

Essay from “Australia’s Foreign Wars: Origins, Costs, Future?!”  
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## 7. Outcomes of World War I the Tragic Path to World War II

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### Introduction

Yes, indeed, a tragic path to WWII for many reasons, for it becomes all too clear from Lord Robert Cecil’s “*All the Way*” (RC), Philip Noel-Baker’s “*The First World Disarmament Conference 1932-1933 and Why it Failed*” (N-B2) and from Winston Churchill's account of WWII's origins, “*The Gathering Storm*”, (WC4i) that with any degree of sensitivity to popular feeling, and but a modicum of responsible action by government, that the Second World War could readily have been avoided. In Churchill's terms it was totally "unnecessary".(see WC4i, Preface, p. xiv)

As earlier indicated, WWI left the prime combatant countries greatly weakened, very much worse off than before the war. The human losses in dead and maimed - mentally as well as physically - were past description. Although Japan and the USA gained economically, Japan had not been involved in the fighting and the US's serious combat role did not begin until July 1918 (i.e., until the submarine menace had been controlled and safe trans-Atlantic troop transport assured). All other combatant countries were left enormously debilitated and heavily in debt. With such an awful experience all round, the need for a fresh start, a new way of organising both national and international affairs in a juster and more sustainable way was (almost universally) deeply felt.

Much was written into the Covenant of the League of Nations which could act as a positive guide to improving international relations and preventing future wars. That, after all was the Covenant's declared intention. In its broad aims there was to be "*open, just and honourable relations between nations*", regulated by international law to promote the maintenance of justice and international cooperation towards "*the achievement of international peace and security*". Those principles, along with its more specific provisions could have guided a much needed radical departure from the 'business as usual' European norm and thus given the greatly needed fresh start. As Churchill put it, "*The reign of law was proclaimed and a World Instrument was formed to guard us all, and especially Europe, against a renewed convulsion*". (WC4i,15).

Sadly, such was not to be. The problem was that despite the recent and ongoing suffering of so many victims of the war, with but one exception the leaders of the world's 'victor' states had not changed their ways of thinking. The exception, President Wilson of the United States, having long recognised the basis of WWI for what it was, - a power struggle between competing Empires, realised full well that an enduring peace would have to be built on a completely new set of principles: international cooperation instead of self-serving competition; peoples' right to self-determination replacing big-power domination; and cooperative rather than competitive approaches to ensure the economic and military security of all. Moreover he clearly saw that an essential first step must involve the major combatant states in admitting that they bore *mutual* responsibility for bringing about the war.

Unfortunately, however, while Wilson's powerful historical and humanitarian insights enabled him to recognise these needs and to advocate many practical programs to ensure enduring peace, he had failed to gain the backing of his own Congress. And making things worse, when he came to Paris to negotiate with the leaders of the so-called victorious European powers (Britain, France, Italy) he discovered that while they were happy to go along with much of the Covenant's rhetoric as useful window dressing, they were quite determined *not* to put it into practice. For them it was very much business as usual, a continuation of all the old ways of thinking about territorial gain, economic dominance, military supremacy, national and self aggrandisement.(JMK1,30-3; RC,155-7)

The above three topics will be used to illustrate certain victor-designated outcomes of the Entente 'victory' and how these disastrous outcomes were to lead inexorably to WWII. **A.** First, how 'war guilt' was used as a weapon to punish the defeated Germany and prevent its economic recovery - this resulting in enormous suffering of its people, many of whom, in desperation, ultimately came to see Hitler as their 'saviour'. **B,** Secondly, how the victors dealt with the issue of the self-determination of peoples, - tragically by continuing their traditions of foreign territorial dominance, - a potent factor that encouraged the emerging Dictators to do *exactly* the same thing. And **C,** thirdly, how the victor states failed to honour their Versailles and League of Nations' Covenant pledge that *all* nations limit their armaments to the *minimum* essential for national *defence*, that betrayal of commitment culminating finally in the absurdly self-defeating decisions not only to assist the rearmament of Germany under Hitler, but to go along with his European territorial ambitions, - until finally 'the penny dropped', by which

time it was too late to avoid another catastrophic war. (cf WC4i, 285, 310-312)

## **A. Germany's Alleged 'Total War Guilt' and Punishment**

For a number of reasons Britain and France, the principal European 'victor' States, promoted the myth of Germany's *total* responsibility or guilt for bringing on the war. I say pursued because to justify their own involvement as combatants, it had been a stand taken not only at the war's outset but throughout its course. Once the war ended, the reasons for continuing to insist on Germany's war guilt involved more than pride in having 'won' and 'been right'. First and foremost, having enormously weakened Germany (as well as themselves) they were altogether determined to keep Germany that way. In part that was to ensure Germany could not again rise as a military power - an issue of enormous concern to France. But linked to that and even more critical, especially for Britain, was to prevent Germany's resurgence as a competing industrial and financial power. For Britain that, after all, had been the prime reason for joining the war against Germany, - namely its fast-growing economy and the increasing industrial and commercial competition that presented.

Already at the turn of the 19th Century, English Liberal economist, John A. Hobson had seen the drift to war between the economically-competing superpowers of the day and, as John Maynard Keynes commented in 1920, - "*The politics of power are inevitable, and there is nothing very new to learn about this war or the end it was fought for; England had destroyed, as in each preceding century, a trade rival;...*".(JH; JMK1, 30) Indeed later, Hitler in his Mein Kampf analysis regarded the pre-WWI struggle between Britain and the rising Germany in identical 'trade rivalry' terms.(AH, 129-131; and see 8A(a), 2) Thus for Britain it could make no sense to fight a terrible war in such a cause only to see the defeated Germany again rise up as a predominating industrial/commercial competitor. By that logic, the 'peace' had to be shaped in such a way as to 'keep them down'!

Clemenceau's attitude was essentially the same. Although before the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, France and Germany had been more or less equal in terms of population and economic strength, in that earlier conflict Germany had come out 'on top'. But by November, 1918, after a 4-year mutually-debilitating struggle, with help from Britain and (in the final stages) the US, the result was a turn of the tables - Germany's ultimate defeat. And since by then France's population was but two thirds that of Germany, Clemenceau was motivated not to justice, but to maintain Germany's disadvantage, to keep her both militarily and economically weak *in perpetuum*, permanently!

The two self-styled victor states were therefore fully agreed on what had to be done! It was to institute what Keynes called a "*Carthaginian Peace*".(JMK1, 33) Yet to justify the terms of such a policy, it was essential to maintain the myth that Germany bore *total* responsibility for the war's origin. It was a myth fostered not only in France but throughout Britain and, indeed, its Empire - for I can remember 'knowing' it from my earliest years in suburban Melbourne - hearing, with my brother Allan, how Britain had to fight Germany because it had 'started the war' - by 'invading neutral Belgium'. No

other explanations given or necessary as we were given to understand. Only now, realising the nature of the British and French hidden agenda for proclaiming Germany the *sole* guilty party, can we appreciate the logic of the punitive conditions of the 'peace'.

### **(a) The Versailles Treaty Provisions**

Versailles' Clauses 231 and 232 specified Germany's total war guilt. Added to this were two major provisions designed to affect the German economy and its potential for development. These were the 'Economic Clauses' and 'Reparations'.

**(a) Economic Clauses.** As well documented in British economist, J.M.Keynes' study, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (JMK1, 60) these clauses covered all aspects of the German economy and were extremely severe. For a start they included the forfeit of many of its smaller yet economically important homeland territories (e.g., Alsace-Lorraine, Saar Basin) as well as *all* its overseas territories and assets (e.g., railroads, etc.); a great deal of its coal and iron; much of its rolling stock; 20% of its river transport vessels; and almost all its mercantile marine fleet (all ships exceeding 1600 tons, 50% of those 1,000-1600 tons, 25% of its fishing fleet).

As Keynes summed up the purpose of these provisions, *"Thus the Economic Clauses of the Treaty are comprehensive, and little has been overlooked which might impoverish Germany now or obstruct her development in future."* (JMK1, 102)

Of course the above is but a sketchy overview. For more detail on the provisions of the Treaty's 'Economic Clauses' see Appendix A

**(b) 'Reparations'.** Additional to its 'Economic Clause' provisions, the Treaty specified Germany must pay two forms of 'Reparations', one in the form of 'Resources', the other in gold or cash..

**'Resources'** Payments included both coal and iron ore, principally to France. For example, aside from cession to France of the coal- and iron-bearing territories of Alsace-Lorraine and the Saar Basin, Germany was to make *annual* coal payments as follows:- to Belgium - 8 million tons, France - 7 million tons, and Italy - 6 million tons. (c.f. also Appendix A)

**'Gold or Cash'**. Germany had agreed to this penalty (as defined in one of President Wilson's 'Fourteen Points' of January 14, 1918, - and further specified in the Allied government's 'qualifying note' of November 5th - before it signed the 'cease-fire' Armistice agreement. This 'Point' was that Germany must pay for the repair of damage done to *invaded* territory (i.e., within Belgium, France, Roumania, Serbia, etc) - but the 'Point' had failed to cover damage done elsewhere, - by submarines and aerial bombardment. Hence the 'qualifying note' of the 'Supreme Council of the Allies' stating Germany's obligation to pay for *"...all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and to their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air."* As indicated, that principle having been agreed by Germany, the Armistice came

into effect on November 11. (JMK1,103-6)

Curiously, however, the Treaty did not refer to the damage done by 'Germany and its allies' and it omitted one Entente Ally, Italy, as a recipient of such reparations! That aside, whereas the original intent was limited to claims against the cost of repairing the military-caused damage to Allied civilian property, buildings, plant, etc., all was to change over succeeding weeks and months. The first deviation was when it came to assessing such costs by France, its government making outrageously excessive claims (e.g., 2,600 million Pounds Sterling to restore the devastation in Northern France (5 times Keynes' estimate of 500 million) - ultimately claiming a total of 5,360 million for all property damage - more than 6 times Keynes' estimate! (JMK1, 116-120)

Likewise Britain too made disproportionately excessive property claims. Its principle losses were from submarine attack, some 2,479 ships, their cargos (and all too often their crews) - though of course it had suffered no invasion damage. Notwithstanding that, Britain came up with a total claim of 570 million pounds. According to Keynes that should amount to a grand total for all the Allies' claims of 2,120 million pounds, a costing that Keynes judged exaggerated but "*not hopelessly erroneous*". But the matter did not finish there, for over the succeeding weeks and months far greater claims were to emerge. So if figures for the exaggerated claims had already been calculated and lodged, what possible basis was there for far far greater claims?! (JMK1,123)

#### **(b) And Lloyd George's 'Crisis': Re-election?!**

As explained by Keynes, a new situation confronted Britain's Prime Minister, Lloyd George in that he faced a domestic challenge, a crisis which could lose him office. Although he had gained the prestige of being a 'victorious' war-time leader, yet since in human, social, financial and organisational terms his country had been so gravely weakened by the war, Britain was left in truly dire straits. Recognising this and his resulting vulnerability, he opted for an early general election, before the 'victory fever' subsided. As Keynes commented, "*It was widely recognised at the time as an act of political immorality.*" After all, his plans for dealing with Britain's deteriorated situation were but "*...the subject of silence or generalities.*" since, lacking programmes to heal the damaged nation, he was simply at a loss. So what to do!? There being no positive answers, he sought stirring, rallying, election cries.(JMK1, 125) There are just so many modern parallels, are there not!?

For much additional valuable information on this election, on the Peace Conference of 1919, and on the various claims being made on Germany, both for 'spoils of war' and keeping Germany's economy down, see Jill Kitson's *Patriots Three*, (at <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/tep/48570>)It's an absolutely 'riveting' read.

Attending the Peace Conference was Australia's Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, (the so-called 'Little Digger' - some hope, he'd never fought in the trenches, had he!) who had been stridently critical of the limitations of the Reparations concept under which *his* country would receive no compensation whatever. As already indicated, Hughes' line

was strongly supported by the influential editor of the *London Times*, Lord Northcliffe. Both provided the immoral fuel needed for the politically ailing Lloyd George: for, as advised, he could run a sort of 'khaki election' campaign - looking backwards to the 'victory', - instead of forward to the very difficult rebuilding tasks ahead.(JMK1,124-210) Thus over the course of his campaign, the cries and demands against Germany became shriller and shriller, more and more extreme. And although when Lloyd George and Bonar Law first announced their Election Manifesto on November 22, 1918, the issues emphasised included important ones, such as the League of Nations' programmes (e.g. universal arms limitation) yet within days the tone had markedly changed.

By November 29 Lloyd George was demanding "*...that Germany must pay for the costs of the war up to the limit of her capacity to do so.*" (JMK1, 129) And adding to the hysteria, on November 30, one War Cabinet Member (a Mr Barnes who, as Keynes explained, "*was supposed to represent Labour*") shouted from an election platform: "*I am for hanging the Kaiser!*", while another government member, Sir Eric Geddes, was proclaiming: "*We will get out of her all you can squeeze out of a lemon and a bit more.....I will squeeze her until you hear the pips squeak.*" At about this stage, Lloyd George summarised his attitude as "*First, we have an absolute right to demand the whole cost of the war; second, we propose to demand the whole cost of the war; and third, a Committee appointed by direction of the Cabinet believe it can be done.*" Four days later he went to the polls.(JMK1,132)

But, as Keynes had noted, "*The whole cost of the war has been estimated at from 24,000 million (pounds) upwards. This would mean an annual payment for interest (apart from sinking fund) of 1200 million (pounds). Could any expert Committee have reported that Germany can pay this sum?*" (JMK1,132) His judgement: quite impossible! Notwithstanding that, "*No candidate could safely denounce this programme and none did so.*" (JMK1,133) So, making no comparable offer, the old Liberal Party was swept 'out of existence' and the Coalition under Lloyd George returned with huge majority. As Keynes commented, "*Shortly after their arrival at Westminster I asked a Conservative friend, who had known previous Houses, what he thought of them. ' They are a lot of hard-faced men,' he said, 'who look as if they had done very well out of the war.'*" (JMK1,133)

And as Keynes went on (referring to the imminent Peace Conference) "*This was the atmosphere in which the Prime Minister left for Paris, and these the entanglements he had made for himself. He had pledged himself and his Government to make demands of a helpless enemy inconsistent with solemn engagements on our part, on the faith of which this enemy had laid down his arms. There are few episodes in history which posterity will have less reason to condone, - a war ostensibly in defence of the sanctity of international engagements ending in a definite breach of one of the most sacred possible of such engagements on the part of the victorious champions of these ideals.*" (JMK1,133)

Thus we see, far from agreeing with President Wilson that responsibility for the war's origins should be shared by all combatant states, the victor statesmen stuck to their

convenient war-time propaganda line that the fault was totally that of Germany. Indeed, in Britain that line, pushed so hard by Lloyd George during his Khaki election had a very practical angle to it, namely what to do about Britain's stupendous war debt. You see, during the war the British (like the French) government had run *two* budgets, one domestic (and public) together with another (to finance the war) that was altogether covert.

And since neither government had ever declared publicly the enormity of their war-time borrowings from the United States, it seemed the war guilt issue could be used as a convenient cover to dodge the consequences. To their people, who understandably felt they had suffered more than enough already, they had argued that the nation which bore *total* responsibility for the war must bear the *total* cost. Indeed, so that Germany could be forced to pay the war's entire cost, the two war guilt Clauses, 231 and 232, had been included in the Treaty. At war's end, however, Germany was an absolute basket case, its people suffering greatly not only from their war-devastated economy, but from the on-going British economic blockade.(JMK1; AO; BK)

However when, under pressure, having agreed to the punitive reparations terms Germany attempted to pay through the export of its manufactured commodities, it was faced with the reality of trade barriers. Wanting it both ways, Lloyd George said "*She ought to pay, she must pay as far as she can, but we are not going to allow her to pay in such a way as to wreck our industries.*"(JMK1,129) Thus, as recognised by Churchill and others, the victor states refused to accept manufactured imports as payment precisely because these competed with their own industries.(WC2, 44-5) That, after all, was what the war had been about, the need to abolish German trade competition! But the situation was bad news not only for the German people but for people the world over because not only could Germany *not* pay but, denied outside markets, it was hamstrung in rebuilding its shattered economy. And of course this meant additional suffering for the German people at large, that generating the extreme bitterness which later promoted their acceptance of Hitler as the hoped-for 'saviour' of the nation.

In summary then, the failure of the victorious European powers to admit their *joint* responsibility for bringing about the war led them to decree Germany the *sole* guilty party. That, coupled to their determination both to dismantle Germany's economy *and* force it to bear the war's total cost through Reparations became a major factor in the generation of WWII.(c.f. above; and don't forget (JK 1-6) i.e., Parts 1-6!)

## **B. More Spoils of War: Disposing of Others' Lands**

### **(a) The League's Pledge for Self Determination Betrayed**

The Covenant of the League of Nations was specific on the rights of people to self determination, their independence. However that made little impact on the victors' deliberations as to how the world's lands and peoples were to be divided up once the war had been 'won'. Having decided that the entire blame for the war be awarded to the defeated, the victor states determined that the enemies' Empires must be dismembered.

Very convenient! Had such a policy been applied to *all* Empires, liberating all subject peoples, a huge leap forward in international justice could have occurred. But that was not the intention. Instead only the German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires were split up. Moreover, it did not necessarily follow that the constituent ethnic groups would gain their independence. Although many former subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire gained their's - including the Czech, Slovak and Yugoslav peoples, the lands and peoples of Germany's former overseas territories and of Turkey's Ottoman Empire were simply parceled out to various nations. In addition, parts of Germany itself were split off and, along with their ethnically German-speaking populations, incorporated into Czechoslovakia and Poland - unjust arbitrary acts which contributed to the generation of WWII.(WC4i, 251).; see also Lloyd George's Fontainebleu Memorandum of 1919, quoted fully in MG3, 189)

Aside from any punitive aspect, these post-war territorial settlements were essentially about distributing the spoils of war.(BK) For example, Britain and France took over Germany's pre-war treaty rights and commercial concessions in Morocco, Egypt, Siam and Liberia.(MG1, 551) In Africa, while German East Africa (later Tanganyika) went to Britain, Britain and France divided Togoland and Cameroon between them. In addition, various enemy territories had been promised to entice states to join the Entente side in the war. For example, on April 26, 1915, one day after the Gallipoli landing, Italy (formerly an ally of Germany and Austro-Hungary) agreed, through the Pact of London, to join the Allies on condition Britain and France went along with its territorial demands in Turkey and Austro-Hungary.(MG1, 368) Similarly, Italy later acquired the South Tyrol, Istria, part of Dalmatia and all of Austria's Adriatic islands.(see below)

Likewise Japan, although a non-combatant ally, gained its rewards. As related by Martin Gilbert, on August 17, 1914, stimulated by the lure of easy conquests to support its imperial ambitions, Japan laid siege to Kiaochow, a 'German' port city on China's Shantung peninsula, and declared war on Germany, citing its commitment to Britain under the 1905 *Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Alliance*.(MG1,333-4) Supported by a British contingent of Welsh and Sikh soldiers, the Japanese forced the surrender of the German garrison. Japanese troops also occupied four 'German' Pacific island groups: Palau, the Marianas, the Carolines and the Marshalls. That such occupations were accepted as normal and proper by the Entente powers is clear from the fact that at war's conclusion, China's Kiaochow and these island groups (with their peoples) were formally assigned to Japan, - the islands as 'Mandates'.(MG1, 548)

### **(b) A Case History: Dismembering the Ottoman Empire**

Most of the Ottoman Empire territories, long under Turkish control, became the preserve of Britain and France. Indeed that had been decided in negotiations between them through their secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Thus while France was assigned the Lebanon and Syria, including Damascus, Britain would have Palestine/Transjordan and (with its oil) Mesopotamia (later Iraq) as League of Nations 'Mandates'. This was much to the distress of the Arabs who, under Sherif Hussein of Mecca, leader of the anti-Turkish forces in Arabia, had been given British assurances

(via T.E. Lawrence and others) that their fight against Turkey would earn Arab independence.(TL)

But for Turkey there was much more to come. Like Germany, it was 'guilty' and 'had to be punished'. Moreover, since it spanned one of the world's strategic waterways, even its central territory was occupied. And so with the consent of a cooperative Sultan and his government, British, French and Italian military and naval forces took control of Constantinople and the Dardanelles Straits. Further complications were the war's Secret Treaties. In agreeing to join the Entente side in 1915, Italy had been promised Turkey's Anatolian southern provinces. Similarly, on entering the war in 1917, Greece was promised Anatolia's Smyrna (Ismir) province, along with additional Turkish islands in the Aegean Sea. (MG1, 364)

And for their own purposes, in May 1919 Britain and France encouraged Greece to send a force of 20,000 troops to occupy that Smyrna (Ismir) province. However, as General Milne, British Commander in Constantinople warned his government at the time, any such invasion would unite the Turks in a remarkable way. But Milne's warning was ignored and in rapid response Turkey's Gallipoli hero, Mustafa Kemal, proclaimed a national movement aimed at expelling *all* foreign powers from Anatolia. (MG1, 547) A year later the Allied Supreme Council (minus the United States which by then had withdrawn) announced the terms of the Turkish Peace Treaty. The Straits were to become a neutral zone controlled by a Commission of the League of Nations - members to be nominated by Britain, France, Italy and Japan, their troops to remain in permanent occupation. Additional territories to be awarded to Italy were the Dodecanese islands, other than Rhodes - this assigned to Greece. And Greece was to receive the Aegean islands of Tenedos and Imbros as well as the already occupied Anatolian province of Smyrna - and most of Turkey in Europe (Thrace). The Treaty also confirmed the existing de facto dispositions of Syria, Lebanon, Mesopotamia (Iraq), Trans-Jordan and Palestine.(MG1, 591)

And while the Sultan's government in Constantinople accepted these terms, Kemal's further response was to set up a national headquarters in Angora (Ankara) and begin assembling an army, part of which occupied the southern shore of the Marmora sea. Although the British cabinet in London saw Kemal as a mere 'bandit' they were reluctant to challenge him with their Constantinople-based troops. However the Greek Prime Minister, Venizelos, 'generously' suggested the use of his soldiers for the purpose, an offer gladly accepted. Greek troops thereupon advanced rapidly to the Marmora sea, driving Kemal's men from Bursa.(MG1, 593)

The Turkish Peace Treaty was signed at Sevres on August 10, 1920. Mustafa Kemal promptly instituted a 'Turkish Grand National Assembly' in Angora (Ankara), denounced the Treaty and declared war on the occupying powers. That set the pattern. Within a year, Greece had 200,000 soldiers in Anatolia. To rid his country of *all* foreign forces, Kemal aimed to build 'an army for national regeneration' and by August 1922, that army had driven the Greek forces deep into western Anatolia. By this time, France, wanting improved relations with Turkey to facilitate its administration of Syria and the Lebanon,

urged the Greeks to sue for an armistice. But the British feared that if the Greeks withdrew, Kemal would attempt to overturn the Allies' occupation of Constantinople and the Straits. Supported by Churchill, Lloyd George remained firm, stating that *"It was inconceivable that we would allow the Turks to gain possession of the Gallipoli peninsula, and we should fight to prevent their doing so."* (quoted in Gilbert, MG1, 639)

However, by September 14, 1922, the Greek forces had been routed, literally driven into the sea at Smyrna and forced to return to their homeland. Kemal's troops, now in control of most of Anatolia, advanced towards the Straits where a small British garrison at Chanak guarded the Dardanelles' narrows. Lloyd George was determined the British must fight 'to prevent the Turks crossing'. And notwithstanding the sizeable British naval force that could easily have prevented any such crossing, Churchill sounded the alarms, warning that failure would result in a renewed 'Turkish invasion of Europe', asserting that *"The resuscitated Turk was marching upon the Dardanelles and Constantinople, and beyond them, upon Europe."* (WC2, 422) a claim reminiscent of his early post-WWII claim that Russian armies were poised ready to advance across Western Europe to the Atlantic. (see WWII and the Origins of the Cold War, 9I(a), below)

So, Another 'Empire Call!' In a message drafted by Churchill on September 16, 1922, the British government appealed to the Dominions' governments to contribute troops for the coming struggle. However, as a press release from Lloyd George the same day appeared in overseas newspapers before his government's cable reached Dominions' Prime Ministers, they were embarrassed by offers from ardent volunteers *before* they had seen the formal request! In the event only New Zealand and Newfoundland agreed to send troops. All others, including Australia and Canada, convinced their involvement would not be in a good cause, refused. On September 18, both France and Italy decided to withdraw their forces from the Straits. Set on negotiation, France's President Poincare was determined his country must not again go to war with Turkey. Without support, the British position was untenable.(MG1, 640)

On September 23, unbeknown to Lloyd George, and despite his and Churchill's determination to use force, Poincare met with Britain's Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon and Italian ambassador Sforza in Paris where they signed a 'Joint Note' agreeing to Turkish claims to eastern Thrace (Turkey in Europe) and the withdrawal of Allied troops from Constantinople and the Straits. Aware of this, General Harington, Commander of the British forces at Constantinople and the Straits, believing that war was neither desirable nor necessary, contacted Kemal to explore other possibilities. Cooperating, Kemal avoided any confrontations by his troops.(MG1, 642)

Meanwhile, to his cabinet colleagues, Lloyd George was emphatic that a British evacuation of Chanak *"...would be the greatest loss of prestige which could possibly be inflicted on the British Empire."* (c.f., Lloyd George's Mansion House speech leading to WWI.(WC1i, 47; IB2, 7). So on September 29 a British government ultimatum, sent via General Harington to Kemal, demanded that unless he withdraw his troops confronting Chanak, hostilities would ensue. But Harington, feeling *"...it was wrong that I should launch an avalanche of fire...for which there would be no drawing back"* decided not to

deliver the ultimatum pending further developments. When the British cabinet learnt that Kemal had agreed to talks with Harington, Churchill cabled a reply stating that while the British government "...earnestly desired peace .....we do not however desire to purchase a few days of peace at the price of actively assisting a successful Turkish invasion of Europe. Such a course would deprive us of every vestige of sympathy and respect and particularly in the United States. Nor do we believe that repeated concessions and submissions to victorious orientals is the best way to avert war."(MG1, 641-3) As usual in the affairs of Great Powers, prestige loomed all too large, as did loss of face by politicians at the top, clearly a weakness *not* unique to 'orientals'!

Wisely withstanding this encouragement to war, Harington, met with Kemal and instead of presenting the ultimatum, reached agreement for the withdrawal of Turkish forces from the Straits' Neutral Zone pending formal talks. These took place but not without quite some disagreement between the Allied powers, especially Britain and France whose relations were at their lowest since the war. However, with the background encouragement of various Conservative dissidents, unhappy with the unrealistically bellicose approach of Lloyd George and Churchill, agreement satisfying all parties was ultimately reached. At one point, when the British negotiators were at odds with the French and Italian, Bonar Law, a leading Conservative, wrote to *The Times* pointing out that the British could hardly expect to keep the Turks out of Constantinople and Thrace unless *all* the Allied powers, including the United States were in agreement. As he put it: "*We cannot act alone as the policeman of the world.*" The agreement finally reached at talks on October 11, and later formalised as the *Treaty of Lausanne*, restored Constantinople, the Straits, and Eastern Thrace (Turkey in Europe) to Turkey, and further specified that all Greek and Allied forces evacuate permanently. Thus finally, though against considerable opposition, the 'core' territory of Turkey was preserved for the Turks who then, through their new National Assembly, voted to abolish their puppet sultanate and declare Turkey a Republic. Yet certainly there were still some not happy with the outcome. As Horace Rumbold, former British Ambassador in Constantinople, later wrote, "*We ought to have gone for the Turks at the time of the Chanak business, and bombed Angora with all its gasbags.*" (MG1, 645). Sounds just like modern times!

Thus, we can say there were some good outcomes. First, another war on foreign soil (to which we Australians were again 'invited') was avoided through the wise judgement of Britain's General Harington. And secondly, the international community finally came to recognise the validity of an independent Turkey. Yet, overall, through the actions of Britain and France, most of the subject peoples in Turkey's former Ottoman Empire failed to gain their independence, a basic injustice common to so many of the post-WWI territorial settlements, - some of which were to contribute significantly to the tensions that led to WWII – and later (including current) wars.

## C. Betraying the Versailles Commitment to Universal Arms Limitation

As earlier stressed, after the four years of awful carnage that killed and maimed so many millions, there arose a popular ground-swell, a great revulsion and determination to ensure that no further 'Great War' could ever again occur. Peoples' survival instincts came to the fore. In broad terms they knew what was wrong about the pre-war world, they knew what should be done. As well as the crying need for economic and social justice - including rights to self-determination - they recognised the urgent need to limit the size of military forces and the armaments they used. That popular feeling was so palpable, it was soon taken up by the very politicians who had so recently played key roles in promoting the pre-war arms race. So we have Lord Grey, Britain's Foreign Secretary in the decade before WWI, saying (afterwards!) how "*great armaments inevitably lead to war*", that armament competition was the "*true and final cause of the war*". (N-B1, 396) Similarly, we have Lloyd George referring to the need for "*....a general reduction of the huge armaments responsible for precipitating the Great War.*" (LG,601) Both ever so wise! - or were they?! (seeIB1)

In thus stressing the role of armaments, such pronouncements were overstatements in that they ignored the more direct roles that Europe's leaders played in bringing the war about.(see Appendix C, MAPW Submission for 'Defence Review 2000'). That aside, such statements make the point that even the leading actors could admit the destabilising effects of arms build-ups, the fact that they were a very potent *factor* in the war's causation. But it was left to others, like eminent British historian G.P.Gooch to see the effect of the prior excessive arms build-up in its proper context. As he emphasised, "*The Old World had degenerated into a powder magazine, in which the dropping of a lighted match, whether by accident or design, was almost certain to produce a conflagration.....It is a mistake to imagine that the conflict of 1914 took Europe unawares, for the statesmen and soldiers had been expecting it and preparing for it for many years.*" (GG2, 559; see also 3B,(b), (c))

### (a) The Versailles Treaty and its League Covenant

The widespread realisation that the gross overproduction of arms throughout Europe had not only been significant in triggering the war, but a critical factor in amplifying its destructive effects, soon brought the public at large to see the absolute necessity of *universal* arms limitation. Of course the victor powers were already determined on *German* disarmament. But responding to the intense widespread public feeling, they incorporated provisions for the generalised limitation of armaments in both the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations Covenant, - itself an integral and binding part of the Versailles Treaty. These documents made the international obligation very clear. Article 8 of the League Covenant begins "*The Members of the League recognise that the maintenance of peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations.*" (N-B1, 512) And Part V of the Versailles Treaty is equally unequivocal. It specifies the drastic disarmament of Germany and its allies, and in a Preamble makes clear the context, its ultimate purpose, stating that: "*In order to render*

*possible the initiation of a general limitation of the armaments of all nations, Germany (Austria-Hungary, etc.) undertakes strictly to observe the Military, Naval and Air Clauses which follow." (LG, 602-3)*

The Germans protested against what they feared could end up as their *selective* disarmament, but the above terms were clearly spelt out and amplified. As Lloyd George recorded, *"The reply given by the Council of Four to the German protest constitutes a fundamental part of the Treaty of Versailles"* - which reply he then quotes as - *"The Allied and Associated Powers have already pointed out to the German Delegates that the Covenant of the League of Nations provides for 'the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations'. They recognise that the acceptance by Germany of the terms laid down for her own disarmament will facilitate and hasten the accomplishment of a general reduction of armaments; and they intend to open negotiations immediately with a view to the eventual adoption of a scheme for such general reduction."* (LG, 602)

It has to be stressed, however, that the stated aim was never *total* disarmament. No nation was to be left completely defenceless. All would be allowed sufficient arms to *defend* themselves - yet none should be allowed arms levels sufficient for *offence*. Thus even the defeated Germany was permitted a full-time non-conscripted army of 100,000, plus armaments of limited type and quantity - sufficient for its defence - plus a small navy (no vessel over 10,000 tons) but of course, *no submarines* and *no military aircraft*. Certainly, such a force was marginal, but as Lloyd George emphasised: *"It was clear that the cutting down of the greatest army in Europe to a barely adequate police force of 100,000, imposed the duty upon the Allies as an obligation of honour to set up machinery in the Treaty for reducing the enormous armies then at the disposal of other Powers to a minimum calculated on the same principle."* (LG, 601) So there it was, set down in solemn Treaty form. There would be severe arms limitation imposed on Germany, but that was to be but the vital first step on the road to general, world-wide arms limitation, *one* essential factor for the prevention of further war.

A very clear principle to be followed, but the underlying reality was that while nearly all victor politicians paid lip service to the idea, most firmly resisted its substance. One outstanding exception, however, was Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Salisbury's third son and Conservative member for Hitchen in the Cecil's home County. Having viewed the human destruction and utter waste wrought by the war with absolute horror (Cecil had no children but the war took five of his ten beloved nephews) he devoted the rest of his life to war's prevention. (KR,149; RC) As early as 1916, recognising the urgent need for imaginative changes to the international system, Cecil had written a draft for the League of Nations Covenant. (Others, including President Woodrow Wilson and South Africa's General Jan Smuts also made important contributions.) In this task, Cecil proved to be no mere ideas man. Realising that even with general agreement on arms limitation, systems for inspection, verification and enforcement would be essential, he wanted to see all necessary practical programs implemented. And although he desperately wanted peace, he recognised that, as a last resort to control an aggressor bent on war, the use of

League of Nations-sanctioned force might be necessary and must be provided for.

Unless your pacifism is absolute – pure - that sounds reasonable. Yet Cecil, along with the many many millions of others working towards the same end around the world (including over 8 million WWI veterans (for details, see N-B1, 82-3) were to encounter extraordinarily strong opposition from powerful sectional interests. And for Cecil, the strongest and most distressing opposition was at home, within his own Conservative Party. Unfortunately it occurred also within sections of the Liberal and even in the Labour party. In addition, uncompromising opposition came from government bureaucracies, some senior military men and, of course, the arms industries and the 'patriotic' societies they supported (e.g., The Air League of the British Empire, the Navy League of the United States, the British Navy League, etc.).(NB1, 290) Tragically, between the wars no matter what government was in office (frequently it was either Conservative or a Coalition with preponderant Conservative influence) the moves towards universal arms limitation and other measures to prevent war were met with great and, ultimately, decisive opposition.(RC; N-B2)

Needless to say, however, the victors took German disarmament *very* seriously, - that is until Hitler came to power.(see8A, (a),(b), below) Indeed according to the Allied Commission under General Foch, Germany's stipulated disarmament had been fully implemented by 1927.(N-B1, 521) So why was *general* arms limitation not favoured? Well, for one thing, widespread Empires, such as the British, did not want to give up any position or even symbol of power. For another, they wanted to go on using their arms, including air power, to control their colonial populations, to prevent dissident 'natives' from exerting their independence. So, among many senior bureaucrats and service people, that meant total opposition to *any* arms limitation.

However, there *was* one valid issue. If nations which had reduced their arms were to be protected, they needed guarantees that, if attacked, other members of the League would, together, come to their military assistance. In these early post-war years, an insistent case was France. Although Germany was being systematically disarmed, France insisted on that guarantee of mutual assistance *before* it would agree to arms limitation. Cecil fully agreed with this need.(RC,170, 183)

In 1924, working hard on the problem with the French in a League committee, Cecil came up with a *Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance* (TMA). This fully supported Article 16 of the Covenant which stated the principle that should any League member attack another, the aggressor would be subject to sanctions and, if necessary, military action by other League members. But the Draft TMA was opposed by the Conservatives, Cecil's own party, as well as by the Liberal-Labour government of the day - which refused to commit itself. And since the United States had declined membership of the League, the proposal lapsed for lack of a strong backer. Shortly after, the League Assembly met and by a majority approved a similar though less stringent treaty, the *Geneva Protocol*. However, as that also failed to gain the support of the British government (by then Conservative) it too never came into force.(RC, 186)

What the Conservative government preferred and then negotiated was an arrangement *outside* the League, one limited to selected European powers. Known as the *Locarno Agreement* (1925), it was to bind England, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Poland in a *series* of treaties of guarantee and arbitration. In a major one, the powers guaranteed the boundaries of Belgium, France and Germany as specified in the Versailles Treaty. Included also were mutual defence pacts (between France and Poland; and between France and Czechoslovakia) against possible German aggression. Of course the fact that these agreements were made *outside* the League weakened the League's standing as the world's chief instrument to ensure peace. Moreover, that the agreements were so partial and conditional meant that they could not be used to deal with aggression elsewhere in Europe or around the world. Lord Cecil was greatly disturbed. As he commented, peace was 'indivisible' and the powers should be remembering how rapidly a distant small conflict can lead to world conflagration, as had happened in the Balkans such a short time before.(RC,187)

Nevertheless, if (at least within Europe) Locarno was *in fact* a sound guarantee of international security, as claimed by its proponents, there was every reason to proceed rapidly towards a mutual arms limitation agreement. Already too much time had been wasted since the war. For despite the *technological* means of modern industrial societies to satisfy the material needs of everyone, the world was not being transformed into a juster more secure place so many causes of inequity and enmity had still to be dealt with. The more reason then for urgent haste. After all, Germany's forced disarmament was well advanced and its liberal-democratic Stresemann government and suffering people were looking to the other powers to fulfill *their* side of the Versailles *universal* arms limitation bargain. Clearly it was time for the promptest action.

Yet, despite this Locarno Agreement, progress continued to be painfully, indeed willfully slow. Although under Versailles Germany was to have been admitted to the League, there were belated challenges by France, with much wrangling and delay. Not only that, but for lack of political will the moves on arms limitation (always referred to as 'disarmament') were so slow as to be near stationary. Britain and France were, to say the least, reluctant in the matter and at that stage the Americans, being out of the League, showed limited interest. Finally, however, a *Preparatory Commission for General Disarmament* was set up in 1926. Its role was to seek agreement ahead of a proposed *World Disarmament Conference* which would determine qualitative and quantitative arms levels appropriate to each nation's defence. The discussions soon got bogged down on a range of technical issues and on France's insistence that it be allowed to retain military superiority over Germany. Indeed France's demand for superiority in a military field was not unique and the unresolved disagreements were such that the work of the *Preparatory Commission for General Disarmament* was to continue until 1931!

That time, 1931, was approaching the eve of what finally eventuated, the *First World Disarmament Conference 1932-1933*, an international meeting to agree on the terms of a universal arms limitation agreement, an agreement which *should* have been made ten years *earlier*, *i.e.*, shortly after the war. But by 1931 the world was well into the Great Depression, a period of enormous suffering for many, especially in Germany, a situation

the Nazis under Hitler hoped would facilitate their rise to power – as well as Germany's military resurgence. The Conference was therefore an absolutely critical last chance to bring *all* countries into a general arms limitation system while Germany was *still* democratic *and disarmed!* Otherwise there would be the on-going very real issue of unfair discrimination - i.e., forcing Germans to remain disarmed in the midst of its armed European neighbours.

Now although the United States had remained outside the League of Nations, it was by the late 1920s maintaining an interest in European stability and peace. Indeed, it was to play a positive role in the *First World Disarmament Conference* itself which, had it been supported by the other Western Powers, would have brought success both for arms limitation and for preventing Hitler's rise to power. The US's efforts to reach agreements to limit naval arms are outlined here since they give some background to its later positive role.

### **(b) The United States and Naval Agreements**

Although throughout the 1920s the United States had remained aloof from most of Europe's efforts towards arms control, it had retained an interest in naval treaties. Such a treaty between the USA, Britain and Japan had been reached at the Washington Conference of 1921. Through it the Naval Powers had agreed to set the ratio of their capital ship holdings at 5:5:3, as well as to significantly reduce their numbers. But as that Conference had not dealt with cruisers and other smaller vessels, including submarines, and since a new naval race was beginning, President Coolidge called a second conference for June 1927 in the League's building in Geneva, the League's Secretary-General and staff acting as Secretariat. That chosen location should have been a good omen for success and for the US's ongoing involvement in the disarmament process. Britain sent two cabinet members, Mr Bridgeman MP, First Lord of the Admiralty, and Lord Robert Cecil, as its representatives.(N-B2, 28; RC, 290)

However as Britain and the US had, between themselves, made advance agreement only to the *principle* of parity, and details of the US plan were not revealed until the first day. The US wanted considerable arms limitation, their own navy allowed cruisers up to 10,000 tons (with 8-in. guns) to a total limit of 400,000 tons. This would have given them 40. Applying the US formula to the British fleet meant its cruiser numbers would be reduced from 70 to 50 since that would have given them a total tonnage of 400,000. The British cabinet had a very different idea. It wanted 70 cruisers of 6000 tons with 6-in guns, allegedly for 'commerce protection'. The Americans saw this as a British attempt to attain naval superiority. Certainly it ignored the fact that the need for 'commerce protection' would largely disappear once naval disarmament became a reality. And Cecil, disturbed by the on-going wrangling, believed that the British cabinet should not treat the US as a potential enemy but rather as a friendly ally and, that in setting a good example, it would be advancing the disarmament process. Indeed, as he wrote, to allow failure would only encourage arms build-ups and 'warmongering' in other countries. In the event his warnings went unheeded, the wrangling continued and agreement was never reached. The Conference having failed, Cecil resigned his office in

protest. And although he remained a member of the Conservative Party, he took his House of Lords seat on the cross benches.

In 1928, a further initiative indicating ongoing US interest in international security was the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Initiated by US Secretary of State, Kellogg, with France's Briand, and agreed to by all the Powers, it declared that war as an instrument of national policy (i.e., other than in self defence) was illegal. However, in the event of a breach, it failed to bind its signatories to economic sanctions or concerted military action to support victims of aggression. It's much delayed and only use may have been at the post-WWII Nuremberg trials! (RC, 192)

### **(c) New Hope: Strong Public Support for Arms Limitation**

Returning to the European disarmament scene of the late 1920s, the British government's activity in the work of the League appeared to suffer from a creeping paralysis, nothing being done to bring on the much needed world disarmament conference - until after the general election of May, 1929. The public's reaction to that delay, to the failure of the *Geneva Naval Conference* and to Cecil's resignation is well described by Noel-Baker.(N-B2, 33-7) The outcome of this failure was a popular backlash against the government's continued Old Diplomacy approach, especially via heightened public support for the League. Clearly that was because most people wanted to see real progress towards general disarmament, mutual security pacts, compulsory arbitration of disputes and other commonsense measures to guarantee *everyone's* security. As a result the *League of Nations Union* (c.f. our UNAA) with its 600 branches throughout Britain became extremely active in promoting League ideals and programmes via lectures, discussions and questionnaires. On these issues British Labour had also been active. After the war it had developed a remarkable 'Advisory Committee on Foreign Affairs' under Leonard Woolf. I say remarkable because it comprised many extraordinary people including Norman Angell, John A. Hobson, G. Lowes Dickinson, H.N.Brailsford, and Philip Noel-Baker. All shared powerful insights into the tragic inadequacies of the Old Diplomacy which had led to WWI, - as well as sound ideas as to what should replace it, ideas included in their Party's Election Manifesto "*The Seven Pillars of Peace*."(N-B2,35)

All this contributed to the result of the British general election of May 1929. From that there emerged definite signs of hope because Labour had come into government as the largest party in the house (though not with a clear majority - Labour 289, Cons. 245, Libs. 58).(N-B2,37) Cecil, appointed as Britain's representative at the League, was set up in his father's (Lord Salisbury's ) old room in the Foreign Office. There he was welcomed by Arthur Henderson, the new Foreign Minister, whose private secretary was Philip Noel-Baker, a trusted ally in the quest for international security. It was an extraordinary turnaround. As Cecil put it: "*It was a great relief to find myself in full accord with my official colleagues, instead of feeling, as I had done at previous visits to Geneva that fundamentally I did not agree with my government.*"(RC,194) How radically different this government's approach when, in 1929, fully 10 years after the League's inception, for the very *first* time a British Prime Minister, Ramsay McDonald, attended a

meeting of the League of Nations Assembly, - a 'first', since all previous British Prime Ministers had studiously avoided such visible League support! But now, with McDonald's presence and similar support coming from France's Briand, Germany's Stresemann and Italy's Grandi, there seemed every reason to expect that at last, progress could be made!

One of McDonald's successful early tasks was to call an international Naval Conference to remedy the failure of 1927.(N-B2,42) Noel-Baker and McDonald developed a broad plan which, with the strong support of the First Lord Albert Alexander, brought the Admiralty on side. McDonald then visited the US where he met with Coolidge's successor, President Hoover, who he found fully sympathetic. He also made a series of inspiring public addresses in Washington and New York. Joint plans were drawn by January 1930 and the Liberal Japanese government (then, happily, still civilian!) agreed to take part (the French and Italians electing not to be involved). What became the *London Treaty of Naval Disarmament* was a great success, incorporating *all* the reductions and limitations of naval strength earlier proposed by President Coolidge. This great contrast with the previous conference well illustrated the positive outcomes possible with cooperative (c.f., competitive) approaches. Most importantly it strengthened the involvement of the US in the urgent matters of international security. As Noel-Baker said "*And the United States was now co-operating in all League conferences; she paid the second largest subscription after Britain; she was coming closer every day*". (N-B2, 45)

All most encouraging and although various negative influences were still very active in Britain and elsewhere, (c.f. below) so all seemed set for the *League Preparatory Disarmament Commission* to proceed towards what would be the *first* general disarmament (i.e., arms-limitation) conference in the world. Cecil was Britain's delegate on the Commission, on which also were delegates not only from all League members, but from non-member powers, including the US and the Soviet Union. To get broad in-principle agreement on what would be essential, the Commission worked towards a '*Draft Treaty of World Disarmament*', a skeleton outline with model clauses that later could be used to specify budgetary limits, limits on the size of armed forces, on the types and quantities of arms, provisions for inspection and other measures to assure proper monitoring and compliance.

In-principle agreements not requiring specific figures meant that the work could proceed without impasses.(N-B2, 57-59) The approach succeeded - though not without some difficulties and delays. Both Cecil and Henderson played important facilitating roles, as did Briand, Grandi, and Stresemann. Since all countries other than Germany were still armed, it was only through Stresemann's extraordinary efforts that his already disarmed country continued to participate despite the strident voices of the now rising Nazis. Indeed, he was a most dedicated and courageous person, especially since at the time he was in the throes of a terminal illness - which finally took him in September 1929. As Noel-Baker wrote, "*The loss of Gustav Stresemann was a grievous blow to Weimar Germany, to the Council and Assembly of the League; above all to the cause of World Disarmament.*" (N-B2, 60)

Also, unfortunately, in Cecil's attempts to expedite the World Conference, other problems were getting in the way. Cecil's relations with Baldwin (a highly influential cabinet member) were not good and he began to fall out with Henderson over approaches to the Draft Treaty. Henderson thought Cecil was making too many concessions to the French. And making things worse Cecil found McDonald increasingly inaccessible, preoccupied with more pressing issues. Chief of these was the dire effect the world's economic Depression was having on the British economy - similar to that aggravating Germany's already desperate situation, the very condition favouring Hitler's rise to power. So although the preparatory work for the long-overdue conference went on, it was not being finalised nearly rapidly enough. Although the Draft Treaty was ultimately available for the League Council meeting of September 1930, this Council decided 'further preparations' by governments and Secretariat required the Conference be postponed until February 6, 1932! (N-B1, 518; N-B2, 59) However, the Council appointed Henderson Conference President, potentially a good move, especially as the attitude of Britain would be decisive for the outcome.

#### **(d) The Great Depression, a New British Government, and Japan Invades China**

But the prospects for ultimate agreement suddenly changed for the worse in August 1931 when, due to the worsening economic slump, Ramsay McDonald first resigned, then accepted a new appointment to head a Conservative-dominated National Coalition government which dropped most of his former colleagues, including Henderson. (RC, 197) In the election which followed, Labour lost 240 seats, including that of Henderson and most other Ministers. The changeover was doubly unfortunate because no British delegation had been appointed for the forthcoming League Assembly meeting. At the last minute Cecil was asked, along with 4 others not of his choosing. (RC, 198) Although no serious issues had been anticipated, this Assembly meeting coincided with the Japanese attack on Manchuria. China, a League member, appealed to the League and this serious challenge to world peace was brought to the League's Council. Britain's acting Foreign Secretary, Lord Reading, did not attend that Council meeting and Cecil was left without instructions from his Prime Minister. In the event, the Council passed several Resolutions calling on the two warring powers to 'cease hostilities', then adjourned for two weeks! By the time it met again, Sir John Simon had become Britain's Foreign Minister and moves to deal with the Manchurian crisis were, in Cecil's words, "...*even more ineffective*" than before. "*Indeed, the new government were resolute about only one thing in Foreign Affairs, and that was to do nothing.*" (RC, 199)

At this stage of the world's Great Depression, Japan's earlier successes in exporting goods to the West had come up against prohibitive trade barriers, both in Europe and the US. And this situation encouraged Japan to get around that problem by further emulating the West's colonial 'successes' in the Far East, a region it regarded as very much *its* 'back yard'. Accordingly, as Cecil went on to explain, the Japanese army took over the civilian government in Tokyo and set course on a more strident policy of Asian domination. Cecil's recommendations for 'vigorous action' to combat the assault on China were met by assertions that Britain had 'no vital interest' in these events of the Far

East. An International Commission of inquiry headed by Lord Lytton and including representatives of the US, France, Germany and Italy was set up. Unfortunately although their report, confirmed by the League, condemned Japan's aggression, the British government declined to take any effective action. As Cecil commented, "*Indeed, it alone of all the League powers appeared to defend the Japanese action.*"(RC, 200) And there can be no doubt that in this open and shut instance of aggression, Britain's failure to take appropriate action through the League greatly encouraged Japan's subsequent aggressions in the East - as well as Italy's in Ethiopia and Germany's in Europe.(RC, 200; WC4i, 78-80) Moreover Britain's failure to see peace as 'indivisible', its unwillingness to act with other powers in the cause of common security, was to greatly undermine both the standing of the League in world affairs and the outcome of the then imminent general *First World Disarmament Conference*, finally set for February 1932. (RC, 200)

### **(e) The First World Disarmament Conference, 1932-33**

When Cecil was asked by Sir John Simon whether he would be a delegate at the Conference, he wisely asked for clarification of intended British policy. But since in spite of three further talks with Simon he could gain no clear view of it, he declined. On February 6, the Conference opening day, Henderson initiated a novel departure, one allowing NGOs to state their views. The first speaker, Lord Cecil, speaking as President of the *World Federation of League of Nations Societies*, (c.f., today's WFUNA) stressed the urgent need for general agreement to abolish those highly aggressive types of weapons already forbidden to Germany under Versailles. As Cecil later recorded "*The suggestion was well received, but was later on stifled in the Conference.*" (RC, 200) And, as we shall see, precisely because of that stifling, months and months were to pass without agreement, and such extreme delay not only facilitated Hitler's rise to power, but ensured also that once he came to office (as happened in January, 1933) *any* arms-control agreement would be totally out of the question!

Notwithstanding all the delays, even in mid 1932 there seemed still *some* hope because Sir John Simon had been greatly impressed by the logic of Cecil's approach of limiting the size of forces and the types and quantities of armaments to those sufficient for *defence* only. Yet, as an ambitious Liberal in league with hawkish Conservatives, Simon would later give way to the hawks' wishes. At first, though, he was positive, going so far as to move resolutions supporting what he himself termed "*qualitative disarmament*", the universal abolition of tanks, heavy mobile artillery, bombers, capital ships, aircraft carriers and submarines, those armaments described by British military historian Liddell Hart as "*defence-breaking weapons*".(LH, 256-7) Moreover, early in the *General Conference Debate*, Simon had made important supportive speeches.(N-B2, 77) And the response was good, Simon's resolutions being unanimously adopted. However, the Conference also had three Special Commissions, - on 'Naval', 'Land', and 'Air', whose delegates were high-ranking service chiefs. Their task was to define the various categories of 'defensive' as against 'offensive' weapons. Unfortunately, as many of these delegates were advocates *for* particular defence-breaking weapons, they left many vital issues unresolved. For example, because Britain's Admiral Sir Dudley Pound was unable

to agree that capital ships were offensive, agreement to their universal abolition (or even one third reduction) was blocked through to the end of the Conference - a result which prevented similar moves towards the abolition of submarines (my brother Allan just 10 years old at this time).

However, notwithstanding the delays and limited agreements by the 'hawkish' delegates within these Special Commissions, there was a counter-veiling effect. As Noel-Baker noted, *"But whatever arguments they produced to prove that their favourite weapons - tanks or battleships or bombers - were not 'offensive', there were always Staff Officers from the 'middle' or smaller powers to answer them. ....The longer the debate went on, the more completely was the general opinion of the Conference convinced that the weapons described by Cecil as 'offensive' in his opening speech were, indeed, 'specifically offensive,' 'specifically efficacious against national defence' and 'most threatening to civilians'."* (N-B2, 79,80)

#### **(f) US Presidential Initiative - the Hoover Plan**

At this critical time a further opportunity for joint positive action arose through the intervention of US President, Herbert Hoover. President Hoover's proposal for a drastic downscaling of the levels of land, sea and air armaments was laid before the Conference on June 22, 1932 by US representative, Hugh Gibson. Broadly based on Cecil's principles, Hoover introduced his message by quoting from the *Kellog-Briand Pact* of 1928 which he paraphrased as: *"The nations of the world have agreed that they will use their arms solely for defence.....not only through broad general cuts but by increasing the power of defence through reducing the power of attack."*(N-B2, 81) To that end Hoover proposed the elimination of all bombing aircraft, all tanks, all chemical warfare, all large mobile guns, and the reduction by one third of battleships and submarines - no nation to retain a total tonnage of submarines of more than 35,000. Hoover's proposals were met with a veritable 'explosion' of applause *"from the delegates, from the press and - quite improperly - from the well informed public gallery"*. (N-B2, 82)

There was to be an open debate on the Hoover proposals but most unfortunately it was delayed. Although it did occur eventually, procedures in the meantime were significantly changed. Thus the usual League of Nations parliamentary method of open debate in public sessions, with press and public present, was interposed with closed sessions limited to the representatives of certain Great Powers. In practice that meant private discussions between USA, Britain, France, Italy and Japan. The USSR, Germany and all 'lesser powers' were excluded. Not only was the secrecy approach an enormously unproductive way to go, but it made the excluded powers extremely resentful. Moreover the changed procedure meant that for these unpredictable, unaccountable, private meetings, one or other Great Power could arbitrarily suspend the open meetings of the Conference, thus destroying its continuity and leaving the other delegates hanging around, not knowing when the Conference would reconvene! It was a return to the Old Diplomacy which, cutting across the promising start boded ill for the final outcome. As Noel-Baker stressed, these private deliberations brought forth no advances towards agreements on disarmament. To the contrary, they acted powerfully to defeat the

Hoover plan.(N-B2, 84) Indeed, it was like a re-run of the blocking tactics the 'Great Powers' used (to their ultimate self-undoing) throughout the *Hague Peace Conferences* of 1899 and 1907.(BT1,229; see Appendix B for outline)

Eventually, when the conference reconvened, certain powers were given opportunity to comment on the Hoover proposals. First to respond, Sir John Simon acknowledged the President's proposals as "*the latest contribution*" of the United States, but made no commitment that Britain would accept them, further hinting that his country had in mind 'alternative proposals'. France's Jean Paul-Boncour was next. His welcome to the plan was far warmer, though he went on to emphasise the long-held French concern that disarmament must be complemented by effective guarantees of mutual support in the event of attack. Although the French had the Locarno Agreement, they had no great confidence that this non-League document would guarantee other powers coming to their aid should they be attacked. And yet as Noel-Baker commented, notwithstanding such valid concerns, France could have been made more secure had it enthusiastically promoted general disarmament, since by going down that path Germany would have been reassured that in *its* long-continued state of disarmament, it would not be left prey to its still-heavily-armed neighbours.(N-B2, 83)

After Boncour came the USSR's Litvinoff who strongly supported early implementation of Hoover's proposals. Nadolny, of Germany, also warmly welcomed the Hoover plan "*with keen interest and special satisfaction.....no better way could be imagined of achieving that very security which all States were rightly demanding and which was promised to them all in Article 8 of the Covenant.*" (N-B2, 88) Understandably, he wanted to emphasise the issue of 'legal equality' in arms for Germany and her allies, a reasonable indication of what must follow if other states failed to honour their Versailles pledge. Signor Grandi, Italy's Foreign Minister was also very positive, as was Spain's Madariaga. On this note the General Commission again adjourned - for 15 days – 'to allow for private talks between the Powers'! (N-B2, 92)

When the General Commission resumed on July 7, other nations were allowed to state their attitudes to the Hoover plan. Some 30 did, including Belgium, Canada, Turkey, Austria, Norway, Cuba and Brazil, in every case welcoming it. However while the prospects of general agreement might have seemed bright, success depended critically on having the support of the *major* powers. Here, however, a serious problem arose because in the interval between the General Commission meetings, Sir John Simon had returned to London where, having consulted with Cabinet colleagues, he made a speech in the House the text of which went to all Geneva delegations. As Sir John had been a 'prophet' of qualitative disarmament, both in Geneva and earlier in the House of Commons, one might have expected that his statement would have advanced that cause. After all, *just one month earlier* (May 13, 1932) he had put to the House the following cogent case: "*There are certain weapons mentioned in Part V of the Treaty of Versailles which are prohibited to Germany, and there are certain other weapons which Germany is permitted to have. Will anybody who thinks that Qualitative Disarmament is all nonsense be good enough to tell me why the Allied and Associated Powers selected these particular weapons and prohibited Germany from having them? The answer is written*

*on the face of the Treaty of Versailles, and it is that those weapons were then regarded as weapons which would have enabled Germany, had she been so minded, to undertake operations of offence.* " (Hansard, Commons Record May 13, 1932, col. 2334) (N-B2, 103)

Now this case had been so compelling to people in general that it had greatly alarmed all who were opposed to the very idea of limiting the use of arms to *defence*. At the time there were 500 Conservative members, most of whom were hostile both to arms limitation and the League. Included were such people as Eyres-Monsell, First Lord of the Admiralty, Douglas Hogg (Lord Hailsham) Secretary of State for War, and Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air who, along with other influential members of the defence establishment, were at one in holding that Britain must retain *all* offensive weapons which the Hoover plan would abolish. And this attitude was persisted in by such people, even though it was well understood that it would be impossible to maintain the disarmament of Germany unless *all* nations were similarly disarmed. After all, as earlier spelt out by Sir John Simon to the House: "*We have to choose and our choice is very clear. Shall we disarm ourselves, or shall we allow the Germans to rearm?*" (Hansard Commons record May 13, 1932) (N-B2, 104; - and 8A(a),(b) below)

The general public in Britain and throughout Europe were very supportive of the Hoover approach. Notwithstanding that, Simon, bending to the will of his defence critic hawks, came up with Britain's '*alternative plan*' which he introduced with non-committal platitudes on the need for "*compromise*" and claims that the 'concrete' proposals he was working on would mean "*more disarmament*" by measures which would be "*more adequate*" and "*more appropriate*". (N-B2,106)

That alternative plan, presented to the House on July 7, 1932, was simultaneously distributed to the delegations in Geneva. Greatly disappointing to the Americans, it amounted to a rejection of almost everything President Hoover had proposed. In insisting on the retention of bombers and other classes of offensive weaponry prohibited to Germany under Versailles, it guaranteed Germany's rejection. It thus totally undermined the Hoover Plan's intention for the *universal* prohibition of *all* weapons currently prohibited to Germany. And obviously if that principle were overturned, there could be no doubt it was only a matter of time before Germany would rearm - and rearm in full. And by July 1932, *everyone* knew that *if* Germany rearmed, it would be a Germany under the fast-developing Nazi Party of Adolph Hitler. (N-B2, 106-8)

Clearly, therefore, if Hitler's rise to power was to be blocked, it was absolutely essential the Hoover plan be applied to *all* nations. For only then would the German people feel free of discrimination, more secure against the surrounding nations which, in defiance of Versailles' (Part V) and the Covenant (Article 8) still remained fully armed.

It was left to the Rapporteur of the General Commission, Czechoslovakia's Edward Benes to try to make the most of the situation by salvaging useful elements of agreement and cobbling them together in a final Resolution (July 22, 1932). With the support of *all* the Middle Powers, as well as the USA and Russia, he had worked long and hard for the

Hoover plan. Yet Simon had ruled out most of what he, himself, had *earlier* advocated prohibiting, - re. air forces, aerial bombardment, tanks, heavy mobile artillery and naval arms. Hence the resulting paragraphs were a mere shadow of what they should have been. A large majority of the delegates made clear they regarded the final result as extremely inadequate. The Conference President, Henderson, pointed to the enormous public support for Simon's initial '*Resolution on Qualitative Disarmament*' and the resulting Hoover proposal for a broad arms equality with Germany. Voting against the Resolution, the Russian delegate, Litvinoff, was scathing. Gibson, the American delegate accepted it, but with great reluctance. And, predictably, Nadolny of Germany voted against, indicating that *no* German delegate would return to the Conference until his nation's 'equality of defence rights' was formally accepted by all. The Conference was then adjourned for several months!! (N-B2, 111)

When it reassembled on October 1, 1932, France's Foreign Minister, Paul-Boncour made a last-minute attempt to save the day. He proposed France reduce its army to match that of Germany and that tanks, heavy mobile guns, poison gas and military air forces be abolished, at the same time supporting Hoover's proposals for naval down-sizing. But, to enable acceptance of these limits by his own country, he asked for a guarantee of British military support should France be attacked. However Simon's response was to say that that would be impossible. And when Boncour countered with a request for Britain to at least undertake that, if a signatory nation to the Treaty was found to be violating its disarmament obligations, Britain would join in economic sanctions, that too was refused.(N-B2,115) Understandably, with these refusals Boncour's proposals failed to get off the ground.

### **(g) Final Efforts to Save the Conference – and Stop a Nazi Take-Over!**

After that response to Boncour's proposal there appeared to be but one last chance for success. As British War Office representative in Geneva, Major-General A.C.Temperley (who had served the *League Commission on Armaments* for 10 years) believed, if British Ministers had really tried, they could have produced an effective treaty on disarmament which would have prevented a Second World War. And indeed at this critical time one British Minister, Stanley Baldwin, with pent up anxieties as to the dire consequences of failure, did come forward to speak. On November 10, 1932, Baldwin addressed a crowded House of Commons. Pointing out that failure to reach agreement would inevitably mean war, he drew attention to the obvious effects of aerial warfare on civilian as well as military populations. "*I think it is well for the man in the street .....to realise, that there is no power on earth that can prevent him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him the bomber will always get through....I am firmly convinced myself.....that if it were possible, the air forces ought all to be abolished" ...* plus lots more in that vein, ending by expressing the fear that "*I do not think we have seen the last great war.....It is really for the young to decide....The instrument is in their hands ..*". (N-B2,119) If only the future had been in their hands!

For about a minute there was total silence; then prolonged cheering broke from all corners of the House. The speech and its response signaled a new cause for hope for a

revival of British support for an effective Treaty - before it was too late. As Noel-Baker commented, the speech also made a deep impression throughout the world, not least in Germany. Indeed in its general election in December, 1932, the Nazi's lost 2 million votes, this causing Germany's representative at the League Secretariat to say: "*That's the end of Hitler. Lets make the Treaty and we shan't hear of him again.*" (N-B2, 120) Additional last minute attempts were made to save the situation. Although Simon avoided further participation at Geneva, Anthony Eden, his Parliamentary Under-secretary and Principal British Delegate, backed by Major-General Temperley and Sir Alex Cadogan, Head of the League Section of the Foreign Office, fashioned a new Draft Treaty.(N-B2, 121) Yet due to various delays (many hawk-induced) this did not eventuate until March, 1933!!

Meanwhile, from the year's very outset, aware that *their* critical 'window of opportunity' would be brief, the German militarists had made themselves *very* active. Reichschancellor General von Schleicher, - convinced that Britain would not agree to a Treaty giving Germany equal defence rights, that Versaille's Part V would never be honoured, and concerned over Hitler's electoral defeat in December, - was desperate to make certain that the new British initiative stemming from Baldwin's speech *would* fail. So on January 31, 1933, von Schleicher persuaded the ailing Weimar Republic President, Field Marshall von Hindenburg, to immediately name Hitler as Germany's Chancellor, which he promptly did.(N-B2, 122) And thus, despite the absence of a popular mandate, at this absolutely crucial time Hitler came to power. Then, as Chancellor, Hitler was able to abolish the Weimar Constitution and its associated democratic norms. Next, he called a General Election for March, but ensured his 'success' in advance, simply by preventing vast numbers of Social Democrats and Liberals from voting and, to the same end, outlawing the Communist Party. Even so, Hitler failed to gain an electoral majority, continuing in power only with the support of Hugenberg's Nationalists who thereafter assisted him in the total destruction of German democracy. The result: hundreds of thousands of Hitler's opponents were killed or imprisoned. Buchenwald alone 'boasted' 58,000 victims and soon, with the backing of the General Staffs and powerful sectors of industry, Hitler's Nazis had complete control. (N-B2, 121-3; WC4i, 61-4)

Logically then, since the British Draft Treaty was to be presented *after* Hitler had come to power, its prospects (putting it mildly) 'could not be good'. And although the Draft was a big improvement on Simon's proposals of July 1932, British hawks had succeeded in including the retention of various offensive military and naval weapons. On the advice of the Lord President of the Council, Stanley Baldwin, McDonald and Simon presented the British plans in Geneva on March 10, 1933. As Baldwin and others saw it, it was the last chance for a sane solution to the arms problem. But in the event McDonald's speech was *very* poorly presented, in no way inspiring or convincing. Yet because Temperley's proposals went some way towards giving Germany equality in arms, a ray of hope might have persisted. As Temperley recorded in "*The Whispering Gallery of Europe*", "*...the figures were well received* " and with bold leadership at the highest level from Britain the Conference could have been persuaded to accept Britain's Draft proposals.(N-B2, 126)

However, as Noel-Baker recalled, certain influential figures at home like Vansittart and Hankey, following a very different agenda, had quite other ideas. Not only were they hostile to the very concept of this Treaty, but, unrealistically, they also sought to bring about an alliance between Britain and Italy to counter German influence. And they had convinced MacDonald and Simon that on the very day following their Draft Treaty presentation, they should leave Geneva (and all further discussion of the British proposals) and travel to Rome! There the discussion was to be about Mussolini's proposal for a new European Council, a 'Big Power' body - to consist of Britain, France, Germany and Italy - which on all key issues would by-pass the Council of the League. In the event, despite MacDonald's and Vansittart's enthusiasm for it, Mussolini's proposal caused widespread distress in Britain and nothing came of it. Yet, by leaving the Geneva Conference at this altogether crucial time, MacDonald had fatally undermined any hope for success it might have had. (N-B2,128)

Even so, the Conference continued, the US Delegation doing its utmost to save it. Indeed, in the end Franklin Roosevelt, who had by then replaced Hoover as President, expressed willingness to support Part V of the Versailles Treaty (universal abolition of all offensive weapons) *providing* that other governments did likewise. Had the Conference accepted Roosevelt's offer, notwithstanding the inevitable objections from the newly-arisen Hitler, its conditions could easily have been imposed on him because Germany was *already* disarmed. Moreover, had arms-limitation agreement been reached, follow-up inspections by the League could have ensured that Germany *remained* effectively disarmed, i.e., to the same level as all other states.(N-B2, 130) And, as Liddell Hart put it, the Axis aggressions of 1939-40 would thus have been 'impossible'.(LH, 6-7) Similarly, in Churchill's words, "*....the strict enforcement at any time till 1934 of the Disarmament Clauses of the Peace Treaty would have guarded, without violence or bloodshed, the peace and safety of mankind.*" (WC4i, 15) But in the event, urged on by Londonderry, Hogg, Eyres-Monsell and other hawks, Britain continued to insist on its retention of bombers, submarines and other offensive weapons, thus rejecting Roosevelt's proposal. And it was this that finally sealed the fate of the Conference. The German delegates were not prepared to accept unequal treatment - the very outcome that played into Hitler's hands.

The Conference nevertheless limped on until July when it again adjourned. It was to meet again in October, the Great Powers supposedly seeking agreement through 'private talks' in the interim. But these were totally unproductive and in mid October Hitler announced Germany's withdrawal both from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations. As Noel-Baker remarked: "*The hawks had won. The Conference was dead. The vibrant hopes inspired by the Hoover Plan became a mocking memory. ....In 1933 the Governments turned their backs on Disarmament and were soon engaged in the fiercest arms race .....the world had ever known.*" (N-B2,133)

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