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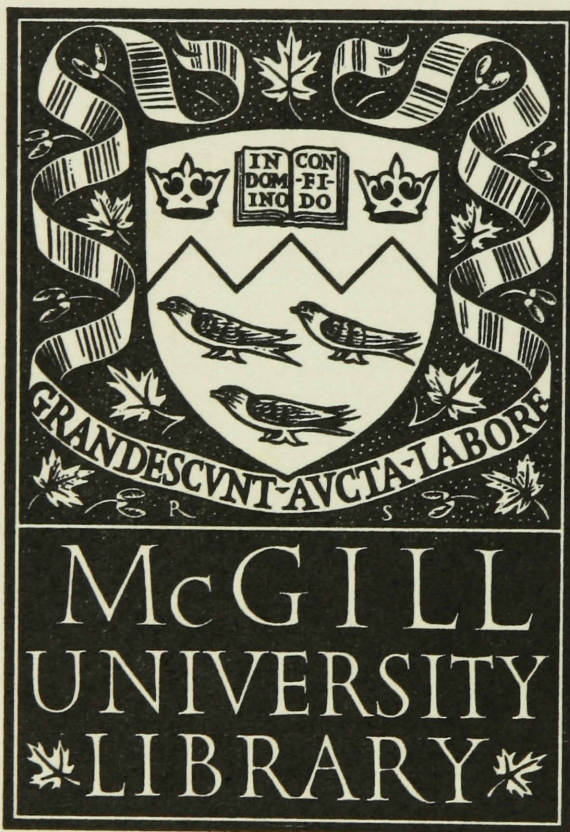
Parliamentary opinion and British foreign



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PARLIAMENTARY OPINION AND BRITISH FOREIGN
POLICY 1936 - 1938

With Special Reference to Germany

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfilment of the requirements
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PREFACE

In the quarter of a century since the outbreak of the Second World War an abundance of literature has accumulated about all antecedents of that war, with particular attention devoted to the foreign policy of Great Britain. Massive documentary evidence on both British and German foreign policy has been published, and a considerable quantity of memoirs, monographs, essays and articles is available.

The most critical period in the sphere of foreign policy was that from March 1936, when Germany reoccupied the Rhineland, to September 1938, when the Munich Conference provided temporary respite to a Europe on the verge of war. That period represents a unique phase in British foreign policy, at the heart of which was the policy of appeasement principally conceived and carried out by Neville Chamberlain.

The unfolding of British foreign policy itself has been reconstructed and well analyzed, although there has been considerable controversy on that subject mainly because

of the policy of appeasement, since, in much of the secondary literature, appeasement and Neville Chamberlain have come up for censure. However, in recent years there has been a trend toward re-evaluation of both the period and the policy, leaving much room for further study.

The Parliamentary Debates have remained a neglected source of study of the opinions expressed therein as they related to foreign policy. Such a study could offer considerable explanation for, and a better understanding of, the motives and other factors which influenced foreign policy in this fateful period. In the many extant works, there are some references to Parliamentary opinion on a particular issue, which are usually simply stated. But hitherto, no systematic study has been made of Parliamentary opinion to explore the reaction of different schools of thought to important issues in foreign policy, in order to understand and interpret the motives for it. Consequently, the overall objective of this dissertation was to contribute toward removal of that deficiency.

Though not perfectly balanced, Parliament axiomatically reflects public opinion, and consequently in a microcosm represents the cross-currents of British thought in general, and on foreign policy as well. Parliament also

directs the Government in Britain, and by extension influences the unfolding of that policy. During the period under consideration, virtually every debate which did not deal expressly with internal policy inevitably drifted into the sphere of foreign affairs. This pertains particularly to the numerous debates on defence.

In the variety of views expressed in the debates, the strong opinions held by the Members of the Opposition were dominant, and the Government, in articulating foreign policy, had to take much of that opinion into account. Particularly striking was the emotional thinking to which the Opposition was subject, and which, when applied to issues of foreign policy, manifested a whole range of ambiguities and contradictory points of view. It is only a little oversimplified to say that at the root of these ambiguities stood the ethical values of British humanitarianism. With evangelical zeal, the Opposition stood for universal righteousness in international affairs, while it professed a passionate desire for peace -- two incompatible ideas. In addition, it insisted that disarmament was the certain road to peace. Because this entire phenomenon and related elements decidedly dominated the debates, this

thesis deals at length with its manifestation in foreign policy.

Because of the nature of the present investigation, it was necessary to concentrate almost exclusively upon the debates in the House of Commons, and the original expressions of individual speakers were retained for flavour. If this method at times jars the harmony of the exposition, it also demonstrates the irregular rhythm of the thinking and debating which was so characteristic of the times.

This dissertation, then, is an attempt to analyze and interpret Parliamentary opinion in that critical period as it pertained to foreign policy. It is an exploration of that opinion about certain overriding elements which conditioned or motivated foreign policy, rather than being another extensive reconstruction of that policy. Essentially the dissertation is a study of what and how the Members of Parliament thought on the subject of policy in the context of several dominant issues, with special reference to Anglo-German relations. When necessary, concomitant issues are discussed, since the debates did not apply exclusively to Germany. Inter alia, close scrutiny has been given to the controversy over the League of Nations and collective security,

and to the ambiguities which were present in various schools of thought.

All available documentary sources, official and personal, pertinent historical literature in several languages but mostly in English, and predominantly the Parliamentary Debates were consulted to obtain an independent and balanced view of the foreign policy in this period. Unfortunately, the documents on British foreign policy of the period up to March, 1938 have not yet become available. Though extensively listed in the Bibliography, footnote reference to sources other than the Parliamentary Debates is kept to a minimum.

The contribution of this thesis, more specifically, is to show the goals which the Members of Parliament and the House of Commons, individually and collectively, together with Baldwin and Chamberlain, sought for Britain in foreign affairs during that period. Furthermore, it is intended to demonstrate that in at least two essential and critical issues of national life -- defence and foreign policy -- there was scarcely any unity in the Parliament.

The thesis proposes, in addition, to bring to light the considerable ambiguity on foreign policy which was harboured by many Members of Parliament and the extensive

muddle prevailing in the ranks of the two major Opposition parties. On some major problems however, the essential differences of opinion were those of degree, or of emphasis and method in pursuing the same goal. Often it was a case of different nomenclature for the same policy.

Next, it will be shown that the country and the Parliament were united in their abhorrence of war. This obliged the Government, in charting its foreign policy, to sail the precarious lanes between the Scylla of national pacifism and the Charybdis of insufficient armaments and national unreadiness to face stark issues.

Finally, the thesis will try to establish that, in the light of Parliamentary opinion, given the circumstances and the most unpalatable of alternatives, the policy of appeasement as pursued by Chamberlain was the only possibility of fulfilling the universal desire in Britain for peace. Its ultimate failure was the fault neither of that policy per se, nor of Neville Chamberlain.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

To the Canada Council I gratefully acknowledge the award of a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship for 1959-60. I am also grateful to the Board of Governors of Assumption University of Windsor for a summer research grant in 1963.

I am particularly grateful to my research director, Professor H. N. Fieldhouse, who gave me more than generously the benefit of his wisdom and experience, and patiently allowed me virtually absolute freedom of work and decision. Above all, I acknowledge with pleasure the debt I owe to him for the reflections upon and insights into British foreign policy which I have incorporated in my interpretations throughout this dissertation.

To my first professor of history, Rev. D. J. Mulvihill, C.S.B., Ph.D., for igniting the spark that made me a disciple of Clio, and to him also as the Head of the Department of History, University of Windsor, for encouragement, and patient forbearance during the completion of this thesis while on the staff of that Department, I owe more than I can express.

I am indebted to the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Wayne State University in Detroit, and the Detroit Public Library for generous permission to use their facilities and resources. To the library staffs of those institutions, as well as those of McGill University and the University of Windsor for facilitating my research, I express my thanks.

Not least do I recognize the invaluable help of my wife Helen in typing and criticizing the drafts, and admire her endurance during all the peripeteia involved in thesis work.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In describing the dominant schools of thought, the problem arose of how to identify them without pedantically using the peculiar deviations of opinion expressed by each Member. At the risk of oversimplification, excessive use of too many political or ideological labels was avoided. The terms pacifism and pacifist were used to mean the universally-shared anti-war sentiment in Britain. When the term was applicable in a different sense, for example, regarding George Lansbury, then it is usually further specified. But no distinction of various shades of pacifism, or classification of Members according to those nuances, was attempted.

The term Socialist is used synonymously with Labour party, unless otherwise specified. For the purpose of this thesis, the Government side of the House, though predominantly Conservative, occasionally is referred to as Unionist. Because the intention behind this study was to focus upon a broad consensus among Parliamentary groups, the term Radical was adopted to denote the opinion prevalent in both

Labour and Liberal ranks. The difference between these two parties on the subject of foreign policy in this period was more in phraseology, based on their respective persuasion, than it was in substance.

In identifying Members of Parliament, the prefix Mr. is omitted throughout, except where appropriate for non-familiar figures. To facilitate identification, a separate Register of cited Members precedes the main text. Party affiliation as given in The Times, November 16 and November 18, 1935, is also stipulated, as is the constituency.

REGISTER OF MEMBERS CITED IN THE TEXT

Adams, Samuel Vyvyan Trerice -- Unionist
(Leeds, West)

Alexander, Rt. Hon. Albert Victor -- Labour
(Sheffield, Hillsborough)

Amery, Rt. Hon. Leopold -- Unionist
(Birmingham, Sparkbrook)

Astor, Viscountess -- Unionist
(Plymouth, Sutton)

Astor, Hon. William Waldorf -- Unionist
(Fulham, East)

Attlee, Rt. Hon. Clement Richard -- Labour
(Stepney, Limehouse)

Baldwin, Rt. Hon. Stanley -- Unionist
(Worcester, Bewdley)

Barr, Rev. James -- Labour
(Lanark, Coatbridge)

Bellenger, Frederick John -- Labour
(Nottingham, Bassetlaw)

Benn, Rt. Hon. William Wedgwood -- Labour
(Manchester, Gorton)

Bernays, Robert Hamilton -- Liberal
(Bristol, North)

Boothby, Robert John Graham -- Unionist
(Aberdeen and Kincardine, Eastern)

- Buchanan, George -- Independent Labour
(Glasgow, Gorbals)
- Butler, Richard Austen -- Unionist
(Essex, Saffron Walden)
- Chamberlain, Rt. Hon. Sir Austen -- Unionist
(Birmingham, West)
- Chamberlain, Rt. Hon. Neville -- Unionist
(Birmingham, Edgbaston)
- Churchill, Rt. Hon. Winston Leonard Spencer -- Unionist
(Essex, Epping)
- Cobb, Captain Edward Charles -- Unionist
(Preston)
- Cocks, Frederick Seymour -- Labour
(Nottingham, Broxtowe)
- Cooper, Rt. Hon. Alfred Duff -- Unionist
(Westminster, St. George's)
- Cranborne, Viscount -- Unionist
(Dorset, Southern)
- Cripps, Hon. Sir Richard Stafford -- Labour
(Bristol, East)
- Croft, Brigadier-General Sir Henry Page -- Unionist
(Bournemouth)
- Dalton, Edward Hugh John Neale -- Labour
(Durham, Bishop Auckland)
- Dodd, John Samuel -- Liberal National
(Oldham)
- Ede, James Chuter -- Labour
(South Shields)

Eden, Rt. Hon. Robert Anthony -- Unionist
(Warwick, Warwick and Leamington)

Edwards, Alfred -- Labour
(Middlesbrough, East)

Emmott, Charles Ernest George Campbell -- Unionist
(Surrey, Eastern)

Fletcher, Lieutenant-Commander Reginald Thomas -- Labour
(Warwick, Nuneaton)

Fyfe, David Patrick Maxwell -- Unionist
(Liverpool, West Derby)

Gallacher, William -- Communist
(Fife, Western)

George, Rt. Hon. David Lloyd -- Independent Liberal
(Carnarvon, District of Boroughs)

George, Major Gwilym Lloyd -- Independent Liberal
(Pembroke)

Gibson, Robert -- Labour
(Greenock)

Graham, Captain Alan Crosland -- Unionist
(Chester, Wirral)

Greenwood, Rt. Hon. Arthur -- Labour
(Wakefield)

Grenfell, David Rees -- Labour
(Glamorgan, Gower)

Griffiths, James -- Labour
(Carmarthen, Llanelly)

Guest, Dr. Leslie Haden -- Labour
(Islington, North)

Hannah, Ian Campbell -- Unionist
(Wolverhampton, Bilston)

Hannon, Sir Patrick Joseph Henry -- Unionist
(Birmingham, Moseley)

Henderson, Arthur -- Labour
(Stafford, Kingswinford)

Hicks, Ernest George -- Labour
(Woolwich, East)

Hills, Major Rt. Hon. John Waller -- Unionist
(York, West Riding, Ripon)

Hoare, Sir Samuel John Gurney -- Unionist
(Chelsea)

Horne, Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Stevenson -- Unionist
(Glasgow, Hillhead)

Horsbrugh, Miss Florence -- Unionist
(Dundee)

Jones, Morgan -- Labour
(Glamorgan, Caerphilly)

Lambert, Rt. Hon. George -- Liberal National
(Devon, South Molton)

Lansbury, Rt. Hon. George -- Labour
(Poplar, Bow and Bromley)

Law, Richard Kidston -- Unionist
(Kingston-upon-Hull, South-West)

Lees-Smith, Rt. Hon. Hastings Bertrand -- Labour
(York, West Riding, Keighley)

Lindsay, Kenneth Martin -- National Labour
(Ayr and Bute, Kilmarnock)

- Mabane, William -- Liberal National
(Huddersfield)
- Macdonald, Gordon -- Labour
(Lancaster, Ince)
- MacDonald, Rt. Hon. James Ramsay -- Labour
(Scottish Universities)
- McEwen, Captain John Helias Finnie -- Unionist
(Bierwick and Haddington)
- McGovern, John -- Independent Labour
(Glasgow, Shettleston)
- Mainwaring, William Henry -- Labour
(Rhondda, East)
- Mander, Geoffrey le Mesurier -- Liberal
(Wolverhampton, East)
- Maxton, James -- Independent Labour
(Glasgow, Bridgeton)
- Milner, Major James -- Labour
(Leeds, South-East)
- Montague, Frederick -- Labour
(Islington, West)
- Moore, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Thomas Cecil -- Unionist
(Ayr District of Burghs)
- Morrison, Rt. Hon. Herbert Stanley -- Labour
(Hackney, South)
- Nicolson, Hon. Harold George -- National Labour
(Leicester, West)
- Noel-Baker, Philip John -- Labour
(Derby)

O'Neill, Rt. Hon. Sir Robert William Hugh -- Unionist
(Antrim)

Parker, John -- Labour
(Essex, Romford)

Pethick-Lawrence, Rt. Hon. Frederick William -- Labour
(Edinburgh, East)

Pilkington, Richard Anthony -- Unionist
(Lancaster, Widness)

Potts, John -- Labour
(Barnsley)

Price, Morgan Phillips -- Labour
(Gloucester, Forest of Dean)

Raikes, Henry Victor Alpin Mackinnon -- Unionist
(Essex, South-Eastern)

Rathbone, Miss Eleanor Florence -- Independent
(Combined English Universities)

Ridley, George -- Labour
(Derby, Clay Cross)

Royds, Admiral Sir Percy Molyneux Rawson -- Unionist
(Kingston-on-Thames)

Sandys, Edwin Duncan -- Unionist
(Lambeth, Norwood)

Shaw, Major Peter Stapleton -- Unionist
(Liverpool, Wavertree)

Silverman, Samuel Sydney -- Labour
(Nelson and Colne)

Simmonds, Oliver Edwin -- Unionist
(Birmingham, Duddeston)

Simon, Rt. Hon. Sir John -- Liberal National
(York, West Riding, Spen Valley)

Sinclair, Rt. Hon. Sir Archibald Henry Macdonald -- Liberal
(Caithness and Sutherland)

Sorensen, Reginald William -- Labour
(Leyton, West)

Spears, Brigadier-General Edward Lewis -- Unionist
(Carlisle)

Spender-Clay, Lieutenant-Colonel Rt. Hon. Herbert -- Unionist
(Kent, Tonbridge)

Stephen, Campbell -- Independent Labour
(Glasgow, Camlachie)

Thomas, James Purdon Lewes -- Unionist
(Hereford, Hereford)

Thurtle, Ernest -- Labour
(Shoreditch)

Tinker, John Joseph -- Labour
(Leigh)

Titchfield, the Marquess of -- Unionist
(Nottingham, Newark)

Ward, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Albert Lambert -- Unionist
(Kingston-upon-Hull, North-West)

Wedgwood, Colonel Rt. Hon. Josiah Clement -- Labour
(Newcastle-under-Lyme)

Wilkinson, Miss Ellen Cecily -- Labour
(Durham, Jarrow)

Williams, Thomas -- Labour
(York, West Riding, Don Valley)

Winterton, Rt. Hon. Earl -- Unionist
(West Sussex, Horsham and Worthing)

Wolmer, Rt. Hon. Viscount -- Unionist
(Hants, Aldershot)

Young, Sir Robert -- Labour
(Lancaster, Newton)

C O N T E N T S

Preface	ii
Acknowledgements	viii
Explanatory Note	x
Register of Members Cited in the Text	xii
CHAPTER:	
I. Diplomatic Background of 1935	1
II. The Onset of Ambiguities	39
III. Misconceptions About Collective Security	87
IV. Ideological Antipathies	135
V. The Sense of Guilt Toward Germany	164
VI. The Inconsistency About Self-Determination	203
VII. Parliamentary Opinion and Foreign Policy: A Recapitulation and Conclusion	238
Bibliography	288

CHAPTER I
DIPLOMATIC BACKGROUND OF 1935

I

After her defeat in the First World War, Germany was rendered impotent under the provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty. She was forced to accept war guilt and was assessed almost impossible reparations. In addition, she was bound by the Covenant of the League of Nations, but until 1925 was denied membership in that body. Imposed upon a defeated enemy, the Versailles Treaty was a settlement which the Germans considered unjust, and which they called a Diktat. In these factors were the origins of most of the subsequent troubles in Europe, which ended in another world war far worse than the first.

After the ascension to power of Hitler and his National Socialist Party, the rapid chain of events in Germany held the attention of all chancelleries in Europe. The most significant of these events came on October 14, 1933, when Germany announced her withdrawal from both the World Disarmament Conference at Geneva, and the League of

Nations.¹ From that time on, the unrelenting march toward the fulfillment of the German-Nazi "manifest destiny" became increasingly apparent. The reckless accomplishment of this design could only have come by complete defiance of the Versailles Peace Treaty and by total destruction of the European equilibrium established after 1918.

During 1934, Hitler demanded equality of rights for Germany,² declaring that the world must know two facts: first, "the German Reich will never sacrifice its honour and equality of rights"; and second, that the German Government, "like the German people, is filled with the unqualified wish to make its greatest possible contribution towards the maintenance of world-peace."³

These verbal assertions were steadily contradicted by Germany's acts. In January 1934, she signed a ten-year Pact with Poland which was designed to weaken the influence

¹See Hitler's Proclamation to the German people; the Proclamation by the German Government to the German people; and Hitler's broadcast, all on October 14, 1933 in Norman H. Baynes, ed., The Speeches of Adolph Hitler, 2 vols., (London, 1942), II, 1088-90; 1090-92; and 1092-1104 respectively.

²See for example Hitler's speech to the Reichstag, January 30, 1934 in ibid., pp. 1151-71, particularly p. 1168.

³Hitler's speech at Hamburg, August 17, 1934, in ibid., p. 1184.

of France in Eastern Europe. At the end of June, the violent purge of some of Hitler's closest collaborators began to show the bloodthirsty ferocity of the Nazi system. Within a month, the brutal assassination by the Austrian Nazis on July 26 of the Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Dollfuss, was a further signal of alarm for Europe.

In January 1935, Germany legally retrieved a piece of her former territory. Hitler's attraction for the German populace outside of the Versailles borders of Germany had proved too strong, and the inhabitants of the Saar overwhelmingly voted in favor of returning to the German Reich. Pleased with the result of the plebiscite, Hitler announced that after this return, Germany would "make no further territorial claims on France."⁴

Not two months later, defiance of the military clauses of the Versailles Treaty was announced by Germany. On March 9, 1935, Hermann Goering announced the existence of a German air force. This was followed on March 16 by Hitler's own Proclamation to the German people repudiating the military clauses. Completing this action was the passage on the same date of a brief law which predicated

⁴Hitler's broadcast January 15, 1935, in ibid., p. 1195.

German forces on universal military service, and which fixed their peace strength at thirty-six divisions.⁵ All Europe stood aghast, and the last doubters clearly understood the international implications.

Germany's clamour for equality under Hitler was purposefully aimed at superiority in Europe; and in their demands for revision of the Peace Treaty, the Germans saw the means for expansion.⁶ Almost from the beginning of Hitler's regime, Germany was producing war material "in growing confidence, for France only frowned and Britain looked the other way."⁷

At first, few people took Hitler's rantings too seriously, as he "well understood and skillfully exploited the wishful thinking of the West and the almost pathological

⁵Texts of both the Proclamation and of the Law of March 16, 1935 in John W. Wheeler-Bennett and Stephen Heald, eds., Documents on International Affairs, 1935, 2 vols., (London, 1936), I, 58-64. [Hereafter cited thus: Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935.]

⁶See Sir Robert Vansittart, The Mist Procession, (London, 1958), pp. 433 and 454.

⁷Ibid., p. 451.

wish of most peoples for peace."⁸ However, the major European powers reacted relatively swiftly to the succession of Hitler's drastic acts which progressively contributed to the return to reality. But the reaction in the major European capitals was as diverse as it was characteristic.⁹

France took Hitler's actions rather coolly. For years she had fearfully predicted German resurgence, but not without taking some counteraction of her own, especially in Eastern Europe. More important reaction came from Moscow. With Germany on the rise again, the U.S.S.R., experiencing an assortment of great difficulties at home, became mortally afraid of a combined Germano-Japanese threat. France and the Soviet Union recognized an urgent need for each other, and in the second half of 1933 Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Union's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, speedily journeyed to Paris, after the French Minister, Edouard Herriot, received a rapturous reception in Moscow.

In 1933, the Soviet Union also obtained diplomatic

⁸René Albrecht-Carrié, A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna, (New York, 1958), p. 483. Sir Robert Vansittart observed that the British thought wishfully and the Americans not at all. See op. cit., p. 484.

⁹See Section II below, for more detail on British reaction.

recognition by the United States of America. The culmination of this activity was the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations in 1934, conveniently ignoring that, prior to this date, its policy had been revisionist, anti-British, anti-French and anti-League.¹⁰ Both France and the U.S.S.R. and various other small nations rushed in, separately, to conclude regional pacts of various degree of value, sincerity and reality. Particularly notable was French Foreign Minister Barthou's vigorous attempt, during 1934, to create an East European Pact to complement that of

¹⁰ Stalin now turned to the League, talking collective security most ardently of all. The Soviet Ambassador to Britain at that time, later wrote about it thus: "In its turn the Soviet Government, by the end of 1933, had come to the conclusion that in these conditions it would be useful for the U.S.S.R. to join the League of Nations. This would place at its disposal an international platform, most important at that time, from which to defend peace and counteract the peril of a second world war. It also opened a possibility -- though the Soviet Government never overestimated its significance -- of raising obstacles in the path of those who would launch a new world massacre." Ivan Maisky, Who Helped Hitler? (London, 1964), p. 47.

Following the First War, it was natural that Germany and the U.S.S.R. would gravitate toward one another, culminating in the conclusion, in 1922, of the Treaty of Rapallo. The U.S.S.R. was for some time one of the most vocal opponents of the League. And as long as Germany evaded the terms of the Versailles Settlement, it enjoyed the full support of the U.S.S.R. See detailed treatment of those years in Gerald Freund, Unholy Alliance: Russian-German Relations from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the Treaty of Berlin, (London, 1957).

Locarno in the West.

The reaction of Italy was similar, but was somewhat slower in developing. In 1933, Mussolini advanced his ambitious -- but unfulfilled -- plan for a Four Power Pact in Western Europe. He argued for gradual revision of the Treaties because of his conviction that some concessions to Germany were necessary. When the Nazis attempted a Putsch in Austria in July of 1934, Mussolini alertly prevented a German Anschluss of Austria by sending Italian troops to the Brenner Pass. Thereafter, for a few years at any rate, he made the new Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Schuschnigg, virtually an Italian protégé.

When in March 1935, Germany had announced the creation of a standing army, a flurry of Notes protested against this latest action. Britain sent a Note on March 18, deeming the action "calculated seriously to increase uneasiness in Europe."¹¹ The reaction of Italy was in a Note three days later, which expressed "most ample reservation."¹² France reacted more vigorously, for in addition to the Note of protest to Germany, she addressed a separate

¹¹"British Note to the German Government, March 18, 1935," Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 64.

¹²"Italian Note to Germany, March 21, 1935," ibid., I, 69.

Note to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations requesting an extraordinary session of the League Council to consider the German repudiation.¹³

With the unfolding of these developments, it became obvious that the central problem of peace in Europe was primarily the danger of Nazi Germany. "Anything that would build up power against Germany was to be welcomed without being pedantic about abstractions like collective security or the prerogatives of the Lion of Judah."¹⁴ As Germany was demonstrating both her intention to unilaterally disrupt European equilibrium and her readiness to violate all Versailles restrictions, it clearly became necessary for the remaining European powers to attempt to build more than a diplomatic wall of confinement.

II

From Castlereagh to Neville Chamberlain, the

¹³See "French Note to Germany, March 21, 1935," and "Note from the French Government to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, March 20, 1935," French texts in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 67-68 and 66-67 respectively. For the documents and extracts of the debate in the Extraordinary Session of the League Council, see ibid., I, 93-116.

¹⁴R. B. McCallum, Public Opinion and the Last Peace, (London, 1944), p. 150.

abiding British interest had been peace on the Continent. For over a century British foreign policy had been focussed upon it. Between 1918 and 1935, the Versailles distribution of power in Europe, which was favourable to the status quo countries, generally prevailed. Britain's discernible policy in this period was a loose and general attitude inspired by pragmatism but mixed with pledges through her membership in the League of Nations. These were relatively noncommittal -- as long as a challenge was absent. While it would be difficult "to find a common denominator for Britain's policy toward Germany," except in the first half of 1935, it could be said that "both before and after the advent of Hitler it was mainly characterized by attempts to assist Germany."¹⁵ While the "Anglo-Italian friendship had been a popular axiom of European politics,"¹⁶ the case with Germany was different. The general British sentiment for years had been that some restoration of German power through negotiation was not only inevitable but desirable.

¹⁵ See Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France between Two Wars: Conflicting Strategies of Peace Since Versailles, (New York, 1940), pp. 272, 267 and 242.

¹⁶ Maxwell H. H. Macartney and Paul Cremona, Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy, 1914-1937, (London, 1938), p. 169.

After the war, France and Britain held two divergent and incompatible views about Germany's place in Europe. The British preference for the orderly restoration of Germany to her rightful place among European powers was possible only with the good will and consent of France. Since France was paralyzed by an almost irrational fear of Germany, her policy was one of vigorous opposition to any such scheme.¹⁷ In continued German impotence, France saw the best guarantee of her own security and of European peace. The exclusiveness of these two views proved a major irritant to the friendly relations of these two countries in this period, as the "war-time Anglo-French duet soon turned into a post-war Anglo-French duel."¹⁸ French intransigence inevitably needed re-evaluation in the face of "the reappearance on the scene of the German cat with newly grown claws and with an appetite that had been whetted to an unheard-of sharpness by a forcibly imposed

¹⁷"But of all inter-allied relationships the most crucial and the most difficult were the relations between England and France." McCallum, op. cit., p. 162.

¹⁸René Albrecht-Carrié, The Meaning of the First World War, (Englewood City, N. J., 1965), p. 143.

fast."¹⁹

The record of German unruliness prompted France and Italy to conclude a Treaty on January 7, 1935 and to bury the hatchet of animosities.²⁰ Thus, during the first half of 1935, a major diplomatic counter-offensive designed to create a front of Western powers united against Germany was initiated. The shock of the Nazi revolution prompted the British Government to join in this pursuit, as it "cordially welcomed" the Franco-Italian rapprochement just concluded in Rome.²¹

Three days of conversations between French and British Ministers were concluded on February 3, 1935, their object having been "to promote the peace of the world by

¹⁹Arnold J. Toynbee, ed., Survey of International Affairs, 1934, (London, 1935), p. 324. [Hereafter cited thus: Survey Int. Affairs, 1934.]

²⁰Since 1920, Franco-Italian relations were clouded by multiple irritations, the major source of friction being the old North African quarrel over Tripolitania, Tunis, Libya and the naval rivalries in the Mediterranean. With the rise of Germany, these various irritations were quickly set aside. Now Pierre Laval and Mussolini declared "the determination of their Governments to develop a traditional friendship which united the two nations and, in a spirit of mutual confidence to collaborate for the maintenance of general peace." "Franco-Italian Declaration, January 7, 1935," French text in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 19.

²¹"Franco-British Declaration, February 3, 1935," Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 25-26.

closer European co-operation, in a spirit of most friendly confidence."²² Pierre Laval stressed "the solidarity of our interest and our common resolve to pursue and to achieve a methodical organization of the security of Europe."²³ In his speech to the Chamber of Deputies two days later, the French Premier emphasized the world's awareness that Germany had for some time been rearming in excess of the limits fixed by Part V of the Versailles Treaty.²⁴

The Italian reaction to this Anglo-French meeting was sympathetic and approving,²⁵ and Mussolini later said that the Conference in London was "considered as a continuation of the Franco-Italian Conference in Rome."²⁶ The

²²Ibid., I, 25.

The meeting had "been extremely valuable and important." Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary, in a broadcast, February 3, 1935. The Times, February 4, 1935, p. 14.

²³"Broadcast by M. Laval, Minister for Foreign Affairs, February 3, 1935," French text in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 31.

²⁴"Speech by M. Flandin, Prime Minister, February 5, 1935," French text in ibid., I, 31.

²⁵See the statement issued by the Italian Government, February 9, 1935. The Times, February 11, 1935, p. 12.

²⁶"Extract from speech by Signor Mussolini, May 25, 1935," Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 176.

Soviet Government greeted the London meeting with enthusiasm, and, shunning the use of restrained diplomatic phrases, openly suggested pacts of mutual assistance:

After the London Agreement, it is possible to state that the idea of the necessity of adopting the most prompt and effective measures to counteract military aggression through pacts of mutual assistance is actively supported by four of the largest States of Europe -- namely the U.S.S.R., France, Britain, and Italy, as well as the countries of the Little and Balkan Ententes, having jointly a population of 165,000,000, or 70 per cent. of the population of the whole of Europe. It cannot be doubted that the overwhelming majority of the other countries of Europe also regard sympathetically all that can be undertaken for the strengthening of peace, and that thus the existing 'tendency to aggravate the danger of war' is represented by a comparatively small number of adherents.²⁷

After such encouragement, and realizing that hopes for a contemplated Eastern Pact were virtually reduced to naught,²⁸ late in April 1935, the French Government resumed

²⁷"Reply of the Soviet Government to the Franco-British communiqué, February 20, 1935," ibid., I, 37.

²⁸The then recent British diplomatic reconnaissance in Berlin, Moscow, Warsaw and Prague established that both Germany and Poland no longer contemplated joining such a Pact. For the genesis of the Pact and negotiations with Germany regarding the East European Pact, 1934-1935, see Correspondence Showing the Course of Certain Diplomatic Discussions Directed toward Securing an European Settlement, Cmd. 5143, No. 1, 3, 9, 26, 37, and 59, parts I and III; pp. 7-8, 9-14, 19-20, 41-42, 53-56, 80-82, and 83 respectively.

active negotiations with the Soviet Union which had as their purpose the completion of a specifically Franco-Soviet arrangement. The idea for such a bilateral arrangement originated when Herriot visited Moscow in the summer of 1933.²⁹ But now, under the urgent threat of German rearmament, on May 2, 1935, France concluded an Agreement of Mutual Assistance with the U.S.S.R.³⁰

To reconstitute the pre-war Franco-Russian alliance was but one specific result of the Nazi revolution.³¹ The Agreement was defensive in character, but "the intent of the pact was clear and its German focus unmistakable; the pact was exclusively European."³² Though very carefully

²⁹ Louis Barthou carried through the negotiations during 1934 before he was assassinated. For the steps in these negotiations, see Henri Torrès, le rapporteur, "III. Genèse du Traité d'assistance mutuelle," Chambre des Députés, No. 5792, in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 119-27.

³⁰ For a detailed French analysis of the Agreement see idem., "IV. Le Traité et son Protocole," in ibid., I, 127-135. For the official French text of the Agreement and the Protocol itself, see ibid., I, 116-19. For English translation of that text, see Cmd. 5143, No. 18, pp. 26-29.

³¹ See Edward H. Carr, International Relations Between the Two World Wars, (London, 1959), p. 204.

³² Albrecht-Carrié, A Diplomatic History of Europe, etc., p. 481. The pact was generally popular in France. Ibid.

drafted and, at some pains, anchored within the League Covenant and the Locarno Treaty, this Franco-Soviet Agreement provoked Germany into denouncing it as a disguised military alliance, charging that some of its terms were violations of the Locarno.³³

In a Note of June 25, the French Government disputed this German contention.³⁴ The British Government soon declared its "entire agreement with the views expressed and the arguments used by the French Government."³⁵ Of the two remaining signatories of Locarno, Italy sided with the French interpretation, as did Belgium eventually.³⁶

On May 16, 1935, a further link was added to this

³³See "Memorandum on the Relations between the Franco-Soviet Pact of May 2 and the Treaty of Locarno. -- (Communicated to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs by the German Ambassador in London on May 29, 1935)," Cmd. 5143, No. 23, pp. 36-39.

³⁴See "French reply to German Memorandum regarding the Interpretation of the effects of the Franco-Soviet Pact." Ibid., No. 27, pp. 42-45.

³⁵See "Sir Samuel Hoare to Baron von Hoesch, Foreign Office, July 5, 1935." Ibid., No. 28, pp. 45-46.

³⁶See "Memorandum by the Italian Government Communicated to the German Government on July 15, 1935...." Ibid., No. 29, p. 46; and "Aide-mémoire communicated by the Belgian Government to the German Government on July 19, 1935." Ibid., No. 30, p. 47.

defensive chain in Eastern Europe when the long-standing post-war French ally, Czechoslovakia, signed a Treaty of Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union. This Czech-Soviet Treaty was identical with the Franco-Soviet one, except for the Protocol of Signature.³⁷

III

From 1931, Britain was led by the National Government headed by the old Labourite, Ramsay MacDonald. Though some Liberal National and National Labour members participated in that administration, it was virtually a Conservative Government. The real spark in the Cabinet was Stanley Baldwin, who held the office of the Lord President of the Council.³⁸ A former Asquithian Liberal, Sir John Simon, was the Foreign Secretary. In a way, these three key men symbolized three specific political persuasions.

³⁷See the French text of the "Protocole de Signature" of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty, May 16, 1935. Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 138-39. This Protocol notably contained casus foederis, which became the source of controversy at the time of the Munich crisis in 1938.

³⁸Baldwin's "chief ability lay in his power to secure the support of the Commons by persuasive speeches, setting forth common-sense conclusions." Arthur Berriedale Keith, The Constitution of England From Queen Victoria to George VI, 2 vols., (London, 1940), I, 174.

Though similarly balanced politically, the House of Commons which they led, was not nearly as well balanced numerically.³⁹

Allowing for individual viewpoints within the mass of Conservatives preponderant in the House of Commons, and allowing to the miniscule Opposition the right of dissent, criticism, and political antagonism, there was generally an underlying unanimity in the Parliament as to the theoretical basis of British foreign policy. In the main, it revolved around two major elements: preservation of peace, and membership in the League of Nations. What concern there was for Germany, the following summary might adequately express:

As long as Germany's strength was still well below the danger line, Britain's conciliatory policy toward her was backed almost unanimously by all political parties in Britain. Since the traditional policy of the balance of power and the policy of pacification ran parallel in that they both called for assistance to Germany, Conservatives and pacifists alike had reason

³⁹In the Election of 1931, the Conservatives won a landslide victory, capturing approximately 500 seats. The Labour party suffered a débâcle at the polls winning only a little over 50, while the Liberals had a little over 30 seats. See ibid., I, 477.

to favor concessions and redress of German grievances.⁴⁰

But the effects and dangers of the Nazi revolution were not lost upon the members of the British Government. Surveying the uncertainty with which Europe was seized since Hitler's ascension to power, Stanley Baldwin told the Parliament:

As a net result of nearly two years of that regime in Central Europe, we have a condition of nervous apprehension running through from one country to another, which bodes ill for the peace of Europe or, anyway, ill for that mentality in which peace can be maintained.⁴¹

Prime Minister MacDonald himself discussed the main tenets of British foreign policy, declaring peace to be the supreme need of the time. He heartily welcomed the entrance of the Soviet Union into the League while continuing to deplore Germany's absence therefrom. Acknowledging

⁴⁰Wolfers, op. cit., pp. 249-50.

In the early 1930's the Government was not only pursuing a policy of disarmament at home, but also actively working for it through participation in the World Disarmament Conference. E.g. see a brief survey and reaffirmation by Stanley Baldwin, House of Commons, Parliamentary Debates, Official Report. Fifth Series. Vol. 292, cols. 1273-74, July 19, 1934. [Hereafter cited thus: 292 H. C. Deb., col. 1273, July 19, 1934. All volumes of the H. C. Deb., cited in this monograph are Fifth Series and this detail will be omitted in subsequent references.]

That policy was unreservedly supported by the Opposition. See Wolfers, op. cit., pp. 368-69.

⁴¹295 H. C. Deb., col. 874, November 28, 1934.

the deteriorating international situation, he stressed Britain's unremitting support of the League of Nations.⁴²

Concerning the League policy, the Opposition declared its position "unequivocally for a system of collective security under the League of Nations."⁴³ In an admixture of principles, British Labour asserted its stand "for Democracy, and for the establishment of peace, freedom and justice in the world through conciliation and arbitration, disarmament and constructive political and economic co-operation between the nations of the world."⁴⁴ As for the foreign policy of the Labour party it was:

based on the collective Peace system. The collective Peace system means the League of Nations plus such co-operation between the League and non-Member States as may be established either on the Pact of Paris or other treaties or by any other means. Labour's policy

⁴²See Ramsay MacDonald, Speech at Guildhall Banquet, November 9, 1934. The Times, November 10, 1934, p. 12, passim.

⁴³The acting leader of the Opposition, Clement Attlee, 292 H. C. Deb., col. 685, July 13, 1934.

⁴⁴"Report of the National Executive Committee, 1933-34." The Labour Party, Report of the 34th Annual Conference (1934), p. 4. [Hereafter cited thus: Labour Party, Report 1934.]

is directed to developing the collective system in such a way as to make it a sure guarantee of Peace.⁴⁵

During the year 1935, the Labour party expressed concern about "the position in Europe resulting from German re-armament and the Nazi regime's open reversion to power politics and international anarchy."⁴⁶ In the House of Commons, George Lansbury solemnly promised that the Labour party "will support the Government by every means in its power so long as the Government stand quite firmly by their obligations under the Covenant of the League," and asked that the Government "should, without reservation, stand loyally by the League Covenant and all that it implies."⁴⁷

⁴⁵"War and Peace," ibid., Appendix II, p. 242. The sentiments of the former Foreign Secretary, Arthur Henderson, were quite similar: "Labour's policy is directed towards the abolition of war, through the League of Nations, and the strengthening of the Collective Peace System, by expanding and clarifying the undertaking not to resort to war; by non-aggression treaties backed by a definition of aggression and the ultimate revision of the Covenant." Ibid., p. 154. The Conference also unanimously carried a resolution expressing its deep satisfaction at the entry of the Soviet Union into the League. See ibid., pp. 151, 152.

⁴⁶"Report of the National Executive Committee, 1934-35." Labour Party, Report 1935, p. 3.

⁴⁷304 H. C. Deb., col. 2894, August 1, 1935.

IV

Early in 1935, since there was an apparent absolute unanimity about the theoretical basis of British foreign policy, the Government unmistakably launched a diplomatic counter-offensive vis-à-vis the nascent Germany. But the ultimate success of any diplomatic moves which Britain was to undertake depended very much upon the state of her armaments. Because in international politics, the possibility of armed conflict always had to be considered, "...military strength becomes a recognised standard of political values." The foreign policy of a country "is limited...by its military strength;" moreover, such a policy, "never can, or never should, be divorced from strategy."⁴⁸ However, up to this time, Britain not only preached, but practised disarmament. But this great example in the hope of securing universal disarmament failed to obtain the corresponding response from other countries.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Edward Hallett Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939, (London, 1958), pp. 109, 110.

⁴⁹As early as 1931, the Secretary of State for War in the Labour Government, Thomas Shaw, clearly perceived this failure: "I believed...that, provided somebody set an example, that example would be immediately followed. In my opinion the example was definitely shown, but the result did not come." 250 H. C. Deb., col. 295, March 24, 1931.

In the realities of 1935, Britain could not defer her own decision to rearm much longer. But a particular psychological block, created by the long-lasting disarmament policy and widespread pacifist feeling, made the very thought of rearmament altogether repugnant. With the nation so gripped, even men in responsible posts and in Government were divided in their opinions concerning the timing of rearmament.⁵⁰ In order to provide for her own defence, to offset German disregard for limitations of armaments, and to give some force to diplomatic declarations, Great Britain made a modest break with past policies and on March 1, 1935, issued the Statement Relating to Defence.⁵¹ This beginning

⁵⁰This psychological state during the early 1930's and the place of Stanley Baldwin in it is well treated in A. W. Baldwin, My Father: The True Story, (London, 1956), Chaps. XI-XV, pp. 170-247. See also Baldwin's own succinct survey, 317 H. C. Deb., cols. 1143-45, November 12, 1936.

⁵¹Cmd. 4827. German rearmament was particularly censured, and if it "continued at its present rate, unabated and uncontrolled, will aggravate the existing anxieties of the neighbours of Germany, and may subsequently produce a situation where peace will be in peril." Ibid., Paragraph 12, p. 7. This White Paper was debated in Parliament on March 11, 1935. See 299 H. C. Deb., cols. 35-162. Clement Attlee for the Labour Party moved a Motion of Censure which was defeated 424 to 79. See ibid., cols. 35 and 162.

of rearmament was to repair Britain's dangerously neglected armed strength, which had seriously reduced the effect of her foreign policy.

Coinciding with the inauguration of those steps, British statesmen undertook a series of diplomatic conversations in various capitals of Europe. During the second half of March 1935, Sir John Simon made a fruitless visit to Berlin.⁵² Much more important, however, was the visit to Moscow by Anthony Eden, since the Soviet Union was on every count the key power in Eastern Europe for the potential development of a coalition opposing German expansionist designs.

In Moscow he had conversations with Litvinov and eventually with Stalin, as well. All participants agreed that "it was more than necessary to pursue the endeavour to promote the building up of a system of collective security in Europe." They noted happily that there was "no conflict of interest between the two Governments on any of

⁵²Upon his return, he told the House that in Berlin he had expressed to the Germans the British "disappointment at the difficulties disclosed in the way of agreement." See 300 H. C. Deb., col. 986, April 9, 1935. Also see the terms of the communiqué issued at the close of Anglo-German discussions in Berlin, March 26, 1935. The Times, March 27, 1935, p. 14.

the main issues of international policy," a fact which provided "a firm foundation for the development of fruitful collaboration between them in the cause of peace."⁵³

During the conversations, Stalin maintained that "the only way to meet the present situation was by some scheme of pacts. Germany must be made to realize that if she attacked any other nation she would have Europe against her."⁵⁴

So far, only the initiation of a series of bilateral rapprochements was accomplished. A major attempt at cementing these rapprochements in Western Europe was made at Stresa, April 11-14, 1935, when the leaders of Britain, France and Italy "forgathered to contain the Germans, and Laval thought this our last chance."⁵⁵ The meeting at Stresa was designed to build a firm entente, if not an alliance against aggression, and "there had been

⁵³ Communiqué issued at the close of Anglo-Soviet discussions in Moscow, March 31, 1935. The Times, April 2, 1935, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Earl of Avon, The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon: Facing the Dictators, (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 173. [Hereafter cited thus: Facing the Dictators.] For Eden's detailed account of these meetings, see ibid., pp. 160-84.

⁵⁵ Vansittart, op. cit., p. 520.

nothing like this since the meetings of the Supreme Council in the days of Lloyd George. It was a last display of Allied solidarity."⁵⁶ The declarations made at the meeting suggested unanimity of views and a growing unity, which swiftly became known as the Stresa Front.⁵⁷ But Germany was, without a doubt, the galvanizing agent which dictated this unanimity:

The three Powers, the object of whose policy is the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations, find themselves in complete agreement in opposing, by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose.⁵⁸

The host at the Conference was quite pleased with its outcome. Mussolini, "without exaggerating its intrinsic importance," found the Stresa meeting "sufficiently decisive in that it established the solidarity of the three Western

⁵⁶A. J. P. Taylor, The Origins of the Second World War, (London, 1961), p. 85.

⁵⁷See P. A. Reynolds, British Foreign Policy in the Inter-War Years, (London, 1954), p. 102.

⁵⁸"Final Declaration of the Stresa Conference, April 14, 1935," Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 82.

Powers in the face of certain urgent problems."⁵⁹

For his part, the British Prime Minister, who went to Stresa "determined on a last effort to keep Italy by the side of Great Britain and France,"⁶⁰ told the House upon his return that the three participating States departed "as a combination of States pledged to keep together."⁶¹ Later, in a major debate on the Stresa Conference, the Prime Minister reiterated that the attained good understanding between France, Italy and Britain "we value as a guarantee of peace."⁶²

In the outcome, the Stresa Front never developed. Its accomplishments were born out of the necessity of the hour: condemnation of the German breach of the Treaty; a profession of concern for the fate of Austria; and reaffirmation of loyalty to Locarno. Nevertheless, the significance

⁵⁹"Extract from Speech by Signor Mussolini, May 25, 1935," ibid., I, 177. He was certain that with "such an effective, constant, and omnipresent solidarity, political action is possible on a large scale." Ibid.

⁶⁰Douglas Jerrold, Britain and Europe, 1900-1940, (London, 1941), p. 121.

⁶¹Ramsay MacDonald, 300 H. C. Deb., col. 1853, April 17, 1935.

⁶²Ramsay MacDonald, 301 H. C. Deb., col. 576, May 2, 1935.

of the Conference lay in the fact that "it contained the possibility of the revival of a common Anglo-Franco-Italian front, which might effectively bar the realisation of further German ambitions."⁶³

V

When these demonstrable steps of rapprochement of early 1935 developed into the more firm arrangements of the Stresa Front and Franco-Soviet Pact, respectively, they seemed to augur well for Europe. The recent actions and drawing together of the major European powers gave ample evidence that, despite their continuous solemn references to the League of Nations and collective security, in their own pursuit of practical security they were working to create a united front against Germany. They were in effect moving toward the reconstruction of the old, pre-war type of Alliances wherein they saw the surest pledge of containing Hitler and his threat of unlimited German expansion in Europe.

In this process, two important aspects accompanied the development. The danger of rampant Hitler as the driving force impelling this coalition tended to obscure

⁶³Albrecht-Carrié, A Diplomatic History, etc., p. 479.

completely any of the considerable ideological differences among the participants, and thus tended to suspend thought about ideology. Monarchical, parliamentary and conservative Britain; the Free-masonic, Radical-Socialist Third French Republic; dictatorial, Fascist and Catholic Italy; and even more awesome, the Bolshevik and atheistic Soviet Union; all were drawing together again -- as they had once before, some under different regimes -- into the same kind of Grand Alliance which fought against Germany in the First World War.

Britain, by her tradition and abiding interest, was the most ideologically aloof. She "felt no unalloyed sympathy with any of the continental powers. Government and Opposition thought alike on this, however much they may have differed on method and immediate policies."⁶⁴ Though he had the Soviet Union in mind when he spoke, Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Foreign Secretary, declared: "Any State sincerely desirous of maintaining the peace of Europe, whatever may be its government, will have our collaboration in that aim."⁶⁵ However, after 1935, the

⁶⁴Reynolds, op. cit., p. 103.

⁶⁵304 H. C. Deb., col. 522, July 11, 1935.

ideological element was to erupt into the open in Britain, and was to introduce a strong note of discord in the Parliament.

Secondly, there was another element of harmony on the diplomatic horizon of this developing anti-German coalition. There was at that time neither shadow nor shred on anyone's part of surreptitious imputation of sympathy for Hitler and Nazism. A later tendency in this direction, which caused considerable recrimination and bitterness, was eventually attributed to some governing circles in Britain because of their active sympathy for the policy of appeasement. Especially during the first half of 1935, there was full recognition by all of the only thing that mattered: the danger from Nazi Germany. The containment of that country was a task to which they devoted their energies. There was no evidence of the distrust, dissension, or recrimination which eventually tore this whole enterprise asunder, where the Abyssinian conflict as a turning point played a significant part.

If there was a tragic flaw in the Stresa Conference, it was in the fact that Abyssinia was not mentioned, perhaps because "no one wished to obstruct collaboration

against Germany."⁶⁶ Ultimately, all good will and the potential for constructing a new Triple Alliance against Germany floundered over Abyssinia. The Italian war against Abyssinia "finally destroyed the Three-Power coalition which, however vacillating and discordant, had yet remained dominant in Europe" since Armistice Day.⁶⁷

Even before the bouleversement over Abyssinia, Britain provided a major diplomatic jolt in June 1935 by concluding the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. This act simultaneously rendered prophetic yet voided the Prime Minister's words before the Parliament about the Stresa Front: "It would be a great calamity if there were any weakening or deterioration in the confidence which exists between France, Italy and ourselves, and we shall take all the care we humanly can that that shall not happen."⁶⁸

⁶⁶C. Grove Haines and Ross J. S. Hoffman, The Origins and Background of the Second World War, (New York, 1947), p. 379. Germany's rampage in Europe forced an ineluctable choice on the participants: to save Austria and order in Europe by checking Germany, or to check Mussolini in Abyssinia and thereby to undermine the whole anti-German front. See Vansittart's reflections on this, op. cit., pp. 519-22.

⁶⁷Jerrold, op. cit., p. 122.

⁶⁸Ramsay MacDonald, 301 H. C. Deb., col. 572, May 2, 1935.

VI

With Ramsay MacDonald's star setting by 1935, on June 7, there was a reconstruction of the British Cabinet. Stanley Baldwin was natural as his successor, taking over the reins of Government. Sir John Simon changed portfolio and was succeeded by Sir Samuel Hoare as Foreign Secretary. Anthony Eden became the Minister for League Affairs.⁶⁹ These Cabinet changes per se portended no calamities in the future unfolding of British policy. Yet from the middle of June onward, things suddenly started to go wrong. The fragile structure of the fledgling entente against Germany, begun with hope and proceeding with speed, started to founder.

In a protracted and important speech on May 21, Hitler offered to fix German naval strength at 35 per cent of that of Britain.⁷⁰ The British Government carefully considered the tempting German proposal and decided to accept it. Then following brief but intensive negotiation, the British Government concluded with Germany, a Naval

⁶⁹By coincidence, that same day there was some Cabinet change in France as well. Pierre Laval became the new Prime Minister, but kept the portfolio of foreign affairs.

⁷⁰See point eight of Hitler's speech in Baynes, ed., op. cit., II, 1242-43.

Agreement based on the proposed ratio.⁷¹

The First Lord of the Admiralty gave the Parliament no less than seven reasons which had compelled the Government not to miss this opportunity: inter alia, the Government considered the Agreement a good one in the interest of the favorable future relations between Britain and Germany; it held out a possibility of averting for all time the threat of naval rivalry between the two countries; the Government had managed to circumscribe the effects which might flow from Germany having unilaterally repudiated Part V of the Versailles Treaty; and finally, a serious error would have been committed by Britain if the Government either refused to accept the offer or hesitated unduly to do so.⁷²

⁷¹See "Note from the Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Herr von Ribbentrop, German Ambassador-at-Large, June 18, 1935," and "Note from Herr von Ribbentrop to Sir Samuel Hoare, June 18, 1935," in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 142-45.

⁷²Very closely based on Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell, 303 H. C. Deb., cols. 705-07, June 21, 1935. See also a similar justification by Sir Samuel Hoare, 304 H. C. Deb., cols. 511-13, July 11, 1935. This was Hoare's first major speech in the House as new Foreign Secretary.

Winston Churchill was one of the most severe critics of this Treaty. He was distrustful and dissatisfied, considered it unwise and made no secret of his feelings. See, e.g. 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1405, May 4, 1936.

Former First Lord of the Admiralty in the Labour admin-

All Europe was stunned by the news of the Agreement, and no one more so than the Stresa partners.⁷³ It was hard to imagine more unfortunate timing, coming so soon after the Stresa Conference. In concluding this private deal with Germany, Britain disregarded the spirit and intent of Stresa. This step was "hardly compatible with that respect for treaties which the Stresa powers had just proclaimed."⁷⁴ Moreover, the action in concluding the Naval Agreement signalled exclusive British condonation of Germany's violation of the Versailles obligations. The net effect of this action was that:

the common diplomatic front agreed on at Stresa had been broken. Equally, what was done was a departure

istration, Albert Alexander, suggested that when the Government thought it better to give up a treaty, it broke the pledge given at Stresa: "they promised to keep a united front and walked straight back and made an agreement with Germany." 310 H. C. Deb., col. 169, March 16, 1936.

⁷³"Paris and Rome were inevitably offended and indignant when it was known that the Agreement had been signed without any consultation with them." Laval was bitterly angry, particularly as the British had told him at Stresa that they would not accept a German claim for 35 per cent of the British fleet. Eden was quickly sent to Paris to explain the British stand to Laval. See Avon, op. cit., p. 258.

⁷⁴Taylor, op. cit., p. 87.

from the standpoint agreed on by France and Great Britain in February that German release from the restrictions of Versailles should only be conceded as part of a general settlement. France and Italy showed clear signs of dissatisfaction. England appeared in their eyes too readily to have swallowed a bait artfully dangled before her by the German dictator. If the primary purpose of Herr Hitler's offer had been to shake the solidarity of the 'Stresa Front,' it had certainly achieved its object.⁷⁵

But the whole controversy over the Agreement was soon overshadowed by a new storm center which had been gathering for some time. The Italo-Abyssinian dispute burst into the open, completely taking precedence by the end of June. The events centering thereon opened a door to developments which ultimately not only dissolved the Stresa alliance, "but destroyed also the League of Nations and, with it, the entire system of collective security."⁷⁶

The dispute put both Britain and France in a very delicate diplomatic dilemma. To side with Italy -- as both were inclined to do -- France would be enabled to

⁷⁵G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, A Short History of International Affairs, 1920-1939, 4th ed., (London, 1950), p. 402.

Vansittart saw more force in the charge that Britain broke a pledge given in February to France concerning Germany, but claimed "less force in the imputation that we shattered the glass front of Stresa;" and he concluded: "tactless rather than faithless we asked for trouble." Op. cit., p. 527.

⁷⁶Taylor, op. cit., p. 87.

keep the Italian friendship achieved in January, while Britain could thereby preserve the fragile Stresa Front as a counterpoise to Germany. Conversely, to side with the League of Nations on behalf of Abyssinia would alienate Italy. While there still was time, France and Britain sought to find some formula for settlement of the Abyssinian affair preferably outside the League and by direct negotiations with Italy.⁷⁷

There were but two clear-cut alternatives, each requiring some sacrifice, and neither one easy to adopt under the circumstances. One was Laval's policy, which France generally advocated, and which Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the British Foreign Office, totally shared: holding on to Italy for a united front

⁷⁷While still a contentious point, there is strong evidence that at their January meeting Laval had given Mussolini a free hand in Abyssinia, and had continued his tacit agreement to Italian preparations during 1935. See William C. Askew, "The Secret Agreement between France and Italy on Ethiopia, January 1935," in Journal of Modern History, XXV (March, 1953), pp. 47-48.

Britain sent Eden to Rome June 24-26 to make a private offer to Mussolini. For details of these conversations, see Avon, op. cit., pp. 247-63. On Eden's personal involvement in the development of the whole problem, see ibid., chs. 12-16, pp. 241-350.

against Germany.⁷⁸

The other alternative was to enter into a war against Mussolini. Though most unpalatable at the time, with the position of Britain as a great power, such a policy would have been intelligible, logical and consistent:

A clean renunciation of the League would have been an intelligible policy and might have been profitable. Equally intelligible would it have been to take the Covenant seriously and work out its implications, bring all the influence that the British name could command to induce other nations to combine with us into making it a real alliance for peace. Hesitating between these two courses was fatal.⁷⁹

⁷⁸Eden wrote that, to meet the coming Nazi challenge, Sir Robert was "determined to keep the rest of Europe in line against Germany, and would pay almost any price to do so." Facing the Dictators, p. 270. Sir Robert, "from the first to the last...was an unrepentant advocate of alliance with Italy." Taylor, op. cit., p. 92. In the outcome, "the real crux was that the Leaguers were anti-Italian" while he himself was anti-German. Vansittart, op. cit., p. 522.

⁷⁹McCallum, op. cit., p. 151.

War was "the only alternative to an Italian triumph, once compromise was ruled out." But in Britain, neither "the Cabinet nor the country were united on war, and France would not fight." Jerrold, op. cit., p. 129.

When Italian conquest of Abyssinia was no longer in doubt, to the constant harrassment by the Labour party, Anthony Eden put the whole case concisely to the House: "It is a situation which nothing but military action from without...can possibly reverse. Is there any country prepared to take such military action? Or is there any section of opinion in this country prepared to take such military action?" To this, John McGovern of the Independent Labour party tersely replied: "The Labour party." 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1200, June 18, 1936.

Neither of the clear-cut choices which were available was adopted. In the course of time, Britain suffered the consequences by getting the worst of both worlds. Ultimately, all efforts to liquidate the dispute by negotiation and by compromise failed, and on October 3, 1935, in an act of unprovoked aggression, Italian armed forces started their invasion of Abyssinian territory. Under Article 12 of the Covenant, the Council of the League found that Italy had resorted to war and it immediately invoked Article 16 for the application of economic sanctions against the aggressor.⁸⁰ Thereupon the British "suddenly all became knights without armour, eager to kill Musso[lini] with their mouths."⁸¹

⁸⁰See "Report of the Council Committee [Committee of Six], October 7, 1935," in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, II, 182; and "Extracts from Minutes of the League Council, October 7, 1935," ibid., II, 183-84.

Neither the dispute nor the eventual Italian aggression and related issues form a part of this monograph. It was necessary to establish the event as one of the major starting points. The history of the dispute is well covered in Survey Int. Affairs, 1935, vol. II, with a detailed "Chronology of the Italo-Abyssinian Conflict" in Appendix, pp. 527-36. An excellent documentary collection on the conflict is similarly well assembled in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, vol. II.

⁸¹Vansittart, op. cit., p. 523.

The overwhelming mass of Britons, associated with or influenced by the League of Nations Societies, raised a hue and cry against the aggressor. Labour Party adherents and the broad spectrum of philosophical and political Radicalism among the British people came out excitedly in favour of sanctions, but short of war, to stop the aggression. Now the contradictory latency of the "highly pacific international ideals" of English liberalism and "its highly provocative enthusiasm for the cause of righteousness,"⁸² burst forth with passionate force.

In forming its policy, the British Government had to contend with this sentiment. The process afforded opportunity for the successive utterance of a variety of intellectual misconceptions and contradictions on the subject of foreign policy and foreign relations. The chapters that follow will examine some of the dominant ambiguities as they emerged in the House of Commons' debates in the period between the German reoccupation of the Rhineland and the Munich Conference.

⁸²H. N. Fieldhouse, "The British Labour Party and British Foreign Policy," in Queen's Quarterly, XLVI (Summer, 1939), p. 202.

CHAPTER II

THE ONSET OF AMBIGUITIES

I

The spread of post-war pacifism and the extent of addiction in Britain to the League of Nations was dramatically made known on June 27, 1935, when the result of the National Declaration of the League of Nations and Armaments was published. This controversial Declaration, better known as the Peace Ballot, was "an attempt to vocalise public opinion on the scale of a General Election, but on a single issue."¹ This Ballot was the first "Referendum on a national scale" ever experienced in Britain, and it received well over 11,500,000 replies.² Altogether, the Ballot was unique, and at a time when peace was being threatened, its result was a reinforcement of all pacifist influences, which never before had been articulated in such a fashion. It was "an encouragement to the complacent

¹Dame Adelaide Livingstone, et al., The Peace Ballot: The Official History, (London, 1935), p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 33. The grand total of votes cast was 11,627,765. See Labour Party, Report 1935, p. 8.

in their belief that no special effort was necessary to strengthen British defences."³

The first question on the Ballot read: "Should Great Britain remain a member of the League of Nations?" and an overwhelming 97 per cent of those who voted answered in the affirmative.⁴ Thus, in a rare expression of virtual unanimity, the British public endorsed membership in the League, which predicated support of a foreign policy firmly based upon association with the League, and embodied a strong endorsement of collective security. The policy of national isolation, traditionally dear to the British nation, was thereby implicitly rejected.⁵

³Viscount Templewood (Sir Samuel Hoare), Nine Troubled Years, (London, 1954), p. 128.

⁴Based on still incomplete returns, there were 10,980,534 total answers, 337,964 of which were in the negative. See the Table in Livingstone et al., op. cit., p. 38.

⁵For a suggestion that this result of the Ballot was a resounding repudiation of British isolationists, notably of Lord Beaverbrook, and in general, of opinion recommending withdrawal from the League, see Harold Nicolson, "British Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," Public Opinion Quarterly, I (January, 1937), p. 57.

In a differing opinion of the Ballot, Jerrold suggested: "Unfortunately for the peace of the world, the faint voice of the first White Paper on Rearmament had been drowned by the strident noise of the Peace Ballot, which, in the summer of 1935 disclosed, or appeared to disclose, an immense majority in Great Britain in favour of the League

When the Ballot had been proposed initially, of the three major British political parties, the Conservative party had refrained from taking an official position, but a large number of its Members of Parliament did support the Ballot.⁶ The Labour and the Liberal parties had given their official approval immediately. The Labour party praised the Ballot as a significant "experiment in democratic control of foreign policy." This party saw the whole event as a great plebiscite and interpreted the result as an "overwhelming popular mandate to Labour's Foreign Policy."⁷

policy just when the League prestige in Europe was at its lowest." Op. cit., p. 127.

Even two years later, when the climate of opinion in the House was considerably changed, Philip Noel-Baker claimed that the Ballot proved an overwhelming demand from the people that "the system of collective security through the League, should be upheld." 326 H. C. Deb., col. 1908, July 19, 1937.

⁶ Livingstone, et al., op. cit., pp. 12-13; for a partial but impressive list of some influential people who endorsed the project wholeheartedly, see ibid., p. 13.

Herbert Morrison stated that the Government and "the Conservative Central Office were pouring cold water on, and actively discouraging and, indeed, opposing the Peace Ballot." 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2074, March 10, 1936. Sir Austen Chamberlain took exception to the Ballot, not as a member of the party, but as an executive member of the League of Nations Union. See ibid., col. 2075. Another time, Sir Austen contended that the Ballot had very little meaning. See 310 H. C. Deb., col. 2501, April 6, 1936.

⁷ Labour Party, Report 1935, p. 8.

Lord Cecil declared with elation that the result primarily assured the Government of the overwhelming approval of the people of the United Kingdom in support of the collective system.⁸ For the Leader of the Liberal Opposition the meaning of the Ballot was clear: the people in the United Kingdom "were prepared to support collective action up to the point of using armaments if that was necessary."⁹

Some two months after tabulation of the Ballot results, two notable, but separate, declarations were issued in support of the League in Britain. On September 3 and 4, 1935, at the initiative of the Parliamentary Labour Party, joint meetings were held of the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, the National Executive of the Labour Party and the Executive Committee of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Thereupon British Labour leaders sent a telegram to their French brothers, expressing very strong sentiment about the League:

The British and French Labour Movements are united in the demand that their respective Governments at the

⁸See "Conclusion" in Livingstone, et al., op. cit., p. 60.

⁹Sir Archibald Sinclair, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 244, March 2, 1937.

forthcoming meeting of the Council and Assembly of the League of Nations shall formally and without reserve uphold all the duties and obligations implicit in the Covenant of the League of Nations with a view to safeguarding the Peace of the World.¹⁰

The other declaration expressing support of and adherence to the League came from the Government, as Sir Samuel Hoare delivered his famous speech in Geneva on September 11, 1935. As if complying with the demand of the Labour movement which was contained in the Margate telegram, and expressing the prevalent feeling in Britain, Sir Samuel addressed a different forum -- the General Assembly of the League. He said, inter alia:

I will begin by reaffirming the support of the League by the Government that I represent and the interest of the British people in collective security.

.
It is because, as practical people, they believe that collective security, founded on international agreement, is the most effective safeguard of peace that they would be gravely disturbed if the new instrument that has been forged were blunted or destroyed.

.
The attitude of His Majesty's Government has always been one of unswerving fidelity to the League and all that it stands for. . . .

.
In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations,

¹⁰ Concurrently and independently, a mass meeting was held in Paris under the auspices of the French Socialist Party and the French General Confederation of Trade Unions. Text of the telegram in Labour Party, Report 1935, p. 9.

the League stands, and my country stands with it, for the collective maintenance of the Covenant in its entirety, and particularly for steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression.¹¹

In an allusion -- he must have had in mind the recently concluded Peace Ballot -- he added that the attitude of the British nation "in the last few weeks has clearly demonstrated the fact that this [collective maintenance of the Covenant] is no variable and unreliable sentiment, but a principle of international conduct to which they and their Government hold with firm, enduring, and universal persistence."¹²

II

With the Ballot showing its high water mark, the spirit for peace, collective security, and unflinching support of the League dominated all parts of the United Kingdom during the summer of 1935. This seeming domestic serenity was threatened internationally by the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. At this moment, Baldwin was the new

¹¹"Speech by the Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, September 11, 1935" at the Sixteenth Assembly of the League of Nations (Extracts) in Doc. Int. Affairs, 1935, I, 235, 236, 242.

¹²Ibid., p. 242.

Prime Minister directing a Parliament whose constitutional term would soon expire. Suitably impressed by the Ballot, and with almost a sixth sense for public opinion, Baldwin and his colleagues decided to seek renewal of the mandate.¹³

On October 25 Parliament was dissolved, and a general election was called for Thursday, November 14. One of the features of the election campaign was the publication by the Government, on October 28, of its Election Manifesto, in which the Government promised solemnly:

The League of Nations will remain as heretofore the keystone of British foreign policy. The prevention of war and the establishment of [settled] peace in the world must always be the most vital interest of the British people, and the League is the instrument which has been framed and to which we look for the attainment of these objects. We shall, therefore, continue to do all in our power to uphold the Covenant and to maintain and increase the efficiency of the League.¹⁴

¹³The Government had to respond to the sentiments expressed through the Ballot by adjusting its policy. See Charles Loch Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940, (London, 1955), p. 542. See also, Reynolds, op. cit., p.112. Sir Samuel Hoare, too, "was not to all appearance indifferent to the replies elicited by that tendentious questionnaire." Algernon Cecil, Facing the Facts in Foreign Policy, (London, 1941), p.79.

¹⁴Cited in Winston S. Churchill, Arms and the Covenant: Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, (London, 1938), p. 280; also cited by Neville Chamberlain, 334 H. C. Deb., col. 56, April 4, 1938, and by Philip Noel-Baker, 328 H. C. Deb., col. 285, October 28, 1937.

Responding favourably to this League of Nations chord,¹⁵ the electorate returned the Government with a better than two to one majority, as shown in Table I. The

TABLE I

Distribution of Votes in the General Election, November 1935, and the Distribution of Seats in the House of Commons as a result of this Election.¹⁶

P A R T Y AFFILIATION	SEATS	VOTES	% of TOTAL VOTE
I. National Government:			
Conservative	387		
National Liberal	34		breakdown
National Labour	8		
Others	3		not available
Total	432 ^{a)}	11,810,158	53.7
II. Opposition:			
Labour Party	154	8,325,491	37.9
Liberal	20 ^{b)}	1,422,116	6.4
Ind. Labour	4	139,577	0.7
Communist	1	27,117	0.1
Others	4	272,595	1.2
Total	183 ^{c)}	10,186,896 ^{c)}	46.3 ^{c)}
GRAND TOTAL	615	21,997,054	100.0

¹⁵Bitter about the result, Arthur Greenwood chided the Government for having sought power in this election by false pretences, and that it "capitalised for electoral purposes the result of the Peace Ballot." 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1975, March 10, 1936.

¹⁶Ad a) This breakdown of the Government side, from

newly-elected House of Commons was dominated by the Unionists, i.e. the Conservatives and their associates. The numerical preponderance of Government supporters in the House made an anomaly of electoral representation, which was reflected in the future deliberations of the House.¹⁷ The Government had an overwhelming majority and never was in danger of being brought down by a vote of confidence. In capturing the mandate from the electorate, and 70.3% of seats in the House, the Unionists received only a majority of 7.4% of all votes cast: in effect a slim

Ivor Jennings, Parliament, (Cambridge, 1948), p. 25.

Ad b) Four of these were Independent Liberals, according to Jennings, loc. cit.

Ad c) With the exception of these three figures, and those ad a) and b), all others are drawn from David Butler and Jennie Freeman, British Political Facts, 1900-1960, (London, 1963), p. 124.

¹⁷ Analysis of Table I shows:

The Government had an absolute majority of 249 seats, or 66 more than a 2:1 ratio. The difference between the vote for the Government parties and the Labour party alone was a considerable 3,484,667; but the difference in total votes between the Government and all Opposition parties was only 1,623,262 or not very great, and therefore an important fact.

The Labour party, winning 154 seats, captured approximately 25% of the House, while it polled 37.9% of the popular vote. The total votes polled by the remaining small parties sitting in Opposition was 1,861,405, or 8.4% of all votes cast. The combined Opposition therefore polled 46.3% of the total popular vote, but captured only 29.7% of seats in the House.

country-wide popularity.¹⁸

That posed an embarrassing dilemma for the Government to face, because it was true that, "...however unthinking many electors may be, their votes do seem on balance to represent a general judgement between the merits of the national parties."¹⁹ The electors collectively had given preference to the Unionists. With the huge majority of seats in the House, the Government was able to defeat any Opposition challenge of its policies, impressively. On the other hand, the Government must have been fully aware of this anomaly and have borne it heavily when charting the

¹⁸The leader of the Opposition was to remark correctly, if ruefully, that the Government in fact was returned with a much bigger majority than it was entitled to "on their strength in the country." Clement Attlee, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 2455, April 6, 1936.

Other speakers from the Labour party regretted this anomaly, but warned the Government that both sides of the House had equal claim to represent one section of the nation. See Dr. Haden Guest, 328 H. C. Deb., col. 321, October 28, 1937. Some reminded the Government: "...it should not be forgotten that, however powerful the Government's majority in the House is at the moment, the Opposition represents nearly 10,000,000 votes." Frederick Bellenger, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 101, March 14, 1938. Arthur Greenwood echoed this statement in asserting that his side in the House represented "a very substantial portion of the nation." 350 H. C. Deb., col. 2428, August 2, 1939.

¹⁹David E. Butler, The Electoral System in Britain Since 1918, (Oxford, 1963), p. 205.

course of its policies. Therein lay an element of caution for the Government, especially when the European situation demanded an agonizing re-appraisal of the British position. Rearmament and policy based upon the League were but two areas where the Government had to tread warily: it saw the logical necessity of introducing the former and abandoning the latter. Not until the outbreak of war in September, 1939, was there an abrupt end to all discussion and controversy over such issues.

In 1936 however, the numerical preponderance of Government seats was only one of several characteristics of the new Parliament, but "it is not enough to tabulate party strengths to understand the feeling and temper of a House."²⁰ Among certain overall traits the Members had in common, a pronounced factor was their late middle-age, which averaged about fifty years per Member. Statistically, the Conservatives were in their late forties; the rest were on the other side of fifty.²¹ More than 50% of the

²⁰McCallum, op. cit., p. 39.

²¹With the information available for 584 of the total 615 Members, the Conservatives averaged 49.7; others averaged about 54 years of age. See Jennings, op. cit., pp. 47 and 47 n.1. Of these 584, 271 Members were between the ages of 21 and 39; of the remaining 313 who were beyond the age of forty, 26 were over sixty. See ibid., p. 49, Table IX.

whole House was above the age of forty, and therefore all of those had been of military age during the First World War.²²

In their various speeches, many Members made personal references indicating their respective ages. One of the oldest Members in the House was Brigadier-General Sir Henry Croft.²³ One Liberal Member indicated his seniority when he told how long ago he had sat in the House with Joseph Chamberlain.²⁴ Others, like the Earl of Winterton, had served in the House for ten years before the outbreak of the War.²⁵ Despite the partisan tone, Sir Thomas Moore easily could have been speaking for the whole House when he said: "As we are middle-aged we have seen

²²One annoyed Member drew attention to the number of Members who continued to carry their naval and military titles after entering the Parliament. See Campbell Stephen, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 185, March 16, 1936. There were, on the average, one hundred Members who held a rank of some kind, the majority ranging from Major to Major-General and Admiral of the Fleet. See, e.g. the list of Members, 341 H. C. Deb., pp. vii-xvi, passim., November, 1938.

²³See 333 H. C. Deb., col. 73, March 14, 1938.

²⁴George Lambert, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 1433, March 24, 1938.

²⁵See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1910, March 9, 1936.

what war means, and as we are Conservatives we want to try to conserve such peace as we have gained."²⁶

III

The Parliament that assembled after the General Elections of November, 1935 was of a generation which had experienced the calamity of war and in one form or another had been touched by its scourge. In the spring of 1936, this generation lived in an almost deathly fear at the thought of another war, a fear which would largely account for their dominant pacifist outlook.²⁷

Although "not simply the sum of its separate members,"²⁸ the House collectively held some unique characteristics because of this fear. It expressed a mentality peculiarly its own. Concerning Britain's task

²⁶339 H. C. Deb., col. 258, October 4, 1938.

²⁷Being one of the generation whose early years saw the Great War and therefore would have to fight a new war, John Dodd said that they did not want to fight and did not want a war. See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1884, March 9, 1936. The Marquess of Titchfield was also one of those in the House who were still of military age and who could well remember the year 1914. They were determined that what happened that year would never occur again. See 312 H. C. Deb., col. 1244, May 20, 1936.

²⁸Wilfred Harrison, The Government of Britain, 3rd ed., (London, 1955), p. 50.

in international affairs, for example, the Members looked upon developments from a narrow point of view because "in the first place...[they had] the experience of the war period."²⁹ Changes in the dynamic world of the late 1930's were too fast for their thinking processes. Though very much disliking the new political ideas in Europe, the Members showed a certain rigidity of outlook. Because of their particular experience, background and education, or any other combination of reasons, they were "apt to express the ideas of [their] own generation."³⁰ One of the Members recognized this condition:

As the result of the effort to work a post-war system with pre-war mentalities, we find ourselves in a position where Fascism...is in the ascendancy. We have to-day all the paraphernalia of 1914 -- only more so. We have all the ingredients for such an orgy for the war god that the War of 1914-1918 will seem but an hors d'oeuvre. Every year Europe is being sucked faster and faster into this maelstrom of destruction.³¹

This "pre-war mentality" was applicable not only to the situation of 1936. The British seemed always to

²⁹William Mabane, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1329, March 25, 1936.

³⁰Jennings, op. cit., p. 47.

³¹Richard Pilkington, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 122, February 24, 1936.

base their campaigns on the experience of a previous one, as one Member pointed out to the House: "In the South African War we commenced very much in the same way as we had carried on in the Sudan. In the last War we started as though we were fighting the South Africans."³² This air of unreality, although by no means universal, was not limited to any one subject or to any one party, yet it permeated all debates.³³ Despite impassioned pleas from Sir Austen Chamberlain to awaken to realities, many Members, he warned, lived in a fool's paradise.³⁴

In the spring of 1936, the thoughts of the Members were very much absorbed by the possibility of war, and their opinions on the subject expressed their apprehension.³⁵ Winston Churchill recognized the deep fear in the country and rhetorically asked: "How are we going to stop this war

³²Major Peter Shaw, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2393, March 12, 1936.

³³The chapters which follow will attempt some demonstration of this air of unreality which was so often characteristic of Parliamentary debates on foreign policy in this period.

³⁴See 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1486, March 26, 1936.

³⁵Earl Winterton anticipated actual fighting in the West as a possibility within a month of the Rhineland coup. See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1910, March 9, 1936.

which seems to be moving towards us in so many ways?"³⁶

This fear was common among Labourites like William Mainwaring, who also saw that the danger of war was "very real and present," adding that "everyone is fearful of what tomorrow might bring."³⁷

A strong pacifist line emanated particularly from the Opposition, mostly in the name of the people who "have expressed their opinion perfectly clearly in their hatred of war."³⁸ The Government should not expect the electorate to rally behind them in the event of war, warned some, because the Government would "get a rude shock."³⁹ It was common knowledge, the Opposition maintained, that "the great majority of people have had enough of war" and wanted peace.⁴⁰ The Opposition was neither anxious to have a war, nor desirous to convey the impression that its Members were

³⁶310 H. C. Deb., col. 1528, March 26, 1936.

³⁷310 H. C. Deb., col. 1314, March 25, 1936.

³⁸Clement Attlee, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1537, March 26, 1936. This was a reference to the Peace Ballot.

³⁹John Potts, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 333, March 17, 1936.

⁴⁰Major James Milner, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2459, March 12, 1936.

"resigned to the certain possibility of war in Europe."⁴¹

To whatever extent the Members disliked war, they could not conceal that an atmosphere of war was very much present in the minds of all or most of the Members in the House.⁴² Interpreting the recent speeches of nearly every Minister, Clement Attlee suggested that in three or four years there would be a "deluge -- another war."⁴³ The Members were sensitive to any talk of war and stressed pacifism -- their own and that of the people they represented:

We here are talking ourselves into the mood for war.... In the last six or seven years there has been a tremendous deterioration in the attitude of this House towards all these questions. A few years ago war was unthinkable; then it began to be something of a dim possibility but most unlikely; now we are getting to the stage of regarding it as almost a certainty. We have talked and worked ourselves up into the mood for it. The people of this country are as pacific as they were 7, 8, 9 or 10 [sic] years ago.⁴⁴

This last sentiment was echoed from all sides of

⁴¹David Grenfell, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1348, March 25, 1936.

⁴²See e.g. Oliver Simmonds, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 578-86, March 17, 1936, passim.

⁴³312 H. C. Deb., col. 1426, May 21, 1936.

⁴⁴James Maxton, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1489, March 26, 1936.

the House. According to Anthony Eden, the one aim of the British public was peace.⁴⁵ Hugh Dalton agreed with Eden that there was in Britain widespread passion for peace.⁴⁶ Others had no doubt about the prevalent pacifist feeling in the country,⁴⁷ which was that of nine-tenths of Britain.⁴⁸ The Secretary of State for the Colonies agreed that there were no people more "desirous of peace, no people of whom it can be claimed that they want peace and will make sacrifices for it, than the working classes" of Britain.⁴⁹ Because of these feelings it was no surprise to find "candidates in all the elections since the War [having] sought the authority of their constituents to work and fight for peace."⁵⁰ Much of their success in being elected after such pledges was largely because the

⁴⁵See ibid., col. 1448.

⁴⁶See ibid., col. 1449.

⁴⁷See Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert Spender-Clay, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2369, March 12, 1936.

⁴⁸See William Astor, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1493, March 26, 1936.

⁴⁹See James Thomas, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1929, March 9, 1936.

⁵⁰Ernest Hicks, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2019, March 10, 1936.

nation at this time was "more peace-minded than it ever was before."⁵¹

IV

Because of the nature and variety of its composition, the House of Commons reflected both the genuine and apparent differences of opinion coming from all sides of the House. For those same reasons which made the House "the great forum of political discussion"⁵² and the embodiment of British views, a broad area of national consensus frequently was produced.

At the end of 1935, following the result of the Peace Ballot and the verdict of the General Election of November, the country appeared almost unanimous in supporting the spirit of League of Nations and the idea of collective security as the best means of preserving peace. The Prime Minister, no less than the leaders of the Opposition parties, along with everyone else, ardently wished for peace and placed his hopes in collective security.

⁵¹David Grenfell, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1353, March 25, 1936.

⁵²Jennings, op. cit., p. 382.

The newly-elected 37th Parliament began its first session on Tuesday, December 3, 1935. Sir Samuel Hoare continued as the Foreign Secretary. The course of the war in Abyssinia cast a lengthening shadow upon the world and soon involved the House of Commons deeply in its ramifications.

The collective action in the form of economic sanctions, which had been decreed by the League of Nations to curb the aggressors, fell short of its mark. A last desperate move was made by Pierre Laval and Sir Samuel Hoare to reinstate the Stresa Front by placating Mussolini through a compromise arrangement on Abyssinia. After initial approval by the Cabinet, the ill-fated Hoare-Laval plan to end the conflict raised a storm of indignation in all quarters in Britain. The Government extricated itself from this political predicament by sacrificing the Foreign Secretary. Amid the din of disapproval for his honest attempt, Sir Samuel resigned.⁵³ On December 23, Anthony Eden became the new Foreign Secretary.

Both in the country and in Parliament the uproar over the Hoare-Laval plan was only a violent symptom of

⁵³For the circumstances of his resignation see "The Storm" in Templewood, op. cit., pp. 183-92.

deep-seated disease. The real test of collective security and the League came with its application in the Italo-Abyssinian war. In the case of Britain, this crucial test revealed considerable ambiguities in the attitudes of the people and the Members of Parliament. On this occasion, the presence of scruples and an abundance of humanitarian zeal, mixed with some ideological preferences, were whipped into a frenzy of "highly explosive but....contradictory emotions."⁵⁴

The war in Abyssinia was not a threat to purely British interests, but the exclusiveness of diverse attitudes now showed fully in Britain, because "it was not the imperialists who wanted to fight for Abyssinia, but the left-wing pacifists."⁵⁵ The anomaly of the situation also demonstrated that these pacifists took far too literally the abstract ideas of collective security through the League. Occasioned by the Abyssinian war, emotions erupted in the House, and revealed widely different suppositions about the League and collective action. The crisis exposed that the apparent unanimity about the

⁵⁴Fieldhouse, op. cit., p. 198.

⁵⁵Nicolson, op. cit., p. 61.

theoretical basis of British foreign policy in fact concealed this ambiguity and intellectual contradictions in a score of elements, virtually affecting the formulation and conduct of that policy.

While the ambiguity in some elements was most pronounced within one or two specific political parties in the House of Commons, whose spokesmen tirelessly harangued those of different persuasion, broadly speaking, all of these elements were to be found in varying degrees among adherents of all parties. Some extreme views however, especially those of a doctrinal nature, were more prevalent within particular groups.

Nowhere was the ambiguity on the myriad of conflicting opinions shown better than in the case of collective security. Controversy over this issue raged in the House for years, mostly ignoring the fact that the principle of collective security also implied the principle of collective action. The only experiment in collective security under League auspices was employed against Italy through the collective application of united economic sanctions, and quickly brought into focus the many difficulties and dangers which were inherent in the concept. Collective coercion

against the transgressor was sine qua non for the effective application of collective security. During the experiment against Italy it became amply evident that the conglomerate peoples of European states were reluctant to make the required sacrifices to coerce Italy so that Abyssinia might be spared.⁵⁶ Britain learned a particularly painful lesson by this turn of events. Neville Chamberlain said as much in referring to the problem of "obtaining collective action by States of unequal size, of different views, of different degrees of armaments and, above all, running very different risks."⁵⁷

The adherents of the Labour party vociferously insisted that collective security should be carried through by Britain alone, if necessary. Not only did its spokesmen oppose the lifting of sanctions when their failure was evident, but they strongly urged a further increase by insisting on the introduction of oil sanctions. They

⁵⁶See Leopold Amery, reproaching the League enthusiasts in the House of Commons, 315 H. C. Deb., col. 133, July 20, 1936. For similar thought also see Captain Edward Cobb, 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2273, February 25, 1937.

⁵⁷He expected this experience to "indeed prove useful in educating public opinion," while he cryptically suggested "keeping under review the whole structure and condition of the League of Nations as it stands today." 310 H. C. Deb., col. 2555, April 6, 1936.

admitted that Britain, in that case, "had to take the risk that Mussolini would take retaliatory measures." But had the oil sanctions been imposed from the very beginning, their argument ran, no one thought "it was ever likely that Mussolini would have taken the mad course" of attacking Britain.⁵⁸

The stand of the Liberal party in Opposition was no less impelling. Their leader pleaded for a supreme effort at the eleventh hour in defence of the League and of the new world order represented by it. In this effort to save the League, the duty of the British Government was to:

declare unequivocally that they will insist that sanctions should be maintained against Italy and intensified until the Italian Government will agree to terms imposed by the League, and such terms should clearly show that the rule of law is reality and that aggression is a crime which in the modern world will not be allowed to pay.⁵⁹

Government supporters expressed quite different opinions. Collective security did not exist for them, in the light of the Abyssinian experience. They recognized

⁵⁸Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, 312 H. C. Deb., cols. 1316-17, May 20, 1936.

⁵⁹Sir Archibald Sinclair, 311 H. C. Deb., cols. 1755-56, May 6, 1936.

that the nations of the world were unprepared to "risk a war and their own lives, in support of some principle which does not really directly touch them. Until we have faced that issue, any talk about collective security is very largely 'bunkum'."⁶⁰ From the Government benches, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, insisting that collective security was a collective matter, declared that Britain must not burden herself in isolation with collective security, and advised the House against taking dangerous risks.⁶¹ He thought that the League "had failed to stop the war, or to protect the victim, and had thereby demonstrated the failure of collective security" as then understood.⁶²

V

As the controversy continued, additional elements were introduced or others emphasized. A strong ideological

⁶⁰Henry Raikes, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 116, April 21, 1936.

⁶¹See Neville Chamberlain, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 2556, April 6, 1936. He also said that before Britain took risks, she "...must be prepared for the consequences and we must see that our weapons are weapons that will shoot if they are required to do so." Ibid.

⁶²Diary, April 27, 1936, cited in Keith Feiling, Life of Neville Chamberlain, (London, 1947), p. 295.

tint emerged, in which imputations of ideological sympathies and/or antipathies were made. For example, both in their approach to foreign affairs, and in their articulation of the guidelines of foreign policy which they urged the Government to adopt, the members of the Opposition were inspired by their "preference in the shades of coloured shirts."⁶³

The Socialists in both of the Labour parties, though at odds with each other, seldom missed a chance to express their preference for regimes and politicians of whose political colour they approved. Herbert Morrison, for example, explained some of the reasons why his fellow Socialists had their quarrels with the Fascist Governments. He asked the House to understand his own and his friends' feelings. They could not forget that their Socialist comrades in Germany and Italy "have had their liberty destroyed, their property taken, their lives destroyed." And above all, they could not forget "the tortures that these people [were] put through." They simply could not forget Fascism, which had treated their political friends

⁶³Fieldhouse, op. cit., p. 203.

cruelly.⁶⁴

A deeply ideological Socialist bent was manifest in the opinions advocated from the thin ranks of the Independent Labour Party. Speakers from that party, like John McGovern, were opposed to almost everyone, "to the Government Front Bench, Liberal, so-called Labour, and Conservative."⁶⁵ The Independent Labour party was particularly articulate on ideological grounds in its attitude toward the League of Nations. Calling it "a sham and a delusion," and being himself "one of those simple, fundamental Socialists who does not believe in any League of Nations," fiery John McGovern stated that the League was "concocted by the wily men in the capitalist world." He described it as "this hoodlum assembly which has got the Labour party into its toils, for the purpose of trying to

⁶⁴332 H. C. Deb., cols. 307, 308, February 22, 1938.

⁶⁵See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 165, February 24, 1936. On many occasions McGovern denounced the Labour party, which he claimed was bankrupt of Labour class leadership and did not know where it stood. Showing his contempt, he felt that the leader of that party was entirely incapable of working-class thought. See 309 H. C. Deb., cols. 1893 and 1898, March 9, 1936. McGovern also stated that the Labour party was "torn from top to bottom by conflicting points of view," and could not put forward the Socialistic point of view. 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2256, February 25, 1937.

make the working class believe that it has the power to prevent war."⁶⁶

Both the Labour and Liberal parties reached a peak in ideological display on the occasion of Eden's resignation and of the Government's decision to hold direct negotiations with Italy forthwith. Prior to resigning, Eden had occupied "a unique position in British politics, for although he was a member of a Government of the Right, he was acclaimed by the parties on the Left."⁶⁷ As the reason for his break with the Cabinet, Eden gave his strong disagreement with Chamberlain's contemplated opening of official negotiations with the Italian Government in Rome.⁶⁸

⁶⁶309 H. C. Deb., col. 166, February 24, 1936, and ibid., cols. 1891, 1892, 1890, March 9, 1936.

⁶⁷Michael Foot, Armistice, 1918-39, (London, 1940), p. 190; Eden's political future "was assured in his own camp; he stood well with the Labour Party." Vansittart, op. cit., p. 530.

⁶⁸See Eden 332 H. C. Deb., cols. 45, 46, February 21, 1938. For Eden's side of the divergent opinion on this occasion, see his Facing the Dictators, pp. 646-65. For Neville Chamberlain's side, see his Diary, February 19-27, 1938 in Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain, (London, 1961), pp. 211-17. See also Anthony Eden, "The Need to Stand Firm," Speech in Leamington, February 25, 1938, Foreign Affairs, (London, 1939), pp. 266-72.

The Cabinet crisis was "a severe blow to Chamberlain's administration."⁶⁹ But for the Opposition, through the medium of some marvellous parliamentary chemistry, Eden was transformed overnight from a near-villain into a near-hero. No opportunity to praise him was lost. Attlee was the first to express sympathy with Eden, whose "efforts were interfered with by what seemed to be extremely amateur methods" on the part of the Prime Minister.⁷⁰

Sir Archibald Sinclair noted that Eden was "regarded by men and women of all schools of thought in this country as the champion of democracy, law and peace against the dangers by which they are threatened."⁷¹ The Opposition withdrew some of the criticism which it had levelled against Eden while he was in office, describing him now as "one of those younger men of the Conservative party who had ideals, who had visions, who had aims, which

⁶⁹ Lord Halifax, Fullness of Days, (New York, 1957), p. 195. Winston Churchill considered the whole episode of resignation as "the complete triumph" of Mussolini. 332 H. C. Deb., col. 242, February 22, 1938.

⁷⁰ 332 H. C. Deb., col. 65, February 21, 1938. Both Eden and Viscount Cranborne, who also resigned, were praised for having taken a courageous stand based on principle. See ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., col. 73.

commanded sympathy outside the strict political circles within which he moved."⁷² On this occasion and on the immediate issue over which he resigned, Eden had "stood for a position which we believe to be indispensable to the making and keeping of peace."⁷³

The most deplorable, wider aspect of Eden's resignation according to the Opposition was that he was "young and progressive and a passionate supporter of the collective system of the League of Nations."⁷⁴ Looking at the whole Cabinet dispute, one Labour Member asserted that the people in Britain and the ordinary workers would regard it "as the final betrayal" of the League by the Government.⁷⁵ Eden's departure was altogether the best signal that the League's policy was being abandoned, since it meant "the jettisoning of the policy with which he has been identified."⁷⁶

⁷²Herbert Morrison, 332 H. C. Deb., col. 300, February 22, 1938.

⁷³David Grenfell, 332 H. C. Deb., col. 144, February 21, 1938. Lieutenant-Commander Reginald Fletcher observed that Eden might have been "a little embarrassed...by the warmth of his reception from the Opposition." Ibid., col. 126.

⁷⁴Geoffrey Mander, ibid., col. 118.

⁷⁵James Griffiths, ibid., col. 110.

⁷⁶Major John Hillis, ibid., col. 114.

The Opposition, the Labour party in particular, because of ideological animus, was in the habit of accusing the Government of having sympathies for fascism and for fascist dictators. Colonel Josiah Wedgwood thought that "the Conservative party had taken to recruiting its junior ranks entirely from Fascists or Fossils."⁷⁷ Consequently, during 1937 most of the debates on foreign affairs were taken up with the Spanish Civil War and all its ramifications. A torrent of critical abuse poured from Labour benches against the Government's policy of Non-Intervention in that conflict, and was punctuated with vitriolic outbursts, on ideological grounds, against Government supporters. Attacks were concentrated in the main against Italy and Mussolini, whose names by now were used interchangeably by the Opposition. Curiously enough, relatively little attention was paid to Germany per se, although usually that country was included when Spain was being discussed, or when Franco and Mussolini were

⁷⁷309 H. C. Deb., col. 124, February 24, 1936.

attacked.⁷⁸

VI

As Germany under Hitler unilaterally denounced the limitations imposed upon her by the Versailles Treaty, British reaction was generally limited to a series of protests, but essentially was one of acceptance of the fait accompli. One of the dominant reasons for it was the intense and widespread opposition in Britain to the severity of the Treaty terms. Both sides in the House eventually emerged holding similar opinions on this issue, but from different motives.

A great many of the Conservatives subscribed to the proposition that the terms of the Treaty were too constricting upon Germany and that it was, therefore, desirable to have them relaxed. The resultant gradual achievement of equality, it was expected, would return a revamped Germany into the community of nations. This sentiment was, however, more latent than spoken, on account of the inherent British

⁷⁸This phenomenon will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

The Spanish Civil War and its ramifications in Britain are beyond the scope of this study. An excellent treatment is available in K. Watkins, Britain Divided: The Effects of The Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion, (London, 1963).

"inclination to regard every settlement as a temporary solution that would probably have to be changed in due time."⁷⁹

On the other hand, Radical thinkers of every degree objected similarly to this severity and to the alleged vindictiveness in the Peace Treaties. The Labour leaders, for example, "declared that they did not want a peace of revenge."⁸⁰ The reason for this attitude was the old feeling of justice and fair play, which was more the hallmark of the Liberal school of thought. In addition to this sentiment, strong sympathy for Germany, particularly rampant before 1933, prevailed in British Labour circles because of their close ideological affinity with the Social Democrats, who had been prominent in the life of the Weimar Republic. Since the Germans from the beginning had protested against the unjust severity of the Treaty, Labour opinion advocated the lifting of restrictions to strengthen the Weimar State.

There was yet another source of inspiration, somewhat blurred in delineation because it was generated

⁷⁹Wolfers, op. cit., p. 202.

⁸⁰McCallum, op. cit., p. 43.

from pacific feelings in all schools of thought. Since redress of grievances and the progressive liberation of Germany from the Versailles impositions would help to maintain peace, it was therefore desirable. But when Hitler defied the Versailles terms, the only way to reimpose them was by coercion, which the pacifists had no inclination to do. There had been many critics of the Treaty from the very beginning:

Most people had some fault to find and some condemned it generally. Many radical journalists and politicians condemned it bitterly; some had decided to oppose it before the Conference met, since they held that such men as governed its deliberations could not but do harm. But the great majority of the conservative, professional and middle classes in the country were not ill-satisfied with it, and the outcry against it came only from the Left.⁸¹

That Versailles was at the root of the trouble and that Germany had a legitimate case became almost a rallying cry for those Members who tried to rationalize, or otherwise justify, the growing furor teutonicus. The dean of the orthodox pacifists in the House looked upon the Treaty with sombre pessimism: "The statesmen who were responsible for the Versailles Treaty must have known, President Wilson must have known, that they were sowing the dragon's teeth;

⁸¹Ibid., p. 52.

they must have known that they were sowing the seeds of another terrible and fearful war."⁸² Supporters of the Government stated that Hitler was not born in Berlin, nor in Austria, nor in Germany at all, but at Versailles. They suggested that the Members in the House "must agree" that Germany had a case for relaxation of the Treaty, and that the House should realize the "tremendous provocation" suffered by Germany.⁸³ In this vein, on the occasion of every major crisis in Europe precipitated by Hitler's actions, from the Rhineland coup to the Munich Conference, some Members in every section of the House found room in their speeches to blame the Versailles Peace Treaties.⁸⁴

Another element closely related to the settlement was a new idea in world affairs, the right of self-determination. The idea became a reality chiefly because of the political disappearance, following military defeat, of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a result, several new states were created in Central and

⁸²George Lansbury, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2000, March 10, 1936.

⁸³See Ian Hannah, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 134, February 24, 1936.

⁸⁴This attitude toward the Versailles Treaty is discussed in more detail in Chapter V.

Southeastern Europe, and some, like Poland, were re-established within new frontiers. The principle of self-determination as one of the main points of peace settlement had been enunciated before the end of World War I. As early as January 5, 1918, in outlining war aims to a meeting of trade unionists at the Caxton Hall, the British war-time Prime Minister had declared: "A territorial settlement must be secured based on the right of self-determination or the consent of the governed."⁸⁵ For the Liberals, the idea of self-determination held particular fascination, being an overall part of their confession of freedom, justice and equality. In so far as the Labourites shared these Liberal sentiments, they too conceded self-determination. On the other hand, the Conservatives, certainly those who realized the implications, were quite sceptical, but accepted the principle on the ground that all these new, so-called succession states had been allies during the war.

The decade and a half after the war witnessed a great re-orientation of attitude toward the former enemy.

⁸⁵McCallum, op. cit., p. 28, citing War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, V, 2487.

In an almost masochistic re-evaluation of post-war conditions, for Radical opinion in Britain, "the proper objects of sympathy were the enemy states, starving Austria and shocked and shattered Germany, now apparently mending her ways under liberal institutions."⁸⁶ Hitler recognized this emotional inertia in Britain and made good use of it by repeatedly basing his claims for Germany upon the principles formulated by the victorious powers. He appealed to the sense of justice and fair play that was the Achilles' heel of British public opinion. In his pronouncements, Hitler insisted that all Germany wished was to be treated in accordance with the principles contained in President Wilson's Fourteen Points.⁸⁷

In the process of denouncing the Versailles Peace Treaty, Hitler went beyond the mere violations of its limitations. He soon denounced other treaties which he had accepted previously, giving evidence that his quest for German equality was inseparable from German territorial expansion in Europe. He very successfully invoked Western principles to justify his deeds, basing them upon the right

⁸⁶McCallum, op. cit., p. 101.

⁸⁷See Wolfers, op. cit., pp. 216-17 and n.9.

of self-determination for the German people. This phase in diplomatic development reawakened in Britain the idea of self-determination, with almost disastrous consequences. Most schools of opinion initially swallowed the bait, opening a new area of ambiguity in foreign policy.

Faced with the precipitate acts committed by Hitler in Europe, the Members of Parliament deplored his method. At the same time, they attempted to understand those acts by rationalizing the motives behind the deeds. Sir Archibald Sinclair, for example, said: "For too long we refused to recognise the equality of Germany. Hitlerism is a revolt against humiliation, an expression of economic despair and a passionate demand for German equality of rights, status and opportunity with other nations."⁸⁸

The first high point regarding the right of self-determination, which revealed the widespread sense of guilt toward Germany in all sections of British opinion, occurred on the occasion of German reoccupation of the Rhineland. At this time, "a great wave of pro-German feeling" was sweeping the country.⁸⁹ Because the Germans had been "the

⁸⁸309 H. C. Deb., col. 1863, March 9, 1936.

⁸⁹Harold Nicolson, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1469, March 26, 1936.

under-dog" for so long, public opinion in Britain had a "tendency to be sympathetic" toward them.⁹⁰ Many ex-service men wrote to their Members expressing their opposition "to engaging in another war, merely because Germany has broken an arrangement which she herself has signed and has occupied her own territory."⁹¹

To aggravate the paradox of the self-determination principle, Conservative opinion, which originally had been cool toward the idea, increasingly seized upon self-determination to justify Hitler's territorial expansion. The culmination of this was reached at Munich. But, as evidence mounted that Hitler was using this principle as a thinly-veiled disguise for German imperialism, it was the Radical opinion which virtually had invented the principle, which now denounced Hitler's imperialistic designs, and vociferously attacked the ceding of Sudeten Germans to Hitler.⁹²

⁹⁰ Brigadier-General Edward Spears, ibid., col. 1509.

⁹¹ David Lloyd George, ibid., col. 1477.

⁹² See Chapter VI for discussion of this particular ambiguity.

VII

Worthy of brief discussion is another major area of opinion which expounded certain old doctrines about the causes of war, the removal of which would presumably eliminate war and secure a lasting peace. Those who subscribed to such views saw two distinct elements which primarily led to war: on the one hand, an increase in armaments; and on the other, economic depression. Although there was some variation in emphasis, and the two elements were frequently combined, this thinking prevailed among the ranks of all Opposition parties. The ideas of the Liberal party closely coincided with those of the Labourites in aversion to an increase in armaments. For the Socialists, the economic cause was particularly pronounced. The Independent Labour party was articulate concerning both aspects, although it is hard to determine in what proportion.

The doctrine that accumulation of armaments led to war became a position from which the Opposition consistently argued against the Government policy of rearmament. The Labour Members declared that they would be "no party to piling up armaments and following a policy either of Imperialism or of alliances, but only [of] collective

security through the League."⁹³ From the position that armaments led to war, Clement Attlee impugned the Government for lack of principle in requesting more arms; he complained that, because of the rearmament programme, the Government was leading Britain "back to the blood-stained tragedy of 1914, in a way that is unworthy of this country."⁹⁴

The leader of the Liberals did not substantially differ from the leader of the Labour party. Sir Archibald Sinclair questioned the huge sums of money earmarked for rearmament and insisted that the expenditure be used for asserting the rule of law and for strengthening the authority of the League.⁹⁵ In Sir Archibald's mind, armaments inevitably led to war. His hopes of saving the world from catastrophe were to be found in measures for removing: (i) the causes of war; (ii) the impoverishment of the people of the world; and (iii) international fear and suspicion.⁹⁶

⁹³Clement Attlee, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 154, February 24, 1936.

⁹⁴313 H. C. Deb., col. 1240, June 18, 1936.

⁹⁵See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 96, February 24, 1936.

⁹⁶See 315 H. C. Deb., cols. 89-90, July 20, 1936.

Considering themselves true Socialists, spokesmen for the Independent Labour party advanced their own belief that armaments led to war. Reginald Sorensen loathed war, which for him settled no moral question; if rearmament were continued, it would lead to "the total and complete ruin of Europe as a whole." He added: "Only insofar as we undermine the very foundation on which militarism is based shall we be able to release the world from the fear, suspicion and gathering hatred which threaten us at the present time."⁹⁷

Parallel with this were the views of John McGovern, who explained that war was "the outcome of the economic position and imperialist aims." Having great imperial possessions, Britain was satisfied; having none, Germany, Italy and Japan were not satisfied. Therein reposed the germ of future wars, McGovern reasoned, as predictably the "have not" powers attempt to wrest some imperial power from Britain and France. The dispute in Abyssinia was one link in the chain of that competition, and the Rhineland coup was another. In the Rhineland, Hitler was "compelled to bring into the open the whole brute force of the State

⁹⁷309 H. C. Deb., cols. 2392, 2393, March 12, 1936.

machine in order to depress the workers within and try and extend the frontiers from without."⁹⁸ Having given his general conviction about war, McGovern went on to explain the rearmament process:

...this mad scramble and race in armaments is the outcome, the development, of the capitalistic system, which will soon reach a point when the anger of the intelligent masses of the working classes will compel them to take a hand and tear the ruling classes from their seats of power and ensure peace by the common people; a peace which capitalism can never make.⁹⁹

The other of the two elements in the Opposition's thought on causes of war was an abstract culprit which was always identified by the adjective economic. The causes of war were economic, they claimed, because the prevailing economic inferiority, or economic deprivation, was a sure incentive to aggression.¹⁰⁰ Conversely, a state of economic equilibrium would safeguard peace and repress aggression.¹⁰¹

Herbert Morrison of the Labour party formulated

⁹⁸320 H. C. Deb., col. 2253, February 25, 1937.

⁹⁹Ibid., col. 2255.

¹⁰⁰See George Lansbury, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2000, March 10, 1936.

¹⁰¹See Hugh Dalton, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1928, March 9, 1936.

doctrinaire incantations better than most, when he insisted that he and his brethren must urge in the House of Commons and elsewhere that the causes of economic friction and economic rivalry between states had to be removed. There was no better nor more logical friend of peace than a Socialist, who really wanted to remove the economic as well as the military causes of war. The application of Socialist policies was urged because Socialism itself was in the end the most secure guarantee of peace of the world. The logical extension of this position was a broadside attack on the capitalist system with its profit motive, which ultimately caused economic rivalries between states. Capitalism was the prevalent social order in Britain, he continued, for the defence of which the Conservative party in the main existed. Because of this evil nature in capitalism, the system was singled out as one of the fundamental causes of war which had to be eradicated before war could be eliminated.¹⁰²

The term economic causes was invoked with regularity and with little variation. A sweeping assertion often

¹⁰²Closely adapted from Morrison, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2078, March 10, 1936.

equalled an article of faith: "Everyone who speaks about war and the causes of war knows that war is not provoked by indiscreet statements of Ministers. It arises deep down in the economic and commercial rivalries of one country against others."¹⁰³ According to this Socialist belief, wars were caused mainly by competitive economic considerations between capitalist states. The First World War had broken out largely because of such competition between Germany and some other countries of Europe, including Britain.¹⁰⁴ The repetition of similar conditions was horrible to contemplate, but:

...unless the economic causes of war are faced, are considered and dealt with, as part of the work of the League of Nations, or as part of the considerations of diplomacy and discussion between our own country and the other countries of the world, one of the causes of war will not have been removed.¹⁰⁵

Identifying economic factors as the principal causes of war, the Labourites held that salvation lay only in their elimination. Once economic and political problems were

¹⁰³Ernest Hicks, ibid., col. 2020. Clement Attlee stated: "It is the rotten world economic system which makes dictators and gives them their power." 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1852, March 9, 1936.

¹⁰⁴See James Maxton, 317 H. C. Deb., col. 50, November 3, 1936.

¹⁰⁵Herbert Morrison, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2077, March 10, 1936.

solved by way of world conference -- this was the main corollary of the economic doctrine -- there no longer would be need for Britain to "try to safeguard our national security by the strength of our own armaments instead of relying on our association with the other nations."¹⁰⁶

Persistently advocating the convocation of an economic conference, Arthur Henderson warned the House that "unless and until we make some attempt to grapple with economic problems that confront the world, even the Covenant of the League of Nations...will not avoid world wars in the future."¹⁰⁷

The economic cry showed no signs of abating during most of the year 1938. Because Labour saw widespread economic evil, it continued to advocate a world conference to deal with the causes of war.¹⁰⁸ As long as economic evil

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Henderson, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1878, March 9, 1936.

¹⁰⁷ 330 H. C. Deb., cols. 1840-41, December 21, 1937.

¹⁰⁸ George Lansbury visited Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and reported seeing ordinary working masses starving everywhere. See 332 H. C. Deb., cols. 1615, 1616, March 7, 1938.

Arthur Henderson also visited Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia, he discovered conditions akin to those in distressed areas of Britain. See 335 H. C. Deb., col. 2480, June 3, 1938.

existed on so large a scale, no peace in Europe was possible; and governments which failed to satisfy their people tended to "embark upon adventure abroad."¹⁰⁹ Dr. Haden Guest recognized the existence in Europe of many political discontents like Hitler and Mussolini, and he claimed that their discontent was almost entirely economic. He also advised that a conference of the League be called to discuss the economic questions which were the source of "the troubles which we see between Germany, Italy, and all other countries."¹¹⁰

At the time of the Munich Agreement the Labour party adamantly adhered to the doctrine of economic causes of war. Clement Attlee wanted a conference that would "endeavour to deal with the causes of war that are affecting this world, the wrongs of the Versailles Treaty," and other wrongs, but above all to deal with the "great economic question, the condition-of-the-people question."¹¹¹

During the period treated in this monograph, in the debates on foreign affairs which followed the onset of the

¹⁰⁹Clement Attlee, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 1420, March 24, 1938.

¹¹⁰See 334 H. C. Deb., cols. 97, 94, April 4, 1938.

¹¹¹339 H. C. Deb., col. 66, October 3, 1938.

Abyssinian crisis, a considerable amount of muddled thinking in many areas relating to Britain's policy was evident. The broad areas just discussed serve to point out the particular attitudes held toward a variety of problems. When applied to concrete situations in the period 1936-1938, such thinking was demonstrably ambiguous and was to be found in all parties in the House. Mutatis mutandi, the ideals of all parties concerning foreign policy showed some inherent incompatibility, when these were contrasted with the stark reality of European international development. The interplay of intellectual contradictions in those areas forms a substantial part of the subject matter in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COLLECTIVE SECURITY

I

For the majority of people in Britain the phrase "collective security" acted as an intellectual sedative, stifling any realistic thought on international responsibility. No single element of British foreign policy was as paralyzing, and consequently as disastrous in its effects, as the principle of collective security. In its logical implications, collective security was a commitment, not a policy. That commitment was imposed upon and assumed by the member states under the most controversial clause of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article 10 committed the members, virtually in perpetuity, to the preservation of the status quo of the Peace Settlement.

Until someone came along to disturb the whole system by defying it, the illusion of the harmony and potency of collective security was preserved. But, when the system was challenged and the League came to act, most member states assumed vastly different attitudes to the primary task of

apprehending the law-breaker, as obliged by the Covenant and the principles of collective action.¹

During the early period of Hitler's ascendancy in Germany, Britain had a choice of three policies, but adopted none of them. One was to build up "a strong military coalition, based on mutual self-interest, to restrain Germany, seeking the greater good at the expense of the less, on nineteenth-century lines."² Britain had done this many times previously, and the most recent example was early in 1935, when an ill-fated attempt was made through the building up of the Stresa Front. During the summer of 1939, there was a belated and unsuccessful attempt at an anti-German military coalition.

Two major problems impeded the formation of such a coalition against Germany. One was uncertainty concerning the attitude and intention of the U.S.S.R., uncertainty which had been confirmed when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was concluded in August 1939. The second problem was the actual

¹For an incisive appreciation of the League-worshippers' expectations in the face of contradictory events, see Cecil, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

²Jerrold, op. cit., p. 131. Of the other two policies, one was of appeasement and the other of isolation. See ibid.

incompatibility between a policy of Grand Alliance against a defined enemy, in this case Germany, and a policy based on the League of Nations through the principle of collective security against an unidentified enemy. The animus of the League, as personified in collective security, meant a universal coalition against aggression under unforeseen conditions and contingencies, thereby rendering the Covenant, in its strict application, into a clear instrument of war.

By resorting to abstract terminology, the proponents of collective security always aimed at a potential aggressor -- even though they primarily meant Germany. This kind of "collective" alliance, with a blank commitment against a hypothetical aggressor, was not just an entirely different proposition from the traditional Grand Alliance against a specific aggressor; the two types were mutually exclusive.³ Under prevailing circumstances in Britain, the construction of a traditional Alliance against an aggressor would have been extremely difficult. As a result of agitation by and the influence of the League of Nations Societies, a great body of opinion in Britain was virtually hypnotized by the

³See Wolfers, op. cit., Chs. XX and part of XXI, pp. 321-43 passim, for more discussion on this incompatibility.

magic of collective security. A good example of that process was the Peace Ballot episode, which made any attempt to form an alliance almost impossible.

The policy of the British Government, Eden announced, was to maintain steady, collective resistance to aggression; and that policy would be guided by the Covenant of the League itself. Believing that such a policy was the one most likely to assure maintenance of peace, the Government would remain firmly attached to it.⁴ While these expressions of belief from the Foreign Secretary were reassuring, just as his personal work with the League was a pledge of them, they were insufficient to convince the Opposition. The dissatisfied Members of the Opposition perpetually accused the Government of being "tepid and wavering" in their support of the League.⁵

In showing resolute support of the League, both sides of the House seemed to vie with one another. A veritable torrent of oratory flowed freely over this issue, consuming countless hours of all but pointless debate. During the period 1936-1938, in contrast to the Government,

⁴See 309 H. C. Deb., cols. 80, 84, February 24, 1936.

⁵See e.g. Arthur Greenwood, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1975, March 10, 1936.

the Opposition remained staunchly attached to the League and to the idea of collective security. The position of the Labour and Liberal parties on this was rigid, emotional, naive, and above all, contradictory. With almost religious fervour, the League was supported by many segments of opinion in the country and in the House.⁶ While this included many Members of the Conservative party, the Labour Members pointed out with pride that they had "been wedded throughout to the principle of collective security and using the League as the nucleus and framework for this Federation of the world."⁷

Although the majority of people in Britain believed in the principle of collective security much in the same way that they believed in the principles of Christianity,⁸ collective security did not mean the same thing to all of them. From the various declarations on the subject in the House, several interpretations emerged and, from the number

⁶In those terms, Hugh Dalton wanted to remind Eden of that fact, when it became obvious that the Government was reappraising its attitude toward the League. See 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1730, May 6, 1936.

⁷Colonel Wedgwood, 318 H. C. Deb., col. 2839, December 18, 1936.

⁸See Captain Edward Cobb, 320 H. C. Deb., cols. 2272-73, February 25, 1937.

of definitions, the issue appeared to be greatly confused. Some imagined collective security as an international association of peace against potential aggressors. Others saw in it "a common defense of the democracies against Fascist aggression;" progressively, many more regarded collective security as a "grand alliance of Britain and her friends to protect British security from a German attack."⁹

Unquestionably in this period, together with devotion to the League went worship of its corollary, collective security. Inseparable from this was unyielding insistence that British foreign policy should be firmly based on the Covenant of the League. From here on, in accordance with the personal outlook of the speaker, everyone could -- and usually did -- attach his own amplifications. For example, in the same breath Sir Archibald Sinclair urged a policy "of military and economic disarmament, of collective security in which all countries, and not merely groups of allies, must participate, and of justice and equality for all nations."¹⁰ This declaration was representative of the whole range of idealistic thinking and virtuous intentions

⁹Wolfers, op. cit., pp. 342-43.

¹⁰310 H. C. Deb., col. 1468, March 26, 1936.

of League followers.

In the ranks of the Labour party there was considerable variation on the main theme, and for some, there was more than one stage in the development of their attitude to collective security. For example, analyzing its objective, Sir Stafford Cripps found in 1936 that collective security was designed to safeguard the British Empire and the status quo under the Treaty of Versailles -- a condition he disliked -- and proceeded to explain:

Collective security, if it is to secure the right things, may be a most valuable weapon in the world. Collective security to secure that the fullest abundance could be distributed in this world to-day, to secure the workers of the world against exploitation,...would be a thing that might well be worth while, but collective security which is intended merely to stabilize those very incidents in our civilization which are causing war to-day is something to which nobody who desires peace can give any support. That is why 'collective security' in the mouth of a capitalist or an imperialist Government must be a hollow phrase, and so it has proved itself.¹¹

Two and one-half years later, the term collective security was used with less frequency, being supplanted by a new expression, "peace front," although Sir Stafford attempted a contemporary definition. He declared that it was clearly the name which had been given to "the method of

¹¹309 H. C. Deb., col. 2055, March 10, 1936.

combining the defence forces of several nations so that they might all be available for the protection or defence of the territory of any particular nation in the event of unprovoked aggression against that country."¹²

II

The greatest source of irritation in the House was its inability to emerge with a reasonably universal definition of "collective security." To no other subject was Terence's expression quot homines tot sententiae so fully applicable as to that phrase. As time would show, the difficulty was that from 1936 both the League and collective security were, increasingly, no more than abstract concepts and ideals. But for years, the Labour and Liberal Members steadfastly burned incense at the altar of collective security and paid homage to the chimaera of the League and collective security.

Collective security was a "vague phrase with little real meaning," even in the opinion of some of its believers.¹³ Others, who doubted, noted the soporific effect of that

¹²339 H. C. Deb., col. 414, October 5, 1938.

¹³Sir Archibald Sinclair, 315 H. C. Deb., col. 97, July 20, 1936.

phrase on the Members of Parliament.¹⁴ Some in the Opposition recognized that all Members gave at least lip service to collective security.¹⁵ From the Government benches no less a personage than Sir Austen Chamberlain said that the House and the country would have to do "some hard thinking about the League of Nations, what it implies, what we mean when we say we are making it the basis of our policy, and whether collective security is any more than a pretty phrase to adorn a meaningless speech."¹⁶ Herbert Morrison suggested wistfully that if collective security were to become a real element in international policy and in the work of the League, then it could not "be left in the air as a mere uncertain and empty phrase which everybody is free to disagree about and to give different interpretations of."¹⁷

Another ambiguous phrase frequently used in the House synonymously with "collective security system" was

¹⁴See Kenneth Lindsay, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 157, March 16, 1936.

¹⁵See Morgan Price, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1504, March 26, 1936.

¹⁶Ibid., col. 1484.

¹⁷309 H. C. Deb., col. 2076, March 10, 1936.

"system of pooled security", or variants thereof. When the latter phrase was clarified, it meant to some Members security "for the maintenance of peace and justice, and to uphold the authority of the League."¹⁸ But whatever the name, the precise meaning of the phrase was very elusive, depending on the party, the speaker, the particular occasion, and the context in which it was used. When "collective security" was being transformed years later into "peace front against aggression," one Member recalled almost mournfully: "for years our people have been bemused, their critical sense has been lulled to slumber, and their thought has been confused by a series of vague, indeterminate phrases, all revolving around the conception of 'collective security'."¹⁹

As a consequence, there was scarcely a satisfactory, let alone a realistic, definition of the term. However, in many of the definitions which were advanced, there was a clear connotation of balance of power. While this was understandable among Government supporters, it was inexplic-

¹⁸Sir Archibald Sinclair, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1853, March 9, 1936.

¹⁹Charles Emmott, 345 H. C. Deb., col. 2560, April 3, 1939.

able among the Radicals, as balance of power was an anathema for that school of thought. Believing that his own interpretation was fairly representative, Viscount Cranborne defined collective security as meaning that "the forces which stand for a system of international law and order should be stronger than those which are against it," with its real object "that war will not break out at all."²⁰

Because they shunned the use of force and the thought of coercion, some Members seemed to have in mind the mobilization of a massive quantity of persuasion, the undefined existence of which they assumed, and the effect of which would be to deter a transgressor. The League was not constructed "merely in order to prevent one nation [from] attacking another;" because there was in addition, "such a thing as providing a system under which a nation which attacks another shall receive such treatment as to make her think twice before embarking [on] such a policy."²¹

²⁰321 H. C. Deb., cols. 317-18, March 2, 1937.

²¹Arthur Henderson, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1876, March 9, 1936. *Italics added.*

Liberal Member Geoffrey Mander put collective security above peace, when he advocated taking "all risks to make the aggressor bow the knee to the collective system." 309 H. C. Deb., col. 140, February 24, 1936.

Hugh Dalton conceived of the League of Nations as a specific collective influence exercised by governments through their representatives at Geneva. In his view the League should have been four things:

- (a) an international club where mutual confidences might be created;
- (b) a regular instrument of economic cooperation between nations;
- (c) a court of justice for settling juridical matters and for negotiation of peaceful changes in the order of things then; and
- (d) a grand alliance of peaceful states against aggressors.²²

The venerable old Liberal, Lloyd George, similarly viewed the whole basis of the League as a federation of forty or fifty countries that "will combine the whole of their resources and power to prevent aggression -- not merely to prevent a particular aggression that interferes with our selfish interests, but aggression that will interfere with the integrity, the liberty, the independence of other nations, and with international right."²³

Whatever the interpretation, one inescapable fact, often overlooked, was the impossibility of having collective security unless its champions were prepared to use force as

²²Wording closely based on Dalton, 326 H. C. Deb., col. 1815, July 19, 1937.

²³326 H. C. Deb., col. 3547, July 30, 1937.

a last resort to maintain it. In view of the experience in the Abyssinian dispute, it was painfully obvious that the nations of the world were "not prepared to go to the extreme of using force in order to maintain the principle of collective security."²⁴ The Prime Minister himself uttered the naked truth in saying that if collective action were "a reality and not merely a thing to be talked about, it means not only that every country is to be ready for war, but must be ready to go to war at once. That is a terrible thing, but it is an essential part of collective security."²⁵ Because of that realization, in their disappointment some Members urged the swift removal from the political dictionary of "those fraudulent words" collective security.²⁶

In their intellectual intoxication with the League, the Radicals stubbornly insisted on collective security. No less adamantly did they advocate disarmament and attack

²⁴Sir Hugh O'Neill, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1779, May 6, 1936.

²⁵Baldwin, 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1726, June 23, 1936. He recognized the reluctance of nearly all European nations to proceed with military sanctions against Italy, mainly because "there was no country except the aggressor country, which was ready for war." Ibid., cols. 1725-26.

²⁶Sir Henry Croft, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1795, May 6, 1936.

the Government for its then current policy of rearmament. According to Attlee, the Labour party had absolutely no faith in the Government's protests of loyalty to the League; nor did they accept Baldwin's belief in collective security or in the League.²⁷

Herbert Morrison continued this relentless line of attack. From British attempts at rearmament he saw no signs that the Government would "...pursue a wise diplomacy or give a lead to the world on disarmament, or properly to organise the League of Nations and work out collective security." The Labour party did not believe, he continued, that the Government was "either competent or willing to pursue a policy of international peace and further the League of Nations as we would desire."²⁸ The Labour party had high hopes that the proper use of the League in accordance with their precepts would guarantee the complete safety of Britain.²⁹

The Opposition preferred to harass the Government, accusing it of vacillation in League affairs. Clement

²⁷See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1851, March 9, 1936.

²⁸309 H. C. Deb., col. 2079, March 10, 1936.

²⁹See Colonel Wedgwood, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2383, March 12, 1936.

Attlee reproached the Government for the outbreak of the Abyssinian war -- for not firmly supporting the League from the start of the dispute. The Government, he maintained, failed to take a firm line which would have enabled the other countries of the League to follow.³⁰ The deputy leader of the Labour party actually indicted the Government for the outbreak of that war, elaborating specific charges.³¹ It was Attlee again who stated the basis for Labour's indictments: "Had the Government done their duty and carried out the policy," which had been announced by Sir Samuel Hoare in Geneva in September 1935, the Abyssinian dispute "would have been stopped [because]...an early strong line of action would have prevented the war."³²

III

Recognizing that the Italian military campaign in Abyssinia had succeeded, Neville Chamberlain believed that the Government must recognize as well that the sanctions had failed to achieve the purpose for which they were

³⁰See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 153, February 24, 1936.

³¹See Hugh Dalton, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1717, May 6, 1936.

³²310 H. C. Deb., col. 2458, April 6, 1936.

imposed. The continuation of sanctions to him seemed at least "the very midsummer of madness,"³³ and it became only a matter of days before the Government officially announced their abandonment. After mature consideration and on the advice of the Foreign Secretary, the Government had "come to the conclusion that there [was] no longer any utility in continuing these measures as a means of pressure upon Italy." Predictably enough, when Eden made his statement, it was greeted by some shouts of "Shame," "Resign," and "Sabotage."³⁴

The Prime Minister declared that Eden's statement commanded the unanimous support of the Government, who believed that the British decision would not kill the League. Rather, the Government believed: "to allow sanctions to go on, and ultimately, as we imagine, to peter out, would be a far harder task for the League to surmount than to face up boldly to failure." Moreover, it was his view that, for

³³In a speech to the 1900 Club on June 10, 1936, cited in Feiling, op. cit., p. 296.

³⁴See 313 H. C. Deb., cols. 1200-01, June 18, 1936.

whatever reasons, collective security had failed.³⁵

Pleased that sanctions had been terminated, Sir Austen Chamberlain echoed both Eden and Baldwin by saying that the collective system had been insufficient either to preserve the peace or to prevent aggression from being successful in the Abyssinian war.³⁶

But a majority in the Opposition steadfastly refused to believe that the purpose in imposing sanctions had failed. They paid little heed to the fact that, from the beginning of the Abyssinian dispute until June 1936, the Government had taken full part in collective action as instituted by the League.³⁷ Obstinate in its ambiguous support of League policy, Radical opinion bitterly opposed the lifting of sanctions against Italy.

There were a few unconventional voices from the Opposition benches which expressed strong dissent from this stand. The old pacifist, George Lansbury, held that

³⁵Baldwin, ibid., cols. 1239, 1234. He added: "Time may prove that we are wrong...I do not think that it is necessarily a mark of cowardice to take action which we know will be repugnant to large sections of our people." Ibid., col. 1239.

³⁶See 315 H. C. Deb., col. 1167, July 27, 1936.

³⁷See Eden, 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1197, June 18, 1936.

sanctions led to the use of force and potentially implied war. He not only objected to the continuation of sanctions, but was against their imposition from the beginning.³⁸ The other notable dissenters in the Opposition came from the ranks of the small Independent Labour party, which was equally adamant against sanctions, but from a doctrinal inspiration. Members of this party were consistently "not in favour of the application of sanctions at any point."³⁹ Firmly against placing any British armed forces at the disposal of the League, John McGovern condemned the policy of sanctions and explained: "I will have no part or lot in the application of any sanctions against Italy which will lead to war." Giving the point of view of his party, he added:

We are not going to war, because we do not believe in capitalist war and, not going ourselves, we are not prepared, in the House or in the country, to declare for a policy which will lead the youth of the nation on to the battlefield and into death.⁴⁰

The rest of the Opposition never understood that if

³⁸See 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1657, June 23, 1936.

³⁹James Maxton, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 2495-96, April 6, 1936.

⁴⁰309 H. C. Deb., cols. 167, 168, February 24, 1936.

peace were enforced in Abyssinia by the League, in harmony with its Covenant, war with Italy would result. They gave even less thought to the distinct possibility that war with Italy, once begun, would develop into a much wider conflagration. Sir Archibald Sinclair gave a good illustration of this contradictory stand. "We are a peace party," he asserted. But claiming that Britain had been drifting perilously near war in recent weeks, he concluded: "one reason is that we have not enforced the law against Italy in this dispute."⁴¹ On a previous occasion Sir Archibald had challenged the Government to show that British rearmament would be used to assert the rule of law by demonstrating "a firm resolve to stop" the war in Abyssinia, and by calling upon the "fellow members of the League...to impose those sanctions which will make impossible the indefinite continuance of Italian military operations."⁴²

So the majority of the Opposition clung to the

⁴¹310 H. C. Deb., col. 2495, April 6, 1936. James Maxton remarked that it was wrong and misleading for Sir Archibald to say that he stood for peace, because his demand for the enforcement of the law against Italy made him an advocate of war in the immediate future. See ibid.

⁴²309 H. C. Deb., col. 97, February 24, 1936.

ideal of collective security and agitated for sanctions. Labourite John Parker rose "to ask the Foreign Secretary not merely to enforce the oil sanctions, but to see that existing sanctions are fully enforced."⁴³ Abandonment of sanctions by the British Government, in the opinion of Hugh Dalton, would have meant defaulting in its obligations to the League. He urged the Foreign Secretary to create in no way the impression that the Government was even proposing such abandonment, because Eden would thereby:

...create in this country such fissures, such divisions and such dissensions with regard to international policy that, greatly though our prestige has already been reduced and lowered by the policy of the Government, the situation would be rendered even more desperate by the dissensions which would be created by any such development, and this country would be rendered utterly impotent to play any consistent or effective part in the councils of the world.⁴⁴

This overwhelming preoccupation with sanctions exploded into a torrent of invective when the Opposition expressed its shock and indignation at the Government's decision to abandon sanctions. Less concerned with recognition of practical affairs than "with beating moral tom-

⁴³Ibid., col. 130.

⁴⁴311 H. C. Deb., col. 1730, May 6, 1936.

toms or emotional cymbals,"⁴⁵ these Members placed the blame on the Government. The real reason why sanctions might have failed partially, suggested Arthur Greenwood, was the half-hearted attitude of the British Government. He called the withdrawal of sanctions "a complete surrender to Fascism and all that Fascism means." That action was "an abject capitulation of reason and the rule of law to wanton lawlessness and gangsterdom." It was a surrender which had "given heart to Mussolini, who can stride his jack-boots across Europe, and a supine British Government will let him do it." As for Eden's speech in the House, a no more deplorable one had "ever fallen from the lips of a British Minister," and for Greenwood that speech meant "truckling to a dictator."⁴⁶

Never at a loss for an incisive and devastatingly cutting remark, Lloyd George invoked the great names in the pantheon of British Ministers, Disraeli, Gladstone, Balfour, Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Palmerston, whom he praised for pursuing their policies without flinching and without fear. Thereupon, with the skill of the consummate orator, he

⁴⁵Phrase used by Captain Alan Graham about this school of thought. 340 H. C. Deb., col. 273, November 2, 1938.

⁴⁶313 H. C. Deb., cols. 1216-17, 1211, June 18, 1936.

turned to the entire House and delivered the blow: "Now in their successors you have this exhibition of poltroonery." But his real coup de théâtre was reserved for the Government Front Bench: "To-night we have had the cowardly surrender, and there are the cowards."⁴⁷

Clement Attlee preferred to single out Eden and Baldwin, who, he claimed, had "nothing to offer a world that is asking for peace" which was not to be had "by running away, by shaking like a jelly at every dictator who shakes his fist at you."⁴⁸ Another Labour Member recalled a previous episode of "unspeakable shame". He reached back into the far British past, to the reign of George III, Lord North and the loss of the American colonies. "Since the defeat at Yorktown," Morgan Price contended, "there has been no more terrible disgrace to this country." In lifting the sanctions, the Government "...run away like rabbits into their holes and leave us confronted with a disaster as terrible as that of Yorktown."⁴⁹

There was the customary blanket diatribe against the

⁴⁷Ibid., col. 1232.

⁴⁸Ibid., col. 1240.

⁴⁹Ibid., col. 1245.

Government as well. Lloyd George contended that there had been no stability, no steadfastness, no resolute pursuit of any particular aim. The Government "...go forward, then they go backward; they go sometimes to the left, and sometimes to the right."⁵⁰ Arthur Greenwood, on behalf of the Labour party, virtually asked for the dismissal of "this trembling, vacillating, cowardly Government, which is leading people backward instead of forward." He urged that Britain "must have a Government that sincerely believes in the possibility of an effective League of Nations, that is prepared to put that principle to the test." The kind of Government Greenwood had in mind was one which was prepared to abandon the motive in the hearts of many Members who supported the Government, "the motive of Imperialism and militarism which animates people who are prepared to fight for any cause but the League of Nations."⁵¹

The leader of the Labour party first charged Baldwin with having killed the League and collective security,⁵² and a few days later moved a Motion of Censure: "That His

⁵⁰Ibid., col. 1230.

⁵¹Ibid., col. 1221.

⁵²Attlee, ibid., col. 1240.

Majesty's Government, by their lack of resolute and straightforward foreign policy, have lowered the prestige of this country, weakened the League of Nations, imperilled peace, and thereby forfeited the confidence of this House."⁵³

On behalf of the Government side in the House, Viscount Wolmer reminded the Opposition that they had no right to arraign the Government for having allowed the gangster to triumph, or for not having enforced the law against aggression, since they had "consistently denied the policeman his truncheon." He added that it did not "lie in the mouths of hon. Members who have done everything they could to prevent the policeman having an adequate truncheon, to complain that the gangster has triumphed."⁵⁴

IV

Thus the Labour party, "consistent in its inconsistencies," could maintain its "irresponsible criticism" only while in Opposition.⁵⁵ They consistently urged the Government to action which would have led inescapably to war,

⁵³Attlee, 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1605, June 23, 1936.
This motion was defeated 384 to 170.

⁵⁴313 H. C. Deb., col. 1241, June 18, 1936.

⁵⁵Fieldhouse, op. cit., pp. 201, 206.

while they also consistently voted against providing the means for such action, on the ground that the Government's rearmament policy was "leading the world to war, disaster and destruction." They cast their votes against this programme, "conscientiously believing that we are voting for what is best for our country, for the world and for the future well-being of the human race."⁵⁶

One of the greatest obstacles to their proper understanding of the Government's rearmament policy was the extent to which Opposition thinking was chained to the ideal of the League of Nations and of collective security. Participation in the League was conceived by Radical opinion as being equal to a form of supra-national security. As Attlee explained, the point of joining the League was not that "you each severally defend your nationals or your country, but that you should have collective defence."⁵⁷ For him, the real League principle did not differentiate between national frontiers; "we are out to defend the rule

⁵⁶Herbert Morrison, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2080, March 10, 1936. The Government was also accused of attempting to get Britain "by means of fear, into a jingo frame of mind." Ibid. This was during the debate of the White Paper on Defence, Cmd. 5107, (1936).

⁵⁷309 H. C. Deb., col. 1846, March 9, 1936.

of law, and not particular territories." He envisioned an idealized League as "a place where men and women are free from fear, and have happiness."⁵⁸

Proceeding mainly from just such an inspiration was a stand advocating both the emaciation of national armaments and a dependence upon collective security. Accompanying this was another contradictory idea, that Britain should not participate in the League merely pari passu: in concert and on an equal level with all other member nations. Some Labour Members insisted that Britain should be doing more than the other member nations and thereby giving leadership.⁵⁹ As Attlee explained, Britain had "its obligations because of its position;" he knew that when Britain did take a lead, other states in the League would follow.⁶⁰ If such leadership of the League were to bring Britain "to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the other nations," the possibility did not disturb Arthur

⁵⁸Attlee, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1534, 1535, 1538, March 26, 1936.

⁵⁹See Mr. Lees-Smith, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 112, April 21, 1936.

⁶⁰309 H. C. Deb., col. 152, February 24, 1936.

Henderson, as in that case, Britain should have:

the consolation of knowing that our action was evidence to the whole civilized world that, after the pledges we gave when we signed the Covenant of the League of Nations, this country is not prepared to dishonour its bond and repudiate its obligations, but is prepared to take risks in order to further the ideals of peace.⁶¹

Little thought was given to the fact that "taking a lead" in any sense, thus putting one League member publicly in advance of the others, was inconsistent with the idea of collective security, and was likely to be fatal to the League in practice:

But when zealous people are again exhorting the Government to 'take a lead', while again hedging their advice with the proviso that we are in no circumstances to fight alone, it is time to be warned. The lesson of the past is surely the exactly opposite one that we must make no fresh start, either in dealing with Italy or hereafter with Germany, until we and our partners in the League are in absolute agreement as to the length we will go and can rely on one another to act resolutely together up to this point. On any other terms collective security becomes individual irresponsibility, and the partner who 'takes a lead' will bring all the discredit of failure upon himself.⁶²

For the majority of the Opposition the link between collective security and rearmament was a matter of relative

⁶¹311 H. C. Deb., cols. 110-11, April 21, 1936. Viscount Cranborne labelled this policy of acting alone as heroic but not collective. See ibid., col. 126.

⁶²J. A. Spender, "Old Diplomacy and New", a Letter to the Editor, The Times, May 12, 1936, p. 17.

quantities and measurable portions. The Labourites insisted that it was impossible to specify what armament was necessary until the share of participating members in collective security had been calculated. John Parker stated: "An attempt should be made to make collective security a reality and to find out what should be our share. When that is done, we on our part should be prepared to supply our share of the security."⁶³ The Labour party was therefore prepared to maintain only such forces as were consistent with necessity to implement the country's obligations under the League.⁶⁴ That was the formula which found expression in the concept of Britain's "adequate share" in collective security.⁶⁵ The leader of the Opposition Liberals attempted to be quite explicit on this subject:

We are concerned only to avert what must be the hideous, and what may be as far as our generation is concerned, the complete and final, catastrophe of war, and therefore to base our policy on the Covenant of the League of Nations and measure our armaments by the requirements of collective security.⁶⁶

⁶³309 H. C. Deb., col. 132, February 24, 1936.

⁶⁴See Mr. Alexander, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 87, March 16, 1936.

⁶⁵See Mr. Mander, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 287, March 17, 1936.

⁶⁶Sir A. Sinclair, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 95, March 16, 1936.

If this was Liberal party thinking, the view of the Labour party differed very little; it was merely expressed with greater frequency. Herbert Morrison complained that neither the Prime Minister, nor a single Minister, nor a single word in the White Paper on Defence, gave the House:

the slightest indication that there has been consultation with other Powers as to what the British proportion of collective security should be. In no way has that been done, and consequently we think that the Government are using this phrase of collective security merely as a cloak to reproduce the old policy of unilateral competition and national armaments upon a large scale.⁶⁷

Major Milner saw the need to "calculate our requirements alongside and in addition to those of other members of the League and, indeed, by agreement, with the League Powers decide what our proportion should be."⁶⁸ This thinking was further compounded by Mr. Price, who claimed that under collective security Britain could ignore the armament programmes of those nations which were loyal to the League, such as France and the U.S.S.R. Even the United States of America, though not in the League, was "not a country whose armament programme[Britain] need to take into

⁶⁷309 H. C. Deb., col. 2077, March 10, 1936.

⁶⁸Ibid., cols. 2044-45. Italics added.

consideration."⁶⁹ And the magic of collective security prompted one Member to exclaim that it was "an absurd argument to say that because we have a collective system our individual responsibilities are increased."⁷⁰

With considerable tenacity, the Labour party maintained that British defence policy had to be related to the collective action of the League as-a-whole.⁷¹ The basis of their insistence was that Britain should provide only a share of armaments because, as long as she was a member of the League, whose object was to preserve the peace of the world, Britons must think in terms not of one nation, but of a combination of nations.⁷² Denying any inconsistency in the attitude of the Opposition, who demanded action while withholding the means, Arthur Henderson declared their position:

We are prepared to accept any degree of armaments in a system of pooled security provided the League of Nations, through its Council and Assembly, states that

⁶⁹311 H. C. Deb., col. 416, April 23, 1936.

⁷⁰Alfred Edwards, 312 H. C. Deb., col. 1508, May 21, 1936.

⁷¹See Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 166, April 22, 1936.

⁷²See Thomas Williams, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 269, March 2, 1937.

such is the quota to be provided by this country. The Government, on the other hand, have not consulted any other State Members of the League; they are seeking in the name of collective security to follow a policy which, in my humble opinion, is the very antithesis of the system of collective security. The greater the national arms the greater the degree of collective insecurity, and no system of collective security will ever flourish unless there is multilateral disarmament -- I do not suggest that disarmament by one country will have the slightest effect.⁷³

In giving the Labour stand, an important Member declared that "adherence to the doctrine of collective security will in the long run mean a reduction of and not an enlargement of the [British] fighting forces."⁷⁴ Sir Archibald Sinclair asked the Government's assurance that British armaments would never be used except in accordance with the Covenant. He wanted the Government to:

recognise as [its] imperative and urgent duty, the creation of a system of collective security under the auspices of the League, so that British armaments shall be used, not for selfish or Imperialist aims, but to uphold the rule of law against arbitrary force, and thus to maintain peace on the only firm foundation, that of justice, and to avert the catastrophe of war.⁷⁵

In similar, though simple, direct terms, Labour promised the Government its support for military action, but only on

⁷³ 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1763, May 6, 1936. Italics added.

⁷⁴ Mr. Alexander, 312 H. C. Deb., col. 2309, May 28, 1936.

⁷⁵ 315 H. C. Deb., col. 99, July 20, 1936.

condition that:

any military expenditure is first understood to be the exact requirement for collective security; and, secondly, that there is to be no use, in any circumstances, of British armaments as an instrument of national policy, but only in support of the Covenant of the League of Nations in action against an aggressor.⁷⁶

V

By 1937, the Spanish Civil War was six months old, and attention to it increasingly consumed the emotions of the Labour party and of the Opposition in general.⁷⁷ As the year wore on, the cry for collective security persisted in the House, but with diminishing intensity. Gradually, a relatively new voice calling for something akin to a broad alliance, preferably but not necessarily within the League, became more audible.

For a Labour spokesman, the policy of collective security was the only alternative to the unilateral security

⁷⁶Mr. Alexander, ibid., cols. 177-78.

⁷⁷Their bellicosity over sanctions on the wane, though not their sympathies for Abyssinia, their concern was drawn by the Spanish conflict. Now they urged the Government to take a line in Spain which almost certainly would have involved Britain in the civil war there. See Sir Robert Horne, 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2250, February 25, 1937.

of rearmament, for which he criticized the Government.⁷⁸ Only the policy of collective security, some Liberals also insisted, could ensure peace for the world and reduce the insane expenditure for rearmament.⁷⁹ During the second reading of the Defence Loans Bill,⁸⁰ the Labour party moved an Amendment. In doing so, Mr. Lees-Smith added that the House viewed with misgivings "the massing of huge competitive national armaments without any constructive foreign policy based upon collective security under the League of Nations," and that the House was "opposed to financing defence expenditure by loan."⁸¹

Labour would willingly support a policy of rearmament but only if it took place within the system of collective security, which was the only safe measure of

⁷⁸See Frederick Montague, 319 H. C. Deb., col. 992, January 27, 1937.

⁷⁹See Major Lloyd George, 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2244, February 25, 1937.

⁸⁰The Government asked authorization for the Treasury to borrow money or to apply any budget surplus, up to a maximum of 400 million pounds for the next five years, to enable it to meet partially the expenditure of the Defence Service. See the Motion to this effect, 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2219, February 25, 1937.

⁸¹See the full Motion of the Amendment, ibid., col. 2226.

peace.⁸² They loved their country, but if the Government wanted their co-operation it had to give 100 per cent loyalty to the League by action, and had to make known universally that it would pursue a peace policy just as actively as it was pursuing its armaments policy; and finally the Government was to leave nothing undone to bring about some measure of disarmament.⁸³

One major but virtually lonely voice of dissent in the Labour ranks belonged to Lansbury. He disagreed with his Labour friends because "...they continually put in the forefront of their demands that collective security can be obtained by collective mass action, the piling up of collective force on one side in order to deal with a potential aggressor who may not be quite so strong." As this position meant that the presence of massed power would prevent aggression, that thinking was false, Lansbury claimed; not since the end of the Great War had massed power prevented aggression, particularly in the case of

⁸²See Frederick Bellenger, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 254, March 2, 1937.

⁸³See Henderson, ibid., col. 235. Thomas Williams held a very similar view. See ibid., col. 273.

Japan and China.⁸⁴

When the Opposition Members spoke of collective security it was hard to follow their thinking with logical exactitude. For most of them, the idea of collective security appeared in some way to diminish Britain's need for efficient national defence. They seemed to imply a contrast between collective security and national defence by putting them in two different moral categories. If a country claimed that it was arming for purposes of collective security, that was admirable and merited Opposition praise. But if armament was for national defence, as the Government considered the case in Britain, then that was old-fashioned, reactionary, or otherwise undesirable, and must be vehemently criticized and attacked.⁸⁵

When countries of their liking, especially those in

⁸⁴See 325 H. C. Deb., col. 1578, June 25, 1937.

⁸⁵Major James Milner, for example, said: "almost the whole of the Government's rearmament programme is, in fact, aggressive in character and provocative to the last degree." He advocated a combination of "adequate collective security with non-provocative national defence," and the making of a "fresh start in the matter of obtaining collective security." 317 H. C. Deb., cols. 1118, 1121, 1122, November 12, 1936.

the League, built armaments, the Opposition insisted that the Government should reckon these as an asset and as a contribution to collective security. But if, on the other hand, Britain wanted to build up her armaments, the Opposition quickly alleged that this was clear proof that the Government had abandoned the policy of collective security. Essentially they wanted to have it both ways, which was impossible. They wanted to collect but not to subscribe. The point they missed entirely was that national defence was the very foundation of collective security; collective security was not a substitute for national defence.⁸⁶ To some Members in the Opposition, collective security appeared to be an automatic obligation to fight everywhere, and to others it seemed to be a sort of talisman which insulated the nation from attack whether it was armed or not, as Viscount Cranborne aptly put it.⁸⁷

The incantation for collective security did not subside in 1938, and in the face of European realities it represented merely a desperate rear-guard action by the

⁸⁶The foregoing is in part a loose adaptation of the argument offered by Duncan Sandys, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 250, March 2, 1937.

⁸⁷See ibid., cols. 317-18.

most staunch believers. The common argument was that arms could be used effectively only within collective security.⁸⁸ While berating the demonstrated lack of faith in collective security, Sir Archibald Sinclair admitted that it "does not now exist, and none of us would assert that it does."⁸⁹

It was left for the Prime Minister to appeal to the Members to awaken to the realities of the League. As if to jolt the League die-hards from their stubbornness, Neville Chamberlain used very sharp words: "We have never said that in no conceivable circumstances could collective security under the Covenant be provided, but I ask what small country in Europe today, if it be threatened by a larger one, can safely rely on the League alone to protect it against invasion?"⁹⁰

⁸⁸See e.g. Geoffrey Mander, 332 H. C. Deb., col. 119, February 21, 1938. For him, the only hope for the future lay in collective defence. Ibid., col. 120.

⁸⁹332 H. C. Deb., cols. 1585-86, March 7, 1938.

It was Winston Churchill who then charged that those who mocked the Covenant were short-sighted, because, in his view, the Covenant constituted "a most important element in... [British] practical military security." Ibid., col. 1610.

⁹⁰Ibid., col. 1565. Mr. Cocks accused the Prime Minister of uttering a disastrous declaration containing "a series of sentences...which were so cynical and dangerous that they might even have been composed by Herr von Ribbentrop." He added that Chamberlain clearly showed that in

On March 7, 1938, opening a major debate on defence, Neville Chamberlain moved that the House approve the recent Statement Relating to Defence. This Statement for the most part contained "a survey of the progress achieved" and concluded ominously that, despite an anticipated peak of defence expenditure in 1939, "the total expenditure on defence over the five financial years 1937-41" would exceed the sum of one and a half billion pounds.⁹¹ In the ensuing debate on the Motion, Labour moved its own Amendment, which was full of vague phrases:

believing that the safety of this country and the maintenance of peace can only be attained through collective security under the League of Nations and being willing to provide the arms necessary to implement such a policy, [the House] condemns the provision of immense armaments to further a dangerous and unsound foreign policy undertaken by the Government in defiance of its election pledges and, moreover, cannot

the present situation he had "no further use for the League of Nations and the principle of collective security." Ibid., cols. 1647, 1648.

⁹¹Cmd. 5682, (1938), pp. 3, 12. For Chamberlain's Motion, see 332 H. C. Deb., col. 1555.

A year earlier, indicating the magnitude of contemplated Government expenditure, the Statement Relating to Defence Expenditure had suggested that "it would be imprudent to contemplate a total expenditure on defence during the next five years of much less" than one and a half billion pounds. Cmd. 5374, (February 16, 1937), p. 11.

approve [this] defence programme.⁹²

The armaments proposed by the Government were not connected with any clear foreign policy, claimed Attlee; they were not directed to the preservation of the rule of law in the world, but to a dangerous policy of adventure which could not bring peace; for these reasons his party was opposed to them.⁹³ After the Anschluss, Attlee continued his stand that armament was bad for diplomacy and led to war. Yet he conceded the need for some armaments; he recognized that the League had broken down, but only because it was "betrayed by the people who ought to have worked it, and by no people more than by the present Government."⁹⁴ Even at this time, those from the Labour benches put virtually an ultimatum to the Government:

Let me warn hon. Members, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and others, that the workers of this country will rally to the side of the Government only if the Government are prepared to stand for the principles of the League of Nations and for collective security. We regard those principles as the only safeguard for the

⁹²Mr. Lees-Smith, 332 H. C. Deb., col. 1567, March 7, 1938. The Amendment was defeated 351 to 134, while the House approved the Statement on Defence, Cmd. 5682, 347 to 133. See 332 H. C. Deb., cols. 1676, 1680, March 7, 1938.

⁹³See ibid., col. 1663.

⁹⁴333 H. C. Deb., col. 1416, March 24, 1938.

freedom of Democracies and as the only things that are worth making sacrifices for.⁹⁵

VI

Broadly speaking, after the Anschluss advocacy of the League and collective security was, if less frequent, not any less intense. Occasional outbursts continued but, in a growing number of cases, the ideas being expressed had undergone a certain metamorphosis, which only emphasized the ambiguous views about collective security held by its proponents. A new concept called "peace alliance" was used synonymously with "collective security," and was urged as a preferable alternative to armaments.⁹⁶ With this semantic deviation from the original "collective security," the term "alliance" was either employed outright, or increasingly implied through the use of various expressions which connoted the same thing. For example, Morgan Price suggested that Britain should aim currently at "the organisation of the League States to resist firmly the unification of the

⁹⁵James Griffiths, ibid., cols. 1468-69.

⁹⁶As an "effective alternative policy" of the Labour party, Albert Alexander advised the Government: "we say that until you can rebuild an effective peace alliance you will go on having to provide armaments." 334 H. C. Deb., cols. 145, 146, April 4, 1938.

world under a dictatorship hegemony."⁹⁷

Sir Archibald Sinclair however, while mellowing, was still wedded to the old terminology when he pleaded: "Let us then, assert, and rally support for, the principles of the Covenant of the League of Nations before all our potential Allies in resisting the application of force, whether in Spain or in Central or Eastern Europe are beaten or terrorized into submission."⁹⁸ In the summer of 1938, some speakers even used the term "balance of power" together with collective security:

One country after another which might have been our ally in a system of collective security is subjected either by force or by diplomatic pressure, and the balance of power in Europe is steadily being shifted to our disadvantage and to the disadvantage of all the other surviving democratic powers.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Ibid., col. 108.

⁹⁸333 H. C. Deb., col. 1424, March 24, 1938. But he also still firmly believed: "the principles of the Covenant of the League and of international good faith are the only ones upon which peace can be securely established." Ibid., col. 1423.

⁹⁹Miss Eleanor Rathbone, 338 H. C. Deb., col. 3019, July 26, 1938.

Two years earlier, the conception of collective security held by Morgan Jones implied balance of power: "if any member of the League is attacked by another member of the League or any aggressor, all the others pledge themselves, within their power and according to their ability, to make a collective effort to safeguard the aggrieved member of

Similar suggestions were heard intermittently in the House, not merely from the Labour benches, but were usually rejected. Under the aegis of the League and cloaked in the phrase collective security, these suggestions merely meant another formula for alliance. Neither the Government nor the Opposition wanted alliances. Consistently for Attlee, "the sure shield of peace is the League of Nations, not alliances," though he insisted upon collective security.¹⁰⁰ Having in mind various formulae about "peace alliance," the Prime Minister rejected alliances under any guise:

However completely we encase such a proposal as that in the Covenant of the League, however whole-heartedly the League may be prepared to give its sanction and approval to such a project, as a matter of fact, it does not differ from the old alliances of pre-war days which we thought we had abandoned in favour of something better.¹⁰¹

The illogical persistence upon collective security was continued sporadically until, at the time of Munich, it

the League." 315 H. C. Deb., col. 1199, July 27, 1936. The Government shared this idea as Viscount Cranborne replied: "Our conception of collective security is the same as his [Jones']. That is common ground. He says that the forces of order must be stronger than the forces of disorder. We say the same thing." Ibid.

¹⁰⁰310 H. C. Deb., col. 2460, April 6, 1936.

¹⁰¹Neville Chamberlain, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 1402, March 24, 1938.

was again very seriously advanced by its die-hard advocates in both Liberal and Labour parties of the Opposition. With considerable irrelevance, the speakers found diverse grounds to regret that, both prior to and during the crisis, the policy of the League was not followed by the Government.¹⁰² The majority, however, turned toward the future and insisted that the only means of salvation was a return to collective security. Miss Ellen Wilkinson declared solemnly: "The only hope for this country is to build up a collective security system through the League, and no improvisation, however well meant or followed by the prayers of the people or the Prime Minister, can take its place."¹⁰³ In view of the experience of the crisis which preceded the Munich Agreement, Mr. Alexander expressed his conviction that:

unless you can rally opinion in this country, in the other democratic countries in Europe, and in our

¹⁰²E.g. Geoffrey Mander lamented that if League policy as advocated by the Opposition "had been consistently and courageously pursued, we should now be well on the way of securing world peace, with a League of Nations functioning normally, as was intended, with an ever-decreasing taxation and with great extension to our social services, which are impossible in the present conditions." 339 H. C. Deb., col. 225, October 4, 1938.

¹⁰³339 H. C. Deb., col. 528, October 6, 1938.

Dominions to the cause of real collective security based upon the rule of law and the support of that law against the aggressor, then the world is going to slide down and down into chaos....I want all, to whatever party they belong, to take the present opportunity of working for the reconstruction of a true League and collective security. If the Government are willing to adopt the real basis of, and to support, collective security through the League, I shall never hesitate to vote the money required to back it.¹⁰⁴

But the masterpiece of irrelevance and the culmination of ambiguity was reached when Arthur Greenwood, on behalf of the Labour party, moved an Amendment to the Government's Motion of approval of the recent policy surrounding the Munich Conference. Greenwood proposed that, following the words "That this House" in the original Motion, this text of the Amendment be substituted:

while profoundly relieved that war has been averted for the time being, cannot approve a policy which has led to the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia under threat of armed force and to the humiliation of our country and its exposure to grave dangers; and realising the intense desire of all peoples for lasting peace, demands an active support of the method of collective security through the League of Nations and the immediate initiation by His Majesty's Government of proposals for the summoning of a world conference to consider the removal of economic and political grievance which

¹⁰⁴339 H. C. Deb., col. 295, October 4, 1938.

imperil peace.¹⁰⁵

Spurning both unilateral disarmament and unilateral rearmament equally, Mr. Greenwood said: "To tread the path of peace we must seek first the high road of collective security." He then submitted his opinion that an immediate start on it should be made. The moment was opportune, he went on, as the horrors of war were deeply implanted universally. Thereupon Mr. Greenwood asked directly: "Do the Government, or do they not, intend to take steps to organise collective security for defence against aggressors?"¹⁰⁶ Since the Opposition thought that difficulties had arisen because people had put off facing them, they advanced their "suggestions for collective security and for a world conference in order to deal with the causes of war."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵339 H. C. Deb., col. 351, October 5, 1938. Sir John Simon moved the Motion: "That this House approves the policy of His Majesty's Government by which war was averted in the recent crisis and supports their efforts to secure a lasting peace." Ibid., col. 337.

In the vote the Amendment was rejected 369 to 150, and the Motion carried 366 to 144. See ibid., cols. 554, 558.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., cols. 358, 359. About the world conference he said: "Those, if there were any, who did not choose to attend, would be branded as unwilling to conform to the wishes of humanity." Ibid., col. 359.

¹⁰⁷Attlee, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 542, October 6, 1938.

Unique in outlook, another speech given by a Member learned in law was replete with contradictions. In the Labour party Amendment, he explained, the reason for combining action to support collective security with the summoning of a world conference was "to consider the whole problem of those economic injustices which are still festering in the world." Collective security was the only known method of restraining "the forcible change of boundaries, and it has no aggressive purpose" behind its operation. "To abandon collective security," he claimed, was to "welcome lawlessness in the world." But even collective security had no value without economic appeasement. This Member pleaded for resolve and new efforts "to protect what remains of law and order and justice in the world by an alliance of those nations which still believe in these great principles of civilisation." This verbal edifice was capped by the belief that it was still possible in Britain, "at this hour of crisis, [to] make the greatest and most lasting contribution to world peace, not by building massive armaments to protect and isolate our own vast Imperial possessions, but by working out a new and better system for the co-operative economic development of world

resources."¹⁰⁸

The Prime Minister succinctly answered these Opposition charges and demands when he declared that no conference was better than one which would fail if the ground for it were insufficiently prepared. Concerning collective security, he told the House that some Members would "walk into any trap if it is only baited with a familiar catchword and they do it when this system is called collective security."¹⁰⁹

It was evidently impossible to resolve these intellectual contradictions because the Members held their views with great fervour and with an unshakable faith steeped in the Radical tradition and ideological persuasion. It remained for one Member to provide an epitaph for the phrase collective security, when she stated: "It is not the road to peace: it is the end of that road."¹¹⁰ While the ideal of collective security was never achieved, its concept, as actually understood by many Members, was revived in the

¹⁰⁸Sir Stafford Cripps, 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 415, 416, 417, October 5, 1938.

¹⁰⁹Chamberlain, 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 550-551, 549, October 6, 1938.

¹¹⁰Miss Florence Horsbrugh, ibid., col. 523.

spring of 1939 under the new label, "Peace Front Against Aggression."¹¹¹

¹¹¹What "we are trying to build up [is]...a peace front against aggression." Neville Chamberlain, 347 H. C. Deb., cols. 1838, 1839, May 19, 1939.

CHAPTER IV

IDEOLOGICAL ANTIPATHIES

I

Precipitated by the Abyssinian crisis, the debating in the House became strongly coloured by party ideology. Narrow partisan vision obscured wider horizons and precluded realistic evaluation of the ever-changing circumstances in foreign affairs. This was particularly true within the ranks of the Opposition parties, predominantly Labour. The ideological inspiration of the latter being of the political Left, that party vigorously espoused any associated issue, and habitually vilified anything related to the political Right.

The Labourites frequently gave the impression that they were more fervently devoted to the doctrines of international socialism, and to its idea of justice in favouring Leftist causes, than they were loyal to their own country. As members of the Trade Union movement, many Members of Parliament belonged to, and expressed solidarity with the Socialist International. By virtue of this, they pointedly gave their reasons for censuring the Government's negotia-

tions with the Fascist powers, both Italy and Germany: the regimes in those countries were persecuting their fellow socialists.

Moreover, a strong sense of ethics and an urge for universal righteousness formed an integral part of the principles of foreign policy advocated by the Labour and Liberal parties. Mere expediency should not be allowed to dictate British foreign policy, one Member proclaimed. It should be based instead "on something better, on fundamental and external principles of right and wrong." He pleaded for Britain to stand for decency.¹ Another Member complained of uncertainty whether Britain, with her "great forces, [was] really going to act in defence of the cause of right."² Although he spoke in a specific context, Philip Noel-Baker made a statement which was representative of this feeling:

The most important simple fact in human government is the moral sense of man, and unless our policy is based upon that moral sense and upon a desire for justice and for the upholding of the law in the Spanish question, in the Abyssinian question and in the China question, then the Government will not be able to have the support of this people in the policy they are

¹Lieutenant-Commander Reginald Fletcher, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 3143, March 25, 1937.

²Geoffrey Mander, ibid., col. 3113.

pursuing and they will not be able to get the results which they hope that policy will achieve.³

Speaking of the historic tradition of British foreign policy during the nineteenth century, Clement Attlee characterized it in its broadest, non-party sense as having been in "the Liberal tradition," favouring "democracy and self-government," and that British interest had been in "the extension of liberty and democracy throughout the world." He hoped to hear an assurance that that still was the British interest.⁴ But in the post-war twentieth century, Britain could not afford to take this nineteenth century point of view. Britain was no longer unassailable, maintained Harold Nicolson. Furthermore, the word democracy posed some difficulty, admitting of many interpretations. While using the word with abandon, Labour never clearly defined it. The only possible impression, which Nicolson derived, was that the Opposition Members, "when they talk of democracy, mean only those countries which are governed by groups of people who share their own economic and social

³336 H. C. Deb., cols. 787-88, May 20, 1938.

⁴328 H. C. Deb., col. 667, November 1, 1937.

views."⁵

This discriminatory attitude in foreign affairs provided a source of contempt toward specific dictators and their arbitrarily imposed regimes. The Members in the Opposition, applying their own ethical norms as a matter of course, implied or stipulated the degree of their contempt for the various dictators. In the category of odious, they placed Benito Mussolini and Adolph Hitler, soon adding General Francisco Franco. A somewhat milder form of dislike existed for the two Austrian Chancellors, Engelbert Dollfuss and his successor, Kurt von Schuschnigg. Conspicuously, the ideological scorn did not apply to the dictator of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics who seemingly enjoyed full immunity from this kind of treatment.

This dislike of particular dictators once led Attlee to suggest that Britain should not recognize some of them. Clearly having Mussolini in mind, he said, "we must not recognise a Government that kills its political opponents,

⁵326 H. C. Deb., col. 1892, July 19, 1937. If they meant "government by the consent of the governed," Italy and Germany were certainly democratic. If they meant control of the executive by the legislature, the United States would not be democratic. If they meant the right of an individual of whatever party and class to enjoy the freedoms of speech, movement and writing, then the Soviet Union under these terms was not democratic. Closely adapted from Nicolson, ibid.

and we remember Matteotti." For Hitler, this Opposition leader had a different charge: "We must not have any dealings with a Government that persecutes religion, and we know what is happening with regard to the Protestant and the Catholic Churches in Germany."⁶

An articulate Labour Member who was a frequent speaker in foreign affairs debates, Morgan Price, did not want to "see a League of Nations with Hitlerite Germany and Mussolini's Italy" as members of that body, unless those two countries were "prepared to work in co-operation with other nations." But having offered this condition, he immediately expressed his belief that "the totalitarian States of Germany and Italy [were] incapable of working with the other nations of Europe."⁷

The Labour party did not perceive any shading in international affairs: everything was either black or white. The party preferred one and had utter contempt for the other. That division was always the starting point of Labour's perorations against the Government or against those outside Britain whom they disliked. They implied that

⁶328 H. C. Deb., col. 667, November 1, 1937.

⁷313 H. C. Deb., col. 1246, June 18, 1936.

Europe was divided into two camps, and that there should be little or no communication between the two. One Member identified those camps in the following terms:

In the world outside there are two forces -- the forces which seek to preserve democracy and liberty and freedom, and to use them to build a better life, a life of tolerance, a life in which there is equality of opportunity, the life which we here believe will fully flower only under a co-operative system; and there are other forces which seek to cramp life and to destroy democracy.

Whether we like it or not there are those two forces, the democratic forces and the Fascist forces.... Since 1931 the democratic countries of Europe have been on the retreat and the Fascist Powers have been marching on.⁸

In this steady march of the Fascist powers, Hitler's Germany indisputably represented the most important factor in international affairs. It would be logical to expect that the greatest concern of the British Parliamentarians would be with the danger signs emanating from Germany. But such was not the case. Preoccupation with Germany, while strong and active, nevertheless was quite uneven. It corresponded roughly with the news of events in Europe

⁸James Griffiths, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 1465, March 24, 1938.

At the time of Munich, Colonel Wedgwood divided Britain into two classifications: "Those who distrust the Chancellor Fuhrer [sic] of the German Reich and those who do not;" and those who trusted Hitler, he regarded as "fools or traitors to the cause of democracy." 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 211, 214, October 4, 1938.

engendered by Germany, and it was distinctly unsustainable.

These sporadic but pronounced expressions of attitude toward Germany were, for the most part, heavily charged with emotion. But, because intense contempt for Mussolini and everything which he represented dominated the emotions of the entire Opposition, so that he became the main target of its invective, concern about Germany as the more acute source of danger tended to recede. Thus Hitler escaped much Parliamentary attention during 1936 and 1937. Nevertheless, in regard to Germany and Italy, both the Labour and Liberal parties gave full vent to their ideological susceptibilities, rather than govern their opinions with equanimity.

All of this contributed to the development of grossly distorted and impractical views. A forceful spokesman from the Labour party, James Griffiths, made the position of his political friends abundantly clear in a frank declaration, which went a long way toward explaining the reasons for his party's overt hostility to Government policy:

We in the trade union movement belong to a Labour and Socialist International and we make no apology for it. ...Do the hon. Members expect us to applaud a Government which enters into negotiations with the Italian Government and the German Government, which have destroyed in their countries the movement of which we

are a part?

.
The Government proposes to negotiate with the Fascist Powers, which deny any freedom to their workers. We cannot support a Government that fawns on Fascist Powers, which killed some of the best comrades we have had the privilege of knowing.⁹

II

Among the first things which Adolph Hitler did in Germany was to dissolve trade unions and persecute their officers, to abolish political parties and to eradicate the Social Democrats. These developments particularly aroused British Labour and resulted in a rapid change of attitude toward Hitler and his Germany. After a continued display of solidarity with and sympathy for the Weimar Republic, the Labour party now demonstrated its contempt and antipathy for the Nazi state and its leader. The entire Labour party concept of foreign policy was not only coloured by this outlook, but was now firmly anchored in ideological hatred. The Labour Members told the Government not to expect the trade unions of Britain to "assist you to be friendly with people who smashed those trade unions and murdered those

⁹332 H. C. Deb., cols. 111, 112, February 21, 1938.

colleagues of ours in the international trade union world."¹⁰

From their maze of statements, a typical line might be reconstructed. As evidence accrued of the ruthlessness of the Nazi regime, Germany became the living symbol of all retrogression. Her rearmament programme, "proceeding rapidly, remorselessly, menacingly," emerged as an enormously threatening concern.¹¹ The peace of Europe was at stake, insisted some, the greatest danger being the "German-Fascist dictatorship."¹²

German rearmament was then explained by the Labour party in terms of the denial to Germany of the equality she had asked but never had been granted, since Versailles. Because of this, the Nazi hand was strengthened in that period, until equality was taken by Germany without permission.¹³ But this did not explain Hitler entirely. One of the stock interpretations was that Hitler came to power "largely because of the 7,000,000 unemployed and of the

¹⁰Gordon Macdonald, 334 H. C. Deb., col. 80, April 4, 1938. This applied to Hitler and Mussolini equally.

¹¹Hugh Dalton, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1714, May 6, 1936.

¹²John Parker, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 131, February 24, 1936.

¹³See Arthur Henderson, 311 H. C. Deb., cols. 1762, 1763, May 6, 1936.

fearful sufferings of the people during the economic crisis."¹⁴

It was relatively easy for an attitude of this kind to be transferred into demands for action against the enemies of democracy. Some Labour voices advocated the rapid removal from power of the two great dangers to peace, Hitler and Mussolini. While stopping short of advocating a preventive war against either of them, they recommended that nothing should be done to encourage or support the dictatorships, and that everything should be done to precipitate their downfall.¹⁵

Others claimed that Britain was deferring to Hitler, thereby misleading him and unconsciously luring him on; but his past triumphs did not mean that Britain would always defer. Because of this it was "high time that we made up our minds at what point we are going definitely to resist aggression and, through the League of Nations, organise collective security against that possibility."¹⁶

¹⁴Philip Noel-Baker, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 509, October 6, 1938.

¹⁵See John Parker, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 131, February 24, 1936.

¹⁶Hastings Lees-Smith, 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2233, February 25, 1937.

In a similar vein, Vyvyan Adams, although he was a supporter of the Government, referred to the peculiar mood prevalent at the time in Britain. He pointed out that the Nazis in Germany were all the while waiting, watching and working, and that the Nazi government had already eluded retribution for far too much. He deplored the behaviour of the British press, which had "sung for the law-breaker the paeon which has varied from piano to fortissimo."¹⁷ He wished to emphasize the danger implicit in the Nazi system in Germany; there had never been "a danger more manifest than that which Nazi Germany to-day presents to Christendom." Germany for him was really the central and underlying problem in Europe, while Italy was merely an item. In view of this, he pleaded for a dedication of "the strength of all to the defence of each." If that were not done then, he warned, "we are deferring a collision whose momentum may be increased by the postponement." Seemingly addressing himself to Britain-at-large in this eloquent philippic against Germany, Mr. Adams uttered words that were a match for any shrill Cassandra:

never was there a more pitiable self-deception than is

¹⁷311 H. C. Deb., col. 119, April 21, 1936.

to-day being practiced in this country by thousands of our generous-hearted fellow-countrymen. If they can be persuaded to show themselves not hostile to the proposition that Britain will stand with other countries in the path both of the aggressor Italy to-day, and of a potentially aggressive Germany to-morrow -- then there will be in fact no realization of that frightful danger -- aggression by Germany in Central Europe. If that condition is not established, we may have to intervene yet again to stem an avalanche upon the continent of Europe that we have been too late to stop.¹⁸

Vyvyan Adams was particularly concerned that the greatest threat to the British Empire was "from the two expansionist capitals of Berlin and Rome." He deplored a policy, which he saw developing in certain quarters, of saying, "'Peace at any price, and embrace Hitler and the Germans at any cost.'" Someday, somewhere, we in this country shall have to make our stand."¹⁹ But the fact was that, in the balance, most Members in the House, regardless of party affiliation, shared in the belief tersely expressed by David Grenfell that war was "the most futile and foolish weakness of mankind, a terrible thing."²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., cols. 120, 121.

¹⁹327 H. C. Deb., col. 154, October 21, 1937.

²⁰337 H. C. Deb., col. 1029, June 21, 1938. At the time of Munich he confessed his own background: "I found myself in a Radical household, with a tradition of freedom and a tradition of right." 339 H. C. Deb., col. 445, October 5, 1938.

III

Among other far-reaching consequences, the re-occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 sealed the fate of Austria. If Hitler could take such an action and meet only paper protests, then he knew that he could do anything in Central Europe and not be seriously challenged.²¹ In the two years between the Rhineland coup and the Anschluss of Austria, many Members sporadically raised their voices in the House, demanding action against Germany that would exceed paper protests. But on the issue of Austria, the Opposition was caught in the web of its own confused thinking, and broadly speaking, did not protest unduly.

In many ways, the case of the Austrian Anschluss merely afforded occasion for a major demonstration of the addiction to ideological prejudice which permeated the ranks of Radical opinion. Contempt which they harboured for Italy led many Members to regard the prospect of Austrian absorption into Germany almost with glee:

As Austria is now practically a dependency of Italy and has taken no part in sanctions, it is true that no one

²¹This was the essence of an article by Edouard Bonnefous, "Les conséquences économiques de l'Anschluss," in Le Journal des Economistes, XCVII (1938), pp. 324-32, cited in Baynes, ed., op. cit., II, 1889.

is going to defend the Brenner Pass for Mussolini. If the German troops like to invade Austria by the Brenner Pass in order to release the Germans in the Trentino, we shall regard that with complete complacency, and even if they find it necessary to bomb the Palazzo Venetia, it would not be the first time that Rome has been sacked by the Goths.²²

Nor was Lloyd George greatly concerned about Austria. On June 18, 1936, he made a statement which must have caused many Members in the House to listen in utter disbelief. The war-time Prime Minister declared: "Austria? Well, Austria is always with us, always full of trouble. But there is one thing the people of this country have made up their minds definitely about. Whatever Government is in power they will never go to war again for an Austrian quarrel."²³

On March 13, 1938, Nazi Germany precipitately incorporated the State of Austria into the Third Reich. Though the world had anticipated the event, it generated widespread shock when it took place. The Anschluss came as no surprise, suggested Mr. Mander, as it "was merely a

²²Mr. Cocks, 313 H. C. Deb., cols. 1689-90, June 23, 1936.

²³313 H. C. Deb., col. 1226, June 18, 1936. He later repeated his belief that no one would be able to persuade Britain to go to war "in respect of any quarrel in that part of the world." 315 H. C. Deb., col. 1134, July 27, 1936.

question of the date when it would happen, but it was, none the less, abominable that it should have happened, and that it should have happened in the brutal way it has."²⁴

Deeply hurt and disappointed by the turn of events, the Prime Minister invited the House to face the hard fact of the situation: "nothing could have arrested this action by Germany unless we and others with us had been prepared to use force to prevent it."²⁵ Since no one was prepared to do so, all that remained was to bemoan the method which Germany employed. Neville Chamberlain himself set the tone for widespread feeling in the House when he declared: "...methods adopted throughout these events call for the severest condemnation, and have administered a profound shock to all who are interested in the preservation of European peace."²⁶ The Members unanimously disliked the mode of its execution, but the two Opposition parties limited their objection to the Anschluss of Austria to only that. As Arthur Henderson put it at the time: "What we are concerned with is the method which has been adopted, and

²⁴333 H. C. Deb., col. 108, March 14, 1938.

²⁵Neville Chamberlain, ibid., col. 52.

²⁶Ibid., col. 50.

the implications which arise as a result of the application of that method."²⁷

The deed was deplored, but accepted, and Vyvyan Adams gave three examples by which he tried to show that Hitler had been led to assume that Britain "would be practically indifferent to the fate of Austria." One "coming from a great authority" was "the monstrous question-begging remark" made by Lloyd George in the House on June 18, 1936. The second was "the very vocal attitude of the pacifists" in Britain, represented particularly by George Lansbury. There was a third school of thought: "the savage, stupid, prehistoric cry of the isolationist, best expressed in the phrase: 'The independence of Austria and Czechoslovakia are not worth one British life.'" It was Mr. Adams too, who succinctly expressed the feeling of the House as a whole about the Anschluss: "No words are strong enough to condemn the action of Germany. Her conduct is obscene and abominable, and the fact that it has been exactly what some of us were expecting does not make it any more venial."²⁸

²⁷Ibid., col. 67.

²⁸Ibid., cols. 149, 150, 149. He asked: "What has happened to the pro-German element in this honourable House? They are singularly subdued to-day, almost taciturn." Ibid., col. 149.

Coloured by ideology, the Opposition's outlook on foreign policy provided a typical demonstration of contradictory thinking on the occasion of the Anschluss. Austria was a small, downtrodden country and enjoyed a great deal of sympathy in post-war years. In accusing his political adversaries of having "cut up [Austria] and left [her] like a torso without arms, without head, without legs,"²⁹ George Lansbury could have been speaking for all Britons harbouring those sympathies. When this sentiment was brought together with corresponding contempt for Germany and Hitler, the Opposition Members logically should have been obliged to raise a hue and cry on behalf of Austria. But they did not do so for the simple reason that Austria no longer enjoyed their good grace, as was demonstrated by several speakers in the ensuing debates.

Prompted by the urgency of the Austrian crisis, the issue was discussed on three occasions, March 7, 14 and 24, 1938. But on the whole, there was less debate about the Anschluss itself, or about Austria in general, than there was about other problems. This was indicative of a certain coolness toward Austria. While Hitler's use of force and

²⁹332 H. C. Deb., col. 1617, March 7, 1938.

his disregard for the rule of law were heavily scored, in the balance the Anschluss itself appears to have prompted less regret than the method by which it was achieved. Some representatives of the Labour party, like Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher, took the Anschluss with relative calmness and pointed out the reason:

Perhaps Austria was bound to go. Perhaps what we are complaining about chiefly is the manner in which the extinction of Austrian independence has been brought about. I agree with other hon. Members that the fate of Austria was decided when the Austrian Government decided to shoot up the workers' movement.³⁰

Another Labour Member seemed almost relieved at the turn of events, saying that the late Austrian Government was "nothing to weep over. It was a dictatorship." Amplifying this feeling, he provided the key to understanding this emotional aloofness as he added:

The crime of Dr. Dolfuss [sic] and Dr. Schuschnigg was that they destroyed the Socialist party of Austria, and when the time of crisis came there was no body of feeling in the country which regarded them as popular Government. I deplore this march into Austria, but I am not weeping over the dead body of Dr. Schuschnigg's Government.³¹

In the case of the Austrian Anschluss the Labourites

³⁰333 H. C. Deb., col. 146, March 14, 1938.

³¹James Ede, ibid., col. 130.

demonstrated their preference for only those regimes in Europe which met, and continued to meet, their ideological approval. They could not forget the odium which Dollfuss incurred; nor was their displeasure mitigated by the fact that he was assassinated by the Nazis in an attempted Putsch in 1934. They considered him and his successor Schuschnigg as symbols of a dictatorial regime in milder form, but still with an affinity to the dictatorships of Germany and Italy.

On the whole, an Independent Labour Member summarized the virtual unanimity in appraisal of the Anschluss: Hitler's action in Austria was in defiance of international law and contravened all decency under any ruler or any state in the past. For the Socialists, in addition, there was another element to the Anschluss which they could not forget: the Austrian Chancellor Dr. Schuschnigg did not have a blameless record in his treatment of Socialists in Austria. They had been imprisoned, often without trial, and they had been cruelly treated.³² On those grounds the demise of Schuschnigg and the passing of Austrian independence were accepted with relative equanimity by all the Opposition

³²Closely adapted from George Buchanan, ibid., col. 137.

parties in Britain.

IV

At the time of the Anschluss, and especially in the debate of March 14, 1938, Italy occupied the largest part of the Opposition speeches. Conditioned by the doctrinaire approach, the Labour party in particular continued to bear a gigantic grudge against Italy and Mussolini, intermittently paying some attention to the danger emanating from Berlin. The current censure of Italy was not so much because of her assent to the Anschluss; rather it was due to the state of Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Discussion on the course of that war always provided opportunity for the outpouring of strong anti-Italian emotions.

It was evident from the speeches that the concern expressed for Spain, and for the Italian role in the civil war there, was much stronger than the regret about Hitler's latest action in Europe. Well into 1938, despite individual bursts of vituperation against Hitler and Nazi Germany, there was decidedly less attention given to that state than there was sustained vitriolic agitation directed against Mussolini. The Italian dictator remained the main object

of Opposition ideological venom.

Up to the time of the Anschluss, the bête noire of Europe and the international law-breaker without peer was, for the Opposition, not so much Hitler as it was Mussolini, with General Franco coming a close second. One of the reasons that Mussolini drew so much ire from the Opposition parties was the lingering of the old emotions over Abyssinia. Though the war in Spain became the main pre-occupation of the debates, there were frequent bitter references to Abyssinia. In a fine example of ironical ambiguity, Hugh Dalton recalled the course of events thus:

In 1935-36, there was the Italian aggression against Abyssinia. Perhaps the conduct of His Majesty's Government on that occasion struck a harder blow at the League as an institution and at our hopes of preserving peace in an orderly fashion than any other incident that had occurred, because not only did they fail to prevent aggression by speaking to Signor Mussolini in good time, but when aggression occurred they applied only the most mild and inoffensive sanctions. They neither stood up to Signor Mussolini nor stood clear of him. Either alternative would have been better, but they chose a policy in which we got the worst of both worlds and we got most of the discredit. Italy was alienated from us, without being hindered in her action, and from that has arisen many of the dangers of which we are now very conscious. Finally, we have had the civil war in Spain, of which much has been said.³³

³³326 H. C. Deb., col. 1827, July 19, 1937.

Robert Bernays, a Liberal, gave the city of Bristol as an example, which was typical of the confusion of the Labour

Sir Archibald Sinclair similarly declared the Government chiefly responsible for the humiliation as well as for "the abandonment of Abyssinia, except for inadequate sanctions, to the ruthless military aggression of Italy, an aggression which has been marked by deeds of barbaric violence and most horrible of all, by the use of the vile and fiendish weapon, gas."³⁴ But in placing all the blame upon the British Government, Hugh Dalton termed the failure to discuss Abyssinia at the Stresa Conference "one of the most criminal blunders in the whole course of British diplomacy in these disastrous years since the summer of 1931."³⁵

However, since its outbreak in July 1936, the civil

candidates in the recent Election: in Central Bristol, a Labour candidate was in favour of economic sanctions; in East Bristol, the Labour candidate was opposed to all sanctions; and in his own constituency of North Bristol, the Labour candidate was in favour of economic sanctions as long as they did not apply to food. See 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1812, May 6, 1936.

³⁴311 H. C. Deb., col. 1746, May 6, 1936. But he did add: "It would be unfair to attribute...the sole responsibility for these calamities" in Abyssinia to the British Government, as there was heavy responsibility resting upon the French Government as well. Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., col. 1721.

war in Spain and its side issues held the almost undivided attention of the Opposition, prompting one new Member to observe that since he had taken his seat, he had heard more about Spain than he had heard about Britain; the story was singularly monotonous as there was "nothing but good on the side towards which there is a partisan leaning."³⁶

Among the many issues, the merits of non-intervention and the granting of belligerent rights were hotly disputed, with the Opposition fiercely objecting to both. For example, the leader of the Labour party seldom missed an opportunity to show his pro-Spanish Government bias when he criticized the non-intervention policy of the British Government, and when he adamantly opposed the granting of even partial belligerent rights to the forces of General Franco.³⁷

In the course of the Spanish conflict, the Labour and Liberal parties were completely incapable of impartiality, and persistently expressed a distorted, partisan viewpoint. The Prime Minister could have had most Opposition

³⁶Admiral Sir Percy Royds, 334 H. C. Deb., col. 73, April 4, 1938.

³⁷See Clement Attlee, 326 H. C. Deb., cols. 3533-34, passim, July 30, 1937.

speakers in mind when he said, of Philip Noel-Baker's preoccupation with the Spanish Civil War, that his "judgment [was] warped by his sympathies in this matter."³⁸ The lure, for the Opposition, of the Spanish conflagration was so irresistible as to be almost inexplicable except by ideological affinity. This probably led the Foreign Secretary to exclaim: "We do not want, on this occasion, a war of the Spanish obsession."³⁹

V

Obsession with Spain was inseparable from obsession with Mussolini. The opinions voiced by the Opposition about Mussolini were all the same in general tenor. Since their criticism of Government policy did not bring desirable results, and since they were driven by subjective views, many Members resorted to the frequent use of offensive language. Particularly attacked in language uncommon among British Parliamentarians was Mussolini, the head of a state with whom the British Prime Minister had been trying to reach an agreement. Arthur Henderson was concerned that

³⁸Neville Chamberlain, 337 H. C. Deb., col. 940, June 21, 1938.

³⁹Anthony Eden, 325 H. C. Deb., col. 1601, June 25, 1937.

Mussolini was carrying on a subtle diplomatic game, determined to compel the British Government to recognize his recent conquest of Abyssinia.⁴⁰

But many Members had no compunction about heaping a barrage of abuse upon the head of the Italian Government. Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher considered him to be "drunk with vanity, drunk with arrogance, drunk with megalomania, drunk with pride and power, [and] reeling along."⁴¹ Singularly strong terms were used by the spokesman from the Independent Labour party. John McGovern, usually outspoken on every subject, called Mussolini "the brutal, ruthless dictator, the gangster of Italy."⁴² He accused the Italian dictator of being incapable of telling the truth and of having organized "the greatest thuggery ever known in history."⁴³ McGovern described Hitler and Mussolini as "two of the greatest three-card tricksters that the world has ever known. They are, in working class language, a

⁴⁰ See 330 H. C. Deb., col. 1843, December 21, 1937.

⁴¹ 327 H. C. Deb., col. 131, October 21, 1937.

⁴² 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2254, February 25, 1937.

⁴³ 327 H. C. Deb., col. 110, October 21, 1937.

bunch of liars in whom no one can have any faith."⁴⁴

It was only after Arthur Greenwood referred to the content of one of Mussolini's recent speeches as that of "brag, bluff, braggadocio and cowardice," that Sir Patrick Hannon rose on a point of Order, asking whether it was in accordance with the procedure and tradition of the British House of Commons for a Member to make that kind of observation with regard to the head of a friendly state. The Speaker of the House resignedly replied: "If I were to have my time taken up correcting hon. Members with regard to what they say about friendly states I should have time for nothing else."⁴⁵

Occasionally, some Labour Members were capable of candor and lucidity. Compared with their usual declarations, these moments helped to illustrate their confused thinking on foreign policy issues. For example, Arthur Henderson

⁴⁴333 H. C. Deb., col. 1475, March 24, 1938. He held no less original views about the German dictator. "Hitlerism" was, for McGovern, "simply capitalism in a greater state of decay" than prevailed in Britain at that time. 309 H. C. Deb., col. 168, February 24, 1936. Hitler was "a determined aggressor and capitalist dictator, born not of some theories of Fascism but of the necessities of the decaying order of capitalism." 320 H. C. Deb., cols. 2253-54, February 25, 1937.

⁴⁵See 334 H. C. Deb., col. 42, April 4, 1938. Italics added.

once clearly saw that "any attempt to separate the sheep from the goats and to have the world divided into two or more camps based upon ideological differences would be absolutely fatal to the future welfare of the world."⁴⁶

Another time, Herbert Morrison made a similarly enlightened admission. Hoping to speak for everyone else, he said:

"Our business is to promote peace with all nations of the world, whatever the complexion of their Government may be. It is difficult for us in the case of the Fascist Powers, but if we were the Government it would be our duty to do that."⁴⁷

But in the balance, they were too chained to their doctrines to overcome their ambiguities. They wanted friendship with Italy, Philip Noel-Baker maintained, promptly qualifying it: "But when we look at Mussolini's record, we remember that for 15 years he has destroyed law

⁴⁶330 H. C. Deb., col. 1841, December 21, 1937.

⁴⁷332 H. C. Deb., col. 307, February 22, 1938. Italics added. He repeated: "As a Labour party, if we were a Government, we should be, as we ought to be, ready to do business in the interests of the peace of the world and of justice with every nation in the world and every type of country, irrespective of political complexion." Applying these feelings toward Germany and Italy, he also declared: "We are ready for justice to every people in the world provided that that justice is coupled with peace and the collective organisation of world order." Ibid., col. 310.

and justice in Italy, the very basis of civilisation."⁴⁸

Concerning Germany and Hitler, language on the whole was more moderate until the Anschluss, when scorn and acerbity became more intense. The acrimony reached a new peak at the time of Munich, but culminated in mid-March of 1939, when the President of Czechoslovakia yielded before the brutal Nazi pressure and the remains of that weakened State became a Protectorate of the Third Reich. The intervals in which expressions of ideological dislike for Hitler's Germany were relatively few could be explained largely by the presence in Great Britain of a great deal of guilt feeling toward Germany. During the period between the wars, and long before the Nazi revolution, there loomed large a school of thought in Britain which agitated for revision of the harsh terms imposed by the Versailles Peace Treaty. Meaculpism, a French scholar aptly suggested, was a name which that school of thought readily invited.⁴⁹

The ranks of the Opposition in particular were replete with meaculpists, and remained subject to an unresolved emotional burden, wherein a strong sense of guilt

⁴⁸336 H. C. Deb., col. 788, May 20, 1938.

⁴⁹See Etienne Mantoux, The Carthaginian Peace, (Pittsburgh, 1965), p. 17.

toward Germany wrestled with doctrinaire dislike for the Nazi dictatorship. That feeling of remorse, as it prevailed in the House of Commons in the period under consideration, will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE SENSE OF GUILT TOWARD GERMANY

I

The two major parties in the Opposition represented a large body of political opinion in Britain. For about three-quarters of the period between the wars, these parties had been pleading the cause of the prostrate Germany. The Liberals did so mostly because of their tradition of sympathy for the helpless and inferior. The Labourites did so because of a strong bond of solidarity with the German workers, and of a general affinity to the German trade union movement, as well. The preponderance of close political kin, the German Social Democrats, in the life of the Weimar Republic further complemented these compelling sympathies. The two British parties enjoyed strong support at home from many talented and able intellectual leaders and writers. In their ranks, both parties:

harboured pure pacifist elements, the Labour party more than the Liberal. Both had the same mentality on methods of maintaining peace, the same belief in the League of Nations, the same reluctance to think in military and strategic terms, the same feelings of shame and distaste at the memory and about the instruments of war....in their attitude towards the Peace Settlement

they were all well agreed; 'Versailles' was a term of abuse.¹

Broadly speaking, the whole House shared a negative attitude toward the Versailles Peace Treaty. The Opposition was riddled with feelings of guilt because of the alleged injustice done to Germany by the Treaty terms. But not everyone objected to the Treaty in the same way, nor did everyone denounce a particular aspect of it, because "hostility to the Treaty was a complex matter."²

When there was little left of the Versailles settlement, Albert Alexander emphasized in the House that, ever since 1918, the Labour party had "persistently and consistently...argued against the injustices which were imposed upon defeated enemies." He claimed that, in effect, the policy of the Labour party from that time on had been

¹McCallum, op. cit., pp. 90-91. The two parties "could never unite, because many Liberals were conservative in economic matters, and even the more radical refused to be bound by Socialist doctrine." Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 91.

For a superb analysis of the composition of British opinion which was hostile to the Treaty, see ibid., pp. 86-125. Also see A.J.P. Taylor, The Trouble Makers, (Bloomington, Ind., 1958), pp. 167-200 and the article by Professor Fieldhouse, "The British Labour Party and British Foreign Policy," op. cit., pp. 198-206. I am indebted to these scholars for their interpretative insights on some of the problems discussed in this monograph.

one of appeasement. With few exceptions, Mr. Alexander asserted that it was "the constant opposition, the capitalist opposition" to the Labour party's attempts "to secure complete appeasement in Europe which led to the German people finally taking Hitler because they felt there was nothing else they could take."³

When the Rhineland was reoccupied, recognizing that Germany was already breaking the shackles of the Treaty, the leader of the Opposition Liberals declared: "we ought to have struck them off before now. No system of law can preserve the status quo, or can be immune from the laws of growth and change." The failures in the past to improve the situation, he suggested, had not been entirely Germany's fault.⁴

This great sympathy for Germany suffered an unexpected setback when Hitler appeared at the helm of the German state. Before he had come to power, in Labour reasoning, it had been desirable to promote both appeasement of Germany and the granting to her of equality. But Hitler's

³334 H. C. Deb., cols. 145, 146, April 4, 1938.

⁴Sir Archibald Sinclair, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1462, 1464, March 26, 1936.

actions had evoked ideology which was latent in the ranks of the Opposition parties. They now resisted appeasement of a Germany led by Hitler, while at the same time they continued to denounce the intrinsic hardships of Versailles under which Germany was suffering.

A turning point in European affairs, according to the Labour view, came in 1931. By then, "many of the worst features of the Peace Treaties were being removed. There was in 1931 a beginning of peace in the world." The German nation was "beginning to come back into the full councils of the world," and the Labourites wished that "the policy then had been followed up."⁵ But in that year, the Labour party was emphatically turned out of office. Early the following year the Disarmament Conference convened and eventually proved a failure. After this failure, one Member maintained, the German people became disgusted and disheartened, and turned in despair to Hitler. Blame for this was placed upon the National Government. Sir John Simon was assigned the role of midwife at the birth of triumphant Nazidom in Germany, and Neville Chamberlain was

⁵Clement Attlee, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 540, October 6, 1938.

accused of having acted as its wet nurse.⁶ The synthesis of all this reasoning came from Hugh Dalton all in one speech:

In 1933 and 1934, the Disarmament Conference having broken down and German democracy having been wrecked, Herr Hitler came into power and started to arm. He armed without let or hindrance....[the] Government not only let Herr Hitler arm in the air without let or hindrance, but they allowed him to get ahead of this country in the air....[In 1936] Baldwin did not tell the country that Germany was re-arming, he delayed a process of enlightenment which was most desirable.... That knowledge was held back from the country....and from that act of concealment many evils have flowed. After this delay the retreat continued; it became a rout when Signor Mussolini put his troops through the Red Sea into Abyssinia. At that time...the Hoare-Laval agreement scandalised the conscience of the country.... Mussolini at that time conceived at once a hatred and contempt for this country which in the eyes of history may be most important. It was the incapacity of the Government to warn him not to go to Abyssinia or, once he had started to stop him, but they did neither of these things....You will get war, if you go as you are going, and you will get it soon and you will get it without allies and without bases....These are plain facts in the record of the foreign policy of this so-called National Government, but no Government has more grossly betrayed the national interest of this country.⁷

During the Abyssinian crisis, there was a vigorous introduction of -isms in political life and a consequent

⁶See Robert Gibson, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 269, October 4, 1938.

⁷328 H. C. Deb., cols. 573-74, November 1, 1937. For the almost identical reasoning of another Member, who joined collective security to his indictment, see Frederick Cocks, 313 H. C. Deb., cols. 1679-80, June 23, 1936.

mental division of Europe along ideological lines, to which public opinion in Britain completely surrendered. The Labour and Liberal parties were particularly susceptible to this phenomenon, and for a considerable period, Radical opinion in those parties saw more threat to peace emanating from Italy than from Germany. Members from those parties had been ardently expressing the view that Germany was treated unfairly at the Peace Conference, that the Versailles Treaty was unjustified, and that Germany should denounce its terms. In addition, they favoured the union of Austria and Germany.

II

When Nazi Germany began to violate the restraining clauses of the Peace Treaty, a considerable amount of muddled thinking on a variety of related issues became evident in the opinions expressed in Parliament. However ideologically antagonistic the Opposition Members were toward Hitler's Germany, and however they disliked the German march of emancipation, it was not so much the successive acts which they denounced, as it was the method of their execution.

Because Germany acted deliberately and unilaterally,

that modus operandi was censured, but justification for the acts was generally found. This attitude contained an element of self-blame which could be described as the "English ethical sense or Anglo-Saxon masochism."⁸ The proponents of this attitude claimed that Britain must bear a great part of the guilt for the rise of Nazism in Germany because of the harsh terms of the Treaty: "Past failures have not been entirely due to Germany; they have not been entirely Germany's fault."⁹ Radical opinion usually found a way to reconcile its contradictions during the crises by subordinating its strong ideological antipathy for Nazi Germany to the mass emotion which might be labelled "pity poor Germany."

The Conservative opinion, on the other hand, although realistic and less susceptible to ideological intransigence, disliked the Versailles Settlement as well. Thus from separate motives, both major schools of political thought in Britain shared a negative attitude toward the

⁸McCallum, op. cit., p. 91. For the source of complexity in Radical opinion toward Germany and the Versailles Treaty, see detailed account in ibid., especially Chapters 2 and 3. For a succinct account focussed on the Labour party alone, see Fieldhouse, op. cit.

⁹Sir Archibald Sinclair, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1464, March 26, 1936.

Treaty. Both the Radicals and the Conservatives, "by an extraordinary irony...in the post-war period came to sentimentalize the good old Austrian Empire, but for different reasons. The Tories regretted it because it was old, it was large and it was an Empire; the Radicals softened their hearts towards it because it was an enemy, it was defeated and it was a large free-trade area."¹⁰ As a consequence of those sentiments, when Hitler began to lead Germany in its progressive emancipation from the constricting clauses of the Versailles Treaty, public opinion in Britain tacitly accepted the fait accompli in each case.

In recognizing that the remnants of old treaties were at the heart of the grievances which Germany held, Hugh Dalton pointedly suggested that Germany i.a. be invited to:

...co-operate peacefully in seeking to modify, not by brutal force or threats, but by friendly discussion, by resort, if need be, to conciliation and arbitration, any treaties of which you [Germany] make complaint, or any international situations of which you make complaint....and let the whole thing be examined, with an open mind and in a fair spirit.¹¹

Dalton's proposal represented the heart of the old, ideal-

¹⁰McCallum, op. cit., p. 124.

¹¹310 H. C. Deb., col. 1456, March 26, 1936.

istic "The Hague" notion for conciliation and arbitration, but it also expressed readiness to revise the treaties, which Germany considered unjust or obsolete. No treaty probably ever drew such fire and contempt as Versailles received from Radical opinion in Britain. Every time there was a crisis in Europe, that Treaty was assailed. Whether their speeches were occasioned by the Rhineland coup or by the Munich Conference, in explaining Hitler's latest deed, most Members of the Opposition put the blame on Versailles.

It seemed to be habitual procedure in those speeches to recall the controversial Khaki Election which preceded the Treaty; to state that the hopes of a generation were buried in that election; and to trace all subsequent troubles from the unjust Peace Settlement.¹² Having established those elements, the critics used them to justify subsequent German actions. As a result, in every crisis Germany had some "valid grievances arising out of the

¹²Almost two decades after the event, George Ridley for example, in censuring the Government's foreign policy, attacked some of its political associates for having returned to Parliament after the Khaki Election, "drunk with political power and saturated with desire for international revenge. They imposed a Peace Treaty which stopped one war and sowed the seeds of another. They imposed punitive reparations which were far beyond the point which economic wisdom justified. They scrapped one disarmament conference and broke up another." 334 H. C. Deb., cols. 115-16, April 4, 1938.

Treaty and of other incidents that have taken place since that Treaty was concluded."¹³ This widespread aversion to the Treaty of Versailles generated that considerable pro-German sentiment in Britain which was so noticeable at the time of the Rhineland coup. Roughly at that time, there developed a widely held proposition that:

Britain should arrange for 'the formal disappearance' of any clause in the Treaty that Germany found obnoxious [which] was acceptable in the country generally. The only important centre of dissent was the Foreign Office. The Permanent Head of the Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, held the view that such a practice, if not checked, must have very grave consequences.¹⁴

There were many Government supporters, as well, who were very much dissatisfied with the Treaty. For example, in his own claim that the Versailles Treaty was at the bottom of all the trouble in connection with the Rhineland, Robert Boothby assailed British foreign policy as having been carried out in a manner which was grossly unfair to

¹³Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1511, March 26, 1936.

¹⁴The History of the Times, 5 vols., (New York, 1952), IV, part ii, p. 892. Sir Robert "stood for a policy radically opposed to that of The Times and so remained until.... he was promoted out of the way by Neville Chamberlain." Ibid. Toward the end of 1937, at the time of Lord Halifax' visit to Germany, the Editor and his Assistant both thought Sir Robert "responsible for a highly inconvenient and improperly strong, anti-German line." Ibid., p. 910.

Germany.¹⁵ Looking at Versailles in retrospect, Mr. Boothby did not find it "the wholly admirable instrument of peace which those who negotiated it at the time imagined it to be." He was not blaming Lloyd George for it because "the difficulties at the time were almost insuperable, and he [Lloyd George] was supported, and indeed pressed on, by a surge of public opinion in this country that made cool and calm negotiation almost impossible."¹⁶

Sympathetic understanding for Germany among Opposition speakers did not abate with the waning of excitement over the Rhineland coup. Frederick Bellenger suggested that the people in Britain were responsible to a certain extent, and that there was a very good reason for Germany and Japan having left the League of Nations. The Germans without a doubt received poor treatment at Versailles, but the fact had to be recognized that Germany was finished with the Treaty, which "in very many respects was a shame on those who made it." The fact that Germany had "thrown off those shackles" was welcomed by Mr. Bellenger.¹⁷

¹⁵See 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1494, 1495, March 26, 1936.

¹⁶332 H. C. Deb., col. 248, February 22, 1938.

¹⁷320 H. C. Deb., col. 2302, February 25, 1937.

His words scarcely differing in essence from Hitler's term for the Treaty, Diktat, that same Mr. Bellenger claimed that the Peace Treaties of 1918 and 1919, as well as the Covenant of the League, had been imposed upon the vanquished countries "under duress." For all those reasons Mr. Bellenger wanted "justice for Germany, just as for any other country," which Germany had not yet received.¹⁸

Nor did the leader of the Labour Opposition think that the Versailles Treaty was the last word in justice. He felt that surely it was time for a new settlement in Europe.¹⁹ And Arthur Henderson did not believe that there was a Member in the House who was not anxious to give Germany "a square deal."²⁰ Others said that Germany was

¹⁸321 H. C. Deb., cols. 254, 257, March 2, 1937. He said that it was legitimate to consider whether a nation like Germany could be kept in the position which she occupied in 1918, when forced to sign an unjust Treaty. If one held the view that Germany bore just grievances, he added, then it was necessary to provide a way of scaling them. See ibid., col. 256.

¹⁹See Clement Attlee, 330 H. C. Deb., col. 1802, December 21, 1937.

²⁰321 H. C. Deb., col. 231, March 2, 1937.

There was at least one Member who disagreed. Vyvyan Adams regretted the current of opinion running through the country, broadly "expressed in the notion that Germany has not had a square deal." He found Germany "heavily-armed, ruthless and totalitarian," causing terror to all her

"stupidly" treated in 1918, and explained that the intention behind the disabilities imposed upon her was to "prevent Germany from being strong again to repeat the aggression."²¹

Recognizing the "growth of German despair," there was an occasional outburst of feeling on this issue which summarized the attitude of most Opposition Members fairly well. After the Great War:

statesmen and people were not courageous enough. Some, indeed, would have lost prestige, including [Lloyd George]. If he had only dared to speak the word against the popular voice, if only the others had done it....they might have saved England and Europe at the present time.

Because, for one reason or another, they did not do so, we have drifted on from year to year, from stage to stage. The German people, becoming embittered and disappointed, cast on one side their democratic principles and hopes, and out of that bitterness they grew into their present stage of belligerency, fear and suspicion. Alike in Germany and Britain we are

neighbours and to most of them constituting a danger. He concluded: "Give Germany a square deal! What we have to avoid doing is presenting her with a square meal." 311 H. C. Deb., cols. 119, 120, April 21, 1936.

²¹David Grenfell, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 203, March 2, 1937.

Another time, the solitary Communist Member, William Gallacher, complained: "The Versailles Treaty was used in the most brutal and rigid manner against the democratic Government in Germany, but when Hitler came to power everything he wanted, he got." 327 H. C. Deb., col. 147, October 21, 1937.

paying the price of the blindness of the years immediately succeeding the War.²²

III

Having violated the Treaty of Versailles on several previous occasions without being seriously challenged, on March 7, 1936, Adolph Hitler denounced the Treaty of Locarno and ordered German troops to march into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. "If the real-politik had been our game, [this] was the moment for a war with Germany."²³ But in Britain there was no desire for involvement in any action designed to force Germany to evacuate her troops from the Rhineland.²⁴

The British Government was quite aware of this sentiment. In the hour of crisis, Britain dissuaded her

²²Reginald Sorensen, 320 H. C. Deb., col. 2278, February 25, 1937.

Lloyd George once said that he "always pleaded for fair treatment for Germany," and stood out "against excessive demands upon Germany." 325 H. C. Deb., col. 1592, June 25, 1937.

²³Jerrold, op. cit., p. 129.

²⁴If challenged to do so, Hitler was prepared to withdraw German forces. See William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, (New York, 1960), p. 293.

French ally from any precipitate action,²⁵ and for this she "must shoulder the main responsibility."²⁶ The feeling in Britain was best synthesized in the phrase "A Chance to Rebuild," which headed an editorial article in the leading national newspaper, and in the concluding two sentences from that article: "The old structure of European peace, one-sided and unbalanced, is clearly in ruins. It is the moment, not to despair, but to rebuild."²⁷ Public opinion was little disposed to a military venture over the Rhineland, and was certainly not inclined after Hitler's announcement: "In Europe we have no territorial claims to put forward."²⁸

To soften the British reaction which Germany's denunciation of the Locarno Treaty would surely evince, Hitler made a soothing offer. In the Memorandum which the

²⁵See Winston S. Churchill, The Gathering Storm, (Boston, 1948), p. 194.

²⁶Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 422.

²⁷The Times, March 9, 1936, p. 15. For more detail on public opinion in Britain and the degree of sympathy for the German case in the Rhineland crisis, see Survey Int. Affairs, 1936, pp. 275-79.

²⁸Hitler's speech in the Reichstag, March 7, 1936, in F. J. Berber, ed., Locarno, (London, 1936), p. 226, [pp. 198-227.]

German Ambassador communicated to Anthony Eden on March 7, 1936, there were seven proposals "for the creation of a system of peaceful security for Europe."²⁹ Certainly the most tempting for Britain was the first half of the seventh proposal, which expressed Germany's willingness to re-enter the League of Nations.³⁰ For Eden, Germany's attitude toward the League was the most important new element.³¹

The leader of the Liberal Opposition found this offer to be the most satisfactory feature of Hitler's speech to the Reichstag. He advocated a "calm and dispassionate study [of] these detailed constructive proposals for the removal of Germany's grievances and for securing European peace which Germany has at last tabled;" and he urged the Government not to "let slip this opportunity for

²⁹Memorandum by the German Government respecting the Franco-Soviet Treaty, the Treaty of Locarno and the Demilitarized Zone in the Rhineland, (London, 1936), Cmd. 5118, p. 5.

³⁰Ibid., p. 6. The other half was the German "expectation that in the course of a reasonable period the question of colonial equality of rights and that of the separation of the League Covenant from its Versailles setting may be clarified through friendly negotiation." Ibid.

³¹See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1810, March 9, 1936; also see "Eden to Sir E. Phipps (Berlin), Foreign Office, March 7, 1936," in Cmd. 5143, No. 58, pp. 75-76.

finding a basis for the rule of law."³² One of the frequent spokesmen on foreign affairs from the Labour party was quite tempted by Hitler's proposals. In his view, the German leader was:

sinning with one hand and holding out the olive branch with the other, which ought to be taken at its face value. These may prove to be the most important gestures which have yet been made, if they are followed up, for a solution of the difficulty that now faces us. It is idle to say that those statements were insincere. If they were insincere, we have to prove it.³³

Germany's offer to return to the League proved to be fraudulent, but served its apparent purpose as the strongest of inducements to British acquiescence in the Rhineland coup. Though interspersed with some apprehension, the attitude in Britain and in the House of Commons toward that coup, when it was not sympathetic, was predominantly one of dejected acquiescence. This was so for at least two reasons: the belief that Germany had legitimate grievances arising from the Versailles Treaty; and the absorption of the House in the Italo-Abyssinian conflict and its ramifications. Except for some further diplomatic activity, by the

³²Sir Archibald Sinclair, 309 H. C. Deb., cols. 1864, 1863, March 9, 1936; and 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1462-63, March 26, 1936.

³³Arthur Greenwood, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1976, March 10, 1936.

end of March, 1936 the Rhineland issue was all but closed and a period of relative calm in relations between Britain and Germany ensued. But this did not eliminate the sense of guilt and the anti-Versailles feeling in Radical opinion.

No Member in the House appeared to have assumed the role of champion of the German cause more than did Lloyd George, who in 1936 was also a critic of France. He claimed that in 1931, when Germany had an army of one hundred thousand, Czechoslovakia had nearly one million, Poland nearly two million, and France about four million. This condition, he implied, only helped Hitler: "If France had honourably carried out the pledges given by her own Prime Minister, under his own hand, to follow the example of Germany in disarming, you would never have had Herr Hitler in power."³⁴

Continuing his defence of Hitler, Lloyd George said that German rearmament was an accomplished fact and that Germany had a great deal of justification for her action. In addition to everything else, when France built the Maginot fortifications and concluded a Pact with the Soviet Union, Germany could not remain indifferent; if Hitler had

³⁴315 H. C. Deb., col. 1206, July 27, 1936.

not taken some action with regard to those developments to protect his own country, in the opinion of Lloyd George, he would have been "a traitor to the Fatherland."³⁵

There were other voices, as well, trying to understand and explain, even to justify, German rearmament. Arthur Henderson, for example, refused to panic. He compared the amount which Germany was alleged to have spent on rearmament in the previous three years, and noted that Britain spent much more for the same purpose. He contrasted the German expenditure of 30 to 35 million pounds with about 110 million for Britain, and pointed out that the British Government was asking for two to three times that amount again. This state of the rearmament race led him to ask: "How does it lie in our mouths to attack the German Government because they have found it necessary to spend this extraordinarily large amount in the comparatively

³⁵Ibid., col. 1207. He declined from arguing whether Hitler could have rectified the situation by negotiation, or whether German rearmament was wise or not, in the face of these French acts. See ibid.

Since France was one of the victorious Powers who were responsible for the Peace Treaty, the cruel terms of which she insisted upon, the large body of anti-Versailles opinion in Britain was also eagerly anti-French. In most respects, Lloyd George's views about France were representative of that entire school of thought.

short space of three years?"³⁶

The mercurial Lloyd George was also outspoken in understanding Hitler's action in the Rhineland. The old Liberal found that there was no Power which had not broken a pact, and that no one could cast the first stone. Hitler's greatest crime on this occasion, in Lloyd George's judgment, was not the breach of a treaty, because there had been provocation; it was that "in the inflammable conditions of Europe he should commit it [the breach of the Locarno Pact] in so reckless a manner."³⁷

The leader of the Liberal party, Sir Archibald Sinclair, also deprecated Germany's use of force in the Rhineland, for it had "gravely perturbed public opinion" in France, Belgium and Britain, "even among those of us who are most anxious to see Germany taking her rightful place as an honoured member of the family of nations on terms of complete equality."³⁸ On this same occasion, although indicating some reservations about the offer which

³⁶315 H. C. Deb., col. 1907, July 31, 1936.

³⁷310 H. C. Deb., col. 1481, March 26, 1936.

The only Communist in the House, William Gallacher, was not concerned about the breaking of a particular treaty, but about the way in which it was done. See ibid., col. 1521.

³⁸Ibid., col. 1462.

Hitler made in his Reichstag speech, Sir Archibald concluded: "If we are to accord full equality to Germany -- and on no other basis, in my belief, can European peace be secured -- we must treat Herr Hitler's utterances with respect, and give them careful study."³⁹

IV

As early as November 1933, when the Nazi State was in its infancy, Winston Churchill urged the adoption of a policy which would have curbed German rearmament and would have avoided many anxious moments subsequently. He anticipated the least risk and the greatest benefit in the re-creation of "the Concert of Europe through the League of Nations," as an attempt to approach Germany collectively, in order that "there may be some redress of the grievances of the German nation and that that may be effected before this peril of rearmament reaches a point which may endanger the peace of the world."⁴⁰ He recommended this plan to the House once again when its realization had become that much

³⁹Ibid., col. 1466.

⁴⁰281 H. C. Deb., col. 142, November 7, 1933.

more difficult as a result of the Rhineland coup.⁴¹

The Labour party spokesmen, too, wanted to negotiate with Germany, but without "creating machinery for the destruction of human life," as Britain was doing with her rearmament programme.⁴² To negotiate, but not from a position of strength, seemed to be the Labour stand. The term "position of strength" conjured up a vision of armaments, which for Labour implied war. Rearmament indicated a return to the insecurity experienced before the outbreak of the Great War, with "the system of alliances, the balance of power, the policy of isolation, large armaments and the eventual clash of forces, of policies and national aspirations which will, sooner or later, bring us back to where we were prior to the Armageddon of 1914."⁴³ For the Liberal Opposition, Sir Archibald Sinclair insisted that "transcending all party interests...[was] the cause of peace. To secure peace on a sure foundation of justice, economic co-operation and international good-will must be the supreme

⁴¹See 310 H. C. Deb., col. 2489, April 6, 1936. He advocated negotiation through the League collectively, because he saw safety and peace in numbers. See ibid., col. 2488.

⁴²John Potts, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 332, March 17, 1936.

⁴³Arthur Henderson, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 111, April 21, 1936.

objective of British policy."⁴⁴

Since they were opposed to armaments and were imbued with high idealism, it was natural that the Opposition would warmly receive Hitler's offer to have Germany return to the League. The Labour party was prepared to make various concessions to Germany within the framework of the League. In a conciliatory mood, Hugh Dalton divulged that his party would welcome Germany back to the League provided that Germany concentrate on peaceful co-operation. If Germany did return, the League collectively would guarantee the inviolability of Germany's frontiers; and without pausing to consider the means, Dalton promised Germany that if she were attacked, "we shall all be at your side."⁴⁵

In emphatically supporting negotiations with Germany, Arthur Greenwood urged that the opportunity "be seized upon without a day's delay for a free and full discussion." But the discussion he had in mind was to be "...not with a narrow range of States, but with all the nations of the world, of the outstanding problems that have

⁴⁴315 H. C. Deb., col. 1152, July 27, 1936.

⁴⁵310 H. C. Deb., col. 1456, March 26, 1936.

helped to create this tension and unrest and war, and atmosphere of war, so as to re-create an effective League of Nations backed by a sound system of pooled security."⁴⁶

The view of Major James Milner was comparable. Feeling that Hitler had "committed a breach of solemn obligations," and that there was distrust of Germany keeping her word in the future, he found no other way but to suggest that advantage be taken of Hitler's "offer to negotiate through and by reason of his promise to return to the League." The Major recommended further that Hitler would have to be taken at his word, and that the British Government ought to:

...make an effort in the negotiations....to obtain agreement between France, Germany, and ourselves, and it may be other nations, through the League of Nations for an international tribunal in equity...capable of dealing with all the matters which are now in dispute both in Europe and elsewhere.⁴⁷

All of this, which was so idealistically conceived, led Major Milner to consider Hitler's offer as an opportunity to obtain a large measure of disarmament through conference. In that way alone, and not by Britain becoming leader in an

⁴⁶309 H. C. Deb., col. 1976, March 10, 1936.

⁴⁷Ibid., col. 2046.

arms race, was peace possible.⁴⁸

Even the ambiguous thinking concerning negotiations could not conceal the fact that the principle of negotiations itself was universally advocated. Lloyd George suggested that if it were possible -- through any negotiations -- to secure about twenty-five years of peace in Europe, the defence problem of Britain then would be quite different. The expectation of peace which would result from such negotiations, he implied, would serve to reduce Britain's expenditure for defence immediately, to a considerable extent.⁴⁹ Clement Attlee wanted to "get not merely some temporary peace, but to lay its foundations for the future."⁵⁰ George Lansbury was prepared for Britain "to make whatever sacrifices [were] necessary...for the service of mankind" as that was the only way for peace.⁵¹ And Hugh Dalton was quite explicit about the whole problem:

Whatever one thinks of the Hitler regime, however much one hates that regime, however much one may mistrust the man and all those who are nearest to him and

⁴⁸Ibid., col. 2047.

⁴⁹See ibid., col. 2037.

⁵⁰310 H. C. Deb., col. 1531, March 26, 1936.

⁵¹309 H. C. Deb., col. 2000, March 10, 1936.

influential upon him, and however much one may reprobate this unilateral repudiation of a treaty [Locarno], which he himself admitted was freely signed, however all this may be, none the less, it is indispensable that one should talk with this man, frankly and bluntly, and bring up to the surface all the grievances which he may still entertain and all the motives which may lie behind this action. For this reason, neither I, nor, I think, any of my hon. Friends behind me, make complaint of the intention of the Government to urge a frank discussion of the practical proposals put forward in Herr Hitler's latest speech.⁵²

If Britain's object were to persuade Germany to negotiate, the Labour party insisted, then "surely the only successful thing to do [was] to endeavour to remove all possible obstacles to such negotiations." In making proposals to Germany, it was important not to use injudicious language, but to try "to set in motion machinery for a revision of just grievances from which we know Germany is suffering." Britain should aim "at cutting away all the tangle of the old treaties in which these grievances are rooted and which make it almost impossible for Herr Hitler to accept proposals for negotiations."⁵³

⁵²309 H. C. Deb., col. 1926, March 9, 1936. Fearing that the danger of war was real, he urged the Government to press discussions with Hitler, "with the French and with the rest, bringing them together into a common talk out of which we hope that something good may come." Ibid., col. 1928.

⁵³Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1515, 1516, March 26, 1936.

Perennially advocating a conference, Arthur Henderson urged the Government to make "every possible attempt to ascertain from Germany, what are her actual grievances and what are her actual aspirations." He urged the Government further to do "everything that they can, in conjunction with the other countries of Europe, to remove these grievances, and, if possible, to satisfy Germany's reasonable aspirations." He did not wish thereby to "buy off Germany," but he did hope that the Government would make tangible gestures of its own and would not "allow any considerations of amour propre or national dignity to stand in the way."⁵⁴ A few months later Henderson reiterated this sentiment:

Assuming that it is necessary and essential to have strong armaments for the time being, is it not equally, or even more, important to strain every nerve, putting on one side any question of amour propre and national dignity, in an attempt to bring about a final settlement of some of the problems which may land us into a European, if not into a world, war?⁵⁵

Approximating this sentiment were the ideas of that genuine pacifist, George Lansbury, who in his bones did not believe the people would allow a war to happen. Before

⁵⁴₃₁₅ H. C. Deb., col. 1908, July 31, 1936.

⁵⁵₃₁₇ H. C. Deb., col. 326, November 5, 1936.

there was a danger of it he asked that "these men who have the power of life and death in their hands be challenged to sit at a table and tell the world in clear language what they want, and let the rest of the world who possess everything tell what sacrifices they will make for peace and not for war."⁵⁶

V

Throughout the year 1937, nearly all the debates were concerned chiefly with developments in, and the ramifications of, the civil war in Spain. Since Germany per se was relatively quiescent that year, references to her were relatively few. The exceptions were opinions about Germany in the context of the Spanish conflict, or about British attempts at reconciliation. On the whole, a period of relative calm in relations between Britain and Germany prevailed.

The attitude of the Opposition in 1937 and on into 1938 unfolded on two separate levels. On the one hand, hostility toward Germany and Hitler was articulate in this period mostly because of ideological prejudices. On the

⁵⁶Ibid., col. 309.

other hand, the Opposition still harboured the old sense of guilt and anti-Versailles sentiment, which was less pronounced than it had been, but was as continuous. Occasionally a combination of both emotions was expressed by individual speakers.

The Opposition generally conceded that Germany had grievances which they were willing to redress but, in a changing attitude, they proposed conditions which Germany was not likely to accept. They insisted, for example, that Germany return to the comity of nations, that she play her part in establishing an effective system of collective security in Europe, and that she accept all the obligations which membership in the League involved; "then, and not before then, would be the time to discuss with Germany her grievances in regard to the necessity for her commercial and political expansion."⁵⁷

Sir Archibald Sinclair stated that friendship with Germany could only be established on the basis of confidence, and he urged the British Government to persuade Germany that she would be welcomed into the League as an equal member.

⁵⁷Arthur Henderson, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 232, March 2, 1937.

Once Germany had returned to the League, had joined in a measure of general disarmament, and had agreed to abide by "third-party judgment in international disputes, there [was] no price for her friendship that our League obligations permit, that justice and equity demand, and that third-party judgment assesses, that we shall be unwilling to pay." In expressing dislike for the German system of government, Sir Archibald said that it did not alter his respect for the German nation, nor did it lessen his wish to work with Germany for the peace and prosperity of Europe. For him, "quite clearly, the quickest and surest way of establishing peace in Europe [was] to reach an understanding with Germany."⁵⁸

But others, like David Grenfell, were quite conciliatory toward Germany. Grenfell advocated that Germany "be asked definitely whether she wants peace. What kind of peace does she want? Does she stand for peace all round? Cannot we find out from Germany directly?...We must ask aloud, so that all Europe may hear, how, and upon what terms, peace can come to Europe."⁵⁹ Arthur Henderson acknowledged

⁵⁸325 H. C. Deb., cols. 1541, 1540, June 25, 1937.

⁵⁹321 H. C. Deb., cols. 202, 203, March 2, 1937.

that Germany and Italy had it in their power to assist in the appeasement of Europe, and added: "No one on this side of the House would seek to ostracise Germany or in any way to place Germany outside the comity of nations."⁶⁰

Lloyd George believed that "if the four great Western Powers of Europe could come to a working understanding, a new atmosphere altogether would be created." And since Hitler was not averse to effecting an agreement in Western Europe, Lloyd George was ready to accept that first, in the hope that further agreement might be reached for the rest of Europe: "I say without any hesitation that I would come to an arrangement so far as Herr Hitler is prepared to go."⁶¹ Reginald Sorensen of the Independent Labour party was prepared to sacrifice the nation and the Empire as then constituted, rather than engage "in a war which would have the effect of demolishing such democracy as we possess." He pleaded with the Government to try "at least to find some means of speaking through the mists of fear and suspicion."⁶²

In the dilemma between desire for settlement with

⁶⁰₃₂₅ H. C. Deb., col. 1573, June 25, 1937.

⁶¹₃₂₁ H. C. Deb., col. 3161, March 25, 1937.

⁶²₃₂₀ H. C. Deb., cols. 2279, 2280, February 25, 1937.

Germany through concessions, and idealistic preference for the principles of the League of Nations, many Opposition Members showed an emotional preference for the latter. The solution advocated by Frederick Bellenger was quite representative:

What are you going to do if those nations press their grievances in too bellicose a manner? Is rearmament, unilateral rearmament, your answer?...We on these benches say that if you want to ensure peace, rearmament is not the right policy. It must be this system of collective security, which I know may be difficult to define, but which is undoubtedly a reality, and this system of collective security envisages nations, including Germany, Italy, and Japan, which are prepared to come to some arrangement to ensure a settlement of the just grievances of any nation, not by force of arms, but by conference and argument.⁶³

Philip Noel-Baker was even more emphatic, insisting that there was no use to talk about anything but the League if peace, law and order were desired in the world. The Covenant and the Kellogg Pact consisted "of practical rules of action, prescribing definite courses if disputes or wars break out," and they furnished "the only real foreign policy to-day."⁶⁴

⁶³321 H. C. Deb., col. 258, March 2, 1937.

⁶⁴328 H. C. Deb., col. 286, October 28, 1937.

VI

The annexation of Austria by the German Reich in March, 1938 provided opportunity for a fresh Opposition outburst of recriminatory remarks about the Versailles Treaty and the injustices committed against Germany. There was an ingredient, in those remarks, of self-satisfaction that the Anschluss had taken place. As if with pride, Miss Ellen Wilkinson pointed out the lesson: "Since the signing of the Versailles Treaty, the Labour party has said that if an attempt were made to keep a great nation such as Germany in a strait-jacket and to ring her round with steel, the time would come when there would be an explosion." And if any responsibility for the Anschluss had to be assigned, Miss Wilkinson left no doubt that it reposed with the Conservative party, not with Labour.⁶⁵

The Liberals hardly differed from this view. Sir Archibald Sinclair said that for years many Members had begged "successive Governments to redress the legitimate grievances of the nations which were vanquished in the war," only to be told that their suggestion to revise the Treaties

⁶⁵333 H. C. Deb., col. 88, March 14, 1938.

was irresponsible.⁶⁶ Moreover, in attempting to understand why the German people supported the Nazi Government, Sir Archibald felt that they had been "goaded into supporting it by the reluctance of other nations to give them equality of rights and status while they were still a democratic country."⁶⁷

Some Government supporters also remembered that the traditional source of all European irritation was the Versailles Treaty. The most noticeable of these was Robert Boothby, who scored the lack of subsequent action to remedy the faults of that Treaty. He blamed everybody in Britain, as Government after Government "made no constructive effort to mitigate the severities of the Treaty of Versailles in order to bring about a better situation."⁶⁸ Ian Hanna was even more remorseful about the Treaty:

What about the Conference of Versailles promising to disarm if Germany would disarm? Have we kept the promises that we made? Germany was disarmed; the Allies promised to disarm, but they did nothing of the kind. France took advantage of the absolutely unarmed condition of Germany to send her forces into the Ruhr. She made an attempt to detach the Rhineland, against

⁶⁶Ibid., col. 59.

⁶⁷Ibid., col. 57.

⁶⁸Ibid., col. 63.

all history, against all right....Did the Germans set up Hitler? Did the Italians put Mussolini in his place? Emphatically no. We put them there. We did it by repudiating our solemn promises at Versailles, and we have got to take the consequences.⁶⁹

Despite these variations in individual interpretation, clearly at the heart of the whole problem in Europe, perpetuating the crisis and preventing a settlement, stood the Treaty of Versailles. Logically, then, a revision of the Treaty was necessary. In terms which could have been uttered by any Member of Parliament at the time, and which were not at variance with Prime Minister Chamberlain's own expressions on the matter, Mr. Bellenger of the Labour party thus summed up the prevailing sentiment for the Opposition:

sooner or later the whole question of appeasement will have to be settled. I believe that the colonial, economic, financial and political issues will have to be settled between the different countries. The Versailles Treaty, the Treaty of Trianon and all the other agreements that finished the war cannot remain forever. What we have to decide is whether those treaties are to be broken in the manner in which the German Government are breaking them at the present time in the case of Austria, and as they will possibly break them, when the appropriate time comes, in the case of Czechoslovakia, or whether the political and economic frontiers that were drawn at the end of the Great War shall be settled on the grounds of equity and justice.... If we want a long-term settlement, that settlement can

⁶⁹336 H. C. Deb., col. 790, May 20, 1938.

be based only on some grounds that will be stable and permanent.⁷⁰

But the Opposition was far from done with recrimination about the Treaty or with attempts to understand Germany, always managing to attribute to the British Government considerable blame for German actions. The leader of the Opposition stated categorically: "The victorious Powers who made the Treaty of Versailles constantly refused to reason what is now being yielded to force, and in doing so they sapped the rule of law just as much as those who are now yielding to force."⁷¹

The next major outburst of comparable feelings in the House was occasioned by the Munich crisis. The Labour Members once again pointed out that "the Peace Treaty was vindictive and that the exclusion of the enemy nations from the original membership of the League was political foolishness."⁷² Reverend James Barr gave a survey of Labour condemnations of Versailles since 1919, and saw the Munich crisis as "having directly descended from the Peace Treaties

⁷⁰332 H. C. Deb., col. 98, February 21, 1938.

⁷¹Clement Attlee, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 1415, March 24, 1938.

⁷²Sir Robert Young, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 401, October 5, 1938.

of Versailles, St. Germain and Trianon."⁷³ Still another Labour Member, in his own indictment, included the core of the Labour attitude:

In 1918, when there was the opportunity, when there was an effort to establish the new German democracy, when the Kaiser had been driven out, when the junker class had been ousted, who was it that crushed that new Germany? The people who now speak to us from those benches [i.e. Government]. That is what happened in 1918 and at successive elections since. I say that if in 1918 we had held out a helping hand, the hand of fellowship, to that new Germany, there would have been no Hitler in Germany now.⁷⁴

At the time of Munich, the Opposition ignored the fact that the Munich Conference in intention represented the fruition of their own demands. The mode of execution was different, but the result was, in the main, the same. At the time of the Rhineland, Clement Attlee said: "it is our case that treaties must be changed from time to time with the consent of the signatories."⁷⁵ One of the archi-

⁷³339 H. C. Deb., col. 237, October 4, 1938.

⁷⁴James Griffiths, ibid., col. 251. The same sentiments were expressed by another Labour Member, Robert Gibson. He also traced the record of the Government's failures in foreign policy from Versailles to Munich. See ibid., cols. 266-72. He concluded by suggesting that the King and Queen visit Berlin and Moscow which "would be a great step towards peace" and that the League of Nations "should be much more used than it has been." Ibid., col. 274.

⁷⁵309 H. C. Deb., col. 1842, March 9, 1936.

tects of the Versailles Treaty observed that one could not treat it as a Holy Writ, and he reminded the House that provision had been made to cover revisions.⁷⁶

Ever since 1919, the view of the Labour party had been that the Versailles Treaty was a grave injustice to Germany. They maintained the same view at the time of the Munich Agreement, but were violently opposed to the settlement reached then. The heart of Munich was revision of the unjust Versailles Treaty, fulfilling the intent of Article 19, if not the procedure. The only explanation for this contradictory position lies in the fact that, to Labour, "a treaty is unjust to Germany when Germany's politicians are a political colour of which Labour approves, but cease[s] to be unjust when the German people choose politicians whose political colour Labour dislikes."⁷⁷

The Opposition manifested another gross intellectual

⁷⁶See Lloyd George, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1473, March 26, 1936.

Article 19 of the Covenant provided for a Review of Treaties, but it was weak and ineffective: "The Assembly may from time to time advise the reconsideration by Members of the League of treaties which have become inapplicable and the consideration of international conditions whose continuance might endanger the peace of the world."

⁷⁷Fieldhouse, op. cit., p. 204.

contradiction at the time of Munich. As Attlee observed: "It was not until the Germans entered the Rhine zone that these troubles increased, and it was not until after the Anschluss that they became acute."⁷⁸ The Opposition did not contest those developments strenuously because, in the spirit of self-determination, German-speaking territories were involved. The Munich settlement, whatever else, was also the culmination of that principle. The Government accepted it for the Sudeten Germans, but the Opposition bitterly attacked it.

It was, nevertheless, a Member of the Independent Labour party who pointedly asked: "What objection can you possibly have to Herr Hitler wanting to defend the people of his own race and of his own nationality wherever they may be?"⁷⁹ This question served to emphasize the whole philosophy underlying the principle of self-determination which disclosed still another intellectual muddle in Parliamentary opinion, and which will be treated in the next chapter.

⁷⁸339 H. C. Deb., col. 55, October 3, 1938.

⁷⁹James Maxton, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 196, October 4, 1938.

CHAPTER VI

THE INCONSISTENCY ABOUT SELF-DETERMINATION

I

One dominant consequence of the First World War was the complete re-drawing of the map of Europe following dismemberment of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire. Application of the principle of self-determination was largely responsible for the creation of several new states, in the process of which the principle itself was violated by inclusion within these states of population blocs of different ethnic stock. The majority of new states, which had been national minorities in the Austrian Empire, were thereby consigned their own national minorities, thus implanting seeds of future trouble. The worst example of this double standard of self-determination was the creation of Czechoslovakia. More than three million Sudeten Germans were incorporated into that state, which was already a conglomerate of nationalities.

If, in 1919, the intention of the peacemakers had been to handicap Germany in such a way as to prevent a

recurrence of German aggression, then either they should have drafted a just Peace Treaty by universally applying self-determination; or conversely, they should have ignored that principle and drawn the map by objective necessity. Although self-determination was "not a principle but a practice to be applied with discrimination,"¹ the peace-makers accepted it as a principle. They applied it to those who were their allies or otherwise enjoyed their sympathies, but largely ignored it concerning the vanquished.

With the candour for which he was well known in the House, Lloyd George called the Treaty of Versailles "a compromise between a great many conflicting claims, conflicting duties, conflicting traditions, and perhaps even conflicting emotions." But among the many problems and difficulties which the Peace Conference had to solve, "one thing," he said, "which gave us the greatest trouble was a principle which everybody accepted." That was the principle of self-determination:

Danzig is due to that; the Corridor is due to that;
some of the mistakes in regard to Hungary are due to

¹Vansittart, op. cit., p. 431.

For a persuasive argument against the self-determination principle, see E. H. Carr, Conditions of Peace, (New York, 1942), passim.

that. We had to adjudicate on the statistics which were submitted to us. There was always a natural bias for the nation which fought on our side, and we were more inclined to accept their contentions than the figures of those who fought against us. I am sorry that we were not justified in that conclusion in many cases. There are parts of Hungary which were given over to Czechoslovakia on unchallengeable statistics, which shows what dangerous things statistics are, and the proof of it is that they return at the present moment Hungarian members to the Czechoslovak Parliament.

All those things are sources of irritation. The Corridor was one of our very greatest difficulties. If Danzig had been thrown into the Corridor, there would still have been a Polish majority, and Danzig would have become Polish. The best thing we could do was to set up this expedient which very probably will be temporary, in my judgment. I think inevitably that will have to be solved probably by an arrangement between Poland and Germany. Primarily it really concerns those two countries and not the rest of Europe. Those were the difficulties in the application of a principle which was accepted by everybody, and it shows how very much easier it is to lay down a general principle than to apply it rightly and fairly. That is really the basis of the criticism of the Treaty of Versailles.²

The territorial viability of the new states was secure only as long as the terms of the Peace Treaties remained in force. Termination of that condition by defiance of the Peace Treaties to a large extent meant defiance of the prevailing self-determination, auguring its ultimate collapse. Only as long as Germany remained impotent and shackled could the self-determination principle exist intact.

²315 H. C. Deb., cols. 1202-03, July 27, 1936.

Therefore, as shown by events onward from 1936, self-determination as established at Versailles was flatly incompatible with German emancipation from the Versailles terms. German regeneration in Europe in the light of the principle of self-determination clearly meant return of the lost territories to Germany. The Saar plebiscite was the first step toward this, and was the only one taken legally.

A recurrence of German aggression could be prevented only by forceful preservation of the status quo in Europe. When Europe proved unprepared to do so, there was nothing to stop Germany. In his quest for expansion, Hitler seized upon the principle of self-determination and employed it most successfully. Thus there was little opposition to his initial acts to build up the great German state, as long as belief prevailed that Hitler wanted only to gather his German people into one country. But a fact less realized at that time was that a gathering together of the German Volkstum meant the ultimate German domination of Europe. The return of German ethnic stock would enlarge and strengthen the Germany of Versailles. And, except for Austria and the Rhineland, all German territories returning as part of the Fatherland had to be detached from the newly-

created states, none of which was powerful enough to oppose the process.

Based on the principle of self-determination, those countries which were the most threatened by this German ethnic expansion were the Republic of Czechoslovakia, and the Republic of Poland, in that order. Of all the successor states, the least nationally homogeneous was Czechoslovakia. Since it was an invention of Versailles and because of its multi-racial makeup, John McGovern called it "the Versailles cocktail."³ But even during the 1930's, despite all evidence to the contrary, Labour and Liberal opinion in Britain harboured sympathies for Czechoslovakia which were of almost rhapsodic proportions.

The Republic of Czechoslovakia was "the one democratic republic which remains in the sea of Fascist dictatorships."⁴ Denoting it as one "which we helped to bring into existence, partly as a reward for the service it did for the allies during the War," Miss Eleanor Rathbone asked "whether it would be decent to abandon this country [Czechoslovakia],

³339 H. C. Deb., col. 530, October 6, 1938.

⁴Morgan Price, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1506, March 26, 1936.

the last free enlightened democracy left in Central Europe?"⁵ For the Liberal, Geoffrey Mander, Czechoslovakia was "one of the best and freest and most democratic countries in the world."⁶ In considering that country to be a paragon of democracy, the Opposition had further reason for admiration, as there was "no Government in Europe that has made a more solid, more sustained, or more constructive effort on behalf of the League of Nations since the end of the War than Czechoslovakia."⁷

II

In order to eliminate German grievances, revision of the Versailles territorial arrangements meant disturbance of the European status quo. Britain favoured a series of diplomatic transactions to that end; however, both France and the new states especially remained adamantly opposed to it. But when Germany asserted herself from a position of strength, the self-determination issue erupted over Europe once again. When Hitler undertook the process of reclaiming former German territory, Radical opinion accepted it, as

⁵321 H. C. Deb., col. 3120, March 25, 1937.

⁶328 H. C. Deb., col. 365, October 28, 1937.

⁷Morgan Jones, 338 H. C. Deb., col. 2970, July 26, 1938.

they had advocated such a course, although they did not like it being done under Hitler. In addition, their attention and emotions were absorbed first by the Abyssinian war and next by the civil war in Spain.

That left Hitler, more or less free to undertake the march into the Rhineland. Radical opinion in both Opposition parties was not disposed to the exertion of any pressure in the form of sanctions against Germany. Morgan Price stated that the occupation of the Rhineland was "nothing which would justify the application of sanctions."⁸ Although Hugh Dalton considered Hitler's action to be reprehensible, he stressed that it had "taken place within the frontiers of the German Reich." Better than anyone, Dalton succinctly expressed this feeling:

It is only right to say bluntly and frankly that public opinion in this country would not support, and certainly the Labour party would not support, the taking of military sanctions or even economic sanctions against Germany at this time, in order to put German troops out of the German Rhineland.⁹

The leader of the Liberal Opposition in the House signified latent belief in self-determination when he told the House: "nor, while we must condemn any violation of

⁸310 H. C. Deb., col. 1505, March 26, 1936.

⁹Ibid., col. 1454. Italics added.

treaties, can we regard the occupation of German territory by German troops as so clearly indefensible, as an aggression against the territory of a member of the League."¹⁰ Labour party spokesmen made a qualitative distinction between an "aggression" against one's own territory and aggression against a member of the League. Hitler's action in the Rhineland was quite different from that of Mussolini in Abyssinia: "Whatever we may think about this occupation of the Rhineland, it obviously is not on all fours with the invasion of Abyssinia." The invasion of Abyssinia was a complete violation of Article 10 of the Covenant, "whereas the occupation of the Rhineland is only a thing which would have to take place some time because the Rhineland is the most obvious German territory with all the traditions of German history attached to it."¹¹

In a display of strange emotional fluctuations in regard to foreign affairs, that same British Radical opinion which was so bellicose over Abyssinia proved to be very inert over the Rhineland. Neither of the leaders of the

¹⁰Sir Archibald Sinclair, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1863, March 9, 1936.

¹¹Morgan Price, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1504, March 26, 1936.

major Opposition parties protested against German action. They neither invoked collective security nor exuded enthusiasm for action, even though the Covenant was defied, agreements broken and the Locarno Treaty ruined. Sir Archibald Sinclair merely expressed an opinion that the German Government had "indeed broken a treaty, but only to the extent of sending troops into its own territory."¹²

Aversion to British involvement in the Rhineland ran very high. From the beginning of the crisis, the Government sought to rebuild international confidence, and it neither expected nor asked for German withdrawal from the zone.¹³ The Prime Minister saw Britain's task in simple terms: "In Europe we have no more desire than to keep calm, to keep our heads, and to continue to try to bring France and Germany together in a friendship with ourselves."¹⁴

¹²Ibid., col. 1466.

¹³See Anthony Eden, 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1208, June 18, 1936. The Government believed that its urgent duty was to "seek by negotiation to restore...confidence;" from the first hour of the crisis, that was its objective. Eden, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1440, March 26, 1936.

¹⁴Stanley Baldwin, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1841, March 9, 1936. Sir Samuel Hoare echoed the same feeling: "We will keep our heads cool, we will do our utmost to effect a reconciliation between the contending parties, we will take no rash action...." Ibid., col. 1867.

Even some of the most prominent and consistent advocates of a firm stand vis-à-vis Germany remained silent. It was almost two years after the event before Winston Churchill, having second thoughts, knew that:

a firm stand by France and Britain with the other Powers associated with them at that time, and with the authority of the League of Nations, would have been followed by the immediate evacuation of the Rhineland without the shedding of a drop of blood, and the effects of that might have been blessed beyond all compare, because it would have enabled the more prudent elements in the German Army to regain their proper position and would not have given to the political head of Germany that enormous ascendancy which has enabled him to move forward.¹⁵

Hitler's action of invading his own back yard in the Rhineland was allowed to go unchallenged, and the right of self-determination was thereby conceded to Germany. As long as belief persisted in Britain that Hitler's use of this principle in his subsequent advances in Central Europe was a real expression of self-determination, there were no strenuous objections raised. Hitler used that prevailing belief to good advantage. Nevertheless, there was growing doubt that his use of self-determination was a means to satisfy German fulfillment; and there was increasing

¹⁵332 H. C. Deb., col. 247, February 22, 1938.

For similar feelings see Vyvyan Adams, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 149, March 14, 1938, and particularly Captain McEwen, 333 H. C. Deb., cols. 1480-81, March 24, 1938.

perception that it served as a clever disguise for German imperialism in Europe. A month after the final engulfment by Germany of the truncated Czechoslovakia, Anthony Eden expressed the consensus of the House. Remembering the Rhineland crisis, he said: "The reoccupation was not done in order that Germany's reasonable national pride should receive satisfaction, but was part of a deliberate plan to make possible further steps to gain strategic advantage in different parts of Europe."¹⁶

During the execution of that plan, the series of revisionist acts committed by Germany under Hitler was broadly condoned, in the ultimate hope of most opinion in Britain that, when German demands for equality were satisfied, Europe would achieve a stable and permanent basis for peaceful co-operation among all nations. Whenever Hitler annexed fresh territory under the pretence of self-determination, the British Government saw as its "plain duty," as the Foreign Secretary once said, "to attempt to create out of the era of difficulty an era of opportunity."¹⁷

When Neville Chamberlain became the new British Prime

¹⁶346 H. C. Deb., col. 47, April 13, 1939.

¹⁷Anthony Eden, 315 H. C. Deb., cols. 1116-17, July 27, 1936.

Minister late in May 1937, the balance of Europe had been noticeably changed by Germany's various acts of defiance. In view of overwhelming evidence of a passion for peace across Britain which was identical to his own, and reinforced by a widespread desire to rectify the injustice of Versailles, Chamberlain adopted a course in foreign affairs which became identified as the policy of appeasement.¹⁸ That policy actively implied peaceful revision of European frontiers, and largely meant application of the principle of self-determination in the case of Germany.

The National Government in Britain emerged optimistically as the leader in conceding German advances in the cases of the Rhineland, the Anschluss of Austria, and the Sudetenland, "in terms of equality and self-determination."¹⁹ Paradoxically, the Conservatives, who were originally lukewarm to self-determination, now began to argue vigorously for it in those cases; and the Opposition, especially

¹⁸Chamberlain realized with his people that "in the absence of any powerful ally, and until our armaments are completed, we must adjust our foreign policy to our circumstances, and even bear with patience and good humour actions which we should like to treat in very different fashion." Letter written in January 1938 to Mrs. Morton Price, his step-mother's American cousin. Cited in Macleod, op. cit., p. 207.

¹⁹Wolfers, op. cit., p. 218.

that classic liberal streak within it, began no less vigorously to deny the very principle which they virtually had invented, when it was now claimed by Germany.²⁰

Early in February 1938, when the Austrian crisis began, there were indications in Britain of concern, but not of undue agitation. In regard to Austria, Britain was "under no commitment to take action" beyond a long-standing pledge to consult with France and Italy in the case of occurrences which would affect Austrian independence and integrity. The pertinent articles of the Peace Treaty had provided for that. Moreover, in February 1934, the three Governments had reaffirmed that pledge, and they had done so once more at the Stresa Conference.²¹ The Opposition was still too upset over the ramifications of Eden's recent resignation and was too involved emotionally with Spain.

²⁰See the succinct analysis of the self-determination principle in McCallum, op. cit., pp. 78-85. In it, he outlined developments in Western Europe from the time of Belgian Independence in 1830 to the enactment of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, and concluded: "Those who like their politics with more abstraction and less history will find the rational basis for national self-determination admirably stated in Mill's Treatise on Representative Government, Chapter XVI." Ibid., p. 81.

²¹See the statement by Neville Chamberlain, 333 H. C. Deb., col. 51, March 14, 1938.

Generally, the fate of Austria did not concern Radical opinion to a great extent, as that country was not considered to be in the same moral category as Czechoslovakia. When the Anschluss took place, the spirit of self-determination had much to do with British acquiescence in it. The Prime Minister himself succinctly expressed the feeling of the nation on that problem:

I do not think that the people of this country would want to interfere in a case where two States desired to join together, but there were features about the methods which were employed in this particular case of union which were extremely distasteful to His Majesty's Government, and which profoundly shocked public opinion.²²

III

Following the Anschluss of Austria, it was obvious that Hitler's logical advance would be in the direction of Czechoslovakia.²³ Because of the presence there of a

²²Neville Chamberlain, speech in Birmingham, April 8, 1938, The Times, April 9, 1938, p. 17.

²³Concern for that country became very pronounced in the speeches of the Members. See 333 H. C. Deb., March 14, 1938, i.a. the following: Henderson, cols. 71-72; Amery, cols. 86-87; Churchill, col. 97; Mander, cols. 110-11; Ede, cols. 132-33; Sir A. Lambert Ward, cols. 135-36; Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher, col. 143; V. Adams, col. 151.

In the debate on March 24, 1938, the international situation vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia was again discussed at length by i.a. the Prime Minister, 333 H. C. Deb., cols. 1403-04; Sir A. Sinclair, ibid., cols. 1424-25; Churchill, ibid.,

German minority, as early as the time of the Rhineland crisis, some Labour Members had anticipated that Hitler might make such a move, which they judged to be more serious than that against Austria.²⁴ On the same occasion, Hugh Dalton bluntly asked what the attitude of the British Government would be in such a contingency.²⁵

Great Britain had no commitment toward Czechoslovakia beyond its blanket obligation under the League Covenant, which the Government was prepared to honour in company with the other members of the League. Arthur Henderson asserted that Britain was thus sufficiently pledged under Articles 10 and 16 of the Covenant, assuming that the Government was resolved to fulfill the obligation. Any additional pledge to Czechoslovakia would be superfluous, Henderson suggested to the House, as it would have "more a psychological than juridical value."²⁶

Soon after the Anschluss, however, it became clear

cols. 1445-50; James Griffiths, ibid., cols. 1465-66; and several others.

²⁴Morgan Price, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1506, 1507, March 26, 1936.

²⁵See ibid., col. 1541.

²⁶333 H. C. Deb., col. 1489, March 24, 1938.

that Britain wished to avoid a contingency in which her pledge under those Articles would have to be honoured. Although the Prime Minister saw a major source of anxiety in relations between the Czech Government and the Sudeten German minority, he desired a peaceful solution. For him, it was "probable that a solution of this question, if it could be achieved, would go far to re-establish a sense of stability over an area much wider than that immediately concerned."²⁷

With Hitler's prodding, Czech-Sudeten relations moved toward a confrontation during the summer of 1938. Britain sent Lord Runciman in his personal capacity to act as an investigator and mediator in the Czechoslovakian dispute. If some peaceful solution to that dispute could be found, the Prime Minister again expressed his belief that the way would then re-open "for a further effort for a general appeasement -- an appeasement which cannot be obtained until we can be satisfied that no major cause of difference or dispute remains unsettled."²⁸

²⁷Neville Chamberlain, ibid., col. 1403.

²⁸Neville Chamberlain, 338 H. C. Deb., col. 2959, July 26, 1938.

The Liberal leader in the Opposition had many misgivings about the Prime Minister's policy in the critical Czechoslovakian situation, but also declared: "We want friendship with Germany, with Italy, with Russia and with all other countries as well; we would exclude none; but let each occupy its place with equality of rights and status in a world order based on law, justice and third-party judgment." With this assertion of principle, he urged that the House give as much support as possible to the Government, "on whom must rest so heavy a responsibility for preserving the peace of the world and of our own homes," and welcomed Lord Runciman's mission.²⁹

As the crisis unfolded during September 1938, the paramount issue no longer was settlement of the Sudeten dispute with Czechoslovakia. By mid-September, German troops were concentrated at the Czech borders, bent on invasion under the guise of protection for the German Sudeten population. All along, Hitler had diabolically continued merely to allude to application of the principle of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans. Then on September 12, for the first time, he publicly raised the issue of self-

²⁹Sir Archibald Sinclair, ibid., cols. 2942-43.

determination during a long speech delivered at the close of the Parteitag at Nuremberg. In a segment of that oration, Hitler turned his attention to the plight of the Sudeten minority. Claiming that there were three and a half million Germans among the majority of nationalities which were suffering oppression in Czechoslovakia, he said: "The Almighty did not create them in order that by means of a State-construction designed at Versailles they should be given over to a hated alien Power." In Czechoslovakia, he went on, "in political life over seven and a half millions in the name of the right of self-determination of a certain Mr. Wilson are deprived of their right of self-determination."³⁰

As the crisis unfolded during September 1938, the principle of self-determination emerged as the main propo-

³⁰Text of speech in Baynes, ed., op. cit., II, 1489, 1489-90. The seven and a half million included all the minorities in Czechoslovakia, in Hitler's reckoning.

During his speech to the Reichstag on February 20, 1938, Hitler stated that over ten million Germans lived in the two states adjoining the German frontiers, and said: "The fact that they are now citizens of other States should not deprive them of their rights as members of a national community. Yet a people has the right to self-determination, as we were solemnly assured in Wilson's Fourteen Points which served as the basis of the Armistice. This cannot be overlooked simply because the people in question happen to be Germans!" Text in ibid., II, 1405.

sition, publicly at least, both in Hitler's demands and in Britain's concessions. In analyzing the problem of complex "relations between the Teuton and the Slav races in the area...called Czechoslovakia," Lord Runciman acquired great sympathy for the Sudeten case. During his attempt at mediation, it became self-evident to him that:

those frontier districts between Czechoslovakia and Germany where the Sudeten population is in an important majority should be given full right of self-determination at once. If some cession is inevitable, as I believe it to be, it is as well that it should be done promptly and without procrastination.³¹

In September 1938, all other attempts to find a modus vivendi for the Sudeten minority in Czechoslovakia having failed, the British Government accepted the self-determination principle, particularly because, from Lord Runciman's report to the Cabinet, Germany's claim on that principle appeared justified. After his first meeting with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, it became clear to Chamberlain that, with German troops prepared to invade Czechoslovakia, "there was nothing that anybody could do that would prevent that invasion unless the right of self-determination were granted to the Sudeten-Germans and that quickly. That was

³¹"Lord Runciman to the Prime Minister" September 21, 1938, in Correspondence respecting Czechoslovakia, Cmd. 5847, No. 1, pp. 3, 4, 6.

the sole hope of a peaceful solution."³² Ever since the Peace Settlement, the Labour party had favoured what amounted to self-determination for the German population of Czechoslovakia. Now, in conceding this principle twenty years later, the Government was in effect doing what the Labour party had continually advocated.

At the time of the Godesberg Meeting with Chamberlain, Hitler emphasized that "these Sudeten Germans are not coming back to the German Reich in virtue of the gracious or benevolent sympathy of other nations, but on the ground of their own will based on the right of self-determination of the nations, and of the irrevocable decision of the German Reich to give effect to this will."³³ But also at Godesberg, Hitler repeated the assurance which he had given to Chamberlain earlier at Berchtesgaden, that the return of the Sudeten Germans to Germany "was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe and that he had no wish to

³²339 H. C. Deb., col. 15, September 28, 1938.

On September 18, when Daladier and Bonnet met with British Ministers in London, it was agreed that "the only means of achieving this object was to accept the principle of self-determination." Neville Chamberlain, ibid., col. 16.

³³"The Reichschancellor to the Prime Minister, Godesberg, September 23, 1938," in Cmd. 5847, No. 4, p. 12.

include in the Reich people of other races than Germans."³⁴ Hitler publicly reiterated this assurance in a speech in the Sportpalast in Berlin on the evening of September 26, 1938, when he said: "We want no Czechs!"³⁵

These explicit assurances irresistibly strengthened Hitler's argument based upon self-determination, and made it much easier for the British Government to concede that argument. The only thing remaining was the maintenance of peaceful procedure, which Chamberlain called "carrying out the principles already agreed upon in an orderly fashion and free from the threat of force."³⁶

IV

All information which was available to the British Cabinet at the end of August 1938, Duff Cooper told the House, indicated that Germany was prepared for war at the end of September. "We were all under the shadows of a great and imminent menace," he related; "war, in a form

³⁴Chamberlain, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 22, September 28, 1938.

³⁵Text in Baynes, ed., op. cit., II, 1526.

³⁶"The First Letter of September 23, 1938, from the Prime Minister to the Reichschancellor, Godesberg," Cmd. 5847, No. 3, p. 10.

more stark and terrible than ever before, seemed to be staring us in the face."³⁷ The right of self-determination having been conceded to the Sudeten Germans during September, there no longer was any justification for Britain to contemplate an armed conflict with Germany. Addressing the whole nation directly, the Prime Minister gave a personal analysis of the essential point in the Sudeten crisis:

However much we may sympathise with a small nation confronted by a big and powerful neighbour, we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight it must be on larger issues than that. I am myself a man of peace to the depths of my soul. Armed conflict between nations is a nightmare to me; but if I were convinced that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted. Under such a domination life for people who believe in liberty would not be worth living; but war is a fearful thing, and we must be very clear, before we embark on it, that it is really the great issues that are at stake, and that the call to risk everything in their defence, when all the consequences are weighed, is irresistible.³⁸

Prompted by recognition that the will to fight for the Czechoslovak issue was negligible in Britain and in the House, a few days later Chamberlain repeated the essence of

³⁷339 H. C. Deb., cols. 31, 41, October 3, 1938.

³⁸Chamberlain's broadcast to the nation on the evening of September 27, 1938, in his In Search of Peace, (London, 1939), p. 276.

these sentiments. Evoking the dreadful features which modern war would bring, he told the House:

when you think of these things you cannot ask people to accept a prospect of that kind; you cannot force them into a position that they have got to accept it; unless you feel yourself, and can make them feel, that the cause for which they are going to fight is a vital cause -- a cause that transcends all the human values, a cause to which you can point, if some day you win the victory, and say, 'That cause is safe'.³⁹

Estimating ten million mutilated dead in a potential war, one Member could see the futility of its only possible justification: "To prevent the very right of self-determination which we fought the last War to secure, or else because of differences of opinion as to the method and time by which the principle already conceded should be applied."⁴⁰ There was no question that Britain would not fight for such a cause, and Duff Cooper saw that "if we were obliged to go to war it would be hard to have it said against us that we were fighting against the principle of self-determination."⁴¹

When the Prime Minister told the tense House that

³⁹339 H. C. Deb., col. 545, October 6, 1938.

⁴⁰Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Thomas Moore, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 260, October 4, 1938.

⁴¹339 H. C. Deb., col. 35, October 3, 1938.

he had just been invited by Hitler to meet him at Munich, and that Mussolini and Daladier had also been invited, the Members accepted the news virtually without dissent or reservation. Attlee voiced satisfaction at this opportunity which might prevent war, and with similar feelings Sir Archibald Sinclair wished the Prime Minister "God-speed in his enterprise."⁴²

The Conference at Munich on September 29, 1938 was "a horrible and wretched business" but, given the only alternatives of war or the Munich Agreement, it was the lesser of two evils.⁴³ Though Munich was merely a Four-Power Conference, it none the less resembled a high-level meeting and gave the appearance of peaceful and negotiated change. To a considerable extent, that was in conformity with the perpetual demand by Radical opinion for a world conference to effect change through negotiation. The Munich Conference also served as the major corrective surgery of the Versailles Treaty. Relief was universal that peace was preserved, and in Britain the Agreement was greeted

⁴²See 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 26-27, passim, September 28, 1938.

⁴³Lord Halifax, op. cit., p. 201.

with almost unanimous approval.⁴⁴ The mood of anxiety gave way to one of jubilation.

By Monday, October 3, the Members had a chance to sober down and to evaluate the dramatic developments of the previous week.⁴⁵ A four-day debate for discussion of the Munich settlement opened that afternoon. During the first two days of this debate, at least two areas of unanimity became apparent: intense relief that the war clouds had been dispersed at least temporarily; and abhorrence of the horrors of war. Generally, both of these were accompanied with praise for the Prime Minister's courage.

⁴⁴For extracts from over fifty London morning and evening papers, twenty-six provincial morning papers and fifteen Sunday papers, which were published on October 1 and 2, 1938, see W. W. Hadley, Munich: Before and After, (London, 1944), Ch. XIV, pp. 93-110. These "representative journals were all but unanimous in their expression of the warmest gratitude to the Government, and especially to the Prime Minister, for the maintenance of peace." Ibid., p. 93.

See also discussion and results of a survey conducted during the month of September 1938, in Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, "Crisis," Britain by Mass-Observation, (Harmondsworth, 1939), Ch. II, pp. 23-108.

⁴⁵Everyone in the House was "cultivating second thoughts." Hugh Dalton, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 135, October 3, 1938. Nevertheless, they were all meeting "in joy and thankfulness that the prayers of millions have been answered, and a cloud of anxiety has been lifted from our hearts." Duff Cooper, ibid., col. 41.

Unanimity did not extend beyond that. The Members poured out their inner convictions and personal views, revealing a staggering number of ambiguities on relevant issues. These ambiguities were not the monopoly of any one side in the House; they varied according to the individual, and differed in inspiration.⁴⁶ Predictably, the leader of the Labour party was critical of the Munich Agreement. He was particularly sorry for Czechoslovakia: "We have seen to-day a gallant, civilised and democratic people betrayed and handed over to a ruthless despotism....We have seen the cause of democracy, which is, in our view, the cause of civilisation and humanity, receive a terrible defeat." He considered the recent events to represent a tremendous victory for Hitler, who had destroyed the last fortress of democracy in Eastern Europe. The cause of the crisis, he maintained, was not the existence of minorities in Czechoslovakia, nor "the wonderful principle of self-determination;" the cause of the crisis was more fundamental:

We are witnessing a degeneration of the world due to two things...failure to deal with the political and

⁴⁶On all sides of the House, the sentiments were very strong, but they did not follow ordinary party channels particularly. See Richard Butler, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 447, October 5, 1938.

economic questions arising out of the follies of the Peace Treaties, and arising out of the widespread injustice and maladjustments of the economic system. The other thing is the failure to deal with force, the failure to restrain aggression. The Disarmament Conference's failure; the failure of the World Economic Conference; aggression in Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain, Austria and Czechoslovakia -- these are milestones that mark the road to the abyss. We on these benches have, again and again, shown the danger of a policy which failed to restrain aggression, which failed to face the issue, which neither stood firm against aggression, nor tried to deal with causes. We stood for collective restraint against aggression.⁴⁷

In trying to ascertain the policy that had brought Britain to "the edge of war", and by whom it was promoted, Sir Archibald Sinclair absolved the following from responsibility: the official Opposition because it had opposed Government policy; his own party because it had advocated another; Anthony Eden who had resigned in protest against Government policy; and finally Winston Churchill because he had consistently condemned that policy. Thereupon, with an indictment which was strikingly similar to Attlee's, Sir Archibald declared:

The policy which brought us to the edge of war, from which we were extricated only at the price of immense sacrifices by a small and weak nation, and of the forfeiture of liberty for hundreds and thousands of Czechs and of Germans who are opposed to the Nazi

⁴⁷Clement Attlee, 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 51, 52, 54, 56, October 3, 1938.

dictatorship -- that policy was the policy of successive retreats in the face of aggressive dictatorships -- Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, and now Czechoslovakia. It was the policy of the Prime Minister which so nearly brought us into war last week. A policy which imposes injustice on a small and weak nation and tyranny on free men and women can never be the foundation of lasting peace.⁴⁸

The most persistent advocate of the League of Nations, Philip Noel-Baker, showed the tenacity of his beliefs in his suggestion that the Government should have asked the League six months earlier to intervene in the dispute by sending an impartial international commission to examine the merits of the dispute. Had that been done, he believed, "we should now...have had justice for the Sudeten Germans, justice for the Czechs, and stable peace for them and all the world." Retreat from the principles of the League had brought Britain to the edge of war, and it was "in the return to those principles that there lies the sole hope of 'peace in our time'."⁴⁹

⁴⁸Ibid., col. 68. Two months earlier, Sir Archibald said: "We want the Czechs to give the most generous concessions which are consistent with the safety of their State, to the reasonable wishes of the Sudeten German minority." 338 H. C. Deb., col. 2943, July 26, 1938.

⁴⁹339 H. C. Deb., cols. 502, 501, October 6, 1938.

V

The strong sympathy for Czechoslovakia held by the ranks of Radical opinion was virtually axiomatic. The comments of Hugh Dalton represented Radical persistence in seeing only one side of the coin; in pitying the Czechs, he described them as "gallant torchbearers of democracy amid the surrounding darkness of dictatorship."⁵⁰ Conversely, the Government supporters for the most part expressed the attitude that the Czech Government was "representative of a minority, supported by a minority and governing in the interests of a minority."⁵¹

Some independent-minded Members on the Government benches attacked self-determination after the events of Munich. Churchill declared that it was "fraud and farce to

⁵⁰339 H. C. Deb., col. 137, October 3, 1938. He visualized the Czech soldiers "retiring with heavy hearts from those [ceded] fortresses along the mountains where they would have fought and died like the Greek soldiers in the mountain pass of Thermopylae when facing the overwhelming odds of the barbarian hordes." Ibid.

⁵¹Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Thomas Moore, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 261, October 4, 1938.

For another negative view about Czechoslovakia and a description of the plight of the Germans in that country, see Sir Lambert Ward, 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 129-31, October 3, 1938. See also Henry Raikes, ibid., col. 96.

invoke" the name of self-determination about the Munich settlement.⁵² Comparing it with collective security, Richard Law described self-determination in the context of Munich as "a slogan of singularly repulsive hypocrisy."⁵³ Eden said that whatever else they might have been, the Munich proposals were not self-determination.⁵⁴ Viscount Cranborne implied the same idea when he described the basis on which the Munich Agreement was reached: "The Powers there assembled agreed unanimously and enthusiastically to achieve peace by giving away territory which belonged to someone else, in order to avoid embarrassment to themselves."⁵⁵

But Members from both sides of the House implied agreement with the solution at Munich. The genuine pacifist Lansbury considered the price of Czechoslovakia to be cheaper than another war.⁵⁶ A Government supporter pointedly

⁵²339 H. C. Deb., col. 364, October 5, 1938.

⁵³339 H. C. Deb., col. 112, October 3, 1938.

⁵⁴See ibid., col. 83.

⁵⁵339 H. C. Deb., col. 233, October 4, 1938.

⁵⁶See 339 H. C. Deb., col. 89, October 3, 1938.

For another Labour Member, the Rev. James Barr, war was "a vision too terrible to contemplate." No war was inevitable, he believed, and "no war should take place in any cause whatsoever." 339 H. C. Deb., cols. 238, 242, October 4, 1938.

asked the whole House: "Would any hon. Member have gone to those mothers and wives [in Britain] and asked that their sons and husbands should die in order to keep Carlsbad and Marienbad under the Czechs?"⁵⁷

However, a few Labour Members remained consistent with their party's original stand on these issues. Sir Robert Young pointed out that his party "did not hesitate to declare that the Peace Treaty was vindictive and that the exclusion of enemy nations from the original membership of the League was political foolishness." He cited a statement by the Labour party in 1919 which claimed that "'the Peace Treaty will entail a situation aggravated by territorial rivalries, growing hatreds, desire for revenge, the impossibility of economic reconstitution, national and international lack of equilibrium.'" Finding that prognostication to be neither incomplete nor exaggerated, Sir Robert concluded: "We realise now to our regret that our diagnosis was all too accurate." When the crisis developed, he went to his constituents and told them: "I would be no party to a war which could be avoided by the delimitation

⁵⁷Maxwell Fyfe, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 246, October 4, 1938.

of new frontiers."⁵⁸

Another Labour Member, Ernest Thurtle, approved without reservation of the entire action by the Prime Minister because, he maintained, where war or peace was at issue, emphatically the choice was for the Munich Agreement before war. He did not care about the methods employed to reach the Agreement; it was the end result that mattered: "Who would dare to take the responsibility for seeing death and destruction rained down upon these helpless people if by any means it could be avoided?"⁵⁹ Broadly speaking, these varied views were merely individual expressions of the deep convictions held by Members of various political and personal persuasions.

Transcending the international crisis in September 1938 was the fact that Hitler was bent on war. The intrinsic object of his vaulting ambition was undisputed power of Wagnerian dimensions. In conceding self-determination for the Sudeten Germans, the Agreement reached at Munich temporarily impeded and restrained Hitler's quest for that power. The definite sentiments

⁵⁸₃₃₉ H. C. Deb., cols. 401, 402, October 5, 1938.

⁵⁹Ibid., cols. 423-26, passim.

expressed by Members from the Independent Labour party fully illustrated the irrelevance of the principle of self-determination in the overall context of the Munich Settlement. That principle was a sham and a pretext for Hitler, they believed.

Without qualification, the spokesmen from the Independent Labour party had only praise for and approval of the Prime Minister's work during the crisis. The Members of this party, which had been so inimical to Government policy in every respect, supported Chamberlain "in maintaining peace by the Munich settlement." Leading men such as McGovern, Maxton and Stephen were in trouble in their own party outside of Parliament because of that support.⁶⁰ The dominant belief among Independent Labour Members was that war was "one great overriding evil that humanity" had to face. If war had broken out, their party would have been "in opposition to that war and would take every step that lay within [its] power to bring it to a speedy end."⁶¹

⁶⁰See John McGovern, 351 H. C. Deb., col. 39, August 24, 1939.

⁶¹James Maxton, 339 H. C. Deb., col. 193, October 4, 1938. McGovern later reiterated the same thought. See 339 H. C. Deb., col. 531, October 6, 1938.

During the September crisis, McGovern's mind was in a state of utter despair. He had been holidaying in Austria at the time, and had experienced a nightmarish vision of "men disemboweling each other, blinding each other, blowing the limbs off each other, driving each other insane." He further pictured "bombs raining from the sky, and death and destruction everywhere," a condition which he could not face. On learning while in Vienna that the Prime Minister was coming for the first time to Germany, McGovern, a proud Socialist, thanked God that some effort was being made to prevent such horrible visions from becoming reality. Because of that aversion to war, McGovern considered war to be more evil than Hitler's tyranny: to stand up to Hitler and oppose him by force in all probability meant "the sacrifice of millions of the lives of the working class."⁶²

Concerning the Munich Agreement, McGovern was pleased that the Prime Minister "broke through the traditions, that he stepped right out of the ordinary hidebound methods of settling disputes, went straight to the heart of the matter, met Hitler, and attempted to get some solution."

⁶²339 H. C. Deb., cols. 529, 530, 532, October 6, 1938.

If a man like the Prime Minister, "at the head of affairs in a difficult situation," averted war and provided "a breathing space to the world for reason to operate," then people were entitled to say to him generously, as McGovern was saying, "Well done thou good and faithful servant."⁶³ And another no less fiery Socialist and very popular Member in the House, James Maxton, praised the Prime Minister to the point of embarrassment. He gave Chamberlain full credit for having done something that:

the mass of the common people in the world wanted done. With all my political antagonisms, with all my antagonism to the political philosophy of the people who stand beside him, I am not going to stand here and lie. Last week he did something which the common people of the world wanted done, and now that we have a breathing-space we can argue and debate and denounce in the good recognized legitimate democratic way.⁶⁴

In the aftermath of Munich, all Members finally understood clearly the monster that was Hitler. In Parliamentary opinion generally, although the Munich Agreement was reached at the expense of Czechoslovakia, a Danegeld seemed to be preferable to the chaos of war.

⁶³Ibid., cols. 528, 533, 530.

⁶⁴339 H. C. Deb., col. 195, October 4, 1938.

CHAPTER VII

PARLIAMENTARY OPINION AND FOREIGN POLICY: A RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION

I

The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyse some of the dominant elements relative to the unfolding of British foreign policy in the period under consideration. The most striking element that emerges was the intrinsic anti-war sentiment which was shared equally by all schools of thought. Given all the circumstances and the most unpalatable of alternatives, Neville Chamberlain embarked upon the ill-fated policy of appeasement as the only course promising the peace which was universally desired in Britain.

No study of Parliamentary opinion would be intelligible without taking into consideration the human composition of the Parliament. In this period, the House of Commons on the whole was dominated by older men whose mental roots were Victorian and whose mature thinking was decidedly Edwardian. To a great extent, the Members were prisoners of their own traditions, environment and prejudices, in addition to

having been proxy to an unenlightened electorate in which the spirit of the Peace Ballot lingered. Precisely because they belonged to a particular generation, the Members of Parliament were not agile enough to comprehend the meaning of the staggering developments in Europe. It was a new age dominated by unpalatable political phenomena: the advance of new states which were conditioned by new ideologies, and all of which were distinctly hostile to democracy. In this situation, most Members spoke therefore with considerable naiveté on the subject of foreign affairs. When not betraying complacency, they showed limited political astuteness and quite often projected an impression of bewilderment and fear, as well. Because of these characteristics, much of the debate on foreign policy had an air of utter unreality, and at times contained statements which bordered on the grotesque.¹

In the unfolding of British foreign policy, three distinct phases emerge. The first coincided with the

¹Some outstanding Parliamentarians, most of whom had Cabinet experience, were the exceptions. Members such as Leopold Amery, Robert Boothby, Sir Austen Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and Duff Cooper expressed specific but individualistic thoughts on foreign policy. With the added exception of the Cabinet, the two sides in the House of Commons generally demonstrated inflexibility.

Premiership of Stanley Baldwin, with the accent upon foreign policy based on membership in the League of Nations, and on observance of its Covenant. In 1937 a transitional phase is evident, during which the League policy faded out and a more active policy of appeasement developed when Neville Chamberlain became the new Prime Minister. The third phase was Chamberlain's policy of appeasement in 1937-1938 which ended with his Godesberg meeting with Hitler. The Munich Conference, which followed, was in a class by itself and did not form part of Chamberlain's original policy of appeasement.

For a considerable time during the first phase, there was no major cleavage in the House of Commons on the principle of foreign policy based on the League. Initially, through their speeches, all Members displayed affinity to the principles of the League and collective security, although the Independent Labour party remained a distinct exception to this throughout. The other Opposition parties, Labour in particular, constantly lamented that Britain did not put enough trust in the League, which was good evidence of a prodigious difference of opinion on how best to pursue that policy.

The Labour party's persistence in advocating policy based on the League and collective security bordered on the irrational. Without precisely stipulating what security would be guaranteed, or whom Britain would collect, that party consistently placed complete faith in this abstract slogan, which was neither collective nor affording security. To the Labour and Liberal Opposition, the twin chimaera of the League and collective security resembled an all-powerful deus ex Geneva before which they worshipped.

Delusion about the League was one of the greatest handicaps to British foreign policy in this period. On the whole, the policy based on the League was less a policy than an excuse for one. It had little meaning, since few major powers remained in the League in the middle 1930's. For the Opposition, it was a grand illusion; for the realist it was a popular cause to which it was safe to pay lip service. As it transpired, the League was paralyzed by its most fervent followers, who in their collective intransigence left that body bereft of either readiness for conciliation, or the means for coercion. Lacking both, the League floundered on the shoals of misguided intention.

Foreign policy must be as flexible as reality if it

is to serve any purpose. As long as the post-war settlement prevailed in Europe, no insurmountable difficulties beset the British Government in its conduct of foreign policy, despite the many latent ambiguities in Parliamentary opinion. In 1935, when the Abyssinian crisis erupted, Parliament was incapable of formulating a national consensus on foreign policy. The greatest manifestation of that was in Parliament's attempts to establish a policy toward Italy on the one hand, and toward Germany on the other, although in practice the two were so intertwined as to represent two aspects of the same policy.

Since the Abyssinian war had no connection with purely British interests, it is doubtful that Britain would have taken any action with regard to the Ethiopian question had it not been for her membership in the League.² The united action by the League to arrest Mussolini's aggression demonstrated beyond a doubt that an absolute system of collective security did not exist except in the idealistic presumptions of Radical Parliamentary opinion. In their high expectations of, and repeated incantations to

²See Viscount Cranborne, 321 H. C. Deb., col. 3178, March 25, 1937.

collective security, its disciples entirely overlooked the fact that collective security was flatly incompatible with, and in overt contradiction to the idea of traditional alliance.

The Abyssinian crisis therefore was of the greatest significance to the future of the fledgling anti-German Grand Alliance begun early in 1935, and the importance of Italy in it could not be overestimated. In its first application, against Italy, the new idea of collective security quickly proved to be impotent either to preserve the universal peace or to save a Member country in Africa.

In addition, this experiment meant a complete rejection both of the principles of traditional alliance and of old-style diplomacy.

As events unfolded, it was imperative to retain the friendship of Italy, which was so crucial to the continuation of that young anti-German alliance. In particular, had the idea of traditional alliance been employed to save the Stresa Front, its partners would have connived with Italy in regard to her invasion of Abyssinia. Sacrificing the lesser good for the greater, Italy would have been allowed to complete her Abyssinian adventure in order to

preserve both the Stresa Front and the attendant alliance.

In the very least, had the principle of collective security been tempered with old-style diplomacy in seeking compromise solutions to difficult problems, and had this idea been applied in the case of Abyssinia, reasonable advantage would have accrued to all concerned:

The 'old diplomacy' would at least have kept Signor Mussolini guessing, and it would almost certainly have saved something out of the wreck by a compromise which, on its own assumptions, it could have accepted without disgrace and even with credit. The League so acted as to make its defeat inevitable, and it preached a doctrine which made the acceptance of any compromise impossible without dishonour.

If (1) settlement by compromise is to be vetoed in the name of League principles, and (2) the League is unable to make these principles [of collective security] prevail, our last state will be worse than our first. We shall have lost the advantages of ordinary diplomacy, and gained none of the benefits of the new order. Europe...is in extreme danger of falling between these two stools.³

However, during the Abyssinian crisis, intense humanitarian concern for the underdog coalesced with Left-wing ideological contempt for fascism, and resulted in a fever of anti-Italian jingoism. In the face of a menacing Germany which was in the throes of rearmament, the importance of Italy to Britain's side in European affairs was

³J. A. Spender, "Old Diplomacy and New," a Letter to the Editor, The Times, May 12, 1936, p. 17.

ignored. Little thought was given to the ineluctable fact that international relations were dictated by considerations of geographical propinquity and not by subjective preference.

As foreign policy became increasingly subject to the control of mass opinion, in this crisis as well as in the following ones, so Parliamentary opinion was in effect guided by emotion rather than by reason. That was "apt to make democratic diplomacy not only weak and inconsistent but also hazardous when it [came] to grips with dictatorship."⁴ The Radicals maintained that the Italo-Abyssinian dispute was a clash between absolute right and wrong, with no room for compromise, and there could be:

no better example of the disastrous consequences which a well-meaning but uninstructed democratic electorate can produce in international relations when it brings its full weight to bear on a delicate issue of foreign policy than the unhappy predicament of the British Government in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute.⁵

The high watermark of such behaviour was reached on the occasion of the ill-fated attempt on behalf of the League by Sir Samuel Hoare, together with Pierre Laval, to effect a compromise settlement with Mussolini by methods

⁴Sir Victor Wellesley, Diplomacy in Fetters, (London, 1944), p. 7.

⁵Ibid., p. 77.

of old-style diplomacy. In December 1935, the so-called Hoare-Laval plan emerged as the only "practicable basis for a compromise to end the war...and for the re-establishment of the Stresa front, and [it] was the best, or...the least bad, in the circumstances."⁶ When news of this plan reached London, public opinion in Britain rose in revolt within the hour, while "the lobbies of the House of Commons buzzed with anger and within a few minutes it became evident that either Sir Samuel Hoare and his agreement must be jettisoned or the Government would fall."⁷ Having been "so punched above and below the belt before he found his feet,"⁸ and given the alternative to recant, Sir Samuel chose the honourable way out and resigned

⁶Templewood, op. cit., pp. 191, 188.

⁷Nicolson, op. cit., p. 60. For the effect of public opinion upon the Government's policy in regard to the Hoare-Laval plan, see Survey Int. Affairs, 1935, II, 66-67 and 314-320.

⁸Vansittart, op. cit., p. 522.

Arthur Greenwood, for example, termed the Hoare-Laval attempt "the shameful episode" of the time "when the British policeman engaged in a conspiracy to help the burglar to get away with the swag." 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1975, March 10, 1936.

instead.⁹

An explanation for the furor was given by Sir Archibald Sinclair, who believed that the Hoare-Laval controversy affected the sense of honour of the British people, as it implied British betrayal of the rule of law.¹⁰ Radical opinion on the whole protested against the Hoare-Laval plan because it considered the plan to be a fatal betrayal of the League. Abyssinia was not saved, their argument ran, because "the Government...wobbled and vacillated while the aggressor was pursuing his nefarious designs with fixed determination and resolute will."¹¹ The thinking of few Members in the House was unobscured by emotion. For example, Leopold Amery approved of Sir Samuel's endeavour because:

When he heard the roar of the Niagara towards which we were drifting [he] had the courage to steer for the shore. What is more, he convinced the Prime Minister

⁹He was convinced that "nothing short of the proposals would save Abyssinia and prevent Mussolini from joining the Hitler front." See his own description of these developments in Templewood, op. cit., p. 185.

¹⁰See 321 H. C. Deb., col. 245, March 2, 1937.

¹¹Sir Archibald Sinclair, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1752, May 6, 1936.

Mr. Cocks for the Labour party had brought his own charges in strikingly parallel terms. See 313 H. C. Deb., cols. 1683-88, passim, June 23, 1936.

that his action was right and necessary....Unfortunately, the Prime Minister showed a few days later that a breeze in this House counted more with him than the deadly and imminent storm in Europe.¹²

During the Abyssinian controversy, Britain reeled under the influence of the conflicting intellectual professions of the time. Much to their mutual annoyance, the political Right and political Left agreed temporarily on one thing: "Neither wanted to fight, but the Left was fierce because the Right had not been fiercer. Both were bent on being firm, whatever that meant, but neither knew." All of this was illustrative of the widespread confusion expressed by all sections of opinion:

We were all in a muddle, and it is hard to keep track of opinions when the owners are not sure of them. Arthur Ponsonby, a supporter of the League, felt loath to lead Labour in the Lords because an honest pacifist could not countenance forceful policies. Lansbury took the same line, and let in Attlee to public advantage. Equally honest pacifists like Trevelyan were ready for sanctions and fisticuffs. Contrariwise again Labour had wanted Leaguers to disarm as an example, and now asked for an example of contrary kind. Cripps had once called the League The International Burglars' Union; now his mates adjured Burglars to arrest safe-breakers. Or again parts of the party,

¹²311 H. C. Deb., col. 1823, May 6, 1936.

Mr. Stephen of the Independent Labour party had a similar view when he said that Hoare with Laval "was taking a much wiser view than the view of those who uttered the words of criticism of [Hoare] on that occasion." Ibid., col. 1774.

with dictatorial tendencies to government by decree, were hot for stopping dictators.

Most contradictory were Winston [Churchill] and his school. He said that 'we could have fought Italy with a minimum of risk.' Yes, if one could exclude the German war, and he could not....[German war] could only have been thwarted by early strength; and for two further years more wrath was spent on Italy than on Germany.¹³

II

All opinion in Britain could show amazing and sudden reverses. In this grave period of history, public opinion suffered from a kind of mass schizophrenia, which was reflected in the ensuing indecisive foreign policy. The projected depth of feeling usually was expressed without the commensurate depth of thinking. The great wave of public indignation in December 1935, when Sir Samuel Hoare would have conceded something to a dictator, was in sharp contrast to a reversed tide of public feeling in March 1936, which accepted Hitler's illegal action in the Rhineland with hardly a murmur.

To all but the blind, Germany's arbitrary method in the Rhineland should have served as notice of her future intentions in Europe. But neither Britain nor France were

¹³Vansittart, op. cit., pp. 544, 544-45.

prepared to challenge German advances. Britain had just begun to rearm -- a policy which was strongly resisted by the Opposition parties, particularly Labour. France's preparations to curb anticipated German expansion consisted largely of building a series of alliances, which were of doubtful wisdom, with the countries in Eastern Europe. The Abyssinian war erased her 1935 rapprochement with Italy; and her passive acceptance of German entry into the Rhineland nullified any possible advantage from her Eastern alliances, which no longer made strategic sense.

In the contemplation of any resistance to German revival, British difficulties were compounded by the ambiguous attitudes, which were deeply rooted in moral values, and which were generally held in matters of foreign policy. All problems were approached with emotional agitation and in the framework of absolute right and wrong. It was clear to Wedgwood Benn, for example, that a policy based on right and wrong was realistic.¹⁴ Along with his own convictions on the subject, another Labour Member aptly described this phenomenon:

The mass do not know much about these questions, but

¹⁴See 336 H. C. Deb., col. 714, May 19, 1938.

they have sense to see which is the right policy from the moral point of view, and which is the wrong, and no amount of advocacy of expediency will ever wash out that conscience. It came to the top last year, both in the League of Nations Ballot and in the November bouleversement [i.e. General Election]. You have there that infallible evidence of an English Nonconformist conscience which is the backbone of our national character, and which might perfectly well be made the backbone of a new Covenant of the world at Geneva.¹⁵

Though in the minority in the House, Labour represented a great part of the electorate and therefore a large part of public opinion. When expressions of public opinion polarized sufficiently, pressure could be brought to bear in Parliament, where it could "compel the Government to modify somewhat the emphasis of its policy, if not the policy itself."¹⁶ This pressure of public opinion was continuously exerted upon the Government through the medium of Opposition criticism and prodding. As Arthur Henderson put it:

to-day the present generation of public opinion is not prepared to allow this or any other Government to carry on the foreign affairs of this country without being subjected to the spotlight of public criticism which should emanate from those whose duty it is, under the

¹⁵Colonel Wedgwood, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 127, February 24, 1936.

¹⁶Jennings, op. cit., p. 157.

constitution of this country, to form the Opposition parties.¹⁷

That the Opposition wielded some influence upon the Government must therefore be assumed. When Opposition opinions were heeded by the Government, the Government's own hesitant thinking in the shaping of policy was aggravated, and its decisions were affected.

Because of this, the Peace Ballot became the determining factor in British policy at the time. The ambiguity of the title "Peace Ballot" symbolized the ambiguity of its very questions, as well as of the subsequent interpretation of its result. The title implied an affirmative vote for peace, and the wording of all questions but the first contained the phrase "by international agreements." As a consequence, "of all forms of insidious and dangerous proceedings few [were] worse than a referendum to millions of ill-informed people in the shape of a questionnaire on a political subject which they [did] not understand and so framed to elicit the answer desired."¹⁸

¹⁷330 H. C. Deb., col. 1839, December 21, 1937.

¹⁸Wellesley, op. cit., pp. 77-78. There could have been "no better illustration of how in a democracy, irresponsible popular clamour and the exigencies of party consideration can fetter the hands of diplomacy, than the

The answers demonstrated a great deal of contradictory thinking among the voters. Particularly ambiguous was the two-part fifth question, to the first part of which it was impossible to vote affirmatively without readiness to do so to the second part, as well.¹⁹ The Ballot achieved its most conspicuous success in areas of Britain where Gladstonian Liberalism dominated or where nonconformist humanitarianism prevailed. This contrasted eloquently to the almost complete failure of the Ballot in, roughly, the Southeastern part of England, especially London.²⁰ The result indicated an overwhelming preference among Britons for the League and disarmament, but also showed their readiness to defend the Covenant by recourse to war, if necessary. A fair, composite interpretation of the answers

unfortunate concatenation of events which followed the Peace Ballot on the eve of the General Election of 1935." Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁹An important segment of this question read: "if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by: (a) Economic and non-military measures? [and] (b) if necessary, military measures?"

²⁰The greatest success was noted in Wales, then in the Lowlands of Scotland, and the textile district of Lancashire and Yorkshire. See the analysis in Livingstone, et al., op. cit., pp. 51-58, passim.

and the resultant message to the Government was probably this:

'Go as far as you can, in combination with other members, to secure and observe loyalty to the Covenant, and to resist aggression; but do all you can to keep out of war, even in company with other member-States; and we give no support at all to military measures which will fall exclusively and preponderantly on British shoulders.'²¹

The speech of Sir Samuel Hoare at Geneva in September 1935, and the Election Manifesto were but two pieces of evidence that the Government did receive this unusual message from the electors.

In actual practice the Government saw no alternative but to pursue a double policy: to placate Mussolini and to associate with the League of Nations, as well. Concurrent with the first part was the establishment and maintenance of a firm friendship with Italy to counter-balance danger from the renascent Germany. The Stresa Front was an example of this. There was further proof of Britain's intention in Eden's sojourn in Rome late in June 1935, with firm offers from Britain to Mussolini; in Britain's great reluctance to impose limited sanctions; and in the attempt to salvage the

²¹Gathorne-Hardy, op. cit., p. 409.

Stresa Front through the Hoare-Laval plan. When the sanctions failed, Britain led the way, along with France, in lifting them. Although major damage had been done and the Opposition at home was uncooperative, the Government increased its efforts to tie Mussolini to the West.

Nevertheless, in 1936, Britain and the League incurred Italy's enmity and disdain because of the Abyssinian episode. Dissatisfaction with the Western powers alienated Mussolini from the West and drew him closer to Hitler. Through the unfolding rapprochement between the two dictators, those "revisionists found identity in Spain, and the Rome-Berlin Axis began."²² With the fabric of peace in Europe thereby perilously undermined, Britain no longer could depend on any potential alliance, except with France.

The subsequent development of the Axis made the growing threat from Germany even more formidable, but Britain did not give up her attempts to loosen Italy's association with Germany. To that end, the Government continuously demonstrated a strong desire to improve relations with Italy. The course of the civil war in Spain, a series of international agreements in the Mediterranean,

²²Vansittart, op. cit., p. 503.

and Neville Chamberlain's later unconditional efforts to appease Italy, all testify to this. There was no departure from policy in Chamberlain's accelerated attempts to keep Italy's friendship during the month of February 1938, although the absence of preconditions, which caused Eden to dissent, was a new element. Even at that late hour, Chamberlain risked a Cabinet crisis and allowed the loss of a Foreign Secretary in a vain effort to resurrect the Stresa Front.

This Government persistence was seriously impeded by the vigorous attacks of the ideologically intransigent Opposition. On the occasion of the controversy which precipitated Eden's resignation, the Opposition accused Neville Chamberlain of Fascist sympathies, which was a good indication of the high velocity of anti-Fascist winds in the House. Yet even in the face of such bitter opposition, the undaunted Government soon concluded the Anglo-Italian Agreement, recognizing de jure the Italian conquest in Abyssinia. Its culmination was the visit to Rome in January, 1939 by Chamberlain and Lord Halifax.²³

²³See "Britain and Italy" in Wolfers, op. cit., Ch. XIX, pp. 311-320.

Parallel with this continued pursuit of a partnership with Italy, at least until 1938, was the second part of Britain's double policy: association with the League of Nations. The League had not recovered from the Abyssinian experience and had suffered a new strain during the civil war in Spain, but still possessed a reservoir of moral appeal and persuasion. However, with the effectiveness of the League progressively declining, Britain derived no advantage beyond using it as an international forum. "Policy based on the League" was no longer viable.

Thus Britain had to adopt a policy toward Germany which was appropriate under prevailing conditions in Europe, in order to safeguard British national interests. That task brought into focus the great dilemma which the Government had to surmount. Any policy would be at least reasonably successful if the means for it were provided. However, many a policy has failed because the majority of people advocate the ends, but deny the means necessary for its successful execution. Suffering from ambiguities, Parliamentary confusion, and contradictory stands, Britain was handicapped in her efforts to effect a strong foreign policy. Confusion about British rearmament and British

participation in collective security were but two critical factors.

III

More than anything else, the rising threat of Hitler's Germany prompted the Government to institute a rearmament programme in Britain for her own adequate defence, and to promote a stronger foreign policy. The Opposition did not share this view; it demanded that Britain's defence be considered only in relation to the League of Nations and collective security. In this context, the Opposition essentially denied to the Government the means for intervention, which that Opposition was only too prone to demand. Those Members thereby managed to suggest to the world that their parties advocated defiance without defence. Thus it was with a House deeply divided on the most crucial issue -- the nation's survival -- that the Government had to face the problems in international affairs. From 1936 onward, Germany was decidedly at the center of all those problems, and, for Britain, there were but three possible policies to adopt toward Germany.

One was that of isolation, which the facts of geography rather cancelled. In addition, Britain's member-

ship in the League was further evidence of her clear rejection of that policy. Another was the virtual mobilization of all democratic forces into a new military Grand Alliance to resist Germany's expansion, and to risk another war like the first. Such a policy had much to recommend it, but for various reasons it was found to be no less fraught with danger than the first alternative, and was unanimously rejected.²⁴ The third possibility was to accept the new balance of power; to adjust frontiers and alliances accordingly, i.e., to recognize the validity of German grievances; and to satisfy those grievances peacefully and reasonably.

With the first alternative demonstrably impractical, if not impossible, one of the other two alternatives had to be adopted. The core of the dilemma was that most people in Britain, and in Europe generally, were unprepared for either of them. To make matters worse, a large body of opinion in Britain demurred from supporting rearmament, which was so necessary for the successful pursuit of any foreign policy.

²⁴For more detailed discussion of this aspect see Section IV, below.

One of the major sources of difficulty with which the Government had to contend was the very vocal body of Parliamentary opinion demanding British intervention, which was usually expressed as "calling the dictator's bluff," or as insistence upon unilateral sanctions. If, for example, as a result of British imposition of oil sanctions against Italy to stop the war on Abyssinia, Mussolini made war upon Britain, the latter should be prepared to take that risk.²⁵ Without stopping to reflect on how Britain could take that kind of risk without arms, another Labour Member advocated closing the Suez Canal, with Britain taking the consequences even to the extent of going it alone.²⁶ These Members were simultaneously so bellicose and yet so fervent in abhorring war that Ramsay MacDonald once observed that the most ardent pacifists were the most war-spirited advisers in foreign policy that he

²⁵See Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, 312 H. C. Deb., col. 1316, May 20, 1936. Another time he insisted that the Government should prove, at whatever expense, once and for all, that aggression did not pay. See 311 H. C. Deb., col. 165, April 22, 1936.

²⁶See John Tinker, 311 H. C. Deb., col. 1787, May 6, 1936.

had ever known.²⁷

Interpreting the attitude of the British people, one Labour Member denied that they were extreme pacifists, but suggested their certainty that no nation could rely safely upon its own armaments. This Member further asserted that, as the people were desirous of avoiding war, they were consequently not prepared to:

fight a war to defend democracy; they are not prepared to fight a war for self-defence; they are not prepared to fight a war in defence of imperial interests or lines of communication, anywhere in the world; because they are by no means convinced that any of these needs can be so attained;

they would use force only if it were necessary, "in combination with all other nations and peoples of the right belief for the purpose of replacing international anarchy by international law."²⁸

This demonstrated the perennial inability of the Opposition to see that both power and principle were required for successful foreign policy. With all the eloquence at its disposal, the Opposition hindered provision for power through armament; and with equal loquacity it

²⁷See his Guildhall speech, November 9, 1934, in The Times, November 10, 1934, p. 12.

²⁸Samuel Silverman, 334 H. C. Deb., cols. 125, 126, April 4, 1938.

differed from the Government in its exposition of principle. Nowhere did the Opposition assume its duty to oppose with so much expectancy and acrimony as in matters of foreign policy and defence, both of which were tied closely to the whole question of rearmament. Baldwin stated that defence requirements and foreign policy were so firmly inter-related that one could not be considered apart from the other.²⁹

The leader of the official Opposition agreed with the Prime Minister that foreign policy could not be separated from defence, but he insisted that defence was the result of foreign policy.³⁰ In the same vein, for Mr. Alexander, the whole question of what was required for the armaments policy depended upon the foreign policy of the Government.³¹ Others complained that the Government had laid before the House no foreign policy to which its

²⁹See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1827, March 9, 1936.

³⁰See Attlee, ibid., col. 1843. He repeated this inverted Labour logic: "defence policy must depend on your foreign policy." 312 H. C. Deb., col. 1434, May 21, 1936. But two years later he conceded that defence and foreign policy were closely related. See 332 H. C. Deb., col. 1658, March 7, 1938.

³¹See 310 H. C. Deb., col. 78, March 16, 1936.

armaments policy could be coordinated or related.³²

Aversion to armaments was a deep-seated part of Labour doctrine, as Attlee showed when he said: "I disbelieve entirely the idea that peace can be obtained by having a number of armed forces becoming stronger and stronger and watching each other."³³ Doubt was expressed that peace was attainable merely by building up armaments.³⁴ Some saw no guarantee of world peace or defence of the country in increased armaments.³⁵ Sir Archibald Sinclair saw "no safety for the world if the statesmen in Germany, France and Britain are all saying the same thing and are piling up great armaments that give no safety but increase danger."³⁶ In a note of pessimism, Lansbury regretted the buildup of defence forces, which was in direct proportion

³²See Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher, 315 H. C. Deb., col. 161, July 20, 1936.

³³317 H. C. Deb., col. 1095, November 12, 1936.

³⁴See James Ede, 309 H. C. Deb., col. 2399, March 12, 1936.

³⁵See Frederick Montague, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 285, March 17, 1936. He favoured disarmament: "If we could be Christian enough to say that we would disarm unilaterally, I believe we should get through, because I have faith in spiritual power over material power." Ibid.

³⁶311 H. C. Deb., col. 183, April 22, 1936.

to certainty of the catastrophe of war.³⁷ Arthur Greenwood wished the Government to make a fresh start on the problem of disarmament,³⁸ and Mr. Mander hoped that the Government would be much more active in the work of disarmament.³⁹ But on the whole, Labour could not trust the Government:

We do not trust their foreign policy and we will not entrust this enormous rearmament programme to their hands. Rearmament, in so far as it may be necessary at all, must be handled in the right way. The Government have shown that they cannot be trusted so to handle it. We refuse, therefore, to give them our confidence afresh.⁴⁰

Consequently, whenever budgetary proposals were discussed, the armament policy was subjected to sharp criticism. From 1936 onward, all budgets brought down by the Chancellors of the Exchequer were essentially defence budgets. Additional revenue had to be found to pay for

³⁷See 309 H. C. Deb., col. 1999, March 10, 1936.

Ernest Hicks was even sure: "We are now on the threshold of what might almost be regarded as mutual annihilation." Ibid., col. 2020.

³⁸See ibid., col. 1977. For him the dominant problem was that of peace and not of defence. Ibid.

³⁹See 310 H. C. Deb., col. 287, March 17, 1936.

⁴⁰Mr. Pethick-Lawrence, 315 H. C. Deb., col. 1163, July 27, 1936.

increased defence spending. The Opposition wasted no time in letting the Government know that they considered the expenditure to be unchristian, barbarous and out of date.⁴¹ Money could not be found to improve the conditions of the people, but "all these hundreds of millions of pounds can be found for expenditure upon instruments of death."⁴²

The leader of the Opposition Liberals believed that it was useless to bankrupt the country by accumulating defence equipment, and insisted that plans for rearmament meant "preparing to fight the flames with the fuel." Conceding the necessity of adequate provision for defence against foreign aggression, he urged that defence problems be considered as one unit, including the important financial aspect. He further believed that the fires of war could be extinguished not by armament but by economic and military disarmament.⁴³

⁴¹See John Potts, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 332, March 17, 1936.

⁴²Mr. Stephen, 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 183-4, March 16, 1936.

⁴³See Sir A. Sinclair, 311 H. C. Deb., cols. 181, 183, April 22, 1936. However, Sir Archibald and his party decided to support the policy of rearmament in so far as additional expenditure for the coming year was to be met by additional taxation. Ibid., col. 179.

The Opposition could not comprehend the meaning of British rearmament policy. Even by the end of 1937, Attlee reiterated that his party was as opposed as it always had been to "a competition in armaments divorced from foreign policy."⁴⁴ The Opposition was locked in a perpetual struggle with the Government over the problem of what constituted real need in regard to British armament, all of which underscored the paradox of the situation, as those:

who called for resistance to the 'Fascist aggressors' opposed vigorous rearmament, while those who were accused of condoning these aggressors were eager to have Britain make a maximum effort at rearmament, directed unmistakably against the powers with which they were assumed to be sympathizing. It is not surprising that both the participants in the debate and the outside observers were confused.⁴⁵

IV

The turning point in foreign policy came in 1937, inaugurating a somewhat new course which was the second phase in that policy, and which coincided with Chamberlain's elevation to the Premiership. Whereas Baldwin was more aloof, Chamberlain kept a close watch on foreign affairs,

⁴⁴328 H. C. Deb., col. 21, October 26, 1937.

⁴⁵Wolfers, op. cit., p. 379.

shaping his own policy. In doing so, he leaned toward personal diplomacy. This came to a head when Eden resigned, leaving the stage free for the third phase.

When at the end of May 1937, Neville Chamberlain at the age of sixty-eight succeeded Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister, he inherited a very bad hand in the sphere of foreign policy. Europe was clearly at the crossroads; the League was in a state of collapse; Spain was engulfed in the flames of the civil war; France was dejected, Italy estranged, Germany ascendant and Britain herself woefully lagging behind in rearmament because of a late start. It was not an easy task for Chamberlain to chart British foreign policy against this difficult and unpalatable background.

Of the three possible choices available to the Government, that of isolation was not seriously entertained. But the alternative of alliances along traditional lines was equally rejected after the failure in 1935. The Opposition was most emphatic on this point. There was no security in isolation, and no security in armaments; nor was there security, they insisted, "in the balancing of

possible advantages from alliances."⁴⁶ Fearing that under the haven of the League there might be a building up of alliances which were to be in effect the old military alliances, Attlee was quite disturbed by the possibility of restoration of the Stresa Front; for him that was not a League principle, but the old one of alliances and balance of power.⁴⁷ Hugh Dalton advised the Government that the British people would not support an exclusive Anglo-French alliance.⁴⁸ According to Sir Archibald Sinclair, in Britain there would never be whole-hearted support for a military alliance; "only for an effort to build peace upon a rule of law...such support will be forthcoming."⁴⁹

The Opposition was equally against regional pacts, the Labour stand on this explaining their dislike of alliances; such pacts "might conceivably lead to a series of alliances here and there in Europe which might give us

⁴⁶David Grenfell, 327 H. C. Deb., col. 159, October 21, 1937.

⁴⁷See 310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1536, 1534, March 26, 1936.

⁴⁸See ibid., col. 1452.

⁴⁹Ibid., col. 1466. He added: "to avert the dangers and fulfill the hopes, we must avoid military alliances."
Ibid.

precisely a counterpart of what happened in Europe" before the First War broke out.⁵⁰ Robert Boothby found himself almost agreeing with the Labour party as, for him too, the policy of military alliances in Europe inevitably led to a war in which Britain, sooner or later, would become involved.⁵¹

The Prime Minister emphatically discounted the possibility of amassing an overwhelming anti-German alliance to re-establish the balance of power in Europe. Declaring that his Government was against alliances, Chamberlain said: "...what we, at any rate, have always set our faces against, namely, to divide Europe into two opposing blocs or camps. So far from making a contribution to peace, I say that it would inevitably plunge us into war."⁵² He had considered a plan for what Churchill called "The Grand Alliance" and had found it attractive until its practicability was examined: "from that moment its attraction vanishes," in

⁵⁰Morgan Jones, 315 H. C. Deb., col. 1197, July 27, 1936.

⁵¹See 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1499, March 26, 1936.

⁵²334 H. C. Deb., col. 61, April 4, 1938.

the realities of European geographic distribution.⁵³

An alliance was thus emphatically rejected by both sides of the House. But in searching for effective methods of dealing with Germany, proposals eventually emanated from the Opposition benches for an offensive and defensive alliance between Britain, France and the Soviet Union, against some other Power, or group of Powers, under the guise of collective security. These suggestions in no way impressed the Prime Minister:

the party opposite never bothers to look at the mixture inside the bottle as long as the label outside is right. When I think of all their past fulminations against pre-war alliances, which they used to accuse us of wanting, I am amazed at their being able to bamboozle themselves into thinking that if they take a pre-war alliance, and mumble these words, 'Collective Security,' over it, they can change its character and the consequences which are bound to flow from it.⁵⁴

The Prime Minister thus reduced to naught the prospect of either an active Grand Alliance against Germany or something similar under the guise of collective security. Under the circumstances, there was room only for an attempt at a policy of genuine appeasement, since foremost in the British interest was pacification of Europe. With the

⁵³See Chamberlain, Diary, March 20, 1938, cited in Feiling, op. cit., p. 347.

⁵⁴334 H. C. Deb., col. 60, April 4, 1938.

realization that Germany could not be permanently confined in Europe, appeasement became the policy filled with the highest hope. But in the course of its development, both the policy and the very word appeasement underwent a profound change of meaning from the initial "virtuous endeavour" to the later "craven immorality."⁵⁵

In practice however, the policy of appeasement always consisted of two complementary segments: that toward Italy and that toward Germany. The negotiations with Italy were an indispensable step in that framework as "quite apart from its own inherent merits, the Italian Agreement was made in the interests of appeasement in Europe."⁵⁶ Chamberlain never intended the Anglo-Italian Agreement to be simply a bilateral arrangement between the two countries. For the sake of restoration of their old friendly relations, Chamberlain was prepared to recognize the Italian conquest of Ethiopia, the moral justification for which he found in "the knowledge that that recognition had brought with it a

⁵⁵Vansittart, op. cit., p. 430.

⁵⁶The Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Richard Butler, 337 H. C. Deb., col. 1031, June 21, 1938.

real contribution to the peace in Europe."⁵⁷

When Chamberlain's policy of appeasement emerged, by means of direct conversations with Mussolini and Hitler individually, he tried to make offers so that, through orderly negotiation, grievances might be satisfied, adjustments made, and peace maintained. The essential part was to anticipate public demands from Germany by private soundings and offers, and for Britain to take and maintain the initiative. The first attempt to explore the ground with Germany within this scheme of appeasement was the visit to Germany in November, 1937 of Lord Halifax, then Lord President of the Council. In the light of information obtained on this occasion, Chamberlain hoped to pursue that exploration further at a convenient opportunity.⁵⁸

V

The idea of appeasement, primarily referring to Germany, was not a new one in the context of European affairs. Intrinsically, it enjoyed more widespread support than was apparent on the surface. This was demonstrated by

⁵⁷338 H. C. Deb., cols. 2953-54, July 26, 1938.

⁵⁸See 332 H. C. Deb., col. 54, February 21, 1938.

the sense of guilt toward Germany in the country generally and in Radical opinion particularly, and by the fact that the Government always sought pacification. To both sides of the House, the spirit of "peaceful and just change," which was so difficult to achieve, was the corollary of appeasement in Europe.

At the time of the Rhineland coup, the Foreign Secretary assured the House that, continuously, the Government had contemplated appeasement of Europe as a whole.⁵⁹ On many subsequent occasions, he expressed similar thoughts to the House.⁶⁰ Believing that nothing less than a European settlement and appeasement should be Britain's aim,⁶¹ he asserted that her interest in peace was universal and that the Government desired "peace and good understanding."⁶² These sentiments were echoed by the man destined for active pursuance of the policy of appeasement. While still serving as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Neville Chamberlain stated that the Government was aiming

⁵⁹See Eden, 310 H. C. Deb., col. 1446, March 26, 1936.

⁶⁰E.g., see Eden, 318 H. C. Deb., col. 2861, December 18, 1936.

⁶¹See Eden, 313 H. C. Deb., col. 1209, June 18, 1936.

⁶²Eden, 325 H. C. Deb., col. 1603, June 25, 1937.

at the establishment of a "lasting, peaceful and satisfactory settlement" with Germany.⁶³

Therefore, the Government's design, which was frequently referred to as "the general scheme of appeasement," in practice presupposed "the renegotiation, among the four Great Powers, of a new European peace settlement without a preceding renewal of war. The new settlement was to be based on the existing true balance of power, which meant a revision of the 1919 treaties in favour of Germany and, to a lesser extent, of Italy."⁶⁴

The stand taken by the Opposition on that "scheme of appeasement" was substantially although unwittingly the same. Leading spokesmen from the Opposition benches repeatedly urged the Government to adopt a course of action which was virtually synonymous with appeasement. When taken collectively, their utterances scarcely differed from Government intent in general, or from the intent of Neville Chamberlain in particular. Occasioned by the German

⁶³310 H. C. Deb., col. 1542, March 26, 1936.

⁶⁴Sebastian Haffner, "The Bitter Logic of Appeasement," The Observer, September 28, 1958, p. 3. Also see his "Appeasement in Ruins," ibid., October 5, 1958, pp. 3-4. I am indebted to Mr. Haffner for some of his interpretative insights, which are integrated into sections III, IV and V above.

reoccupation of the Rhineland, Hugh Dalton set forth the main theme of these Opposition pronouncements in an inclusive and explicit declaration of what practical steps were necessary:

Whatever one thinks of the Hitler regime, however much one hates that regime, however much one may mistrust the man and all those who are nearest to him and influential upon him, and however much one may reprobate this unilateral repudiation of a treaty [Locarno], which he himself admitted was freely signed, however all this may be, none the less, it is indispensable that one should talk with this man, frankly and bluntly, and bring up to the surface all the grievances which he may still entertain and all the motives which may lie behind this action.⁶⁵

As if expanding upon his original thought, some two weeks later that same Hugh Dalton suggested that Germany be invited to:

...co-operate peacefully in seeking to modify, not by brutal force or threats, but by friendly discussion, by resort, if need be, to conciliation and arbitration, any treaties of which you [Germany] make complaint, or any international situations of which you make complaint....and let the whole thing be examined, with an open mind and in a fair spirit.⁶⁶

Others, such as David Grenfell, similarly advocated that Germany "be asked definitely whether she wants peace. What kind of peace does she want? Does she stand for peace

⁶⁵309 H. C. Deb., col. 1926, March 9, 1936.

⁶⁶310 H. C. Deb., col. 1456, March 26, 1936.

all round?" Anticipating the steps undertaken later by Lord Halifax and Neville Chamberlain, he asked further: "Cannot we find out from Germany directly?" He concluded by urging: "We must ask aloud, so that all Europe may hear, how, and upon what terms, peace can come to Europe."⁶⁷

About that same time in the spring of 1937, to some extent foreshadowing the path to Munich, Lloyd George expressed his own belief that "if the four great Western Powers of Europe could come to a working understanding, a new atmosphere altogether would be created."⁶⁸

These Opposition speakers asserted, as Morgan Jones did, that there was "no dispute in Europe to-day that is incapable of settlement by agreement if there are good will and willingness to settle prevalent among the nations. War will not settle anything." As Mr. Jones saw it, the task to be pursued by the British and by other Governments was "in season and out of season, the path of peace and reconciliation, for only in peace and reconciliation lies the hope of the world."⁶⁹

⁶⁷₃₂₁ H. C. Deb., cols. 202, 203, March 2, 1937.

⁶⁸₃₂₁ H. C. Deb., col. 3161, March 25, 1937.

⁶⁹₃₁₈ H. C. Deb., cols. 2822, 2827, December 18, 1936.

Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher insisted that "surely the only successful thing to do [was] to endeavour to remove all possible obstacles to such negotiations." In making proposals to Germany, it was important to try "to set in motion machinery for a revision of just grievances from which we know Germany is suffering;" and, he advised, Britain should aim "at cutting away all the tangle of the old treaties in which these grievances are rooted and which make it almost impossible for Herr Hitler to accept proposals for negotiations."⁷⁰

Hardly a better general description could be provided of Neville Chamberlain's aim in pursuing that "general scheme of appeasement," than is to be found in those sustained declarations from the Opposition benches. Equally the endorsement of this policy by Government supporters could be considered axiomatic. With such broad unanimity behind him in the Parliament, Neville Chamberlain adopted the policy of appeasement. The quintessence of that policy, as he understood and pursued it, was the creation of an atmosphere of peaceful negotiation, the precipitation of a new settlement in Europe, and the

⁷⁰310 H. C. Deb., cols. 1515, 1516, March 26, 1936.

restoration thereby of a genuine state of peace. Therefore, the whole point in Chamberlain's emerging position was his insistence upon peaceful procedure in the settlement of international disputes. Abhorring war as much as Lansbury did, Chamberlain became obsessed with the principle of peaceful negotiation. He remained relentless both in his promotion of change by conference instead of by force, and in his efforts to induce Hitler to respect the rule of law -- the very principles which the Opposition had insisted upon repeatedly. In essence then, Neville Chamberlain fervently attempted to carry out the wishes of the entire Parliament, and did what everyone wanted to be done.

Neville Chamberlain's main purpose, since he became Prime Minister, had been to "work for the pacification of Europe, for the removal of those suspicions and those animosities which have so long poisoned the air." As he embarked upon that arduous task, Chamberlain was fully aware that the path which led to appeasement was long and bristled with obstacles.⁷¹ In expressing recognition that no government could frame a policy which would prevent some other

⁷¹1339 H. C. Deb., col. 48, October 3, 1938.

government from going to war, if that government had so decided,⁷² Chamberlain also foresaw the ghastly prospect of that which he had tried to avoid so desperately.

In the course of appeasement and in the face of growing disappointments, what was in question was the actual execution of that policy and Hitler's willingness to reciprocate. From the British standpoint, the success of the policy of appeasement would mean the making of substantial concessions to Germany, which Chamberlain was prepared to make, but in the spirit of reciprocity and in the expectation that Germany would observe the newly-created harmony in Europe thereafter. In pursuing the policy of appeasement, Chamberlain implied that its success was predicated on the German quid pro quo. He also expressed hopeful anticipation of reaching a stage when:

reasonable grievances may be removed, when suspicions may be laid aside, and when confidence may again be restored. That obviously postulates that all those who take part in such an effort must make their contribution towards the common end, but, on the other hand, I think it must be clear that conclusions cannot be hurried or forced, that there must lie before us a certain period of time during which further study and exploration of those problems must take place, and that what has happened so far is only the preliminary

⁷²See 334 H. C. Deb., col. 55, April 4, 1938.

to a more extended but, I hope, a more fruitful future.⁷³

Chamberlain thought that the principle of orderly negotiation upon which he insisted in dealing with Hitler was the test that would disclose Hitler's intentions, and would have an educative effect upon Germany. In this spirit, Halifax was able to tell Hitler that "nobody in their senses supposed the world could stay as it was forever" and that "the whole point was how changes were to be brought about." In his reply, Hitler saw but two alternatives: "the free play of forces that meant war; and settlement by reason."⁷⁴ The latter was exactly Chamberlain's aim. But this did not have the same meaning in Hitler's vocabulary, because beneath his conciliatory phrases was his plain implication to Halifax that Germany meant to realize her ambitions in her own way.

Neville Chamberlain remained steadfast in his pursuit of the policy of appeasement, although in the outcome his efforts failed. In the light of Hitler's mounting intransigence, Chamberlain intensified his efforts

⁷³330 H. C. Deb., col. 1805, December 21, 1937.

⁷⁴Lord Halifax, op. cit., p. 187.

with Italy. When Germany seized Austria in March 1938, Chamberlain perceived that Hitler, obsessed by Machtpolitik, did not want peace but had to be forced to choose it. In September 1938, Hitler was bent on war, and Chamberlain's effort to dissuade him by personal confrontation at Berchtesgaden and Godesberg averted the impending outbreak of hostilities. When Hitler extended his demands at the Godesberg meeting, Chamberlain was obdurate and refused to accede to them.⁷⁵ After this firm stand, Chamberlain made no more concessions to Germany, thus marking the end of the policy of appeasement as he had conceived it originally.

VI

The policy of appeasement abroad was never separated from the policy of rearmament at home. Long before the burden of pursuing those parallel policies fell upon the aging shoulders of Neville Chamberlain, in the spirit of si vis pacem para bellum, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin articulated that combination in the following unequivocal terms:

The whole of our efforts in the field of diplomacy

⁷⁵Hitler told Chamberlain at Godesberg: "You are the first man to whom I have ever made a concession." Cited in Ivone Kirkpatrick, The Inner Circle, (London, 1959), p. 121.

and foreign policy will be aimed at bringing agreement and peace to all foreign Powers. At the same time all our efforts will be devoted to this great question of defence -- the protection of our own people -- and we will not relax our efforts for one moment, because we know that while we shall work for the blessings of peace, there can be no peace, in Europe certainly, unless every country knows that we are prepared for war.⁷⁶

When at the time of the Anschluss the acceleration of existing plans for rearmament became essential, Chamberlain concluded that it "must have first priority in the nation's effort," and declared that Britain's primary aim was "full and rapid equipment of the nation for self-defence."⁷⁷

Appeasement and rearmament policies were bound together, the one depending upon the other: the stronger the rearmament position, the better the chance for success of a genuine appeasement.

Considering all its ramifications at home and abroad, particularly the mode of its execution, the Anschluss of Austria represents, in a way, a dividing line in the policy of appeasement. Prior to that event, Britain was genuinely interested in, and prepared to make concessions to Germany in an effort to remove any remaining valid

⁷⁶317 H. C. Deb., cols. 1150-52 [sic], November 12, 1936.

⁷⁷333 H. C. Deb., cols. 1410, 1410-11, March 24, 1938.

grievances. Afterwards, the complexion of appeasement changed considerably. Britain was still amenable to redress grievances. But in the atmosphere of fear, and with the increasing threat of naked force which Hitler introduced into European affairs, Britain's initial spirit of good will waned progressively and her efforts for appeasement amounted to not much more than a stubborn intent to avoid war.

This aversion to war, which was so often expressed in the House of Commons by Members of all political persuasions, was such a dominant element in Parliamentary thinking, that it must be considered to have been a major factor in the development of foreign policy. To the extent that all Members ardently desired peace, they were pacifists without exception.⁷⁸ The generation which had experienced the bloodletting of the First War mortally dreaded another. It was inevitable that horrifying recollections of carnage

⁷⁸ However, this pacifism had several shades. Headed by Lansbury, the extreme view, that it was wrong under any conditions to fight, was not widely held. The others, who abhorred war no less, were conditionally ready to help their country by allowing for preparedness exclusively limited to aggression against Britain. This was usually the Labour party stand, when it went that far.

would colour the Members' ideas of any war. The all-consuming thought was: NOT another war! Anticipation of the resulting prostration, impoverishment, and financial and economic destitution was unanimous. That Hobbesean vision usually imposed the conclusion that war in Europe must be averted by any and every effort.

Beside this general aversion to war, at the heart of the difficulties in British foreign policy, stood the inescapable problem of defence. The statements of the extreme pacifists notwithstanding, there was broad but ambiguous agreement in Parliamentary opinion that foreign policy depended to a great extent upon defence resources. The Government side predicated policy on defence; the Labour party saw the predication in reverse. While hating the idea of war with equal vehemence, most Members admitted the said necessity of maintaining British forces in a state of readiness. The Opposition insisted that such defence forces must be provided in accordance with decisions made by the League of Nations and in the framework of collective security. The Government preferred to build up defence forces for Britain's own requirements with little regard for the League. In principle, therefore,

both sides of the House presupposed an army.

Regardless of the motives behind it, the presupposition of an army served to spur on the Government in its policy of rearmament. In its wider implications, pursuit of such a policy in effect meant Britain's return to the traditional policy of balance of power, a policy which the Opposition never failed to denounce. The tragic outcome was that neither full collective security nor balance of power was achieved, nor was war averted.

Yet any alternative to the policy of appeasement ultimately had to allow for war. Since war was thus a distinct possibility, before Britain was drawn into one, it was imperative that the whole country should unite in its outlook toward the international situation. This requirement was no less applicable to the Parliament, which remained far short of unanimity on foreign policy, even during 1938.

The two sides in the House of Commons earnestly differed in urging the all-important methods of proceeding with Britain's avowed policy of peace. If the methods advocated by the Opposition had been executed, Britain very likely would have been at war with Italy in 1935 or 1936.

In Parliamentary opinion, the destination was the same, but the roads leading to it were subjects of contention. Therein was the difference. For in the balance, the road chosen by the Government was the safer one, holding more promise of reaching that universally-desired destination. The electorate supported it, as well, since it continued to elect Government candidates in a two to one proportion in by-elections after the General Election of 1935.

With events moving toward a collision, the policy of appeasement in 1938 may have been inadequate, but it was at least an active policy, and as such was far better than the hesitant policy of the mid-1930's. Even if it did not succeed, it could not have made things any worse than they were already. The ill-fated policy of appeasement represented a pragmatic approach under the circumstances. In view of the general unpreparedness at home and of the constant harassment of the House by the Opposition, appeasement was the only policy which offered any reasonable chance of retaining peace.

It was ultimately the basic pacifism of the British nation, its Parliament and its Government, that stood behind all the difficulties experienced in the period under con-

sideration. The country had voluntarily disarmed after the First World War, and viewed with the greatest reluctance either the possibility of, or the need for, any rearmament. But from 1935, British foreign policy increasingly and unmistakably rested upon two main pillars: preparedness to revise treaties, which was relatively synonymous with the policy of appeasement; and an accelerated rearmament programme at home, for insurance.

In the end, all was to no avail. Less than a year after the Munich Conference, the Second World War broke upon Britain worse than the First. In Britain, no one expressly should bear a monopoly of blame or discredit. Every Member in the House and every voter in the country must share in it. If it is true that the democracies were lagging behind the dictators by two years, as Baldwin suggested in 1936, then perhaps the democratic system itself was to blame. Against these conditions, the dominant expression of British foreign policy in this period -- appeasement -- was neither good nor bad. It was merely a great gamble for the highest of stakes, which did not succeed.

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