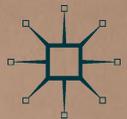




HOWARD ELCOCK

# Could the Versailles System have Worked?



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## FOREWORD

Howard Elcock had been planning and undertaking research for a book on the Versailles Treaty and the long-term viability of the European system established at Versailles for many years, so it was with considerable sadness that I learned of Professor Elcock's untimely death in the summer of 2017. In a moving tribute published in *The Guardian* newspaper, former colleague John Fenwick wrote that Howard was "a strong supporter of the traditional values of scholarship". This is apparent from the very outset of this extremely important and welcome study of the impact of the Versailles Treaty, written to coincide with the centenary of the Paris Peace Conference. No stone has been left unturned to reveal the realities and difficulties confronting the leaders of Europe in the two decades following the First World War. Howard Elcock's contribution to academic research was enormous. Throughout his long career, he was the author of many books and articles on political behaviour, local government, political leadership and ethics in public service to name but a few, but it seems especially poignant that this, his final book, revisits a subject that had enthused him so much during the earlier stages of his career. Howard's book *Portrait of a Decision* (1972) was a pioneering work on the impact and legacy of the Versailles Treaty and was undoubtedly significant in encouraging many other scholars to investigate this critically important subject in twentieth-century European history. Born in Shrewsbury and educated at Shrewsbury School and Queen's College Oxford, Howard Elcock began his academic career in 1966 at the University of Hull. In 1981, he moved to Newcastle Polytechnic

(now Northumbria University) where he remained until his retirement in 1997. Alongside writing and teaching, Howard worked tirelessly in support of politics education, serving on a range of executive committees including the Joint University Council (of which he became chair in 1990) and the Political Studies Association. In 2002, he was elected a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. Following his retirement from a full-time position, Howard was appointed Professor Emeritus at Northumbria University. He continued to write and travelled the length and breadth of the country to deliver papers for university research series and conferences. His enthusiasm for presenting his current research findings was tremendous, and I was especially struck by his warmth and kindness towards my own undergraduate students during his numerous visits to Manchester Metropolitan University. Blessed with enormous energy, Howard was a life-long supporter of the Labour Party (serving, for a period, as a county councillor in Humberside), a determined campaigner for the Campaign to Protect Rural England, a passionate advocate of classical music and a highly skilled sailor. Howard Elcock was a committed academic, but he was also a generous and decent human being whose loss will be felt by all those fortunate enough to have known him in any capacity. Howard was an enormously valued friend, colleague and mentor to many people. I am honoured to have been given the task of ensuring that this book, that meant so much to him, was completed for publication. Howard Elcock's enthusiasm for this subject was second to none and his attention to detail truly remarkable; this book is a significant and timely addition to the literature on the Versailles Treaty by an eminent, but modest, scholar.

Dr. Samantha Wolstencroft

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have wanted to write this book ever since I published my account of the making of the Treaty of Versailles, *Portrait of a Decision: The Council of Four and the Treaty of Versailles* in 1972. In that book, I argued that the makers of the Treaty of Versailles had been widely misunderstood, chiefly because of the impact of Maynard Keynes's brilliant polemic *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. This book written in haste after his resignation from the British Empire Delegation to the Conference in June 1919 and published the following October has had an enormous influence on policy-makers, journalists and historians then and since, but his perceptions of the members of the Council of Four and their approach to their task were substantially wrong. Woodrow Wilson was persuaded to breach the principles announced in the Fourteen Points speech not by the chicanery of Lloyd George and Clemenceau but by his hatred of the Germans, which by January 1919 had become visceral. Clemenceau for his part had sought to secure the continuation of the wartime alliances to the extent that he moderated France's demands to the consternation of his colleagues up to and including his political and personal enemy President Poincaré. Lloyd George was far from being "rooted in nothing", he sought valiantly to secure peace terms that would secure the economic recovery of Germany and Europe and to secure a territorial settlement that would give no excuse for future wars: in his own words to avoid "new Alsace-Lorraines".

The widespread accusation then and since has been that the Treaty was unduly vindictive, and as a result, the "Versailles System" was from

the beginning unworkable, but the diplomatic history of the following ten years proved that once considerably amended, the system could secure a stable and lasting peace, to the extent that by the end of the 1920s, the prospect of a federal European Union was being widely discussed; indeed, Aristide Briand had produced detailed proposals for such a union in 1930. It was the Great Crash and the consequent rise to power of Adolf Hitler that destroyed that vision and led Europe to another war only twenty years after the Treaty had been signed.

I feel a certain compunction in attacking the work of one of my intellectual heroes, JM Keynes, whose economics provided the escape from the Great Depression and were regrettably not heeded by those who had to deal with the economic crisis that followed the more recent bankers' folly which led to the financial crash of 2007–2008. However, the analysis of the Paris Peace Conference offered by Keynes in 1919, written as it was in haste after his resignation from the British Empire delegation, was significantly in error. I therefore make no apology for challenging that analysis of the Conference and its principal actors, while having no doubt that his analysis of European economics at the time was correct and should have been heeded by all concerned.

This is a work of documentary research, so it has attracted relatively few debts of gratitude. However, Professor Tim Kirk of Newcastle University has been a good friend and supporter of the work. I am indebted to that University for granting me a Visiting Fellowship in History to cover the period of this work. I am also indebted to the staff of the Robinson University Library in Newcastle, as well as their colleagues at the Brynmor Jones Library at the University of Hull for their help in identifying the many sources to which I needed to have access. Another librarian and her staff who were unfailingly helpful were that of my *alma mater*, The Queen's College Oxford.

I am also indebted to Dr. Samantha Wolstencroft and her colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University for their comments on an early version of my ideas, as well as to the members of the British International History Group for their helpful comments at their conference at the University of Edinburgh in September 2016. Of course, what I have written is my own responsibility alone and none of them bear any responsibility for it.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: The Carthaginian Peace—Or What?

### 1 THE VERDICTS ON THE TREATY

The Treaty of Versailles has over many years had a bad press. From shortly after its signing, authors, politicians, journalists, commentators and historians argued that the terms of the Treaty had been excessively severe and later that the Treaty had been the prelude to the Second World War. Certainly, the proximate cause of war in 1939 was Hitler's invasion of Poland in order to correct the allocation of 2 million or so Germans to Polish rule in order to meet President Wilson's demand in the Fourteen Points (Point 13) for an independent Poland with a secure access to the sea. The "Polish Corridor" was a source of friction between Germany, Poland and the rest of Europe from the beginning of the inter-war period to its end. The Second World War was indeed, at least as its immediate cause, "war for Danzig" (Taylor 1961: Chapter 11). A. J. P. Taylor's final verdict is interesting:

In this curious way the French, who had preached resistance to Germany for twenty years appeared to be dragged into war by the British who had for twenty years preached conciliation. Both countries went to war for that part of the peace settlement which they had long regarded as least defensible. (ibid.: 277–278)

The “Polish Corridor” had indeed been an irritant throughout the inter-war years, but the wider failure to defend and implement the Treaty of Versailles had more extensive origins.

Almost as soon as the ink was dry on the Treaty of Versailles, its justice and fairness were called into question by influential commentators, most notably J. M. Keynes, who had resigned from the Treasury section of the British Delegation because he was appalled by the overall severity of the Treaty. He told Prime Minister Lloyd George that “I ought to let you know that on Saturday I am slipping away this scene of nightmare. I can do no more good here” (Harrod 1953: 253). He retreated to Cambridge and there proceeded to write a book which was to have huge and severe consequences for the future of the “Versailles System” and indeed did much to discourage respect for the terms of the Treaty and to dissuade the former Allies’ willingness from implementing them. Nonetheless, the “Versailles System” did work for a while but was eventually overwhelmed by the unresolved defects of the Treaty and the calamity that hit first the USA, then Europe and the world after October 1929.

Keynes’s rapidly written book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, was published towards the end of 1919 and caused an immediate storm of reaction in Britain and elsewhere. Zara Steiner (2005: 67) described it as “pernicious but brilliant” and argues that “the reverberations of Keynes’s arguments were still to be heard after Hitler took power. They are still heard today”. Although historians as well as others who were present at the Conference have argued for years that Keynes’s interpretation of the “Big Four” and the making of the Treaty were in important respects wrong (see Headlam-Morley 1972; Nicolson 1964 edition; Mantoux 1946; Sharp 1991; Elcock 1972; Macmillan 2001 and others), these arguments have not been heeded by ministers, civil servants, US Senators and news media reporters who have been influenced by Keynes’s book rather than the scholars and others who have challenged his interpretation. This is indeed a classic example of the gulf that exists, especially in Britain between academic students of history and politics on the one hand and the ministers and civil servants who make government decisions on the other. Policy-makers and journalists but not academic historians were mesmerised by Keynes’s accusations, which were a significant cause of Wilson’s failure to secure the ratification of the Treaty by the Senate and in the longer term to the appeasement of Hitler.

Keynes's criticism related not only to the content of the Treaty but also to the characters of the three principal statesmen responsible for drafting it: Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, and the American President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, of all of whom he painted vivid but erroneous pictures, to be discussed shortly. Keynes's work can be examined from two directions. The early chapters discuss the process by which the Treaty was drafted and the personal attributes of the three statesmen who were responsible for its contents. They were advised by numerous commissions of experts, as well as holding hearings with the authorities from the various states that wished to make territorial or financial claims on the defeated Germans and their allies. The final decisions were originally to be taken in the Council of Ten, which consisted of the Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers of the five principal Allied and Associated Powers: the British Empire, France, the USA, Italy and Japan, attended and advised by numerous officials from each delegation. However, this body was plagued by leaks to the Press corps gathered around the hotels and government buildings in Paris where the clauses of the Treaty were being drafted and decisions made about them. In consequence, the principal statesmen Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and the Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, decided in early March to meet as the Council of Four. This decision led to the intimate atmosphere that Keynes attached so much importance to in his account of the personalities of the "Big Three" and their interaction (he had little to say about Orlando). His account included vivid descriptions of the physical characteristics of the three men. Here, our concern is to outline Keynes's opinions of the three statesmen; assessing their validity is a task for the next chapter.

## 2 THE STATESMEN

First up is the 78-year-old Prime Minister of France, Georges Clemenceau. For Keynes, Clemenceau "felt about France what Pericles felt of Athens – unique value in her, nothing else mattering. He had one illusion – France – and one disillusion – mankind, including Frenchmen and his colleagues not least" (Keynes 1919: 29). He goes on, "In the first place, he was a foremost believer in the view that the German understands and can understand nothing but intimidation, that he is without

generosity or remorse in negotiation” (ibid.). Clemenceau’s vision of the future was pessimistic: “European history is to be a perpetual prize-fight of which France has won this round but of which this round is certainly not the last” (ibid.: 31). Keynes uses Clemenceau’s long-standing nickname, “the Tiger”, to summarise his view of Clemenceau: obstinate in his defence of French interests and his determination to secure guarantees for her future safety, especially by weakening Germany as much as possible: “This is the policy of an old man, whose most vivid impressions and most lively imagination are of the past and not of the future. He sees the issue in terms of France and Germany, not of humanity and of European civilisation struggling forwards to a new order” (ibid.: 31). Earlier in the chapter, Keynes pronounced his damning verdict on Clemenceau: “One could not despise Clemenceau or dislike him but only take a different view as to the nature of civilised man, or at least indulge a different hope” (ibid.: 26). Nonetheless, Keynes took the view that Clemenceau’s policies largely prevailed in the writing of the Treaty.

This leads directly to the issue of President Wilson, whose Fourteen Points had been the basis on which the Germans had sought an armistice in November 1918 and which many participants in the Conference as well as the wider publics of Europe and America supposed would form the ethical and practical basis of the Peace Treaty. Hence, “When President Wilson left Washington he enjoyed a prestige and a moral influence throughout the world unequalled in history” (ibid.: 34). He went on, “With what curiosity, anxiety and hope we sought a glimpse of the features and bearing of the man of destiny who, coming from the West, was to bring healing to the wounds of the ancient parent of his civilisation and lay for us the foundations of the future” (ibid.: 35). For Keynes, then the essential question was why Wilson betrayed his principles and allowed the creation of a Carthaginian peace treaty. His explanation was that Wilson was badly prepared for the negotiations and unable to comprehend, let alone respond to the devices and desires of his British and French colleagues: “Never could a man have stepped into the parlour a more perfect and predestined victim to the finished accomplishments of the Prime Minister (Lloyd George)” (ibid.: 38). More severe criticism in the same vein follows: “... the Old World’s heart of stone might blunt the sharpest blade of the bravest knight-errant. But this blind and deaf Don Quixote was entering a cavern where the swift and glittering blade was in the hands of his adversary” (ibid.: 38). Keynes characterised Wilson as being “like a Nonconformist minister,

perhaps a Presbyterian. His thought and his temperament were essential theological, not intellectual ...” (ibid.: 38). To make matters worse, “in fact the President had thought out nothing; when it came to practice his ideas were nebulous and incomplete. He had no plan, no scheme, no constructive ideas whatever for clothing with the flesh of life the commandments which he had thundered from the White House” (ibid.: 39). Hence “he was liable to defeat by the mere swiftness, apprehension and agility of a Lloyd George” (ibid.: 40). He also failed to make appropriate use of his advisers in the American Delegation: “Caught up in the toils of the Old World, he stood in great need for sympathy, of moral support, of the enthusiasm of the masses. But buried in the Conference, stifled in the hot and poisoned air of Paris no echo reached him from the outer world” (ibid.: 45). Keynes also argued that Wilson had often been deceived by clever drafting, “sophistry and Jesuitical exegesis” (ibid.: 47) that caused Wilson to be persuaded that his principles were being honoured when in practice they were not. The other statesmen bamboozled him into thinking that his principles had been honoured and when Lloyd George tried to modify the Treaty in early June, “it was harder to de-bamboozle the old Presbyterian than it had been to bamboozle him ... So in the last act the President stood for stubbornness and a refusal of conciliation” (ibid.: 50); in reality, Keynes argued, the result was a bad Treaty.

Of the British participant in the deliberations of the Council of Four, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Keynes said relatively little in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* except to refer to his quickness of mind and his flexibility in responding to the successive issues that arose during the Council of Four’s discussions. However, in a later publication Keynes issued a similarly damning verdict on Lloyd George (Keynes 1933), which he had hesitated to publish in the earlier volume because he retained a certain regard for the Prime Minister. He saw Lloyd George as an unprincipled operator who simply sought an agreement as sympathetic as possible to British interests; otherwise, he did what seemed best at the moment:

Lloyd George is rooted in nothing: he is void and without content; he lives and feeds on his immediate surroundings; he is an instrument and a player at the same time which plays on the company and is played on by them too; he is a prism, as I have heard him described, which collects light and distorts it and is most brilliant if the light comes from many quarters at once; a vampire and a medium in one. (Keynes 1933: 37)

In this piece, Keynes likened Lloyd George to a Welsh witch; his charm and flexibility were for Keynes feminine qualities: “How can I convey to the reader who does not know him any just impression of this extraordinary figure of our time, this syren, this goat-footed bard, this half-human visitor to our age from the hag-ridden, magic and enchanted woods of Celtic antiquity?” (ibid.: 36). It was with these wiles, according to Keynes, that Lloyd George was able to persuade the President to forego his ideals and sign up to a severe Treaty that in many ways ran counter to the Fourteen Points. In this essay, Keynes presents a portrait of Lloyd George that combines savage criticism with a certain admiration for his subject.

### 3 THE COUNCIL OF FOUR

Like Keynes’s other portraits of the major statesmen at Paris, this picture is inaccurate, as we shall see in Chapter 2, but for the meantime, there is one more issue to note, the nature of which Keynes describes with considerable insight: the relations that developed between the participants in the Council of Four. Indeed, he regarded this pattern of relationships as essentially responsible for the defects of the Treaty. The President could “take the high line: he could practise obstinacy; he could write Notes from Sinai or Olympus; he could remain unapproachable in the White House or even in the Council of Ten and be safe. But if he once stepped down to the intimate equality of the Council of Four the game was evidently up” (1919: 45–46). His account is brilliant if misleading:

Prince Wilson, sailing out from the West in the barque *George Washington* set foot in the enchanted castle of Paris to free from chains, oppression and an ancient curse the maid Europe, of eternal youth and beauty, his mother and his bride in one. There in the castle is the King, with yellow parchment face, a million years old and with him an enchantress with a harp, singing the Prince’s own words to a magical tune. If only the Prince could cast-off the paralysis which creeps on him and crying to Heaven could make the sign of the cross, with a sound of thunder and crashing of glass the castle would dissolve, the magicians vanish and Europe leap into his arms. But in this fairy tale the forces of the half-world win and the soul of Man is subordinated to the spirits of the Earth. (Keynes 1933: 36–37)

The end was the opposite of that in Wagner's opera *Parsifal*. Keynes's final verdict on the interaction of the three statesmen is similarly forthright:

These were the personalities of Paris – I forbear to mention other nations or lesser men; Clemenceau aesthetically the noblest; the President morally the most admirable; Lloyd George intellectually the subtlest. Out of their disparities and weaknesses the Treaty was born. Child of the least worthy attributes of each of its parents, without nobility, without morality, without intellect. (Keynes *Ibid.*: 40–41)

Thus for Keynes, the Treaty was the lowest common denominator of the emotions and attributes of its three principal makers. Keynes's writings on the Peace Conference are brilliant polemics, but whether they were a totally accurate portrayal of the negotiations at Paris is at the very least doubtful.

#### 4 THE CONTENT OF THE TREATY

Fundamental to Keynes's analysis of the Treaty were two beliefs. One was that the most important issues facing the Peace Conference had been economic rather than political or diplomatic. He argued that future wars would occur as a result of economic rather than political conflicts: he believed that "The perils of the future lie not in frontiers and sovereignties but in food, coal and transport" (*ibid.*), but this was a view firmly rejected, justly in the event, by Etienne Mantoux, the economist son of the Council of Four's interpreter, who during the Second World War alleged that as a result of Keynes's denunciation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler's demands for territorial adjustments could be shrugged off: "This was not what could really be ailing the German people. Didn't you know? The perils of the future lie not in frontiers and sovereignties but in food, coal and transport" (Mantoux 1946: 14).

Keynes's other fundamental belief was that the Allies had to try to secure a peace that would hold because no country, especially Germany, should feel so outraged by its terms that it would resort to war to reverse them. After a detailed review of the contents of the Treaty, he concluded that the suppression of Germany's economy was dangerous to the future of Europe. He was particularly concerned about the likely impact that

reparations payments would have on the German economy and therefore on the economies of all other European countries unless the demands made on Germany were kept modest. He devotes an entire chapter to this issue. He regarded Wilson's ultimate betrayal of his principles as being the point at which President Wilson conceded a British demand that war pensions and separations allowances should be chargeable to reparations: a demand made by the British Empire delegation in order to ensure that the proportion of whatever reparations payments Germany made would accrue to the British Treasury, whereas the French were looking to receive the lion's share to fund the restoration of their devastated north-eastern regions. For Keynes, this was this was "the decisive moment in the disintegration of the President's moral position" (ibid.: 48), which was achieved by creating a draft before which "the President finally capitulated before a masterpiece of the sophist's art" (ibid.: 49). However, the records of the Conference reveal a different attitude on Wilson's part. Although in the early stages of the Conference he was doubtful whether the inclusion of war pensions in the Reparations demand was justifiable under the terms of the Armistice (see Elcock 1972: 203), he later changed his position: he declared, "to the Devil with logic. I want to include pensions" in the reparations demand. He concludes with a number of proposals for revising the Treaty although these were unlikely to be heeded, at least in the short term.

Several other participants in the Peace Conference offered their accounts of the proceedings and their assessments of the results. Some were critical but none of them had Keynes's "brilliant and pernicious" (Steiner 2005: 67) ability to attack the peacemakers and the statesmen's handiwork in the Treaty in such a compelling fashion. Sir Harold Nicolson, then a Foreign Office civil servant (1964 edition: 188), wrote that

... as the Conference proceeded we were scarcely conscious of our own falsity, (which) may indicate that some deterioration of moral awareness had taken place. We did not realise what we were doing. We did not realise how far we were drifting from our original basis. We were exhausted and over-worked ... There were few moments when we said to ourselves 'this is unjust': there were many moments when we said to ourselves, 'better a bad treaty today than a good treaty four months hence'. In the dust of controversy, in the rattle of time pressure, we lost all contact with our guiding stars.

According to his daughter Agnes, Sir James Headlam-Morley, another Foreign Office official, “reacted strongly against Keynes’s *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. He did not question the purely economic arguments but he considered Keynes’s account of the procedure and purpose of the conference to be a travesty of the facts” (Headlam-Morley 1972: xxxii). Yet it was Keynes’s account that made the almost indelible impression upon policy-makers and journalists that the Conference had been mishandled and the Treaty was bad.

## 5 THE REACTION

The publication of Keynes’s book and other critical accounts of the Conference and Treaty provoked an immediate and hostile reaction against the Treaty. It was cited by members of the American Senate in the debates that led up to that body’s refusal to ratify the Treaty in March 1920: The British Ambassador in Washington reported to Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary on 24 February 1920:

It is not easy to exaggerate the effect on America of Mr. Keynes’s book ... Americans do not care for the political side of the Treaty ... already several Senators have read long speeches in the Senate which are mainly plagiarised from it ... It shows Germany, after being led to capitulate on conditions formulated by an American President that have been violated, is now being sucked dry ... It is difficult to see how an Irishman from the heart of Sinn Fein could have written better pro-German propaganda than Mr. Keynes’s book”. (BDFP I, 10: 202–203)

Étienne Mantoux (1946: 10) recorded that Keynes’s “book was seized upon by the President’s opponents as a first-rate weapon in the fight then raging” over the ratification of the Treaty. Taylor (1961: 66–67) recorded that American isolationism in the 1930s resulted in part from doubts about the Treaty: “The Democrats were now disillusioned Wilsonians. Some believed that Wilson had deserted the American people; others that the European statesmen had deceived Wilson. The Democratic majority in Congress passed a series of measures which made it impossible for the United States to play any part in world affairs and President Roosevelt accepted these measures without any sign of disagreement”.

It also turned liberal opinion in Britain against both the Treaty and Lloyd George, although the Treaty had been ratified by the House of Commons with only four votes against. In introducing the Treaty to the House of Commons on 3 July 1919, the Prime Minister said that

The terms are in many respects terrible terms to impose upon a country. Terrible were the deeds which it requites ... In 1914 you had an Empire which possessed the greatest army in the world ... There was a navy, the second in the world ... Where is it now? The colonies of Germany covered about 1,500,000 square miles. Stripped of the lot! ... There is no doubt that they are stern. Are they just? (HC Debates, 5th series, col. 1213)

He continued, "I agree that justice should not only be tempered by mercy but it ought to be guided by wisdom ... There were three alternative methods of dealing with Germany, bearing in mind her crime. What was that crime? Germany not merely provoked, but planned the most devastating war the Earth has ever seen" (ibid., col. 1218). He continued to say that they could have said "Go away and sin no more" but "Louvain is not in Prussia. France is not in Pomerania, the devastated territories are not in Brandenburg" (ibid., col. 1219–1220). Alternatively, they could have destroyed Germany with a Carthaginian Peace: "Fling the bits to the winds of Heaven and have done with them". He denied that they had done this but "It is not merely that this would have been a wrong and an injustice but it would have been a folly". Lloyd George had always recognised that imposing excessively severe terms would have merely laid the seeds for the next European war. Hence, this third option, "To compel Germany, in so far as it is in her power, to repair and redress. Yes, and to take away every possession of any kind that is within our power against the recurrence of another such crime ... That is not vengeance. It is discouragement. The crime must be mended. The world must not take these risks again". The Prime Minister's oratory won the vote easily, but soon he was to lose much credibility over the Treaty he had negotiated.

Lloyd George's rhetoric did not satisfy public opinion for long. A. J. P. Taylor (1967: 358) described the British response soon afterwards: "The British people were told over and over again by their most idealistic advisers that Germany had been hardly used. Reparations, one-sided disarmament, the peace settlement of 1919 was condemned by Liberals and Conservatives alike ... For the vast majority of the British

people Hitler's demands seemed justified however evil Hitler was in himself ... otherwise they would have opposed him despite the risk". Taylor recalled that after 1937, Neville Chamberlain was convinced that "the Treaty of Versailles was unjust, punitive and unworkable. Germany was entitled to equality in armaments and everything else" (Taylor 1977: 417). Among Liberals and the Labour Party, "it could also be argued that Hitler was the product of 'Versailles' and would lose his evil qualities as 'Versailles' disappeared" (Taylor 1961: 136). In their book on the appeasers, Martin Gilbert and Richard Gott confirm the importance to their motivation to the alleged evils of the Treaty of Versailles:

JM Keynes said the Treaty was filled with clauses 'which might impoverish Germany now or obstruct her development in future.' Many Englishmen had read and accepted his criticisms. Ashamed of what they had done, they looked for scapegoats and for amendment. The scapegoat was France; the amendment was appeasement. The harshness of the Treaty was ascribed to French folly. But nobody could deny that Britain had supported France. France was blamed for having encouraged Britain in an excess of punishment. Justice could only be done by helping Germany to take her rightful place in Europe as a Great Power. (Gilbert and Gott 1963: 21)

In what follows it became clear that British and French policy both at the Peace Conference and in following years diverged more than this account fully credits, but as A. J. P. Taylor (1967: 365) shows, this is a fair account of what Keynes's book did for public opinion and policy-makers:

Most people who knew England and France in 1938 will agree that it would have been impossible for their then Governments to take an intransigent line with Germany even if they had wished to do so, their public opinion would not have supported them. It is useless for the diplomats to complain about the public demand to be kept informed. If the people are going to pay taxes and perhaps even fight a war as a result of diplomatic action, they will want to know what it is about.

Thus, rejection and hostility has been a long-standing feature of analyses of the Treaty and its effects. They are a large part of the explanations offered for the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930s: Étienne Mantoux (1946: 17) thought that "when concession after concession on the part of the Allies had finally been rewarded most properly by the

National-Socialist Revolution they never stopped complaining that Hitler was the consequence of Versailles and of the outrageous treatment meted out to the German Republic". To support her view of the impact of the Treaty, Steiner states that on 31 December 1999 *The Economist* declared that "The war's final crime, it could still be declared in 1999, was a peace treaty whose harsh terms would ensure a second war", but the editors went on to declare that "the Treaty of Versailles was unquestionably flawed but the Treaty did not shatter the peace that it established" (qu. in Steiner 2005: 15). In 1999, the historian Alan Sharp wrote that Keynes's book "has dominated later debate and tended to carry all before it" (1991: 97). Still in 2016, this occurred in the *BBC History Journal*: "The Versailles Treaty, however its architects had been motivated, produced a settlement that guaranteed conflict over disputed territories and demands for revision". The purpose of this book is not to deny the flawed nature of the Treaty but to argue that it established a system of European international relations that could be and indeed was developed and revised in order to establish a stable peace in Europe and secure prosperity for its peoples had the system not been blown apart by the Great Depression and the rise to power of the arch anti-system and anti-Treaty leader Adolf Hitler.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Keynes's book was very popular in Germany but not in France: "enthusiasm was loudest in Germany even though nothing in the book could be sensibly called 'pro-German'. And although Keynes had written 'France in my judgement, in spite of her policy at the Peace Conference [...] has the greatest claim on our generosity', it was received in France with [...] indignation" (Mantoux 1946: 6–7). It helped to launch the mythology that came to surround the end of the First World War in Germany: notably, two grievances. First, the allegations of the "stab in the back", that Germany's armies had not been defeated because the Allies had not succeeded in invading German soil, but rather Germany's surrender had been forced by strikes by treacherous workers led by Marxist politicians and mutinies in the Navy and, second, the "Diktat of Versailles", that Germany had been inflicted with a harsh and unjust peace treaty whose provisions needed to be amended to remove Germany's justified grievances. These included the reparation settlement, where the indeterminate settlement of Reparations in the Treaty, which had been intended by Keynes, Lloyd George and others to secure moderation in fixing the final figure payable after

post-war passions had subsided, became the mechanism to impose starvation on Germans. Although the loss of Alsace-Lorraine was generally accepted by Germans, Germany's Eastern frontiers became another running sore in 1920s Europe, with successive German Governments refusing to accept as valid the "Polish Corridor" in particular. Above all, this mythology was ruthlessly and cleverly exploited by Adolf Hitler to justify his demands for the rejection of the Treaty and the rectification of the wrongs done to Germans by the enforced separation of German-Austria from Germany, the isolation of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia, the international free city status of the German city of Danzig and last and not least the separation of East Prussia from the rest of the nation by the "Polish Corridor".

Arguably then, by encouraging the sense of German injustice Keynes did indeed lay some of the seeds from which the Second World War eventually grew, as Étienne Mantoux pointed out in his stern critique of Keynes's views, a book subtitled *The Economic Consequences of Mr. Keynes* (see Mantoux 1946). He challenged many of Keynes's conclusions, and repeatedly and sardonically quotes Keynes's statement that Europe's problems were not political or territorial but financial and economic and that "the perils of the future lay not in frontiers and sovereignties but in food, coal and transport". In reality, it was of course a dispute over territory and sovereignty that had led to the outbreak of the Second World War, in which he was serving and which eventually cost him his life. He confirms the view expressed by others that Keynes's book was influential in securing the Treaty's defeat in the US Senate (*ibid.*: 10–11). He quoted Harold Nicolson's remark that the danger that America might reject the Treaty was "the ghost at all our feasts" (*ibid.*: 8) and comments that "it seemed essential that America should not be persuaded to let Europe stew in its own juice" (*ibid.*) which is, of course, what happened, to the detriment of the future of the League of Nations and eventually the peace of Europe.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# The Conference and the Treaty

## I THE DRAMATIS

### PERSONAE: REINTERPRETING THE BIG FOUR

After extensive preparatory work (see Elcock 1972; Macmillan 2001), the Paris Peace Conference opened with appropriate splendour on 18 January 1919. After the grand opening, the detailed work was dispersed to a series of expert commissions with the final decisions reserved initially to the Council of Ten: the Heads of State or Government plus the Foreign Ministers of the USA, the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan. However, by March persistent leaks to an over-excited Press compelled the four leading statesmen to meet in secret as the Council of Four. Initially, their concern for security was such that they met without a secretary to record their discussions and decisions, although some members of the British delegation urged Lloyd George to take the Secretary to the Cabinet, Sir Maurice Hankey with him: General Wilson told Lloyd George that “He ought to have Hanky-Panky with him. The trouble is that the four of them meet together and think they have decided things but there is no-one to record what they have done. The consequence is that misunderstandings often arise and there is no definite account of their proceedings and nothing happens” (Liddell 1933: 59). However, the Big Four did not have a common language, so from the beginning an interpreter was needed, in the form of the eminent French historian Paul Mantoux. Then by mid-April, problems caused by

the lack of an official record of their meetings caused them to engage Sir Maurice Hankey, to take their minutes. Only by using both Mantoux's interpreter's French notes and Hankey's minutes can a complete record of the Council of Four's deliberations be achieved.

The pressures on the leading statesmen were enormous and highly varied. The conditions under which the Conference operated were far from ideal. Taylor (1977: 135) captures the frenetic series of issues with which the Council had to work:

The Big Four were also the Supreme War Council. At one moment they were drafting peace terms with Germany, at another wrangling over Fiume, or considering what to do with Bela Kun, the Bolshevik dictator of Hungary. Then they would turn aside to debate how to end the civil war in Russia, whether to conciliate the Bolsheviks there or to intervene against them. All Europe was clamouring for food and economic assistance.

Lloyd George himself stressed the complexity of the issues facing the conference in his speech to the House of Commons on 16 April 1919. He said that "No Conference that has ever been assembled in the history of the world has been confronted with problems of such variety, of such complexity, of such magnitude and of such gravity" (HC Debates, 5th series, col. 2956). It was the ease with which Lloyd George coped with this urgent and constantly shifting agenda that caused Clemenceau to remark during a performance of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*: "Figaro here, Figaro there. He must have been a sort of Lloyd George" (Steiner 2005: 28). Even for him, the stress must have been considerable: Sir Harold Nicolson (1964: 188) described the proceedings of the Conference as follows: "Such portraits (of the issues) would be interspersed with files, agenda papers, resolutions, *procès verbaux*, and communiqués. These would succeed each other with extreme rapidity and from time to time would have to be synchronised and superimposed". One constant source of pressure was the increasingly victorious Bolshevik regime in Russia, which had an avowed policy of fermenting revolution in the West, especially in Central Europe and Germany. The immediate results included a short-lived Bolshevik regime in Hungary under Bela Kun and the development of growing Communist Parties in most Western states, notably in German and France, although this was less

successful in Britain. Even there, however, fear of the threat of “Red Revolution” was widespread among the ruling classes of the Empire and in Britain herself, resulting in extensive scrutiny of Labour and Communist Party leaders and their officials by the Security Service MI5 (see Andrew 2009).

Secondly, the conditions under which the Conference had to operate in its string of Parisian hotels and government offices were constantly stressful, as Nicolson later recalled:

We had to shorten our labours and work crowded hours, long and late, because whilst we were trying to build, we saw in many lands the foundations of society crumbling into dust and we had to make haste. I venture to say that no body of men have ever worked in better harmony. I am doubtful whether any body of men with a difficult task have ever worked under greater difficulties – stones clattering on the roof and crashing through the windows and sometimes wild men screaming through the keyholes. (ibid.: 153–154)

In his speech to the House of Commons in April 16, Lloyd George himself referred to the poor conditions under which the Conference had to work:

We had to shorten out labours and work crowded hours, long and late, because whilst we were trying to build we saw in many lands the foundations of society crumbling into dust and we had to make haste. (ibid.: col. 2937)

It was little wonder that in the interest of quick decision-making, the final responsibility was concentrated in four pairs of hands. The personalities of the “Big Four” (mainly the Big Three since Orlando played little part in the decisions relating to the German treaty) must now be considered, especially since they have been widely misunderstood.

## 2 INTERPRETING THE BIG THREE

*Woodrow Wilson.* Thomas Woodrow Wilson had been elected President of the USA in 1912. He had maintained American neutrality until late in 1916, despite his anger at the sinking of the Cunard liner *Lusitania* off the Irish coast in 1915 and the unrestricted U-Boat campaign launched

by the German Admiralty against Allied shipping announced on 31 January 1916. The resultant sinking of American ships forced the USA to declare war on Germany, as well as did the Zimmermann Telegram, which appeared to threaten German support for Mexico in her attempt to recover New Mexico and other American territories. Taylor (1963: 129) noted that “Since the security of America was not endangered, the Americans had to treat the war exclusively as a moral crusade. They insisted more strongly than anyone that they were entirely in the right and the Germans entirely in the wrong”. This point is important in view of what was to follow.

On 8 January 1918, Wilson made his Fourteen Points speech, in which he set out the moral basis on which the future peace could be built, which inspired many liberals and Socialists to believe that it would be possible to create a new and peaceful international community. Wilson declared that “What we want in this war...is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made a fit place to live in and particularly that it be made a safe place for any peace-loving nation”. The Points included the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France, the creation of an independent Polish state “which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea”—a demand that was to cause a great deal of trouble later. Most important, the final Point proposed the creation of the League of Nations “for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small alike” (qu. in Elcock 1972: 18). It was the creation of the League which above all attracted the support of many European liberals and Socialists, although a system of international arbitration had already existed for several decades and had on several occasions successfully settled international disputes that threatened to provoke a war (Macmillan 2014: 269ff). Wilson was seeking after a narrow re-election in 1917 to “distance himself from his European allies and their traditional diplomatic dealings” (Henig 1984: 10). The importance of the Fourteen Points as the basis for peace was reinforced by the Germans when, in November 1918, they asked for an Armistice on the basis of the Fourteen Points. However, Wilson’s confidante Colonel House said that Wilson then insisted that the Germans must accept “all his speeches and from these you could establish almost any point that anyone wished against Germany” (qu. in *ibid.*: 11).

*President Wilson's Fourteen Points*

The programme of the world's peace, therefore, is our programme and that programme the only possible programme as we see it is this:

- I. Open Covenants openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.
- II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas outside territorial waters alike in peace and war except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.
- III. The removal as far as possible of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.
- IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.
- V. A free, open-minded and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observation of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the Government whose title is to be determined.
- VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and free co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing ...
- VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoyed in common with all free nations ...
- VIII. All French territory shall be freed and the invaded portions restored and the wrong done by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interests of all.

- IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognised lines of nationality.
- X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity for autonomous development.
- XI. Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro to be evacuated, occupied territorial restored. Serbia to be given free and secure access to the sea and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel....
- XII. The Turkish portions of the Ottoman Empire to be assured a secure sovereignty but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.
- XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.
- XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.

The Fourteen Points had greater symbolic than practical effect. Georges Clemenceau notoriously declared that “The Lord God Himself was content with only ten”, but others saw the Points as the starting point of a new and peaceful world order. In consequence, Wilson’s apparent betrayal of his ideals aroused widespread consternation when the contents of the draft Treaty of Versailles became known in May 1919. Keynes’s horrified reaction was typical:

The disillusion was so complete that some of those who had trusted most hardly dared speak of it. Could it be true? They asked of those who returned from Paris. Was the Treaty really as bad as it seemed? What had happened to the President? What weakness or what misfortune had led to so extraordinary, so unlooked for a betrayal? (Keynes 1919: 35)

Keynes's explanation criticised the failure of the American Delegation to the Conference to prepare detailed analyses of the issues that would face Wilson in the Council Chamber; he argued that this meant that Wilson usually had to respond to proposals drawn up by the British and the French: "Since the President had thought nothing out, the Council was generally working on the basis of a French or British draft. He had to take up, therefore, a persistent attitude of obstruction, criticism and negation if the draft was to become at all in line with his own ideals and purpose", rather than taking the initiative himself (Keynes 1919: 42). Such neglect of knowledge and preparation for international events has dogged American statesmen and diplomats on many occasions since. This was a source of inherent weakness in the President's position but it cannot wholly explain Wilson's acceptance of the supposedly unjust clauses of the Treaty, including the "War Guilt Clause", the imposition of reparations and his determination that the Kaiser and his principal lieutenants should be tried and executed or exiled for war crimes.

The main reason why Wilson so apparently betrayed his principles was something else altogether: his growing hatred of the Germans. He had bitterly denounced the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the unrestricted U-boat war, but it was in the run-up to the peace that Wilson's condemnation of the Germans became increasingly evident. A further and major crime that Wilson abhorred and did not forgive was the unjust Treaty of Brest-Litovsk that the Germans had signed with the then weak Bolshevik Russian Government in January 1918. This treaty granted independence to Finland and the three Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia). It redrew the Russian Western frontier far to the East of where it had previously been and made possible the re-creation of Poland (Henig 1984: 8). Wilson's initial response, in a speech delivered on 6 April 1918, was bitter: he said that whereas the German civilian delegates had professed their desire for a fair peace,

Their military masters, the men who act for Germany and exhibit her purpose in execution....are enjoying in Russia a cheap triumph in which no brave or gallant nation can long take pride. A great people, helpless by their own act, lies for the time at their mercy. Their fair professions are forgotten. They no-where set up justice but everywhere impose their power and exploit everything for their own use and aggrandisement. (qu. in Temperley 1920, I: 441)

On Independence Day, 4 July 1918, he described the Central Powers as “an isolated and friendless group of governments who speak no common purpose but only selfish ambitions of their own” (ibid.: 444). Finally, on 27 September he declared that the Germans “have convinced us that they are without honour and do not intend justice. They observe no covenants, accept no principle but force and their own interest. We cannot ‘come to terms’ with them. They have made it impossible” (qu. in ibid.). Wilson’s hatred and contempt for Germany could not have been expressed more clearly than this. It is impossible to believe that feelings of hatred and contempt so strongly expressed did not affect Wilson’s conduct at the peace negotiations.

During the Conference, Wilson’s stances and decisions fluctuated between a determination to uphold the principles laid down in his Fourteen Points against his loathing of Germany and what her rulers had done during the war. Early in the conference, at the second plenary session of 25 January, Wilson declared that the USA had entered the war for “a single cause.... That was the cause of justice and liberty for men of every kind and place” (qu. in Elcock 1972: 79). At times, he fought vigorously to uphold the Fourteen Points, but this was easier when the subject of the negotiations was not Germany. Thus, he repeatedly asserted the Fourteen Points as a reason to reject Italy’s extensive claims to territory around the Adriatic Sea, including the port city of Fiume (now Rijeka). Thus in April, he declared that “The compulsion is upon her (the United States) to square every decision she takes part in with those principles. ... She trusts Italy and in her trust believes that Italy will ask nothing of her that cannot be made unmistakably consistent with those sacred obligations” (Temperley 1924, V: Appendix III). However, the previous day Orlando had protested at the inconsistency with which Wilson had applied his principles: “Having made concessions right and left to respectable interests, he now wants to recover the purity of his principles at our expense. How can we possibly accept that?” (*Délibérations*, I: 302). Orlando’s protest was justified and the end result was to be his withdrawal from the conference; Wilson’s determination to uphold his principles had been over-weighed by his hatred of Germany, but this caused him to act inconsistently in ways that others could not stomach.

Orlando had demanded that the secret Treaty of London of 1915, under which Italy had been promised extensive territorial gains in the Adriatic area, including the port of Fiume and much of the Dalmatian coast, must be honoured. These demands were now rejected by Wilson

on the ground that they contravened the principle that the Slavonic people of the area should not be placed under foreign rule. The impasse between Wilson's insistence on upholding the moral force of the Fourteen Points specifically the self-determination of peoples against Italian expectations of promised gains under the Treaty of London resulted in the withdrawal of Orlando and his delegation from the Conference at the end of May. It then resulted in the fall of his Government, political instability in Italy and the occupation of Fiume by a militia led by the soldier-poet Gabriele d'Annunzio. The ultimate result in 1922 was the establishment of the Fascist dictatorship of Benito Mussolini.

In his dealings with Germany, Wilson's attitude was different. He was determined that the Kaiser should be tried for war crimes and executed or exiled as part of a general condemnation of German actions: "What I want to avoid is leaving historians any chance to be sympathetic to Germany. I want to condemn Germany to the execration of history and not to do anything which might cause someone to say that we went beyond our rights in a just cause" (*Délibérations*, I: 123). Later, he threw caution to the winds: on 8 April Wilson declared of the Kaiser: "Whether we send him to the Falkland Islands or Devil's Island, or wherever we wish does not matter to me" (*ibid.*). On May 16, Wilson wrote in response to a letter urging moderation in the terms of the treaty from Jan Smuts, that "I feel the terrible responsibility of this whole business but inevitably my thought goes back to the very great offence against civilisation which the German State committed and the necessity for making it evident once (and) for all that such things can lead only to the most severe punishment" (qu. in Nelson 1963: 326). In June, during the final Peace Congress, when the Allies were discussing the response to Germany's memoranda demanding amendments to the Treaty, Wilson's dislike of the Germans emerged repeatedly. Thus, Wilson's reaction to Brockdorff-Rantzau's speech on receiving the draft Treaty was blunt: "The Germans really are a stupid people. They always do the wrong thing. They did the wrong thing during the war and that is why I am here" (*ibid.*: 242). He was offended by Brockdorff-Rantzau's failure to stand up to receive the draft Treaty on 7 May, which he attributed to the arrogance that he also saw in Brockdorff-Rantzau's response to the peace terms but others who were sitting nearer to Brockdorff-Rantzau saw that he could not stand up because of his nervous state. Later in the Congress Wilson declared that "All we need to do is to reject the German

claim that Germany was not responsible for starting the war” (ibid.: 283). The constant recurrence of bursts of anti-German hatred throughout the conference demonstrates that where Germany was concerned, Wilson’s motives were mixed. He sought on many occasions to assert the importance of his principles but he also ignored them when it came to dealing with Germany’s war guilt and misconduct during the war. Towards the end of the Conference, he declared that “No injustice on our part would be involved in imposing complete reparations on the Germans but we have recognised that that would be an impossible demand” (*Délibérations*, II: 283). When Lloyd George, with the support of his British Empire Delegation, sought to moderate the Treaty in early June Wilson was largely unsympathetic. Little wonder that many, including the Germans themselves, felt that Wilson had not acted in accordance with his Fourteen Points in matters concerning Germany.

*Lloyd George.* David Lloyd George was the most creative intelligence to have entered 10, Downing Street. Before the war started he had achieved a formidable series of radical domestic reforms, including the creation of old-age pensions and sickness benefits, the reduction of the powers of the House of Lords to veto legislation, the settlement of industrial disputes by personal intervention and more. Becoming wartime Prime Minister in December 1916 he radically changed the machinery of Cabinet Government, introducing a Cabinet Secretariat and creating a small War Cabinet to oversee strategy. He sought and obtained the co-operation of the Trades Unions in the war effort and together with Winston Churchill imposed the convoy system on a reluctant Admiralty in 1917.

Keynes’s attitude to Lloyd George, which he shared with others including Lord Cecil, who described him once as “a tricky attorney negotiating about an unsavoury court case (who) could scarcely have been worse” (Balfour Papers), was a mixture of admiration for his abilities and criticism of his lack of principles: Keynes (1933) wrote that “Lloyd George is rooted in nothing; he is void and without content”. Lloyd George was certainly a nimble-footed negotiator, but throughout the Conference he consistently maintained at least two basic principles. The first concerned reparations and related issues, including war guilt. He argued consistently that Germany must be enabled to recover after the peace was made and allowed to regenerate both her own economy and hence the wider European economy. Indeed, he regarded such a revival as being urgently needed because the peoples of Central and

Eastern Europe were starving. He therefore repeatedly resisted French demands for heavy reparations payments, a policy he was to follow consistently in the years following the conclusion of the Treaty. He insisted that the demand for reparations must take account of Germany's capacity to pay without critically damaging her economy.

Within the British delegation views about what Germany could and should pay varied widely. The Treasury, led by Keynes, estimated that Germany could pay no more than £3000 million and it would be wise not to extract more than £2000 million, a view that Keynes retained in subsequent writings (see Keynes 1922: Chapter 2) but a committee under William Hughes, the Australian Prime Minister, produced a huge demand of £24,000 million (Steiner 2005: 31). Lloyd George therefore resisted both French demands that Germany must make full reparations for war damage and members of his own British Empire Delegation, led by William Hughes who were demanding the imposition of severe reparations: he had declared that "the right to reparation rests upon the principle of justice pure and simple in this sense, that where damage or harm has been done, the doer should make it good to the extreme limit of his resources" (*Délibérations*, I: 120–121). When Hughes threatened to refuse to sign the Reparations Chapter, Lloyd George retorted, "I quite understand your attitude. It is a very well-known one. It is generally called 'Heads I win, tails you lose'" (Lloyd George Papers). In his dealings with the French Lloyd George was equally firm, for example resisting French demands for heavy reparations in March he declared that

It will be as difficult for me as for M. Clemenceau to disperse the illusions which reign in the public mind on the subject of reparations. Four hundred members of the British Parliament have sworn to extract the last farthing from Germany of what is owing to us; I will have to face up to them. But our duty is to act in the best interests of our countries.... I am convinced that the Germans will not sign the sort of terms some people are suggesting. I would not sign if I were them. Germany will succumb to Bolshevism and Europe will remain mobilised, our industries stopped, our treasuries bankrupt. (Lothian Papers, GD40/17, VV: 135)

In April he was forced to return to London from Paris to defend his record in the negotiations against attacks by the Northcliffe Press, especially on the reparations negotiations, which had stimulated unrest in the House of Commons. He told the House then that "we want peace.

We want a stern peace because the occasion demands it. The crime demands it. But its severity must be designed not to gratify vengeance but to vindicate justice ... And overall we want to protect the future against a repetition of the horrors of this war ... by avoiding conditions which would create a legitimate sense of wrong, which will excite national pride needlessly to seek opportunities for redress" (House of Commons Debates, 5th series, vol. 114, col. 2950). He also told the House that "Honestly, I would rather have a good Peace than a good Press" (*ibid.*, col. 2947). It was Lloyd George, advised by Keynes as the chief Treasury representative, who proposed that no figure for reparations should be set in the Treaty but rather that a Commission should determine Germany's liability by May 1921. This would allow time for passions to cool and thus for a reasonable settlement to be achieved.

Lloyd George's second abiding principle was that the territorial settlement should not provide potential causes for a future war. He repeatedly argued, before, during and after the Conference that the Treaty must not create any new Alsace-Lorraine, likely causes of a future war. He saw the seizure of these two provinces by Germany from France in 1871 as a major cause of Franco-German enmity and hence of the First World War; he was determined that the Peace Treaty should leave no such causes for future enmity and war. In his speech to the Trades Union Congress on 5th January 1918—three days before President Wilson's Fourteen Points speech—in which he set out his war aims, Lloyd George said:

The days of the Treaty of Vienna are long past. We can no longer submit the future of European civilisation to the arbitrary decisions of a few negotiators striving to secure by chicanery or persuasion the interests of this or that dynasty or nation. The settlement of the new Europe must be based on such grounds of reason and justice as will give some promise of stability. Therefore it is that we feel that government by the consent of the governed must be the basis of any territorial settlement in this war. (Lloyd George 1936: 2570)

He committed himself to establishing "an independent Poland comprising all those genuinely Polish elements who desire to form part of it" (*ibid.*: 2572). Of Alsace-Lorraine he declared that "this sore has poisoned the peace of Europe for half a century and until it is cured healthy conditions will not have been restored. There can be no better illustration of the folly and wickedness of using a transient military success to

violate natural right” (ibid.: 2521). He asserted the principle of refusing to create “new Alsace-Lorraines” throughout the Peace Conference, particularly when discussing the frontiers of the new states in Central and Eastern Europe. For example, on 5 June he firmly rebuked the Polish Prime Minister, the celebrated concert pianist Ignace Paderewski, for making excessive territorial demands on Germany, Ukraine and elsewhere:

You know, I belong to a small nation and therefore I have great sympathy with all oppressed nationalities and it fills me with despair, the way in which I have seen small nations, before they have hardly leaped into the light of freedom, beginning to oppress other races than their own. They are more imperialists, believe me, than either England or France, than certainly the United States. It fills me with despair as a man who has fought all his life for little nations. (BDFP I, 3: 352)

This was the last of several rows he had with Paderewski over Poland’s territorial claims against not only Germany but also against Russia and Ukraine. He took a similar view, for example, over Czech demands to take over the district of Teschen. Taylor (1977: 134) concluded that “the territorial clauses of the Treaty were fair from the ethnical point of view. This was mainly Lloyd George’s doing”.

Finally, it should be remembered that on two occasions Lloyd George demanded modifications to the Treaty. The first came after the British Empire Delegation withdrew to the château of Fontainebleau in March to review the developments at the Conference. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey warned Lloyd George that “for some time past I have felt a vague and indefinite uneasiness as to whether the Peace Treaty was developing on sound lines of policy”. He was concerned particularly about reparations but other members of the delegation were more concerned about the frontier squabbles in Central and Eastern Europe. The result of this meeting was the Fontainebleau Memorandum, which warned of the danger that “Germany may throw in her lot with Bolshevism”, which was then seen as the greatest threat to peace and stability. The remedy was a series of commitments that ran true to Lloyd George’s two principles. Frontier questions must be settled in such a way as to reduce the number of Germans placed under foreign rule to a minimum. Hence the Rhineland could not be permanently separated from the rest of Germany but it could be demilitarised; the Polish

Corridor must be drawn upon ethnographical lines “irrespective of strategic or transportation considerations so as to embrace the smallest possible number of Germans” (qu. in Temperley 1924: 546–547). Hence, “the proposal of the Polish Commission that we should place 2,100,000 Germans under the control of a people which is of a different religion and which has never proved his capacity for stable self-government throughout its history must, in my judgement lead sooner or later to a new war in Eastern Europe” (ibid.: 547). Such doubts about Polish capacity to govern reasonably were to re-emerge often during and after the Conference.

The French response was unsympathetic. In their response to the Fontainebleau Memorandum, the French delegation argued: “The Conference has decided to call to life a certain number of new States, can the conference, without committing an unjust sacrifice of them, out of consideration for Germany, by imposing upon them unacceptable frontiers”? Later the French went on to state that “... the policy of the French Government is resolutely to aid these young peoples with the support of the liberal elements in Europe and not to seek, at their expense, ineffectual attenuations of the colonial, naval and commercial disaster inflicted upon Germany by the Peace” (Lloyd George 1938: 417–418). Here the determination of the French to weaken Germany as much as possible and to secure strong allies on Germany’s Eastern borders are clearly in evidence, in contradiction to Lloyd George’s intention to revive Germany’s economy and prevent Germans being placed under foreign rule.

France should be compensated for the damage to her coal mines but not allowed to annex the Saarland. Reparations should be set at the limit of Germany’s capacity to pay rather than providing compensation for all the Allied losses. Lastly “the Allied and Associated Powers should do all they can to put Germany on her legs once more” (Elcock 1972: 168ff). At the Council of Four Clemenceau rejected Lloyd George’s plea for Germany’s early admission to the League of Nations and rejected the spirit of the Fontainebleau Memorandum but its points provided a basis for further negotiations leading up to the presentation of the draft Treaty to the Germans on 7 May.

At this stage, Lloyd George was not alone in his unease about the way the Treaty was developing. On 30 March the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing expressed his own concerns.

I am sure now that there will be no preliminary treaty of peace but that the treaty will be complete and definitive. This is a serious mistake. Time should be given for passions to cool. The operations of a preliminary treaty should be tested and studied. It would hasten a restoration of peace.... The President's obsession as to a League of Nations blinds him to everything else. An immediate peace is nothing to him compared to the adoption of the Covenant. The whole world wants peace. The President wants his League. I think the world will have to wait. (*PPC XI*: 547–548)

In a second memorandum, he criticised the way in which discussions with the various states making claims on Germany had been conducted. “The President, as I now see it, should have insisted on everything being brought before the Plenary Conference. He would then have had the confidence and support of all the smaller nations because they would have looked up to him as their champion and guide. They would have followed him ... A grievous blunder has been made” (*ibid.*: 548–549). Like Keynes, Lansing thought that the privacy in which the negotiations had been conducted had resulted in a failure to deal properly with the many demands being made on the principal statesmen.

The second such intervention by the British Prime Minister came in early June when, after another meeting of the Empire Delegation, Lloyd George threatened to refuse to sign the Treaty unless it was modified to take more account both of Germany's current situation and of the need to secure a just and lasting peace. The British and their Imperial colleagues had considered the Treaty in the light of the German response, which had stimulated unease among many members of the Delegation. After a Delegation meeting of 30 May, Lloyd George submitted his new demands to the Council of Four on the afternoon of 2 June. He warned his colleagues that unless the Treaty was modified and “if the Germans refuse to sign, they (the British delegation) will not consent to renew the war or the blockade unless some changes are made to the Treaty of Peace” (*Délibérations*, II: 265–266). He requested that a plebiscite be held in Upper Silesia and several smaller areas and that the number of French troops sent to occupy the Rhineland ought to be limited. He urged Germany's early admission to the League of Nations and also demanded changes to the reparations settlement. He stressed the particular importance to the British delegation of Germany's Eastern frontiers and the reparations settlement (Elcock 1972: 272ff). However, these demands met with hostility from both Clemenceau and Wilson.

Clemenceau sneered that “Some of these little points that you have just been explaining to us are not without some importance” (*Délibérations*, II: 268–275). He went on to argue that “Unhappily, we know the Germans better than anyone and we believe that the more concessions we give them, the more they will demand” (*PPC* V: 564). Wilson was unsympathetic to Lloyd George’s proposals. However, Lloyd George was to win several of his demands in the subsequent negotiations.

Wilson’s attitude was revealing. His dislike of the Germans re-emerged immediately: “If the Germans had had the good sense to say to us, as the Austrians did, ‘We are in your hands but we were not the only people responsible for the war’” they could have been treated more leniently. In private he was angry with Lloyd George and his British colleagues: “Well, I don’t want to seem to be unreasonable but my feeling is that we ought not, with the object of getting it signed, make changes to the Treaty if we think that it embodies what we were contending for; that the time to consider all these questions was when we were writing the Treaty and that it makes me a little tired for people to come and say now that they are afraid the Germans won’t sign” (*PPC* XI: 222). Lloyd George fought alone but according to Nicolson, he was “fighting like a Welsh terrier” (Harrod 1953: 253). He gained a number of points including the Upper Silesia plebiscite. However, Clemenceau would not yield in his distrust of the Germans to permit them early entry to the League against both Wilson’s and Lloyd George’s opposition. He also rejected altering the reparations clauses despite Lloyd George’s repeated plea that the figure must be set at a level that would allow German and European economic recovery, or shortening the occupation of the Rhineland.

On receipt of the final Treaty, the incumbent German Government split and fell on 20 June, but its successor felt obliged to sign the Treaty despite its members’ reservations about various aspects of it: the German Government’s moral authority was not helped by the sinking of her High Seas Fleet at Scapa Flow. The Treaty was not modified and after a second attempt at resignation by the new German Government which was rejected by the President of the Weimar Republic, the Treaty was signed in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles on 28th June.

*Georges Clemenceau.* As the French Prime Minister (strictly President of the Council of Ministers), Georges Clemenceau assumed the Presidency of the Peace Conference. At 78, he was by far the oldest of the three principal statesmen. In his relative youth, he had been *maire*

*de Montmatre* during the siege of Paris in 1870–1871. Now he saw his chance to take his revenge on Germany for the humiliation his country had suffered then. Keynes’s (1919: 29f) view of Clemenceau was half respectful, half derogatory. He wrote that “Clemenceau was by far the most eminent member of the Council of Four ... One could not despise Clemenceau or dislike him but only take a different view as to the nature of civilised man, or indulge at least a different hope” (Keynes 1919: 26). He went on to explain Clemenceau’s policy at the Conference in the light of his view of the German character (*ibid.*: 29ff): as quoted earlier: “He felt about France what Pericles felt of Athens – unique value in her, nothing else mattering and one disillusion – mankind, including Frenchmen and his colleagues not least”. Keynes thus portrayed Clemenceau as a *revanchiste*, determined to avenge his country’s woes at German hands and above all, to secure Germany’s weakness relative to France—an objective sought by French statesmen for centuries but not achieved during modern French history. For Clemenceau ensuring the security of France and the subjugation of Germany were his understandable main war aims and he carried them over into the Peace Conference.

However, this is a very one-sided view of Clemenceau’s approach to his allies, especially Britain and the USA. He wanted, more than any other Frenchman to maintain the wartime alliances and thus secure France’s safety. In December 1918 he told the Chamber of Deputies that “for this entente I shall make every sacrifice” (qu. in Jordan 1943: 37). He elaborated:

There was an old system, which stands condemned today and to which I do not fear to say that I remain to some extent faithful at this time: countries organised their defence. It was very prosaic. They tried to have good frontiers. They went armed. It was a terrible burden to all peoples ... this system of alliances, which I am not for giving up. I tell you this openly. (*Ibid*)

In understanding Clemenceau’s diplomacy in Paris, this desire to maintain the American and British alliances was of critical importance: Taylor may have exaggerated somewhat when he declared that “it was only because Clemenceau was of all French statesmen the most favourable to Great Britain and the United States that the Treaty of Versailles was signed at all” (1961: 35). Elsewhere he recorded that “It was fortunate for him (Lloyd George) that Clemenceau was more concerned

than any other French statesman to retain the friendship of the Anglo-Saxon Powers and gave way when pressed by Wilson and Lloyd George” (1977: 134). He saw the League of Nations as a means of perpetuating the wartime alliances, thus providing security against a future German attack.

In doing this Clemenceau frequently infuriated his own colleagues, including Marshal Foch and even more his political opponents, including Raymond Poincaré, then President of the Republic and the wider French public. This is evident in two controversies in particular: those concerning reparations and the future status of the Rhineland. Clemenceau’s Finance Minister, Lucien Klotz demanded heavy reparations from Germany. Throughout the war, French finance ministers had assured the Chamber of Deputies and the public that “*l’Allemagne paiera*”. More seriously, the French were depending on reparations to pay for the restoration of the former battlefields of North-Eastern France and the revival of the industries whose plants there had been devastated by the fighting. In this Klotz was supported by the Minister for Reconstruction, Louis Loucheur as well as by Poincaré. It did not help that Poincaré and Clemenceau were political and personal enemies, Clemenceau being a man of the Left and leader of the Radical Party, while Poincaré was a leader of the Right.

On reparations, the conflict was mainly with Lloyd George. Clemenceau was determined to recover the maximum amount of reparations from Germany, both to pay for the restoration of the damage done by the war and to keep Germany weak. A heavy reparations demand would increase France’s security against an enemy who had invaded her twice in less than fifty years. Lloyd George by contrast was concerned first to prevent Germany succumbing to Bolshevism and secondly to ensure that her economy and the wider European economy could recover from their current state of depression: in April he told President Wilson that “the economic mechanism of Europe is jammed” (Macmillan 2001: 194). French and British estimates of what Germany could be expected and required to pay were far apart. It was Lloyd George, advised by Keynes who had proposed that the total sum of reparations should be not fixed at the Conference but should be allocated to a Reparations Commission that was to report in 1921. Clemenceau eventually accepted this proposal as the only escape from their deadlock and in order to maintain his relationships with Britain and the USA, but he protested to the end:

I could accept that but I do not understand the difficulty in fixing a figure. Someone has stolen my watch, my pictures, my furniture. The thief has been caught. It is not difficult to fix a figure before a detailed estimate is available, that is the constant practice of the courts of law. But in a spirit of conciliation I shall accept the proposal made by President Wilson and Mr. Lloyd George. (*Délibérations*, I: 219)

However, British and French perceptions of the basis upon which reparations were to be assessed remained strongly divergent. The British consistently argued that reparations must be limited to estimates of Germany's capacity to pay without suffering economic ruin, while the French wanted the maximum amount of reparations possible, both to keep Germany weak and to secure as much redress for the country for the damage done to her territories and industries during the war.

A second major cause of Anglo-French friction was the Rhineland. In his initial presentation to the Council, Marshal Foch had demanded a permanent French frontier on the Rhine and the French Government demanded the creation of the Rhenish Republic independent of Germany. This demand was supported by all the French generals. Colonel House reported to Wilson that Foch's view was that "under no circumstances will the German empire extend beyond the Rhine. That in his opinion was essential for the security of France and makes the settlement of the frontier a simple matter" (House 1928, 4: 344). This, however, was unacceptable to the Americans because it would breach the Fourteen Points. On 20 March Colonel House recorded in his diary that he had met with Clemenceau, who "had had a meeting with Lloyd George and the President all afternoon. I asked him how they had got on: "Splendidly, we disagreed about everything" (Seymour 1928: 405).

The British were opposed to an indefinite commitment to maintain Allied troops on the Rhine, in addition to Lloyd George's often repeated opposition to the creation of "new Alsace-Lorraines", fresh causes of tension among nations and hence the possible causes of a future war. The eventual agreement to a fifteen-year occupation of the Rhineland was a major concession on Clemenceau's part that was widely criticised in France. For him, however, it was more important to secure the alliances with Britain and the USA than to secure the Rhine frontier in perpetuity, despite his own reservations about making this concession.

In the negotiations leading up to the establishment of the League of Nations, again differences in how different statesmen perceived the purpose of the League were submerged in the need to agree the creation of the new organisation. Whereas the British and the Americans saw the purpose of the League as being to arbitrate in international disputes and so prevent wars from erupting, the French saw it as a means of ensuring security against future German aggression, hence Clemenceau's refusal to agree to the early admission of Germany to the League. Thus, "the French wanted the League to develop into a system of security directed against Germany; the British regarded the League as a system of conciliation that would include Germany" (Taylor 1961a: 39).

### 3 THE INTERACTION

Not only must the characters and motivations of the principal statesmen be considered: the Treaty was also the product of their interaction in the Council of Ten and above all in the Council of Four. Keynes certainly regarded the interaction among the "Big Three" as a crucial influence on the Treaty. Winston Churchill recorded that "four men, for a time to be reduced to three, each the responsible head of a great victor state, are all that are left. The five hundred gifted journalists, the twenty-seven eager nations, the Council of Ten (fifty), the fifty-eight commissions, so rich in eminent personages, have all melted down to three men" (1928: 198–199). Keynes regarded the Treaty as the product of their worst motives and the least desirable aspects of their characters: "The President, the Tiger and the Welsh Witch were shut up in a room together for six months and the Treaty is what came out" (Keynes 1961: 36). In reality, all three men had to resolve within themselves, their colleagues and by compromises within the Council of Four their conflicting values and interests. Wilson allowed his hatred of the Germans to override the ideals of his Fourteen Points. He also clearly believed that the defects of the Treaty could be rectified over the coming years by the League of Nations, the creation of which was for him the most important achievement of the Conference.

Lloyd George frequently asserted his views that care must be taken not to create new causes of conflict—"new Alsace-Lorraines"—and his belief that Germany must be allowed to survive and prosper if the economic fortunes of Europe were to be restored and the current chaos, hunger and desperation were to be at all quickly assuaged. Clemenceau

was the least conflicted of the three but his compromises designed to ensure the continuation of the wartime alliances aroused great hostility among his colleagues and the French public. The result was a series of pragmatic compromises. Reparations were to be determined later. The Rhineland was to be occupied but not permanently ripped from Germany's side. Danzig became a Free City under League of Nations administration and the "Polish Corridor" was established but not with the boundaries desired by Paderewski and other Polish representatives. Overall, Winston Churchill estimated that 90% of Europe's peoples were placed under governments of their own nationality and there were occasions when this was impossible because to do so would create a nation as discontinuous as the spots on a leopard. The League of Nations was created but Germany was for the time being refused admission.

On reparations Clemenceau's task in gaining acceptance for compromise and at times engaging in "an unqualified abandonment of his minsters" (Keynes 1919: 27) was made easier by the general contempt with which his Minister of Finance, Klotz "France's fatuous Finance Minister" (Steiner 2005: 25), came to be held by the other members of the Conference. Clemenceau declared that Klotz was "the only Jew who did not understand finance" (Sharp 1991: 79). After a particularly tiresome session, Wilson complained that "We got Klotz on the brain". Lloyd George was particularly angered by Klotz's refusal to allocate resources to alleviate the plight of the starving people in Germany and Central Europe. Keynes (1949: 62) memorably described an occasion when Lloyd George openly displayed his contempt for Klotz:

Lloyd George had always hated and despised him and now he could kill him. Women and children were starving, he cried and here was M. Klotz prating and prating of his 'gold'. He leaned forward and with his hands he indicated to everyone the image of a hideous Jew clutching a moneybag.

He concluded by likening Klotz to the Bolshevik leaders, when "all around the room you could see each one grinning and whispering to his neighbour, 'Klotzky'". After this humiliation, food was supplied to the Germans and others, albeit in return for payments in gold (see Keynes 1949; Elcock 1975: Chapter 16).

The defects of the Treaty were to some extent mitigated by Lloyd George's two *démarches* on behalf of his Empire Delegation in March and June, although both his *démarches* were unwelcome to the others.

The second, in early June was received with particular hostility by Wilson and Clemenceau. The resultant Treaty was overall probably the best result that could have been achieved given the mixed motives of the principal statesmen, the constant demands for severe treatment of Germany from their colleagues, together with inflamed national Presses and public opinion. Lloyd George faced repeated criticism from colleagues on his delegation, notably from the Australian Prime Minister, William Hughes, although other including General Smuts of South Africa and Lord David Cecil supported his efforts to secure a moderate settlement. He was forced to return to London in April to defend his conduct at the Conference in a House of Commons Adjournment debate; he diverted criticism by a brilliant denunciation of the Northcliffe Press: "Reliable? That is the last adjective I would use. It is here today, jumping there tomorrow and there the next day. I would as soon rely on a grasshopper" (HC Debates, 5th series, vol. 111, col. 2952). He further accused Northcliffe of arrogance because of his thwarted demand to be a member of the British Empire Delegation (*ibid.*, col. 2953). His defence succeeded and he went on to try to secure further modifications to the Treaty in early June. The next stage is to consider the nature of the Treaty that finally emerged in late June from the endless discussions that had taken place since January.

#### 4 THE TREATY

Keynes wrote (1961: 34) that "The President, the Tiger and the Welsh witch were shut up in a room together for six months and the Treaty was what came out". This section discusses the content of the Treaty and the implications of the decisions reflected in its clauses and sections. The questions are why were the decisions taken as they were, what those decisions amounted to and what were their implications for the future.

The first section of the Treaty of Versailles contained the Covenant of the League of Nations, which President Wilson and many others saw as the key to securing a peaceful Europe and world during the years following the Conference. This had been largely drafted by experts, particularly those who were enthusiastic supporters of the idea of a League of Nations, such as Lord Robert Cecil in the British delegation. The ideas and experiences behind the proposals in the Covenant for international administration and arbitration were not entirely new: arbitration of

various disputes had become established practice during the nineteenth century (Macmillan 2014: 269ff). International functional institutions such as the Universal Postal Union, the International Telegraphs Union and international railway administrations had ensured that European countries had become accustomed to working together on matters of common interest. The Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 had laid down rules for the conduct of interstate relations and warfare, whose breach by the Germans in the opening days of the First World War provoked British complaints and helped to draw her into the war.

Before and during the First World War several blueprints for a society or league of nations were prepared, notably by the British Phillimore Commission, which sowed the seeds for what became known as collective security by proposing that if a nation broke the rules of the league and attacked another member state, this would be seen as a declaration of war against all the members (see Sharp 1991: 44ff. For the Phillimore Commission, see pp. 45–46). Then on 5 January 1918, Lloyd George proposed the creation of a League of Nations in his war aims speech to the Trades Union Congress, followed three days later by Wilson's Fourteen Points speech, the last of which was a commitment to a "general association of nations" with a remit to maintain peace.

The placing of the Covenant as the opening section of the Treaty was important because many of the participants in the Conference, most notably President Wilson, believed that whatever the faults in the remainder of the Treaty might be, they could ultimately be corrected through the agency of the League. Thus, for example, "President Wilson ... acquiesced in the clauses directed against Germany solely from the belief that the League of Nations would get rid of them or make them unnecessary ... once it was established" (Taylor 1961b: 28). Wilson wrote to his wife that "I now realise, more than ever before, that that once established, the League can arbitrate and correct mistakes which are inevitable in the treaty we are trying to make at this time" (qu. in Sharp 1991: 59). The League would provide the means to reform the inevitable defects of the Treaty. In the House of Commons Lloyd George likewise spoke of the "great world scheme ... an experiment upon which the whole future of the globe hangs—the Society of Nations" (HC Debates, vol. 111, col. 2932). Lloyd George was to become more sceptical about the League later, partly because of America's failure to join it, but at this stage, he saw it as the main hope for future peace.

Also, as Taylor (1967: 368) claimed “President Wilson ... believed at bottom that France and Germany were equally responsible for World War 1, he wanted to protect them and all other states under the rule of law. The essence of the League of Nations was that it should be “something other than a meeting place for the representatives of sovereign states, it was to create a conscience of humanity to which all states would become obedient”. Steiner (2005: 349) argued that “the League of Nations was never intended to be a super state; it was an experiment in internationalism at a time when the counter-claims of nationalism were running powerfully in the opposite direction”. There were differing views on what the ultimate purpose of the League was to be. The British and the Americans saw it mainly as a means of avoiding war by settling international disputes by negotiation and arbitration. The League was given the power, in Article 16 of the Covenant, to summon its members’ troops to collective military action against an aggressor if arbitration failed. However, the French and their allies regarded it as a means of securing collective security against a regenerated Germany, or possibly against the menace posed by the developing Soviet Union with its ambition to spread Communism throughout the world. Hence, “underneath to be sure, there were profound disagreements. The Anglo-Saxons envisaged the League as an instrument of conciliation. The French wanted mainly an additional machine of security against Germany, perpetuating the wartime alliances” (Taylor 1977: 133–134). Both Germany and the Soviet Union were to be excluded from membership of the League until they could demonstrate their future good behaviour.

A major issue that was to cause problems for many years ahead was the settlement of the reparations Germany must pay to compensate for the damage caused by the war. Of course, the statesmen at Paris all believed that Germany must bear the sole responsibility for the outbreak of the war and the destruction that had resulted from it. However, the negotiators were caught in the jaws of a major dilemma. The French and British Press, as well as the wider public, had been encouraged to expect that a heavy burden of reparations would be imposed to pay for much if not all the costs of the war to the victorious Allies. First Lord of the Admiralty Sir Eric Geddes’s promise that “I will squeeze the lemon until the pips squeak” was a typical example of the promises that Governments had made to their anxious citizens. However, the advice from the economic experts advising the “Big Four”, J. M. Keynes their lead member, was that the reparations settlement must take account of Germany’s capacity to pay reparations without her economy being stifled

and hence the recovery of the whole European economy being inhibited. In consequence, the Council of Four decided that no figure for Reparations should be set; instead, the decision should be handed over to a Reparations Commission with a remit to determine the figure by May 1921, which it did. By then, it was hoped that the Press and public passions that prevented a realistic assessment of Germany's liability being assessed at the Conference would have subsided. The indeterminate settlement was the only wise course of action available in Paris in 1919, although Clemenceau accepted it only reluctantly, but it was to cause endless trouble for several years ahead.

Lastly, the territorial clauses of the Treaty gave rise to a great deal of sometimes angry confrontations between the leading statesmen and the representatives of the newly independent states that had formerly been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as other smaller countries including Greece, Ukraine and others, who demanded increases in their territory that were not justified by ethnic considerations. These had to be considered in view of the commitments made by President Wilson in his Fourteen Points and Lloyd George in his statement of British war aims that the self-determination of nations must stand as a principle in the drafting of the Treaty. However, one issue in particular had to lead to an infringement of this principle. This was the promise in the Fourteen Points of a free and independent Poland with secure access to the sea, which made the division of East Prussia from the rest of Germany inevitable, coupled with the necessary incorporation of Germans in the "Polish Corridor" linking the main part of the country with the port of Danzig (now Gdansk) as the promised outlet to the sea, although the predominantly German city of Danzig was declared an independent "free city" under the supervision of the League of Nations in an attempt to reduce the number of Germans who had Polish rule imposed upon them. The delineation of the "Polish Corridor" led to several clashes between Lloyd George, David and Paderewski. Lloyd George wanted to minimise the number of Germans placed under Polish rule, while Paderewski was anxious to secure the widest corridor possible. Unfortunately, Polish statesmen also sought excessive territories elsewhere, including Eastern Galicia and even Russia, resulting in a war between the two countries that almost resulted in Poland's destruction (see Elcock 1969). Another territorial issue that was to cause trouble later was the German population in the mountainous area known as the Sudetenland. The Czechoslovak delegation, led by Edouard Beneš claimed that Czechoslovak possession of this mountain range was essential

for her defence despite the presence of a German population there, a demand that was acceded to by the Council of Four after a good deal of discussion. Nonetheless, despite these and other cases where the principle of self-determination of peoples was violated, Winston Churchill estimated that well over 90% of Europeans were now subject to government by people of their own nation. He wrote that “probably less than three per cent of the European population was now living under Governments whose nationality they repudiate; and the map of Europe has for the first time been drawn in general harmony with the wishes of its peoples” (1928: 206). Later he wrote that “a fair judgement on the whole settlement, a simple explanation of how it arose, cannot leave the authors of the new map of Europe with any serious reproach. To an overwhelming extent the wishes of the various populations prevailed” (ibid.: 231).

Hence the territorial clauses of the Treaty were “fair from the ethnical point of view. This was mainly Lloyd George’s doing” (Taylor 1977: 134). Lloyd George’s main concern was to try and ensure that no territorial settlements were reached that were likely to be the cause of another European war. He declared that “The strongest impression made upon me by my first visit to Paris was the statue of Strasbourg veiled in mourning. Do not let us make it possible for Germany to create a similar statue” (qu. in Sharp 1991: 108). In this, he was ultimately not successful mainly because of the allocation of the Sudeten Germans to Czechoslovakia and the Polish Corridor, which the Germans much resented at the time and afterwards, culminating in the Munich crisis in September 1938 and the declaration of war a year later. The overall territorial settlement was not perfect but it was probably as good as was possible to achieve at the time, especially as in many areas, to comply with the strict ethnic principle would have required them to create countries as discontinuous as the spots on a leopard’s skin.

Austria lost her huge polyglot empire in the interest of national self-determination but was otherwise treated more leniently than Germany in her peace treaty, the Treaty of St Germain-en-Laye. Austria’s sins were lesser than those of Germany. Towards the end of the war, a German general is said to have said to an Austrian colleague: “The situation is serious but not hopeless”, to which the Austrian replied, “No, it is hopeless but not serious”. As Keynes remarked shortly afterwards, “in any case, the Viennese were not made for tragedy; the world feels that there is none so bitter as to wish ill on the city of Mozart” (1922: 178). Austria was required by the Treaties to remain separate from Germany.

Repeated attempts to create an economic union with Germany were resisted until 1938, when Hitler absorbed Austria into the Reich.

The negotiations at Paris produced a treaty that was in many respects imperfect but not a Carthaginian Peace designed to weaken Germany forever. It was a series of pragmatic deals done by statesmen with mixed but sincere motives labouring under severe pressures of time and popular demands that as democratic leaders of their countries they had to try and satisfy, or at least not inflame unduly. It was not perfect but it was probably the best outcome realistically achievable in all the circumstances surrounding Paris in 1919. Margaret MacMillan's (2001: 500) conclusion is fair: "They tried, even cynical old Clemenceau, to build a better order. They could not foresee the future and they certainly could not control it. That was up to their successors ... The peacemakers ... had to deal with reality, not with what might have been. They grappled with huge and difficult questions. How can the irrational passions of nationalism or religion be contained before they do more damage? How can we prevent war? We are still asking these questions". Ruth Henig (1984: 14–15) came to a similar conclusion: "There is some truth in the many sketches painted of the Council of Four discussions but the records show that this process of bargaining was complex, with attitudes by no means fixed. The easiest way to summarise the settlement finally reached is to examine the principal areas of discussion and dispute and outline the compromise solutions put forward". Their successors' efforts to implement the Treaty and modify its defects is the subject of the remainder of this book.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# “Double, Double, Toil and Trouble”: Years of Frustration in the Early 1920s

The immediate aftermath of the signing and ratification of the Treaty of Versailles boded ill for its future. Major issues remained to be resolved, and at this stage, many of them could not be resolved because of the conflicting views and policies held by the statesmen of the Great Powers. Until 1924, only limited progress could be made in implementing the Treaty and resolving the issues that were left unresolved or problematic during the negotiations at Paris. Furthermore, two problems originating outside Europe which inhibited the implementation of the Treaty were to pose significant difficulties: first, the withdrawal of the USA from European affairs after the Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and secondly the threat posed to Western order by the Soviet Union. However, several inter-Allied disputes between Britain and France, as well as difficult negotiations with Germany resulted in a stalemate what made progress towards a stable and peaceful Europe impossible.

### 1 THE AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL FROM EUROPE

The first of these was the refusal of the American Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. President Wilson had failed to include any Republican senators in the delegation that he took to Paris, which caused offence in the Grand Old Party. To make matters worse the Republicans made significant gains in the 1918 mid-term elections, giving them a majority in both Houses of Congress: thirty-nine in the House of Representatives and two in the Senate. The ratification of a treaty

requires a two-thirds majority in the Senate and the election results were likely to make this difficult to achieve. The President's aloofness and arrogant personality increased the danger to the Treaty. To make matters worse "the President's personal and political foe" Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (Steiner 2005: 34) became Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Steiner (2005: 35) states that "To Wilson the real issue at hand was the opportunity presented by the end of the war and peace-making to refashion a new world order ... The 'stern Protestant preacher' demanded that his fellow Americans should show the way to a new conception of international relations that would allow men to live in peaceful harmony". When Wilson presented the Treaty to the Senate for ratification, he demanded, "Dare we reject it (the Treaty) and break the heart of the world?" but Cabot Lodge called hearings of the Foreign Relations Committee to scrutinise the Treaty in detail—a move then unprecedented in Senate consideration of treaties. The hearings lasted six weeks. Cabot Lodge argued that "Wilson had undertaken to be the final umpire in every European question, increasing hostility both to himself and his country and meddling in things in which the United States had no interest whatever" (Walworth 1986: 529). By contrast, the British House of Commons had quickly ratified the Treaty with only four votes against.

Among the major problems that Senators were worried about was that Article 16 of the League Covenant would restrict the Congressional prerogative guaranteed in the US Constitution to declare war and make peace. There was also an issue concerning whether the Covenant would permit or require foreign powers to breach the Monroe Doctrine, which since 1823 had guaranteed European restraint from interfering in the affairs of the New World. Then too, Senators were reading Keynes's *Economic Consequences of the Peace* and having their doubts reinforced by their reading: "the reaction to Keynes's book provides startling evidence of the potency in the history of ideas of the incrustations of myths and half-truths which obscure and distort reality and contribute in turn to the formation of a new reality" (Lentin 1986: 143). The Foreign Relations Committee's conclusions included 50 amendments that "would prevent American participation in the work of the commissions that the Peace Conference was impatient to, put into action" (ibid.: 533). Wilson, however, declared that "Here I am, here I am dug in" and began a nationwide speaking campaign in support of the Treaty until he was incapacitated by a stroke, while the Senate initially failed to ratify the

Treaty on 19th December because Democratic Senators combined with the "irreconcilables" who were opposed to the Treaty on any terms to deny it a two-thirds majority. The final defeat of the Treaty by 7 votes, came on 20th March 1920.

Taylor urged that the consequences of the American withdrawal from the League of Nations ought not to be exaggerated, nonetheless the consequences were significant. The short-term result of the Senate's hostility to the Treaty of Versailles as that Wilson ordered the withdrawal of American representatives at the various commissions and committees working on the implementation of the Treaty on 21st November 1919. Thereafter, if the Americans participated at all in European discussions, it was as unofficial observers with some speaking rights but no votes. The impact of this is seen in a remark by Clemenceau at a meeting at 10 Downing Street on 11th December 1919: "He did not think America could help much. To begin with, they are very far away. Moreover, he would not forget that politically America had forced a peace system on the Allies with which she had now refused to agree" (BDFP I, 2: 731). At the first meeting of the Reparations Commission on 9th January 1920, it was agreed that American representatives could participate informally but not vote. At the Cannes conference in January 1922, an American representative, Colonel Harvey, attended but did not speak. Subsequently, the USA Government declined to attend the Genoa Conference in April and May 1922 because, as Sir A Geddes in Washington reported to the Foreign Secretary on 7th March 1922, the American view was that "... it is not primarily an economic conference as questions are excluded without a satisfactory determination of which chief causes of economic disturbance must continue to operate. Conference is of a political character and American people do not wish to become involved in European political questions" (BDFP I, 19: 198). In the longer term, the inability and unwillingness of the USA to participate in resisting the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 was the first of the failures that resulted in the emasculation of the League.

From then on, American participation in the affairs of Europe in the years before 1924 was at best spasmodic. During the Harding Administration between 1921 and 1923 little was done but when Calvin Coolidge took over after President Harding died of heart disease and pneumonia in San Francisco in 1923. Americans began to intervene in European affairs because

Though the United States failed to confirm the Treaty of Versailles, America needed a peaceful Europe and a stable economic order. American diplomacy was ceaselessly active in European questions. The two schemes for the payment of German reparations, the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan were both devised under American guidance, each bore the name of an American chairman. American loans restored Germany's economy – for good or ill. (Taylor 1961, 32)

Only later did isolationism become dominant in American foreign policy: “American isolationism in the 1930s did not rest on selfishness. It sprang from the conviction that the First World War had been a crooked conspiracy of armaments manufacturers and that it served no moral purpose. Once the American people discarded this belief, isolationism was dead” (Taylor 1967: 358). Again, isolationism resulted from inaccurate perceptions of the corruption and vengefulness of European states. The Harding Administration would have nothing to do with the League but when Calvin Coolidge became President in 1923 his Secretary of State, Charles Evan Hughes, appointed an observer to attend meetings of the League without a vote.

A further consequence of the US' failure to ratify the Treaty of Versailles must be noted here. Together with the Senate's refusal to ratify the Versailles Treaty, the US' treaty of guarantee to France, upon which, together with the associated British treaty of guarantee, Clemenceau had depended to win French security from a future attack by Germany. When the American treaty of guarantee failed ratification, the British declined to ratify her parallel guarantee treaty. This was seen as more crucial to French security because only British troops could arrive quickly to France's aid in the event of her being attacked. The failure of these guarantees had a considerable effect on French post-war policy, as Anthony Lentin (2000: 106) noted. France was diplomatically isolated by the loss of support from Russia, America and now Britain. The French reaction was to attempt the rigid and punctilious enforcement of the Versailles settlement, tempered by consciousness of a waning ability to do so as Germany recovered her strength. Hence the expeditions across the Rhine, to punish every infraction of the treaty, the almost desperate occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 and the revival of ill-fated attempts to foster Rhineland separation, both the cause of a gross rupture in Anglo-French relations.

America’s default and British evasion, a true case of *Albion perfidy* since Lloyd George may have bamboozled Clemenceau by inserting in the British Treaty of Guarantee the condition that it would come into force only if the Americans ratified their guarantee treaty (Lentin 2000: 108). The failure of the two guarantee treaties was to be the cause of a great deal of trouble in the years following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. Ruth Henig (2000: 147) quotes FS Northedge who stated that the effect of the failure of the USA to join the League was “to widen the gulf between British and French attitudes towards the peace and thus to contribute to their fatal inability to act together when the great challenges to the League came in the 1930s”. However, the divergence between British and French policies on European recovery and security were to cause trouble long before then.

Before discussing the second major external problem facing Europe as the 1920s began, the dangers posed by the Soviet Union, that it intended to stimulate revolutions in other European states and that it might ally with Germany to threaten the succession states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Eastern Europe must be noted.

## 2 THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS BEGINS WORK

The first meeting of the League’s Council took place on 16th January 1920. The first Secretary-General of the League was Sir Eric Drummond, a British civil servant and “a cautious Scot”, who had to reconcile British doubts especially Lloyd George’s and his colleagues’ doubts about the usefulness of the League in the absence of American participation: in November 1919 a meeting of senior British politicians and officials concluded that “The League could not really exist if the United States was not a member” (qu. in Henig 2000: 145). The French determination to use it to ensure France’s security against future aggression by Germany caused an increasing division of policy between Britain and France, who in the absence of the USA were the most powerful members of the League. Drummond “underlined the limited conception of the organisation’s future role ... He cultivated his connections with London while trying to remain on good terms with Paris” (Steiner 2005: 153). He appointed as one of his Deputies Jean Monnet who many years later was to be one of the founders of the organisation that eventually became the European Union.

The League of Nations began its work, which Ruth Henig (2000: 145) described as follows: “In 1920 the new League came into being and began to operate quietly but purposefully at its Geneva Headquarters”. Its initial achievements included successfully running a series of plebiscites to determine the final frontiers of Germany, the most important of which was the plebiscite in Upper Silesia in 1921 which restored the bulk of the province to Germany but divided the industrial district between the two countries and left some 350,000 Germans under Polish rule (Steiner 2005: 204). The League went on to settle further minor disputes between 1919 and 1926, including a dispute between Sweden and Finland over the Åland Islands, which were allocated to Finland but it was less successful with the bitter dispute between Poland and Estonia over Vilna. In 1925 war between Greece and Bulgaria was averted by “firm League action” (Henig 1984: 46). The League also settled a major dispute between Britain and Turkey over the attribution of the city of Mosul (Steiner 2005: 354f). However, in 1922 Poland rejected an attempted settlement adjudicated by the League of her quarrel with Lithuania over the city of Vilna. The League also organised financial rescues for Austria in 1922 and for Hungary the following year.

Procedures were agreed for supervising the Mandates that had replaced colonial rule in the former German colonies and in the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, as well as protecting refugee and minority rights. The League oversaw the return of prisoners of war to their home countries. It also established the International Labour Organisation to deal with human rights, refugees, economic and financial issues: this is the only League of Nations organisation to have survived to the present day. Overall the League was carrying out important, useful but unspectacular work on a variety of fronts but it could not become involved in trying to settle the major disputes that threatened European peace, or its attempts to do so proved ineffective. These had to be left to the Great Powers.

Lloyd George for one was sceptical about the League’s chances of success. At a meeting with the French Prime Minister Aristide Briand in January 1922, he said of the League that “the organisation was bad. It should have been much more informal like the supreme council. As it was it had weak limbs spreading everywhere and no grip anywhere. He feared that the United States would never join it while the Republicans were in power” (BDFP I, 19: 12). Later he told the Italian

Prime Minister in March that because all nations were represented on its Assembly on an equal footing: “this was one of the reasons why the League had not accomplished more” (ibid.: 254). The French, on the other hand, insisted that the League’s status must not be compromised by the forthcoming Genoa Conference and that it should have some form of representation there, while Lloyd George was reluctant to allow the League to take over the running of the conference. Later Prime Ministers would be more supportive of the League, especially Ramsay MacDonald, who was the first Head of Government to address the League on 4th September 1924. He told the League’s Assembly that “The League of Nations has to advance the interests of peace. The world has to be habituated to our existence; we have to instil into the world confidence in the order and the rectitude of law and nations ... can then pursue their destinies with a feeling of perfect security, none daring to make them afraid!” (qu. in Marquand 1977: 353). Regrettably, this vision was lost when the League failed to curb Japanese and Italian aggression in the 1930s, so losing its credibility as an enforcer of peace.

It should also be noted that the League had substantial public support by the late 1920s. In 1929, the British League of Nations Union had over a million members. In France, the French League Society had 129,000 members in 600 branches. Hence, in 1927 British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain noted “how profoundly pacifistic our people now are. I must bear this constantly in mind” (Henig 2000: 154). This public support was to become especially important in the 1930s when it was seen as a sign of a demand for peace that Governments could not ignore.

### 3 REPARATIONS: THE IMPOSSIBLE QUEST FOR AGREEMENT

The indeterminate settlement of the reparations to be paid by Germany let the statesmen at Paris off the immediate hook of inflamed public opinion which prevented them from taking account of the need to enable the Germans to recover economically and avoid revolution but achieving any sort of agreement proved impossible in the years immediately following the signing of the Treaty. Keynes (1922: Chapter 2) identified eight inter-allied reparations conferences that took place between April and July 1920, which laboured over the Reparations issue but came to no firm conclusions. He then lists four further meetings held between December 1919 and May 1921. Zara Steiner lists 15 inter-Allied

conferences and 10 meetings with the Germans between 1921 and 1924 (2005: 153). The indeterminate results of these meetings were eloquently captured by Keynes in discussing the British Prime Minister's role in them:

The deeper and the fouler the bog into which Mr. Lloyd George leads us, the more credit is his for getting us out. He leads us in to satisfy our dreams. He leads us out to save our souls. He leads us down the primrose path and puts out the bonfire just in time. (Keynes 1922: 167)

The fundamental problem was the clash between the British view that reparations must be set at such a level that Germany could revive her industry and economy against the French desire to weaken Germany as much as possible and as the country most damaged by the war, to extract the maximum compensation for damage to her land and industries. For Lloyd George, "the problem of how to deal with Germany was for him the problem of how to punish Germany and yet provide a stable and economically healthy Europe" (Steiner 2005: 29). On 6th January 1922, he told the Allied Conference at Cannes that it is difficult to advocate "a word for moderation". He went on to say that "Germany must pay to the utmost of her capacity. Justice demands it. She has inflicted these injuries on our respective countries. It is right by the elementary principles of jurisprudence in every civilised country that she should pay damage and compensation for the injury she has inflicted. But you have to consider what every lawyer has to consider when he is recovering damages – to what extent judgement and execution can be most effective. You may drive things so far that you get nothing out of your verdict" (BDFP I, 19: 21). He thus harked back to his youth as a Welsh solicitor to press the policy of moderating demands for reparations that he had consistently pursued at the Peace Conference.

Closely related to these arguments was the British refusal to grant France and Belgium territorial guarantees to be defended by British troops if they were attacked. They had failed to ratify the Treaty of Guarantee agreed at the Peace Conference when the Senate refused to ratify the simultaneous American treaty of guarantee. To be fair to the British, part of their reason for their reluctance to offer such a treaty was that their forces were dispersed throughout the world in order to defend the British Empire; only two divisions would have been available for immediate deployment in Europe if war threatened there (Henig 1984: 44).

Another problem was German slowness in delivering payments in kind, of goods and fuels, notably coal in the years following the Treaty, which they blamed on strikes and unusually drastic flooding of the Rhine Valley. Yet late and inadequate deliveries of reparations in kind provoked considerable anger in France, leading to friction between France and Britain over the enforcement of reparations. An early conflict occurred at a meeting of British and French Ministers in London on 12th and 13th December 1919. On the first day, Loucheur declared that "it was most important for friendly relations of the two countries that a solution of some kind should be reached (on reparations). Unfortunately, the interests of the two nations, as creditors of Germany, were mutually conflicting" (BDFP I, 2: 749). There was also a dispute over how whatever reparations were eventually extracted should be divided between Britain and France. The dispute was therefore not only about the amount of reparations that could be extracted from Germany but also about the division of the spoils when they did arrive. At the first meeting of the Reparations Commission on 24th January 1920 the failure of Germany to deliver agreed supplies to France of coal and other resources was blamed by the German Government on Rhine flooding, claimed to be the worst for a century and railway strikes, which led to a French "proposal to make a formal demand for the execution of the Treaty in this respect directly to the German Government" (BDFP I, 10: 183). In February, the British Ambassador in Berlin, Lord Kilmarnock, warned the Foreign Office of the need "to help Germany get her industries going. Unless something is done matters will go from bad to worse and the chances of her paying any indemnity will be nil. It *cannot* be in our interest that the country should collapse economically" (BDFP I, 10: 199), but at this stage, such a view was unacceptable to the French, who still wanted to keep Germany as weak as possible.

They also argued over the chairmanship of the Reparations Commission: the French wanted a Frenchman to chair it but the British resisted this. In February 1920 Raymond Poincaré was appointed as the French representative on the Reparations Commission almost immediately after his term as President of France ended. Poincaré had taken a hard line against Germany during the Peace Conference and was to do so again repeatedly as Prime Minister in the years following it. Lord Derby, the British Ambassador in Paris advised the Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon that "As is well known, he protested along with Marshal Foch during the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference

against Monsieur Clemenceau's policy of compromising with the American and British views on the question of a permanent occupation of German territory west of the Rhine by France" (ibid.: 198). Soon afterwards Poincaré became French Prime Minister and was able to give his well-known hostility to Germany free rein.

The next morning Clemenceau said he was bound by decisions made by the Chamber of Deputies on reparations but also because "France had suffered more than any other country from invasion and German devastation", after which Loucheur proposed an estimate of 125 milliards (billion in today's terminology) in gold marks. Lloyd George said that he was "amazed at the 125 milliards mentioned by M. Loucheur and also said he could not accept the French priority for receiving reparations: the reason was our grave financial difficulties in this country. Public opinion was very much upset by the very heavy taxes and with the fact that we had not received a penny from Germany" (ibid.: 763). On 18 January 1920, Clemenceau resigned from office and departed from public life after being defeated in the Presidential election. He was replaced as Prime Minister by Alexandre Millerand but he attended meetings along with M. Millerand on 20th and 21st January.

An Allied Conference was held at San Remo between 18th and 26th April 1920. Before the conference opened Lloyd George met with Millerand but the motivations of the two leaders were different, as is clear from the minutes. Lloyd George was concerned that "in Germany the Allies were dealing with a weak government which had no authority, was composed of second-rate men and was without influence, prestige or even respect in its own country" but Millerand's view was that "it was best for the Allies to agree to inform the German Government that they must carry out certain obligations in regard, for instance, to reparations, disarmament and coal" (BDFP I, 8: 7). Thus Lloyd George wanted to bolster the weak position of the German Government, while Millerand was determined to force Germany to fulfil her obligations under the Treaty of Versailles. The French were by then considering enforcing the Treaty by occupying the Ruhr valley. In February Lord Curzon, the British Foreign Secretary had alerted Lord Derby, his Ambassador to France, that the French were threatening to occupy the Ruhr district because of a shortfall in coal deliveries. He warned Derby that the French had tried to "rush us into military measures"; this "did not come off in this case but they are more than likely to try it on again" (BDFP I, 10: 197).

On 15th April, at a meeting of the Heads of Delegation Millerand stressed that "he was always principally concerned to insist on the integral execution of the treaty. He and the French Government were wholly opposed to its revision" (ibid.: 11) but Lloyd George wanted to meet the German Government to "find out what sort of people they are and whether we can expect to do business with them". He also suggested that "it was far better to have a smaller fixed sum (of reparations) than to go on entertaining vague hopes of enormous indemnities which could never be fulfilled" (ibid.: 12). The British policy of moderation was confirmed in April by advice sent by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Austen Chamberlain, to the British representative on the Reparations Commission, Sir John Bradbury: "The Cabinet ... agreed with the views of the General Staff that the desirability in the interests of the Allied Governments lay in maintaining the authority of the present German Government in preference to the only possible alternatives and they agreed further in viewing with considerable anxiety the present economic condition of Germany and the stagnation of her industrial life". Concern about the stability of the German Government was well merited. From its beginning, the Weimar Republic was governed by coalitions whose longevity could not be guaranteed: she had 16 Governments between 1919 and 1933. The Social Democrat Party formed the centre of most of these coalition Governments but their partners varied, although the Catholic Centre Party played a major role.

However, from the beginning Left and Right wing parties who were determined not merely to overthrow the Government but to destroy the entire Weimar system posed a constant threat to the Government. In 1920, a right wing attempted coup, the "Kapp Putsch", tried to overthrow the Government and the Constitution but were thwarted by a general strike. The Communists attempted a revolution in October 1923 and the following month there was an attempt at a putsch in Munich led by a then little known Austrian painter, Adolf Hitler together with the First World War General Ludendorff. Lloyd George and his colleagues were right to bear in mind the need to assist Germany towards stable government. Ultimately, the British "attach[ed] great importance to the resumption of German economic life and production not only on political grounds but [also] as being essential to the ability of Germany to meet the just claims of the Allies upon her" (BDFP I, 10: 204).

In his search for moderation in reparations demands at San Remo Lloyd George was supported by the Conference Chairman, the Italian Prime Minister Signor Nitti, but Millerand “said that there was a fundamental difference between Mr. Lloyd George and Signor Nitti on the one hand and himself on the other, a difference which every point in the discussion tended to emphasise and that difference was that fundamentally Mr. Lloyd George and Signor Nitti believed in the good faith of Germany and he did not” (*ibid.*). Thus there was no meeting of minds on this occasion either. Much of this conference was concerned with drafting the peace treaty with Turkey. By 24th April there was concern about stories that were appearing in the French Press and the Northcliffe newspapers in Britain that a “real quarrel” was taking place between Britain and France. For his part, Millerand said that “it could be very useful ... if Mr. Lloyd George could realise that underneath the Press campaign ... there was a certain public opinion of which the Government must take account. The underlying public sentiment was that France was....waiting for a reparations which did not come” (*ibid.*: 147). At a second meeting later that day, Nitti urged that “It must be possible for Germany to carry out the Treaty ... Germany was simply unable to execute the Treaty ... Germany must be put in such a position as to be enabled to resume work”, but Millerand responded that there were some points “upon which he could not yield” and added that what Signor Nitti asked for was “more than Christian charity demanded [and] the Germans must execute the Treaty”. Nitti refused to accept the threat to occupy parts of Germany (*ibid.*: 201). Again there was no meeting of minds, especially on reparations.

At a conference in Hythe on May 15th and 16th much the same occurred. The Germans were to be invited to meet the Allies at Spa after the German elections on 6th June. Millerand wanted agreement to “recall in some form of words to be agreed the clear understanding that the Germans were to come to Spa in order to give explanations as to the unexecuted clauses of the Treaty and to make suggestions” (*ibid.*: 253) while Lloyd George asserted that “when they spoke of the fixation of the amount for reparations, he was not thinking in the least of Germany’s interests but only of how to get what he could out of Germany” (*ibid.*: 259). This would only be possible if the Germans were allowed to recover economically and politically from the present state of depression and unstable Governments. On 30th July 1920, Lord d’Abernon, writing from Warsaw, warned Lord Curzon that Germany “is increasingly

near bankruptcy. Recovery is only possible through great skill on the part of her financial authorities aided by careful nursing of economic factors on the part of all interested. The only chance of obtaining from Germany a large annuity towards reparations is intelligent assistance, enabling her to revive her agriculture and her industry” (BDFP I, 10: 497) However, the lack of agreement between Britain and France was to continue until a means of escape emerged with the deliberations of the Dawes Committee in 1924. In 1921 the reparations Commission estimated Germany’s capacity to pay reparations at £600,000 million but this did nothing to resolve Anglo-French disagreements. An agreement was reached in London in the summer of 1921 but this demanded sums greater than Germany could possibly pay. In 1922 Keynes warned that “The project of extracting it (reparations) at the point of a bayonet ... a payment so heavy that it would never be paid voluntarily and to go on doing so until all the makers of the Peace Treaty have long been dead and buried in their local Valhalla’s, is neither good nor sensible” (Keynes 1922: 188). Before a sensible solution could be reached, the French would occupy the Ruhr on Poincaré’s orders and the German economy would be ruined.

On 6th July 1920, the Allies met with the German Government, which had only been in office for a week, for the first time at Spa. At the opening session of the conference the German chancellor, Dr. von Fehrenbach attempted to be conciliatory: “The German Government and people had always been and would continue to be animated by a firm desire to loyally execute the Treaty (of Versailles) and they wished to prove it by their actions” (BDFP I, 8: 423) but they had problems. They could not discuss the military clauses of the Treaty until the Minister for War arrived but he had been delayed by a telephone breakdown, so the session was adjourned by the Chairman, the Belgian M. Delacroix. The following day the Minister of National Defence informed the conference that Germany could not reduce her army below 200,000 to the 100,000 required by the Treaty because of problems in maintaining domestic order, including the “Kapp Putsch” and unrest elsewhere: the Minister (Herr Gessler) declared that “the question was intimately bound up with that of the internal situation of Germany. Since the German Government had commenced reducing their military effectives, the domestic situation had remained essentially unstable” (ibid.: 432). The naval and air clauses had been executed, he replied to a question from Lloyd George. Lloyd George was unsympathetic but the meeting left the issue unresolved.

As with the Peace Conference the previous year, the main business of the conference was interrupted by other events—in this case the danger of the Polish army being defeated by the Red Army. An appeal by M. Patek for Allied help was met with hostility at a meeting with Lloyd George, who declared that “If Poland did not make peace, she could make war entirely on her own responsibility” (ibid.: 442). He went on, “Poland would never get the active sympathy of Great Britain so long as she pursued an imperialistic policy” (ibid.). Thus Lloyd George maintained his firm conviction that had caused confrontations with Polish Prime Minister Paderewski at Paris that Poland was behaving inappropriately and unwisely by demanding control of Vilna from Lithuania, Teschen from Czechoslovakia and Eastern Galicia from Ukraine. At a further meeting on 9th July with M. Grabski, Lloyd George continued his hostility towards the Poles but Grabski pleaded that Polish policy would change, at which Millerand said he was “very glad” to hear that but “the French and British Governments would make every possible effort to give effective help to Poland but Poland on her side must not forget the engagements she had entered into and must fulfil them” (ibid.: 506). On 7th July the conference returned to disarmament, with the French Prime Minister, Alexandre Millerand threatening to occupy the Ruhr if the Allies’ terms were not met (ibid.: 477). Two days later a meeting to discuss war criminals also ended indecisively.

On 10th January, the conference turned for the first time to the issue that was to occupy its members for most of the remainder of the conference: the inability or unwillingness of the Germans to maintain reparations coal deliveries to the Allies. The conference agreed to hear representatives of the coal owners and the workers but at the beginning of their presentations the coal owners’ representative, Hugo Stinnes fell foul of the president of the conference. Stinnes insisted on remaining standing and began, “M. Millerand the previous day said the hearing was to be accorded to the German delegation out of courtesy. Anyone not sick beyond recovery with the disease of victory ...” at which point Delacroix intervened angrily: “He should remind the speaker of that the countries represented at the meeting were at peace and seeking a means to make this peace workable in a spirit of co-operation. He would therefore beg the speaker not to adopt a provocative tone”. Stinnes then became more conciliatory (ibid.: 521–522) but Steiner describes Stinnes’s behaviour as “very aggressive” (2005: 195). At a later meeting, Millerand told the German Foreign Minister that “he felt sure that Dr. von Simons would not be surprised if he did not devote himself

exclusively to the question before the conference but referred to what had taken place at this morning's meeting. Certain observations had been made by some of the German delegates which it was obvious that the conference could not accept ... He was completely at a loss to understand why such extraordinary statements as they had heard this morning had been made" (ibid.: 532). Lloyd George also made clear his anger at Stinnes's behaviour, for which von Simons apologised: "he had no idea that Herr Stinnes was going to take the line he had" (ibid.: 617). The atmosphere had therefore been soured, although the conference continued to try and reach an agreement on coal deliveries.

After this, the Allies squabbled among themselves and with the Germans over the reparations deal to be offered to Germany, particularly on the matter of coal deliveries. However, Lloyd George made an important point: There was "a very strong party in Germany that wanted to break up the Spa conference" but "if it was broken off today, that information would go to Moscow and the Bolsheviks would aim at joining hands with Germany, Consequently he was urging both prudence and subtlety" (ibid.: 584). He thus foresaw that the outcasts of Europe, Germany and the Soviet Union might gang up together against the West, a danger that was to become acute in the near future. The coal issue dominated the rest of the conference and was not fully resolved when it ended on July 16th, although the parties moved closer together (see ibid.: 637). The allies did agree on the proportions of reparations to be allocated to each country: France 52%, the British Empire 22%, Italy 9.3%, Belgium 8%, Yugoslavia 5.9% and 3% for everyone else but there was still no agreement either on what the total reparations demand should be or on the amount of annuities Germany should pay. Taylor's verdict (1961: 42) was correct: "The divergence between British and French views which had been covered over in 1919 rose again to the surface as soon as they tried to fix a figure: the French still trying to push it up, the British impatiently scaling it down". No-one could provide a solution to this dilemma, which was based on a fundamental difference of view over how severely the defeated enemy should be treated. For the Germans, "the country's financial and fiscal woes were blamed on the Allied demands rather than on budget deficits and the depreciating currency, both of which resulted from the lack of political consensus about tax incidence and income distribution. Opposition to paying reparations ... became one of the two bonds which held the Weimar parties together and kept the right wing in check" (Steiner 2005: 192).

Once Poincaré became French Prime Minister, relations between Britain and France deteriorated further, a major cause being disagreement about reparations, as well as on agreeing the arrangements for the forthcoming Genoa Conference on the economic restoration of Europe. reparations were to be a running sore throughout the 1920s. On 6th January 1922, Lloyd George told the Allied Conference at Cannes that unless reparations demands were moderated. Germany might not be able to pay anything. Unless Germany was allowed to recover economically, no reparations would become payable. Once he gained office, Poincaré could not agree: he was determined to extract the last drop of reparations regardless of the consequences. The result of the disagreement over reparations was a cooling of relations between the two principal Allies. When they met at Boulogne on 25th February, a meeting Steiner (2005: 211) described as “glacial”, Lloyd George warned Poincaré that “British opinion had made up its mind to have peace, they were convinced that two things were standing in the way of this. The first of these, he regretted to say, was the Treaty of Versailles. The second was that Russia, with its vast resources, had been excluded from the comity of nations” He went on to say that “British public opinion believed that France has imperialistic and chauvinistic tendencies. The feeling was standing in the way of peace in Europe. This was producing a breach between the two countries which had widened considerably during the last few weeks” (BDFP I, 19: 172). Poincaré’s response was unyielding. This account of British opinion was “incomprehensible in France”, He went on: “In France if a treaty has been signed it became a sacred thing. If in England they felt differently under this head there would be a cruel misunderstanding for which France was not responsible” (ibid.: 173). In particular Poincaré insisted that reparations could not be raised at Genoa: “If the French Chamber of Deputies did not have absolute guarantees that questions of reparations would not be raised, the French Government could not go to Genoa” (ibid.: 174). Lloyd George was compelled to accept this last point and reparations were not directly discussed at the Genoa Conference. However, the issue was raised indirectly by the German delegation as a reason why they could not restore their economy to good health and on the French side, Poincaré made it increasingly clear that he intended to occupy the Ruhr valley if reparations were not paid according to the agreed schedule. This he did in 1923. On 11th January, French troops occupied the Ruhr Valley, with the result that the German economy was paralysed because the German workers in the

mines and steel plants, resorting to “passive resistance”, went on strike and refused to work for their new French masters. Hence they paralysed Germany’s industrial heartland.. The result was economic collapse and hyperinflation. This disastrous stalemate continued until the Dawes Plan was agreed in 1924.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# More Troubles

Although reparations were the principal cause of deteriorating Anglo-French relations and consequently the failure to agree a programme for the resuscitation of the European economy, several other problems remained to be worked on in the five years following the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. These are discussed in this chapter.

### I DISARMAMENT

Germany had been heavily disarmed under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, with her army reduced to a maximum of 100,000 men. She was also forbidden to build any warships over 10,000 tons. As with reparations, progress towards German disarmament was not sufficient to satisfy the French. Dissension between the Allies was less pronounced than over reparations but disarmament was to become a running sore in the European diplomacy of the 1920s. At the San Remo Conference in April 1920, Lloyd George reported a conversation with Marshal Foch, who had told him that “it had been generally realised that there had been moments when there was just a chance that Germany might have succeeded. This must never occur again. Hence France demanded that Germany’s teeth should be drawn and wanted to keep these teeth in her cupboard”. Lloyd George and Millerand agreed with this statement, “as did the vast majority of the French people” (BDFP I, 8: 147–148). At the First Conference of Hythe in May 1920, Lloyd George said that Germany still possessed “an enormous quantity of guns, etc.”

and said that he was “seriously concerned, particularly in view of the unsettled situation in Russia, at the large armaments still maintained in Germany” (*ibid.*: 257).

At this time there was increasing concern among the Allies that Germany and Russia, the two outcasts of Europe might make common cause against the West, a fear that turned out to be at least partly justified by the agreement between these two countries of the Treaty of Rapallo in April 1922. One reason for this German-Russian rapprochement was to evade the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. In 1921 secret discussions were held between Germany and the Soviet Union about producing armaments in the Soviet Union; they had to be secret because they were a breach of the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty (Steiner 2005: 161). The aim was to avoid the international system set up by the Treaty of Versailles. One of the participants in these negotiations was General Kurt von Schleicher, who was later to play a crucial role in the rise of Hitler. On 11th August 1922, a military accord between the German Reichswehr and the Red Army was signed. Lloyd George, to his alarm, was not forewarned of this event by his ambassadors in Berlin and Moscow and it caused still greater alarm among the new states of Eastern Europe: “The partnership between Berlin and Moscow confirmed their worst nightmares; the two great powers were in a position to stifle the successor states should they so wish” (*ibid.*: 167). Furthermore, “the challenge to the French security system was palpable, the threat to Versailles and France’s Eastern alliances could hardly have been greater” (*ibid.*).

One success to be noted here was the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–1922, which was led by Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes. At this conference, the three main naval powers, the USA, Britain and Japan, agreed to decommission a number of their warships and to limit their holdings of battleships in the ratio of 5 each for the USA and Britain, with Japan permitted 3. However, no other classes of warships, such as cruisers or destroyers were similarly restricted. Nonetheless, this agreement lasted for the next ten years and was perhaps the main international achievement of President Harding’s Administration.

## 2 THE RUSSIAN PROBLEM

The second external issue facing European statesmen in the early 1920s was the threat of revolution posed by the Soviet Union. The amount of alarm generated in the West by the Soviet Union’s attempts to spread

Communist revolutions into Europe and elsewhere would be hard to exaggerate. In November 1917 (using the Gregorian calendar: the Julian Calendar placed the revolution in October, hence it is universally known as the October Revolution) the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (Ulyanov) seized control in Russia after a previous revolution in February had dethroned the Tsar and established a Provisional Government under Alexander Feodorovich Kerensky. The new Bolshevik Government took Russia out of the war, negotiating under duress an unjust treaty with Germany, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which deprived Russia of a quarter of her territory, including the Ukraine, her Baltic, Finnish and Polish territories and thus 40% of her European population, a settlement which enraged President Wilson and increased his detestation of Germany and all her works.

The Bolshevik regime was committed to fermenting Communist revolutions throughout the world but especially in the ravaged countries of Central and Eastern Europe, above all Germany. To this end, the Bolsheviks created the “Third International”, the Communist International, known as the Comintern, which was headed by Grigori Zinoviev and was charged with a mission to encourage revolution wherever in Europe or elsewhere seemed most likely to succumb to it. Initially, its focus was chiefly on Germany and Britain. The Comintern was established on 24th January 1919 and its first Congress was held that March in Moscow. Because at the time Moscow could not easily be reached from abroad because of the civil war that was being waged against the “White Russians”, the delegates were those members of foreign Communist parties who were in Moscow at the time. One motive for establishing the Comintern was to try to secure help from abroad from newly installed revolutionary Communist governments in the civil war then raging between the Bolsheviks and the “White” forces led by Generals Denikin and Yudenich in the North and South and Admiral Kolchak in the East. The Peace Conference had attempted to mediate among the warring parties by summoning all the rival governments to a meeting on the Turkish island of Prinkipo in February 1919 but this attempt was abortive because the Bolsheviks insisted on being recognised as a government before they attended and Admiral Kolchak’s regime in Siberia flatly refused to attend (Elcock 1972: 94–97).

Among the Western Powers there was much anxiety at the Paris Peace Conference and afterwards about the Communist agitation that the Comintern sought to stimulate in their countries, with particular concern

about Germany, where the Kaiser was overthrown by revolts by soldiers and sailors in October and November 1919 and where therefore a revolutionary tradition was feared to have become established. There was an attempt at a Communist revolution in Bavaria in 1919 and a full-blown national Communist revolution was attempted in 1923. In 1919 a Communist dictatorship under Bela Kun was established in Hungary but its life was short. Franz Borkenau (1962: 107) states that “undoubtedly the foundation of the Communist International is ultimately connected with the revolutions in Central Europe ... The German, Austrian and Hungarian events are directly connected with the foundation of the Communist International”. The Soviet Union’s desire and attempts to ferment revolution in Europe and further afield certainly alarmed Western statesmen. The official historian of MI5, Christopher Andrew (2009: 139), quotes from the Security Service archive:

Western leaders saw Bolshevism seeping out of Russia, threatening religion, tradition, every tie that held their societies together. In Germany and Austria soviets of workers and soldiers were already seizing power in the cities and towns. Their own soldiers and sailors mutinied. Paris, Lyon, Brussels, Glasgow, San Francisco, even sleepy Winnipeg on the Canadian prairies had general strikes. Were these isolated outbreaks or flames from a vast underground fire?

In 1917 Gyorgi Chicherin, then in exile in England, was appointed by Lenin to be the Soviet Union’s first ambassador in London, charged with developing relations and trade between the two countries but he engaged in revolutionary propaganda in Britain, for which he was arrested in 1918 and expelled from the country, being exchanged for a British diplomat, Bruce Lockhart, who had been imprisoned in Soviet Russia. For a while, the leaders of the British Labour Party, including Ramsay MacDonald and Arthur Henderson, were trailed by Security Service and Special Branch officers because they were suspected of being agents of subversion. The leaders of the Communist Party of Great Britain were spied on for longer and more intensively. By 1925 the “Defence Black List” of suspected Communist traitors had 25,250 names on it (ibid.: 143).

In early 1920 there was general reluctance among the Allies to recognise the Bolshevik Government and have dealings with it. Thus at a meeting of Allied Heads of Delegations on 16th January 1920, with

Hugh Wallace as an American observer, there was a general reluctance to recognise the Bolshevik Government (BDFP I, 2: 894–895) although two days before trade with Soviet co-operatives had been discussed (*ibid.*). For the British, Chicherin's activities in 1918 had left a bad taste in British mouths; Lloyd George told the San Remo Conference in April 1920 that although Britain was prepared to contemplate developing trade with the Soviet Union Chicherin would be unacceptable as a Soviet trade delegate "because before in London Chicherin had infringed every rule of diplomatic procedure and had indulged in open propaganda" (BDFP I, 8: 152).

Some Western politicians wanted to continue supporting the "White" forces, but by the end of 1919, they had to face up to the reality that the "White" Russians were facing defeat. One such was Winston Churchill, who remained determined to support the anti-Bolshevik forces until their mission was clearly fruitless but on 11th December 1919 Clemenceau told a meeting at 10 Downing Street that he "had received a visit from Mr Churchill, who was reported to hold very strong view on the question of Russia" (BDFP I, 2: 744). However, he felt that intervention in Russia had been "useless" and it would be better to create "a barbed wire entanglement around Russia in order to prevent her from creating trouble outside and in order to stop Germany from entering into relations with Russia, whether of a political or a military character" (*ibid.*: 744). Thus was born the "cordon sanitaire" policy. However, in 1921 Lenin decided that the effort to stimulate revolution in European states must be soft pedalled in the interests of ending the civil war and securing much needed trade and investment with the West. With the introduction by Lenin of the New Economic Policy in 1920 and his realisation that he needed to establish relations with the Western Powers to secure both trade and support from them, as well as to end what support remained for the "White" forces among Western politicians, Comintern activities must be curtailed: this was an early stage in the evolution of the Comintern from an organisation devoted to world revolution to becoming an instrument of Russian foreign policy. The result was the "united front" policy under which Communist parties were encouraged to co-operate and form coalitions with Social Democratic parties in Europe and elsewhere.

There was a real risk that the two outlaws of Europe, Germany and Russia might get together in order to improve their situation relative to the West. The move to manufacture armaments for Germany in the

Soviet Union in 1921 in order to evade the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, followed by the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 gave indications that this was a real danger for the West. Also, when Walther Rathenau became German Foreign Minister in January 1922 he advocated increasing trade with the Soviet Union (Steiner 2005: 152). He appeared to take fright when Lloyd George attempted a reconciliation with the Soviet Union but “there was no meeting of minds and the Russians broke off the talks” (ibid.: 166). A poor harvest in 1921 resulting in a massive famine had been relieved by American and other foreign aid but “the Russians remained highly suspicious about doing business with any Western bloc of commercial interests and worried about the *quid pro quo* the capitalist powers might demand in return for credit and concessions. Though in serious need of capital and investment Lenin rejected Allied terms for Russian participation in the proposed economic conference in Genoa” (ibid.: 164).

### 3 THE ROAD TO GENOA AND RAPALLO

In January 1922, Lloyd George proposed to a meeting of the Supreme Council at the Cannes Conference that a grand international conference be held to address Europe’s economic problems, The Italians offered to host it at the port city of Genoa. Much of the Cannes conference was taken up with debating the conditions on which the Germans and above all the Russians would be allowed to attend. In the case of the new Soviet Government in Russia there were two main points of concern. The first was the Soviet attempts to promote revolutions in other countries by their propaganda, largely issued through the Comintern. The second was the danger that Germany or Russia might attack the new succession states that separated them and with all of which they had territorial issues. Eventually the Cannes conference agreed a series of resolutions to govern proceedings at Genoa. These were:

1. Nations could claim no right “to dictate to each other regarding the principles on which they are to regulate their systems of ownership, internal economy and government. It is for every nation to choose for itself the system which it prefers in this respect”. This condition would both prevent the Russians trying to impose Communism on the West and reassure them that the Western powers would not try to re-impose capitalism on the Soviet Union.

2. Before foreign capital can be invested in a country, “foreign investors must be assured that their property and their rights will be respected and the fruits of their enterprise secured to them”.
3. This sense of security could not be re-established until “all states acknowledge their debts and public obligations and the obligation to restore foreign interests’ damage or loss caused to them when property has been confiscated or withheld”.
4. An adequate means of exchange must be created.
5. “All nations should undertake to refrain from propaganda subversive of order and the established political system in other countries than their own”.
6. All countries must refrain from aggression against their neighbours. (BDFP I, 19: 36)

There were also discussions about the number of delegates each country was to be allowed to appoint to the Genoa Conference.

The Cannes conference was brought to an abrupt end when the French Government headed by Aristide Briand fell and was replaced by one led by Raymond Poincaré, the former right wing French President who among others had repeatedly pressed Clemenceau at the Peace Conference to take a hard line against Germany. One result of Poincaré’s appointment was to be a marked deterioration in Anglo-French relations. The aborting of the Cannes conference also meant that many details of organising the Genoa conference had to be agreed piecemeal among the inviting Powers in the period between the end of January and the opening of the Conference, which on Poincaré’s insistence was postponed from 1st March to 10th April.

The Genoa conference opened on 10th April and lasted some six weeks, finally dispersing after its third and last plenary session on 19th May. On the same day that the Genoa Conference opened, an alliance between the two outlaws, Germany and the Soviet Union became a threatening reality when the Germans and the Russians signed the Treaty of Rapallo. This treaty established full diplomatic relations between Germany and the Soviet Union, mutual renunciation of claims against one another, obviated the possibility of Russia claiming reparations against Germany and established most favoured trade relations between them.

At this time Germany and the Soviet Union saw themselves as the two outcasts of Europe. By agreeing the Treaty of Rapallo, they sought to advance their interests in three directions. The first and perhaps must

important was trade and investment because this “seemed good business for both parties” (Morgan 1963: 253). Secondly, both saw advantages in military co-operation because for Russia it “made possible the introduction of the latest weapons” and for Germany it enabled evasion of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles (*ibid.*). Thirdly both countries hoped to avoid either party joining a hostile coalition for attacking and dismembering Poland (*ibid.*). A. J. P. Taylor (1961: 49) commented that:

The Russians and the Germans attended (the Genoa Conference) but with the not unjustified suspicion that they were to be played off one against the other: the Russians were to be urged to demand reparations from Germany, the Germans were to be invited to join in exploiting Russia. Instead the representatives of the two countries met at Rapallo and agreed not to work against each other. The Treaty of Rapallo crushed the Genoa conference and acquired great notoriety throughout the world.

When the Genoa Conference opened on 10th April the participants were not aware that Germany and Russia had signed a separate treaty between themselves on the same day. When they discovered this a few days later there was great indignation. At a meeting of delegates from Belgium, Britain, France, Italy and Japan the Belgian delegate, M. Theunis attacked the Germans, declaring that “the Germans had no justification in concluding this agreement behind the backs of the other members of the conference during the two or three days’ holiday at Easter. It had not been fair play on the part of the Germans” (BDFP I, 19: 424). M. Barthou, the French delegate declared that “This agreement is unacceptable in itself” and said that “very serious consequences must result from this situation”. He declared that “it was now impossible to sit with Germany and Russia after what had happened” (*ibid.*: 425). At a meeting the next day Lloyd George said that “Germany had been guilty of an act of base treachery and perfidy which was typical of German perfidy and stupidity, perhaps even more of German stupidity than her perfidy” (*ibid.*: 432). In the face of Western protests both Germany and the Soviet Union’s delegates refused to withdraw their treaty. Chancellor Dr. Wirth told Lloyd George on 19th April that they “had considered it necessary to go forward with the Russian negotiations in order to save something for Germany. They were now told that this had changed the atmosphere of the Conference” (*ibid.*: 460). The Germans agreed to

withdraw from participation in the discussion of Russian matters. The atmosphere of the Conference was therefore soured from early on in its proceedings but it dragged on for some 6 weeks.

For the successor states of Central Europe, this Russo-German treaty signified a real threat to their very existence. The Polish delegate at Genoa, M. Skirmont declared that "It would be extremely grave for him to go back to his country after the failure of the conference and with Germany and Russia in alliance Poland would be the first to suffer" (*ibid.*: 437). The Czechoslovak delegate, her Prime Minister Eduard Beneš, also expressed grave concern about the threat to his country from a combination of the major powers that lay to East and West of it. On 27th April Lloyd George "said at present we are handing Russia over to Germany" and if capital was returned to Germany "Poland would crush like an egg". He went on: "Russia and Germany together would form a vast and powerful organisation. That was what he was trying to impress on everyone here but he could not get them to listen, neither the French nor the Belgians. Dr. Beneš was really frightened and so was M. Skirmont" (*ibid.*: 588). If the alliance cemented at Rapallo were allowed to survive, Central Europe would again become a cockpit of conflict, probably war. Hence the importance of the non-aggression treaty proposed at Cannes.

Genoa failed for two reasons besides the disruption caused by the Rapallo Treaty agreed between the Russians and the Germans immediately before it opened, which was likely to create a bipolar Europe. The main one was the failure to agree terms with the Soviet Union because the Russian delegates would not accept the Western Powers' demands that they must pay the debts of the Tsarist regime plus those incurred during the war. A particular contention issue was the Western demand for the restitution of foreign properties that had been nationalised by the Soviet Government or if this was impossible, the payment of compensation for the owners. The Soviet delegation argued that this was a fundamental attack on the principles underpinning their regime: the Russian delegate Chicherin stated that "in Russia the political system was more subject to great elementary political forces. The mass of workers and peasants influenced Russia's policies in their essentials so that it will constitute a great elemental force. Thus, private ownership and recognition of debts without reciprocity could not be accepted by them. The great primary force of the mass will not allow it" (*ibid.*: 388). In a memorandum, they declared that the Western requirements set out in the Cannes

Resolutions amounted “in practice not only to the exploitation but also to the absolute enslavement of the working population of Russia by foreign capital” (ibid.: 529). By the fifth meeting of the sub-committee set up to deal with the Russian question its chairman, the British delegate Sir Laming Worthington-Evans declared that “the result of their conference with the Russian delegates seemed to him to be a complete denial of the very basis of the conference” (ibid.: 555). By this time, the Russians had withdrawn from active participation in the Conference. They had based themselves in Rapallo, and relations between them and the Conference were conducted henceforth by written Notes. Western statesmen warned the Russian delegation that they would not get credits from Western investors unless they proved that they would honour their debts. The Russians responded with a counter claim for reparations to pay for the damage caused in Russia by Western support for the “White” forces, but this was summarily rejected by the Western delegates. The issues between the Soviet delegation and the Western Allies were never resolved at Genoa and were deferred to a further conference held at The Hague in July, which failed to resolve the issues as well.

A second issue damaging the Genoa Conference was the deteriorating relations between Germany and France. On the one hand the Germans, led by Chancellor Wirth and Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, repeatedly claimed that their obligation to pay reparations was preventing them from restoring their economy to stability and growth, while from Paris Poincaré was increasingly threatening to enforce the payment of reparations by invading the Ruhr Valley. The French delegation, led by M. Barthou, was handicapped by Poincaré’s refusal to attend the conference, instead issuing instructions from Paris which the French delegates were forced to obey. Lloyd George told Barthou that “if M. Poincaré wished to be able to touch a button and say that the Genoa conference was to do this and not do that, he would have nothing to do with it. He (Poincaré) had asked that M. Barthou should not be entrusted with the conduct of negotiations” (BDFP I, 19: 368–369). Poincaré’s harsh attitude to Germany also alienated the British: on 24th April Lloyd George told M. Barthou that “He was unable to take the same charitable view as M. Barthou of M. Poincaré’s pronouncements. M. Poincaré had spoken of measures to be taken and had assumed that either the Allies would agree or else France would act alone ... He himself was all in favour of solidarity which he agreed was essential to the peace of Europe and was the foundation on which the peace of the world depended. A speech like

that of M. Poincaré was doing much to shatter that solidarity” (ibid.: 573–574). He thought Poincaré should come to Genoa to speak to the delegates assembled there but he did not do so. Lloyd George warned the Germans that they “had no idea how difficult it was to keep France from going into the Ruhr”. M. Poincaré “had been elected in the interest of a firm policy and this made matters more difficult” (ibid.: 454).

At its first session the Conference established four expert commissions, a political commission to consider the major and most contentious issues, an Economic Commission chaired by M. Colrat of France to explore ways of reviving Europe’s industries, a Transport Commission concerned particularly with enabling and developing cross-European transport by rail and water and a Financial Commission with a remit to discuss the problems of international debts and the raising of credits to fund them. Other commissions were appointed to deal with less contentious issues, including the role of the Red Cross, regeneration of Europe’s industries and agriculture. Much of this business was conducted smoothly and the commissions’ resolutions were adopted at the plenary sessions. Lloyd George said at the final plenary session that “We have now come to the end of one of the most remarkable conferences ever held in the history of the world. The Genoa Conference will be for ever an inspiring landmark on the pathway to peace” (BDFP I, 19: 1028). Others supported him but the Russian delegate Chicherin demurred: “It cannot be denied ... that the results of the conference do not fulfil the great expectations which it desired among the peoples of all nations” (ibid.: 1035). What had been lacking was “a bold step towards not only political and economic methods, a work of creation and construction, the establishment of new systems” (ibid.). The issue of debts and retribution were the cause of failure: “The British Prime Minister tells me that if my neighbour has lent me money, I must pay it back. Well, I agree in this particular case in a desire for conciliation but I must add that if my neighbour has broken into my house, killed my children, destroyed my furniture and burnt my house he must at least begin by restoring to me what he has destroyed” (ibid.: 1036).

The failed Genoa conference and the Treaty of Rapallo were followed in August 1922 by a military accord agreed between the Reichswehr and the Red Army in August, which caused consternation in Eastern Europe, as well as challenging the French security system, which relied heavily on the new states in Eastern Europe especially Poland: “The partnership between Berlin and Moscow confirmed their worst nightmares;

the two great powers were in a position to stifle the successor states should they so wish" (ibid.: 167), although Taylor (1961: 49) noted that "there was no sincerity in German-Soviet friendship and both sides knew it. The German generals and conservatives who promoted the friendship deplored the Bolsheviks and they in turn were friendly with Germany only according to the Leninist maxim of taking a man by the hand preparatory to taking him by the throat". Hence, this friendship was unlikely to last on either side and after 1925 Germany veered firmly back towards the West after Gustav Stresemann became her Minister for Foreign Affairs.

In June 1922 Rathenau was murdered by two right wing thugs. When Gustav Stresemann became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1925 he adopted a pro-western stance. Meanwhile, the failure of the Genoa Conference, which resulted partly from French intransigence over reparations and the blow dealt with its credibility by the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo, solved nothing. It closed on 19th May. Lloyd George had hoped it would resolve the economic problems of Europe, but it "broke up in some acrimony. Nothing had been accomplished and considerable damaged been inflicted on Anglo-French relations. Lloyd George had overreached himself. His grand design was too ambitious and ended in failure. The Welsh Wizard's bag of tricks was almost empty" (Steiner, 2005: 213). Before the end of the year, he was to be out of office forever.

#### 4 FRONTIERS

All the frontiers of Germany as determined by the Paris Peace Conference were problematical. In the West French aspirations for a frontier on the Rhine persisted, to be restrained by British determination to permit only a temporary occupation. To the South German ambitions for an *Anschluss* with Austria were resisted by the Allies until the end of the 1930s, when Hitler imposed it by *force majeure*. To the East German resentment at the German populations placed under foreign control in the "Polish Corridor" and to a lesser extent the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia were to prove constant irritants in relations between Germany, the Allies and the successor states that lasted until they were dispelled by Adolf Hitler's diplomacy and force.

Under the terms of the Armistice, Allied troops had occupied the Rhineland and on 9th March 1921 the Allies occupied the bridgeheads

across the Rhine at Cologne, Düsseldorf, Duisburg and Kehl. The French occupied towns in the Ruhr Valley at times in an attempt to enforce payment of reparations. At the Peace Conference Foch, Poincaré and other French representatives had argued for the Rhine to be made the permanent frontier between France and Germany but Lloyd George and the British Empire Delegation had resisted such proposals for fear of sowing the seeds of a new war. Also the British wanted to withdraw their troops from Europe as soon as possible and Clemenceau had yielded to the British view as part of his attempt to maintain the treaties of guarantee with Britain and the USA. British resistance to anything more than a temporary occupation was a continuing source of tension with the French. In April 1920 the French Government under Alexandre Millerand had threatened to occupy the Ruhr because the Germans were not delivering the amount of coal required under the terms of the Treaty. Lloyd George resisted such a move because “he feared that another Alsace-Lorraine would be created and that perhaps in the next generation another cruel and devastating war might be facilitated” (BDFP I, 8: 148). The British stance was supported by the Americans: On 12th September 1920 Sir A. Geddes of the Washington Embassy reported a meeting he had held with the American Secretary of State, who “regarded France as militaristic and imperialistic and at the same time absurdly full of fear and that he would do everything in his power to secure hearty co-operation with us in any broad and sane policy designed to secure peace and revive commercial prosperity in Europe” (BDFP I, 10: 521) but American influence could only be marginal because she had failed to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and join the League of Nations. The ways in which the Americans exercised their financial and economic power “would critically affect the future of the peace settlement but the (Republican) Congress and people would not countenance debt cancellation because of their own fiscal priorities, inflationary fears and strong protectionist and isolationist sentiment” (Steiner 2005: 188–189). Under Warren Harding’s lackadaisical regime little could be expected of the USA.

Following the fall of Briand’s government, Raymond Poincaré, both a right wing leader and Clemenceau’s deadly foe, became Prime Minister on 12th January 1922; things went from bad to worse. Poincaré had refused to attend the Genoa Conference and at the Fifth London Conference, held between 7th and 14th August 1922, he maintained his stubborn stance in support of forcing Germany to pay reparations as agreed at the Paris Peace Conference and subsequently by the Reparations Commission.

Before the London conference opened the Germans had applied for a moratorium on reparations payments until the end of 1924 because of the “fundamental deterioration” of the German economy (BDFP I, 20: 170). Poincaré told the conference that there was anxiety in France because “in the view of the French public opinion the Treaty of Versailles had during the last three years been less and less carried into effect”. War criminals had been tried in Leipzig and had either been given “ridiculous sentences” or released straight away. Germany had given “great trouble” over disarmament. Above all, “as regards reparations the hopes and expectations of France and her allies had not been realised” (BDFP I, 20: 116–120). Lloyd George required time to consider the French demands. Later in the day, he rejected the French demand to be allowed to occupy the Ruhr Valley. Two days later he stuck to his view that reparations could only be extracted to the extent that Germany was able to pay them. He urged that “It remains to establish a distinction between simple measures of coercion and reasonable measures intended to produce money” (ibid.: 161). On 11th August Lloyd George became exasperated with Poincaré’s stand: “What M. Poincaré proposed was to smash the Treaty and write a new one. He gave a most extraordinary reason for this. The Germans had asked for a moratorium. They had a perfect right under the Treaty to do so ... He (Poincaré) wished to go straight into Germany to get his reparations. If he liked to break the Treaty he would do it alone” (ibid.: 193). By the end of this conference, there was no choice but to agree to postpone the discussion until November.

Subsequent developments provided little reassurance for Lloyd George and others who sought to moderate reparations payments to a level at which Germany could pay without crippling her economy. The impasse was not helped by Poincaré’s increasing hostility towards Lloyd George. On 22nd August 1922 the British Ambassador to Paris, Lord Hardinge, warned Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon that Poincaré had made a speech in which “the whole of his speech bitter and disappointed in tone as it is, is biased by personal animosity towards the British Prime Minister which is beyond his power to suppress. M. Poincaré evidently regards Mr. Lloyd George as his only serious opponent” (BDFP I, 20: 236). Meanwhile, the German economy continued to deteriorate. Lord d’Abernon in Berlin reported on 25th August that the French had rejected a German proposal on reparations and “financial crisis is getting rapidly worse” (ibid.: 242). An attempt by the British representative on the Reparations Commission, Sir John Bradbury in October to relieve

some of Germany's burden was rejected by the French and provoked a furious French press reaction (*ibid.*: 274).

On November 15th there was a General Election that resulted in the Conservative Party taking office under Andrew Bonar Law after Lloyd George had been dethroned by Conservative backbenchers at a meeting which has become immortalised in the title of the present Conservative backbenchers' meeting as the 1922 Committee. Bonar Law stuck to Lloyd George's policy on reparations. However, Poincaré's patience was running out: in November he demanded an international conference in Paris or else he would act alone. At the end of that month the German Government fell and the new Cabinet, headed by Dr. Cuno, made an offer of 1 milliard gold marks at once plus a total of between 20 and 30 milliard marks in eventual payments (d'Abernon to Curzon, 30th November 1922; BDFP I, 20: 303). Poincaré appeared to hope that British policy would change with the fall of the hated Lloyd George but this was not the case and "France claimed as her inalienable right to act alone to secure the Reparations that are due to her" (Hardinge (Paris) to Curzon, 1st December; BDFP I, 20: 308). The German offer of payments was rejected. By this time Poincaré was determined to occupy the Ruhr. A further inter-Allied conference in Paris in January 1923 ended in complete deadlock (BDFP I, 21: vi).

On 11th January 1923 Poincaré ordered the occupation of the Ruhr basin because of German failure to deliver supplies of coal and pay reparations. The President of the French Chamber of Deputies declared that day that "the French nation offered a most notable example and that France, calm and resolute, had arisen in defence of her rights" (Lord Crewe (Paris) to Lord Curzon, 11th January 1923, *ibid.*: 26). The result was the development of passive resistance by German workers which paralysed the heart of German industry in the Ruhr, as workers refused to work for the occupiers. Douglas Dakin recorded that the Foreign Office "watched with some satisfaction the growth of German passive resistance in the Ruhr and Rhineland for it had always been their contention that the Franco-Belgian action would involve costs exceeding the value of reparations forcibly extracted" (*ibid.*). Lord d'Abernon in Berlin reported to the Foreign Secretary on 21st January that "peaceful inhabitants of the Ruhr vigorously refuse to work under pressure of French bayonets ... we are not very far from a general strike there" (BDFP I, 21: 50) and next day he reported that at least two Germans had been shot by the French and many arrests had been made (*ibid.*: 53). The

occupation “provoked “a wave of indignation (which) gave support to the Government’s policy of passive resistance” (Cornerbise 1972: 46). On 13th January Gustav Stresemann declared that Germany must resist “this rape of the German Volk, the German Land and the German economy ... this violation of written and unwritten treaties” (ibid.: 47–48). British policy was firmly that the British troops in occupation of parts of the Rhineland must not be drawn into the struggle between the French and the workers of the Ruhr. A bout of currency decline and hyperinflation followed, further weakening Germany’s fiscal and economic position. The War Office warned the Foreign Office in July that “Germany is on the brink of economic collapse ... It may be assumed that when and if Germany collapses the Communists, reinforced by hungry multitudes, will try to obtain the upper hand. If they do, the slaughter and destruction will be enormous” (ibid.: 378).

On 11th August the Government led by Cuno resigned and he was replaced as Chancellor by Stresemann, who now had to deal with the impasse with the French and Belgians that continued throughout 1923 and into 1924. In April 1923 Mr. Phipps in Paris reported that Poincaré had made a speech repeating his “determination only to withdraw in proportion to payments made. Monsieur Poincaré maintains that by her determination France has increased her prestige and that even those of our friends in England and America who disagreed with us as to the inopportuneness of our action have been unable to withhold their approval at least of our motives and the justice of our claims” (ibid.: 212). By the time Stresemann became Chancellor in August 1923, passive resistance in the Ruhr was weakening and the Government could not afford to continue its subsidies of the striking miners. Stresemann therefore made contact with the French in late August, when the French ambassador reassured him that “Poincaré does not desire to annex any German territory but only required *sécurité et gages* and once these were provided for, the Ruhr would be evacuated” (Cornerbise 1972: 59). Stresemann ended passive resistance on 24th September: “Stresemann had acted as a true statesman in the face of extreme danger to establish a new basis for European peace” (ibid.: 65). In view of the major role Stresemann was to play later in securing European peace, Cornerbise’s final verdict on his brief Chancellorship is interesting: “Disdaining his own personal safety, heedless of the cries from extremists linking his name with those of the assassinated Matthias Erzberger and Walter Rathenau, he bore the responsibility for an unpopular decision in the

face of adversity which is the true hallmark of a statesman. Reviving the initiative he then proceeded to re-establish Germany within the family of European nations” (ibid.: 66). Order was maintained—just. At the end of the year, the “Munich bar putsch” led by General Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler was quickly suppressed, as had been an attempted Communist revolution the previous month.

Germany’s economic situation remained desperate but the French were still unmoved and continued the Ruhr occupation into 1924; Stresemann’s government was short-lived. Throughout all these crises trade negotiations with the Soviet Union continued. In July 1923, the Soviet Union agreed to deliver 30 million Marks worth of grain to Germany at a time when it was sorely needed in exchange for credits to buy German industrial goods (Morgan 1963: 253–254). Walroth told the German Ambassador in Moscow, Brockdorff-Rantzau, that “those who see themselves getting Russian orders to the value of about 25 million gold Marks as a result of the credit can and will certainly be overjoyed. But of course disinterested joy and Christian love of one’s neighbour is not exactly the strong point of German industry” (qu. in Morgan 1963: 254). During the French occupation of the Ruhr Valley the Soviet Union was “Germany’s only supporter” (ibid.: 256) but Germany also feared that Russia “was exploring the possibilities of abandoning the Rapallo policy for one of *rspprocbement* with Germany’s main oppressor: France” (ibid.). Increasingly both Germany and the Soviet Union began hedging their bets between mutual friendship and other alliances. After 1925 Germany became more oriented towards the West as a result of the Locarno Conference. Thus “in 1923 the Soviet Union and Germany both felt isolated and in need of each other, whereas by the Spring of 1924 each of the two governments, seeing new possibilities appearing in its foreign relations, was at least relatively less concerned to prevent an open breach” (ibid.: 258).

From then on further German-Soviet relations were pursued only dilatorily by both sides. Morgan comments that by the end of 1923 “a certain unreality had come to invest their proceedings, doubtless a reflection of the fact that both the Governments concerned now had their attention diverted by more important matters” (ibid.: 259). These included the Dawes Plan for Germany and Russian hopes for better relations with Britain following the election of her first Labour Government at the end of 1923, Relations were also disrupted by hostile acts by both countries including Germany resisting Communist infiltration by police invading

the offices of the Soviet Trade Delegation in Berlin in May 1924, which caused the Soviet Union to withdraw her ambassador to Germany. Nonetheless, a trade treaty was agreed in October 1925. Hence, Germany still had some desire to face both Westwards at Locarno and Eastwards through the Russian trade treaty: Germany “stuck to the line of march at Rapallo but also to leave the Western Powers in no doubt that we are not disposed to replace Rapallo by Locarno. Certainly, this has considerably strengthened the hand of our negotiators at Locarno” (Walroth, 16th October 1925, *qu.* in Morgan 1963: 265). A political commitment between Russia and Germany was achieved by the Treaty of Berlin in 1926 but by this time Stresemann’s policy was firmly focussed towards the West and the “Spirit of Locarno”.

## 5 POLAND

President Wilson’s commitment in the Fourteen Points to a “free and independent Poland with secure access to the sea” was to create persistent problems throughout the 1920s because of Germany’s reluctance to accept the extent of the “Polish Corridor” that resulted from the Paris negotiations, together with the “Free City” status of Danzig and the resultant separation of East Prussia from the rest of Germany. However, the French regarded Poland as a keystone in their system of security against Germany and demonstrated this by assisting the Poles in their war with the Soviet Union when they were on the verge of defeat. This aid included sending General Weygand to advise on strategy. He managed to turn a near defeat into a victory for the Poles. The war was ended by the Treaty of Riga, which placed a million Russians under Polish rule (Elcock 1969; Henig 1984: 34).

Lloyd George resisted the incorporation of German populations into Poland during the Peace Conference in a series of heated exchanges with the Polish Prime Minister, the concert pianist Ignace Paderewski. The difference between British and French views became apparent again in a meeting at Downing Street on 11th December 1919 when “M. Clemenceau said that he felt that Great Britain did not take sufficient interest in Poland. A strong Poland was the best way to avoid a war between Germany and the Allies, since Poland had half a million good soldiers” but Lloyd George was not so sure: “He had only been opposed, in the interest of the Poles themselves, to their taking a large German population into Poland” (BDFP I, 2: 736). At the time of the

Genoa Conference in 1922 Lloyd George again protested about Polish behaviour in the case of Vilna, where Lithuania had accepted the League of Nations' decision on the attribution of the territory but the Poles had invaded Vilna and rejected the League's decision. Lloyd George "said that the Poles were courting disaster. Poland was a country which the Western Allies could not reach ... It was therefore impossible to help the Poles" (BDFP I, 19: 568). So it was to prove in September 1939. The Germans were consistently to resist any attempt to confirm her Eastern frontiers as defined by the Treaty, right up to the time when Hitler came to power.

Polish arrogance and demands for aggrandisement continued to be a problem in 1923. The French were determined to encourage the Poles to develop into a strong ally on Germany's Eastern frontier but the British were not so sure that Poland's leaders had the sense to ensure that they could establish friendly relations with her potentially powerful neighbours, Germany and Russia. The British Minister in Warsaw, Sir W. Max Miller, noted in his annual report for 1923 that "Poland's future – nay her very existence – depends not so much on the support afforded by the Western Powers as on the relations which she may succeed in establishing with her two powerful neighbours – Russia and Germany – before they have had time to regain their pre-war strength. Wedged in between them Poland may at any time find herself in danger from her two great historical adversaries" (*ibid.*: xv–xiv). The Poles were aware of Britain's lukewarm attitude towards them, which was in part the consequence of British doubts about the capability and wisdom of Polish statesmen and diplomats. Douglas Dakin noted in the Preface to Volume 23 of the British Documents on Foreign Policy First Series that "The Poles ... found it difficulty to believe that His Majesty's Government desired a strong and compact Polish state and continued to attribute to British machinations the failure of the Peace Conference to incorporate into Poland the territories of Danzig, Upper Silesia and Eastern Galicia" (BDFP I, 23: v). On 23rd February 1923, the French asked Britain to recognise Poland's Eastern frontier as defined by the Treaty of Riga but Lord Curzon hesitated to do so. He had prepared his own Russo-Polish frontier on the basis of the ethnicities of the area. It was well to the West of the line defined by the Treaty of Riga.

The Poles also sought greater control over Danzig. They encouraged Polish families to move to the city with the intention of creating a Polish majority there, which would justify transferring this German city to their rule. On 10th August J. W. Headlam-Morley of the Foreign Office warned of the danger of doing this:

If the Polish contention is correct that Poles have the right of residence in Danzig and of purchasing real estate (the same as Danzig citizens), the Danzig authorities have no right to restrict the unlimited immigration of Polish citizens into Danzig and they cannot prevent them coming into unrestricted possession of houses and landed property. If the Polish view is correct it may be anticipated that within a relatively short time the Polish population of the city of Danzig will increase to such an extent that the city will lose its predominantly German character. (ibid.: 1048)

Headlam-Morley's conclusion was that the Polish view was incorrect: "all that is reserved to Polish citizens living in Danzig is protection of life, liberty and the practice of their religion" (ibid.: 1050). Danzig was a Free City under League of Nations control but the Poles were seeking means to incorporate it into Poland—an activity firmly resisted by Britain but possibly encouraged by the French.

## 6 IN CONCLUSION

Overall, then, little was achieved in this period in moving towards a just and lasting settlement of European affairs and rivalries. The British and the French were at loggerheads over reparations, Germany's frontiers, especially the "Polish Corridor" were hotly disputed and the countries concerned could not reach agreement about modifying them. Uncertainty about how to deal with the Soviet Union led to a temporary but for the West threatening combination between her and the other outcast, Germany. Germany had been forced to disarm but there were few signs of the general disarmament promised in the Versailles Treaty being achieved. Steiner (2005: 373) stated that "all governments theoretically favoured disarmament; in practice each was mainly anxious to see the others disarm". By the end of 1922 the peacemakers at Paris, Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau had all left the stage and been replaced by politicians leading unstable coalitions in both France and Germany. Poincaré in particular was determined to fulfil the long-standing French ambition to keep Germany weak and initiated the disastrous occupation of the Ruhr. The Americans had largely lost their ability to control events and in any case they had lost interest in Europe, being more concerned with their internal problems, especially under Warren Harding's inactive administration.

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## The Dawn Breaks: Progress Towards Peace

### I THE ROAD TO DAWES AND LOCARNO

By the beginning of 1924, Europe had endured five years of argument, conflict and aggression, including the French occupation of the Ruhr Valley, which had totally disrupted the German economy and caused her first experience of hyperinflation. This occupation “had been the cold douche which brings hysteria to her senses” (Taylor 1961a: 229). From the German point of view, “resistance had failed, only compliance remained. But compliance necessitated co-operation and compromise”, hence the development of Stresemann’s foreign policy which led to the Locarno treaties (Grathwol 1973: 52). By the beginning of 1924, the French were realising that their action had been counter-productive. Also, Poincaré’s Government was overthrown by the electorate on 11 May, giving way to a coalition of the Left which took a less aggressive approach to the German problem. Its Prime Minister, Edouard Herriot wanted speedy execution of the Dawes Plan. In Britain in January 1924 the first Labour Government had taken office led by Ramsay MacDonald, who acted as his own Foreign Secretary and proved to be an adroit negotiator, securing greater policy agreement among the Allied Powers, although his attempt to co-operate with Poincaré was unsuccessful.

In Germany, the Government led by Chancellor Wilhelm Marx with Stresemann as Foreign Minister survived an election: Stresemann was to be a crucial figure in peace-making over the next two years. He was

by this time an experienced politician, having been first elected to the Reichstag in 1912 at the age of 34. During the First World War, he had been a strong patriot; he had demanded extensive territorial annexations and supported the unrestricted submarine campaign but he also wanted liberal reforms at home. His support of annexations and the submarine campaign led to him being rejected by the by the German Democratic Party, so he formed his own party, the Deutsche Nationalistische Volks Partei (DNVP). He served for a few months as Chancellor in 1923, during which time he had to deal with the consequences of the French occupation of the Ruhr Valley and had to terminate the policy of passive resistance which was failing and was too expensive in terms of benefits to striking workers for the Government to be able to sustain.

His view of the Versailles Treaty was horror at the severity of its terms. On 22 June 1929 he declared that “had we conducted the peace negotiations with a pen in one hand but a sword in the other, then they might indeed have driven us back to the Rhine but they could not have been able to present us with a peace treaty in which we are treated like pariah dogs among the nations of the earth” (Hirsch 1978: 35). However, he soon began to establish the friendly relations with the representatives of allied countries that would ease his diplomatic successes later, including the British Ambassador, Lord d’Abernon who came to regard Stresemann as “unquestionably a big man – and he knows it” (ibid.: 39). Stresemann was also able to establish good relations with the French and American ambassadors. From the beginning his policy was pro-Western; he had little time for those who had sought closer relations with the Soviet Union: His colleague Herbert von Dirksen declared that “Russia and the totally unfamiliar mentality of the East was alien and unsympathetic to (Stresemann), especially in the form of the Bolshevik doctrine. The Communist demoralisation and agitation directed against the maintenance of the social order in a deeply shattered Germany, with its Moscow backing, stirred his indignation” (qu. in Hirsch 1978: 66). However, he signed the Treaty of Berlin, which confirmed the agreements with Russia reached in the Treaty of Rapallo, although relations with the Soviet Union would go no further than this and in any case this seems to have been a response to the refusal of Germany’s entry into the League of Nations, which was obstructed by Poland, Spain and Brazil in March 1926.

The first moves towards a more stable future were initiated by two expert commissions, held under American chairmanship. During the

Harding Administration, America had contributed little to European peace, although a success was achieved with the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–1922, but after Harding died in 1923, his successor Calvin Coolidge took a greater interest in Europe. Taylor (1961b: 32) pointed out that “Though the United States failed to confirm the Treaty of Versailles, America needed a peaceful Europe and a stable economic order. American diplomacy was ceaselessly active in European questions. The two schemes for the payment of German reparations, the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan were both devised under American guidance; each bore the name of an American chairman. American loans restored Germany – for good or ill”. It was in America’s interest to do this since she was the principal post-war creditor: the European Powers had financed the war partly with American loans that now had to be repaid but as long as Europe’s economy remained divided and chaotic this was not possible.

During Poincaré’s Premiership in France negotiations over the Ruhr occupation were impossible: on 23 August 1923, Chancellor Stresemann had to tell the Reich Cabinet that “there was no direct way of negotiating with France” (Hirsch 1978: 44). He brought about an end to the passive resistance of the Ruhr workers to working for the French but Germany’s economic and financial situation was desperate: on 5 October 1923, one dollar was worth 600 million Reichsmarks. The Stresemann Government was able to introduce a new currency—the Rentenmark—in November 1923, but his administration was defeated in the Reichstag on 22 November. However, he was immediately appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs by his successor as Chancellor, Dr. Wilhelm Marx—the post he held until his death in 1929. The two men worked well together: Stresemann’s biographer wrote that “he never had such a successful collaboration with any Chancellor as with Marx. Their human relations were harmonious” (Hirsch 1978: 53). Marx gave Stresemann a free hand as Minister for Foreign Affairs. His successor, Hans Luther, who came to office after elections held in December 1924 was more inclined to intervene.

The first of the new initiatives was the Dawes Committee, which at last secured an agreement on how reparations were to be dealt with. Its terms of reference were “to enquire into the means of re-establishing German credit” (BDFP I, 26: xii). It first met on 30 November 1923 and began its serious work in January 1924. Its chairman, Charles G Dawes, was jointly awarded the 1925 Nobel Peace Prize, although one

British Foreign Office official argued that “General Dawes contributed his good name but little else” (BDFP I, 26: xiv) to the work of the committee. It met to conduct serious business on 14 January 1924. The Dawes Plan “put reparations on a business-like footing” (Taylor 1961a: 232). Under the Dawes Plan, the French agreed to withdraw from the Ruhr Valley and reparations were to become more “German-friendly”, with maximum payments set at 1 billion gold marks in the first two years and two and a half billion in succeeding years, with a provision for arbitration in case of disputes. Under a separate agreement, the USA agreed to make large loans to Germany which largely eliminated the strain on the German economy of paying reparations. The result was that “though this temporary settlement was resented by both French and Germans, reparations were in fact paid for the next five years” (Taylor 1961b: 42). “Thus began the celebrated triangular flow of money from the United States to Europe. American loans enabled Germany to pay reparations to France and Britain, the French and British Governments negotiated debt funding settlements with the United States Treasury and began the repayment to America of their war debts” (Henig 1984: 39). This system restored financial stability until it collapsed after the Great Crash in 1929.

The acceptance of the Dawes Plan was made easier by Poincaré’s defeat at elections held in May 1924. His successor Edouard Herriot was keen to secure the speedy implementation of the Dawes Plan. He and his ministers were put under intensive pressure by the British and American Governments, as well as major international bankers including JP Morgan, to accept the Dawes Plan and speedily end the occupation of the Ruhr (Steiner 2005: 245–246). These decisions were confirmed at the London Conference in August 1924. The success of this Conference owed much to the diplomatic skills of the Labour Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary Ramsay MacDonald, who was determined to prove the Labour Party’s competence to govern: “the sight of a Labour Foreign Secretary grappling successfully with problems which had baffled Curzon and Balfour would do much to disprove the charge that a working class party was unfit to govern than would any conceivable action which any minority Government could take at home” (Marquand 1977: 330). Stresemann valued MacDonald highly: “In the spring of 1924 this honest pacifist brought a breath of fresh air to Downing Street and also proved a good friend to the German Republic” (Hirsch 1978: 56). The end result of the Dawes Plan and the London Conference was

that reparations were paid but not without repeated complaints from the Germans about having to do so. In any case, the Dawes Plan was not intended as a permanent settlement of reparations because in 1924 concern about the frailty of the German Government had to be taken into account. Hence in December 1927, in his third report, Parker Gilbert, the Agent-General for Reparations Payments, proposed that a more permanent settlement of reparations was needed (Jacobson 1972: 143). This led ultimately to the Young Plan of 1929.

Another major issue it addressed was the Ruhr occupation. As long as Poincaré remained in power French policy was to withdraw from the occupation if and only if Germany began to make reparations payments in cash and in kind—a policy to which the British Government was firmly opposed. At the end of January 1923, for example, the British Ambassador in Brussels, Sir G. Grahame, had a conversation with the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Jaspar, in which he was very critical of Poincaré: “His present proceedings were indeed the logical outcome of his whole attitude...which was in my opinion most disastrous for Europe ... I remarked that M. Poincaré’s mind was so obsessed with vindictive animosity ... as to be impervious to all other considerations and that it was highly unpleasant to reflect that the prospects of economic recovery of Europe were at the mercy of someone in that fanatical condition” (BDFP I, 21: 84–85). On 22 January 1924 the British ambassador in Berlin, Lord d’Abernon, reported to Ramsay MacDonald, that Poincaré was intransigent about maintaining the occupation. Hjalmar Schacht, then President of the Reichsbank, had had “interviews of three-quarters of an hour with M. Millerand (the French President) and the Prime Minister, M Poincaré ... M Poincaré was unapproachable. He told Schacht with great emphasis that French troops would not leave the Ruhr until the last sou of reparations had been paid, whereupon Schacht replied: In that case there is no point in discussing anything. We are at opposite poles” (BDFP I, 26: 510). The outlook for agreement was not bright at that stage.

Furthermore, the French had been engaged in plots to persuade areas in the Rhineland to split off from the German Reich. French officials had been trying to support the people of the Bavarian Palatinate to break away from the Reich and set up their own state under French protection, a move which was staunchly resisted by the British. On 4 January 1924 Lord Curzon, by then a long-serving Foreign Secretary but about to lose office instructed Lord Crewe, the British Ambassador in Paris, that “His

Majesty's Government are astonished to learn that the Rhineland High Commission have adopted by a majority, the British High Commissioner being outvoted, a decision to register certain decrees issued by a body purporting to be an autonomous government of the Bavarian Palatinate ... His Majesty's Government is not prepared, as at present advised, to recognise any change in the status of any of the component parts of the German Reich which has not been brought about by constitutional means and acquiesced in by the German Government" (ibid.: 479). On 15 January Lord Curzon repeated his instructions to Lord Crewe in yet stronger terms: the British and the French were at loggerheads once more. Eventually, the decrees were postponed and the dispute was referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague (ibid.: 320–322).

Meanwhile, arguments over the French demand for a Rhine frontier and the occupation of the Ruhr continued, together with attempts from time to time to persuade the people of the Rhineland to establish a separate Rhenish Republic. On 10 February, a meeting took place between the Director of Commercial Affairs at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a member of the British Embassy staff in Paris at which "M. Seydoux added that it was useless to suppose that France would accept a British guarantee pact in place of the territorial guarantee on the left bank of the Rhine. The territorial guarantee was intended to protect her from a repetition of the three invasions which she had suffered during the last hundred years ... The Englishman must realise that there were things upon which it was impossible to expect France to yield" (BDFP I, 26: 540). French paranoia about Germany's future intentions was immovable, especially while Poincaré was Prime Minister. On 21 February MacDonald wrote directly to Poincaré urging a more conciliatory approach:

It is widely held in England that contrary to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, France is endeavouring to create a situation which gains for it what it failed to get during the Allied peace negotiations. The view of this section of my countrymen is that that policy can only perpetuate the uncertainty and dangers of that condition not of peace but of war and that in the end it will destroy whatever temporary security France may gain. (ibid.: 552)

MacDonald therefore appealed for Poincaré's co-operation: "I repeat, my dear Premier, the condition of Europe can only ... be remedied by joint action between France and England undertaken with full sympathy

for their respective requirements and with wise regard for the interests of the world at large. For such co-operation I am fully prepared” (ibid.: 554). MacDonald’s view was that “if the French could be lured into negotiation only by promises of security those promises should be given, much as a small child is lured into the sea by assurances that the water is warm. The child discovers that the assurances are false but he gets used to the cold and soon learns to swim. Once the French begin to conciliate Germany, they would find the process less alarming than they imagined” (Taylor 1961b: 52). Poincaré was not receptive to such an appeal but his successors proved to be more amenable. The Palatinate dispute was “more or less under control” by March 1924 (BDFP I, 26: xii–xiii). The need for compromise was initially met through the work of the Dawes Commission; also Poincaré was defeated in May 1924, which produced a more conciliatory French Government and made negotiations easier. This plus heavy pressure from international bankers as well as the British and American Governments led to French agreement to withdraw from the Ruhr. According to Briand’s biographer, the result of the Dawes Plan was to enable Germany to pay reparations “during a few years, to discover the means to recover her fallen currency from nothing and to repatriate her expatriated capital. The France of Millerand and Poincaré were once again defeated by their own victory” (Margueritte 1932: 245). The Dawes Plan compelled the French to behave sensibly for a change.

The Dawes Plan was one of many cases where, despite the US Senate’s rejection of the Treaty of Versailles, which in many ways limited American’s ability to intervene in European affairs and prevented her from joining the League of Nations, her statesmen repeatedly sought to influence European affairs: In this, the US Government were supported by her major banks. America needed a peaceful Europe and a stable economic order, so American diplomacy was ceaselessly active in European questions although her formal participation in the European institutions set up by the Treaty of Versailles as well as the League was not available to her. On 19 January 1924 Lord Curzon commented on the Reparations Commission to Lord Crewe in Paris that “the effect of the withdrawal of the United States Government has been to limit the representation of the Allied Powers to three: Great Britain, France and Belgium” (BDFP I, 26: 506–507), hence arose the problem over the Palatinate, as well as a short-lived “Republic of Aix-la-Chapelle” which

had been more difficult to resolve than they might have been without American intervention and representation on the commissions set up by the Treaty of Versailles.

In other directions, the American input was much more important. Taylor (1961b: 32) points out that “The two schemes for the payment of German reparations, the Dawes Plan and the Young Plan of 1929 were both devised under American guidance”. This point tends to be forgotten in the light of American isolationism in the 1930s but until 1933 she contributed considerably to resolving the major problems that beset Europe in the 1920s, especially on reparations and war debts, as well as the evacuation of the Ruhr, all of which were confirmed at the London Conference of 16 August 1924, at which Britain’s Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald played a significant role. His task was not easy. The negotiations at London were tetchy until a very late stage MacDonald recorded that “The atmosphere ... was ‘freezing’ and when the Germans were introduced Herriot looked as though he was having a tooth drawn” (Marquand 1977: 145). However, at this conference “Marx and Stresemann were accorded a position here of equality, in fact of respect” (Hirsch 1978: 57). At this conference, the mutual interdependence created by the Dawes Plan was confirmed, establishing agreements between the Reparations Commission and the German Government as well as between that Government and the Allied Governments, all to be signed on 30 August. MacDonald “proved an adroit negotiator, determined to make a success of his first incursion into the world of diplomacy and to demonstrate the Labour Party’s capacity to rule” (Steiner 2005: 242). He brought the conference to a successful conclusion. Taylor (1961b: 52) said that Ramsay MacDonald “should be the patron saint of every contemporary Western politician who favours co-operation with Germany”. Somehow the breach with France had to be overcome. On 16 August MacDonald wrote to the French Prime Minister, Édouard Herriot, to warn him that the British Government had never recognised the Ruhr occupation and urged that it be ended as soon as possible when the Dawes Plan came into operation. At the London Conference, he obtained agreement that the Ruhr occupation would be ended within a year. In achieving compromise and co-operation MacDonald and Herriot succeeded, making the holding and implementation of the London conference possible.

## 2 THE BRIAND-STRESEMANN-CHAMBERLAIN PARTNERSHIP: THE “LOCARNITES”

However, the future peace of Europe was secured chiefly by two European statesmen who were their countries' Ministers of Foreign Affairs at the critical time. In France Aristide Briand, an experienced politician who had already been President of the Council of Ministers (prime minister) several times before and during the war once more became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1925, serving in this post until his death in 1932. He made himself a virtually permanent Minister for Foreign Affairs by having himself declared the French Permanent Representative on the Council of the League of Nations, thus becoming “a sort of super minister for Foreign Affairs” (Lord Crewe (Paris) to Austen Chamberlain, 12 February 1926; BDFP IA, 3: 428). Briand thus was able to protect his office and the influence that went with it from the party conflicts in the Chamber of Deputies, which resulted in short-lived, unstable Governments but of which he remained a member as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

By this time, his opposite number in Germany was Gustav Stresemann, who had become Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1923 and served in that office until his death of a stroke brought on by overwork at the age of 51 in October 1929. Taylor described Stresemann's objectives as follows: he “was as determined as any extreme nationalist to get rid of the whole treaty lock stock and barrel ... but he intended to do this by the persistent pressure of events, not by threats, still less by war” (1961b: 51). He took a pro-Western stance and formed a good working relationship with Briand (Kochan 1963: 31ff), thus loosening Germany's ties to the Soviet Union established by the Treaty of Rapallo three years earlier and pursuing a pro-Western policy. The task Stresemann undertook was formidable but his collaboration with Briand was to prove that the Versailles system could be made to work if it was modified. Although they did not meet until the Locarno Conference itself, they then quickly became friendly, helped by a cruise on the yacht *Orange Blossom* on Lake Maggiore. On this cruise where, on the honour of Mr. Chamberlain, Briand had convened diplomats and journalists on a cruise on Lake Maggiore. “The grant actors were enclosed in a cabin and there they achieved their work of coming to an accord” (Margueritte 1932: 259).

At this time they began to talk of the possibility of creating a European Union: at the Locarno Conference Stresemann said that “Locarno would not be the end but the beginning of a period of trusting co-operation between neighbours”. At the treaty signing in December 1925 in London, he said that “... each one should also be a member of Europe, bound by the great cultural idea being worked out in the concept of our continent” (Hirsch 1978: 66). From then on Briand’s biographer records that, “Between the destinies of these two men, assuredly made to meet up and understand each other, there were significant similarities. Both of them were at once romantics and at the same time realistic men who had come from the depth of their patriotisms to the same comprehension of international solidarity. Both men, born of the people, passionately wanted peace” (Margueritte 1932: 259). This mutual friendship also included Austen Chamberlain with whom Briand achieved “an accord of regard for each other, seeking a *détente* and a laugh and broke the ice between them” (ibid.: 259). Their friendships were to secure the peace of Europe for years to come and were rewarded by the joint award of 1925 Nobel Peace Prize.

The interaction between these three men was to have a critical and benign effect on the development of a peaceful Europe from early 1925 onwards. However, their survival in their offices and the execution of their policies were constantly in doubt because both Briand and Stresemann had to rely on the support of frequently changing coalition Governments formed from the several parties in their respective Parliaments. The Weimar Republic in Germany had sixteen Governments between 1919 and 1933 (Steiner 2005: 829–830) while the French Republic had no fewer than 28 between 1917 and January 1933 (ibid.: 828). In consequence, both men were having constantly to look over their shoulders at what was likely to happen next in the Reichstag or the Chamber of Deputies respectively. For example, in February 1926 Austen Chamberlain commented to the British ambassador in Paris, the Marquis of Crewe, that

How long Briand may retain power no man can say. If he falls, having been Prime Minister, he may be unwilling or unable to remain Foreign Minister. It cannot be expected that any other Frenchman would have both the strength or the wish to go so far. Some will have neither. (BDFP IA, 1: 389–390)

He went on to say, “For Heaven’s sake therefore do all you can to persuade German Ministers to make hay while the sun shines” (ibid.).

On the other hand, Chamberlain was concerned about German reluctance to develop friendship with France: to his Berlin ambassador, Lord d'Abernon he wrote on 1 February 1926 that "On every side in fact we have done our part to wipe out the war spirit and co-operate with Germany in building up in common a new Europe on entirely pacific lines" but "in hardly a single point have the German Government come forward with any offer to meet our desires ... they have so far as is apparent made no attempt to check the vituperative abuse with which German statesmen and the German Press have greeted our every effort to act in the Locarno spirit" (ibid.: 381). On 4 February Lord d'Abernon informed the Foreign Secretary from Berlin that in the end their Parliamentary problems were resolved in ways that kept the German government in office: "Sir Austen Chamberlain can rest assured that Dr. Luther and Dr. Stresemann fully realise the position of their French colleague and are endeavouring as far as it is at all possible to take it into account. At the same time the difficulties with which they themselves have contended are no less severe" (ibid.: 396). The Parliamentary weaknesses of both the German and French Governments were to be an unsettling background to Briand and Stresemann's good working relationship throughout its existence.

It should be pointed out *en passant* that the problem of political instability was not confined to France and Germany but occurred elsewhere too. In Italy a period of instability was terminated by the arrival of Benito Mussolini and his Fascisti to take over the Government and establish a dictatorship, an event also encouraged by the inability of successive Italian Governments to end Gabriele d'Annunzio's unauthorised but popular occupation of Fiume against the express wishes of the Allies and of President Wilson in particular. Mussolini's arrival in power stimulated anxiety elsewhere in case he sought to recover the *Alto Adige* from Austria and more generally. The French feared that Mussolini had offered an alliance with Spain against France (see Lord Crewe (Paris) to Lord Curzon, 12 February 1926; BDFP IA, 1: 429). Austen Chamberlain, in Geneva for a League meeting, commented that "we live in a mad world and the present relations between France and Italy form one of the maddest incidents in it" (ibid.: 495). Briand urged Chamberlain to keep an eye on Mussolini.

Another country to succumb to a dictatorship after a period of weak multi-party government was Poland, when in May 1926 Marshal Jozef

Pilsudski, a former President, marched into the *Sejm* (Parliament) at the head of a band of soldiers declaring, “this is a whorehouse: all get out”. Three days of street fighting had taken place between his troops and others loyal to the existing Government. Neal Ascherson (1987: 70) declared that although “the coup of May 1926 was a turning point in Polish history between the wars ... its consequences were not as dramatic as they might have been in another European country. For all their effervescence and verbal extremism, the Poles – including the Marshal himself – instinctively avoided violence and sudden change. There was no ‘White Terror’, no fascistic ‘New Era’” (Ascherson 1987: 70). The aftermath was an improving economy and some of Poland’s best intellectual achievements.

This did not prevent Briand and Stresemann achieving eminence as statesmen and peacemakers during their times in office. Taylor saw Stresemann as the first true German statesman since Bismarck and thought his achievements greater even than Bismarck’s: “Bismarck had only to maintain an existing settlement: Stresemann had to work towards a new one. It is the measure of his success that while he lived, Europe moved towards peace and treaty revision at the same time” (1961a: 51). At the end of Stresemann’s six years in office, “The consequence of stability and perhaps its rewards were increased by the emergence in Stresemann of the first German statesman since the time of Bismarck. Like the ‘mad Juncker’ Bismarck he had learnt wisdom, or at least experience from the pressure of events” (1961a: 212). Robert Grathwol (1973: 68) also compared Stresemann with Bismarck: “peaceful pressure and mutual self-interest among Europe’s leading powers were the keys to Stresemann’s commitment to peace. Like Bismarck before him, he believed that Great Power diplomacy to maintain European peace could work to Germany’s advantage”. Stresemann’s continuance in office was thus vital to the development of a secure peace in Europe but he achieved this against significant opposition at home. “His particular genius in perceiving first that anything but a peaceful modification of the European status quo would destroy Germany. This he asserted in a milieu in which many Germans of his political background refused to accept even the reality of their defeat of 1918. His genius lay in recognising that a range of compatible self-interest did exist between Germany and the western powers” (ibid.: 69). These problems were to re-emerge with a vengeance when the system built to by the three “Locarnites” began to disintegrate under the pressure of the Great Depression.

Stresemann began his work of conciliation by sending a Note to Briand on 9 February 1925 proposing a conference to resolve the continuing disputes between their two countries, including the Rhineland, Germany's Eastern frontiers and reparations. In this Note Stresemann, acting for Germany, stated that "She would accept voluntarily and even to guarantee the situation in the West ... while not being prepared to guarantee the situation in the East ... i.e. while not removing the hope that her Eastern frontiers might be modified by friendly and peaceful means, she was ready to accept arbitration treaties with her Eastern neighbours" (BDFP I, 26: 24). Stresemann was motivated to seek a rapprochement with the French for three reasons. The first was to secure the evacuation by Allied troops of Cologne and its surrounding district, which was being held up by accusations that Germany was not complying properly with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, especially reparations. Stresemann regarded "the sovereignty of Germany on German soil" as the first objective of German policy (Jacobson 1972: 8). Secondly, he was concerned that Britain and France might be about to conclude a defensive alliance that would be contrary to German interests: the result would be that "Germany would be confronted with a hostile coalition in the West and Stresemann would be forced to choose between diplomatic isolation or greater dependence on the Soviet Union" (*ibid.*: 10), although we now know that a formal Anglo-French alliance was never likely to be accepted by Britain despite repeated French pressure for such an alliance. Austen Chamberlain as British Foreign Secretary was equally anxious to prevent Germany forming close links with the Soviet Union. Lastly, Stresemann had to satisfy the Reichstag that his pro-Western policy would bring "direct benefits and lead to political recovery" (*ibid.*: 11). The eventual result was the Conference of Locarno, which was held between 5 and 16 October 1925.

Stresemann's initiative was attractive to the French. It "proposed a mutual guarantee of the Rhineland, to pursue negotiations, even in the face of strenuous objections from her Polish ally" (Grathwol 1973: 53). France's Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand saw that "the promises extended by Germany regarding her Eastern borders represented 'guarantees which are far from negligible for Poland' whose attitude is at times an embarrassment" (*ibid.*). He also thought that getting Germany into membership of the League of Nations would make securing modifications to her Eastern frontiers easier. The British Foreign Secretary,

Austen Chamberlain took a similar view, as did Edouard Beneš, Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister.

However, Stresemann's initiative provoked considerable opposition in Germany, not least from his own party the DNVP and from the exiled Crown Prince, who wrote to Stresemann stating his opposition to Stresemann's policy of co-operation and compromise with the Entente Powers. In particular he attacked Stresemann's intention to join the League of Nations because by entering the League of Nations Germany would lose her freedom of action because she "would be out-voted constantly" (*ibid.*: 55). In his reply on 7 September Stresemann firmly defended his approach, arguing that it was important to secure the resolution of reparations "in a manner tolerable to Germany and the securing of peace". He later declared that "we must first have the hangman from our neck" and to achieve this German policy must be one of "finassieren". He would seek the correction of the Eastern border. He also mentioned the possibility of Anschluss with Austria (*ibid.*).

From the beginning of the Locarno conference, both Briand and Stresemann stressed their desire to achieve peace, although public and Parliamentary opinion would be a constant problem for both men. Meanwhile, acceptance of the Dawes Plan was confirmed at the London Conference in August 1924. Previously MacDonald had warned the French Prime Minister, Edouard Herriot, that Britain had never recognised the French occupation of the Ruhr and hoped it would be withdrawn as soon as the Dawes Plan came into operation (BDFP I, 26: 844–845), which it did. Over the next five years, there were to be many disputes between France and Germany, especially over reparations and the occupation of the Rhineland but Briand and Stresemann were usually able to prevent these disputes turning into major crises in Franco-German relations.

### 3 THE LOCARNO CONFERENCE

The Locarno Conference was an extraordinary event given the problems posed for its members by public opinion in the major Powers represented there, which was mainly concerned in the Allied Powers with restraining Germany and extracting as much as possible in the way of reparations, while German public opinion was increasingly angered by the alleged injustices of the Treaty of Versailles, the legend of the "Stab in the back" by mutinous sailors and workers in 1918 and the Allied and

Associated Powers' failure to invade German territory, which allowed Germans to claim that they had not been decisively defeated in the war. Like the Paris Peace Conference, the delegates at Locarno were besieged by journalists looking for sensational stories either of Western pusillanimity towards Germany or of Allied determination to weaken Germany as much as possible, with the Press having to be satisfied only with occasional communiqués.

At the first plenary session of the Locarno Conference, which was held on 5 October 1925 the principal statesmen, including Briand, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs and the British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain agreed that the conference should be as informal as possible. Briand declared that "the less formality there was the sooner would the desired object be reached" (BDFP I, 27: 1079). However, placating various public opinions would be difficult:

If public opinion existed on one side only the task would be easy but there were several public opinions, each of which must be taken into account to arrive at a balance ... If there had been in his mind the least tendency to continue the present grouping of powers or to keep Germany a kind of prisoner of pacts directed against herself he would not be present at the Conference. (BDFP I, 27: 1083)

This reflected his commitment to the objective to arrive at a stable peace. Austen Chamberlain agreed: "if the division of the parties to the pact into two groups was to continue, the pact would have achieved nothing (ibid.). The German Chancellor, Dr. Hans Luther declared that "the declarations of Mr. Chamberlain and M. Briand were of vast importance and would greatly facilitate the labour of the Conference" (ibid.). Thus was born the "Spirit of Locarno" which was to lead Europe to a new state of peace and stability despite a number of continuing problems. Its development during the Conference was aided by informal contacts between the statesmen involved. For instance, Chancellor Luther met Aristide Briand on 7 October and "Briand regretted that he had not learnt a word of German but since Luther spoke French they could both simply speak European: two good Europeans should be able to understand one another" (Hirsch 1978: 64).

After a meeting of an advisory committee of lawyers had agreed that "the maintenance and inviolability of the frontiers between France and Germany and Belgium and Germany as fixed by the Treaty of Peace"

(*ibid.*) should be retained, the Western frontiers of Germany were agreed by the full conference at the second plenary session. Alsace-Lorraine was guaranteed to be part of France in perpetuity. The conciliatory spirit that inspired Stresemann and Briand again became evident at this session. Stresemann said that the object of his Note to the French on 9 February had been “the conclusion of a treaty of security in the West and the German Government had declared itself ready to conclude both a Western treaty and supplementary arbitration treaties with all the powers concerned” (BDFP I, 27: 1092), to which Briand responded that “the German representatives had repeatedly said that in no case did their country contemplate resorting to force to obtain the modification of this or that frontier. Should difficulties arise they would be settled by peaceful means or arbitration” (*ibid.*: 1093). If these hopes had been achieved, the peace of Europe might have remained unbroken for many years.

At the third and fourth plenary meetings, a treaty of mutual guarantee was discussed. Germany’s admission to the League of Nations was also discussed and agreed. Chamberlain declared that “since the beginning it has been made clear that we could not contemplate the conclusion of the pact without the entry of Germany into the League of Nations” (*ibid.*: 1110). Stresemann responded that Germany “had been ready to enter the League in 1919 but the Allies had rejected their request”. He also warned that after her disarmament Germany might have difficulty in fulfilling her obligation under Article 16 of the Covenant to resist an aggressor with armed force “because the present disarmed situation of Germany was such that she could not make a war of aggression and was even incapable of defending herself” (*ibid.*: 1111). It was further agreed that Germany would have a permanent seat on the League’s Council. Briand declared that the League “was not merely a formula; it was a reality” (*ibid.*: 1113). For Luther participation by Germany in the League had to be wholehearted: “It was far from Germany’s thoughts that she should not be a complete member of the League. She wanted to be a member in the fullest sense” (*ibid.*: 1118).

At this session, Chancellor Luther also addressed the concerns that had been aroused by the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922 which had wrecked the Genoa Conference, by reassuring the meeting that Germany was not bound to Russia “beyond the Treaty of Rapallo” (*ibid.*: 1112). They agreed that if Russia became aggressive, “the League of Nations would be at war with her” (*ibid.*: 1114). At this point Briand declared that “if difficulties of current politics were to be allowed to hinder the work

of international affairs, it was not worth continuing” (ibid.: 1118). This was a brave statement given the instability of both the French and German Governments but it was an important confirmation of Briand’s determination to secure a successful conclusion to the Conference.

There was less success in reaching agreement on disarmament. Germany had been compulsorily disarmed under the Treaty of Versailles but that Treaty had envisaged that German disarmament would be a prelude to a general international disarmament process which had not taken place. At the fifth session of the conference, a number of legal issues were cleared up, including the adoption of a Belgian amendment to adopt arbitration processes in all international differences. Briand agreed with the Belgian statement that they were trying to ensure that “war should in no case break out” (ibid.: 1123). By then an overall agreement was near.

Stresemann declared at the sixth conference session on 12 October that despite his Government facing a difficult situation in the Reichstag “the German Government held the opinion that the Conference of Locarno marked the beginning of a new era in political matters and in economic matters. Above all they wanted it to be a new era in moral matters” (ibid.: 1113), a view largely supported by the others present, although Briand stressed France’s need for security. Disarmament was important for Germany: Stresemann said that his Government “could only rest satisfied with the proposal if they were convinced that the next great accomplishment of the League would be disarmament”, to which Briand responded “without security there could be no disarmament” (ibid.: 1133). Hints of past and future disagreement were thus present here.

Later that day the Heads of the British, French and German delegations met in Austen Chamberlain’s room for what Briand called an “entirely unofficial meeting” (ibid.: 1137). The occupation of Cologne and other parts of the Rhineland was discussed. Briand was conciliatory but was obliged to admit that he had a problem with French public opinion. At one stage this meeting did not proceed entirely smoothly. Jacobson (1972: 61) noted that Stresemann sought a series of concessions on the Cologne evacuation, the relaxation of the conditions of occupation of the remaining two Rhineland zones and on disarmament, at which point “the atmosphere filled with hostility and at one point during a later informal conversation on October 15th the negotiations lapsed into ‘a long and somewhat tense silence’”. Nonetheless, Stresemann won concessions that he had not been able to achieve earlier

in the year. At the last plenary session on 16 October, after some informal meetings and two plenary sessions had been held to agree a mass of detail, arbitration agreements on dealing with Germany's Eastern frontiers with Poland and Czechoslovakia were approved.

The Conference ended with both Stresemann and Briand reaffirming their desire for peace and stability. Stresemann said that "we welcome with sincere joy the great impetus given at Locarno to European peace as incarnated in the Treaty of Locarno, which forms an important landmark in the history of the relationship between states and nations to one another" (*ibid.*: 1177). Briand responded in kind: "As the representative of France I am anxious to associate myself with all my heart with the sentiments expressed by the delegate of Germany and I should be lacking in a sense of justice if I did not recall and salute the courageous gesture which is at the basis of this conference. From Locarno it is necessary that a new Europe should arise" (*ibid.*: 1177). The final treaties were signed by all parties on 1 December 1925. There were five treaties. Four were arbitration agreements designed to secure the revision or confirmation of Germany's Western and Eastern frontiers; the fifth and most important treaty became known as the Rhineland Pact because it guaranteed the permanent restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France, secured the demilitarisation of the Rhineland after a phased withdrawal of Allied troops therefrom and defined Germany's frontiers with France and Belgium (see Jacobson 1972: 3). Jacobson pays tribute to Stresemann's achievement and the abilities that ensured the success of the Locarno conference:

What success Stresemann achieved with Briand and Chamberlain was due to the force of his character, the strength of his convictions and the persistence, earnestness and passion with which he conveyed those convictions to the others, With his quick, clear, shrewd mind time and again he took the initiative ... presented his aspirations in idealistic and even sentimental and emotional terms and won sympathy for himself and acceptance for his policies. (*ibid.*: 71)

This was a turning point on which Europe had to turn and indeed it did so: "it was the turning point of the years between the wars. Its signature ended the First World War; its repudiation eleven years later marked the prelude to the second" (Taylor 1961b: 54). The shame was that the Locarno Conference did not lead to a longer period of peace but events conspired to destroy it after only eight years.

#### 4 THE SPIRIT OF LOCARNO

That Europe did indeed embark on a new and peaceful path was confirmed by a long Foreign Office memorandum written in early 1926 by a Foreign Office staff member, JC Sterndale Bennett, which reviewed the current European situation and reflected the great optimism that the defects of the Treaty of Versailles had either been rectified or were in the process of being resolved, after more than twenty inter-allied conferences had been held without definite results: “Demand after demand had been made on Germany, whose general attitude was one of sullen recalcitrance in spite of the efforts of some of her more enlightened politicians ... to pursue a policy of fulfilment” (BDFP IA, 1: 2). After 1918 Germany was “an outcast in Europe, threatened with economic ruin and financial disaster, political disintegration and civil war, was a danger not only to her immediate neighbours but to Europe as a whole” (*ibid.*: 2). On France’s part, “the failure to ratify the guarantee treaties was ... a most serious blow to France and to it are to be ascribed most of the unhappy events of the five years following the Treaty (of Versailles)” (*ibid.*: 5).

However, there was much to be optimistic about, beginning with the Dawes Plan and its involvement of the Americans in negotiating a new deal over reparations: “By once more calling the New World to redress the balance of the old, they took the first step which led to the setting up of the Dawes Commission” (BDFP IA, 1: 2). Sterndale Bennett declared that as a result of the Locarno Conference “a *détente* has certainly been achieved. The remaining problems which threatened to throw Europe back into chaos have either been solved or are on the way to solution ... all the disputes arising from the execution of the Treaty of Versailles are thus virtually at an end” (*ibid.*: 16). This was over-optimistic as significant causes of friction remained but it reflects the optimistic spirit induced by the Locarno Treaty and the changed diplomatic climate that it ushered in. Stresemann’s memorandum of 9 February 1925 proposing an international conference to resolve the issues that were causing stress among European nations had been “an act of great political courage deserving serious consideration” (*ibid.*: 12) and had led to the Locarno Conference. At this conference “The change in the fortunes of Europe was thus both welcome and positive”. It is interesting to note in this document and elsewhere that at this time the word “appeasement” was used frequently as a term of approbation of policies designed to draw Germany into the comity of nations and to address the admitted defects of the Treaty of Versailles.

In a meeting with the Polish Foreign Minister Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Secretary in a Conservative Government led by Stanley Baldwin, urged Poland to conform to the new atmosphere created by the Locarno Conference by choosing not to deport those German residents of Upper Silesia who chose to remain there after most of the territory was handed over to Poland as a result of the plebiscite there held in 1921. "I described the profound emotion which I had felt as I listened to Dr. Stresemann's speech at the close of the Conference yesterday, so restrained in its terms, so discreet in its allusions and yet bringing before us so clearly the unexpressed thoughts and cherished hopes of the German Government and the noble reply of M. Briand breathing the true spirit of liberal France" (*ibid.*: 21–22). However, a disturbing sign for the future was Chamberlain's view about Germany's Eastern frontiers: he "spoke complacently of the Polish Corridor, for which no British Government will or can risk the bones of a single British Grenadier" (Taylor 1961b: 54). Briand's alternative proposal was to form alliances with both Poland and Czechoslovakia.

A few days later the British Ambassador to Rome, Sir R. Graham, informed Austen Chamberlain that the Italian Press shared in welcoming the results of the Locarno conference which "are widely regarded as signifying the beginning of the end of the confused post-war situation and giving hopes of (a) period of genuine peace" (*ibid.*: 29). Chamberlain himself shared the optimistic mood, informing his Ambassador in Paris that the Locarno Treaty "has introduced a wholly new spirit into the relations between Germany and the Allies which ... is reflected in the view that the peace of Europe will be better guaranteed by the exhibition of a conciliatory spirit on both sides ... It is to my mind most important for the future tranquillity of Europe that the treaties of Locarno should receive the widest possible support in each of the countries concerned" (*ibid.*: 84). Plans were prepared for the evacuation of the Rhineland in November but he was concerned about the possibility of a change of German Chancellor: he told Lord d'Abernon in Berlin that "it is a bad moment to swap horses". His concern was shared by the French Government because the new German Government was more right wing and nationalist than its predecessor (*ibid.*: 95). Lord Crewe in Paris reported that M. Briand "had made it perfectly plain to M. Stresemann that he did not intend to allow the latter to use the negotiation of the Pact or its signature as a means of bargaining on disarmament or Cologne" (*ibid.*: 96). After the Locarno conference "Stresemann,

Chamberlain and Briand appeared regularly at the League Council. Geneva seemed to be the centre of a revived Europe: the Concert really is in tune at last and international affairs regulated by discussion instead of the jangling of arms" (Taylor 1961b: 55). Peace seemed at last to be secure but old suspicions were not dead. In December 1926 Chamberlain, Stresemann and Briand were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

In September 1926 another step towards a stable peace was taken with the admission of Germany to the League of Nations, with a seat on the League's Council. In March, Germany's admission had been proposed after an argument about whether Poland should also be given a seat on the Council at the same time, which had been resisted by Viscount Robert Cecil, who had been one of the founding fathers of the League. He was concerned that the Council should not be made so large that it would cease to be an effective executive body; at present, it included the four Great Powers (Britain, France, Italy and Japan) as permanent members plus six non-permanent members. Cecil was concerned that "if the list of permanent members is extended beyond the Great Powers there does not seem to be any clear limit to their numbers" (BDFP IA, 3: 407). He also clearly shared the British doubts noted in the last chapter about the ability and wisdom of the Polish Government. "There seems little ground for suggesting that she (Poland) has world interests beyond those of other European states ... She has now or recently had quarrels with all her neighbours ... The fact that she has been unable to live at peace with her neighbours does not seem a very good ground for making her a permanent member of the Council of the League" (BDFP IA, 3: 407). However, although Chamberlain thought on the whole that Poland should be given a Council seat (*ibid.*), British support for her was lukewarm on this as it was on other disputed issues concerning the Polish frontiers and her rights in Danzig. In the end the Polish bid for a seat on the Council was rejected in September 1923 partly because of the low opinion other countries' representatives had formed of Polish diplomacy: "Had Polish statesmanship been of a higher order, had those responsible for the conduct of Polish foreign relations enjoyed a better reputation, had moreover Poland improved her internal administration and foreign trade, it is just conceivable that she would have been regarded as a commanding power in Northern and Eastern Europe" (BDFP I, 3: xiv). The Council seats available went instead to Sweden and Czechoslovakia.

The Polish Prime Minister was reported by the British Ambassador there to have argued that Poland should have a Council seat because “quite apart from the size and importance of Poland there was the incontestable fact that she was, owing to her geographical position, the very centre of the dangers that most threatened the peace of Europe, she was the ... foundation of Locarno policy in its part of the world” (Sir Max Miller to Austen Chamberlain, 19 February 1926; BDFP IA, 3: 456). The French were keen to see Poland granted a Council seat because she was a valued ally against a possibly revived Germany. In the person of Jules Cambon, they also supported Poland’s excessive territorial settlement in Russia under the Treaty of Riga. Here Poland, after winning the Russo-Polish War after being brought to the brink of defeat had enforced an Eastern frontier that extended that country far beyond the ethnically justified frontier known as the Curzon Line, named after the British Foreign Secretary who had defined it. Instead, the Poles had absorbed a large piece of what is now Byelorussia (see Elcock 1969). She had also demanded sovereignty over Eastern Galicia, which properly belonged to Ukraine, Upper Silesia and the German city of Danzig, which had been made a Free City under League of Nations administration. Poland’s aggressive behaviour undoubtedly alienated many Allied statesmen except the French and reduced her influence on developments in European diplomacy.

Despite these and other problems, Lord d’Abernon reported to Chamberlain from Berlin that Germany’s admission to the League was expected to be approved on 7 or 8 February 1926. Sir W Max Miller in Warsaw reported on 2 March 1926 that the German minister “could not tell me that the German Government was determined not to admit any change in composition of Council in March beyond that entailed by the admission of Germany but they recognised necessity of doing something to meet Poland’s claims and would be prepared to discuss acceptable compromise” (ibid.: 479). Later Chamberlain, attending a meeting of the League Council in Geneva, reported that the German Chancellor “has now developed what he himself described as an almost passionate belief in the League as his sole chance of preserving peace and avoiding a repetition of past horrors” (ibid.: 498).

However, a new obstruction to reaching agreement to admit Germany to the League emerged somewhat unexpectedly in the form of Brazil. On 14 March Chamberlain warned the Brazilian Ambassador

that “my country would never forgive a nation which, preventing German entry, brought all our labours to naught and destroyed prospect of European peace”. Nonetheless, Brazil blocked German admission because of her concern that the League might become too exclusively concerned with European affairs (see BDFP IA, 3: 518ff). The British Ambassador to Brazil reported on 17 March 1926 that the President of Brazil was obdurate: “I regret to inform you that after two hour meeting during which my French colleague and I used every possible argument ... President while agreeing to think it over said that it would be useless to do so because having gone so far he was unable on account of public opinion to retreat from position taken up” (ibid.: 530). That month it was agreed to defer the decision to admit Germany until the League Assembly met again in September. Mr. London of the Foreign Office reported from Geneva in mid February that “the representatives of Germany, France, Belgium, Great Britain and Italy had met and are convinced that on the occasion of next session of Assembly difficulties which exist at the moment will be surmounted and that agreement which was reached in regard of conditions of entry of Germany into the League of Nations will be realised” (ibid.: 532). Chamberlain thus initiated a process of personal face to face diplomacy that was to become an important means of resolving future disputes: “the Locarnites met in Chamberlain’s hotel room at his summons to discuss, without complete success, the competing claims ... to Council seats” (Jacobson 1972: 69). He thus set a pattern “for the next three and a half years there persisted a pattern of negotiation by means of meetings of the Locarno Big Three – Stresemann, Briand and Chamberlain. Grathwol (1973: 69) remarked that “Briand, Chamberlain and Stresemann wanted at least one thing in common: peace and stability in Europe”. As often as four times a year these three met in Geneva or wherever the League Council was convened” (ibid.). Nonetheless, the Germans were unhappy about the postponement of their entry to the League. The Russians gloated over it. Lord d’Abernon reported from Berlin that Dr. Stresemann had said that “of course the Russians grin with delight over Geneva. They declare that they foretold failure of our endeavour to come to terms with the League of Nations”. The Russians were still nervous of a possible German attack on them, to which Stresemann responded, “With what?” (ibid.: 555). By September Brazil’s concerns had been resolved and Germany’s admission was unanimously approved by the Assembly in September 1926.

The Treaties of Locarno were a major turning point in European affairs on which Europe did indeed turn. In resolving as it did many of the issues that both divided the Western powers and alienated the Germans from the West it secured the prospects for peace. On reparations, the view of Foreign Office analyst Sterndale Bennett was that as a result of Ramsay MacDonald's "patient and persistent diplomacy the Dawes Plan being in operation and the reparations question thus being taken out of the political arena, it seemed that one of the major obstacles to peace had been removed" (BDFP IA, 1: 2). Western Europe was still divided into two camps and the French "policy since Henri of Navarre ... to keep Germany weak" (*ibid.*: 8) remained in force. There was also "the vague menace of Russia in the background" (*ibid.*: 3). The Western Powers were still wary of developing trade relations with the Soviet Union because of the continued threat of Soviet representatives engaging in Communist subversion in their own countries. The Russians were also suspicious of the West, partly because of the continuing dispute about debts and expropriated properties. Austen Chamberlain recorded in a memorandum dated 16 February 1926 that the Soviet Foreign Minister Chicherin is "upset altogether in his judgement" in believing that "the whole policy of Great Britain is ... directed to the isolation of Russia and even to the formation of an actively anti-Soviet bloc. This is foolish but it is also dangerous and I would venture to repeat my opinion that while dealing as we think proper with Communist agitation in this country, we should avoid denunciations of the Soviet Government and its members, which only confirms Chicherin in his obsession" (*ibid.*: 442). Conciliation was the order of the day despite the problems.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# Peace and Prosperity Come to Europe—For the Time Being

## I THE NEW ORDER

With the signing and ratification of the Locarno Treaty and the four other related agreements in December 1925, Europe settled down to an era of peaceful coexistence and increasing prosperity. Taylor (1961b: 55) states that “Locarno gave Europe a period of peace and hope. Germany was admitted to the League of Nations though after more delay than had been expected. Stresemann, Chamberlain and Briand appeared regularly at the League Council. Geneva seemed to be at the centre of a revived Europe, the concert really in tune at last and international affairs regulated by discussion instead of by the jangling of arms”. Jacobson (1972: 36) commented that

In their political rhetoric they all spoke of Locarno as being the beginning of a new era and of that era being a period of peace. After a great war and a post-war era torn by strife, such assurances from Europe’s leading statesmen – publicised by the Geneva correspondents of the American, British and Western European press – were highly popular with the public.

However, each of them had their own view about the benefits the treaties brought to their own countries. For this achievement, Gustav Stresemann had to be given much credit: “Bismarck had only to maintain

an existing settlement; Stresemann had to work towards a new one. It is the measure of his success that while he lived, Europe moved towards peace and treaty revision at the same time” (ibid.: 51). Early in 1926, an extraordinarily optimistic document prepared by Sterndale Bennett professes great hopes for peace despite acknowledging several problems that remained to be solved. The author takes a highly optimistic view of European affairs after the holding of the Locarno Conference, followed by the signing and ratifications of the treaties agreed at that meeting. His overall conclusion was that a *détente* has certainly been achieved. The course seemed set fair for an enduring European peace settlement (BDFP IA, 1: 16). Lord Arthur Balfour, a former Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary told Austen Chamberlain in November 1925 that “The Great War ended in 1918, the Great Peace did not begin until October 1925” (qu. in Sharp 2000: 132).

A contemporary view stated by Austen Chamberlain also rightly gave much credit to the French statesman Aristide Briand: he wrote to his Paris Ambassador Lord Crewe on 2 February 1926 expressing concern that Briand might lose office if the French government then in office fell, saying that “no other French Minister could do as much as he can do, no other French Minister is as deeply committed to the policy of Locarno, has a more profound conviction of the wisdom of that policy or can be relied upon to bring more courage and Parliamentary skill to its development” (BDFP IA, 1: 389). In the event Briand survived in office until his death in 1932. As a result of the efforts of Briand, Stresemann, Chamberlain and others, by 1929 the German people were more prosperous than they had ever been before in their history (Taylor 1961a: 251), a fact confirmed for Europe generally by Étienne Mantoux (1946: 162) who pointed out that Keynes’s prediction of a decline in European living standards had proved to be wrong. Keynes had predicted that “Europe would be threatened with ‘a long, silent process of semi-starvation and of a gradual steady lowering of the standard of life and comfort’. Ten years after the Treaty European production was well above its pre-war level; and European standards of living had never been higher”. This period also ushered in “the ‘golden age’ of German liberalism” (Taylor 1961a: 230). Hence there was much to hope for and to enjoy in 1920s Europe but there were still significant issues that remained unresolved, which could threaten the established

peace and prosperity of Europe and indeed did so once the Great Depression brought about the end of prosperity and stability in Europe, especially in Germany.

However, relations with the Germans were not always easy. On 1 February 1926 Chamberlain wrote to his Ambassador in Berlin, Lord d'Abernon, that "What all who were present at Locarno chiefly hoped for as the permanent result was the continuation of the spirit of mutual confidence and co-operation between Germany and the allied Powers which had so happily manifested itself at the conference". The ex-allies had been generous: "On every side we have done our part to wipe out the war spirit and to co-operate with Germany in building up in common a new Europe on totally pacific lines" but Germany's replies had been unhelpful: "In hardly a single point have the German Government come forward with any offer to meet our desires ... They have as far as is apparent made no attempt to check the vituperative abuse with which German statesmen and the German press have greeted every effort to act in the Locarno spirit. Cannot Dr. Luther and Dr. Stresemann realise that M. Briand no less than themselves has a public opinion to deal with"? Thus, even after the Locarno Conference all was clearly not sweetness and light but on 4 February Lord d'Abernon, the British Ambassador in Berlin, offered reassurance: "Sir Austen Chamberlain can rest assured that Dr. Luther and Dr. Stresemann fully realise the position of their French colleague and are endeavouring, so far as is possible, to take it into account. At the same time the difficulties with what they themselves have to contend are no less severe" (BDFP IA, 1: 381, 396). The following year, Colonel Ryan reported from Koblenz that Stresemann had said that the Allies had made few concessions to German public opinion: "It is true that German requests made either then or subsequently have not been complied with but this fact does not justify recognition being withheld from the many cases in which the German wishes have received full or partial satisfaction ... The action already taken or proposed represents a very considerable modification of the regime as existing prior to Locarno and has only been put through against considerable opposition" (BDFP IA, 3: 2). All the statesmen involved still had to contend with the inflamed public opinion that had resulted from the war: the Germans remained sullen in the face of defeat but the French were determined to keep Germany weak and to exact their pound of flesh.

## 2 RUNNING SORES

Although the result of the Locarno Conference was a period of peace and stability in Europe, three issues remained as irritants, especially from the German point of view. These were, which were paid resentfully, the Allied occupation of the Rhineland and the Rhine bridge-heads and lastly her Eastern frontiers, especially the “Polish Corridor” which Germany was not prepared to accept as a permanent solution to Poland’s need for access to the sea. Disarmament was also an issue causing friction because the general disarmament promised in the Treaty of Versailles was at best slow to materialise. Lastly there was the unresolved issue of relations with the now firmly established Soviet Union under Stalin’s rule but one problem was the continued activity of the Comintern in seeking to foment revolution in the West, especially after the “united front” policy of co-operation with Western social democratic parties was replaced in 1927–1928 by the “class against class” policy of opposition to them. Earlier in the decade there had been indications that aroused serious concern among the Western powers that the two outcasts of Europe, Germany and the Soviet Union might make common cause against the West as they had appeared to do in agreeing the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922, which wrecked the Genoa Conference but the Locarno Conference changed that because Stresemann shifted German policy towards the West, especially in proposing the holding of this Conference and agreeing the treaties that resulted therefrom.

### *Reparations*

Reparations were paid under the reduced terms negotiated by the Dawes Commission throughout the period 1924–1929 but never with good grace. On 12 February 1926 the British Ambassador to France, Sir Eric Phipps expressed concern about inter-Allied debts; he warned that he feared that the Dawes Plan, which was always intended to be a temporary solution to the issue, “must eventually break down before long” (BDFP IA, 1: 427). The Germans repeatedly argued that paying reparations was reducing their ability to generate economic growth, although in 1929, “After six years of peace Germany in 1929 had a higher standard of life than ever before” (Taylor 1961a: 251). When the burden of

reparations became too heavy for Germany to bear despite her relative economic success in this period, a further commission of experts was convened under another American chairman, Owen Young. This commission of experts first met under Young's chairmanship on 11 February 1929 and at first made little progress because the Germans and the creditor nations, particularly France, produced radically different views about how much Germany could be expected to pay versus the needs of the creditor nations, including their own debts owed to the USA. In consequence, "for two months there was no agreement and by mid April the conference was at the point of breakdown" (Jacobson 1972: 251). The final agreement further reduced the total amount to be paid by Germany to 122 billion gold marks to be paid over 59 years. Only one-third of the annual payments were to be mandatory, the rest was to be paid off as and when this was possible. This plan was accepted in January 1930 but was overtaken by the events that followed the Great Crash, which made it impossible for the Americans to continue supporting European economies with loans in the way that they had granted them since the agreement of the Dawes Plan in 1924. The inter-relation between reparations and the evacuation of the Rhineland, war debts, especially those of the European allies to the USA and the evacuation of the Rhineland produced a period of uncertain negotiations between Britain, France and Germany that persisted throughout the late 1920s (see Jacobson 1972: 187ff.). Disarmament was also tied into these discussions, with British and French attempts to agree on naval and military terms also tied in with them.

In October 1930 Sir Horace Rumbold reported from Berlin to Arthur Henderson, Foreign Secretary in the second MacDonald Labour Government on a meeting with the German Foreign Minister, Dr. Julius Curtius, who said that "The German Government recognised that the acute economic depression from which Germany was suffering was not a local but a worldwide problem. But Germany ... was particularly hard hit because she was without economic reserves" (BDFP II, 1: 525–526). He warned that "Reparations payments now depended on the favourable development of world trade but things have gone badly" (*ibid.*). Germany had often blamed her economic troubles, which were now becoming much more severe on her obligation to make Reparations payments.

*The Rhineland*

The Rhenish provinces and the bridgeheads over the Rhine at Düsseldorf, Cologne, Koblenz and Kehl had been occupied under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles but under the terms of the Treaty of Locarno these territories were to be evacuated over the next 15 years, although in fact the evacuation was largely achieved earlier than this, leaving the Rhineland as a demilitarised zone but still part of the German Reich. However, the Germans resented the occupation, while the French were reluctant to bring it to an end. On 2 February 1927 Colonel Ryan, the British commanding officer at Koblenz, reported that Stresemann had complained that few concessions had been made to German public opinion. Colonel Ryan reported that "It is true that all the German requests made either then (the time of the Locarno Conference) or subsequently have not been complied with but this fact does not justify recognition being withheld from the many cases in which the German wishes have received full or initial satisfaction" (BDFP IA, 3: 2). He went on to say that "I prefaced my remarks by saying that I had the sincere hope that Locarno would have led to entire change in the relations between Germany and the Occupation but that instead of an improvement relations seemed to be getting worse and that I could not but regard the future with some concern" (ibid.: 3). He went on, "On the other hand what could be put to Germany's credit on the account of reconciliation? Speaking personally I could find nothing in the past 18 months that evidenced any desire to help in what could only be a mutual task" (ibid.: 4). Germany's sullenness was neither unexpected nor without reason but clearly the "Spirit of Locarno" had not extended to relations with the Occupation. Colonel Ryan also reported that a new German Government had been formed, with Dr. Wilhelm Marx as Chancellor, which included four Ministers from the German National Party but its period in office was only a few months. Stresemann survived as Minister for Foreign Affairs. However, this result aroused French fears: At the beginning of February 1927 Lord Crewe, the British Ambassador in Paris reported that "there is apprehension in France about a new right wing nationalist government in Germany, even with Stresemann still installed as Minister for Foreign Affairs" (ibid.: 12f).

On the other hand, the French were not only reluctant to end the Occupation but sought to hive off parts of the Rhineland. Sterndale Bennett recorded that the evacuation of Cologne was not carried out in January 1925, which “caused a regrettable setback to the improved relations between the Allies and Germany” (BDFP IA, 1: 6). A couple of years earlier the French had tried to encourage the formation of a breakaway state in the Palatinate, a scheme that was firmly resisted by the British, resulting in an open quarrel between the two Allies between January and February 1924. The British attitude can be judged by Lord Curzon’s messages to Lord Crewe, the British Ambassador in Paris, responding to a French attempt to secure recognition for the decrees of an independent Palatinate Government. His first message on 4 January 1924 said that Viscount Curzon “was astonished to learn that the Rhineland High Commission have adopted by a majority, the British High Commissioner being outvoted, a decision to register certain decrees issued by a body purporting to be an autonomous government of the Bavarian Palatinate”. He continued: “His Majesty’s Government is not prepared as at present advised to recognise any change in the status of the component parts of the German Reich which has not been brought about by Constitutional means and acquiesced in by the German Government” (BDFP I, 26: 479). Britain, unlike France, had no desire or intention to see Germany dismembered.

In a second message, dated 15 January Lord Curzon declared that Britain “will not permit the creation of a new state outside the Reich. M. Poincaré’s view that the foundation of a state outside Germany is a matter for Germany alone is one with which His Majesty’s Government find themselves in complete agreement but which makes French action on the subject of the Palatinate decrees all the more incomprehensible” (BDFP I, 26: 498). Furthermore, the Palatinate could secede under the Weimar Constitution and “the *prima facie* conclusion to be drawn from the failure to make use of the constitutional machinery thus provided is that the movement in the Palatinate is not genuine” (ibid.). The dispute was indefinitely postponed and was referred to Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague (ibid.: 420–421) but this dispute demonstrated that German resentfulness about the Occupation was matched by French duplicity in trying to maintain it. Poincaré

continued his hard line against Germany with his “argument that Germans understood no argument but force” (BDFP I, 27: 1, 91). The French continued to delay the evacuation of Cologne and other parts of the Rhineland.

As the 1920s wore on, France continued to maintain that the occupation of the Rhineland was essential for her security. Jacobson (1972: 104) described the general situation: Briand was unable to make concessions on this issue because of fears in the French Cabinet and General Staff of the danger of a German attack despite the extent of her disarmament.

The opposition that Briand encountered in Paris was based on the notion that the occupation of the Rhineland afforded France an essential measure of military security against a German attack. France, it was stated, was vulnerable because her frontiers were not yet protected by permanent fortifications (the decision to build the Maginot Line was taken in February 1927) and because her army was being reduced in size (by reducing the term of conscription from 18 months to a year); without French troops on the Rhine there was no way to protect the nation against the Reichswehr, which it was alleged in Paris was capable of striking at France and inflicting severe damage.

In reality, German forces were too weak to do any such thing but nothing could assuage French fears of renewed German aggression. These fears limited Briand’s freedom of action in making concessions to the Germans and the desire to maintain Briand in office limited Chamberlain’s freedom of action too. For instance, when Stresemann asked the British Government to withdraw British troops from Koblenz at a meeting in Geneva in March 1927, Chamberlain was compelled to decline his request because of his concern over “Briand’s vulnerable position vis-à-vis his critics in France and refused to jeopardise it further by separating himself from Briand” (ibid.: 114). Such resistance to German expressions of desire for the evacuation of the Rhineland soured the friendly relations that had been achieved at Locarno. The Germans realised the frailty of Briand’s position too: Leopold von Hoesch advised Stresemann that “Briand’s methods included a public display of hostility toward Stresemann and a public disavowal of his role in the evacuation discussions”. This, Ambassador Hoesch recommended, “should be overlooked in Berlin, for it was only by such tactics that Briand could remain in office” (ibid.: 116).

However in Britain by late 1928 the Labour Party led by Ramsay MacDonald and the Liberals led by Lloyd George committed themselves to the immediate evacuation of the Rhineland. Labour did this as part

of its forthcoming election manifesto, *Labour and the Nation* in preparation for the General election that had to be held the following year (ibid.: 210). In *Labour and the Nation*, the Labour Party declared its intention to bring about “the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Rhineland”, an ambition shared by the Lloyd George Liberals and even a significant number of Conservative Members of Parliament (ibid.: 210–211). In this election, held on 30 May 1929, the Conservatives lost 159 seats and Labour gained 137, which opened the way for a second Labour Government supported by the Liberals to take office and change British policy on the Rhineland and other matters (ibid.: 280).

The new Government strongly supported the League of Nations, coupled with “the restoration of relations with Russia and the pacification and reconciliation of Germany”, to include the unconditional evacuation of Germany and the ending of the Baldwin government’s close ties to France (Jacobson 1972: 282). Labour also reconfirmed its strong support for the League of Nations, a principle which they stuck to until well after the League had lost credibility over its failure to halt Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia (see Bew 2016: 211ff). The execution of these international ambitions was entrusted to Arthur Henderson as Foreign Secretary, with Hugh Dalton as his deputy. They were determined to impose radical changes in British foreign policy although in the matter of evacuation Henderson was anxious to work with the French and Belgians but he was determined to withdraw British troops from the Rhineland by December 1929. He later came to accept the desirability of the simultaneous evacuation of the Rhineland by British, French and Belgian troops. However, a likely source of dispute arose early in the Government’s term of office when Philip Snowden, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, demanded that the Young Committee’s proposals should be modified to ensure that Britain received sufficient funds from German reparations payments to cover her repayment of her American loans; he felt that his predecessor as chancellor, Winston Churchill had been too lenient on this matter (Jacobson 1972: 285).

Although by 1930 agreement on evacuate the Rhineland had been reached, as late as 1930 the British were concerned about French unwillingness to abide by the evacuation of the Rhineland as agreed at Locarno and afterwards. On 28 April Arthur Henderson, the Foreign Secretary in the second Labour Government wrote to the Paris Ambassador, Lord Tyrrell, expressing his concern that the French would not complete the evacuation by the stipulated date of 30 June: “I feel that any failure to

adhere to this date will cause in Germany a feeling of disappointment all the more bitter in that it is not at present anticipated and while the resultant outburst of feeling will be mainly directed against France, there is a distinct fear that it may have wider repercussions and make more difficult the smooth and loyal execution of the Young Plan" (BDFP II, 1: 475–476). The Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold warned Henderson on 2nd May that a further postponement of the evacuation of the Rhineland "would be dangerous because the Reichstag has passed several unpopular measures on the basis that the evacuation will happen on time" (ibid.: 477). Eventually, the French and others moved out of the Rhineland on 30 June 1930 and the Rhineland became a demilitarised zone until Hitler re militarised it in 1936 in his first act of open defiance against the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

### *Eastern Europe*

Germany had agreed to submit her disputes over her frontiers with Poland and Czechoslovakia to arbitration under the Locarno Treaties but in the short run little progress was made and in the longer run but not at once the commitment to peaceful settlement was abandoned after the Nazis assumed power in January 1933. In April EH Carr, then a Foreign Office official reported that a German official, Mr. Riesser, had "said—and repeated several times—that any pact between Germany and Poland was unthinkable as long as the present frontiers of Poland were unrevised. The conclusion of our talk seemed to be that no form of Eastern Locarno was practical politics at present" (ibid.: 427). Part of the problem was that the Poles in particular were wary of German intentions. On the other hand the Germans repeatedly refused to accept that the current frontiers would not have to be revised: On 16 February 1927 Sir R. Lindsay in Berlin reported a conversation with Herr von Schubert of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who "recapitulated the recent history of German relations with Poland: at Locarno his Government had had to oppose all suggestions of Polish guarantee for reasons which they had declared in the frankest and least provocative manner possible; no use for them to pretend that they did not hope some day, by peaceable means, to bring about a change favourable to themselves in their Eastern frontiers" (BDFP IA, 3: 37). Sir Horace Rumbold reported on 3 July 1930 on a meeting he had held with the German Minister for Foreign Affairs in which the latter "rather went out

of his way to affirm in particularly energetic terms that Germany could not rest content with her present frontier in the East (BDFP II, 1: 490).

A month or so later Rumbold told Henderson that a German politician and Government Minister, Gottfried Rheinhold Treviramus, had spoken of “the iniquitous insistence of Wilson on the unnatural cutting off of East Prussia and of the half-baked condition to which Danzig is condemned” (ibid.: 492–493). This was an unauthorised speech for which Treviramus was firmly rebuked by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Curtius: who telegraphed “have read with astonishment your latest foreign policy declarations ... Urgently request you desist from further statements on foreign policy intentions” (BDFP II, 1: 308–318). To this speech the Polish response was quick and firm from their Foreign Minister: “M. Zaleski made a decided and formal protest in the name of the Polish Government against the action of a member of the Government of the Reich, which was directed against the integrity of the Polish State” (ibid.: 497). This dispute was therefore a running sore and was to be the proximate cause of the Second World War: “War for Danzig” (Taylor 1961b).

The Czechoslovak frontier was also disputed but German claims were pursued more gently and the Czechoslovak Government treated the Sudeten Germans decently. In a report to the Foreign Secretary of a conversation between a Foreign Office official, Mr. Lampson and the Czech Prime Minister, Dr. Beneš reassured him that his Government’s relations with the Bohemian Germans were improving (ibid.: 538). The Czechoslovak Government was less aggressive in its demands than their Northern Polish neighbours and were concerned to treat the Sudeten German minority fairly. There was a rising in the Sudetenland in 1923, but after that, it did not become a serious issue until the leader of the Sudeten Nazis, Konrad Henlein, stirred up agitation among its German inhabitants on Hitler’s orders from March 1938 onwards. Nonetheless, in September 1938 this dispute brought Europe to the brink of war, which was averted by the British and French acceptance of Germany’s demand for the restoration to the Reich of the Sudeten Germans at the Munich Conference—one of the last stands of the appeasers in the British Government, which was subsequently denounced as a display of feebleness in the face of Hitler’s aggression, which brought about Duff Cooper’s resignation from the Government and several official resignations from the Foreign Office (see Gilbert and Gott 1963: Chapter 10).

### *Disarmament*

Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles Germany had been severely disarmed. She was required to reduce her Army to not more than 100,000 men, who were to be professional soldiers recruited and trained for long terms of service. This had led to a long argument at the Peace Conference about whether this small German army should be made up of conscripts recruited for a short term of service or should be a professional army based on long terms of service, the point being that if a conscript army was used, large numbers of German young men would become trained soldiers and therefore a danger to internal order and international peace. In the event, the effect of releasing millions of demobilised soldiers with military training onto the labour market, where most could not find employment because they could not be kept in the severely and compulsorily reduced army led to a threat to public order because in consequence, many of them joined political armies such as the Freikorps and later the Nazi Sturmabteilung (SA) on the Right, or left-wing forces including the Socialists' Reichs Banner and the Communist Rotfrontkämpferbund. The existence of these partisan forces weakened the ability of the Weimar Republic to maintain public order effectively; indeed these political armies were to be a constant threat to the stability of the Republic. Eventually, the Nazi militias would be used to suppress the Republic and all forms of democracy.

The naval disarmament terms were equally severe, including a restriction on the size of surface warships to a maximum of 10,000 tons, which resulted in the construction of Germany's three pocket battle-ships, which were fast, heavily armed but inadequately armoured, despite their ending up considerably heavier than the Treaty permitted at about 14,000 tons each. The weakness of their armour was revealed in the Battle of the River Plate, when three British cruisers were able to cripple the pocket battleship *Graf Spee* despite being heavily outgunned by the German ship. British support for German disarmament was firm: in a message to the Ambassador in Warsaw on 4 November 1925 Austen Chamberlain declared that "whatever concessions we might make, Germany was disarmed and would remain disarmed and incapable for a long time to come of conducting an aggressive war". He went on to argue that other countries, including Poland, should now disarm too: "Now that the Locarno Treaties have been ratified and their security thus

assured, their budgets should be relieved of some part of the high military expenditure which now weighs down Europe” (BDFP IA, 1: 94). This hope did not come to fruition because of continuing fears in France, Poland and elsewhere for their safety.

However, German disarmament was intended under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles to be the prelude to general disarmament and when this did not happen, the Germans were justifiably offended. The French unsurprisingly supported the compulsory disarmament of Germany but they recognised that the relevant clauses of the Treaty of Versailles should lead to general disarmament. In a Note from the French ambassador in 1926, he acknowledged that the military and naval clauses of the (Versailles) Treaty “constitute the first steps towards the general reduction and limitation of armaments which the ... Powers seek to realise as one of the best ways to prevent war ... So it is right and proper to begin obligatory limitation by the nation that carried the responsibility for the increase” (BDFP IA, 2: 421). However, German reluctance to comply with the demands of the Disarmament Control Commission was a matter of Allied concern. Austen Chamberlain instructed Lord Kilmarnock, based at Koblenz, that “the German government must be brought to realise that the Locarno Spirit is simply mutual trust and loyalty and co-operation ... It takes two to make a friendship, one to make a quarrel” (BDFP IA, 3: 425). The Austrians similarly were reluctant to comply with the disarmament terms of their treaty. The British Ambassador in Vienna, Viscount Chilston, had raised this with the Austrian Chancellor at his fortnightly reception in February 1927 (*ibid.*: 14).

A Naval Conference had been held in Washington, in 1920 at which a ratio for the size of capital ship fleets had been agreed at 5 each for the USA and Britain, with 3 for Japan but no similar limits were agreed for cruisers, destroyers or submarines. As a result, a number of battleships were scrapped and the Conference was regarded as a success. A Naval Construction Bill proposing an expansion of the US Navy was defeated in the Senate because of economic stringency coupled with “the shaggy haired Senator from Idaho, William Borah, (who) brought together a formidable collection of women, labour, churches, pacifists and teetotallers to oppose the President’s bill” (Steiner 2005: 375). Disarmament talks then continued throughout the 1920s but they never reached any definite conclusions, although some further progress was made towards agreement on naval questions. The general state of the

negotiations was described in a memorandum from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord Cushenden which indicated a stalemate in the Committee charged to prepare for a World Disarmament Conference, which had been adjourned *sine die*. Naval matters were particularly difficult: "The position is ... full of perplexity and complication and so far as I personally am concerned one of the chief difficulties is that I do not even now exactly comprehend what is the attitude of our Admiralty on some of the points involved" (BDFP IA, 1: 642). A Disarmament Conference was held in Lausanne in 1932 but by then such negotiations were looking increasingly irrelevant as the threat of a Nazi takeover in Germany increased.

### 3 THE SOVIET UNION

During this period, the spectre of "red revolution" continued to haunt Europe and made decisions about developing trade and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union difficult. Once the various "White" forces under General Denikin in the South, Admiral Kolchak in Siberia and the British force left in Archangel and Murmansk had been defeated or withdrawn the Bolsheviks became the undisputed government of Russia, which became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Russia itself became the Russian Federated Republic of the Soviet Republics (RSFSR). In 1919 the Bolshevik Government had established the Third (Communist) International under Zinoviev (see Shapiro 1960: 196ff) whose remit was to attempt to spread Communist revolutions throughout the world. Several were attempted during the immediate post-war period, including one under Bela Kun in Hungary, the Spartakist revolt in Germany in 1919 and a Communist revolution in Germany in 1923. The Comintern's activities caused acute anxieties among Western Governments and made them reluctant to establish relations with the Soviet regime for fear that the latter would use its representatives in the West to ferment revolutions there. In 1917, Georgi Chicherin was in London, and in August that year, he was interned as a threat to the British war effort. While he was detained in Brixton Prison, he received a message from Trotsky, then People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs appointing him the Soviet representative in London but in January 1918 he was expelled from

Britain—handed over to the Soviet Union in exchange for British prisoners held there because of his subversive activities among British workers. A friend described his departure from Waterloo: “as the train steamed out of the station the ‘International’ was sung in Russian and cheers were given for the Russian revolution” (see Andrew 2009: 95ff, quotation at p. 103). He was later to become People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs himself and have extensive dealings with Western diplomats, most notably at the Genoa Conference in April 1922 and for a long time afterwards (see Maisky 2016).

British concern about Communist subversion remained considerable for years after Chicherin’s departure. In 1927 Sir R. Lindsay in Berlin told Mr. Gregory, an Assistant Secretary at the Foreign Office that “The real centre point in the situation is described by yourself in the words ‘the Soviet is to all intents and purposes—short of direct armed conflict—at war with the British Empire’” (BDFP IA, 3: 3). In February, Sir R. Hodgson in Moscow warned Sir Austen Chamberlain that

So long as M. Bukharin and his friends continue to assure the world that the Soviet Union has a special mission to create world communism, in is difficult to anticipate that states which do not happen to want communism will take this expansiveness without demur ... M. Litvinov admitted that all this talk is most unwise, he has again and again insisted that they talk a lot but do little. (BDFP IA, 3: 24)

He goes on to refer to “the conflict which is all the time going on in this country between the Communist Party, whose business is to shout and the Soviet Government, whose business is to govern” (ibid.: 25). This conflict between the desire of some members of the Politburo to provoke international, ideally world revolution conflicted with the more conventional economic and political interests of the Soviet Union. Ultimately the latter would prevail and the quest for world revolution would be abandoned by Stalin in favour of “Socialism in One Country”.

Significantly, the Communists and the Soviet Union rejoiced at the initial failure to secure Germany’s admission to the League of Nations. Lord d’Abernon reported from Berlin on 17 March 1926 that the only quarters in which failure of negotiations for entry of Germany into League of Nations gave genuine pleasure was those of the Völkische and

Communist parties. The organs of these parties declare loudly that the whole Locarno policy has broken down” (ibid.: 534–535), indicating an unholy alliance developing between the Communists and the extreme nationalist right wing. A fortnight later d’Abernon reported that “of course the Russians grin with delight over Geneva. They declare that they foretold failure of our endeavour to come to terms with the League of Nations” (ibid.: 554–555). However, any such joy felt in Moscow was temporary, lasting only until Germany was admitted to the League in September.

There had also been widespread concern in the early 1920s that the two outcasts of Europe, Germany and the Soviet Union, might combine to protect their interests against the West, a concern amplified by the agreement between Germany and Russia of the Treaty of Rapallo in April 1922. In 1926 Sterndale Bennett referred to “the vague menace of Russia in the background” (BDFP IA, 1: 3) and on 1 February 1926 Mr. Campbell of the Foreign Office warned that the current disarmament conference “will necessarily be impaired by the absence of Russia who at the moment constitutes the most serious military menace in Europe” (ibid.: 385). The Soviet Union was still a serious problem for the Western Powers, mainly because of their concern that she still wanted actively to spread Communism into Western Europe, especially in Britain and Germany. However, after 1924 the Comintern adopted the policy of the United Front, which encouraged the Communist parties of Europe to collaborate with the Social Democratic parties and where possible form coalition governments with them. There remained the threat of the Leninist doctrine of taking others by the hand in order to take them by the throat later but in the meantime Russia needed peace, trade agreements and foreign investment, so the desire for worldwide Communist revolution was now muted, especially after Stalin consolidated his power by ousting Trotsky and the “Left Deviation”. At home, the policy was now Socialism in One Country, as opposed to fermenting revolution anywhere. Hence international relations in the 1920s were not without their difficulties in relation to the Soviet Union with its ambitions for world revolution. However, trade relations were gradually developed between the Soviet Union and the Western Powers. As the decade wore on, more concerted efforts were to be made to secure the peace, including a Treaty for the Renunciation of War and a proposal to create a European Federal Union.

#### 4 THE YOUNG COMMISSION AND THE HAGUE CONFERENCE: THE LOCARNITES' LAST HURRAH

The Treaty of Locarno and related documents were signed by all parties on 1 December 1925 and ratified soon afterwards. A new era of peace and stability developed, underpinned by the “Spirit of Locarno”, although further disputes and discussions about reparations and liberating the Rhineland from Allied occupation continued to dominate Western diplomacy, without producing any definite results until 1929. In February 1928 both Briand and Stresemann made major speeches to their respective parliaments about the Rhineland and the need for a permanent settlement of reparations, a need being raised by Parker Gilbert from late 1927 onwards as the head of the existing body with responsibility for the oversight of reparations. The result was the emergence of two views of Franco-German relations. One came to be known as the ‘German thesis’ and the other as the ‘French thesis.’ According to Stresemann, the time had come for France to, in the interests of European peace and harmony, relinquish the gains made in 1919. Briand, on the other hand held that this could not be done because the assurances nominally made to France in 1919 had not yet been realised and executed” (Jacobson: 1972: 151). French policy continued to demand that the evacuation of the Rhineland must be linked to a new settlement of reparations. Thus the conflict between German desires for liberation of the Rhineland versus French demands for assured security continued to exercise diplomatic minds at the Wilhelmstrasse, the Quay d’Orsay and the British Foreign Office. Negotiators were inhibited during 1928 by the holding of elections in France in April, Germany in May and a Presidential election in USA in November.

These conflicts of policy emerged during the negotiations that led up to the agreement of the Young Plan for future reparations payments by Germany. The Plan took some four months to negotiate, with conflicting views persisting about how much the Germans should be required to pay. Those participants, notably the British, who wanted a settlement that would enable German and therefore the European economy to prosper, believed that Germany could not be required to pay more than 1 billion marks per year in annuities. The French and other participants, however, approached the problem from the other end, as it were by basing their assessment of what Germany should pay on the basis of

what the victor countries needed to pay in order to compensate for the damage to people and materials the Germans had caused during the war, which could not be less than 2 billion marks annually. The French also demanded that the evacuation of the Rhineland must be conditional on a satisfactory settlement of reparations. The German delegation, led by Hjalmar Schacht, the President of the Reichsbank, inevitably adhered to the more moderate view.

The problems encountered by the Young Committee were caused in part by the ambiguous status of its members. Jon Jacobson (1972: 275) recorded that “Each had to choose between being an impartial expert or a government representative. Moreau (a French member) took the latter alternative and at one point flatly declared that he would not sign any report that was not satisfactory to the French Government. Young and Stamp chose the former alternative and threatened to resign when their government sent them instructions. Schacht deliberately sought instructions from the politicians, instructions that were reluctantly given”. Inevitably the final report was a compromise between the two opposing views, which was brokered by the committee’s Chairman, the American Owen Young and his colleague, the banker J. P. Morgan. When the point came that he was expected to sign the final deal in late April he demanded written instructions from the German Government requiring him to sign it because he doubted whether it was realistic. After meeting with Chancellor Müller and other cabinet members including Stresemann,, he got what he wanted. The cabinet agreed to sign the Plan on 3 May (Jacobson 1972: 258–271). Both the Young Plan and the evacuation of the Rhineland were finally settled at a conference in The Hague between 6 and 31 August 1929, at which many of the arguments about both reparations and the Rhineland re-emerged and had to be debated and settled before final agreements were reached on both these difficult issues.

In both European countries the party balances in their parliaments changed—in France to the Right and in Germany towards the Social Democrats—but both Briand and Stresemann remained in office, although the latter was threatened by the most severe of the Weimar Republic’s frequent cabinet crises in the early months of 1929. Jacobson (1972: 248) records that a new government was formed keeping Müller and Stresemann in place but it was weak: “the cumulative

effect of these events was to produce both among the German policy making elite and the general public, fatigue with the Weimar system which seemed to permit repeated cabinet crises which were ended only after compromises had been reached and problems patched over". Significantly, with the accession of the Brüning cabinet the following year, parliamentary government would be effectively ended.

The discussions arising from the Young Committee's work and other discussions, particularly of the Rhineland, moved towards a new settlement of reparations to be combined with an early end to the occupation of the Rhineland. Stresemann and his colleagues tried to include the restoration of the Saar to German rule but eventually accepted that this was not possible against French and British opposition. These issues would be determined at the first Hague conference in August 1929, when the evacuation of the Rhineland was agreed to take place by the end of June 1930, along with agreement to the Young Plan for resolving the other running sore, reparations. This conference was at the time described as "the Conference for the final liquidation of the World War" (*ibid.*: 279) but it was not to maintain such a status, while keeping the road to peace open.

The Hague Conference opened on 6 August 1929, with the French delegation, led by Briand, stating at this and subsequent sessions from the outset that their established position that withdrawal from the Rhineland could not be considered until the Young Plan for the future of reparations had been accepted. The German delegation, led by Stresemann argued that because they had fulfilled all their obligations under the Treaty of Versailles, including disarmament and paying reparations instalments under the Dawes Plan, they were legally entitled to expect the unconditional withdrawal of foreign troops from the Rhineland by the end of 1929. However, at the first session the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden, threw a spanner into the works. The Young Commission had revised the proportions that each beneficiary country would receive from German reparations payments in a manner that was disadvantageous to Britain (BDFP IA, 6: 290). These proportions had been fixed at the Spa Conference in 1920 but Britain would now lose out unless she was granted an extra £2.4 million from the reparations instalments. This demand by Snowden led to a deadlock at the Conference that lasted three weeks. Snowden was "neither a skilled nor a patient negotiator. He was not merely discourteous; he gave

expression to the biting sarcasm and vituperative invective which had long characterised his discourse in Cabinet and Parliament” (Jacobson 1972: 311). On 9 August the American official in charge of supervising the Dawes Plan, Parker Gilbert “had described Mr. Snowden as a fanatic who had listened politely to the arguments without changing in the very slightest” (BDFP IA, 6: 511). On 12 August the British Ambassador in Washington DC reported to the Foreign Secretary that the American Press was reporting that “British opposition to the Young scheme was universally regarded as a political manoeuvre and that corresponding resentments would be directed against Great Britain if as a result of such opposition The Hague conference collapsed” (ibid.: 518). The same day the Ambassador in Paris, Neville Henderson informed the Foreign Secretary of a similar reaction there Mr. Snowden is routinely attacked for inaugurating a policy distinctly opposed to that of previous governments and it is made clear that he must bear full responsibility in the event of a rupture” (ibid.: 519). Several attempts by other conference participants to persuade Snowden to soften his position failed and by 25 August the Conference was in danger of collapse.

By this time the principal participants, including Briand and Henderson, were warning that the Conference must end by the end of the month because they were expected to go to Geneva to attend the meeting of the League of Nations Assembly. On 24 August Ramsay MacDonald urged Snowden to accept a compromise that would give Britain seventy to eighty percent of what he had demanded and on 28th Sir Maurice Hankey, acting as the Conference’s secretary-general, reported to the Prime Minister that agreement had finally been reached on such a basis (BDFP IA, 6: 344). On 30 August Arthur Henderson reported to the Foreign Office that “complete agreement on the political side of the conference (evacuation) was ... reached. The moment it became clear that a settlement of the financial side was in sight, both M. Briand and Dr. Stresemann showed the most conciliatory spirit” (ibid.: 624). On this basis, the Conference drew to a successful conclusion on 31st August. Once more patient diplomacy had secured the survival of the Locarno spirit and the modified Versailles system, although a further Hague conference was needed in January 1930 to tie up the details of the reparations settlement before the Powers ratified the Young Plan in May (Jacobson 1972: 316).

## 5 BLUEPRINTS FOR PEACE

Later in 1928, the first of two further initiatives to strengthen the general desire to move towards a secure peace emerged, despite the abiding problems discussed above that still beset European international relations. The first of these peace drives was the Kellogg-Briand Pact (see BDFP IA, 5: 602ff), which Stresemann signed on behalf of Germany in August 1928 which in turn led towards the drafting of a Treaty for the Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy. This treaty was proposed by Briand and supported by the American Secretary of State, Frank Kellogg in December 1927, after rival French and American proposals were merged to become the Kellogg-Briand Pact. The Americans' inability to become formally involved in any European security system or in the League of Nations meant that the French initiative became "totally innocuous" (Steiner 2005: 573). Its signatories promised to renounce war but no means of enforcement were provided for.

The British Ambassador to Washington informed Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain on 19 April 1928 that "At the present moment the State Department can think of little else but pact of perpetual friendship and are unable to consider seriously a set of circumstances which presupposes the existence of a state of war" (BDFP IA, 5: 605). In a Foreign Office memorandum, Sir C. Hurst advised caution on several points, including the need to maintain Article 16 of the League Covenant, which required members of the League to support by all means including force of arms a state that has been attacked. There was a danger that the Treaty for the Renunciation of War "would have removed the deterrent that Article 16 now constitutes against a disturber of the peace" (ibid.: 609). He also warned that Soviet Russia was still a danger because "under cover of the protection which the treaty would give her, Soviet Russia could pursue her present policy of subversive propaganda against Britain" (ibid.: 612). However, on 24 April the German Ambassador confirmed to Sir William Tyrrell, then the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office that Germany was prepared to accede to the treaty: "his Government proposed very strongly to give an intermediate answer expressing their approval of the policy communicated in the American Note to which they could take no exception and declaring their willingness to communicate with the other Powers in order to achieve an

effective Treaty” (ibid.: 617). The Treaty was finally signed in Paris on 27 August 1928. This pact against sin proved immensely popular but uncertainty was created by the American Presidential election that was to be held in November 1928.

The following year the French foreign minister, Aristide Briand instigated another even more radical initiative. On 5 September 1929, he launched an initiative to create a European Federal Union during a speech at the League of Nations Council. The idea has been suggested as early as 1925 by the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Edouard Beneš, followed by his President, Jan Masaryk. Sir G. Clark, Britain’s ambassador to Czechoslovakia, reported to the Foreign Secretary on 21 October 1925 that “Locarno has confirmed the observation made by President Masaryk to the effect that the post-war conditions necessitated for all nations of Europe an understanding and partnership and solidarity, developing gradually into a United States of Europe” (BDFP IA, 1: 37). Stresemann’s biographer wrote that in 1927, “only a year had passed since Germany’s entry, yet the Foreign Minister - with Briand and Chamberlain - already seemed to be a member of the triumvirate which led the League of Nations” (Hirsch 1978). In his last speech to the League Stresemann, now ailing after a series of strokes, said that “... he began to think Europe because he had recognised at an early stage, before many of his compatriots, that European unification, later perhaps expanding into the ‘United States’ would offer Germany the best possible and probably the only chance for the future” (ibid.: 4). Stresemann’s biographer recorded that Stresemann made “... a great speech on 9 September in which he once again proclaimed in moving words his ideal of a united Europe” (ibid.: 81). He “referred great tasks to the League of Nations, such as the peaceful cleansing of centres of conflict, the implementation of general disarmament and justice for minorities. European unity was possible but should not be directed again at other continents” (ibid.). His death shortly afterwards left Briand to carry the idea forward.

In 1929 Briand was to give this project a concrete form. Addressing the Council of the League of Nations he said, “I think that among peoples constituting a geographical group, like the peoples of Europe, there should be some kind of federal bond, it should be possible for them to agree on joint resolutions and to establish among themselves a bond of

solidarity which will enable them, if need be to meet any grave emergency that may arise. This is the link I want to forge” (BDFP II, 1: 312). He went on to say that “The association will be primarily economic, for that is the most urgent aspect of the question and I think we may look for success in that direction. Still, I am convinced that politically and socially also, this federal link might ... do useful work” (ibid.: 2–3). In discussion with Briand on 9 May Arthur Henderson as the British Foreign Secretary endorsed the plan, agreeing that “it must be consistent with the League Covenant” and not be “directed against the United States of America”. Briand agreed to this (ibid.: 313).

On 17 May 1930 Briand circulated a detailed draft constitution for a Federal European Union (BDFP II, 1: 314ff). He stressed that Governments must be involved; they “found the justification in a precise sentiment of their collective responsibility in the face of a danger that threatens European peace ... in the state of in-co-ordination which is found in the general economy of Europe”. The institutions needed would include a “European Conference” (ibid.: 318), with an Executive Organ in the form of a permanent political committee together with a Secretariat, which was to be the responsibility of the Government in charge of the Union by rotation of the presidency of the Executive Committee annually (ibid.: 318–320). The Programme of the European Organisation would include:

1. The need to co-ordinate the customs procedures of each member state.
2. Co-operation through “*Une fédération fondée sur l'idée d'union et non d'unité*”, a phrase which has also found an echo in the present European Union, using the arbitration procedures laid down in the Treaty of Locarno to resolve disputes.
3. A reconciliation of European economies to establish a common market to liberate the circulation of goods, capital and people (ibid.: 320–321). The Union should develop co-operation in a wide range of fields including general economics, major infrastructure projects, transport, finances, labour, hygiene, intellectual co-operation and rapport among Parliamentarians. This blueprint is remarkably prescient of the European Union we possess today, including the “Four Freedoms” guaranteed in the Single European Act of 1986.

This proposal was received with a fair degree of scepticism by other Governments. The Foreign Office summarised their attitude in their report. Germany would consider the blueprint but could not accept the permanence of her present Eastern frontiers, a constant refrain from German Foreign Ministers in the 1920s. On 3 July 1930 the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Horace Rumbold reported on a meeting he had held with the German Minister for Foreign Affairs: "His Excellency rather went out of his way to affirm in particularly energetic terms that Germany could not rest content with her present frontier to the East". A similar problem existed for Hungary. These two countries, the ex-enemies of the Western Allies, insisted that all nations must be treated as equals. The Italians saw disarmament as an essential precondition for the success of Briand's scheme. The Poles, Yugoslavia and Romania all supported Briand's scheme, although some countries were dubious about the effect it would have on their overseas possessions. There was a general view that the scheme would be futile if Great Britain did not join it (BDFP II, 1: 195). The German spokesman would make this clear in his response to M. Briand's proposal for a Federation of Europe. The German-Polish frontier "was absurd in many places, for example there had been incidents on a farm that was divided by the frontier" (BDFP II, 1: 490). The Polish Corridor thus threatened to disrupt Briand's plan. However, the Germans acknowledged that Stresemann had urged a similar idea before his death: "This programme was often put forward in Geneva by Herr Stresemann and particularly in his last great speech before his death and undoubtedly has the support of a large body of opinion among political leaders in various countries" (*ibid.*: 372). The Americans feared that it would weaken the League and wanted its extension to American states and Asian countries.

The British were more positive, if cautious: "If M. Briand principally desires to ... create machinery for the purpose of economic and technical co-ordination ... His Majesty's Government could ... go at least some distance with him" (*ibid.*: 329). Hence the attitude of His Majesty's Government towards M. Briand's proposals should be "one of caution, though cordial caution" (*ibid.*: 330). In a separate memorandum, the Foreign Office declared that "It is our duty to assure M. Briand that we are in full sympathy with the fundamental purpose of the policy of closer European co-operation for which he stands" (*ibid.*: 336-337). There was

some concern about the proposal's effect on the League of Nations but on 17 September the Assembly of the League accepted Briand's proposals as a basis for discussion and requested that a final document should be prepared by the committee they set up to consider them by the time of the next Assembly. Regrettably, like so many of the developments discussed in this chapter the proposal for a Federal European Union was overborne in the maelstrom that followed the Great Crash that began in Wall Street in October 1929 that was to change the course of European history drastically.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# Things Fall Apart: The Great Crash and the Onset of Disaster

## I THE GREAT CRASH AND ITS IMPACT

In October 1929 the US Stock Exchange on Wall Street, New York City collapsed. For several years a speculative pyramid had been built upon company after company, many of which owned few or even no assets. When confidence in this speculative system collapsed, the prices of shares on the market collapsed. The initial collapse occurred on 24 October, followed by another huge fall on Monday 28 October. J. K. Galbraith records that

The bargains then suffered a ruinous fall. Even the man who waited out all of October and all of November, who saw the volume of trading return to normal and saw Wall Street become as placid as a produce market and who then bought common stocks would see their value drop by a third or a fourth of the purchase price in the next twenty-four months, The Coolidge bull market was a remarkable phenomenon. The ruthlessness of its liquidation was, in its own way, equally remarkable. (Galbraith 1961: 130–131)

The market then stabilised briefly but fell further in the subsequent weeks, driving some investors and brokers to commit suicide by jumping from their skyscraper offices. Ultimately the result was to drag the banks into bankruptcy, first in the USA and then throughout Europe as well. The impact of the Great Crash was aptly described by J. K. Galbraith: “when a greenhouse succumbs to a hailstorm something more than a

normally passive role is ascribed to the storm. One must accord similar significance to the typhoon which blew out of Lower Manhattan in October 1929” (Galbraith 1961: 204). This also meant that American loans to Germany were no longer available and the Young Plan, which had been devised earlier in the year to reduce further the burden of reparations on the German economy, collapsed too. One consequence was the drift towards an acute phase of isolationism, in which America looked to her own problems and Congress passed a series of laws preventing the President, by this time Franklin D. Roosevelt, from intervening in European affairs. This isolationism came at what proved to be a very bad time for Europe and eventually for America itself.

The collapse of the Austrian Kreditanstalt in July 1931 when “the financial crisis reached its peak ... when, following the failure of Austria’s greatest banking institution, the Kreditanstalt and an unprecedented flight of capital from Germany, the Darmstadt and National Bank (the Danat), one of the three joint stock banks in Germany, had to close its doors and suspend payments” (Bullock 1962: 177). The banking crisis that started in Vienna precipitated a Europe wide banking crisis which rapidly spread to Germany, resulted in rising unemployment and privation. Unemployment increased from 3 million in September 1930 to four and three quarter million in March 1931 and 5 million by December 1931. The 1931–1932 winter saw the German people “suffering from the primitive misery of hunger and cold, lack of work and lack of hope” (Bullock 1962: 190) and also saw the rise in significance of the Nazi Party, which until then had been only a bit player in the Reichstag, having won only 12 seats in the Reichstag in the elections held in 1928. In this election, the Social Democrats again became the largest party in the Reichstag but they had aroused the hostility of the right, including General Kurt von Schleicher, because they had pledged to abolish the “pocket battleship” programme. The Social Democrats were therefore prevented from forming a Government by right wing opposition.

In the elections held in September 1930, when the number of Nazi representatives rose to 107, the new Nazi members behaved like hooligans at the first sitting of the new Reichstag. Alan Bullock (1962: 176) pointed out that “in speaking of the Nazi movement as a ‘party’ there is a danger of mistaking its true character. For the Nazi party was no more a party in the normal democratic sense of the word than the Communist Party is today. It was an organised conspiracy against the State”. Hitler himself always insisted that his organisation was a movement rather than a party.

The Communists, the other anti-system party, also increased their numbers from 54 seats to 77. Reparations were still seen as to blame for Germany's economic problems: On 27 October 1929 the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Curtius, told the British Ambassador that "The German government recognised that the acute economic depressions from which Germany was suffering was not a local but a worldwide problem but Germany was particularly hard hit because she was without economic reserves" and went on to warn that reparations payments depended on "the favourable development of world trade but things had gone badly" (BDFP II, 1: 525–526).

## 2 FURTHER MISFORTUNES

Several other factors combined to weaken the Versailles System as it had been revised by the Treaty of Locarno. First, Gustav Stresemann, the German Foreign Minister whose role in developing the "Spirit of Locarno" had been crucial, died of a stroke at the age of 54 probably brought by overwork. He was replaced by Dr. Julius Curtius, who had previously served as Minister of Economic Affairs in Dr. Hans Luther's second Government. He was a short, well-poised lawyer with a somewhat foxy appearance. He was the German Minister who negotiated the Young Plan for dealing with reparations and as such was denounced as a traitor to the Fatherland by the Nazis and other right wing groups.

Secondly the Party line in the Soviet Union had been changed by Stalin in 1928 from the "United Front" policy to the "Class against Class" policy, at least partly because of the way the Kuomintang had rejected the Chinese Communists, leading to their Long March into exile in a remote corner of the country. This policy replaced the demand for European Communist parties to co-operate and form coalition governments with the Social Democratic parties to one of outright hostility to them. In consequence, the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) led by Ernst Thaelmann joined the Nazis as one of the two parties that opposed not only the Government but also the entire Weimar Republic. As the economic situation worsened, so the strength of these two anti-system parties grew.

At first, the situation seemed to be manageable. On 28 March 1930, the British Ambassador to Germany, Sir Horace Rumbold, reported to Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson that "Germans generally have been so accustomed to eleventh hour crises that I think most people expected

that the squabbling parties of the Coalition would nevertheless end by finding some solution to the method of financing the unemployment insurance question which could be accepted by all of them" (BDFP II, 1: 473) but in the event the Government led by Chancellor Müller fell. He was replaced by Dr. Heinrich Brüning, the Leader of the Catholic Centre Party. Rumbold commented that "there have been signs for some time that attempts would be made do constitute a bloc of bourgeois parties independent of the Social Democratic Party, though it is doubtful whether, in the long run the government of this country could be carried on without the support of the Social Democratic Party. For this reason, it appears unlikely that the new Government will last for any length of time" (ibid.: 474).

Interestingly, Rumbold also reported that "there does not appear to be a single strong and dominant personality in any of the political parties" (ibid.: 474). The Social Democrats had been at the core of the Governments of the Weimar Republic since its foundation, so Rumbold's prediction seemed reliable but in fact Brüning remained as Chancellor until June 1932. However, his lack of a stable majority in the Reichstag led Brüning and his colleagues to have to rely increasingly on Presidential decrees in order to pass legislation, a practice which led AJP Taylor to describe this period as having "marked the end of the republic" (Taylor 1961: 236). The German historian Eberhard Kolb described this period as a creeping coup d'état. In a later publication, Taylor was still more judgemental: "Germany was a special case: Brüning imposed austerity by Presidential decree for over two years he governed without a Parliamentary majority" (1961: 62). He also maintained his austerity economic policy in an attempt that was ultimately successful, to persuade the European Powers and the USA that Germany's economic situation was so desperate that reparations must be abolished. This was achieved in July 1932 at a conference in Lausanne but by then Brüning had fallen from office (Helbig 1959). Rumbold had reported that the other effect of the instability in the Reichstag was "the increasing prestige and authority of the president" (BDFP II, 1: 474). Following the death of Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert, former First World War General Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg was elected President in April 1925. He had extensive powers under the Weimar Constitution, which were to become increasingly important from 1928 onwards. Under Article 25 he could dissolve the Reichstag and thus force the holding of new elections within 6 weeks. Under Article 48 he could legislate in the

form of emergency decrees, although these required the consent of the Reichstag, which could annul them within 60 days. Under Article 53 he was empowered to appoint the Chancellor. These powers were to become increasingly important as economic depression and political instability both worsened.

Another factor in the growing crisis was the French attitude; her politicians obviously welcomed the economic weakness of their German neighbours but they were still reluctant to reduce their hold over her. On 28 April Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson wrote to his Ambassador in Paris that he was concerned about whether the French would keep their promise to evacuate the Rhineland by 30 June: "I feel that any failure to adhere to this date will cause in Germany a feeling of disappointment all the more bitter in that it is not at present anticipated and while the resultant outburst of feeling will be mainly directed against France, there is a distinct fear that it may have further repercussions and make more difficult the smooth and loyal execution of the Young Plan" (BDFP II, 1: 475–476). The British Ambassador, Lord Tyrrell, assured Henderson a few days later that although the order to evacuate the Rhineland had not yet been given, it could be speedily executed when this was done (*ibid.*). For his part, Sir Horace Rumbold reported from Berlin that any suggestion of a delay in the evacuation of the Rhineland would be dangerous because the Reichstag "had passed several unpopular measures on the basis that the evacuation will happen on time", indeed the merest hint that a hitch might occur and that evacuation of the Rhineland might not be completed by 30 June would have sufficed to jeopardise the passage of the liquidation measure, if not the Young Plan itself and would undoubtedly have overthrown the Brüning Cabinet during the next fiscal debate" (*ibid.*: 477). According to Helbig (1959: 32), Brüning saw the Young Plan as yet another *Diktat* but he accepted it because it secured the evacuation of the Rhineland, so any failure to carry out the evacuation would lead to problems in Germany. It would also destroy growing trust in "the undertakings of the creditor Powers as a body but even on the good faith of the French Government, once France has pledged her word" (*ibid.*). The unstable party system in the Reichstag led the French to fear the rise to power of extreme nationalists, especially the Nazis but the British adopted a policy of trying to keep Brüning in office to prevent this eventuality materialising for as long as possible. Doubts about French commitments were therefore another

source of danger to the increasingly fragile Brüning Government. The evacuation of the Rhineland by Allied troops nonetheless began on 1 April 1930 and was completed in July.

Brüning was determined to secure revision of the Treaty and increasingly took as his major objective the abolition of reparations. Brüning was a realist: "Good Catholic that he was, nothing leads one to believe that Brüning was seeking for the policy that was morally the most responsible; his aim was one that was most realistic and would yield the best results for Germany" (Helbig 1959: 26). His situation was difficult because "he was caught between two fires: refusing to take the way shown by Thaelmann and Hitler and not choosing to follow Stresemann's footsteps he could not hope for any significant parliamentary support for his foreign policy" (*ibid.*). Indeed the Government was constantly insecure, constantly fearing the fall of his Government. In his dealings with foreign statesmen, "he remained calm and polite, modest and patient, appealing to facts and statistics rather than to emotion and prejudice" (*ibid.*: 30), which won him respect from other Ministers. In particular, the British Government became increasingly sympathetic to his pleas for the ending of reparations, to the point at which Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon conceded in January 1932 that the complete abolition of reparations was "the only effective solution" (*ibid.*: 38). He was less successful with the scheme for a customs union (*Anschluss*) with Austria, which was rejected by the Allies and had to be abandoned, leading to the resignation of Curtius on October 1931, after which Brüning became his own Foreign Minister.

The French were uneasy about developments in Germany. Lord Tyrrell in Paris warned Henderson on 3 July 1930 that Briand was determined to secure the evacuation of the Rhineland but the French were concerned that the Germans would celebrate this event. He went on: "If on the other hand appreciation of the new spirit is shown in Germany, M. Briand will be enabled to continue his policy of rapprochement between the two countries. The advice therefore to Germany is that in her own interests she had better go slow now and rest content for the present with what Stresemann's enlightened policy has already achieved for her" (BDFP II, 1: 479–480). However, on the same day Rumbold reported increasing criticism of French behaviour in the German Press (*ibid.*: 481–485). The issue of the Saarland was also being raised; it too was occupied by the French pending a referendum on its future.

### 3 HOW SERIOUSLY TO TAKE THE NAZIS?

Until May 1930 the danger posed by Hitler and his Nazi party had not been taken particularly seriously but then some British observers in Germany began to warn of his and its growing significance. The British Military Attaché in Berlin reported a conversation he had had with Colonel Kuhlertal of the Reichswehr Ministry, who had warned that “the National Socialist movement is a real danger and far more of a presence in the present Constitution than is Communism ... They want to destroy the present fabric of the State but have no constructive programme with which to replace it, except a form of mad dog dictatorship” (ibid.: 478). He also recognised the power of Hitler’s oratory: “Another serious feature of the movement is the ascendancy with which its leader, Adolf Hitler, has the power of exerting his personal magnetism is enough to win over quite “reasonable people to his standard and this is what constitutes the chief danger of the moment” (ibid.: 479).

In September the general election was held in which challenges to the Weimar constitution were voiced by both the Nazis and the Communists. Rumbold reported to Henderson on 29 August that several manifestos had demanded revision of Germany’s frontiers: “The Communist Party have issued a violent manifesto in which they declare their intention of tearing up the Versailles Treaty and the Young Plan which has reduced Germany to serfdom ... It is part of the manifesto that is clearly designed to steal the thunder of the National Socialists, against whom the whole manifesto reveals extreme bitterness” (ibid.: 503). By contrast, on 13 September Rumbold reported that the election “passed off quietly on the whole” (ibid.: 508) but he reported the “remarkable success of the National Socialists”, who had polled 6,500,000 votes and increased their representation in the Reichstag from 12 to 107 members. They therefore became the second largest party in the Reichstag. The Social Democrats remained the largest party with 8,500,000 votes and 143 seats but the Communists had polled over 4,500,000 votes and gained 76 seats. The Centre Party, led by Brüning, gained 7 seats for a total of 69 (ibid.: 508). Thus the parties that supported the Weimar Constitution were still dominant but the two parties that wanted to destroy the Republic had gained significantly in terms of both votes and seats. The result was the loss of any stable basis of support for the Government: Bullock said that “The Chancellor’s appeal for national unity had failed and the elections of September 1930 far from

producing a stable parliamentary basis for Brüning's policy, had only multiplied the strength of the two extremist parties, the Nazis and the Communists" (1962: 179). However, in some respects Brüning himself felt that the increase in Nazi strength had strengthened his hand in his negotiations with foreign Powers, especially the British Labour Government, which was particularly anxious to maintain Brüning in office because the British Government "felt a strong interest in doing all it could to prevent an extremist regime from coming to power" (Helbig 1959: 36).

The election result not surprisingly caused unhappiness in France: Mr. R. H. Campbell reported French concern from the Paris Embassy, writing to Henderson that "the dominant note is that a turning point has been reached in German history which may have far-reaching effects on international foreign policy and this situation requires careful and firm handling on the part of France" (ibid.: 509). He argued that Briand's position had been weakened because his policy of *rapprochement* with Germany was seen to have failed, hence some right wing politicians were demanding his replacement, which did not occur.

Even at this stage, with the economic outlook looking increasingly threatening but at this stage not disastrous and although the unemployment figures were rising, not everyone saw Hitler as a major threat to the Republic. Rumbold reported to Henderson on 18 September that he had discussed political events with Herr Weismann, the Prussian Secretary of State, who thought the Nazi success was "ephemeral" (ibid.: 511) and suggested that the Soviet Union was financing the Nazis because "it was obviously in the interest of the Soviet authorities to create a state of confusion in Germany" (ibid.: 511). He argued that the Government must remain in office. On 25 September Rumbold reported that "Hitler had openly avowed that if his party came to power it would kick down the Treaty of Versailles and all that flowed from it" (ibid.: 512–513). Yet the threat still seemed remote. The next day Rumbold told Henderson that "since the election Hitler has been keeping very quiet and has been obviously endeavouring to show that the National Socialist movement is perfectly harmless and respectable and fit to share in the government of the country" (ibid.: 514). Furthermore, on 23rd October Rumbold reported that the Reichstag had met and Brüning's position was "greatly strengthened ... and his political prestige has increased in the country ... The Chancellor has, in fact, revealed himself as one of the few statesmen to be found in the Germany of

today” (ibid.: 519), while “the National Socialists, having let off a certain amount of steam and made themselves somewhat ridiculous in the initial proceedings of the Reichstag, now show signs of settling down” (ibid.: 520). The new Nazi members had rioted and broken some windows during the new Reichstag’s first meeting.

In October 1930 the Nazis’ intentions became abundantly clear. On 31 October 1930, Rumbold reported to Henderson that the Nazis had published a manifesto that contained a number of definite policy commitments. He summarised it by saying that “the final aim is a ‘greater Germany’ to achieve which the programme demands the consolidation of all Germans into one great German state, equal rights for the German people with other nations, the abolition of the Treaties of Versailles and Saint Germain (the Austrian peace treaty) and space and colonies to feed the nation and absorb the surplus population” (BDFP II, 1: 527). Jews would not be German citizens—“a harsh policy” (ibid.: 528). Furthermore, “the programme declares that a citizen’s first duty is spiritual or physical creation” Roman law would be replaced by German law. Education reform was also promised (ibid.). However, Rumbold’s view was that this policy statement would weaken rather than strengthen the party’s influence: “Such a programme must obviously be embarrassing to the leaders of a party who are anxious to prove its fitness to participate in government” (ibid.: 529). The programme was sinister but it was not seen as likely to lead the Nazis to power. The following month Rumbold reported having lunch with the German Foreign Minister, Dr. Julius Curtius, who was optimistic about the future of the Government of which he was part. The Chancellor’s speech on Government financial proposals “has revealed Dr. Brüning’s statesman-like qualities and had increased his prestige in Parliament and the country” (ibid.: 533). He also revealed that the Nazis obtained their funds by charging for admission to their meetings.

#### 4 THE DISARMAMENT RUNNING SORE

At this time, apart from the worsening but not yet disastrous financial situation, one of the long-standing sources of German grievance was re-emerging: disarmament. On 4 November 1930, Rumbold reported to Henderson that disarmament still “continues to occupy a prominent place in the public interest” (ibid.: 530) because the Germans were dissatisfied that other countries, particularly France had not reduced their

armaments as promised in the Treaty of Versailles and elsewhere. Ten days later Mr. Newton, a more junior official at the British Embassy in Berlin, reported to Henderson that there was growing dissatisfaction in Germany over the failure of other countries to disarm, hence “the whole tendency at the moment is for the right to rearm to become more definite and more outspoken” (*ibid.*: 535). One aspect of this view that was being expressed in practice was her “pocket battleship” programme, under which Germany could acquire capital ships supposedly within the 10,000 ton limit imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, although in reality the ships’ weight exceeded this limit by a considerable margin (see BDFP II, 1: 342, 343).

The discontent over disarmament was grist to the mill of the right wing parties, including the Nazis, who had demanded equal rights with other nations. On 12 January 1931 Dr. Curtius had told Henderson that the disarmament conference should be held as soon as possible and that the Czech Prime Minister, Beneš should not chair it because he was “commonly regarded as being unduly subject to French influence” (*ibid.*: 553). On the same day, Henderson instructed Rumbold to try to reduce German aspirations for speedy disarmament: “The German Government must be aware that the ideal of complete disarmament or anything like complete disarmament is not at present within the sphere of practical politics. Disarmament can at best be a gradual process” (*ibid.*: 554–555). Indeed, Henderson went on: “if the German Government sincerely desires to secure at the Conference the maximum reduction of armaments they will do everything in their power to dissipate the atmosphere of distrust which would inevitably react in the most unfavourable manner on its work”, a remark supported by a suggestion that Germany might denounce the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles because others had not implemented them, which “does a grave disservice to the cause of disarmament” (*ibid.*: 555). A month or so later Rumbold reported that this was now a major grievance for Germans—“in the history of German grievances disarmament is outlined in red” (*ibid.*: 565). The German-Polish frontier and the isolation of East Prussia were also seen by the Germans as major grievances (*ibid.*: 570ff). The Disarmament Conference eventually got under way under Arthur Henderson’s chairmanship in February 1932, but it was to achieve little until its work was halted by the advent of the Third Reich. The running sores including the Polish and Czech frontiers were not to be healed until Hitler denounced disarmament anyway and set about

resolving the other grievances by diplomatic bullying backed up by force, leading to the Western capitulation at Munich in September 1938 but to the outbreak of war over Poland a year later.

## 5 THE GROWING THREAT TO WEIMAR

At this stage not only was the Nazi threat still regarded with only limited concern; also the British Government's view of Germany's economic and financial situation was not sympathetic. On 2 December 1930, Arthur Henderson gave policy guidance to Sir Horace Rumbold in Berlin. He refused German requests for a moratorium in reparations payments under the Young Plan because of a rise in the price of gold and the depressed state of her economy. This plea was rejected by Henderson on the basis that "Germany definitely accepted the fixation of her reparation liabilities in gold, as part of a bargain by which her total liabilities were scaled down". He went on, "Trade depression has affected Germany less than other countries ... such exchange difficulties as have recently occurred are due not to the reparation burden but to the alarm both in Germany and abroad by the reckless pronouncements of Hitler and other extremists in Germany" (ibid.: 536–537). Henderson added that "it must be remembered that the threats of Hitlerites have seriously shaken the credit of Germany" but this had been mitigated by the firm actions of the German Government (ibid.: 537). Rumbold duly conveyed this message to Dr. Curtius and warned of the importance of the survival of the German Government on 10 December: "It is difficult to think of anybody in the Germany of today more capable of directing the affairs of the Reich than the present Chancellor and it would be a misfortune in the country if he had to go" (ibid.: 542). There were dangers in being excessively hard on the Germans. Taylor (1961: 62) commented of this period that "the Depression removed the strongest argument for doing nothing: prosperity. Men who are well off forget their grievances, on adversity they had nothing else to think about". That thinking was to destroy the Weimar Republic.

During 1931 the Nazi movement made large gains in provincial elections, including becoming the largest party in the Prussian Diet, together with gains in Württemberg, Bavaria and Hamburg but they did not win a majority anywhere. Bullock commented "their average vote for the eight most recent provincial elections was thirty-five percent, compared with the eighteen per cent which gave them over six million votes in the

national elections of September 1930. The threat and the promise were gaining in weight" (1962: 190). On 5 January 1931, Rumbold reported to Henderson on the political situation in Germany. He acknowledged the growing Nazi menace: "There is a danger that if an election was now held, the National Socialists would considerably increase its representation in the Reichstag in spite of the sporadic excesses of which adherents have been guilty". He reported also that Jewish bankers have "ceased to entertain" because of their fear of the Nazis.

Another worrying development was that "acts of terrorism against Polish citizens of German race have been reported during recent Polish elections which "furnish a line of approach to the question of the revision of Germany's Eastern frontier". The treatment of Germans in Poland was addressed by the League Council in January 1931, when Germany also succeeded in preventing the British uniting the former German East Africa colony with Tanganyika. These were two minor successes for the Brüning Government's foreign policy (Helbig 1959: 43). Other problems were regret at the failure of disarmament negotiations and the rising unemployment rate, which had now reached 4 million (ibid.: 548–549). The unemployment issue surfaced again on 16 January, when Rumbold warned that "bad economic conditions play straight into the hands of the extreme elements of the State, whether they are National Socialists or Communists" (ibid.: 553). The issue was increasingly becoming the survival of the Weimar Republic against fundamentalist opponents, not just the fate of the Brüning Government.

In February matters took a turn for the worse when the German Nationalist and Nazi parties left the Reichstag, leaving a left-wing majority if the Social Democrats and the Communists could co-operate but this was impossible because Stalin's and therefore Thaelmann's "class against class" policy forbade such co-operation. In any case, Rumbold reported on 13 February that the Social Democrats did not want to oust the Brüning Government but the Nazis could cause trouble because "National Socialist deputies would now go into their electoral districts and stir up as much trouble as possible" (ibid.: 558). On the other hand, Hitler "kept on affirming that the National Socialists must seek to obtain power by legal means" (ibid.). Others continued firm in their support for the Brüning Government: "Herr Oldenburg-Janusschau, who is the reincarnation of Prussian Junkerdom and has sat in the Reichstag for 40 years had expressed ... the view that Dr. Brüning was the first real Chancellor Germany had had since the days of Bismarck" (ibid.: 559).

However, unemployment had now reached 4.8 million, there was a serious budget deficit and no improvement in trade and industry: the outlook was not bright. Taylor commented that “it was generally believed that deflation was the only cure (for the depression). There must be sound money, balanced budgets, cuts in government expenditure and reductions in wages. Then presumably, prices would somehow become low enough for people to start buying again. This policy caused hardship wherever it was applied” (1961: 61).

Henderson expressed his fears to Rumbold on 19 February about the future of the Brüning Government, saying that “If ... there is a real danger of its not being able to weather the storm to which it is likely to be exposed in the near future, it ought, I consider, to be the policy of His Majesty’s Government to give it such support and encouragement as they possibly can, in order to fortify its position” (ibid.: 560). On 4 March Rumbold confirmed Henderson’s concerns: “New elections could only profit the extremists and are out of the question. The continuance of the Brüning Government in power is still the best defence of the Social Democrats against Fascism”. He warned that “the economic problems confronting Dr Brüning’s Government are severe in the extreme” and that he hopes that “he will eventually secure, by mutual consent, a further reduction of Germany’s reparation liabilities” (ibid.: 575–576). Brüning’s policy was to secure the cancellation of reparations. On January 8 Sir Horace Rumbold reported to the Foreign Secretary that he had met with the Chancellor, who “could be obliged to declare at the Reparations Conference that Germany was not in a position to pay reparations either now or at any foreseeable time in the future” (BDFP II, 3: 12) and indeed the following day Brüning made a public statement to this effect and he would retain this policy until the fall of his Government at the end of May.

In a letter two days later Rumbold suggested that the Government’s position might be improved if Brüning could be invited to England: “A visit to England would, I think, give him an international prestige which would be helpful to him in Germany itself. I cannot imagine anything which would probably more impress and please the Germans than if he were to spend a weekend at Chequers, for instance” (ibid.: 580). This was “a gesture ... which might strengthen the Brüning Government *vis a vis* its own public opinion” (BDFP II, 11: 45). Meantime there was a need to revive trade, to which end Dr. Curtius had visited to Vienna to discuss the possibility of a customs union between the two countries,

a proposal that aroused consternation in Paris when it was announced on 20 March 1931 (Helbig 1959: 35). Nothing had been done about the crisis in the Committee of Inquiry for a European Union and “the German Government felt that it was high time to take whatever steps were possible to emerge from the present world economic crisis” (ibid.: 587). Instead of this, the economic crisis was about to worsen rapidly with the collapse of the Kreditanstalt and in consequence in their turn of the German joint stock banks.

## 6 DR. BRÜNING COMES TO CHEQUERS

The British Government recognised that Rumbold’s suggestion to invite the German Chancellor and his Foreign Minister to Chequers as a sound idea, even though the Germans were again requesting relief from reparations payments. He reported that “The first point is the state of the public finances”: the 1931 budget revenue fell short of the estimates by nearly 780 million Reichsmarks. “This disappointing result ... affects the 1931 Budget also, not only is the cash position increasingly strained but the growing falling off in revenue indicates that the estimates for 1931 may have been based on too optimistic a basis”. German recovery was also inhibited by lack of capital and the fall in world prices made the Young Plan impracticable: Lastly, “the failure of the creditor countries to act in the spirit of co-operation explicitly seen as essential in the Young Plan, especially the erection of tariff barriers” made the execution of the Plan and the payment of the reparations payments that were owing under it impossible. In consequence, “a section of German opinion is coming to believe that Germany has nothing to gain by waiting for an American change of heart about war debts and little to lose by challenging French stubbornness over reparations” (ibid.: 62). However, the American Ambassador “who is well disposed towards the country, will report what Dr. Brüning has said to the President” (ibid.: 61). The President was now Herbert Hoover, who had played a prominent role in restoring European food supplies after the war. Thus came the first suggestion that the USA might help to mitigate the effects of the financial crisis that had started in downtown New York.

At the end of the month, Rumbold reported to Henderson further that “the task of the Brüning Government does not get any easier with time. The imminence of an emergency decree ... which is known will call for sacrifices ... has stoked up public opinion and party feeling”

(*ibid.*: 63). In the meantime, “Hitler is observing developments with an attentive eye” and “like an American revivalist he worked 10,000 young people up to indescribable ecstasies of excitement” at a public meeting (*ibid.*: 64). Nonetheless, Brüning still thought Hitler could be reasonable: “The Chancellor said that whilst his personal opinion of him was that Hitler was not unreasonable, the Nazi party was quite unfitted for responsibility. Only ten men out of 107 Nazi deputies in the Reichstag had any Parliamentary experience. The rest were young and unbalanced” (*ibid.*: 64). He thought there were two foreign policy issues: the proposed Austro-German customs union, which was being resisted by the Allies, particularly France who sought to prevent it by applying financial pressure to Austria and reparations: his Railways Minister had declared that “we are being stifled by reparations payments” (*ibid.*: 64). This was probably not entirely the case because the economic crisis was being caused by events beyond any Government’s control.

Meantime, public disorder was a growing problem. On 3rd June 1931, Rumbold reported on a meeting of the Stalheim at which a speaker had urged an aggressive approach to Poland. The Bavarian Prime Minister had also advocated an aggressive attitude towards France. The Polish response, according to Sir Robert Vansittart, was that “manifestations of this kind, which naturally produced as much disquiet in Poland as the Koblenz meeting produced in France, were a very genuine obstacle to disarmament” but Vansittart doubted whether the German Government was strong enough to stop such demonstrations (*ibid.*: 59). Maintaining public order had always been a problem for the Weimar Republic because of the activities of the political militias of both left and right.

Meanwhile, American concern about the state of Europe and especially Germany was increasing. On 6 June Sir Robert Lindsay, the British Ambassador in Washington DC had met with the American Secretary of State, who had “sent for me urgently today and said that very serious situation as regards reparations was arising in connection with Chequers Conference (which took place the following day) ... German situation was still very precarious and likely to degenerate into panic through accelerated withdrawal of ... soft money” (*ibid.*: 69–70). His concern had been aroused by a German decree that “imposed considerable increases in taxation and reductions in salaries and unemployment benefits. The limits of sacrifice had been reached and Germany had the right to claim relief from intolerable reparations obligations” (*ibid.*: 70).

In a further message the same day Lindsay informed Henderson that the President “has been watching the whole situation with utmost care and both he and the Administration were most anxious to help in any way possible, though he added that it was extremely difficulty to be helpful now” (ibid.: 70). American isolationism was being challenged by the severity of the economic crisis in Europe.

On 7 June the meeting of Dr. Brüning and Dr. Curtius with the British Prime Minister and other Ministers had taken place. It had become clear that there was hope of American assistance: the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald said that a visit by US Secretary of State Stimson “would enable Mr. Stimson to obtain first hand knowledge or the situation in Europe and the hope had been expressed that the impressions he received might influence the attitude of Washington” (ibid.: 71). However, “with the best will in the world the authorities there might find that little could be done” (ibid.: 72). Brüning’s response had been that “the German Government had gone to the utmost limit in enforcing new taxation and economise; the German Government could go no further without grave danger of social unrest” (ibid.). After a discussion of the European Federal Union and the danger that Americans might see it as a threat to them, the financial problems of Austria and South-Eastern Europe were raised. Sir Robert Vansittart said that “the US is not ripe for a discussion of reparations ... the question could not be touched with any prospect of good result until after the (American) elections of November year” (i.e. 1932). This was to prove not to be the case. At this point the Germans feared doom for the European Union project: “if there were further shocks to the confidence the (Geneva) committees would have not to disguise the difficulties of Europe but to conduct a post mortem on the corpse” (ibid.: 75). Dr. Brüning had requested a meeting with Briand, the French Foreign Minister but he had been rebuffed, Henderson thought because of the coming Presidential elections there. Brüning warned that “the people were in despair and the growing power of the Nazis and the Communists was a menace” (ibid.: 74). The meeting demonstrated concern on both sides but little clarity about what could be done to improve the situation.

Soon after the Chequers meeting, both the political and economic crises escalated. From the Berlin Embassy, Mr. Yenkin reported to Henderson that the German People’s Party had requested the recall of the Reichstag, which would probably result in the fall from office of the

Chancellor and a new election. Also, the Stock Exchange had “slumped heavily” (ibid.: 79). The political crisis was averted but the economic situation was going from bad to worse. On 13 June Yenkin reported again to inform Henderson that a capital flight from Germany had caused the Reichsbank to raise interest rates by 2% and credit restrictions were likely to be imposed (ibid.). These reports caused Henderson to warn Lord Tyrrell in Paris that “there is no doubt that the situation in Germany is extremely critical. The political difficulties of the Brüning Cabinet, or any delay in settling the Austrian bank trouble, may ... be sufficient to neutralise the effect of the increased bank rate” (ibid.). From Berlin came another warning from Mr. Thelwell, the Commercial Attaché, who wrote on 11 June that “politically distress and discontent has led to a partial disruption of the moderate parties and the strengthening of the extreme at both ends” (ibid.: 82). The Bank of England temporarily rescued the Kreditanstalt at this time but the relief was to be short-lived.

At this stage, the Americans decided that they must take a hand in the growing problems of Europe. President Hoover, who favoured giving support to “liberal minded men in Germany, Austria and Eastern Europe” (Helbig 1959: 28) now proposed a moratorium on international debts, a proposal that was enthusiastically supported by the British Government. Sir Robert Vansittart recorded in a note attached to a dispatch to Brussels that “for years everybody has been saying that no solution of the tangle was possible because the key was in American hands and the Americans would not move. Now the unexpected had happened and had happened with un hoped for rapidity. Our general view was that it was up to everybody concerned to collaborate with the utmost goodwill” (ibid.: 94). However, opposition from France was likely. In a further note, Vansittart warned that “France had not fully appreciated the seriousness of the crisis in Austria. The French Ambassador said that his Government were in a very difficult situation. They were not at all a strong Government and would have a very difficult time with their legislature over the American proposals” (ibid.: 95). The Italians, however, accepted the American proposal despite the “considerable sacrifice” that it would require of them, although they opposed a German-Austrian customs union as a means to alleviate the crisis (ibid.: 97).

The American response was quick and decisive. On 24 June Sir Robert Lindsay in Washington reported that that President Hoover had sent stiff communications to the French and the Italians. To France he had sent “a very stiff telegram to Paris” and “he had spoken very

seriously to the Italian Ambassador about this” (ibid.: 102). Henderson responded to Lindsay on 26 June that “it will ... be an unpopular idea in Europe and increasingly as first enthusiasm cools as emergency recedes, that Germany should receive everything and give nothing. There are already signs of this view and it is not without justification” (ibid.: 104). Germany should reduce her armaments budget, abandon the Austrian customs union and maintain the emergency decree that had imposed heavy taxation, expenditure cuts and wage reductions on the German people.

Lack of sympathy in France was reported from the Paris embassy to London by Lord Tyrrell in the first of two messages written on 28 June: The Chamber of Deputies approved the French response to Hoover’s proposals but “there was a note of bitterness throughout debate and in present temper of Chamber and country no Government could, without some serious guarantees, abandon unconditional (reparations) annuity and live ... All were agreed that abandonment of unconditional annuity was end of reparations” (ibid.: 108). In a second note written the same day, Tyrrell reported that the French view is that “if we are to help Germany it would be under conditions. We do not intend that the ten milliards of which the German budget is about to be freed shall be used against us or against the peace of the world. We do not intend that with our sacred reparations money Germany shall be able to increase her armaments or practise a policy of dumping. We shall tell M. Brüning that tonight’s sitting of the Chamber might be a lesson for everyone, for us and for Germany. It is not possible to play indefinitely with the feeling of France” (ibid.: 109). French hostility and suspicious of their German neighbours had clearly not eased one jot since the signing of the Treaty of Locarno.

In consequence, the Americans temporarily suspended their proposals, and from the Berlin Embassy, Mr. Newton reported that the American Ambassador had told him that “the French Government were ... proving quite unyielding and in fact attempting to dictate terms and assume leadership in regard to the proposal of President Hoover” (ibid.: 112). Henderson replied that he had met the German ambassador and urged that Germany should abandon the proposed customs union with Austria and the plan to build a second pocket battleship: “I suggested that he should draw attention of his Government to the subject with a view to considering whether in present circumstances and in the critical state of

German finances it would not be expedient to abandon this expenditure” (ibid.: 116). This the Germans failed to do. Newton reported that old ships had to be replaced and President Hindenburg would resign if the new ship was cancelled. In consequence, the US Ambassador “seemed to think that it was improbable that further progress could be made with this suggestion”. Germany had offered to drop the customs union with Austria provided the French “accepted the Hoover proposal without reservation” (ibid.: 116). In 1932, at the end of the period of the Hoover Moratorium and with the world financial situation still deteriorating, a conference at Lausanne in July 1932 cancelled 90% of Germany’s reparations dues (Jacobson 1972: 346) but by then the political situation in Germany was deteriorating fast too.

All these developments did not change the impasse between Germany and France, as well as further angering the Americans. The German Government’s claim that it could not abandon the second pocket battleship “because the aged Reichspresident had it very much to heart”, which “made the (US) Acting Secretary of State very angry and he sent some very stiff instructions to United States Ambassador *by telephone* to put pressure on the German Government ... They cannot have the benefits without contributing something” (ibid.: 117–118). Henderson too took the view that proceeding with the pocket battleship was unwise; he advised Mr. Newton in Berlin that “difficulties raised by German Government in reply to United States Ambassador seem to show a wilful misunderstanding of the situation ... As Germany during the ‘Hoover Year’ will be living on charity of other nations, it would be only decent if during that period she should not be spending money on ... the new battleship” (ibid.: 119). He advised Lord Tyrrell in Paris of the British Government’s readiness “to co-operate wholeheartedly in giving effect to President Hoover’s original proposal, which (we) understand means complete and unqualified suspension of all inter-governmental payments for one year” despite the “heavy sacrifices” that this would entail (ibid.: 123).

However, the Germans could not comply with French and other demands: the German Minister for Foreign Affairs had told Mr. Newton that “it was most difficult for the German Government to take any step which could be refrained from being represented as external dictation ... the Chancellor had been most emphatic as to precariousness of the Government and of the country generally and any public reference to

cruisers was impossible and, might impair the loyalty of the Reichswehr” (ibid.: 126). Equally the situation in France was difficult: the French Government was being reasonable, Lord Tyrrell advised Henderson “but the moment is of great difficulty here” (ibid.). However, on 7 July Tyrrell reported that the French and the Americans had reached agreement and the Hoover Moratorium was eventually implemented, proving a breathing space for everybody concerned to reassess their policies.

In August 1931 there was a change of Government in Britain as a result of the continuing financial crisis. In accordance with the economic theories and policies of the day the Bank of England in consequence demanded that the Government must make further reductions in public spending. This was too much for the Labour Government to tolerate and it was forced into holding a General Election which the Labour Party lost disastrously. Before the election, the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, had agreed with King George V that he should remain in office as head of a National Government supported by the Liberals and the Conservatives. Only three of his Cabinet colleagues, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden but not Arthur Henderson, the Foreign Secretary, followed MacDonald into the National Government. The new Foreign Secretary, a Conservative, was Sir John Simon, who now had to take over the difficult diplomatic situation that had arisen from the financial crisis.

## 7 THE LEAGUE WEAKENS: THE JAPANESE INVADE MANCHURIA

An important development, although extraneous to this thesis, took place in September 1931 on the other side of the world and was the first of the acts of aggression that were to destroy the League of Nations’ credibility because it could not prevent or reverse them. On the pretext that Chinese saboteurs had tried to sabotage a Japanese owned extra-territorial railway that ran across the province of Manchuria, the Japanese army invaded that province on 18 September and eventually rechristened it “Manchukuo”. The source of this action was the extreme nationalism of army officers who openly disobeyed the civilian Government in Tokyo. The Government attempted to control the army and deny the existence of the problem but the army did not support them: “There now followed weeks of public embarrassment and secret humiliation for the Wakatsuki Government. While the army in the field boldly extended

the scope of its operations, Japanese representatives at the League of Nations in Geneva and in Washington, London and other capitals, declared that these military measures were only temporary and would soon cease” (Storry 1963: 188). Fighting then spread to Shanghai and other parts of China.

The League sent an investigatory commission to Manchuria under Lord Lytton to investigate the situation. Meanwhile, the Government was increasingly discredited internationally because of the “blatant contrast between Japanese promises and the actions of Japanese troops spreading fan-like through Manchuria led the world to suppose that the cabinet in Tokyo had adopted a policy of deliberate chicanery and deceit. This was not so. What was happening was the breakdown of co-ordination between the civil and military wings of the Japanese structure of state power” (ibid.: 189). When the Lytton Committee reported it condemned Japan for an act of aggression, although it found many Japanese grievances to be justified (ibid.). The Lytton Report was adopted by the League, “whereupon Japan, much to the private anguish of the emperor, flounced out of the League” (ibid.: 193). The League of Nations sought to restrain Japan through sanctions and sought Article 16 intervention but it was unable to do so because the major power in the Pacific was the USA. She has always regarded the Pacific rather than the Atlantic as her *mare nostrum* but she was not a League member and was not inclined to get involved in taking action against Japan because of growing isolationist sentiment in Congress and among the public. Also she was disinclined to put at risk her trade with Japan (Taylor 1961: 63). The only other Power with major forces in South-East Asia was Britain, who was also not inclined to use force against the Japanese. Taylor (1961: 62–63) commented that “The only Power with any stake in the Far East was Great Britain; and action was to be least expected from the British at the exact moment when they were being forced off the gold standard and facing a contentious general election. In any case, even Great Britain, though a Far Eastern Power, had no means of action”. So was executed the first act of naked aggression by one of the future Axis powers and thus was the frailty of the League exposed for all to see. The League was similarly ineffective when the Chinese appealed for help after the Sino-Japanese war broke out in 1937 but by then its credibility had been further damaged by Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia and the League’s abject failure to stop it.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Hence by the end of 1931, the European and worldwide situation was looking increasingly unstable, with the anti-system parties in Germany steadily gaining seats in the Reichstag and the French unsympathetic to German demands for relief from reparations. The only bright spot was the Hoover Moratorium, which was intended to give a year's relief from the chronic international indebtedness that had been incurred in the First World War, plus the disruption to trade and economic regeneration allegedly caused by the continuing demand that Germany must pay reparations. The Hoover Moratorium came into force in July 1931, thus postponing the problems caused by Germany's demand for the cancellation of reparations for a year. The Reparations Conference at Lausanne which finally resolved this problem had to be postponed from early 1932 to June and July. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria was another cloud on the horizon because it was a grave challenge to the credibility of the League of Nations.

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# Götterdämmerung: Hitler and the End of the Versailles System

## 1 THE CRISIS WORSENS

The unrelenting and worsening financial crisis drove the unemployment level in Germany to five million by Christmas 1931. The result of this together with the other privations and hyperinflation affecting Germany was to increase support for the anti-system parties, the NSDAP and the Communists. Tables 1 and 2 indicate how far the balance of power in the Reichstag changed, increasingly threatening not merely the Government but the very survival of the Weimar Republic itself. By December 1931 the Nazis had made major gains in regional elections: “their average vote for the eight most recent provincial elections was thirty-five per cent compared with the eighteen per cent which had given them over six million votes in the national elections of September 1930. The threat and the promise were gaining weight” (Bullock 1962: 190). In March and April 1932 two Presidential elections had been held, both contested by Hindenburg and Hitler. The anti-Nazi slogan was “Wer rettet uns vor Hitler? Nur Hindenburg” (Who will save us from Hitler? Only Hindenburg). The first election was held invalid on a technicality and had to be repeated the following month.

The following tables illustrate the changing balance of power in the Reichstag.

These tables demonstrate the weakening of the party, the SPD that had been central to the survival of Weimar Governments since the foundation of the Republic and the rapid rise of the anti-system parties once

**Table 1** Reichstag elections 1928–1933

<i>Party</i>	1928	1930	July 1932	November 1932	March 1933
KPD	10.6	13.1	14.3	16.5	12.1
SPD	29.8	24.5	21.6	20.4	18.3
NSDAP	10.3	18.3	37.3	33.12	43.9
Centre	–	–	15.0	15.0	13.9

**Table 2** Anti-system parties: Seats in Reichstag 1928–1932

<i>Party</i>	1928	1930	July 1932	November 1932
NSDAP	12	107	230	196
KPD	54	77	89	100
Total	66	184	319	296
SPD	153	143	133	121
Total seats			608	584

Source (BDFP II, 4: 70; Bullock 1962)

the Great Depression took hold after 1931. In particular, the Nazis were a marginal force in 1928 but became the largest party in the Reichstag in July 1932. However, both their vote and the number of seats the Nazis held declined in the October 1932 election, a decline that was also reflected in *Land* (state) elections at around this time. In consequence, Hitler and his colleagues regarded the need to seize power as urgent, before any further decline in their support could become apparent. However, the Nazis were still by far the largest party in the Reichstag after the November 1932 election and as such, they were entitled to demand that President Hindenburg should ask their leader to form a Government. In April an attempt had been made to clip Hitler's wings by the Government banning his storm trooper organisations, the Sturmabteilung (SA) and the Schütz Staffel (SS) but this ban does not appear to have been very effective.

At the end of May 1932, the Brüning Government unexpectedly fell from office as a result of a quarrel between Brüning and Hindenburg, over two issues. The first was that Hindenburg was unwilling to sign further decrees imposing fresh austerity on the German people when Brüning had earlier promised that he would not need any further such decrees. The second was a Government proposal to expropriate bankrupt estates in East Prussia in order to use them to provide work for the

unemployed. Hindenburg had just returned from a Whitsun holiday on his own East Prussian estate, during which Mr. Newton reported to the Foreign Secretary: this “provided these landowners with an especially favourable opportunity to bring influence to bear on him” (BDFP II, 3: 145). The result was a “frigid” meeting between President and Chancellor at which “The President complained that he was being asked to go back on his word and sign fresh decrees imposing fresh burdens, although the Government had promised him on the last occasion that there would be no more of these unpopular decrees”. Rumbold added that “strong influences from the Right have been brought to bear on the President” (*ibid.*: 144). The fall of the Brüning Government came as a surprise in Germany and a shock abroad.

Brüning was replaced as Chancellor by Franz von Papen, a former soldier who had joined the Centre Party and now displaced his own Party’s leader to become Chancellor. Sir Horace Rumbold reported that with Brüning’s resignation “The President had to take action and it occurred to him, or he was advised to form a so-called non-party Government consisting practically exclusively of men of conservative opinion who might be able to control the Hitlerite flood by diverting or canalising it” (BDFP II, 3: 166). Bullock saw this as “the end of democratic government in Germany. The key to power over a nation of sixty-five million people was now openly admitted to lie in the hands of an aged soldier of eighty-five and the little group of men who determined his views” (1962: 210). Von Papen initially re-appointed General Groener as Minister of Defence and von Neurath as Minister for Foreign Affairs; von Neurath had previously been Germany’s ambassador to London. He had discussed the vexed issue of the Polish Corridor with the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, just before he left London to become Minister of Foreign Affairs back in Germany.

However, the French were still not inclined to be helpful to the increasingly embattled German Government: Sir Horace Rumbold in Berlin reported to the new Conservative Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon on 19 July 1932 that “Herr von Papen ... remarked that a reparations settlement was not in itself sufficient to renew the confidence which was a precondition of a trade revival. This could only be brought about by an appeasement in the political situation and he had mentioned to M. Herriot (the French Prime Minister) the necessity of ... taking some action to ‘deblayer le terrain’ of awkward political questions. He had not found M. Herriot receptive” (BDFP II, 4: 9). Under von Papen another

aristocrat, former diplomat Konstantin von Neurath, became Foreign Minister and was tasked with trying to persuade the French to be more helpful. He would remain in office under Hitler until 1938, when he was replaced by a close confidant of Hitler's, Joachim von Ribbentrop, who would negotiate the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939.

## 2 THE LAUSANNE CONFERENCE AND THE END OF REPARATIONS

The long delayed Reparations Conference opened at Lausanne on 17 June, a fortnight after the Brüning Government's fall. By this time the British policy was firmly set towards the cancellation of reparations. At an Anglo-French conference held at the British Embassy in Paris MacDonald, now Prime Minister of the National Government, declared that British policy "was that the Great Powers must agree to wipe the slate clean" (BDFP II, 3: 173) but the French Prime Minister, Herriot cautioned that if a final settlement was reached at Lausanne, "the French Government would have an impossible task. It was necessary to proceed by stages" (*ibid.*: 175). He went on, "He himself was not entirely convinced of Germany's good faith. He did not want the German economy to be allowed to overwhelm the creditor countries" (*ibid.*: 176).

Such were the Allies' positions when the Reparations Conference opened on 17 June its first plenary session MacDonald was elected to the conference Chair. He spoke of the ominous economic situation and warned that "if default is to be avoided engagements which have proved incapable of fulfilment should be reviewed by agreement. Both sides to all agreements must be ready to face facts" (*ibid.*: 193). At the second plenary session the following day it was agreed to suspend all reparations and debt payments due on 1 July for the duration of the Conference, a decision that was welcomed by the new German Chancellor, von Papen, who welcomed this decision as "the first visible proof of the determination of the Powers concerned to facilitate their work of the Conference and to take ... comprehensive and final decisions" (*ibid.*: 196). He warned particularly that German youth "have no possibility and no hope of finding employment and earning their livelihood. Despair and the political radicalisation of the youthful section of the (German) population are the consequences of this state of things" (*ibid.*: 199).

However, Herriot, speaking for the French Government, warned that “the cancellation of reparations, to which we have just been asked to agree, would reduce the burden of State debt on the German economic system in conditions which would involve the risk of granting Germany a distinctly privileged position” (ibid.: 2014). France had problems too, so he urged a series of economic reforms including loosening trade barriers and restoration of agricultural prices instead. The session was then adjourned to the afternoon, when at the third plenary session the Belgian delegate, M. Renkin, supported Herriot’s view that “the important thing is that we should get out of the system of economic barriers” (ibid.: 214). This was probably sound advice but it did not directly address the reparations issue.

After these first plenary sessions there ensued a long series of meetings, some between the British and the French or the British and the Germans only, others being more multilateral, which failed to reach agreement until the Conference was close to having to be adjourned because its leading members were required by urgent business in their own countries. Much of the disagreement concerned a proposal that in return for reparations being cancelled, Germany should make a contribution to the restoration of Europe and would issue bonds to do this but there was much disagreement on the terms on which these bonds should be issued. However, by the time the fourth plenary session convened on 8 July, an agreement had been reached, although agreement was so late that the documents were not ready for signing and the session had to be adjourned while they were typed. Herriot then welcomed the agreement: “the French delegation deeply rejoices in the success which has been achieved by the Lausanne Conference. In order to measure the result which we have obtained under the authority of our President, my dear friend Ramsay MacDonald we have only to remember the anxieties which preceded this great event ... We closed the door to passion and to violence we opposed reason” (ibid.: 426). Von Papen likewise welcomed the cancellation of reparations as “a turning point in the history of Europe and in the history of the world” (ibid.: 428). The next day the agreements were signed at the fifth plenary session. MacDonald declared from the Chair that the conference “is not the end of an old chapter. We have closed the book, we have put the book on the shelf. We have opened a new book. No more reparations! They have gone!” (ibid.: 434). Herriot praised MacDonald for his efforts to secure the agreement, “whose courage, sense of justice and of freedom have rendered so many services to the cause of civilisation” (ibid.).

The Final Act of the Conference declared that “They do not claim that the task accomplished at Lausanne, which will completely put an end to Reparations, will alone ensure that peace which all the nations desire. But they hope that an achievement of which significance and so arduously attained, will be understood and appreciated by all the pacific elements in Europe and the world and that it will be followed by fresh achievements” (BDFP II, 3: 595). Article 1, the longest in the Final Act, provided that as her contribution to the restoration of Europe, Germany was to issue bonds valued in gold Marks at 5% interest totalling three milliard gold marks—a compromise between the British proposal of 2 milliards and the French demand for 4 milliards but implementing this clause was kept flexible in view of Germany’s fragile economic condition (*ibid.*: 596). Article 2 declared that “the present Agreement would put to an end and be substituted for the reparation regime” (*ibid.*). This Conference marked the final and significant achievement of the Locarno system of resolving international disputes by patient informal negotiations reaching a resolution when time became pressing for the principal delegates but its success came too late to avert the storm that was about to break the entire system apart the following January.

### 3 DISARMAMENT AGAIN

On 11 to 15 July 1932, the disarmament conference had been reconvened in the Swiss city of Lausanne under Arthur Henderson’s chairmanship. On 14 September the German Foreign Minister, von Neurath advised Henderson that “in view of the stage reached by the discussions at the Conference the question of equality of rights for the disarmed states could no longer remain without a solution. On that occasion, he accordingly declared that the German Government (which had refused to take part in the conference) could not take part in the further labours of the Conference before the question of Germany’s equality of rights had been satisfactorily cleared up”. Henderson replied from Geneva on 18 September to say “how much I regret the information which you convey to me that the German Government had decided not to participate” (*ibid.*: 63–64). The disarmament question therefore remained unresolved and Germany’s intention to rearm was becoming clearer; for some time her clandestine attempts to rearm with Soviet Russian help had been known to the Western allies.

The political situation in Germany now became increasingly unstable and, as Table 2 shows, the two anti-system parties considerably increased their strength in the Reichstag in 1932, with the result that the Nazis became the largest party in the German Parliament. In these elections “the argument that things must change proved a powerful attraction in a country driven to the limit of endurance by two years of economic depression and mass unemployment made worse by the inability of the Government to relieve the nation’s ills” (ibid.: 215). On 3 August Sir Horace Rumbold reviewed the election results for Sir John Simon. The Right had failed by 24 votes to gain a majority and the Left could not form a Government without the Centre Party, who were unlikely to work with the Communists. The turnout had been 84%. The Nazis had gained 37% of the votes but Rumbold still belittled the chances of Hitler gaining power: “So far from obtaining the 51 per cent (of the votes) for which his followers had hoped, Hitler seems now to have exhausted his reserves” (BDFP II, 4: 16).

There were now only five parties with full rights in the Reichstag but “although this simplifies the position very considerably it does not facilitate the formation of a new Government. Indeed if anything the situation is worse confounded” (ibid.: 17). Von Papen remained in office with General Kurt von Schleicher being appointed Minister of Defence: “Schleicher is now clearly a power in the land” (ibid.). Hitler had refused to enter von Papen’s Government and had demanded the leadership for himself but Hindenburg “emphatically denied this”; instead he “gravely exhorted Herr Hitler to conduct the opposition on the part of the National Socialist Party which had been announced in a chivalrous manner” (Rumbold to Simon, 13 August 1932, ibid.: 32). On 5 August Schleicher had met Hitler, who again had demanded the Chancellorship for himself, together with the appointment of Nazi members to the Ministries of the Interior and Justice. For Hitler it was all or nothing: he would agree to become Chancellor but he would not serve in a Government led by anyone else.

When the Reichstag met on 30 August 1932 Hermann Göring was elected its President. He marched to the dais “amid enthusiastic cries of Heil! from the Nazi deputies and counter-shouts and shaking of fists from the retiring Communists” (ibid.: 46). The Nazis were on their way to power but they were not there yet. However, Sir Horace Rumbold was now taking the possibility of a Nazi victory seriously. In a second

telegram on 30 August he warned that “If anything happened to the President it is quite possible that Hitler would be elected to succeed the old field marshal and we should then have the spectacle of a renegade Austrian who has only become a naturalised German subject within the last four months presiding over the destinies of his new country” (*ibid.*: 48). This possibility was averted when the Reichstag was dissolved on September 12, before a vote of confidence against the Government could take place, leading to new elections on 6 November, the last possible day after the dissolution of the Reichstag.

The second, November election appeared to check the Nazi advance, although they gained 33% of the votes. The Social Democrats got 20.4% of the votes and the Communists 16.9% (*ibid.*: 69ff). Rumbold reported that the Nazi decline made the Government very happy but this was premature: von Papen failed to form a Cabinet and resigned on November 17, to be replaced by von Schleicher on 5 December. On 28 November Rumbold reported to Simon a conversation that Hitler had had with President Hindenburg in which Hitler had said that “His own party was not a party in the ordinary sense but a movement to free Germany from Marxism and he only entered Parliament because there was no other legal way of attaining his goal” (*ibid.*: 86). Hitler was determined to achieve power but only by legal means. As the leader of the largest party in the Reichstag, despite the loss of some seats in the November election it looked as if the fulfilment of his wish could not be long delayed. He was gaining support from industrialists who feared the consequences of a Communist Government but many influential people still wanted to exclude him from power.

#### 4 THE END OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

So it was indeed to be and he needed a quick transition to the Chancellorship. The disappointing results in the November election were followed by a 40% fall in the Nazi vote in local elections in Thuringia, although they won a victory in Lippe at the same time. Hitler therefore needed to gain power before his public and parliamentary support were further eroded. On 28 January, Schleicher resigned and two days later he and Papen persuaded Hindenburg that he should appoint Hitler to the Chancellorship as the leader of the largest party in the Reichstag. Thus Taylor (1961: 68): commented, “Hitler was appointed Chancellor by President Hindenburg in a strictly constitutional way and for solidly

democratic reasons ... Hitler was not made Chancellor because he would help the German capitalists to destroy the trade unions, nor because he would give the German generals a great army, still less a great war. He was appointed because he and his Nationalist allies could provide a majority in the Reichstag and thus end the anomalous four years of government by presidential decree". He would head a coalition government with leading figures in other parties as colleagues. Schleicher, now appointed as Vice-Chancellor, believed that as Chancellor of a coalition Government, Hitler could be controlled but he was wrong.

Rumbold reported to Simon that "the President appears to have followed constitutional procedure in entrusting Hitler, the leader of the strongest party in the Reichstag, with the Chancellorship" (ibid.: 398) but his Government was to be a coalition which included only three Nazi ministers. Bullock commented that "the improbable had happened. Adolf Hitler, the petty official's son from Austria, the down and out of the Home for Men, the *Meldengänger* of the List regiment, had become Chancellor of the German Reich" (ibid.: 250). Streicher became Vice-Chancellor. Bullock acknowledged the destructive role played by the Communists, whose "leaders followed a policy approved by Moscow which gave priority to the elimination of the Social Democrats as the rival working class party" (ibid.: 254)—the "Class against Class" policy which in the future was to cost Stalin dear. Meanwhile, Hitler assembled his cabinet and assumed constitutional power. Taylor's verdict on this episode is interesting: Hitler "did not 'seize' power. He waited for it to be thrust upon him by the men who had previously tried to keep him out" (1961: 71). Papen, Schleicher and Hindenburg thought they could control him; how wrong they were.

## 5 THE THIRD REICH BEGINS

Hitler proceeded rapidly to consolidate his power and eliminate his coalition partners. On 27 February the Reichstag building caught fire and burned down. Initially, a Dutch Communist was accused but we now know that the Nazis themselves were responsible for the outbreak. When the Reichstag convened at the Kroll Opera House on 23 March it was ringed by Hitler's storm troopers and the Reichstag passed the Enabling Bill, which effectively transferred all power to Hitler and his cronies. Bullock's conclusion cannot be bettered: "The street gangs had seized control of the resources of a great modern state, the gutter had come

to power" (ibid.: 270). In 1934 Hindenburg died and Hitler absorbed the Presidency as well as the Chancellorship, so becoming the sole leader—*Der Führer*—of the German state and people. However, during his first year and a half in power Hitler was the presiding officer of a coalition Government with only three Nazis in his Cabinet. As a result, he had to secure agreement from the leaders of other parties represented in the Cabinet to his policies and actions at this time. His first Cabinet meeting was held at the Reichschancellerie on the afternoon of 31 January 1933, the day after he had been appointed Chancellor. Hitler had wanted the Centre Party, a Catholic party which was principally interested in securing protection for Catholic schools, to support the adjournment of the Reichstag for a year but they only offered to support a two months adjournment. "The Centre Party representatives had not been able to deny in the conversation that a very great portion of the German people stood behind the present Government" (DGFP, C, 1: no. 3, p. 6). It was agreed that the next elections to the Reichstag would be the last and that the Reichstag's committees were to be adjourned.

More substantially, the new Government agreed to make an offer to Poland to deal with the long-disputed issue of the Polish Corridor and the Free City of Danzig. The proposal was that the Corridor, together with Danzig and Gdynia should be returned to German control. In return, the Poles were to be given a guaranteed outlet to the sea with a guarantee of free movement of goods to and from Danzig and Gdynia. The new frontier was to be guaranteed together with France and "The German members furthermore declare that it is Germany's desire to pursue a policy of friendship towards Poland and that such policy of friendship is not possible unless the question of the Corridor is settled in accordance with their demands" (ibid., no. 2, p. 3). Not surprisingly this offer was rejected by the Poles and this was the issue that led to war in 1939. The Government also declared its readiness to seek friendship with France since the issue of reparations had finally been settled at the Lausanne conference.

Such policies of moderation lasted only until the end of June 1934, when Hitler consolidated his power by ruthlessly eliminating his political rivals as well as his former friends and colleagues, including Ernst Röhm, Gregor Strasser and the *Sturmabteilung*, the original force of storm troopers who had helped him win power. Röhm, Strasser and many others were murdered in the "Night of the Long Knives" on 29 and 30, 1934. The arch schemer Schleicher, serving as Vice-Chancellor, was another casualty of the Night of the Long Knives. Papen left the Government at this time and survived to a ripe old age, dying in 1969.

However, even after the Night of the Long Knives Hitler's regime did not initially pursue aggressive policies abroad. Instead, Taylor reported that "his foreign policy was that of his predecessors, of the professional diplomats of the foreign ministry and indeed of virtually all Germans" (1961: 68). Also, although the loss of Germany's colonies under the Treaty of Versailles was a grievance to which Hitler referred from time to time, he did not make any serious demands for their return, at least until the last couple of pre-war years (see Gilbert and Gott 1963: Chapter 3). Rather, his ministers concentrated on improving conditions within Germany, chiefly by embarking on large-scale public works, including electrifying the railways and constructing the Autobahn network. His Economics Minister arguably became a Keynesian before Keynes—Hjalmar Schacht realised that to reduce unemployment the Government must intervene to provide jobs by engaging in such major infrastructure improvements. The Nazis also commissioned the first People's Car, the Volkswagen "Beetle". However, persecution of the Jews began soon after the Nazis came to power. They were forced to wear the yellow Star of David badge and their businesses were increasingly attacked by hostile mobs. The full horror of the "Final solution to the Jewish Question" did not materialise until after the Wannsee conference in 1943 but the lives of Jewish residents in Nazi Germany became increasingly precarious and unpleasant as the 1930s wore on.

In foreign affairs, Hitler was initially still to some extent conciliatory. In 1934, he signed a non-aggression pact with Poland, which provided short-lived reassurance for the Western Allies and the Poles themselves. Significantly, he retained the existing Minister for Foreign Affairs, von Neurath, for some years, only replacing him with Ribbentrop in 1938 when he needed a more partisan figure in that office. In 1935 a plebiscite restored 90% of the Saarland to Germany in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Nonetheless, Hitler's assumption of power brought indeed the end of the Versailles system. Hitler denounced the Versailles Treaty in 1937, having previously withdrawn Germany from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations in October 1933 as well as ending reparations payments. He regarded the League as a means of maintaining the status quo, in particular the unjust frontiers of Germany's East that he was determined to rectify. Another indication of a more aggressive attitude by the Third Reich was their unacknowledged but significant participation in the Spanish Civil War, which started with General Francisco Franco's invasion of Spain from North Africa in July 1936. This intervention arguably provided a

dress rehearsal for the Second World War. Intervention in Spain allowed Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to try out new military technologies and new approaches to waging war, for example the Stuka dive bomber. These should have been seen as warnings of the trouble to come. After denouncing the Treaty and after his successful reoccupation of the Rhineland in the previous year Hitler began to make aggressive territorial demands on his Eastern neighbours, including the *Anschluss* of Austria, restoration of the Sudeten Germans to the Reich and the amendment or abolition of the “Polish Corridor”.

## 6 WESTERN WEAKNESS: THE MARCH TO APPEASEMENT

Thus, whatever villainies he was increasingly implementing within Germany, Hitler’s approach to international affairs was at first in the main cautious and conciliatory: Rumbold reported to Simon on 24 March 1932 that Hitler had made a speech on disarmament in which he declared that “Germany has now been waiting for years for the fulfilment of the promise of the rest of the world to disarm in its turn”, thus seeming to give the rest of the world a last chance to disarm. In general, the tone of the speech was conciliatory, as Rumbold reported to Simon on 24 March (BDFP II, 4: 479). However, in his last report before retiring in June 1933 Rumbold made clear his fear and suspicion of the Nazi regime: He viewed the future

with great uneasiness and apprehension ... it would be misleading to base any hopes on a return to sanity ... Unpleasant incidents and excesses were bound to occur during a revolution but the deliberate ruthlessness and brutality which have been practised during the last five months seem both excessive and unnecessary. I have the impression that the persons directing the policy of the Hitler Government are not normal. Many of us, indeed, have a feeling that we are living in a country where fantastic hooligans and eccentrics have got the upper hand. (qu. from BDFP II, 5: 2229 in Gilbert and Gott 1963: 32)

His successor, Sir Eric Phipps, held the same fears of the Third Reich, as did the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart. Both men were in any case pro-French—Phipps had previously served at the Paris Embassy. In 1937 Phipps was replaced by Sir Neville Henderson, who by contrast admired the Nazi regime and became known as “our Nazi ambassador in Berlin”.

Certainly, Henderson demonstrated support for the Nazi regime and formed close and friendly relations with leading members of the Nazi government. On 5 July 1937, shortly after his move to Berlin, Henderson reported that Germany was unlikely to try to weaken or destroy the Anglo-French Entente: “stupid though the Germans may be and however desirable (for the Nazis) a split between Britain and France seemed ... they or their rulers at any rate, have at least had the sense to realise that in practice it is unattainable” (BDFP II: 31). In September Henderson attended the Nazis’ annual Nuremberg Rally and reported favourably on the proceedings there: “Hitler developed his favourite theme, namely that the world is confronted with the choice between the communist and the totalitarian regimes. The old order has passed away and the maintenance of civilisation depends on the destruction of the communist message. ‘Those who are not with me are against me’ is the implicit conclusion” (ibid.: 263). To see Hitler as a bulwark against Communism would have played well with the right wing supporters of appeasement inside and outside the Chamberlain Government.

In a later dispatch commenting on the 1937 Nuremberg Rally Henderson reported that “Everything was extremely well arranged and I neither saw nor listened to anything to which as His Majesty’s representative I could possibly object” (ibid.: 274). Henderson’s social life also made him sympathetic to the Nazis. In early October 1937, he joined a stag hunting party led by Hermann Goering who was “an admirable host from a social and sporting point of view” (ibid.: 386), during which “General Goering ... turned to the question of an understanding with England, which he said that Hitler desired above everything else” (ibid.: 387). Goering went on to say that “all that Germany asked was an assurance that Great Britain would not stab her in the back if she was attacked in the East” (ibid.: 387). However, in a footnote it becomes apparent that Henderson’s activities were not to the taste of Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, who noted that: “What we really told Sir Neville Henderson to do was to challenge General Goering on a most unwarranted statement that (he) had made about British obstructiveness. No effective challenge had in fact been made” (ibid.: 389n). Henderson had failed to carry out his instruction to raise a difficult topic with Goering. A still more remarkable piece of insubordination committed by Henderson in September 1938 is reported by Gilbert and Gott (1963: 143): “... Halifax was quite prepared to issue a stern ‘warning’ to the Germans. Halifax sent the British

warning to Henderson. But Henderson failed to pass it on to Hitler. He thought it might provoke Hitler into doing something rash. He had thus taken policy into his own hands, wildly exceeding his ambassadorial powers". His behaviour caused concern among members of the Cabinet: Duff Cooper lamented that "the Government were prepared to listen to the 'counter-advice' of one man, the hysterical Henderson" (ibid.: 145) rather than heed advice from many others that Britain should make it clear to Hitler that they would fight. The problem was that Henderson was telling senior Ministers what they wanted to hear.

The pro-French Vansittart in particular was side-lined by being removed from the headship of the Foreign Office to a detached post of "Chief Diplomatic Adviser" to the Government (see Gilbert and Gott: 79). His advice was not sought: instead, Chamberlain was increasingly advised by Sir Horace Wilson, his Chief Industrial Adviser, who like Chamberlain himself supported the appeasement policy (see Gilbert and Gott: 68f). As a man experienced in industrial relations, Wilson was an experienced negotiator who had faith in his and the Government's ability to negotiate a deal with Hitler.

In any case, the Foreign Office was by this time being repeatedly side-lined by a series of more or less eminent visitors to Hitler, who all came away believing him to be a reasonable man. (see ibid., Chapter 2.) Notable among them was Lloyd George, who came away impressed that Hitler seemed to be a reasonable man who liked dogs. In November 1937, Henderson arranged a visit to the Nazi hierarchs, including Hitler for Viscount Halifax, who in February 1938 was to succeed Anthony Eden as Foreign Secretary when Eden resigned over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the Government's failure to respond strongly to it. Henderson's view of the purpose of the visit as reported by Halifax is revealing: "The important thing in his view was to make it plain that whether we were able to accept it or not, we did appreciate the German point of view – and were honestly out to make friends. He told me that Goering was *very* keen on the establishment of complete understanding between us, as was Hitler" (BDFP II: 541). When he met Hitler he congratulated him on his economic achievements. Hitler told him that "we had to get away from the Versailles mentality and recognise that the world could never remain 'in status quo'. To this, I replied that no-one wanted to treat Germany as other than a Great Power and that nobody in their senses supposed that the world would stay as it was for ever" (ibid.: 544). Halifax found that Hitler "was on the whole very quiet and

restrained, except now and again when he got excited about Russia or the press ... Very much alive in speech – Eyes moving about all the time and points being reinforced with sharp gestures of the hands ... He struck me as very sincere and as believing everything he said” (ibid.: 546).

On 2 December, shortly after Halifax had returned home, Henderson wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Eden to tell him, “If we, the ex-victors of the war and the authors of the Lloyd George-Clemenceau peace, are prepared to make a generous contribution with a view to establishing the bases of genuine peace and world tranquillity then we have the right to expect Germany also to put something into the pot towards the end. I fancy Hitler would see that standpoint” (ibid.: 427). Henderson was sure that the last thing of all that Hitler wanted was war with England (ibid.). However, there was friction over the *Anschluss* of Austria with Germany in February and March 1938, by which time Halifax was Foreign Secretary. At a meeting with Hitler on 4 March 1938, Henderson reported that Hitler was furious with the British Press, who were making “good relations with Britain impossible” and firmly asserted that he was determined “to protect interests of ten million Germans living outside the Reich. For them he was prepared to go to war at whatever cost” (ibid.: 987). Reports like these persuaded the “Cliveden Set” that Hitler’s demands were reasonable and that the unjust provisions of the Treaty must be removed.

Much has been written about the appeasement diplomacy that led up to the Second World War and it is not the primary focus of this book. However, one of the mainsprings of the Allies’, especially the British, tolerance of Hitler’s early expansionary moves was the by now well-established view among Western politicians and newspapermen alike that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were unjust and provided a just cause for German complaints and activities. Lord Lothian, the former Philip Kerr remarked of the reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936 that the Germans “were only walking into their own back garden”. The appeasement policy, which was very much the creation of the English right wing in Parliament and outside it, was enthusiastically supported by Geoffrey Dawson, the Editor of *The Times* and many others, including the British Ambassador in Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson. Among British Ministers and their circle of acquaintances, particularly the group known as the “Cliveden Set”, support for appeasement and rejection of the Versailles Treaty was general. We have already quoted the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, saying that the Versailles Treaty was “bad”.

The most prominent dissenter against appeasement was Winston Churchill. In July 1937 Chamberlain told the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, that “If only we could sit down with the Germans and run through all their complaints and claims with a pencil, this would greatly relieve all tensions” (qu. in Gilbert and Gott 1963: 65). Winston Churchill’s warnings about the danger posed by the Nazi regime were ignored until just before war broke out because he had discredited himself by his bitter opposition to Indian self-government and the contempt he displayed for Mahatma Gandhi. This bout of reactionary extremism had destroyed his credibility in most people’s eyes, including those of his fellow politicians. His biographer Roy Jenkins recorded of his India outbursts: “for the next two years almost every step that Churchill took on the issue alienated support and weakened his position in the Conservative Party and indeed in the House of Commons as a whole” (Jenkins 2001: 454). He became linked to an “illiberal fringe”. Jenkins goes on: “Churchill’s India campaign seriously separated him from Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and Duff Cooper, as well as a number of lesser known Tory MPs who were potential allies of Churchill in his later fight against the appeasement of Hitler” (ibid.: 455). Meantime the French had lapsed into defensive thinking, believing that they were protected from any future German invasion by the Maginot Line, whose construction had begun in 1930.

There were at least three other reasons for supporting appeasement. One was fear of a future war. Members of the British and French Governments had vivid and horrid memories of the First World War, some of them having fought in the trenches. A new cause for alarm was the development of aerial warfare: in 1936 the then British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin had warned that “the bomber will always get through”. That there was a general demand for peace was reflected in several events. There was the Oxford Union’s vote in February 1933 that its members would not support King and Country in war, which “was a gesture towards world peace rather than an act of disloyalty” (Taylor 1965: 362). In the East Fulham by-election in October 1933 Labour won a formerly Conservative seat, according to Baldwin “on no issue but the pacifist one” (qu. in Jenkins 2001: 473). Then the “Peace Ballot” held by the League of Nations Union in the early summer of 1935, in which over 10 million of the 11 million voters voted in favour of economic sanctions against an aggressor and 6,750,000 voted for war in such a case. The minority voting against this was over 2 million, thus

only 1 in 5 voters rejected military action against a declared aggressor. What the Peace Ballot did reveal was strong support for the League of Nations. The ten million voters who favoured the imposition of economic sanctions by the League against an aggressor were reinforced by the six million who favoured the imposition of military sanctions under Article 16 of the Covenant. Taylor described this as an “expression of opinion very far from pacifist” (1961: 89). There was also the result of the Oxford University bye-election in 1938 when the Master of Balliol College, stood (and lost) as an anti-Munich candidate. He was supported among others by Harold Macmillan and Edward Heath. There was thus real opposition both to war and to appeasement but considerable support for the League. Nonetheless, the failure to act effectively against the Italian attack on Abyssinia dealt the death knell for the League as an effective organisation in maintaining peace.

A second motive for appeasing Hitler was the hope that his anger and his forces could be turned eastward to attack the Soviet Union, an idea encouraged by Joachim von Ribbentrop during his spell as German Ambassador to the Court of St. James between 1936 and 1938: he replaced the former ambassador, Hoerst, who had died in 1936. For example, Lord Londonderry wrote after meeting Ribbentrop that he could not understand “why we could not make common ground in some form or other with Germany in opposition to communism” (qu. in Gilbert and Gott 1963: 43). The appeasers were to a degree held in check by the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin’s indifference and possibly idleness until he was succeeded by Neville Chamberlain in 1937, who was positively supportive of appeasement (see Young 1952) and was hostile to the Soviet Union. On 8 March 1938 Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in London, described Neville Chamberlain as a “consummate reactionary” and went on to tell his diary that “he both acknowledges theoretically and feels with his every fibre that the USSR is the principal enemy and that Communism is the main danger to the capitalist system that is so dear to his heart” (Maisky 2016: 103). During discussions in the Cabinet of foreign policy Baldwin “would ostentatiously close his eyes when foreign affairs were under discussion: ‘Wake me up’ he would say ‘when you are finished with that’” (Young 1952: 63). Chamberlain, by contrasted, was a committed appeaser of Hitler and Mussolini who increasingly side-lined the pro-French Foreign Office and its Permanent under-Secretary, Vansittart in order to pursue his appeasement policy. Once appointed as the Government’s Chief Diplomatic Adviser, Vansittart was thoroughly side-lined.

Both Britain and France by the late 1930s were governed by right wing Administrations who were inevitably hostile to the Soviet Union and all its works. In his policy statement *Mein Kampf* Hitler had stated that his major international ambition was “Lebensraum in the East”, not a desire to attack the Western Powers, which gave the French and British Governments the hope that diverting Hitler’s ambitions eastward could be achieved. Taylor describes the situation: “They inclined to be neutral in the struggle between Fascism and Communism, or perhaps even on the Fascist side. They feared Hitler as the ruler of a strong aggressive Germany; they welcomed him – or many did – as the protector of European civilisation against Communism” (1961: 122). Indeed in this period, Hitler expressed the hope that a Nazi Europe and the British Empire could coexist peacefully. This hope was dashed in August 1939 by the sealing of the Ribbentrop-Molotov non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which kept the latter safe from invasion for the time being but only until June 1941.

In any case, there was a second and less discreditable reason for discounting the usefulness of the Soviet Union as an ally against Nazi Germany. In 1937 Stalin ordered that the top generals in the Red Army should be dismissed and put on trial for alleged treachery towards the regime. As a result, the Army’s chief of staff, Marshal Tukhachevsky, together with three out of five marshals, 13 of the 15 army commanders and many others were shot after secret trials or none at all (see Taylor 1961: 112). Whatever Stalin’s motives for doing this, the result was to discredit the effectiveness of Soviet military capacity in Western eyes. There was no point in looking to Russia for assistance against Hitler if she could not fight effectively because the army had no leaders left: “nearly every Western observer was convinced that Soviet Russia was useless as an ally; her ruler a savage and unscrupulous dictator, her armies in chaos, her political system likely to collapse at the first strain” (ibid.). On 30 September 1938 Winston Churchill told Soviet Ambassador Maisky that “the Cliveden set and other related elements have been busy spreading rumours that Soviet aviation is weak, that the recent ‘purges’ have deprived it of nearly all its qualified personnel”. Churchill learned from Cabinet circles that “the British Government has received a document confirming that between 60 and 70% of the officers in our air forces have been ‘liquidated’ in some form or another” (Maisky 2016: 141). Such scepticism about Soviet military capability

and competence led to the indifferent approach to Stalin in 1939 that involved sending Mr. Strang and a military mission by slow boat to Leningrad and so being upstaged by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Taylor's comment on this episode is acidic: "If British diplomacy seriously aspired to alliance with Soviet Russia in 1939, then the negotiations towards this end were the most incompetent transactions since Lord North lost the American colonies. Perhaps incompetence is the simple explanation" (1961: 229). Ivan Maisky's diaries (2016: 210ff) further demonstrate the difference in the relative urgency that Hitler and the British Government attached to military negotiations with the Soviet Union in August 1939.

Lastly there was the slow and late process of rearmament, which began only in 1935 and was widely opposed, not least by the Labour Party under the leadership of George Lansbury, a committed pacifist who was eventually forced to resign over rearmament after "hawking his conscience from body to body asking what he should do with it", as Ernest Bevin contemptuously described it. Like other government departments, the armed services had suffered from the spending restraints imposed as a matter of economic orthodoxy by the National Government that took office in 1931. For instance, the decision not to add extra armour plating to the decks of HMS *Hood* because of economies imposed by the Government had disastrous consequences when she exploded and sank after being attacked by the German battleship *Bismarck*. There is no doubt that one reason why the Allies succumbed to Hitler's demands in 1938 was that they believed that they could not win a war against him then, a fear intensified by the way Hitler exaggerated the strength of his own forces.

The appeasers were a classic case of "Groupthink", as defined by Irvine Janis (1972), significantly as a result of studying a series of American foreign policy disasters including the Bay of Pigs incident, the escalation of the Korean War and the failure to anticipate the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. He defined Groupthink in terms of a small group of senior politicians and officials who reached a cosy policy consensus that they regarded as being beyond challenge. Dissenters were ignored or marginalised, while group members suppressed any personal doubts they may have. Patrick Dunleavy (1995) argued that British governments are particularly prone to develop Groupthink because of the secrecy in which many of their discussions and decisions are cloaked.

All these factors applied in spades to the appeasers of the late 1930s. Churchill's warnings were ignored; Anthony Eden was replaced as Foreign Secretary by a core member of the Cliveden set, Lord Halifax. Eden became a bitter opponent of the appeasement policy. Vansittart and the pro-French Foreign Office were marginalised, while Chamberlain increasingly relied instead on Sir Horace Wilson for advice and reassurance. Like all industrial relations experts, Wilson would have been expert in negotiations and securing compromises, rather than facing down enemies. Welcome advice was always forthcoming from Sir Neville Henderson. The appeasers met up socially frequently, often at Cliveden but also at All Souls College, Oxford, as A. L. Rowse (1961: 110) recorded:

They would not listen to warnings because they did not wish to hear. And they did not think things out because there was a fatal confusion in their minds between the interests of their social order and the interests of the country. They did not say much about it because they would have given the game away and anyway it was a thought they did not wish to be too explicit about even to themselves but they were anti-Red and that hamstringing them in dealing with the greater immediate danger to their country, Hitler's Germany.

A more perfect example of Groupthink it would be hard to find.

Hitler was not awash with arms in the mid-1930s: he insisted that Germany would not be ready to fight a major war until 1943 at the earliest. Taylor comments that "Nazi Germany was not choking in a flood of arms. On the contrary, the German generals insisted unanimously in 1939 that they were not equipped for war and that many years must pass before 'rearmament in depth' had been created" (1961: 105). For his part, for diplomatic reasons Hitler consistently exaggerated the size of his armed forces—he was the first statesman to do this, against the general belief that the wise course was to conceal the extent of your armaments rather than exaggerate them. Commenting on British and French rearmament, Taylor recorded that "Even when they set out to increase armaments, they did so with extreme caution – the exact opposite of Hitler, who often boasted of armaments which he did not possess" (1961: 117–118). Elsewhere Taylor wrote that Hitler "always exaggerated very greatly the military preparations that he made. In 1936, for instance, the best guesses of British intelligence were about 100% too great. In 1940, when the German army was supposed to have been overwhelming and to

have defeated the French by a mass of metal, the French in fact had more tanks than the Germans ... It was not so much that Germany had more armaments but that from quite an early stage, Hitler said he had” (1978: 45). An early spectacular example of this tactic was presented at the 1934 Nüremburg Rally, which was illuminated by 130 searchlights pointing into the sky, a display designed by Hitler’s architect, Albert Speer. He commented revealingly on this display of apparently plentiful supplies of searchlights, writing:

I had occasionally seen our new anti-aircraft searchlights blazing miles into the sky. I asked Hitler to let me have a hundred and thirty of them. Goering made a fuss at first, these hundred and thirty searchlights represented the greater part of the strategic reserve. But Hitler won him over: ‘If we use them in such large numbers for a thing like this, other countries will think we’re swimming in searchlights. (Speer 1971: 100–101)

This was Hitler’s characteristic thinking about how to scare the Allies by pretending that his forces were stronger than they actually were. There was also the realisation that at this stage there was no way that the USA was going to become involved in another European war.

By the time of the Munich conference in September 1938, confidence in Hitler’s promises was waning among the Western Allies but it was still sufficient to persuade them that if his demands were met, his regime would become pacific and the threat of war in Europe would be over. Taylor records that when Neville Chamberlain flew to Berchtesgaden to meet Hitler in September 1938, “he went armed only with the prejudice of most Englishmen against ‘Versailles’ and the firm conviction that Hitler would become pacific if German national grievances were met” (1961: 174). In March 1938 Hitler marched into Vienna and announced the *Anschluss* of Austria—her incorporation into the Reich. Next, he demanded the return of the Sudeten Germans to the Reich, a demand that was granted at the Munich Conference which denuded Czechoslovakia of her defences against a German invasion and was followed early the next year by an invasion and occupation of the entire country. At the time of the Munich conference Chamberlain denied the need to go to the aid of Czechoslovakia, “A faraway country of which we know nothing”. On his return from Munich the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, notoriously waved the piece of paper that he claimed promised “peace for our time”, only soon to be proved cruelly wrong.

Only then did the Western powers recognise that Hitler was bent on the aggressive expansion of the Third Reich. Hitler's next demand was for the restoration to Germany of Danzig and the Polish Corridor. This was a step too far and his invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 provoked the outbreak of the Second World War. All the dreams of a European peace were lost for the five and a half year duration of that terrible war.

## 7 ADOLF HITLER: SCHEMER OR GAMBLER?

One final historiographical question must be addressed. This is whether Hitler's aggressive moves against her Eastern neighbours were part of a long determined plan to achieve world or at least European domination, or whether, as AJP Taylor argued, Hitler was a brilliant opportunist who saw that he could get away with making progressive territorial demands while reassuring the West each time that the current demand was his final one. For Taylor, Hitler was a gambler who waited for gains to fall into his lap, rather than taking positive steps to secure them until success was certain. "It was never Hitler's method to take the initiative. He liked others to do his work for him and he waited for the inner weakening of the European system, just as he had waited for the peace settlement to crumble of itself" (1961: 108). A classic example of this was the Czechoslovak crisis of 1938, where Hitler was able to wait for the Western Allies in effect to offer him control over the Sudetenland. Taylor wrote that "The crisis over Czechoslovakia was provided for Hitler. He merely took advantage of it" (ibid.: 152). It was only when he started to threaten the independence of entire countries that Western opinion turned against him. He had a vision of what he wanted to achieve but no long-term plans for war or probably anything else.

Taylor's analysis was widely challenged, notably by his fellow Oxford historian, Hugh Trevor-Roper, in a long article in *Encounter* magazine (Trevor-Roper 1961). Trevor-Roper opened his critique by reviewing Taylor's thesis. "According to Mr. Taylor, Hitler was an ordinary German statesman in the tradition of Stresemann and Brüning, differing from them not by methods (he was made Chancellor for solidly democratic reasons) nor in ideas (he had no ideas) but only in the greater patience and stronger nerves with which he took advantage of the objective situation in Europe" (1961: 88). That Hitler was democratically and legally appointed as Chancellor in January 1933 is now beyond dispute,

as the figures in Table 1 demonstrate. Trevor-Roper then went on to thrust his knife stroke in: “Before hurling ourselves down the Gadarene slope, let us ask of Mr. Taylor’s thesis not is it brilliant? Is it plausible? But is it true? By what rules of evidence, by what philosophy of interpretation, is it reached?” (ibid.: 90). He then argued that Taylor quoted selectively from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, his table talk, the Hossbach Memorandum of 1937 and his speech on Poland in 1939 to the generals proclaiming that “there will be war” but declaring that “Our task is to isolate Poland ... It must not come to a simultaneous showdown with the West” (qu. on p. 94) to prove his thesis and that Hitler should not have done this but the last quotation seems to confirm that Hitler did not plan to make war against Britain and France in 1939. It is also worth pointing out that as explained earlier, every German Government since 1919 had been committed to the revision of Germany’s Eastern frontiers, including Stresemann, who “was as determined as the most extreme German nationalist to get rid of the whole treaty lock, stock and barrel, but he intended to do this by the persistent pressure of events, not by threats, still less by war” (Taylor 1961: 51). In this sense therefore Hitler was only pursuing the long-established German policy of demanding revisions to Germany’s Eastern frontiers.

Taylor and Trevor-Roper apparently remained friends throughout his controversy (Sisman 1988: 294f). In turn, Hitler swallowed Austria and Czechoslovakia, then tried to swallow Poland but this led to war. It is not easy to resolve this issue. The “Hossbach Memorandum” of 1937 seemed to suggest that Hitler planned for war but an important phrase has been ambiguously translated as “there will be war” or “there will be fighting” (see Taylor 1961: 131f). Taylor argued that what Hitler argued was that Germany would gain her aims without a great war; ‘force’ apparently meant to him the threat of war, not necessarily war itself” (ibid.: 132). Hence, “there was no concrete plan, no directive for German policy in 1937 and 1938. Or if there was a directive, it was to wait upon events” (ibid.: 132). In any case, he argued then and on other occasions that Germany would not be fully rearmed until 1948.

In discussing whether Hitler planned a general war in 1939, Taylor recorded that “The state of German armament in 1939 gives the decisive proof that Hitler was not contemplating general war and probably not intending war at all” (1961: 218). This and much other evidence gives credence to the Taylorian view that Hitler was a gambler who took

a series of chances that turned out well for him for a while, starting with the reoccupation of the Rhineland, continuing with the *Anschluss* of Austria, climaxing with the cession to the Reich of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia at the Munich Conference. Several authors have cast doubt about the seriousness with which we should take Hitler's table talk or other comments, many of which were recorded unofficially by members of his entourage. However, in the end he took the one chance too many that resulted in the outbreak of the Second World War, by demanding the cession to Germany of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, which he ended up taking by force, so provoking the declaration of a general war against him. There is the evidence that there was no long-term plan for war in 1939 because the *Kriegsmarine* for one would not be ready to fight a world war until 1944 and the Reichswehr's generals declared that it was not ready to fight a long war.

Finally, Trevor-Roper ponders whether Taylor's real intention as a Left-wing unilateralist scholar was to point to a lesson for the present: "Mr. Khrushchev, we should recognise, has no more ambition of world conquest than Hitler. He is a traditional Russian statesman of limited aims and 'the moral line' consists in letting him have his way more completely than we let Hitler have his. In other words, unilateral disarmament" (*ibid.*: 96). The issue is not easy to resolve; the reader, having paid his or her money must take his or her choice.

## 8 A LAST WORD

A recurrent theme throughout this history has been the importance of individual actors and in particular the relations among them. At the Paris Peace Conference the "Big Three" were able to agree a series of pragmatic compromises that did not always command the support of their colleagues or publics because they had interests which brought them together: Clemenceau's desire to maintain the alliances with Britain and America, Lloyd George's search for the means to ensure a lasting European peace and Wilson's desire to punish Germany for her war-time and pre-war crimes. The personal chemistry that developed among them made the agreement of a peace treaty possible. Then in the early 1920s, the animosity that existed between Lloyd George and Poincaré prevented any chance of agreement between them on how to secure

reparations payments, which led ultimately to the latter's foolish decision to occupy the Ruhr Valley and thus destroy all chances of Germany being able to earn the money needed to pay reparations. The diplomatic talent shown by Ramsay MacDonald in 1924 was a factor in making compromise possible, leading to the adoption of the Dawes Plan at the London Conference of August 1924. Then the era of hope, peace and prosperity ushered in by the Treaty of Locarno was made possible by the amiable working relationship that Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresemann established between themselves once they were their countries' Ministers of Foreign Affairs and thus in charge of their countries' diplomacies. Once this collaboration was lost through Stresemann's premature death in 1929 the same relationship could not be established between Briand and Stresemann's successor, Julius Curtius.

This is not to endorse any version of history as the achievement of Hegel's world historical individuals or Thomas Carlyle's heroes. Few of these men were cast in an heroic mode although Lloyd George was very much a hero to his Welsh countrymen. His creative and flexible mind often produced negotiations and compromises that might not have happened without him. However, the relationships among statesmen rather than their individual efforts were crucial to developing the European peace process, especially the relationship between Briand and Stresemann which made the Locarno Conference happen. In the end all these men's individual aspirations and achievements were overborne by events over which governments and their members had no control: the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression that followed it, although the preoccupation of those Governments with balanced budgets and "sound money" undoubtedly made matters much worse than they need have been. Without that cataclysm the beneficent work of the leaders in this story might have continued for far longer and the forces of darkness would have been kept at bay. In particular, the one character in this historical drama who undoubtedly did see himself as an heroic figure, Adolf Hitler, would never have become more than a marginal figure in German politics without the unemployment and economic destruction wrought upon Germany by the Wall Street Crash. The road to tragedy was not inevitable; it was opened by Harold Macmillan's "events, dear boy, events" that changed the face of history and destroyed the efforts to make the "Versailles System" work.

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