaty was a League instrument, the British

²⁶Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.), CAB21/217 (Cabinet: Registered Files on Protocol), book, The Dominions and the Peace Conference by Clement Jones, registered Jan. 14, 1921 (citation is actually from the appendix of this book, in a note by L.C. Christie); F.S. Northedge, The League of Nations: Its Life And Times, 1920-1945 (Leicester, 1986), 46-47.

²⁷P.R.O., F0371/10571/W9788/134/98, draft memorandum on the Protocol by Eyre Crowe, Nov. 25, 1924.

²⁸Norman Hillmer, "The Foreign Office, the Dominions and the Diplomatic Unity of the Empire, 1925-29," Retreat From Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century. Vol. One, 1906-1939. David Dilks, ed. (London, 1981), 64.

Empire had to accept or reject as a whole, not as individual states. Moreover Britain was on the horns of a dilemma. It could not alienate the Dominions because it needed their help in defending the Empire, and because there had emerged a policy in the British government to rely on the Empire as a means of economic recovery for Britain, for markets and for sources of raw materials. Nationalist feelings were widespread in the Dominions and calls for more independence were frequent, and thus British leaders could not ignore this either.²⁹ The Committee of Imperial Defense (the advisory body to the Cabinet on defense matters) therefore proclaimed in April 1924 that "before any reply is sent to the League of Nations [concerning the Draft Treaty], the views of His Majesty's Government should be communicated to the Dominions ... who should be given an opportunity of expressing their views."³⁰ This policy of notification was the one which would also be followed when the Geneva Protocol was being considered. In the end the Dominions decided, along with Britain, to reject the Protocol.

There has been much debate about the role of the Dominions in the rejection of the Protocol. A.J.P. Taylor suggests that the Dominions decisively influenced British foreign policy throughout the 1920s by determining the British policies toward the U.S. and Japan. He claims that Canada refused to support any policy hostile to the U.S. and that Australia and New Zealand were distrustful of Japanese intentions in the Pacific. These, Taylor says, led to the Washington Naval Conference in 1921-22. And thus the Dominions also looked unfavorably on the League [and the Protocol]

²⁹W. David McIntyre, The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins And Impact, 1869-1971 (Minneapolis, 1977), 182, 196.

³⁰P.R.O., PR030/69/155 (MacDonald Papers), C.I.D. meeting 183 (April 3, 1924), no speaker identified; P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 192nd meeting, Lord Curzon, Dec. 16, 1924.

out of fear of conflicts with Japan and the U.S., Taylor maintains. He claims that in 1925, under the Tory government, "[Foreign Secretary Austen] Chamberlain ... rejected the Protocol - partly on the ground that the Dominions were against it."³¹ If we accept Taylor's assessment then the Dominions might have represented an important pressure on Britain to reject the Protocol, much the U.S. did.

Paul Kennedy maintains that the Dominions backed away from British policies which would bind them to certain courses of action or even involve them in another ruinous European war; Pierre Gerbet says that the Dominions were hesitant to take on specific obligations in the League; W.N. Medlicott asserts that Canada, Australia, and New Zealand feared submission of their alien immigration policies to arbitration under the Protocol [the Japanese were calling for the easing of immigration restrictions]; and finally P.A. Reynolds doubts that even if Labour had remained in office and had had a majority government [which of course they did not, since they ruled in a coalition with the Liberals] the Protocol would still not have passed "in the face of Dominion opposition."³² So these scholars agree with Taylor that the Dominions would have urged Britain to reject the Protocol.

The problem with these explanations is that they seem to be making the Dominions a significant cause for the rejection of the Protocol. It is true that Britain was looking to the Empire as a whole for solutions to

³¹A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (New York, 1965), 150, 221.

³²Kennedy, Realities Behind Diplomacy, 249; Pierre Gerbet, "Rise and Development," International Social Science Journal, 29(1), (France, 1977), 21; W.N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles 1919-1963 (London, 1968), 73; P.A. Reynolds, British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years (London, 1954), 34.

economic problems (markets and raw materials), but to maintain that the Dominions forced the rejection or were even the major cause is saying too much. Solutions to security problems on the continent, French demands for security, concerns about economic disruptions caused by the Protocol, fears of loss of prerogatives and control, all had their parts in the rejection. The Dominions played a part, and even a very important part, but not a decisive one. Moreover I question the direction of the pressure to reject in the first place. Were the Dominions pressuring Britain or vice versa?

Gwendolen Carter, in her book on the Dominions and international security in the inter war period, claims that if the British government had encouraged the Dominions they might have accepted the Protocol. "Further discussion and consideration of the Protocol and some encouragement from the British Government" she writes, "might well have brought the Dominions to accept it with only minor amendments." Their opposition was based on misunderstandings of the difficulties in applying sanctions, which would have been, she maintains, little different than under the League Covenant.³³ So the Dominion understanding of the Protocol was misinformed according to Carter, and the British government not surprisingly, did nothing to dispel that misinformation.

F.S. Northedge goes a step further than Ms. Carter, a step with which I would agree. He claims that "so far from encouraging the Dominions to take a more farsighted view [of the Protocol] ... the Baldwin Cabinet put the negative words into their mouths it wanted to hear."³⁴ As we will see Tory

³³Gwendolen M. Carter, The British Commonwealth and International Security: The Role of the Dominions, 1919-1939 (Toronto, 1947), 121-122, 312.

³⁴Northedge, Troubled Giant, 244.

Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin sent letters to the Dominion Prime Ministers outlining the problems with the Protocol. These letters could have easily served to prejudice the Dominion governments against the Protocol before they ever saw it. The reactions of the Dominion delegates to the League seemed to have been mixed about the Protocol during the drafting process in September 1924. Some expressed objections resembling those we have encountered from the Foreign Office or the Services, while others seemed satisfied with the prospects of the Protocol. Why did the Dominion governments advise Britain to reject the Protocol by early 1925? I maintain that the influence was in the opposite direction from that asserted by some scholars. The British government did not want the Protocol and encouraged the Dominions to reject it. As with the United States, Britain wanted another reason for rejection and indeed Chamberlain cited Dominion resistance to the Protocol in his rejection speech to the League Council. The Dominions did, however, dislike certain aspects of the Protocol which made them easily convinced.

The Dominions and the drafting of the Protocol

We have something of a paradox to deal with first. The Dominion League delegates did not seem hostile to the Protocol during the drafting process. Concerns were expressed but no evidence surfaced which would point to an eventual wholesale Dominion rejection as eventually occurred after the first of the year.

The delegates to the League of Nations from the Dominions met several times in Geneva during the month of September 1924 at the same time that the Geneva Protocol was being drafted by committees of the League Assembly. They met with the British Labour delegates to the League,

Arthur Henderson, Lord Parmoor, and Sir Cecil Hurst. All three of these important figures were actively involved in the drafting of the Protocol, and met regularly during the month with the Dominion delegates to keep them abreast of the progress of the drafting. These men believed in the principles of international cooperation for which the League stood. Henderson was an ardent socialist and believed in the application to international relations of its principles of cooperation and justice for all. Parmoor was, along with Lord Haldane, the Labour spokesman in the House of Lords and never in his long life lost the vision of a Christian world in which peace would reign. And Hurst was an international lawyer who served as a judge on the World Court and was even the Court's president in the mid 1930s.³⁵ It is possible that these three ideologues were convincing enough during the Empire delegate meetings to hold down much criticism while the Protocol was being drafted. That is not overly evident from the transcripts of the meetings however.

Certainly no consensus existed among the Empire delegates on the Protocol. Canada's Dandurand exhibited mild approval. New Zealand's James Allen expressed fears of being dragged into another war. There were opinions in between as well. (An Irish delegate was not present at the meetings for some unexplained reason.) The British Labour delegates were not bombarded, however, with hostility and warnings about Dominion sovereignty; and the explanations about the Protocol given by Henderson, Parmoor and Hurst seemed to have been accepted by and large by the

³⁵Michael R. Gordon, Conflict and Consensus In Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965 (Stanford, 1969), 13; Legg & Williams, eds., DNB, 1941-1950, 186-187; E.T. Williams & C.S. Nicholls, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1961-1970 (London, 1981), 551-552.

Dominion delegates. It could have been, however, that since neither the Dominion delegates nor the Dominion governments had seen the finished Protocol, true objections could not have been delivered until after the first of the year (1925) when copies of the Protocol were in the hands of the Dominion governments.

Raoul Dandurand represented Canada at the League that autumn of 1924. Dandurand was born in Montreal in 1861 and educated at Laval University in Quebec. He studied law and was elected to the Senate in 1898 as a member of the Canadian Liberal Party, serving in the MacKenzie King government as cabinet member without portfolio after the war. He was very active in the League of Nations, first as a delegate from Canada and then as President of the League Assembly beginning in 1925, while serving at home as Liberal Party representative in the Senate. Dandurand reflected the Canadian Liberal Party's attitude toward international cooperation, as we will later hear from Prime Minister Mackenzie King. The senator in one of the several Empire delegate meetings in September 1924, voiced his, and the Canadian Government's, approval of the idea of compulsory arbitration of international disputes as was embodied in the Protocol. He added "that Canada had long been in favor of compulsory arbitration," while cautioning that "the taking of common action to enforce acceptance [collective security] ... must have the consent of Parliaments."³⁶ Dandurand, at a later meeting that same month, even proclaimed that "he would not be afraid of the intervention of the League in favour of peace in a [domestic] matter on

³⁶Strictly speaking, these are not verbatim quotes, since there are only summaries of the meetings available, not minutes. P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8073/134/98, summary of Meeting of Empire delegates at Geneva, Raoul Dandurand, Sept. 20, 1924,

which one party felt itself to be vitally aggrieved."³⁷ Thus, the Canadian delegate to the League in September 1924 seemed to be offering support for at least some of the concepts contained in the Protocol. Senator Dandurand offered no serious criticisms of what was being drafted.

Sir Edgar Walton, the delegate from South Africa, refused to commit his government in advance to the preparatory work that was being done but offered no hint that the principles behind the Protocol were unacceptable. Sir Edgar was the High Commissioner in London (the equivalent of an ambassador) from South Africa. He was born in Ceylon, had been educated in England, but spent most of his life in South Africa working mainly as a journalist and publishing the Eastern Province Herald in Port Elizabeth. He served for a few years in the cabinet of that ardent imperialist, L.S. Jameson, whose unsuccessful raid into the Transvaal in 1895 helped to precipitate the Boer War. Believing in an international system which was controlled by the Great Powers Walton claimed that all of the details which were being worked out in the committees "should follow and not precede general agreements with all the Great Powers, including Germany and the United States."³⁸ Walton did not seem to regard the Protocol as unacceptable but only possibly a bit premature.

Australia And New Zealand offered the most detailed criticisms of the Protocol at these meetings of the Empire delegates, but even they could not be considered rejections. Sir Joseph Cook, Australia's High Commissioner in London, was very much a King and Empire man. He was a

³⁷Dandurand is referring here to the so-called Japanese Amendment to the Protocol which called for League intervention in immigration disputes, something most Empire delegates considered to lie within domestic, not international, jurisdiction; Ibid., Raoul Dandurand, Sept. 29, 1924.

³⁸Ibid., Sir Edgar Walton, Sept. 17, 1924, .

Liberal and was leery of the concept of collective security because it might too easily lead to a general war in which the Empire would carry the greatest burden.³⁹ He "expressed some doubt as to whether it could be safely assumed that all States would faithfully carry out their obligations and support us in a war...."⁴⁰ Obviously seeing the situation from the perspective of the Empire rather than just the Australian viewpoint, Cook was concerned, as were the British military services, that Britain would have to police the world alone.

Matthew Charlton, another Australian delegate, had a more national concern. Charlton was the leader of the Australian Labor Party and had very definite views concerning use of Australian troops abroad. He claimed that his party "would never agree that the [League] Council should have power to summon Australians to fight overseas without the consent of their own Parliament." Charlton was also concerned about Protocol Article 12 which seemed to give the Council the right "to compel a signatory state to give military and economic assistance." Lord Parmoor, as one of the drafters, reassured Charlton that the Council would only have the authority to recommend, and that the Protocol did not alter the Council's power under the League Covenant.⁴¹ Indeed all the Protocol says in Article 12 is that the Council would "communicate" its plans for military and economic assistance to the signatory states. If Japan and China, for instance, were at war and Japan was declared the aggressor, the League Council would

³⁹C.M.H. Clark, A History of Australia: Vol. VI 'The Old Dead Tree and the Young Tree Green' 1916-1935 (Victoria, 1987), 112.

⁴⁰P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8073/134/98, summary of Meeting of Empire delegates at Geneva, Sir Joseph Cook, Sept. 11, 1924.

⁴¹Ibid., Matthew Charlton, Sept. 21, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8516/134/98, summary of Meeting of Empire delegates at Geneva, Lord Parmoor, Sept. 27, 1924, .

"communicate" plans to League members which would outline their roles in enforcing sanctions on the aggressor. There is no mention in the Protocol about what would happen if a particular state refused to participate. Charlton brought up this question of Council authority in two separate meetings but offered no further objections after Parmoor's explanations. These objections nevertheless need clarification. In what way, one might wonder, could the League Council "compel" any state to offer the use of its army or navy? Would the League attack it or would it simply rely on the force of world opinion? It seems more reasonable to assume that the state would simply refuse to cooperate with the League. But then technically the state would be breaking an international treaty, the Protocol. That is not always done lightly by states. Thus most states would probably endeavor to fulfill their obligations out of dread of becoming international pariahs. Some of course have not felt compelled to fulfill obligations (Nazi Germany for instance) but these seem to be the exception and not the rule when it comes to the honoring of treaties. In this light maybe Charlton's objections are understandable.

Sir Lyttleton Groome was yet another Australian delegate to the League. Groome was Australia's Attorney-General and exhibited an interesting mixture of Australian patriotism and loyalty to the British Crown.⁴² Groome was primarily interested in four things concerning the Protocol: that the British government should remember that defense decisions concerning the British Navy affected the whole Empire; that Australia supported any measure designed to promote peace; that the League had no right to interfere in domestic situations [another slash at the

⁴²Clark, History of Australia, 296.

Japanese amendment concerning immigration]; and that the U.S. should be present at any disarmament conference which might result because of the Protocol. Groome expanded by saying that "any movement that will leave free Australia's financial resources [for development and production] and enable her to work out her destiny in a friendly relationship to the rest of the world, appeals to our people."⁴³ So Groome seemed prepared to accept the Protocol. The Japanese Amendment (allowing the League Council to investigate domestic problems) was eventually included, however, and it became increasingly clear that the U.S. would not attend the disarmament conference because of hostility to the League and the Protocol.⁴⁴ Still these might have been worked out through amendments to the Protocol if Britain had decided to accept the it.

New Zealand's delegate, Sir James Allen, had the harshest comments concerning the draft Protocol. Allen was born in Australia in 1855 and then later moved to New Zealand with his parents. He was educated at Cambridge, and then turned to the natural sciences, attending the Normal School of Science and the Royal School of Mines in South Kensington in England. Upon returning to New Zealand, he put this scientific knowledge to work in the New Zealand defense forces, eventually serving as Minister of Finance, Defense, and Education in the Reform Party government of W. F. Massey in 1912. It was by this same government that he was appointed as High

⁴³P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8073/134/98, summary of Meeting of Empire delegates at Geneva, Sir Lyttleton Groome, Sept. 11, 1924, and Sept. 18, 1924; P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8160/134/98, summary of Meeting of Empire delegates at Geneva, Sir Lyttleton Groome, Sept. 12, 1924.

⁴⁴The Japanese Amendment was included in Protocol Article 5, and only gave the Council or the Assembly the right to consider a domestic situation. This was apparently too much for the Dominions.

Commissioner in London for New Zealand and then as New Zealand's delegate to the League. Allen, with his experience as defense minister, was concerned about the use of the navy of New Zealand (having been instrumental in creating the New Zealand division of the Royal Navy). Allen pointed out that protection of land and sea communications during a dispute would, of course, involve the navy, and "that this inevitably involved New Zealand in naval action since, under New Zealand law, control of the New Zealand navy was handed over to the [British] Admiralty immediately on the outbreak of war, or if war was imminent." On another matter Allen was supported by New Zealand Prime Minister W.F. Massey in a telegram which instructed Allen to inform the British delegation that New Zealand would not "concur in any form of surrender of interpretation of British rights in maritime warfare to a court constituted of a majority of judges from foreign countries."⁴⁵ This statement actually represented more jealousy of the rights of New Zealand rather than British rights, since New Zealand's navy would be at the disposal of Britain, and maybe even the League! Which brings us to Allen's next point. Was the Protocol, Allen wondered, going beyond the League Covenant by allowing the Council to "communicate" plans for action rather than simply "recommend"? And would not these collective security plans possibly drive a wedge between New Zealand and the United States?⁴⁶ So it seems that New Zealand, as early as September 1924, was

⁴⁵Massey is referring here to the Optional Clause of the World Court, which would have to be accepted by all signatories of the Protocol. It allowed for any party to a dispute to bring the matter before the court for a ruling. P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8073/134/98, summary of Meeting of Empire delegates at Geneva, Sept. 20, 1924, James Allen, and Sept. 17, 1924, telegram from W.F. Massey.

⁴⁶Ibid., Sir James Allen, Sept. 17, 1924 and Sept. 20, 1924.

already making points about the Protocol which the British Military Services and the Foreign Office were also concerned about.

British delegate Arthur Henderson insisted that Britain and the Dominions would have complete control over military operations and the amount of cooperation which would be given to League endeavors. And he asserted that Britain and the Dominions would always be in a supportive role concerning the Covenant and thus would have no worries about being on the receiving end of an arbitration dispute in the World Court.⁴⁷ This of course was an opinion rather than a guarantee and might have influenced the Empire delegates to be less caustic in their final opinions of the Protocol. The series of Empire delegate meetings ended in late September with tacit agreement that the Protocol was acceptable to the Dominions, except possibly New Zealand or maybe Australia. But certainly none of the Dominion delegates counselled outright rejection of the Protocol. No one of course had seen the finished document and it would be difficult to prove decisively that at least some of the delegates would have accepted it then and there if they had seen it.

The Dominion responses to the Protocol

Why then did the Dominions advise Britain so strenuously to reject the Protocol by early 1925? Were they simply flexing their muscles of independence or had they been prejudiced against the Protocol by the Baldwin government? Possibly a little of both but I see British intransigence about the Protocol as being the decisive factor and not Dominion intransigence.

⁴⁷P.R.O., F0371/10570/W8208/134/98, summary of 6th Meeting of the 3rd League Assembly Committee, Arthur Henderson, Sept. 22, 1924.

The Committee of Imperial Defense, the advisory body to the Cabinet on defense matters made up of the Cabinet and other *ad hoc* members (such as representatives from the military services), met for the first time on December 4, 1924, to discuss the Protocol. From the tone of this meeting (which was discussed in an earlier chapter) it was apparent that the Conservative government had no intention of accepting the Protocol.⁴⁸ The C.I.D. decided in a meeting later that same month (December 16) that a copy of the Protocol should be sent to the Dominion governments in order to get their reactions, following the policy which was used with the Draft Treaty. As Leo Amery, Colonial Secretary in the new Conservative government, would later remind his colleagues on the C.I.D.: "We have something more difficult than the American Senate to contend with, we have a group of independent nations, and it is only by getting them round the table that we can deal with our problems."⁴⁹ Thus it was decided that an Imperial Conference would be called for early March of the following year (1925) so that the Empire could present a unified policy to the League Council in mid-March.

In late December of 1924 and then again in January 1925, the new Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, sent telegrams to the Dominion governors-general (the royal representatives in the Dominions) and to the prime ministers which outlined his ideas on the Protocol. Baldwin ordinarily left the conduct of foreign policy to Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain and the Foreign Office, but he apparently felt strongly enough

⁴⁸Dick Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s (London, 1989), 30.

⁴⁹P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 196th Meeting, Leo Amery, Feb. 19, 1925.

about the Protocol to draft these telegrams (or have them drafted) and sent to the Dominions. Whether he wrote them himself or had someone else (Chamberlain for instance) do it, he obviously thought that the Prime Minister's signature would carry the weight of the British government behind it and persuade the Dominion officials of the seriousness of the situation. In December 1924 he cautioned the governors-general that the Protocol involved the possible submission of vital interests to compulsory arbitration, drastic sanctions, and a possible rift with the United States. He then cautioned them that neither France nor Belgium considered the Protocol as an adequate defense against German aggression. Each would be asking for further guarantees which would make a European war, Baldwin hinted, more likely [something the Dominions dreaded]. Then in January 1925, Baldwin sent telegrams to the Dominion prime ministers warning that Britain and the Empire had "to make certain that we do not involve ourselves in obligations and commitments of a vague and undefined character or of such an extent as to increase rather than limit the possibility of our being drawn into conflicts which do not really concern us."⁵⁰

Did Baldwin prejudice the Dominions concerning the Protocol from the beginning? Messages began arriving shortly after the first of the year from the Dominion governments stating that a March meeting would be impossible. The time frame would not allow adequate review time for the Dominion governments. This did not stop the Dominion governments, however, from relaying their opinions of the Protocol to the Baldwin government.

⁵⁰Northedge, *Troubled Giant*, 242; P.R.O., F0371/11066/W5873/9/98, Stanley Baldwin to Dominion Prime Ministers, Dec. 19, 1924; P.R.O., CAB24/172 (Cabinet Papers), C.P.134(25), draft telegram, Stanley Baldwin to Dominion Prime Ministers (undated, but probably Jan. 1925).

The tone of all of these opinions was mostly negative toward the Protocol. Either upon closer examination of the Protocol or upon hearing the Baldwin government's attitude toward it, the Dominion governments had decided not to support the Covenant reform. These negative attitudes reinforced the Baldwin government's resolve to not accept the Protocol. The government was now able to say that the Dominions were also against the League instrument.⁵¹ We must, however, not overlook the fact that the Dominions did have very real objections to the Geneva Protocol; and I contend only that Britain convinced the Dominions and contributed to their rejection of it, not the reverse. In other words with or without Dominion opposition Britain could have accepted the Protocol if it had wished to do so. Dominion resistance was, at least to some extent, manufactured by the Baldwin government and was not the key to the rejection for Britain as some scholars have suggested.

So the role which the Dominions played in the drama might have been that of the chorus, echoing the sentiments of the actors and maybe even urging them on but not as actors themselves in the drama. This contrasts with the very interesting position that the Dominions were beginning to take in the 1920s concerning their independence. Did the Dominions finally decide to reject the Protocol because of their desire for independence from British foreign policy (and the possibility of being once again dragged into a European war), or did they reject it because they were becoming "mini-Britains" with insular policies of their own? Or were they simply still following in Britain's footsteps on foreign policy decisions? In any event their rejection of the Protocol presents a strange paradox concerning their

⁵¹Northedge, Troubled Giant, 243.

desires for independence in foreign policy matters. Let us examine their responses and then make a judgment.

The head of state of the Dominions was the Crown, represented in the dominion itself by a governor-general. In time the popularly elected prime ministers of the various Dominion governments gained more authority at the expense of the governors-general. In the 1920s this relationship was still in a state of transition but the Crown's representatives still acted in an advisory capacity, keeping the British government apprised of doings in the Dominions and also keeping the Crown current on opinions of the Dominion governments.⁵² The governors-general frequently acted as advocates for the Dominions themselves in a sort of an 'amphibious' capacity. They could be advocates of both Britain and Canada at the same time for example.

It was in this latter capacity that Baron Julian Byng, Governor-General of Canada, sent his opinions to the Colonial Office in early 1925. Byng was an old horse soldier who had been given command of the Canadian Corps during the Great War. He was born in England (at Barnet in North London) and was educated at Eton before joining the militia. He worked his way up through the cavalry, seeing action in the Sudan, in South Africa during the Boer War, as well as in the Great War. He was made a baron in 1917 for his service in the war. In 1921 he was appointed Governor-General of Canada by the Crown because he had gained the admiration of Canadians while in command of the Canadian Corps during the war. He was well-liked

⁵²McIntyre, Commonwealth of Nations, 49-51.

in the Dominion, becoming almost a native and preaching the need for unity in Canada.⁵³

Byng was speaking for Canada, England and the Empire when he asserted to the Colonial Office in 1925 that "... we do not consider it in the interest of Canada, or the British Empire or of the League itself to recommend to Parliament adherence to the protocol..." His specific complaints included the "rigid provisions for application of economic and military sanctions"; and "the effect of nonparticipation of the United States upon attempt[s] to enforce sanctions". The apparent coercive aspects of the Protocol seemed to particularly bother him. He wrote that Protocol articles 10 and 11 (providing for an automatic response to an aggressor and seemingly giving the Council the power of determining how each member state should respond), "while not actually converting the League into a super-State, would tend to deflect that organisation from being a powerful moral agency for the moulding of the world's opinion in the direction of peaceful and healthy international relations to being an organisation for the imposition of pains and penalties."⁵⁴ Byng wanted to protect imperial sovereignty, not simply British sovereignty. This attitude viewed the Protocol as possibly infringing upon Imperial, not just British, sovereignty. The British Empire should take care of its own affairs, and the League should only serve as a place to debate world problems. Arthur Balfour made this same basic point about the League.

⁵³L.O. Wickham Legg, The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-1940 (London, 1949), 132-136.

⁵⁴P.R.O., F0371/11065/W1860/9/98, dispatch, Governor-General Byng to Colonial Office, March 4, 1925.

Byng claimed that Canada would continue to support the League, would support a disarmament conference without prior acceptance of the Protocol, and would continue to support arbitration of disputes through the World Court with certain reservations. Canadian Prime Minister MacKenzie King supported Byng on this last point. Byng did, however, criticize Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain for claiming to speak for the entire Empire at the December meeting of the League Council when Chamberlain said that the Dominions did not accept the Protocol. Byng suggested that the Foreign Secretary "might state he has been authorised by [the] Dominions concerned to make this statement on their behalf."⁵⁵ Interestingly enough a representative of the Crown was asserting Dominion independence, presumably because he identified so much with the Canadians and considered himself their advocate.

Both Byng and MacKenzie King advised against acceptance of the Protocol. Collective security seemed unnecessary in Canada's position. (As Senator Dandurand later explained it: "we live in a fire-proof house, far from inflammable materials."); arbitration of disputes and disarmament were both worthwhile, but the Protocol was unnecessary for either to be successful. Moreover anything which might cause estrangement from the United States was unacceptable.⁵⁶

New Zealand's Prime Minister, William Massey, objected to the Protocol for many of the same reasons, except that he supported the

⁵⁵Ibid.; P.R.O., F0371/11065/W1990/9/98, Governor-General Byng to Colonial Office, March 8, 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2698/9/98, Canadian Prime Minister MacKenzie King to League of Nations, March 10, 1925.

⁵⁶Walters, History of the League of Nations, 276; Richard Veatch, Canada and the League of Nations (Buffalo, 1975), 71.

negative British position on arbitration of disputes in the World Court. His greatest concern in this case was immigration policy. Massey headed the Reform Party in New Zealand and his main interest was freehold tenure. In the 1870s, when he came to New Zealand from his birthplace in Northern Ireland, he took up farming and became active in local politics. This intimate involvement with the soil certainly had something to do with his desire to protect the limited land of New Zealand for the white settlers. He wrote to the Colonial Office in January 1925: "No foreigner may come to New Zealand to reside without having first made written application from his country of origin." He feared that if the Protocol were accepted the World Court, "consisting mainly of foreigners, might hold that the New Zealand law is contrary to the comity of nations and that the New Zealand system is not a question of merely domestic jurisdiction." The Governor-General of New Zealand, Lord Jellicoe (the British commander at the Battle of Jutland), agreed with Massey on these points about the World Court but more from a British perspective of protection of sovereignty rather than any fear of immigration.⁵⁷ Massey's fear came from the so-called Japanese Amendment (Protocol Article 5, final paragraph) which requested that the Council at least consider a situation which might be deemed a domestic one. The amendment was rather innocuous but of course could have been used by the Japanese to cause problems for New Zealand or Australian immigration policies.

Beyond problems with immigration the League of Nations was not particularly popular in New Zealand anyway. The Labour Party hated the

⁵⁷P.R.O., F0371/11064/W993/9/98, William Massey to Colonial Office, Jan. 6, 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11064/W335/9/98, telegram, Lord Jellicoe (probably to Colonial Office, but does not specify), Jan. 9, 1925.

League because they viewed it as little more than a society of victor nations seeking to maintain their world status. Massey himself claimed that "the League is utterly useless and our expenditure in relation to it is wasted." There was also the widespread awareness in all political parties that New Zealand's fate was tied closely with that of Britain, meaning that if Britain went to war so would New Zealand. Joined with the fear of domestic interference by the World Court, all of these attitudes made acceptance of the Protocol unlikely.⁵⁸ Still, interestingly enough, a more favorable attitude by Britain toward the Protocol might have swayed the government of New Zealand, since many of its fears were based on conjecture, some of which might have been planted by Baldwin himself the previous December. New Zealand looked to Britain for leadership and Massey admitted himself that the "New Zealand Government must be largely guided by [the] British Government in [its] final decision [concerning the Protocol]...."⁵⁹

The Governor-General of Australia, Lord Forster, was a King and Empire man. He was a native Englishman but spent many years in Australia. In a speech in 1923 this attitude showed through. He referred to "the purifying power of sacrifice" demonstrated by those who were prepared to lay down their lives for King and Empire.⁶⁰ In the matter of the Protocol, he wanted the decision to accept or reject it to be an Empire one. He cautioned that "it is of the utmost importance to us that no action shall be taken by the

⁵⁸Kathryn Peters, "New Zealand's Attitudes to the Reform of the League of Nations: The Background of the Memorandum to the Secretary-General, 16 July, 1936," New Zealand Journal of History, 6/1 (1972), 81-84.

⁵⁹P.R.O., F0371/11064/W408/9/98, summary of Commonwealth Views, William Massey, Jan. 15, 1925.

⁶⁰Clark, History of Australia, 204

British Government unless we [in Australia] have been fully consulted and that such action when taken shall represent the considered opinion of the whole Empire." Beyond that, in a dispatch to the Colonial Office, he warned of possible problems with the Protocol concerning the Japanese Amendment (since Australians felt the same way New Zealanders did about immigration), the difficulties in determining an aggressor, and the fact that the Protocol's imperious nature would keep other states (especially the United States!) from joining the League. He concluded that "the protocol contains principles and provisions which do not at present appear to be applicable to the present situation of international life."⁶¹

The Prime Minister of Australia, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, basically agreed with Forster on the Protocol. Bruce was a native-born Australian but had been educated in England at Cambridge. Upon returning to the Dominion Bruce became involved in the clothing business and in politics as a conservative. He was more concerned than Forster about immigration and the effect the Protocol would have on Australia's relations with the U.S., presumably for business reasons. He, however, was also concerned enough about security not to dismiss the Protocol out of hand. He maintained "that it would be most unwise to reject [the] Protocol except for some cogent reasons or without endeavoring to formulate some positive alternative policy...."⁶² Bruce apparently saw the value of a collective security arrangement to counter possible Japanese aggression.

⁶¹P.R.O., F0371/11065/W1860/9/98, dispatch, Lord Forster to Colonial Office, March 5, 1925.

⁶²P.R.O., F0371/11064/W408/9/98, summary of Commonwealth Views, S.M. Bruce, Jan. 15, 1925.

A further problem in Australia was that public opinion was running counter to the Protocol, not necessarily because of entangling alliances or loss of military control (concerns which were voiced by government leaders). The public in Australia was apparently fearful that the Dominion would be left to its own devices in defense against Japanese aggression, which of course was one of Prime Minister Bruce's major concerns. This public fear stemmed from suspicion that the British Labour Party was not concerned about defending the Empire and that Labour's only reason for wanting the Protocol was for disarmament purposes. (This was basically true since Labour only accepted collective security to satisfy French fears of Germany.) There was also public sentiment against a Socialist party taking the reigns of government in England. For evidence of this public resentment we can look at a series of articles in Australian newspapers in late 1923, when it appeared that Labour might take over the government in England. The Sydney Sun complained that "because the Labour party in England does not believe in the need for defence and is convinced that the Empire has no enemies, its policy does not regard the needs and legitimate apprehensions of the undefended Dominions. In other words, British Labour is anti-Dominion." The Sydney Daily Telegraph claimed that the Dominions "are concerned at the bad example that will be set if a Socialist Government, against the will of the people, as expressed in a General Election, is invited to take office in the Mother of Parliaments in order to satisfy an ancient party grudge." [An obvious reference to the deal struck between the Liberals and Labour against the Conservatives over free trade in 1923, allowing Labour to take the Government rather than the Conservatives.] And finally, the Sydney Herald warned that "[t]here is no

difference, except a tactical one, between the Communist and the Labour-Socialist. The latter repudiates revolution, but seeks the same changes by other means."⁶³ Thus Australians wanted the security the Protocol might have provided but mistrusted it as a socialist tool instituted by the British Labour Party, an attitude which the Baldwin government could have dispelled had it been so inclined.

Probably the strongest reaction to the Protocol came from South Africa, possibly because of all of the Dominions in the 1920s it was having the most internal problems. There were tensions between Afrikaner and British as well as between black and white. While there were many British imperialists in the Dominion who valued the British connection, there were at least as many Afrikaners who wanted independence from Britain.⁶⁴ The Governor-General of South Africa, the Earl of Athlone, worked hard to unify the Dominion with some success (succeeding symbolically, for instance, in keeping the Union Jack as part of the flag of South Africa). Athlone was related to the British royal family by marriage. His aunt was Queen Mary, wife of George V (r. 1910-36). He attended Eton and joined the military shortly thereafter. He was thus a stolid Britisher and believed strongly in British superiority and sovereignty. "By accepting the protocol" he warned, "the character of the League will be so modified that no nation being a member of it subject to the provisions of the protocol can rightly be said any longer to retain its full measure of sovereign rights."⁶⁵

⁶³P.R.O., CAB21/289 (Registered Files on Protocol), telegram, Lord Forster to Leo Amery, Colonial Sec., Dec. 9, 1924; P.R.O., PR030/69/196 (MacDonald Papers), newspaper clippings (undated but accompanied by a letter dated Dec. 20, 1923).

⁶⁴McIntyre, Commonwealth of Nations, 47-48.

⁶⁵P.R.O., F0371/11064/W927/9/98, Lord Athlone to Colonial Office, Jan. 26, 1925.

Also seeking to keep South Africa out of overseas entanglements, Athlone cautioned "that no international obligations should be entered into which may entail a participation and interference by the union [of South Africa] in matters which do not, or only remotely, concern her and whereby her real and proper interests may eventually be jeopardised." He continued by predicting that "[i]t is quite impossible even approximately to calculate or tell in advance what are going to be the obligations and consequences direct and indirect which may accrue from an acceptance of the protocol, or what may be the many and various international complications to which it may give rise...." Coupled with these problems Athlone also feared that peace was not possible in any case, Protocol or not, as long as Germany, Russia, and the U.S. remained outside the League since the Protocol would probably make their joining more remote.⁶⁶

The Prime Minister of South Africa, J.B.M. Hertzog, had stronger sentiments. Hertzog was a highly nationalistic Afrikaner who wanted the ties with Britain minimized if not severed. He protested against the manner in which the British Government had handled the Protocol affair and saw in it reason to criticize the whole Dominion system. He wrote that Britain should remember in negotiations with foreign powers the fundamental principle which was becoming more and more evident in the 1920s, "that every member of the Commonwealth by itself constitutes a distinct National entity with equal Status."⁶⁷ Thus neither Athlone nor Hertzog, for different reasons, were willing to accept the Protocol.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷P.R.O., CAB24/172 (Cabinet Papers), C.P. 109 (25), minute no. 63 by J.M.B. Hertzog, Jan. 1925; McIntyre, Commonwealth of Nations, 188, 190.

The Irish Free State refused acceptance of the Protocol as well but in a rather terse and informal manner. Interestingly enough Ireland did not even respond to the Colonial Office concerning the Protocol until after Foreign Secretary Chamberlain had delivered his rejection speech to the League Council in mid-March 1925, perhaps reflecting Ireland's habit of not cooperating with British policy. In May 1925, the Dail (the lower house of the Irish parliament), through its Minister for External Affairs, transmitted a memo to the British Colonial Office: "The Irish Free State, because of its geographical position, because its armed forces have been reduced to the minimum requisite for the maintenance of internal order, and because of its Constitution which provides that, except in case of invasion, it can only be committed to participation in war with the consent of the Oireachtas [the Irish parliament], cannot be regarded as a material factor in the enforcement of sanctions." The other Irish concern, also reflected in this dispatch, was that the Protocol excluded "any disputes which may arise regarding existing territorial divisions...."⁶⁸ By definition the Protocol was designed to protect existing borders and also excluded the League as much as possible from domestic situations. This, in the eyes of the Irish, prevented further talk of joining Northern Ireland to the South.

All five of the Dominions had had their say. For various reasons each had rejected the Protocol. Canada did not want to jeopardize relations with the U.S. over the imposition of sanctions; Australia and New Zealand feared Japanese immigration and the possibility of interference in their domestic affairs over this issue; South Africa, more concerned about internal

⁶⁸P.R.O., F0371/11066/W6390/9/98, Minister for External Affairs, Irish Free State, in Dail, transmitted to the Colonial Office, May 13, 1925.

problems, did not want overseas entanglements; and the Irish felt that the Protocol would hinder Ireland in its main goal, joining the North with the South. All of the Dominions feared becoming involved in another ruinous European war. Each viewed security as already being provided by their membership in the Empire and thus a strengthening of the League was unnecessary.

How then shall we deal with the Dominions' desire for more independence in light of the Protocol episode? Were they asserting their independence or were they simply following the British lead? Probably both. The 1920s was a period of transition for the Dominions. They gained status as League members in 1919 and obtained the right to determine their own foreign policy by 1926. The British Foreign Office and the Colonial Office had determined policy for the Dominions up until this point. I think what we see over the Protocol is the Dominions following the British lead while at the same time attempting to make policy for themselves by rejecting a document which was obviously born out of European rivalries. In some cases the Dominion responses sounded like the British policy of protecting sovereignty (their own) while at other times they sound a note of Empire unity. Of course we must keep in mind that we heard from individuals in this chapter. Some identified with Britain (the governors-general, for instance); some identified mainly with the Dominion itself; and some saw themselves as Empire men and viewed the Commonwealth as a unit. It is this mix of personalities which caused the varying responses from the Dominions. The Dominions rejected the Protocol but each one (and each individual) for its own reasons. But in addition the Dominions were taking the opportunity offered to them by the Baldwin government to assert their sovereignty by

rejecting a League instrument which they saw as impinging upon their actions as sovereign states. It was a fortunate addendum that it happened to be in harmony with the British position.

Can we make any general statement about the role of the Dominions in the Protocol episode, keeping in mind our overall question of why Britain rejected League Covenant reform? Must we ask first why the Dominions rejected the Protocol in order to understand why Britain rejected it? The second question only makes sense, in the context of our overall question, if we assume that the Dominions in some way influenced Britain's decision. In January 1925, Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain claimed that the British government was "examining [the Protocol] to see whether we could propose amendments which would render it acceptable to the Governments of the Empire."⁶⁹ His implication was that Britain might accept it if the Dominions accepted it. Then in March of 1925, the Cabinet finally agreed to reject the Protocol with the following statement: "...the Cabinet agreed ... to accept the view of the Committee of Imperial Defence, which is confirmed by the reports so far received from the Dominions ... that the Geneva Protocol is open to grave objection and cannot be accepted."⁷⁰ This statement strongly suggests that the Cabinet was using the Dominion objections to bolster the final decision on the Protocol. So it would seem that the British government used Dominion concerns to help justify their own rejection of the Protocol. Evidence presented in earlier chapters demonstrates that as early as December 1924 (and maybe even November)

⁶⁹P.R.O., F0371/11064/W123/9/98, letter from Austen Chamberlain to Marquess of Crewe (British Ambassador to France), Jan. 6, 1925.

⁷⁰P.R.O., CAB23/49 (Cabinet Conclusions), 12 (25)1, March 2, 1925.

Chamberlain and Prime Minister Baldwin had already made up their minds that the Protocol was unacceptable. Baldwin sent messages (or had them sent) to the Dominions in December and again in January 1925 outlining the British government's problems with the Protocol. Objections, some strong and some mild, poured in from the Dominion governments in early 1925, and the Protocol was rejected in March 1925 by the Cabinet.

So the role which the Dominions played was that of booster for an already determined British policy. It would be obviously counterfactual to claim that the Dominions would have accepted the Protocol if Britain had done so, but some evidence exists which would suggest that at least the governors-general might have gone along with whatever the British government had decided. It is also possible that with certain amendments (possibly over immigration or strict application of sanctions) the prime ministers might have come around as well. The Conservative government however did not want the Protocol and they made sure the Dominions did not either. In other words the Dominions were easily convinced that the Protocol might cause problems for the Empire and each individual Dominion. I do not accept Chamberlain's contention in his speech to the League Council in March that Dominion opposition was a significant factor in the British rejection. Amendment of the Protocol (i.e. removal of the Japanese Amendment, easing of Council control over military actions, or alteration of the rules for arbitration of disputes) might have satisfied many Dominion complaints. No amount of amendment I am convinced would have made the Protocol acceptable to Britain. The League worked just fine as it was for British tastes.

So in late 1924 and early 1925, the Baldwin government attempted to find support which would aide in its eventual rejection of the Protocol. By the end of January 1925, a replacement had not been found but it seemed evident that the Protocol would be rejected. Chamberlain had found what he considered proof among leaders of the Continental states (including France!) that the Protocol did not have the strong support that he had imagined. The United States, in the person of Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, had assured Britain that it would not support the Protocol under any circumstances. And the Dominions had begun to demonstrate their dislike of the League instrument, probably prompted by British overtures. Chamberlain was convinced that the Protocol was dead, but he did not know yet what the replacement would be. Nevertheless the public rejection of the Protocol had to be engineered and the speech to the League Council in March 1925 had to be hammered out.

CHAPTER 6

FROM THE PROTOCOL TO LOCARNO

Introduction

It was evident by mid-December 1924 that the Baldwin government would not accept the Geneva Protocol even though it had not made that fact public and had not even made it known through diplomatic channels to other governments. Chamberlain and other Cabinet ministers knew that something still had to be done to deal with the volatile situation on the Continent, but the only prospect was a treaty of guarantee to France and Belgium, a choice which only the Francophile Chamberlain seriously entertained. If the Protocol was not acceptable, then what would be? First the Cabinet and its advisory body, the Committee of Imperial Defense, had to dispense with the Protocol and then look around for a suitable alternative.

The final decision to reject the Protocol lay with the Conservative Cabinet of Stanley Baldwin. The Cabinet made that decision on March 2, 1925, but not before much time was spent in discussing the pros, but especially the cons, of the Protocol. Most of the discussion of the document at the Cabinet level was done in the Committee of Imperial Defense in a series of meetings between December 1924 and mid-February 1925. We have already examined these meetings through mid-December 1924, finding in the process that the C.I.D. had virtually decided to reject the Protocol. All of the Cabinet members sat on the C.I.D., plus any *ad hoc* members whose special expertise were needed (for example, representatives of the military services or the diplomatic corps).

All of the objections to the League instrument which we have examined in previous chapters did not fall on deaf ears in the institution which would make the final decision concerning the fate of the Protocol. Many of the people whom we have already encountered, including Austen Chamberlain, were in the new Tory Cabinet in November 1924. In fact Chamberlain was the linchpin in the whole rejection process. He was Foreign Secretary, which made him the head of the Foreign Office; he was on the Committee of Imperial Defense; and he was in the Cabinet, as are all Foreign Secretaries. He was well placed to influence (and to be influenced by!) a wide variety of people.

It should not surprise us that the Cabinet rejected the Geneva Protocol since virtually all of the responses from the Whitehall bureaucracy, the Dominions, and influential allies (such as the U.S.) had been so negative. So do we simply conclude that the Cabinet members listened to all of the objections and decided that the Protocol was not appropriate for Britain. There of course is a measure of truth in this statement but it oversimplifies the process. The Cabinet not only rejected the Protocol, it discussed possible alternatives to it. The Cabinet could not simply give a terse "no" to the League Council, it had to find the best way to present its case. It also had to find an alternative with which the Conservative government could live.

Some scholars have attempted to explain the Protocol's demise only at the Cabinet level. Historian David Burks credits the Americans with the Cabinet rejection. He wrote: "Had the Americans not opposed the Protocol ... this would have forced the Baldwin cabinet to consider more seriously amendment instead of rejection." He postulates that "British distrust of the

League and American isolationism were walking hand in hand." He never tells us the exact nature of this "distrust" nor does he take into account the serious objections by the Whitehall bureaucracy. Dick Richardson claims that Cabinet skepticism about disarmament and lack of faith in the League were the culprits. Moreover some cabinet members, he wrote, "were out-and-out Imperialists who cared little for internationalism; and there was a residual die-hard element which generally favored a quasi-isolationist foreign policy." And Richardson claims that Baldwin himself "never wholeheartedly believed in the League as an effective force in world politics and held that disarmament was visionary."¹

First of all the Cabinet certainly did not act alone in the rejection of the Protocol since in previous chapters we have already heard objections from several departments of the government. Secondly Stanley Baldwin's support or non-support of the League really mattered little in the end. As we saw in the previous chapter he did indeed write letters to the Dominions outlining the negative aspects of the Protocol, but this was an unusual act for a prime minister who otherwise took no part in foreign policy matters. Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain was the active member of the Cabinet in the Protocol affair. Baldwin cared little about foreign policy. When Sir Robert Cecil, who was in charge of League of Nation's affairs in the new Conservative Cabinet, asked Baldwin to become more active in foreign affairs, Baldwin claimed that he feared becoming too involved lest he interfere too much as Lloyd George had done. Baldwin, in 1926, expressed

¹David Burks, "The United States and the Geneva Protocol of 1924: 'A New Holy Alliance?'" American Historical Review, 64:4 (1959), 905; Dick Richardson, The Evolution of British Disarmament Policy in the 1920s (London, 1989), 20.

gratitude to Chamberlain for having taken the burden from him over foreign affairs. The Prime Minister proclaimed: "It has been a great comfort throughout this year to feel that I never need worry about foreign affairs and to feel perfect confidence in the judgement and wisdom of the Foreign Secretary, and for all this I am grateful." Chamberlain echoed these sentiments only from his own point of view. The Prime Minister, Chamberlain asserted, "leaves me to go my own way, assume my own policy and face my own difficulties." Chamberlain mildly complained, though, that "on the whole it works well though sometimes I wish he showed a little more interest and gave more active support."²

Thus even though the Prime Minister and the Cabinet played a role in the rejection they did not do so in a vacuum. Nor was this role decisive in the sense of being a sufficient cause. The Cabinet made the decision for rejection because the British political system requires that. The C.I.D., as we have seen, had in effect already rejected the Protocol by December after hearing departmental objections. The C.I.D. and the Cabinet gave as much time to the Protocol as they did because of the intense negative reaction by the government departments and because the Protocol could not simply be rejected out of hand. Some kind of replacement had to be found to help settle the volatile Franco-German rivalry.

Toward official rejection

By the December 16th meeting of the C.I.D. Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain was already beginning to lean toward (if he had not already made up his mind for) a Western European solution to security problems rather than a more general solution such as the Protocol. He warned his

²Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin: A Biography (London, 1969), 345, 342-43.

colleagues that outright rejection of the League document would be an "absolute disaster." He also cautioned however that if Britain went ahead and simply signed the Protocol that would not be the solution either. He used Belgium as an example [though France could have been substituted]. Even if the Protocol were ratified, Chamberlain claimed, Belgium "would be on our doorstep the next day asking for a supplementary pact of some kind which linked France, Belgium and ourselves. It is that to which she really attaches importance. She values it" Chamberlain concluded, "infinitely more than the Protocol...." Chamberlain also pointed out that the Protocol would involve Britain in Eastern Europe while security in Western Europe was its main concern.³

There was general agreement in this final C.I.D. meeting of 1924 that Chamberlain was correct. Baldwin concurred: "I do not think any of us felt it was possible to [reject the Protocol] until we had something to put in its place." Curzon agreed that it would be terribly easy to reject it, "because the thing is so full of flaws and absurdities and impossibilities...", but that some alternative should be offered. The lone dissenter was Robert Cecil who warned that a pact with France and Belgium would not solve the security problem "because the strength of Germany ... was likely to increase, and in consequence of which permanent peace could never be assured for Europe."⁴

So rather than simply recommend rejection the 192nd meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defense decided to set up a Geneva Protocol Sub-Committee which would see if amendments could be made to the instrument to meet the criticisms it had received from various quarters of the British

³P.R.O., F0371/10572/W11158/134/98, C.I.D. Meeting, Austen Chamberlain, Dec. 16, 1924.

⁴Ibid., Stanley Baldwin, Lord Curzon, Robert Cecil.

government. The Sub-Committee met several times between December 18, 1924, and January 20, 1925. In its report, which it gave to the C.I.D. on January 23, it suggested rejection of nine of the sixteen articles in the Protocol and amendment of the rest. It even suggested withdrawal from the League!⁵

The chairman of this Protocol Sub-Committee was Sir Maurice Hankey, secretary to both the Cabinet and the C.I.D. Hankey was middle class (his father was a lawyer), but he was educated at Rugby and the Royal Naval College. He worked his way up through the bureaucracy and was appointed secretary to the C.I.D. in 1908. He was made a baron in 1938 upon his retirement. Hankey's prejudice against the Protocol is obvious from a January 1925 memo: "The commitments of a pact [with France and Belgium] are definite, limited geographically, and their application is within our own control. Those of the Protocol are vague, unlimited geographically, and not within our own control, since they are liable to be brought into operation either automatically or in circumstances in which the British representative may be overruled by a majority of the Council."⁶ Hankey's cohort on the sub-committee was none other than Sir Eyre Crowe, that protector of Foreign Office prerogatives. The only restraining force was Sir Cecil Hurst, who had helped draft the Protocol in Geneva, but he was outnumbered by Protocol foes (mainly Hankey and Crowe).

The Sub-Committee's report to the C.I.D. contained a lengthy sentence which summed up not only the sub-committee's view but it seemed to

⁵Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 33; P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 559-B, report by Protocol Sub-Committee, Jan. 23, 1925.

⁶P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 571-B, note by Maurice Hankey, Jan. 23, 1925.

embody the opinion held by most of the Protocol's detractors in the new Tory government: "Is the League to develop gradually on the lines of the Covenant with a view to achieve pacification by forming the habit among nations of bringing their differences and apprehensions to the Council for settlement with moral force as the principal weapon and with material force in the background as a last resort, or is it to be given a new orientation by superimposing on the Covenant a system of compulsory arbitration closely supported by coercion?"⁷ In other words the Conservatives wanted peace to be discussed but not enforced; attained through rational discussion but not forced on them through an international authority.

With the Sub-Committee's report it became more evident than ever that the Tory government would not accept the Protocol. The Protocol was out, and it looked as if a Treaty with France and Belgium would have to be the solution.

Toward Locarno

In late January 1925 Baron D'Abernon, the British ambassador to Germany, sent a dispatch to Chamberlain concerning a German peace proposal. D'Abernon, who was trained for a military career after attending Eton, had served as the financial advisor to the Egyptian government in the 1890s, and after holding other administrative posts was appointed as ambassador to the new German republic in 1920 by Lloyd George. D'Abernon worked for closer economic as well as political ties between Germany and Britain. He was also a close friend of German Foreign Minister

⁷P.R.O., CAB4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 559-B, report by Protocol Sub-Committee, Jan. 23, 1925; see chapter 3 for British attitudes toward League

Stresemann.⁸ When Stresemann offered a chance to decrease European tensions the ambassador immediately apprised Chamberlain of the situation: "In my judgment, the attitude assumed by Dr. Luther [German Chancellor] and Dr. Stresemann in the matter of Security has vast importance." D'Abernon's optimism was obvious: "Coming, as it does, from leaders of a Ministry which is supported by the Right [national conservatives] and is composed mainly of members of the Nationalist party and the Volkspartei, the Memorandum marks an epoch in the advance towards pacification."⁹ Stresemann was proposing a more general solution to the problem which included all the major states of Western Europe.

Lord D'Abernon was enthusiastic about the proposals. He had been prodding Stresemann (apparently unbeknownst to Chamberlain) to make peace with France. The ambassador was not pro-German but pro-French and saw his mission in Berlin as the securing of peace between France and Germany. Upon accepting the ambassadorship to Germany in 1920 D'Abernon had declared "in the execution of my mission I shall constantly remember that peace has been signed."¹⁰ D'Abernon wired Chamberlain on January 20, 1925, with the proposals from German Chancellor Luther and Foreign Minister Stresemann. In keeping with Stresemann's efforts of fulfillment of the Versailles Treaty, the proposals indicated that Germany was ready to negotiate an agreement of a broad nature in order to allay French fears. An agreement of non-aggression in the Rhine area was offered along with

⁸L.G. Wickham Legg and E.T. Williams, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950 (London, 1959), 909-910.

⁹BM Add MSS 48926A (D'Abernon Papers), dispatch, Lord D'Abernon to Austen Chamberlain, Jan. 21, 1925.

¹⁰Sally Marks, The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918-1933 (New York, 1976), 63; Legg and Williams, eds., DNB, 1941-1950, 909.

arbitration treaties with Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Poland and Czechoslovakia. These treaties resembled the Geneva Protocol in that disputes would be arbitrated by a third party before war was declared. The Germans also agreed to the status quo along the Rhine and called for a demilitarized Rhineland (which Hitler of course would ignore in 1935).¹¹ This was the turning point! Chamberlain, even though he did not realize it at the time, had found his replacement for the Protocol. The Baldwin government felt compelled to take some action toward the lessening of the possibility of hostilities on the continent even though it had decided to reject the Protocol. Britain could not be the only holdout in the search for a solution to the Franco-German problem; and a limited solution such as the German proposals would be as far as they would go, not the broad obligations associated with the Protocol.

As if to put the final nail in the Protocol's coffin several things happened throughout the rest of January and in the month of February, 1925, which convinced Chamberlain that the German proposals might be the route to follow rather than the Protocol or even a pact with France and Belgium.¹² The Foreign Office advised the Colonial Office in late January that according to its evaluation, "neither [Italy nor Japan] will sign the protocol unless His Majesty's Government decide to do so." Also the Norwegian Prime Minister, Mr. Mowinckel, proclaimed to the British ambassador to Norway that "it was clear that the Protocol would have no value unless it was accepted by His

¹¹P.R.O., CAB 4/12 (C.I.D. Miscellaneous Memoranda), 569-B, German Foreign Office to British Foreign Office, given to Lord D'Abernon by Gustav Stresemann, Jan. 20, 1925; British Museum Additional manuscripts (hereafter BM Add mss) 48926A (D'Abernon Papers), telegram, Lord D'Abernon to Austen Chamberlain, Jan. 20, 1925.

¹²David Dutton, Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics (Bolton, 1985), 242-243.

Majesty's Government and he well understood the hesitation which [Britain] was showing in the matter." The British ambassador to Norway Sir. F.O. Lindley was a thorough-going British patriot and might have exaggerated the matter to Chamberlain, but the effect was the same - Chamberlain was becoming more convinced than ever that the Protocol had little support on the Continent.¹³ Norway had not signed the Protocol and was now beginning to side with the British stance. It apparently viewed Britain as being far enough from the continental squabbles and as being more objective.

The Netherlands also had not signed the Protocol the previous October. To further convince Chamberlain of the British position as leader in the matter the Dutch ambassador to Britain, van Swindern, visited him in London in mid-February. The ambassador advised Chamberlain that Dutch Foreign Minister de Karnebeek was pro-League but anti-Protocol; that "by ratifying the protocol the Netherlands might be drawn into obligations which it would not be prudent for them to undertake." Furthermore, van Swindern reported, "de Karnebeek was inclined to be largely influenced in his own decision [about the Protocol] by the attitude of the British Government." De Karnebeek was pro-German and had supported the granting of asylum in the Netherlands to Wilhelm II after the war.¹⁴ This would have made the Foreign Minister much more disposed to be anti-Protocol since the instrument was often seen as a French ploy to form a massive alliance (i.e. the League)

¹³P.R.O., F0371/11064/W335/9/98, letter, I.A. Kirkpatrick to Undersecretary of State, Colonial Office, Jan. 22 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1156/9/98, dispatch, Sir F. Lindley (Oslo) to Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 4, 1925; P.R.O., CAB21/289 (Registered Files - Geneva Protocol), letter, F.O. Lindley (Oslo) to Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 4, 1925; Legg and Williams, eds., DNB, 1941-50, 506-507.

¹⁴P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1551/9/98, conversation between Austen Chamberlain and M. van Swindern, Feb. 19, 1925; E.H. Kossmann, The Low Countries, 1780-1940 (Oxford, 1978), 564.

against Germany. Chamberlain now even had a pro-German stance to consider, and it possibly drew him closer to Stresemann's proposals.

Chamberlain was still not completely convinced that Britain should accept the German proposals. Even though he might have held out the hope of an eventual agreement with Germany he wanted to insure the security of France first.¹⁵ He would eventually come to view the German proposals, rather than an Anglo-French pact, as the best replacement for the Protocol mainly because of pressure from other Cabinet members to pursue the German suggestions. As we will see most of the Baldwin Cabinet (including League and Protocol supporter Robert Cecil) viewed Stresemann's suggestions as solving a broader problem. They would not only take care of French demands for security but maybe even provide for the reestablishment of Germany as a Great Power. This would counter French ascendancy on the continent and provide Britain with another industrialized trading partner.

The alternate solution (other than the Protocol), a pact of guarantee with France, had never been popular among Conservative statesmen. Balfour, Curzon, and Churchill all feared that a guarantee to the French would throw Germany into the arms of Russia.¹⁶ The proposal for the Rhineland Pact was as a breath of fresh air for British statesmen. Even Chamberlain seemed to be leaning away from a French pact by February 1925, and gravitating toward the German proposals: "On all grounds therefore I rest upon the formula: 'When France has made a real peace with Germany, Britain will seal the bond with all her strength.'" His French policy had run into difficulty in

¹⁵Dutton, Austen Chamberlain, 242.

¹⁶F.S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant: Britain Among The Great Powers, 1916-1939 (New York, 1967), 249.

the Cabinet so he had to begin leaning toward Stresemann's offers.¹⁷ Moreover the Foreign Secretary was receiving encouragement from his man in Berlin, D'Abernon: "The present moment is exceptionally auspicious, in that the constellation Luther-Stresemann, supported by tame nationalists or semi-tame nationalists is the one more favourable to general agreement."¹⁸ The die-hard nationalists, including the National Socialist Party, continued to give Stresemann a hard time over his cooperative policy with the victors of the war; but after the hyperinflation of 1923 Germans were ready for a solution to the problems facing them.

The tenor of discussion changed somewhat at the next meeting of the C.I.D. on February 13, 1925. General support (except from Cecil) for the conclusions of the Protocol Sub-Committee were voiced and discussion turned to alternatives to the Protocol.¹⁹ Winston Churchill concluded that defensive alliances between states not the Protocol, "are really the solid thing, and I always argue you had far better approach the general conclusions you have in view ... by taking practical steps along the line of getting first one and then another of these regional agreements, and then welding them together in the structure of a much greater agreement...." To Churchill's delight Chamberlain announced that he had received a suggestion from German Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann for a Germano-Franco-Anglo Pact and was in the process of evaluating it. The eventual replacement for the Protocol, which would evolve into Locarno, was on the

¹⁷P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), memo by Austen Chamberlain, undated but probably Feb. 1925; Dutton, Austen Chamberlain, 243.

¹⁸P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), dispatch, Lord D'Abernon to Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 7, 1925.

¹⁹P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 195th Meeting, Lord Curzon, Feb. 13, 1925.

table. Curzon strongly suggested that "we ought to seize this favourable opportunity . It gives us" he continued, "a chance which we have never had before. You have got a friendly Minister in France [Briand]; you have for the first time a reasonable Minister in Germany [Stresemann]. It is an extraordinary combination."²⁰

Arthur Balfour, an ardent British patriot and not an admirer of the French, then cautioned against simply appeasing the French fear of Germany, arguing even further against a pact with France: "... we shall get into trouble because we are doing something which we do not approve of or see the immediate necessity for to please people who cannot manage their own affairs and which we should never do if they were not rather insane, if we were not dealing with people who are psychologically upset." Even Robert Cecil, League of Nations Union president and Protocol supporter, agreed: "To say that [the French] are foolish, as Lord Balfour has said, is very greatly to understate the case, but it is the folly of panic, I believe, with many of them, more than anything else."²¹ It is no wonder that the minutes of these meetings were not made public until fifty years later!

Winston Churchill then elaborated on his view that the German proposals should be accepted: "I am in favour of our not giving ourselves to France at this stage, but of our indicating that if as part of an arrangement between the three great nations [presumably Britain, France and Germany] we might well come in as a guarantor or as a partner." Chamberlain agreed "that the real way to promote peace, which is our object, is by proceeding

²⁰Ibid., Winston Churchill, Austen Chamberlain, Lord Curzon, Robert Cecil.

²¹P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 195th meeting, Robert Cecil and Arthur Balfour, Feb. 13, 1925.

from the particular to the general, and that the reason why the Covenant fails is because we undertake equal obligations in respect of matters in which we have a vital concern and matters in which we have no concern whatever, except as one of the society of nations."²² Chamberlain was pushing once again for his practical notion of specific solutions to specific problems which would also be compatible with a Rhenish guarantee. Even though pro-French Chamberlain would not have agreed with Balfour's characterization of Britain's cross-Channel neighbors; and Cecil would not have participated in Chamberlain's mild League bashing; there seemed to have been general agreement in this particular C.I.D. meeting that the Protocol was dead, that a French guarantee was not advisable, and that the German proposal was probably the route to take.

By late February Chamberlain was preparing the ground not only for the rejection of the Protocol, he was also edging toward the negotiations which would begin after the rejection speech to the Council in March 1925. He first had to prepare French Premier Herriot. He wrote to Lord Crewe, British ambassador in Paris, that he wanted Herriot to come to London so that he could meet "some of my colleagues and perhaps [draw] from his conversations the inference that I am the most pro-French member of the Government and that unless he helps me by his attitude there is little chance of carrying through a solution satisfactory to the French."²³ In other words Herriot should be aware of the need to be flexible since a Franco-British pact was out of the question. Also Chamberlain received more

²²Ibid., Winston Churchill and Austen Chamberlain., Feb. 13, 1925.

²³P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), dispatch, Austen Chamberlain to Lord Crewe, Feb. 20, 1925.

encouragement from D'Abernon in Berlin that Germany was ready to negotiate. He wrote to Chamberlain that the Germans considered Britain "as a restraining force on France and as at once fairly reasonable and wise." D'Abernon continued: "They listen carefully to any advice we give and, within limits, they accept it."²⁴ The ambassador to Germany was once again playing his role of midwife to coax the birth of an agreement including Germany.

The Cabinet met on the subject of the Protocol twice in early March. It basically rubber stamped the decision which had been made by the C.I.D. In the conclusions of the March 2 meeting the Cabinet proclaimed: "After reviewing all aspects of the ... questions, the Cabinet agreed: (a) To accept the view of the Committee of Imperial Defence, which is confirmed by reports so far received from the Dominions and India, that the Geneva Protocol is open to grave objection and cannot be accepted: (b) that a simple rejection is not sufficient and an alternate policy should be sought."²⁵ It is interesting to note that these decisions had already been made three weeks prior to this Cabinet meeting in the C.I.D. meeting of February 13th!

At the next Cabinet meeting on March 4 the new direction in foreign policy was confirmed. After authorizing Chamberlain to announce to the League Council Britain's rejection of the Protocol it also authorized him in his conversations with French Premier Edouard Herriot to pursue the German proposal for a Germano-Franco-Anglo Pact. The Cabinet conclusion quoted Chamberlain: "... these [German] overtures seemed to offer the best chance

²⁴Ibid., dispatch, Lord D'Abernon to Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 21, 1925.

²⁵P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1802/9/98, extract from CAB 12(25) - Conclusions, Mar. 2, 1925.

for giving security to France and peace to the world. To turn it down would be to thrust Germany into the hands of Russia."²⁶

The British Foreign Office, which had objected so violently to the Protocol, gave its backing to the German proposals as a substitute for the Protocol and a French pact. To justify the stance Foreign Office historian, James Headlam-Morley, penned a historical survey which called for a "European Protocol." Headlam-Morley was a widely respected political historian who had written much on German history. In 1920 the post of Historical Advisor to the Foreign Office was created for him and did not survive his death in 1928. Headlam-Morley proclaimed in his survey that what was needed was not "a separate pact with France and Belgium, but ... a general pact in which Germany could be included." He continued: "Any new treaty should therefore first include all the interested States and not be a partial alliance. Secondly, it ought to extend the security not only to Belgium [Britain had guaranteed its neutrality in the 19th century], but equally to France, Germany and Holland." In this way Headlam-Morley asserted, "as the system extends throughout the whole of Europe, we get the ideal of the protocol obtained in another way." Chamberlain liked Headlam-Morley's survey but disagreed with him on the inclusion of Eastern Europe, since the west was where Britain's vital interests lay.²⁷ Thus an attenuated version of Headlam-Morley's idea is what Chamberlain was willing to work toward, including Western Europe but excluding the east.

²⁶P.R.O., CAB23/49 (Cabinet Conclusions), 14(25)1, Mar. 4, 1925.

²⁷P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1252/9/98, memo by James Headlam-Morley, Mar. 11, 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11064/W2070/9/98, historical survey by James Headlam-Morley, Mar. 10, 1925; J.R.H. Weaver, ed., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922-1930 (London, 1937), 412.

By the time Chamberlain arrived in Geneva in early March to deliver his rejection speech he had become convinced that the German proposals were the best replacement for the Protocol and for a pact with France.²⁸ He was reinforced in his opinion by his conversation with Edouard Benes, the Czech Foreign Minister and one of the drafters of the Protocol. Chamberlain reported this conversation to Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Eyre Crowe: "From his [Benes'] long statement I gathered that he did not attach great importance to the protocol, that he was quite prepared to consider mutual treaties of guarantee and arbitration with his neighbors and that ... he felt that it was Poland which was menaced and not Czechoslovakia."²⁹ Though Czechoslovakia was in a vulnerable position in Eastern Europe maybe Benes felt that it was Poland which was in between the two historically aggressive powers, Germany and Russia. Even still we must at least question the validity of this statement which Chamberlain attributed to Benes. Chamberlain might simply have been reading what he wanted to hear into Benes' words in order to justify his rejection of the Protocol. On the other hand Benes, who would have been interested in the status quo in Eastern Europe for the new states created by Versailles, might have been willing to accept whatever security arrangements were acceptable to the Great Powers. Nevertheless Benes was one of the delegates at the September 1925 session of the League Assembly who attempted to have the Protocol put back on the agenda. Needless to say they were unsuccessful. In the end all Czechoslovakia and Poland got out of

²⁸Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain*, 243.

²⁹P.R.O., CAB24/172 (Cabinet Papers), C.P. 166(25), Austen Chamberlain to Eyre Crowe, Mar. 12, 1925. For more on this conversation with Benes, see chapter 8.

Locarno were arbitration treaties from Germany with no guarantees from either France or Britain.

The Protocol idea was not dead and Chamberlain knew it. He knew that a large number of European states, not to mention non-European ones, would be left out of Locarno: "... I expect from the lesser States in particular there may be a good deal of pressure to bring back in some other form a large part of [the Protocol's] provisions." He continued: "While at Geneva I had some indication that this might be the attitude of some of the smaller South American States, and it is especially among the smaller European Powers that support for the Protocol is strongest."³⁰ So it seems that Chamberlain, and the Conservative British government in general, chose to make sure that their own back yard, Western Europe, was secure whether or not it satisfied the security needs of the rest of the world. Despite what Benes reportedly told Chamberlain about not being overly attached to the Protocol, the new states in Eastern Europe were very afraid of potential German or Russian aggression. They looked to the League as their protector and were at the mercy of the Great Powers.³¹ Britain and the other signatories of Locarno, France, Germany, Italy and Belgium, basically ignored these fears of the minor powers in order to secure the area they were most concerned about - Western Europe. With Locarno Chamberlain would get his "special arrangement" for "special circumstances," the phrases he used in his rejection speech to the Council.

³⁰P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers, Austen Chamberlain), dispatch, Austen Chamberlain to Esme Howard, Mar. 31, 1925.

³¹Marks, Illusion of Peace, 30.

In Geneva, before the League Council meeting, Chamberlain met with French Premier Herriot: "I had to tell him, to my great personal regret, that neither the state of public opinion at home nor of public opinion in the dominions would allow us to enter into an Anglo-French or Anglo-Franco-Belgian pact." Chamberlain explained to Herriot: "Any such proposal would be opposed by the whole strength of the Liberal and Labour party and by a considerable section of our own party." "On the other hand," Chamberlain advised Herriot, "the German proposals seemed to us to offer a hope of a solution in which we might cooperate."³² Chamberlain adeptly used public opinion and Dominion resistance to justify the rejection to Herriot.

Chamberlain described Herriot's reaction to the news: "For this statement he seemed wholly unprepared. His face turned very white and he looked suddenly a sick man." Chamberlain explained the reaction: "... [Herriot] was terrified of the effect of this announcement upon French opinion.... Of the reality, if not of the reasonableness, of their fear of Germany there can be no doubt." Two days later Chamberlain met with future French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand, whose reaction was more understanding: "I found [Briand]" Chamberlain reported, "much more favourable to [a pact along the lines of the German proposals] than I had expected."³³ The French eventually (especially Briand) would become completely cooperative in the negotiations which led to Locarno and the guarantees of the existing borders in Western Europe. Briand was a Socialist

³²P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2069/9/98, letter, Austen Chamberlain to Eyre Crowe, Mar. 7, 1925. See previous chapter for the part of the conversation concerning the Protocol.

³³P.R.O., F0800/257 (Private Papers - Austen Chamberlain), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Eyre Crowe, Mar. 7, 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2096/9/98, memorandum by Austen Chamberlain, Mar. 9, 1925.

but was alienated from the Party because he had held posts in many bourgeois governments. He was premier several times in his career and was a champion of reconciliation with Germany after the Great War.³⁴

Herriot responded to Chamberlain's announcement by warning that he viewed the German proposals "with the gravest of suspicion." He wondered if the Germans would require an early departure from the Rhineland. [France and Belgium had stationed troops there in early 1923 when Germany defaulted on reparations payments.] The French Premier was also concerned that neither Eastern nor Southern Europe [except for an Italian guarantee of the Rhine frontier] were included in the guarantee, and he wondered if the proposals were more for domestic German consumption rather than for international security.³⁵ Herriot nevertheless was interested in the proposals and eventually allowed France to participate fully in the negotiations when the Protocol was rejected.³⁶

Chamberlain's speech to the League Council

Arthur Balfour had taken it upon himself to write a rejection statement to the League Council which would serve as Britain's response to that body. He presented it to the Committee of Imperial Defense on February 19, 1925. Balfour had been Foreign Secretary in Lloyd George's coalition government until 1919, then was Lord President until 1922, when he went into semi-retirement until he again became Lord President in late March of 1925 upon the death of Lord Curzon. During this period of semi-retirement

³⁴Dutton, Austen Chamberlain, 347.

³⁵P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2069/9/98, letter, Austen Chamberlain to Eyre Crowe, Mar. 7, 1925.

³⁶Jon Jacobson, Locarno Diplomacy: Germany And The West, 1925-1929 (Princeton, 1972), 27-28.

Balfour served on the defense advisory body to the Cabinet, the Committee of Imperial Defense. It was in this capacity that he participated in the rejection of the Geneva Protocol.

When Balfour's draft was discussed in the February 19th C.I.D. meeting some minor criticism of the idea of regional agreements in lieu of the general nature of the protocol was offered by Lord Curzon. He said that it was this type of agreement which led to the Great War. For the most part though C.I.D. members liked the draft. Churchill announced that "If [the statement] were the view of the Committee, I should entirely associate myself with it, that it should be published as our view on the Protocol discussions that have been taking place." Chamberlain reassured the C.I.D. that the Foreign Office had "gone through Lord Balfour's draft, and I am sure the Committee will not be surprised to find that ... we thought the less we altered it the better it would be." Chamberlain did mention three changes which seemed necessary. More emphasis was placed on the maritime Empire and a statement concerning the Japanese Amendment (which opened up domestic situations to League Council scrutiny) was included, both to meet the criticisms of the Dominions. And more emphasis was put on Balfour's point about turning the League from a machinery of peace to a machinery of war.³⁷

Chamberlain delivered his rejection speech to the Council on March 12, the first time most of the world including most Britons, knew of the decision. Chamberlain began by criticizing the principles behind the Protocol. He said it increased the possibility of League meddling in domestic

³⁷P.R.O., CAB2/4 (C.I.D. Minutes), 196th meeting, Winston Churchill, Lord Curzon, Austen Chamberlain, Feb. 19, 1925.

affairs, not only by the Japanese Amendment, but by compulsory arbitration itself, which would have been required if the Protocol had been ratified. He said Protocol articles 7 and 8 so limited the military movements of potential victims of aggression, that the victim itself "may find himself charged with a breach of the Protocol." He went on to point out that this "is asking the threatened State to make a surrender of its inalienable right of self-defence...." After giving several more examples of situations which might arise out of the Protocol that would be intolerable to the British, he summed up his criticisms: "The additions which [the Protocol] makes to the original document do something quite different from merely clarifying obscurities and filling in omissions [in the Covenant]. They destroy its balance and its spirit." He explained: "... the elaboration of military procedure, insensibly suggest the idea that the vital business of the League is not so much to promote friendly co-operation and reasoned harmony in the management of international affairs, as to preserve peace by organizing war...."³⁸ The basic Tory attitude toward the League was that it should be a grand debating society where world affairs were discussed by the Great Powers; not a coercive body which would enforce peace from above.³⁹

After making it perfectly clear to the Council that the Protocol was not tolerable to the current British government Chamberlain outlined his alternative to Covenant reform. "Since the general provisions of the Covenant cannot be stiffened with advantage, ... His Majesty's Government conclude that the best way of dealing with the situation is, with the co-

³⁸P.R.O., F0371/11065/W1957/9/98, Austen Chamberlain's speech to the League Council, Mar. 12, 1925.

³⁹Compare with chapter 2, the Conservative Party beliefs about the functions of the League.

operation of the League, to supplement the Covenant by making special arrangements in order to meet special needs."⁴⁰ This suggestion in effect would attempt to solve the only real problem which the Baldwin government could discern - French security. It would not be necessary, in other words, to solve world-wide security problems and make Britain a universal policeman simply to guarantee that peace would prevail in Europe [mainly Western Europe]. If a trouble spot emerged [a "special need"], then a specific solution would be proposed [a "special arrangement"]. In Chamberlain's very practical mind, this was the best way of handling the problem which began discussion of the Protocol to begin with, French security.

French League representative, and future Foreign Minister, Briand responded to Chamberlain in a speech to the Council. He announced that he regretted Britain's rejection. He chided them for doing so but then he agreed that "special arrangements" might also solve the security problem. He was supported in this view, including the criticism of British rejection, by speeches from representatives of Belgium and Italy.⁴¹ You will remember that in private Briand and Mussolini both seemed amenable to alternatives to the Protocol (see above), so the criticisms to the Council were apparently for public consumption. The way had been cleared for Locarno. The Protocol had been pushed out of the path. A virtually meaningless treaty, Locarno, would be negotiated on the rubble of the Protocol, one which would guarantee borders in Western Europe which were already basically safe from aggression through the unspoken guarantees of military might. It would be in

⁴⁰P.R.O., F0371/11065/W1957/9/98, Austen Chamberlain's speech to the League Council, Mar. 12, 1925.

⁴¹P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2226/9/98, Aristide Briand's speech to the League Council, Mar. 12, 1925.

unguaranteed Eastern Europe where the first blows of the next European war would be struck, the very place that the British had no interest!

A lengthy memo by Foreign Office historian James Headlam-Morley warned of the possibility of a war breaking out in Eastern Europe. Headlam-Morley was a German historian and had written extensively on Central and Eastern European problems. He advised that Britain "should in some way or another clearly state that we are interested in the maintenance of the new system in Europe implemented by Versailles], that we could not regard with equanimity the forcible overthrow of any of the new States [in Eastern Europe], and that if a grave crisis arose, we should really carry out the obligations [under Versailles] into which we have entered." Austen Chamberlain responded to this memo: "I would say broadly that in Western Europe we are a partner; that, comparatively speaking, in Eastern Europe our role should be rather that of a disinterested [friend]."⁴² This attitude was exhibited in Britain throughout the interwar period [not the least by Chamberlain's own brother, Neville, in the late 1930's!], and would eventually allow Hitler to do his will in Eastern Europe until it was too late. Could the Protocol have prevented this? We will never know.

After (not before!) the Protocol was formally rejected by the Tory government in Geneva on March 12, debates were held on the subject in both houses of the British Parliament on March 24. Not much new was said, mainly a rehashing of the reasons for rejection of the Protocol from the Conservatives and reasons from its supporters about why it should have been ratified. In the House of Lords Lord Parmoor, one of the Protocol's

⁴²P.R.O., F0371/11064/W1252/9/98, memorandum by James Headlam-Morley, Mar. 11, 1925, and minute by Austen Chamberlain (undated).

drafters and Labour spokesman in the upper house, charged that the Tory government unduly influenced the Dominions into rejecting the Protocol [see chapter 5 for possible evidence of this]. In a non sequitural response, Viscount Cave, the Lord Chancellor in the Conservative government, countered by charging: "It is rather strange that [the Labour Party], which claims to be a democratic Party, should propose to enter into an undertaking [which would] ... withdraw from Parliament the power to declare or not to declare war"⁴³ The bickering continued for several hours.

It would seem in any event that Parliament had little if any say in the disposition of the Protocol itself. That same day in the House of Commons, Arthur Henderson, Labourite and also a drafter of the Protocol, put this question to Chamberlain: "Has the cremation taken place? Are the ashes awaiting burial, have the last rites been performed, and are the speeches to be delivered in this Debate anything more than funeral orations?"⁴⁴ Chamberlain had no response; but he knew, even if Parliament and the public were not aware of the specifics, that he had Locarno waiting in the wings to take the place of the Protocol. The question of the Protocol would be raised briefly again at the September 1925 League Assembly meeting, but by then the Locarno Treaty was only about a month away from being signed.

Locarno

In dealing with the problem of European continental security the British government had used two distinct approaches in the 1920s. Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government in 1924 had attempted to satisfy French and

⁴³P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2653/9/98, Lord Parmoor and Viscount Cave, House of Lords debate, Mar. 24, 1925.

⁴⁴P.R.O., F0371/11065/W2654/9/98, Arthur Henderson, House of Commons debate, Mar. 24, 1925.

Belgian fears of Germany by going along with the League of Nations' scheme, the Geneva Protocol, designed to identify and deter aggressors anywhere in the world.⁴⁵ The Conservative Party approach turned out to be more traditional - a specific agreement on the continent to deal with a specific problem in Europe. The first was born of internationalist sentiment to stop war wherever it might break out. The latter was concerned only with Western Europe, and yet even it was somewhat of a new departure. It was influenced by the League attempts to back away from the kind of competing alliances that helped to cause the Great War and also to guarantee security on a broader scale. Even the Conservatives wanted to avoid the alliance system which created a rift between the Great Powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but not by accepting an experiment, the Geneva Protocol.

Locarno was not based on competing alliances but rather on a general guarantee to be applied in Western Europe only. It would identify an aggressor (whether it was France, Belgium, or Germany), and outside powers (in this case Britain and Italy) would come to the aid of the victim. Thus Locarno was not traditional diplomacy in that it included alliances but was traditional because it was negotiated by, and was for the benefit of, the Great Powers. It was also traditional in that it sought to maintain the balance of power, this time centered around a Franco-German hub with Britain and Italy as counterweights. Locarno had its antecedents in the 19th century Concert of Europe and the Congress system which allowed the Great Powers to make broad security decisions while leaving out the smaller states. Eastern Europe was in effect left out of Locarno even though part of

⁴⁵For more see Chapters 2 and 3.

the agreement required Germany to sign arbitration pacts with Poland and Czechoslovakia which would have provided for League of Nations arbitration to head off a dispute. No separate guarantees by Belgium, France, Italy or Britain however were attached to these pacts.

The Locarno Treaties were signed on October 16, 1925, at a sleepy little lake side resort in southeastern Switzerland and were accompanied by much fanfare. The *New York Times* declared "France and and Germany Bar War Forever," and the London *Times* trumpeted "Peace at Last." Until the depression hit Europe hard in 1930 this all seemed to be true, and the late 1920s was pervaded with what is sometimes called the "Spirit of Locarno." It seemed that war had been renounced and peace and brotherhood prevailed. The peace was fragile, however, since it was actually based on fear rather than brotherhood. Moreover Europe and the world were perched on a tottering economic precipice which would lead to renewed nationalistic feelings and eventually war.⁴⁶

In a very real sense the Geneva Protocol was the progenitor of Locarno. The Protocol spurred Britain (specifically Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain) to search for an alternative which would avoid conflict with the United States, win acceptance by the Dominions, and attempt to prevent war in Europe so that Britain could pursue its own economic recovery in concert with its Empire. The Protocol represented an alien way, for the Conservatives and for much of the bureaucracy in Whitehall, of conducting foreign policy. It threatened to take the Foreign Office out of the diplomatic arena by allowing the League to be the forum for discussion of foreign policy problems; it could cause Britain to be the state most looked to for

⁴⁶Jacobson, Locarno Diplomacy, 3; Marks, Illusion of Peace, 74.

naval action in a collective security situation; it threatened to involve Britain in wars outside its area of interest, Western Europe; and it offered up the specter of Britain being forced to submit to arbitration rulings which might have caused it problems with its Empire, if Egypt for instance, took it before the World Court with a complaint concerning British occupation.⁴⁷

Locarno on the other hand kept diplomacy in the hands of the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office. It also placed guarantees on an area of Europe that had become relatively safe in the last several months. Stresemann in Germany and Herriot in France were not the nationalistic hotheads their predecessors had been, willing to go to war over reparations. And very importantly the reparations problem had been solved the previous summer at the London Conference. The solution was embodied in the Dawes Plan which tied payments to the fortunes of the German economy and spread the payments over a longer period. In other words French and German leaders were willing to work together, and the prospects of a war had been lessened. Locarno was a safe alternative to the Protocol because it satisfied both France and Germany and made it much less likely that Britain would be drawn into a war.

Moreover Locarno was finally accepted by the Conservative government because it represented the least alteration in traditional foreign policy, one that shied away from continental entanglements until absolutely necessary and was geared toward rebuilding the concert of the Great Powers. F.S. Northedge asserts that Locarno was grounded in a "mental background, traditionalist, disregarding of the shrinking geographical scope

⁴⁷Burks, "The United States and the Geneva Protocol," 902; Richardson, Evolution of British Disarmament Policy, 42-43.

of world politics"⁴⁸ As long as Britain's back yard was safe, what did it matter if a war broke out in another part of the world unless of course it involved the Empire?

And even though none of the signers of Locarno would have admitted it, the treaties were accompanied by no true obligations at all. Neither Germany nor France would have seriously considered crossing the Rhenish frontier of its dreaded foe anyway; Italy was in no position to guarantee anyone's borders in its current post-war economic dilemma; and most of Britain's army was in its colonies, not at the ready to fight on the continent. Nevertheless Chamberlain felt that Locarno was the peak of his career and that true peace had been attained.⁴⁹ What Locarno really did was put a stamp of international legitimacy on a set of circumstances which had led toward a lessening of the likelihood of another war and had been evolving over a period of about a year. It also provided the Baldwin government with a legitimate excuse to dump the Geneva Protocol for a relatively safe alternative.

These of course are observations made with the advantage of historical perspective. Whether or not British leaders viewed Locarno as a safe alternative is impossible to tell. They probably simply saw it as superior to the Protocol because it was accompanied by fewer commitments. The prospect of going to war on the Continent certainly held its risks, but it was better than going to war in areas of the world that held

⁴⁸Michael R. Gordon, Conflict and Consensus in Labour's Foreign Policy 1914-1965 (Stanford, 1969), 57 (note); Northedge, Troubled Giant, 244-245.

⁴⁹Marks, Illusion of Peace, 72-74, 65.

no interest for Britain. In other words a limited defensive treaty was better than a universal one.

Nonetheless the leadership of the British Labour Party hated this new arrangement. It closed ranks against Locarno even though the rank and file membership agreed with the general public sentiment of optimism over the strides toward settlement of continental disputes.⁵⁰ Arthur Henderson, Home Secretary in Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government of 1924 and League delegate at the 1924 League Assembly, was a critic of Locarno and continued to support the Protocol. Henderson was one of the drafters of the Protocol and was an ardent supporter of the socialist notion of international cooperation. He was also a firm supporter of the League as the institution which could best promote that cooperation. Henderson wrote: "The inevitable corollary to a national policy which aims at the creation of a Socialist community [at home] is an international policy which is directed towards the establishment of a Cooperative World Commonwealth...." He continued: "British Labour would put this country's influence, in its dealings with all other countries, behind a truly international policy, which will develop the League of Nations in the direction of world government."⁵¹

Henderson was obviously an idealist and was very disillusioned by the British government's practical politics. In a pamphlet published by the Labour Party he outlined his response to that policy: "I fail to see how [the German proposals] could be acceptable to the members of the League unless it is also based upon the principles set out in the Protocol. Such a plan must carry forward the idea of arbitration, of security, and disarmament." He

⁵⁰Gordon, Conflict and Consensus, 57.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 13, 15.

then jabbed at the formula Chamberlain had introduced in his rejection speech to the League Council: "No partial and limited arrangements to meet special circumstances and special needs would be acceptable on any other grounds."⁵²

The former Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, also criticized the German proposals [which he simply called the Pact] even though he had registered skepticism over the obligations the Protocol would have placed on Britain.⁵³ MacDonald loathed traditional diplomacy in which the Great Powers ran the show and national rivalries prevailed. In 1907, he had outlined the role socialism could play in international politics: "... it alone can banish national jealousies from the Foreign Offices; it alone offers the guarantees of peace which are a necessary preliminary to disarmament."⁵⁴ When MacDonald took over the reins of government in early 1924 he attempted to use the League to further his goals of international peace and disarmament. So he was highly skeptical of the Pact, which seemed to be business as usual: "After [the Pact] has been made, national activities will go on as before. National groups will form as they have always done, quarrels will arise. One group of nations will range themselves on one side, another group on the other side." He continued: "The Protocol establishes a living system, the Pact a pigeon-holed agreement."⁵⁵ Of course MacDonald's criticism of Locarno is typically vague. If most of the Great Powers except

⁵²P.R.O., PR030/69/1825 (MacDonald Papers), pamphlet, Labour and the Geneva Protocol, by Arthur Henderson, undated but probably early 1925, p.15.

⁵³BM Add mss 551078 (Cecil Papers), letter, Austen Chamberlain to Robert Cecil, June, 19, 1925.

⁵⁴Gordon, Conflict and Consensus, 5, 12-13.

⁵⁵P.R.O., PR030/69/1825 (MacDonald Papers), pamphlet, Protocol or Pact, by Ramsay MacDonald, undated but probably mid 1925, pp.3-4.

the U.S. and Russia were involved in the Treaty, how would competing sides form? I think what he means here however is that Locarno was diplomacy as usual and Great Power politics shifted with the interests of the Great Powers. In other words Locarno was a temporary agreement but could, and probably would, falter under the self-interests of the involved states, which is indeed what happened in the 1930s. To counter this trend MacDonald would have claimed that international agreements involving all states would keep the Great Powers from controlling international relations and eventually lead to true international cooperation. This in itself is extremely idealistic in that it would require that the states with military might give in on questions of vital national interest, the British on control of Egypt or the French on reparation payments from Germany for instance.

MacDonald continued in his criticisms by portraying the Labour Party as one of progress and the Conservatives as reactionary: "The simple truth is that a reactionary Government who has neither the vision nor the courage to help to outlaw war has had to magnify the risks of broken bonds on the part of other States in order that it may maintain its own right to be its own judge because it does not trust arbitration to any extent."⁵⁶ While MacDonald was certainly being an idealist in his vision of the way the international system could operate, he also correctly pointed out that the Tories were attempting to maintain Britain's freedom of choice and action in a world in which Britain was a major power broker. From the Conservative point of view, why should a Great Power voluntarily cede some of its sovereignty to the smaller states when old fashioned power diplomacy would work? Locarno satisfied (or so it seemed) the security

⁵⁶Ibid., 8, 7, 4.

requirements of the Great Powers without any obligations to areas of the world which the Conservative government saw as being outside the field of interest for Britain. So the plan to replace the Protocol with a Rhineland Pact did not please all, but these were apparently in the minority in the rush of excitement which accompanied the signing of the Treaties that autumn of 1925.⁵⁷

During May 1925, it became clear exactly how limited the Conservative government envisioned Locarno would be. A Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy outlined several limiting factors. The minutes of the committee concluded that "the attitude of His Majesty's Government as publicly declared was that they could undertake no new obligation except on the western frontier." The limits to which Britain would support arbitration of disputes was also outlined. As part of the agreement arbitration treaties would be signed between Germany and her neighbors (France, Belgium, Poland and Czechoslovakia). The Cabinet Committee specified that: "In case of a simple refusal to arbitrate by either party to an arbitration treaty, the guarantor [either Britain or Italy] would not move." Furthermore, "His Majesty's Government could not be drawn into war in any dispute before the Council of the League had exhausted its conciliatory procedures [under Article 16 of the Covenant]."⁵⁸ These were reasonable assertions but they illustrate how fearful of continental obligations, especially in the east, the Tory government was. They also illustrate that the Rhineland Pact would have few teeth in it if the guarantors would be so hesitant to act.

⁵⁷Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy*, 3.

⁵⁸P.R.O., CAB27/275 (Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy - Security), minutes of the 1st meeting, May 26, 1925.

In late June the United States put its seal of approval on Locarno through the American Ambassador to Britain. Chamberlain announced in a Cabinet meeting that the ambassador "had intimated ... that the President and Government of the United States of America were very favourably disposed towards the policy of the Security Pact."⁵⁹ On the other hand by late June Aristide Briand, the French Foreign Minister, was not wholly satisfied with the way the negotiations over the Pact were progressing. Briand was concerned that Stresemann continued to refuse to include Eastern Europe in the agreements. All that the Germans would accept were arbitration treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia but with no mention of a guarantee that Germany's eastern frontiers would remain static. The French were almost as concerned about German expansion eastward as westward since it would certainly not be in the French interest for Germany to either control or have enormous influence in Eastern Europe. Germany could then have dominated commerce and industry in that part of Europe, as Hitler would eventually do in the 1930s and 1940s. Chamberlain supported Stresemann on this because he had no intention of committing Britain to obligations in the east and did not see German dominance of the east as a real possibility, especially in Germany's current economic shape.⁶⁰ In the end the British position turned out to be short-sighted but they of course were not capable of foretelling the future.

Briand responded by suggesting to Chamberlain that the Geneva Protocol be revived in the September session of the League Assembly incorporating any changes necessary to meet British reservations.

⁵⁹P.R.O., CAB23/50 (Cabinet Conclusions), 31(25)6, June 26, 1925.

⁶⁰Jacobson, Locarno Diplomacy, 29.

Chamberlain was diplomatic but firm: "The more I have reflected on it, the less expedient does it seem to me that we should enter, at the present stage at any rate, on any further attempt to amend the Covenant." He explained that: "We are in fact engaged at this moment in a great effort to support it by the system of mutual pacts and arbitration treaties contemplated in our negotiations with Germany." The next day, July 3, after Chamberlain's response to Briand, the Baldwin Cabinet approved the draft Treaty of Mutual Guarantee, henceforth the official name for what is alternatively known to history as Locarno or the Rhineland Pact.⁶¹

Another attempt to revive the Protocol occurred in early July. According to the Foreign Office, several Labour M.P.'s. [no names were mentioned in the memos] were spreading rumors that the Dominions had all been in favor of the Protocol and that this had been covered up by the Baldwin government. The government prepared a White Paper (i.e. an explanatory statement) to answer these charges. William Tyrrell, the new Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (he had taken over when Eyre Crowe died in March), was anxious to head off this renewed effort to revive the Protocol. Tyrrell was not only against the Protocol, he was against efforts at disarmament, especially in the middle of negotiations over the Treaty of Mutual Guarantee. He was one of those middle class individuals, as was Crowe, who had ascended the ladder in the Foreign Office to the top rung and who had become very jealous of Foreign Office prerogatives. Tyrrell was optimistic about squelching this new attempt to revive the Protocol: " I think on balance publication [of the White Paper] will

⁶¹P.R.O., CAB24/174 (Cabinet Papers), C.P.324(25), Austen Chamberlain to Aristide Briand, July 2, 1925; P.R.O., CAB23/50 (Cabinet Conclusions), 33(25)1, July 3, 1925.

help us in our negotiations for a treaty of mutual guarantee by weakening the Labour position in favour of the Protocol by showing how strong Dominion opposition to the latter is."⁶² The Protocol was not revived, and the negotiations for Locarno continued.

In September the League Assembly approved a resolution which recognized the nonacceptance of the Protocol, condemned aggression as an international crime, and sanctioned the treaties of mutual security (which would become Locarno) as being within the spirit of the League and the Protocol.⁶³ In November after the Treaties had been signed at Locarno the British House of Commons approved them 375 to 13, an overwhelming sign of the popularity of the Treaties. The Labour Party, and only the leadership at that, were isolated in Britain in its support of the Protocol since even the League of Nations Union had decided to support Locarno. On the day the Treaties were approved in Commons Austen Chamberlain assured the House that "all the agreements initialled at Locarno conform strictly to the spirit of the Covenant and the spirit of the League of Nations, that they are placed under the guardianship of the League, that the League is the ultimate authority in regard to the issues which may be raised and that what we have done is not to subtract from the power or the authority of the League, but to support and to underpin that authority and power...."⁶⁴ There is a great deal of irony in Chamberlain's words, for what Locarno really did was bypass the

⁶²P.R.O., F0371/11066/W6533/9/98, minute by R.H. Campbell, July 7, 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11066/W6533/9/98, minute by William Tyrrell, July 8, 1925.

⁶³P.R.O., F0371/11067/W9293/9/98, League Assembly, Spanish Resolution, Sept.. 23, 1925; P.R.O., F0371/11067/W9354/9/98, League Assembly, Resolution by the 1st and 3rd Committees, adopted by the Assembly, Sept.. 25, 1925

⁶⁴P.R.O., C0532/320 (Dominion Correspondence), excerpt from speech by Austen Chamberlain to House of Commons, Nov. 18, 1925.

League. It ignored the wishes of a large number of the League's member countries, especially the small states such as those in Eastern Europe, but also in other parts of the world (fear of Japan or China in the east, for instance). It is true that certain Eastern European states, such as Czechoslovakia and Poland, ended up supporting Locarno, but what else could they do? If the Protocol was dead they would have to accept whatever security arrangements they could get, in this case, arbitration agreements with Germany.⁶⁵ Locarno was made by and for the Great Powers and it ignored rather than conformed to the spirit of the League.

This was not the feeling at the time however. League historian F.P. Walters said of Locarno: "The Protocol had been rejected, but it had exerted a living influence: it had led to Locarno, and to the hopes of other Locarnos in Eastern and Southern Europe." Locarno was popular, even in Britain. The Times reported the next day, after the Commons had approved the treaties, that there was a "strong feeling of all sorts and conditions of English people that the right thing had been done at Locarno, and that for once a British Government had done something of which the whole nation could deeply and thoroughly approve."⁶⁶

Was the rejection of the Protocol and the acceptance of Locarno positive for international relations in the 1920s? Well as I have said before, since the Protocol was untried we will never know if it would have worked. On the other hand Locarno was rooted in the Concert of Europe of the

⁶⁵Marks, Illusion of Peace, 30, 59, 127, 135, 144.

⁶⁶F.P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, vol. 1 (London, 1952), 384; P.R.O., C0532/320 (Dominion Correspondence), excerpt from The Times, Nov. 19, 1925.

19th century which worked well until the balance of power was upset by a united Germany in the latter part of the century. The Great War had demonstrated that the Concert was over and rivalries had once again taken over among the Great Powers. In the 1920s, as long as the Powers agreed on the status quo, as they did with Locarno, there was no problem. But as soon as one or more of the Powers wanted to alter that status, as Germany and Italy did in the 1930s, then Locarno was bound to break down. The League of Nations fell to the same fate as Locarno in the 1930s; but only because the half of Europe which wanted to maintain the status quo, Britain and France, were unwilling to fight for it because of pressure from their respective publics to avoid war at all cost. So was another war inevitable in Europe in the 1930s? Not if a mechanism had been installed and scrupulously adhered to which would have countered aggression. Of course this did not happen and its explanation belongs to a history of the 1930s not of the 1920s. And yet one is tempted to ask whether, if the Protocol had been accepted and adhered to, Hitler would have been bold enough to challenge an international force made up of all of the members of the League?

Nonetheless either a treaty or a trip mechanism in a system of sovereign states is only as good as the intentions of the signatory states. Odds are that nothing could have stopped the coming of the next war except firm intentions by those states involved (but especially by the statesmen involved!) to stop Germany from expanding eastward. Hitler and Mussolini simply ignored Versailles, Locarno, and the League; and France and Britain did virtually the same by refusing to enforce the treaties or mechanism (i.e. the Covenant) at their disposal. The "Spirit of Locarno" in the late 1920s was little more than a pregnant pause before the next round of competition

began with the onset of the Great Depression. The acceptance of the Protocol probably would have offered no more than that itself. Treaties only embody the intentions and commitments of their parties. They do not create new intentions and commitments. Thus Britain accepted Locarno because it demonstrated its willingness to keep a war from occurring in Western Europe, and its indifference at the time of averting a war in the east. On the other side the British did not accept the Protocol, at least in part, because it went much further than they were willing to go in assuring that aggression did not occur virtually anywhere in the world.

So the British Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin had eschewed experimental international mechanisms such as the Protocol in favor of a more traditional, Great Power approach, Locarno. When Locarno was signed in October 1925, this move seemed justified. France and Germany had renounced war as a method of settling differences (at least in the West!); Britain and Italy were guarantors of that renunciation; and the public in all of the signatory countries were satisfied that another round of devastating war had been averted. There seemed no reason among a majority of the population in the Western world to mourn the Protocol.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Why did the Conservative British government of Stanley Baldwin reject the Geneva Protocol in 1925? This of course is the question with which I began, and it is also the question which is implied by the title of this work. The Protocol episode in British history represents a rejection of an internationalism which seems to be advancing in the last decade of the 20th century with the greater use of international organizations such as the United Nations or even regional organizations of an international nature such as the European Community. In the 1920s however it was not at all evident that internationalism might be the eventual course world history would take. Even now it is not certain that the world will not lapse back into nationalistic tendencies in international relations. Indeed there is much to indicate that nationalism is again rearing its head in newly freed Eastern Europe.

In the 1920s, as always, each state had its own set of objectives and as it turned out Britain's agenda included rejection of an internationalist scheme, the Geneva Protocol. France wanted the Protocol, not out of any love for the welfare of states worldwide, but out of self-interest on the continent in its quest for security from feared German aggression. As a matter of fact one might postulate that all of the states that wanted the Protocol did so out of the desire to protect themselves, not necessarily out of the desire for world peace. Britain felt relatively secure on its island after the Great War and felt that its Empire was relatively secure. It had no reason to put itself in the position of protector of the world. Why would it

want to get involved in a war between Peru and Bolivia or even China and Japan and place itself in the potentially dangerous position of enforcing sanctions against whichever of those states was the aggressor?

On the other hand proposed agreements such as the Geneva Protocol or the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance were devised by sincere individuals such as Robert Cecil, Czech Foreign Minister Edouard Benes, or Greek League delegate Nicholas Politis, who wanted to see peace in the world and wanted to prevent another catastrophic war. Labourites in Britain, Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald, foresaw a day when the world would be disarmed and peace would reign. The controversy over the Protocol represented a clash between internationalists who wanted to use the League as means of enforcing peace through collective security, arbitration of disputes, and disarmament; and nationalists who wanted to play the international game the way it had been played prior to the Great War, by Great Power diplomacy. French statesmen in the 1920s for instance wanted peace but they were willing to use traditional methods to gain their ends. Their support of the Protocol was little more than an attempt to form a collective alliance against Germany. When the Germans, under Stresemann, became cooperative the French were willing, with only a slight reluctance born out of mistrust of the Germans, to accept a more limited arrangement which evolved into Locarno. The British Conservatives played the diplomatic game the same way, looking for an opening for peace but without the world wide commitments of the Protocol.

With Great Power diplomacy alive and well in most of the capitals of Europe and elsewhere in the world in the 1920s did the Protocol ever really have a chance? Probably not. Nationalistic self-interest obviously abounds

even today. No sovereign state is going to give in on a point which it considers vital to its interests simply to please the international community. When rulings by the International Court meet the approval of the United States, it recognizes those rulings. If on the other hand the U.S. is condemned for its involvement in Nicaragua, then that ruling becomes unacceptable. This is what Conservatives in Britain feared with the Geneva Protocol. It would have been unacceptable to be declared an aggressor in one of its Dominions for instance. The Dominions were gaining more independence in the 1920s and were actually League members themselves. What if South Africa had simply proclaimed its complete independence and appealed to the League to help rid itself of British troops and ships? South Africa would eventually remove itself from the Commonwealth in the 1960s but this would have been unacceptable to Britain in the 1920s. And even France, which supported the Protocol, probably would have backed away from unfavorable rulings if its interests called for it. Would it have stood for a World Court ruling, brought by China for example, which called for France's withdrawal from Southeast Asia? Unlikely.

Why then did the British Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin even consider the Protocol in the first place? The most accurate answer is that they did not consider it, at least not seriously. The very first Committee of Imperial Defense meeting in early December 1924 demonstrated that British policy makers did not like the Protocol and knew that a replacement had to be found. Why did they even consider a replacement necessary? The Conservatives feared another war and knew that the continental situation was volatile. France wanted its compensation for the war from the Germans and had demonstrated in 1923 that it was

willing to invade Germany to get it. Germany for its part hated Versailles, resented reparations, and wanted lost territory back. This situation was too dangerous for the British to ignore. The Protocol would satisfy only France and would anger Germany since it was seen by the Germans as being aimed at them. When Stresemann became Foreign Minister in Germany and offered an alternative which might make both parties happy the British jumped at the chance.

If the Protocol was never seriously considered by the Baldwin government, then what do we make of the myriad protestations against the Protocol which came out of the British bureaucracy at Whitehall? Did the people in Whitehall not know that the Baldwin Cabinet would reject an agreement which possibly threatened sovereignty, both national and bureaucratic? Based on the loud clamor in the British bureaucracy which accompanied the presentation of the Protocol, we might assume that the concerns were real. The Foreign Office, the military service departments and the Board of Trade all apparently felt threatened or simply concerned enough to make sure the Baldwin Cabinet knew that they did not like this League proposal. The protests to be sure were couched in language which demonstrated larger concerns (sovereignty, control of military actions, etc.); but in the end they represented attempts to protect turf, with the possible exception of the economic branches who warned of further economic disaster for Britain.

The Foreign Office hated the idea of submitting disputes to the World Court. The department was a conservative, even aristocratic, institution which found it difficult to break out of the traditional way of conducting diplomacy. Treaties between sovereign countries in which each party judged

its own interests and negotiated on that basis was the traditional way, not rulings handed down by the World Court based on international principles which might clash with British interests. Any method which gave even some of the power of conducting foreign policy to the League, or any other outside entity, was unacceptable to the Foreign Office. Locarno was acceptable because it was negotiated by Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain and the final decision of what to accept or reject in the treaty was in the hands of the Foreign Office, of course with subsequent sanction by the Cabinet. So the proposal of an alternate way of doing business, the Protocol, is revealing because it forced the bureaucrats in the Foreign Office to articulate their assumptions about how foreign policy should be formulated. Moreover it forced them to work diligently at coming up with a policy which would more closely approximate their assumptions about the world and how it should work.

The Military Services and the economic branches of the government feared the involvement of Britain in a potentially ruinous situation involving blockades and sanctions against a major naval power, the United States. The Services could not agree to any scheme which might have taken control of the movement of ships and troops out of their hands. The Protocol gave the power of making military plans to the League Council in Article 12, and troop and ship movements of the nations enforcing sanctions were restricted while a dispute was being arbitrated. If Britain signed the Protocol it would be bound to accept these conditions. Moreover the Service chiefs also dreaded the idea of fighting another war, in which the Protocol might have involved them, under severe budgetary constraints. The complaints to the Cabinet came because the service chiefs had no guarantee

that the Baldwin government would not agree to the Protocol and allow the League Council at least some control over the British military and possibly involve Britain in another war. As in any bureaucracy when turf is threatened preservation of the status quo becomes paramount.

What about worries by the economic branches? It is true that another war would have severely hurt Britain's economic situation. It simply could not afford to fight another war. Would loss of trade have occurred? The only recent example Britain had was the Great War and that conflict certainly took trade away and put it in the hands of the United States and even Britain's own Dominions. What if, and it was certainly not out of the realm of possibility, the U.S. got involved in Central or South America in a war with a League member, say Panama. Would Britain then have to enforce sanctions against its large cousin across the Atlantic? Again unlikely but certainly possible. Britain could not take the chance.

What about the role of the Dominions? Britain, again for economic reasons, could not afford to alienate markets and sources of raw materials which might aid in its recovery from the war. But as I indicated in Chapter 5 the reality was a little more complex. The Dominions were already slipping away with each passing year because of increasing moves toward independence. When protestations began to arrive from the Dominion governments, in part spurred on by Prime Minister Baldwin's letters to the Dominion governments, which warned of problems with the Protocol, the Conservative government used those negative comments to bolster its argument against the Protocol and for Locarno. So the role which the Dominions played was that of booster for an already determined British policy.

That policy had been made in secret meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defense, a body made up mainly of Cabinet members. The Parliament or public opinion had little if any say in the decisions concerning the Protocol itself. The Protocol was rejected and the German offers accepted without public debate.

Thus the input from the bureaucracy at Whitehall meshed nicely with the broader picture. Individuals in the bureaucracy were attempting to maintain control over their branches of government and the Cabinet (mainly Austen Chamberlain) was attempting to find a specific policy which would deal with Britain's interests on the continent in preventing war. In the end Britain accepted Locarno because the treaty demonstrated Britain's willingness to keep a war from occurring in Western Europe and Britain's indifference at the time to averting a war in Eastern Europe or anywhere else in the world. Alternatively the British did not accept the Protocol because it was unacceptable to the bureaucracy and the Dominions, and because it went much further than the Conservatives were willing to go by requiring action that would have confronted aggressors virtually anywhere in the world.

So why did the British reject League Covenant reform? Simply put, it did not serve their ends and even threatened, especially among some in the government, to take away some of their freedom of action. The League was working just fine as it was, as a debating society. Why change something which seemed to be doing what the Conservatives wanted it to do? Why not find a specific solution to a specific problem on the continent and not risk

getting involved in wars and situations elsewhere when it was not necessary?

How do we make sense of this whole episode in the broader context of British history? In one sense it is a continuation of centuries of the British policy of remaining isolated from continental affairs until the balance of power was threatened. The balance was not threatened in Eastern Europe but the British perceived it to be in the west, thus they got involved in Locarno. The Protocol also demonstrated the British trait, which the Conservatives embodied since at least the French Revolution, of slow change rather than revolutionary change. They deemed the Protocol as being too drastic in its potential effects on the international community and the British bureaucracy. The British were not willing to risk giving up national sovereignty when old fashioned power politics would do the job. The rejection of the Geneva Protocol demonstrated this attitude perfectly.

In a larger way the Protocol episode also demonstrated why the League itself failed. National self-interest was still too strong, and still is even today. The United Nations seems to be working now because the sovereign states which are its members have similar interests. In the 1920s the League also worked. It mediated the problem over Corfu when Italy attacked it in 1923; it prevented a war between Greece and Bulgaria in 1925; and it prevented a potentially devastating war between Poland and Lithuania in 1928. Preventing these conflicts was in the interest of the larger powers since they had seen the catastrophic results of a small conflict in the Balkans in 1914 which had turned into a big one. But these conflicts had been avoided with the mechanism provided by the Covenant. The Great powers simply put pressure on the lesser powers (including Italy

in 1923) to cease and desist in their hostilities. If the League worked all right in pre-Protocol situations, why change the Covenant? But as soon as the Depression hit and prosperity left, nationalism among the Great Powers returned with a vengeance. The League became ineffectual in the face of national self-interest and the coming of a war between the perceived have-nots (Germany, Italy and Japan) and the powers who were content with the international situation (Britain and France). The League began to fail and a Geneva Protocol or any other prior agreement would have been meaningless. The League met its demise at the hand of national self-interest just as the Geneva Protocol had. If we are to understand why this happened a closer look at the League and its shortcomings is important. And a closer look at one of the League's efforts to prevent war, the Geneva Protocol, and why it failed has demonstrated that the true culprit in international relations is entrenched attitudes and an unwillingness to experiment. We as a species too easily fall back into modes of behavior which time and again have proven not to be effective. Maybe the Protocol would not have prevented a war but neither did Locarno. The acceptance of the Protocol back in the 1920s might have made our job easier today in solving international problems of conflict and cooperation which perennially plague us and might even have prevented the coming of another war in 1939. Of course hindsight in some ways makes gods out of us. Conservatives, and Labourites and Liberals for that matter, were mere mortals back in the 1920s simply trying to make the international system operate the best way they knew how, through enlightened self interest and assuming that all of the other states were doing the same.

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