

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE
ABYSSINIAN CRISIS, 1935 - 1936

DISSERTATION FOR THE DEGREE OF PH. D.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

LOUIS JOHN SMITH

1977



This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

Great Britain and the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935-36.

presented by

Louis John Smith

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in History

Donald Lammers

Major professor

Date August 27, 1976

DEPT

Most acco
to British go
tions against
that, was lo
Basilwick a
the study take
more.

An analysis
held in 1967
probably, it
same front an
the assembly on
tion, and Ede
of operations.
the League woul
British lead wa
of the governm
led to conflic
Mediterranean.

ABSTRACT

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE ABYSSINIAN CRISIS,
1935-1936

By

Louis John Smith

Most accounts of the Abyssinian crisis have condemned the British government for failing to rally the League of Nations against Italian aggression. Thus, it is usually argued, was lost the best opportunity to establish the League as a bulwark against the rising tide of aggression in Europe. This study takes issue with that interpretation on several counts.

An analysis of the cabinet and Foreign Office materials opened in 1967 establishes that the British government consciously, if reluctantly, took the lead in organizing a League front against Italian aggression. Hoare's speech to the Assembly on September 11 rallied the League to united action, and Eden guided the Committee of Eighteen to the point of sanctions. Without a British lead, it is unlikely that the League would have imposed sanctions upon Italy. The British lead was neither bold nor, in the end, effective, and the government drew the line at any proposal likely to lead to conflict between British and Italian forces in the Mediterranean. The critical test of the League's ability to

main address:

must know, for

kind test of

or they learned

You could not

British fleet in

throughout

not to alienate

not to take the

was possible

made Mussolini

the crisis.

was some six

of the governm

known to the c

shared by Hoar

of general desi

which which d

The respons

can built durin

only some satis

same. The dual

will take a mod

led to his aver

ailed disastrous

de la Laya-Laval

Louis John Smith

contain aggression was, therefore, not a full test. But the cabinet knew, from their dealings with the French, that a limited test of the League system was all that was possible. And they learned that the vocal support of fifty nations at Geneva could not be translated into military support for the British fleet in the Mediterranean.

Throughout the crisis, the British cabinet were reluctant to alienate Italy beyond future cooperation. The decision to take the lead against Italy at Geneva was delayed as long as possible. As a result, the best opportunities to dissuade Mussolini from his African adventure were lost early in the crisis. It was not until Hoare took over the Foreign Office some six months after the initial incident at WalWal that the government began to respond in more than a passive fashion to the crisis. Even then, the British response was hampered by Hoare's inexperience, Baldwin's indifference, and the general desire of the government to find a painless solution which did not exist.

The response of the cabinet to the conflicting pressures which built during the crisis was a dual policy meant to give Italy some satisfaction while adhering to the Covenant of the League. The dual policy was premised on the hope that Italy would take a modest gain and draw back short of war. Mussolini held to his aggressive program, however, and the dual policy failed disastrously when an aroused British public rejected the Hoare-Laval proposal in December 1935. The sanctions

experiment co
made, but
an apparent
The rema
condition or
support the Le
expression.
the fact, but
failure of the
to lead at le
the decision
to gain for Br
the cabinet mi
what was to
of the League s
to obtain app
did not do so,
since after th
the as nationa
then.

Louis John Smith

experiment continued for six months after the Hoare-Laval debacle, but the Italian success and the demise of the League were apparent by the first weeks of 1936.

The remarkable thing about British policy during the Abyssinian crisis was not the failure of the government to support the League, but the initiative taken to blunt Italian aggression. There were no League advocates in the cabinet, save Eden, but when it came to the point of accepting the failure of the League or acting to try to save it, they took the lead at Geneva. The pressure of public opinion lent to their decision, as did Eden's arguments and Mussolini's disdain for Britain and the League. But an examination of the cabinet minutes reveals that the principle concern of the cabinet was to save the League if possible, and to determine if the League system of collective security would function to contain aggression without resort to military force. It did not do so, and the post-mortem conducted by the Foreign Office after the crisis suggested that it would not do so as long as national interests outweighed the ideal of international order.

322A

in partia

GREAT BRITAIN AND THE ABYSSINIAN CRISIS,

1935-1936

By

Louis John Smith

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

1977

© Copyright by
LOUIS JOHN SMITH
1977

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my major professor, Donald N. Lammers, for his encouragement, direction and support throughout the project. Similarly, I wish to thank the second member of my doctoral guidance committee, Professor Paul R. Sweet, for his continuing interest in the undertaking and his helpful comments on the draft. I am also grateful to Professor Warren I. Cohen for stepping in after the death of Professor Thomas L. Bushell and reading the final draft. Before his untimely death, Professor Bushell offered encouragement and support which will always be gratefully remembered.

DESCRIPTION

NUMBER
OF SHEETS

OF TOTAL PAGES

OF THE MONOGRAPH

OF THE BRITISH

LIBRARY AND

OF THE END OF THE

NUMBER: ALL

GEOGRAPHICAL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. 1

Chapter

I. DRIFTING 11

II. DUAL POLICY BOX 59

III. THE MOUNTING CRISIS 99

IV. THE BRITISH LEAD. 138

V. TRIAL AND ERROR 186

VI. END OF ILLUSION 269

EPILOGUE: ALL THE KING'S MEN 327

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY 352

INTRODUCTION

If ever there was an opportunity of striking a decisive blow in a generous cause with a minimum of risk, it was here and now.¹

In Winston Churchill's weighty judgment, the Abyssinian crisis was one of those opportunities to turn back the aggressive tide before it properly began to flow. The implication is that Britain should have been willing to run the risk of war with Italy in 1935 in order to prevent a still greater war on the horizon. In the years since Churchill penned this condemnation, the notion of making war to prevent war has fallen on hard times. The casualty lists of Korea and Vietnam have raised serious questions about the 'containment' mentality. It was in part to avoid the specter of such lists that the 'guilty men' of the 1930's lost their reputations. As the distinction between war and preventive war becomes increasingly blurred, the prospect grows that perhaps some of the mud will wash off the memory of those who refused to see war as inevitable. There is still, however, little inclination to look with more sympathy

¹Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. I, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 177.

and the
remain in
were passed
vision as t
writing of
issue of
with war,²

For the
basis offer
theory pol
use to con
basis. Cle
writing of
theory saw
can drive !

2. A typical
action against
from 1996, the
to which he
the letter in
the strong de
issue of sub
some passive
the primary
October 1996,

October
1996
October 1996
the primary's
the evidence in
the letter, and
the evidence
necessary to in

upon the men who chose from among the bad choices facing Britain in 1935. Indeed, few things in recent decades have passed as securely into the realm of conventional wisdom as the conviction that Britain's timid and indecisive handling of the Abyssinian crisis led to the fall of the League of Nations and helped pave the way for the Second World War.²

For those who would damn British policy, the Abyssinian crisis offers a treasure trove of possibilities. Critics of every political stripe and ideological bent have found cause to condemn the National government's handling of the crisis. Clement Attlee, for example, saw in the British handling of the crisis the ugly hand of the imperialist.³ Leo Amery saw only the folly of a misguided experiment which drove Mussolini into Hitler's arms.⁴ Lloyd George

²A typical analysis is that of C. I. Mowat: "Strong action against Italy in December, or against Germany in March 1936, might have prevented the Second World War. The British public did not clamour for such action; but its temper in October showed that it would have responded to a strong lead from the government. Instead, it got a course of sedatives and one piece of shock treatment, and became passive, acquiescing in failure and despair." C. I. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940 (London: Methuen, 1966, first published in 1955), p. 557.

³October 22, 1935. 305 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 35-36.

⁴Leopold S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol. II, War and Peace, 1914-1929 (London: Hutchinson, 1953), 204-5. There is in Amery's account, however, the suggestion that perhaps his friends in the government were hard-headed Conservatives after all, and staged the entire debacle in order to dispose of the encumbering League before getting on with the necessary business of rearmament, III, 174.

passed the
Parliament,
the share-law
withheld an
followed the
the national
which never
again?

June 19,
The
note under
a journal
particularly of
the crisis
from Victor
the Packet (1
about Cecil
the (New
) and Fra
the League o
the first pu

Across the
the crisis
ment as
Vol.
the Union: C
the Hardy
the (Lond
to the line
of most
the reasre
the W. Eber,
the: Har
the: Fran
the New York
the history
the: Ori
the: W. Eber
the: W. Eber
the: W. Eber

accused the government of simple cowardice.⁵ Outside Parliament, League advocates turned sharply critical after the Hoare-Laval incident and condemned the government as weak-kneed and faithless.⁶ Historians, by and large, have followed the indictment drawn up by contemporary critics of the National government and have echoed the conclusion that Mussolini never would have come to grips with a resolute Britain.⁷

⁵June 18, 1936. 313 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 1223.

⁶Kodne Zilliacus, an official of the League Secretariat who wrote under the pen name of 'Vigilantes,' and Robert Dell, a journalist with experience at Geneva, wrote particularly biting accounts of the British role in the Abyssinian crisis. Vigilantes, Why We Are Losing the Peace (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), pp. 67-79; Dell, The Geneva Racket (London: Robert Hale, 1941), pp. 106-143. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood added his condemnation in A Great Experiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 263-79, and Frank P. Walters took the same line in A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford University Press, 1967; first published, 1952), pp. 623-91.

⁷Among the more telling of those accounts of the Abyssinian crisis which helped to brand the National government as 'guilty men' were Arnold Toynbee, Abyssinia and Italy, Vol. II of the Survey of International Affairs, 1935 (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), and G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, A Short History of International Affairs, 1920-1938 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 399-414. The line taken by Toynbee and Gathorne-Hardy was typical of most contemporary accounts and has carried over in good measure into such recent treatments of the crisis as George W. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 172-210, and James Dugan and Laurence Lafore, Days of Emperor and Clown (New York: Doubleday, 1973), pp. 108-115, 123-136. Of the historians who have been critical of the National government, only an apologist for Italian expansion, such as Luigi Villari, Italian Foreign Policy under Mussolini (New York: Devin-Adair, 1956), pp. 134-161, and Gaetano.

It is tr-
mable event
the promises
'gilly men' o
considerations
thesis is pla
certain allie
not popular
conditioned by
initially were
they now co
do not usual
assessment of
ity of the ori
male, pays no
initial: 10

Alman, who s
regulators in
have disc
See in par
'Internationalist'
191-213.

A. J. F. T
University
of the dia
191-25. A r
Administrative s
governing pro
James
relation to the
Studies,

Martin
and

It is true that at a generation's remove from the unheroic events of the 1930's a reassessment is beginning which promises to balance the picture somewhat.⁸ The 'guilty men' of the Western democracies remain guilty, but considerations of degree are being introduced as more emphasis is placed upon inadequate arms, multiple threats, uncertain allies, poor information, timid advice, a deep-rooted popular fear of war, and an approach to spending conditioned by concern for economic recovery. All of these obviously were factors bearing on the Abyssinian situation and they now color more perceptive accounts.⁹ Abyssinia does not usually seem to fit, however, into a general reassessment of appeasement. Martin Gilbert's penetrating study of the origins and development of appeasement, for example, pays no heed to the several efforts to appease Mussolini.¹⁰

Salvemini, who saw the British in the role of cynical manipulators in Prelude to World War II (New York: Doubleday, 1954), have differed significantly from the usual indictment.

⁸See in particular D. C. Watt, "Appeasement: The Rise of a 'Revisionist' School?," Political Quarterly, XXXVI (1965), pp. 191-213.

⁹A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 379-85; F. S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 407-25. A recent article also argues that the administrative structure of the Foreign Office had the effect of hampering prompt consideration of the crisis as it developed. James C. Robertson, "The Origins of British Opposition to Mussolini over Ethiopia," The Journal of British Studies, IX, 1 (Nov. 1969), pp. 129-31.

¹⁰Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

It is
the a
of no
the press
population
order, this
the limited
approach
terveys
the Italian
and the
the, however
of Italy's
and design
national
of civiliz
formation
of the
necessary to
offers the
of justification
of the
exists that
of the
difficult to
of the

It is no doubt difficult to fit Mussolini and Italy into a more balanced reassessment of appeasement. Italy had no grievances comparable to those which the Germans were pressing, despite Italian arguments about over-population and the 'mutilated peace' of 1919. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini was not a new and uncertain element in the 'thirties. Italy did not manage to hide a bullying approach under a cloak of reasonable ambitions. And, perhaps most significantly, few can see, in the light of the Italian military performance in World War II, why Italy posed the kind of threat that required appeasing. At the time, however, many in London saw several reasons for appeasing Italy's demands. Italy was a key element in the Stresa front designed to contain Germany. Italy was also a traditional friend with a long-standing grievance against a half-civilized, quarrelsome, slave-trading people. Open admiration for Mussolini and his system was hardly confined to Sir Oswald Mosley and his blackshirts. It is not necessary to share this sympathy to see that it necessarily softens the image of bending to arrogant demands which had no justification. Equally, one need not admire the British handling of the problem to see that so long as the notion persists that the Abyssinian crisis was a peculiarly odious example of yielding to blatant aggression, it will remain difficult to put aside false issues and explore what was the critical test of the inter-war security structure.

like

which was

not a new

re-creation

before the

assembly

operation

which meant

to maintain

of France.

of League.

operation

to maintain

the world,

— were in

diplomacy and

expression of

of the League

assembly

of old days

which entered

of best hope

offered in

21
L. P.
L. P.
L. P.

Like Munich, the British approach to the Abyssinian crisis was rooted in the post-war settlement. The idea that a new day in international relations had dawned with the creation of the League of Nations had taken root even before the conviction that Germany had been wronged by the Versailles Peace.¹¹ Peace was the passionate concern of a generation scarred by the trenches of France and Belgium. Peace meant, for many Englishmen, a disinclination to fight to maintain the strictures imposed on Germany for the sake of France. Peace also meant adherence to the Covenant of the League, which embodied the hope that war would never again hatch out of secret diplomacy, alliance politics, or an armaments race. The founding fathers of the League -- Lord Cecil, President Wilson, General Smuts, Leon Bourgeois -- were inspired by the intense general desire for a new diplomacy and a better world. In Britain this desire found expression during the war in the Union of Democratic Control and the League of Nations Society. Perhaps because the Versailles Treaty itself gave little reason to believe that the old diplomacy had been buried, the League of Nations became entrenched in the popular mind in Great Britain as the best hope that the agony of the Great War had not been suffered in vain.

¹¹H. R. Winkler, "The development of the League of Nations idea in Great Britain, 1914-1919," Journal of Modern History, XX (June, 1948), pp. 95-112.

It was
a correct
a League
to demand
an effort
for want of
the same
defensive
government
to discontinue
something was
hard. The
American
not the League
and a failure
not focus
number of
The League
effective, no
and. Such a
some proceed
treatment to
of the position
in continuing
to entire and
of the failure

It was to preserve the League, or at least to give it an honest trial, that Britain ran the risks faced in taking a "League stand" in 1935. The hope was that this could be managed while yet giving Mussolini some satisfaction, and the effort ultimately fell disastrously between two stools for want of a clear focus. The attempt to oppose and at the same time to placate Italy constituted a reluctant defensive reaction rather than a well-defined policy. The government stumbled deep into the crisis hoping, like Mr. Micawber, that something would turn up, in this case something which might eliminate the need to face down a friend. The key to understanding British policy in the Abyssinian crisis lies in recognizing that the government took the lead in opposing Italy, despite a keen desire to avoid a falling out. They did so fully aware that Mussolini would focus his resentment on London as the only possible organizer of an effective League front.

The League front actually created was not in the end effective, nor was the stand taken by Britain conspicuously bold. Such determination as there was in London to see the League procedures through was carefully hedged by the requirement that the French show a similar determination. And the position taken at Geneva was thoroughly undermined by continuing efforts to negotiate a compromise settlement. The entire undertaking pointed in the direction of failure, and the failure duly occurred.

It is
not it with
examination
present, or
mainly w
primary to
my sensib
House of a
fully weak
remain a
the League w
and merely
attack tend
main had s
primary imp
the Samuel Ho

12
Another
mainly a
they pressed
they agreed to
the League
think upon
they take sto
the sanction
the concern wa
regard, that
the necessary

13
The beg
posed by the
State of the
the League

It misses the point of that failure, however, to argue that it might have been prevented by more courage, by more determination. The idea of going to war with Italy to prevent, or to stop, Italy's war with Abyssinia was routinely written off in London, and quite rightly so, as contrary to Britain's conception of the League, and as not very sensible.¹² It is equally off the mark to contend that because of a lack of British conviction the League was fatally weakened and a key factor lost in the struggle to restrain aggression. In terms of what was expected of it, the League was born crippled, and the Abyssinian crisis served merely to certify the fact.¹³ When he argued from the back benches in defense of his ruined policy that only Britain had shown any willingness to prepare for the military implications of sanctions, the point being made by Sir Samuel Hoare was that national interests outweighed

¹²Another of the false trails which crisscross the Abyssinian affair is the argument that had Britain vigorously pressed the sanctions experiment, Italy would have been forced to withdraw without coming to the point of war with the League powers. The threat of a 'mad dog' Italian attack upon Britain alone was taken so seriously in London as to make such a course dangerously speculative, particularly if the sanctions had been escalated to include oil. Even if the concern was exaggerated, the central fact is, as Baldwin observed, that taken to their logical conclusion sanctions must necessarily mean a willingness to face war.

¹³The best corrective on the unwarranted expectations raised by the League is F. H. Hinsley, "The Failure of the League of Nations," Power and the Pursuit of Peace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 309-22.

International
The
which
ability
will have
Britain
The cost
British
possible
was strained,
relation, the
withdraw
League
Cambridge
15 Beyond
the possi
like any
and why Eric
interests o
why is why,
ended only o

14 December

15
The Comm
Survey
Follow
427-2
in Herb
(New
276

international covenants, and would no doubt continue to do so.¹⁴ The League collapsed as a result of the Abyssinian crisis, which is to say that it lost what remained of a credibility which it had never been structured to enjoy. It would have suffered a similar, if less spectacular collapse, had Britain stood to one side, rather than providing a lead.

The cost to Britain of playing a leading role in the Abyssinian crisis was considerable. Italy was lost as a possible check on German resurgence, relations with France were strained, the United States withdrew into deeper isolation, the Dominions were dismayed and inclined to withdraw still further from European concerns, and the value of the League as a British and French dominated forum, and as a bridge for Britain to Europe was seriously compromised.¹⁵ Beyond that, the blow dealt to British prestige was, with the possible exception of the early reverses of the Boer War, unlike anything suffered since Yorktown. The mystery is not why Britain failed to take still further risks in the interests of collective security and Abyssinia. The mystery is why, in view of the fact that the cabinet included only one genuine League enthusiast and were agreed

¹⁴December 19, 1935. 307 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 2009.

¹⁵The Commonwealth reaction is assessed in Nicholas Mansergh, Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, Problems of External Policy, 1931-1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 427-29 and an insight into American thinking is to be found in Herbert Feis, Three International Episodes Seen from E. A. (New York: Norton, 1966, first published in 1946), pp. 193-276.

and an Ital

interests, a

The Lea

it did not d

and Neville

was later

where Eden c

the Foreign c

Australia had

operation in

projects for

unaltered

initially hea

Australia, and

being at al

will hope to

that an Italian Abyssinia posed no threat to British interests, Britain ran the very evident risks that it ran.

The League may have collapsed in December of 1935, but it did not disappear. The sanctions experiment limped on until Neville Chamberlain put a merciful end to it six months later with his 'midsummer of madness' speech. Even before Eden conceded final failure in June of 1936, however, the Foreign Office was taking stock of the shambles which Abyssinia had made of the experiment in international cooperation in search of peace, and was weighing the prospects for the future. That international experiment, in an altered form, is still continuing and seems only marginally healthier. What the British learned from Abyssinia, and what difference it made if they learned anything at all, can perhaps be of some use to those who still hope to create a peaceful, logically-ordered world.

from the v
ally against t
the worst of co
and a crisis e
the issue were
policy which
after 100 years
to give way t
after, however
and a happy
ending German
to participat
and involve
at the Geneva
had been known
to bring Germ
the future too
the past tim
during. Germ
interests in E

CHAPTER I

DRIFTING

From the vantage point of London, a crisis pitting Italy against the League of Nations must have been one of the worst of conceivable developments in 1935. However such a crisis evolved, Britain stood to lose. Italy and the League were tied together in the system of regional security which had been structured at Locarno in 1925. Neither Locarno nor the League was especially healthy as 1934 gave way to another anxious year. The collapse of either, however, in the face of a revived German menace was not a happy thought. Far better to think in terms of inducing Germany to rejoin the League on equitable terms and to participate in an eastern Locarno system which would involve Britain only as a midwife. Unless the tranquil Geneva system of great power cooperation, which had been known in the late 'twenties, could be reestablished by burying German grievances alongside of French anxieties, the future looked grim. Even on the most hopeful outlook, it was past time to look to the distasteful business of rearming. Germany posed a potential threat to British interests in Europe, and Japan was an established threat in

the Far East, an area where the League writ clearly did not run.¹ The services had deteriorated to such an extent under the 'ten-year' rule that it posed a serious problem to allocate limited funds between the needs of air defense in Europe and naval defense in the Far East.²

The League of Nations was obviously a shaky reed on which to lean in the troubles facing Britain in 1935. The League's effectiveness had been seriously challenged by the Manchurian crisis, its potential had been badly limited by the withdrawal of Japan and Germany, and its entire conceptual foundation had been called into question by the collapse of the Disarmament Conference. This chain of events tended to reinforce negative opinion in Conservative and military circles which, generally speaking, had never warmed to the notion of a blanket commitment to defend the

¹The efforts made to blunt the Japanese threat stumbled regularly over the United States. The United States would not contemplate a program of naval cooperation designed to give pause to the military extremists assuming control in Tokyo. Neither did Washington smile on the notion of a British ship-building program which would produce the number of cruisers needed to meet more than one threat. In London, those elements which feared the loss of American good-will successfully combined to defeat the impulse to seek an accommodation with Japan. D. C. Watt, "Britain, the U.S. and Japan in 1934," Personalities and Policies (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965), pp. 83-99.

²The ten-year rule originated in 1919 when Lloyd George told the service chiefs that they need not anticipate a major war within the next ten years. It was not until 1932 that the ten-year rule was discarded as the basis for British planning. A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 228.

the world.

to be devised

in year, the

successful eff

popularity of

that consider

movement as

movement, w

propagation

ship. When

existing use

masses. Fo

posed the pro

put across

The storm

movement in

similar way,

these quarter

being on Brit

movement of A

3. Conservat
George Thompson
movement to A
1888, 1921, F

whole world.³ Still, 1935 was not the time to acquiesce in the demise of the League. Across the first months of the year, the "Peace Ballot" was gathering steam in a successful effort to demonstrate and reinforce the popularity of the League in Britain. And aside from all other considerations, the League was vital to the British government as a cover for their necessary program of rearmament, which pursued more openly, would seem to many a repudiation of the whole post-war approach to foreign policy. When Mussolini posed a challenge to the League's continuing usefulness, he created a dilemma for British statesmen. For if Britain resisted that challenge, there loomed the prospect of a third major adversary, positioned to cut across Imperial lines of communication.

The storm which broke over the heads of the British government in December of 1935 grew, in a disturbingly familiar way, out of an incident which occurred in an obscure quarter of the world which had little apparent bearing on British interests. On December 5, 1934 a contingent of African troops in the employ of Italy quarreled

³Conservative mistrust of the League is explored by Neville Thompson in The Anti-Appeasers, Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930's (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 36-38.

with others under the loose control of the Emperor of Abyssinia.⁴ In consequence a number of lives were lost at a place called WalWal, near the frontier between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland, and the sensibilities of two old adversaries were aroused. It was a regrettable thing, involving neighbors in east Africa, but it did not seem to merit immediate concern. It was soon hard to ignore, however, that there was trouble in the making.

On December 11 Italy demanded compensation of Abyssinia in terms calculated to be rejected.⁵ On December 14 Abyssinia reported the incident to the League Council.⁶ On the same day Italy rejected the Abyssinian proposal for arbitration.⁷ It did not take a keen mind to see that Mussolini meant to use the incident to settle an old score,

⁴The Abyssinian troops, by mischance, were escorting an Anglo-Abyssinian Commission which was surveying the grazing grounds in the Ogaden at the time. Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935 Vol. II, Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 135. (It was usual in British official circles in 1935 to refer to Ethiopia as Abyssinia. For the sake of consistency that usage is followed here except where otherwise quoted).

⁵The Italian demands included a ceremonial apology from the Governor of Harar Province, a 200,000 dollar indemnity, and the dismissal, arrest and punishment of those Italy named as guilty in the affair. The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 194.

⁶League of Nations, Official Journal, February 1935, p. 274.

⁷Ibid., p. 248.

and to re
hope exist
disappear
text asked
article 11
entirely t
request to
British gov
later, the
article di
disagreed s
satisfying

Aggression
went when
main key
men by eve
mily was t
military org
controlside
re offered
quite challe
net. Screen

1954
1954

and to record a triumph for his fascist regime. Whatever hope existed that the scope of the quarrel could be limited disappeared on January 3, 1935, when the Abyssinian government asked the League to take action in the matter under Article 11 of the Covenant.⁸ The memory of Manchuria was entirely too fresh for the implications of the Abyssinian request to be lost on London. Until June, however, the British government was reluctant to face those implications. Rather, the matter was allowed to drift in the hope that a little diplomatic oil might calm the water and produce an agreed solution which would preserve the League while satisfying Mussolini.

II

Abyssinia laid its quarrel before the League at a moment when the British government was engaged in rethinking certain key elements of foreign policy which were being overtaken by events. The central fact affecting all of British policy was the revived German threat. Military and paramilitary organizations were multiplying in the German countryside while Hitler shrilled about the abuses Germany had suffered under a bad peace. In Asia, Japan posed an active challenge which Britain was equally unprepared to meet. Something positive had to be done about security.

⁸Ibid., p 252.

By January of 1934, the Foreign Office had begun a reassessment of the concept of collective security.⁹ Britain had always resisted the French desire to make the League an effective and automatic instrument of coercion, and there were serious doubts in London about the value of the League in a tight spot.¹⁰ Had disarmament been generally accepted, the situation might have been different. As it was, it was dangerous to rely upon anything beyond domestic resources, and after years of operating on the assumption that there would be no war for ten years into the future, those resources were slim.

The hope underlying British policy was that the central problem could be scaled down somewhat by taking realistic account of Germany as it existed, and by making allowance for some of the German grievances which were patently just.¹¹ That hope ran throughout the discussion which the cabinet

⁹FO 371/18537, W260/129/98.

¹⁰The contrast between the British and the French approach to the League is developed in Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France Between Two Wars (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940), pp. 153-57. In Britain, any serious suggestion that the League's capabilities ought to be brought more into line with the League's responsibilities was certain to run into military opposition. Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961), p. 166.

¹¹Martin Gilbert offers an excellent treatment of German grievances and British conscience in The Roots of Appeasement (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

had on January 9, 1935, on the subject of coaxing Germany to rejoin the League.¹² Neville Chamberlain argued powerfully that Germany might prove more amenable if granted equity in armaments, and the cabinet agreed that German rearmament, though illegal, was an established fact and ought to be recognized. It was further agreed that British and French interests could best be served by drawing Germany back into the League, and by securing German adherence to an eastern pact similar to Locarno.

The Italian menace to the League thus appeared at a time when London was still thinking in terms of appeasing Germany in the hope of reestablishing the easy interchange and cooperation at Geneva which had been known during the Stresemann era. This vision did not really begin to fade until Simon and Eden visited Berlin late in March and learned from Hitler that the price of a German representative at Geneva was the return of the former German colonies.¹³ Earlier in the month, Hitler had underlined the pressing question of British rearmament by announcing on March 9 that Germany was engaged in creating an air force, and on March 16 that compulsory military service was being reestablished.¹⁴

¹²January 9, 1935. Cab 23/81 2(35)1-8.

¹³Notes of Anglo-German Conversations, March 25 and 26, 1935, Cab 24/254 C.P.69(35).

¹⁴The Times, March 10 and 17, 1935.

On Mar

1952, the

the White P

later in an

the Council

announcement

in the White

remain to

was pu

to within

to fabric

standing

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

25

On March 4 the government issued a Command Paper on defense, laying out the arguments for rearmament. Debate on the White Paper took place in the House of Commons a week later in an atmosphere charged by Hitler's open disdain for the Versailles restrictions. The boost given by Hitler's announcement of March 9 to the modest proposals put forward in the White Paper was no doubt welcome. The debate was certain to call forth an opposition charge that the government was putting Mars in train once again. An election was due within the year, and Canon Sheppard, East-Fulham, and the famous Oxford Union resolution were only the most outstanding recent examples of pacifist feeling in the country.¹⁵ The government could not afford the label of

¹⁵H. R. I. Sheppard, vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, was well known for broadcasts from his church. In 1934 he founded the Peace Pledge Union with an appeal to all males to send him a postcard stating that they would never support or approve another war. By 1936 the movement had 100,000 members.

In February 1933 the Oxford Union passed by a vote of 275-153 a resolution that 'this House will not fight for King and Country.'

Labour won the East Fulham by-election in October 1933 by a margin of 4840. The seat had been held by the National candidate in 1931 by 14,500. This reversal was universally hailed as a triumph for pacifism, and made a deep impression on Baldwin in particular. A. J. P. Taylor notes that it was, in fact, as Neville Chamberlain suspected, largely an attack on the means test. Taylor, English History, p. 367. A recent reassessment of the East Fulham election confirms Chamberlain's impression that the determining issues in the contest were bread and butter issues. Richard Heller, "East Fulham Revisited," Journal of Contemporary History, VI, 3 (1971), pp. 172-96.

War-200

Aspect C

which is

The

affirm

specific

inmate

express

be to

form be

public

the line

structure

of local

clear

that the

more of

'war-monger.' In this light, perhaps the most significant aspect of the debate on the White Paper was the degree to which it focused on the League of Nations.

The government prefaced the White Paper with a reaffirmation of faith in the League, adding only the qualification that once discussion breaks down the existing international machinery could not be relied upon against aggression.¹⁶ The qualification was necessary if rearmament was to make any sense at all. In debate, the government front bench chose to emphasize their faith rather than the qualification. By doing so, they partially neutralized the ire of the opposition, who saw the White Paper as a departure from League principles akin to the sell-out which had occurred in 1931.

Clement Attlee opened the debate by moving, in effect, that the government's policy represented a disastrous return to the old diplomacy:

in the opinion of this House, the policy of His Majesty's Government with respect to defence is completely at variance with the spirit in which the League of Nations was created to establish a collective world peace, gravely jeopardises the prospect of

¹⁶The White Paper was drafted with a keen appreciation of the popular mood. On February 25 the cabinet authorized a final revision, to emphasize the importance of the defense forces from the point of view of peace, defense and deterrent. February 25, 1935. Cab 23/81 11(35)1. The paper as finally approved is found at Cab 24/253 C.P.38(35).

any Disarmament Convention, and, so far from ensuring national safety, will lead to international competition and the insecurity thereby engendered and will ultimately lead to war.¹⁷

Attlee's conclusion was that it was the government's failure to make the League effective which had moved the world away from peace and disarmament to talk of war and rearmament.¹⁸

Most opposition comment was no more thoughtful, and no less indignant.¹⁹ The one exception was the intervention by Sir Stafford Cripps, perhaps the best mind on the Labour benches. Cripps cut through the rhetoric to note the basic difference between the government and the opposition view of the League. The government saw the League "as a body for promoting peace by facilitating and regularising the means of international co-operation," while the opposition looked upon the League "as an incipient world confederation of nations." Without a willingness to subordinate national wishes to the international good, security on a League basis was impossible.²⁰

Of the government supporters, only Leo Amery specifically rejected the larger concept of the League, held by the

¹⁷March 11, 1935. 299 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 35.

¹⁸Ibid., col. 38.

¹⁹See, for example, the remarks of F. S. Cocks on "a sad and dismal occasion." Ibid., cols. 81-86.

²⁰Ibid., col. 147.

1991

1992

1993

1994

1995

1996

1997

1998

1999

2000

2001

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

opposition, as chimerical. In characteristic fashion, Amery denounced the League of the 'true believers' as "the League of Make-believe, the Cloud Cuckoo Land of the dreamers of a millenium which we are not likely to reach for many a long year to come...."²¹ Amery's description was one which a number of Conservatives could appreciate, but which few would like to take out onto the hustings.

The government generally kept to the safer ground of League advocacy, cautioning only that too much could not be expected of the League in the given circumstances. Baldwin's commonsense observation that "it is not a question of doing what is best -- ideally best -- but a question of doing what is best in the circumstances in which you work" was balanced by his assurance that British statesmen were prepared to work through the League for the future.²² Foreign Secretary Simon closed the debate by emphatically denying that the White Paper represented any weakening of the government's faith in, or determination to uphold, the League.²³

Logically, the issuance of a White Paper on rearmament should have offered the ideal opportunity to clear away some of the cobwebs relating to collective security. The failure

²¹Ibid., col. 101.

²²Ibid., col. 47.

²³Ibid., cols. 157-58.

of the central tenet of disarmament to win international approval fairly invited a statement pointing up the obvious weaknesses of the League system of security and the consequent need for national self-reliance. There were, however, very few politicians willing to embark upon a program of reeducation in March of 1935, nor is there evidence that very many had interpreted the blows suffered by the League since 1931 as a cause to despair of its prospects. Thus, the government stepped around an opportunity to debate the weaknesses and the implications of the League system despite the fact that the Abyssinian test was clearly on the horizon. Broad support for rearmament was the bird to have in-hand.²⁴ Disabusing the League faithful would require much more than a White Paper debate. The effect of the White Paper was to establish an approach to

²⁴The government's ability to see rearmament and the League commitment as mutually reinforcing had little in common with Churchill's later concept of "arms and the Covenant." There was no thought of forging a Geneva-centered 'grand alliance' behind the government's approach to rearmament. In fact, despite the amendment which Sir Austin Chamberlain offered on the government's behalf, there was little inclination to think in terms of using enhanced strength in the service of the Covenant. *Ibid.*, col. 71. The League was an instrument for focusing opinion, arranging conciliation, and bringing pressure to bear. None of this should require the force of arms. Tying rearmament to the League was an effort to blend a pressing need with an established political reality, and was probably not consciously disingenuous.

rearmament which had wide appeal. The debate on the White Paper left the issue of collective security dangerously cloudy, however, and the government tied still more tangibly to a League sinking visibly into trouble.

III

By the time of the White Paper debate in March, Mussolini had begun the military build-up in east Africa which was making Italian intentions clear.²⁵ In London, the government's reaction to the problem was emerging in a slow and uncertain fashion. The cabinet, under the less-than dynamic leadership of MacDonald and Baldwin, resigned the matter to Foreign Secretary Simon. Simon, in turn, did little with the problem beyond maintaining an uneasy watch on it.

When Abyssinia brought the dispute before the League Council on January 3, however, Simon reacted with real alacrity, joining Anthony Eden and Pierre Laval at Geneva in a successful effort to postpone a confrontation.²⁶ In a skillful piece of on-the-spot diplomacy, which demonstrated that the Foreign Secretary was quite capable of initiative,

²⁵Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, II, 141-42.

²⁶The French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, fresh from his conversations with Mussolini in Rome, functioned as the chief mediator with the Abyssinians. George W. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 103.

Simon and Eden saw the Abyssinian and Italian representatives and helped persuade Abyssinia not to force the issue immediately. Simon also called for a letter of formal apology from the Abyssinian Emperor, and proposed the creation of an Italo-Abyssinian boundary commission to fix the disputed boundary and to apportion the 200,000 dollars demanded by Italy to the sufferers on both sides. Unfortunately Simon had neither the carrot nor the stick necessary to persuade Mussolini to throw away an opportunity. He could only warn that the League might find it necessary to place the matter on its agenda. Mussolini shrugged this off as representing a threat to the League rather than to Italy.²⁷

Simon's proposal dealt only with the immediate issue and suffered from the illusion that Mussolini's ambitions were reasonable, limited and subject to British influence.²⁸ This illusion would plague British policy throughout the crisis. Simon's personal intervention in the first round

²⁷The details of Simon's initiative are drawn from Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 195.

²⁸On December 20, 1934 Mussolini drew up and circulated among his closest advisers a "Directive and Plan of Action for the Resolution of the Italian-Abyssinian Question." In this document Mussolini asserted flatly that the problem could only be solved by the destruction of the Abyssinian armed forces and the total conquest of Abyssinia. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, pp. 58-61. The great gap between Mussolini's ambitions and what British statesmen calculated he might accept narrowed only gradually under the pressure of the building crisis.

at Geneva helped to postpone a confrontation which could only menace the League. It also established British concern and give Abyssinia reason to hope that British concern would produce a settlement. Buoyed by that hope, and aware that success at Geneva depended upon British and French goodwill, Abyssinia delayed making formal application for League consideration of the dispute.

Abyssinia was fated to waste a great deal of optimism throughout the crisis. Italy's reaction to his personal effort at Geneva effectively warned Simon off, and he adopted a passive posture which he managed, in good part, to maintain until he handed over what had become a sticky affair to his successor at the Foreign Office in June. His handling of the first stages of the Abyssinian problem points up the reason why his colleagues decided in June that Sir John's talents could be better employed in a different capacity.

Sir John Simon is most charitably remembered as a skillful advocate who could vie with the best of legal minds in drafting a comprehensive brief. In his grey way, Simon was a valuable member of the National government, and was rewarded across the 'thirties with key portfolios as Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer. A man of cabinet stature and ability, Simon became, after the resignation of Sir Herbert Samuel in 1932, the visible Liberal in the National government.

... must be ...
... and ...
... and he ...
... safety of ...
... however, he ...
... outside of ...

In Abyssia

... distinct ...
... was evident ...
... acceptable ...
... cited. 29 ...
... the Foreign ...
... regarding the ...
... case in the ...
... country Eden, ...
... relating to ...
... the sense of ...
... the problem. ...
... the became ano...

29 Oct 24/25

... proven on ...
... general possibi ...
... detail. On ...
... the great proble ...
... cooperation. A ...
... they stood in ...
... the respects, ...
... translates to be ...
... the previous dec

Although he lacked the style of Churchill and the bite of Lloyd George, Simon was the best debater in the government ranks, and he put his logic in harness to support a wide variety of government positions. As Foreign Secretary, however, he suffered from a tendency to see too much of both sides of every question.

In Abyssinia, Simon was faced with a problem with two very distinct and unattractive sides. To his careful mind it was evident that to come down on either side posed an unacceptable prospect for British policy, and so the matter drifted.²⁹ Simon devoted a good deal of his last months at the Foreign Office to the German question, which was also occupying the attention of Neville Chamberlain, the motive force in the cabinet.³⁰ Abyssinia was abandoned largely to Anthony Eden, the government's specialist on all things relating to Geneva. Given a free field in which to exercise his sense of international morality, Eden took firm hold of the problem. The result was that as the crisis deepened Eden became another factor complicating the dilemma.

²⁹Cab 24/255 C.P.98(35).

³⁰Even on the German problem, which seemed to admit of several possibilities, Simon's outlook was tinged with despair. On November 28, 1934 Simon noted in his diary that the great problem lay in winning Germany back to European cooperation. A new approach was clearly needed, but the French stood in the way. The Simon Papers, Diary 11. In many respects, British statesmen in the 'thirties conceived themselves to be the prisoners of postures established during the previous decade.

Anthony Eden in 1935 enjoyed a unique position in British politics. At the age of thirty-seven, he held the position of Lord Privy Seal and was regarded by many as the elegant symbol of all that was best in the English people. Born well, educated well, and proven in battle, Eden entered Parliament in 1923 seemingly marked for success.³¹ A member of the sparkling 'lost' generation who had somehow been spared, Eden emerged from the war with his ideals shaped by a serviceman's loathing of war.³² As the protégé of Stanley Baldwin and Austen Chamberlain, he rose to the second position in the Foreign Office in the National government established in 1931. On the strength of his ability and the apprenticeship which he had served as Austen Chamberlain's parliamentary private secretary, Eden merited the promotion to parliamentary under-secretary, and he earned the recognition accorded him as Lord Privy Seal in

³¹Robert Anthony Eden was born on June 12, 1897, the younger son of Sir William Eden, seventh baronet. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church, with time out for the war. At age 19 he became the youngest adjutant in the army. By war's end he was a brigade major with the rank of captain and had been decorated with the Military Cross. In 1923 he was elected to represent Leamington by a majority of better than 5,000 votes.

³²Alan Campbell-Johnson, Sir Anthony Eden (London: Robert Hale, 1955), p. 21. Of his impression of Eden in 1933, Harold Macmillan writes that he "seemed to embody all the aspirations of the war generation." Harold Macmillan, Winds of Change 1914-1939 (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 393.

But his

Dixon, who, as

some National

the an
party,
of the
in dre
relati
which
decrea
in the

Does not only

in League er

but he had d

definite, an

After the assa

the conviction

presented th

and every to

be one sure e

resident le

interests of t

since it was r

33 The Day
has H. Helme

34 See, fo
October 7, 19
of A. C. Lett
London Coll

35 Anthony
and papers,

36 The Soc
the 21
and 4.

1934. But his image counted for more than his ability. Lord Swinton, who, as Philip Cunliffe-Lister, was Eden's colleague in the National government, recalls

the appeal he made to the youth of the party, the young, idealistic generation of the inter-war years. He was elegant in dress and manner, pleasing in his relations with people, dedicated to causes which appealed to a war-weary nation; a debonair young reformer whose heart was in the right place³³

It was not only the young who admired the figure that Eden cut. League enthusiasts of all ages applauded the work which he had done on the Disarmament Conference, the Saar plebiscite, and the mediation between Hungary and Yugoslavia after the assassination of King Alexander.³⁴ Eden shared the conviction of men such as Lord Cecil that the League represented the best hope for the future, and should be given every tonic possible.³⁵ To League supporters, Eden was the one sure element in an otherwise suspect government.³⁶ As resident League champion, Eden was one of the political strengths of the government. He was also a measure of the price it was necessary to pay to win domestic support for

³³The Earl of Swinton, Sixty Years of Power (New York: James H. Heinemann, 1967, first published in 1966), p. 163.

³⁴See, for example, Viscount Cecil to Anthony Eden, December 7, 1934, Cecil Papers, British Museum, Add. 51083; and A. C. Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe (London: Collins, 1939), pp. 280-81, 295-98.

³⁵Anthony Eden to Viscount Cecil, December 11, 1934, Cecil Papers, Add. 51083.

³⁶Viscount Cecil to Frank Walters, August 19, 1935, copy in the Gilbert Murray Papers, Bodleian Library, Box 16a and d.

Asian poli

Even Ed

gerian beco

can be cau

the first re

stret was s

initial reac

map shock.

in working to

preparing a

regulation o

due to the i

the matter, a

which would p

was refused

the's indiar

the telephon

we could do n

the their co

and the Itali

simply before

37 Avon, E

18 aid.

39 aid.

foreign policy.

Even Eden was at first reluctant to see the Abyssinian problem become a League problem. In his memoirs, he noted that he caught the odor of another Manchurian crisis in the first reports of the WalWal affair.³⁷ If so, and the stench was such that there is no reason to doubt it, his initial reaction was to try and help the League avoid another major shock. Eden joined Simon and Laval after January 3 in working to convince the Abyssinians of the wisdom of postponing a formal appeal to the League in favor of negotiation outside of the League framework. Abyssinia had come to the League because Italy had refused to arbitrate the matter, and was quite willing to consider any approach which would produce an agreed settlement. It was Italy that refused to play along, and by the middle of January Eden's indignation was beginning to build. On January 16, Eden telephoned to London that the Italians "should be told we could do no more, and that proceedings at Geneva should take their course."³⁸ In Geneva, he turned the pressure onto the Italian representative, Baron Pompeo Aloisi.³⁹ Shortly before the Council discussion scheduled for

³⁷Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 193.

³⁸Ibid., p. 196.

³⁹Ibid.

January 19, 1900
James Egan
in the province
of Assinia.
Egan's v
left the matter
without effect
and was
Egan's success
the picture.
General Avenue
and previous
Egan's company
Assinia and
conclusion.
learned from
the League was
Assinia was
and, the League
only.

On the
agreements
of the
to settle the
the treaty of
relations. On
agreements in
Assinia
of the League
January 1900

January 19, Mussolini conceded another Geneva 'victory' to Anthony Eden by agreeing to arbitrate the dispute according to the provisions of the treaty of 1928 between Italy and Abyssinia.⁴⁰

Eden's victory was, of course, no victory at all. It left the matter to be negotiated between Italy and Abyssinia without effective mediation, while the Italian military build-up was progressing in east Africa. At the same time, Eden's success served to put the League more squarely into the picture. With his note of January 19 to Secretary-General Avenol accepting an arbitration procedure which he had previously rejected, Mussolini, in effect, conceded the League's competence in the matter. League supporters in Abyssinia and elsewhere were encouraged to draw the wrong conclusion. The best lesson that Abyssinia could have learned from its first appeal at Geneva would have been that the League was incapable of offering effective help. Instead, Abyssinia was led to believe that, given the proper British lead, the League could function was a real restraint on Italy.

⁴⁰On January 19, 1935 the Italian and Abyssinian governments directed notes to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations indicating their willingness to attempt to settle their differences in accordance with article 5 of the Treaty of Amity which had been signed between the two nations on August 2, 1928. Italy asked for, and Abyssinia concurred in seeking, a postponement until May of the discussion by the League Council of the dispute growing out of the Walwal incident. League of Nations, Official Journal, February 1935, pp. 162-63.

Ben's
Mussolini was
when he had
January 29 19
embassy in To
and that it a
the question
ties between
Abyssinia, "2
one of the fa
list. Despit
it was not ex
the question
an intermin
former govern
Secretary in
Measures co
not circulat
Commission's
interests in
the Nile.

41-see
42-see
43-see

Eden's conduct at Geneva won him no admirers in Rome. Mussolini was left to puzzle out the British attitude, which he had hoped would be no worse than passive.⁴¹ On January 29 Leonardo Vitetti, counselor of the Italian embassy in London, visited the Foreign Office to pass the word that Italy had reached an understanding with France on the question of Abyssinia, and to invite an exchange of views between Britain and Italy on respective interests in Abyssinia.⁴² This invitation drew no British response, and one of the few genuine opportunities of the crisis was lost. Despite the obvious importance of the Italian démarche, it was not until March 6 that the Foreign Office handed over the question of British interests in Abyssinia for study by an interministerial commission headed by Sir John Maffey, a former governor of the Sudan, who was then permanent under-secretary in the Colonial Office. The commission pursued its leisurely course and produced a report on June 18, which was not circulated as a cabinet paper until August 16.⁴³ The commission's conclusion was that Britain had no important interests in Abyssinia save Lake Tana, the headwaters of the blue Nile.

⁴¹Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 90.

⁴²Cab 24/256 C.P.161(35).

⁴³Ibid.

Simon di
prefer want
inbyssinia
the time wh
give simply
in London wa
putting on a
van Italy co
highly commi
anti-off ap
and prevente
be a clear
loss of Ital
of the League
since been p
Mussolini do
founded on
and produce
after such a
as clearly
are out the
as it was, t
friendship o
the League.

1922

Simon did not lose the opportunity presented on January 29 for want of a clear appreciation of Britain's interests in Abyssinia. He declined to make Britain's position clear, at a time when that might still have made a difference, quite simply because no one in a position of responsibility in London wanted to choose between Italy and the League. By putting on a stern face, Britain might have been able to warn Italy off in January, before Italian prestige became too deeply committed. Equally, Britain might have adopted a hands-off approach in January, which would have pleased Italy and prevented false expectations. The penalty for establishing a clear position along either of these lines was the loss of Italian friendship on the one hand, or the collapse of the League of Nations on the other. The notion which has since been put forward, that Britain could have backed Mussolini down and still have retained his friendship, seems grounded only in the belief that courage will always win out and produce the proper ending.⁴⁴ Certainly no one operated under such a delusion at the time. An either-or situation was clearly taking shape. Sir John and his colleagues might have cut their losses by selecting one side or the other. As it was, they tried to have it both ways and lost the friendship of Italy while lengthening the fall suffered by the League.

⁴⁴Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 93.

Simon's
in Geneva in
the middle of
to if there
useful dire
have seen su
confidence in
January 20 d
Simon stress
data had be
government,
data was a
was forced t
recently not
first in Sim
in February

the
Ab
Cor
is
a y
the

Simon's
did not suff

45
46
47
48
49
50

IV

Simon's approach to the problem, after his initiative at Geneva in January, was to wait and to hope for the best. The tactic of waiting on events has something to recommend it if there are some signs that events might be tending in a hopeful direction. It is hard to imagine that Simon could have seen such signs, unless he placed a good deal more confidence in Mussolini's acceptance of arbitration than the January 29 démarche warranted. For public consumption, Simon stressed the fact that the Italian minister in Addis Ababa had been instructed to negotiate with the Abyssinian government, and he added that the British minister in Addis Ababa was authorized to encourage the negotiations.⁴⁵ He was forced to concede at the same time that Italy had recently mobilized 30,000 additional men. There was little doubt in Simon's mind which was the more telling development. On February 21 he wrote the king that:

Italy is at present occupied with the Abyssinian question, as to which Sir John greatly fears that a serious outcome is probable. But this must be handled in a way which will not affect adversely Anglo-Italian relations.⁴⁶

Simon's letter to the king indicates that although he had not sufficiently sorted out his thinking to establish

⁴⁵February 13, 1935. 297 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 1904.

⁴⁶Quoted in Harold Nicolson, King George V, His Life and Reign (London: Constable, 1970, first published in 1952), p. 528.

British pos
the direct
the learned i
in a speed
the league of
indicted to
collective pe
to success
stance of pe
the. For E
something whic
the end of Fe
that Italy me

On Febru
expressing hi
diplomatic
the movement
that, in con
League Counc
that they wo
indifference
showing lay

47 Eden
meeting of
British that
the's reply
1946/10/20/21

a British position on the problem, he was certainly leaning in one direction. While Simon leaned in one direction, Eden leaned in the other. Eden's thought was aptly summed up in a speech which he made on February 15 to a branch of the League of Nations Union at Rugby. He confidently predicted to a receptive audience that "the conception of a collective peace system has surely come to stay."⁴⁷ It had to succeed because it was the only substitute for a balance of power, and a balance of power could never guarantee peace. For Eden, the correlation was clearly established: anything which menaced the League, menaced peace. And by the end of February, Eden was becoming increasingly convinced that Italy menaced the League.

On February 26, Eden addressed a memorandum to Simon expressing his impatience with Italian tactics which were delaying arbitration procedures, and his anxiety over the open movement of Italian troops to east Africa. He suggested that, in connection with their 'duties' as members of the League Council, Britain and France should warn Mussolini that they would not view the dismemberment of Abyssinia with indifference. He did not suggest how Simon should go about securing Laval's participation in such a warning. Simon's

⁴⁷Eden is one of the few politicians whose speeches to meetings of the League of Nations Union can be read without concern that they mask unspoken reservations. A copy of Eden's February 15 speech can be found at FO 371/19673, W1443/193/98.

response to
demand in
from the
process on
sit for form
potential had
before the
however, Sim
submitting in
the British

Despite
current in
likely requi
of January
steady strea
passing thro
could withho
March 12 at
Bivariate no
and Abyssini
forces build
requested to
the League

40
the
the drawn

response to Eden's suggestion was to instruct Sir Eric Drummond in Rome, and Sir Robert Vansittart in London, to inform the Italians that Britain would appreciate more rapid progress on the arbitration process.⁴⁸ This was not a request made for form's sake alone; Simon would have been genuinely grateful had the arbitration process begun to move, and to defuse the dispute. After a month of no movement at all, however, Simon must have known that Italy had no intention of submitting its grievance to effective arbitration, and that the British appeal would be, as in fact it was, ignored.

Despite British suggestions, Mussolini made no more movement in the direction of arbitration than seemed absolutely required. By the beginning of March, the agreement of January 19 was not providing much of a fig leaf for the steady stream of Italian troops and supplies which was passing through the Suez canal. Abyssinia decided that it could withhold its appeal to the League no longer. On March 17 at Geneva, the Abyssinian representative Teclé Hawariate noted the lack of any progress toward arbitration and Abyssinia's growing fear of an invasion by the Italian forces building up in east Africa. He therefore formally requested the Secretary-General to lay the dispute before the League Council in accordance with Article 15, for

⁴⁸The details of Eden's memorandum and Simon's response are drawn from Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 198-200.

...ative
...article 17
...responsibility
...material
...follow men
...Argentina's
...neutral away
...was thus put
...to impose san
...The span
...killed to mar
...Following Hi
...any of twel
...list in the
...larger issue
...is a check of
...text of Ital
...in July of 1
...title Italia
...British coun
...Italy repub
...Italy denoun
...that direct
...offered to

"investigation and consideration." He also added an appeal to Article 10, under which the members of the League had a responsibility to preserve against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of a fellow member. Hawariate very cleverly wrapped up Abyssinia's appeal by agreeing in advance to accept any arbitral award arrived at through the League.⁴⁹ The League was thus put on formal notice that it might be called upon to impose sanctions against a principal member.

The sparks which this appeal was expected to generate failed to materialize. The appeal was made on the day following Hitler's proclamation calling for a conscript army of twelve corps, and Abyssinia's problem was momentarily lost in the general concern over what was clearly a much larger issue. Hitler's move multiplied Italy's importance as a check on German militarism. The effect which the movement of Italian divisions to the Brenner pass had on Berlin in July of 1934 made a vivid impression on London and Paris. While Italian diplomats conferred with their French and British counterparts on the best way to constrain Germany, Italy replied to the Abyssinian appeal at leisure on March 22. Italy denounced the Abyssinian move, but held out the hope that direct negotiations might yet produce a settlement, and offered to take "forthwith" the steps necessary to constitute

⁴⁹League of Nations, Official Journal, May 1935, p. 572.

the still...
and, ample
with case...
and Air
admission
stress confer
Casolini mo
agreeing to

Sir John
this recent
discussions
general impr
with Britain
out of his
order had to
stay at the
on way in
Henry's bo
colonies bef
directly eve
security. Th

Scanned
Scanned
Scanned

the still unformed arbitration commission. This was, Italy argued, ample evidence that arbitration was proceeding, in which case Article 15 did not apply.⁵⁰ Italy's promise was empty and Abyssinia urgently repeated its appeal on March 29, and again on April 3.⁵¹ On April 10, on the eve of the Stresa conference called to consider the German problem, Mussolini moved again to offset the Abyssinian appeals by agreeing to proceed with the nomination of arbitrators.⁵²

Sir John Simon went to Stresa in April deeply troubled by his recent visit to Berlin. He had come away from the discussions which began in Berlin on March 25 with the general impression that Hitler desired "a good understanding" with Britain, an impression that Hitler managed to convey to most of his British guests. On specific issues, however, Hitler had been most unaccommodating. Simon recorded in his diary at the time that Hitler seemed determined to go his own way in rearmament, expected to draw all Germans within Germany's borders, wanted the return of the ex-German colonies before rejoining the League, and, even in that unlikely event, had no intention of joining in collective security. The Foreign Secretary was understandably depressed:

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 573.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 573-77.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 577-78.

All this is pretty hopeless, for if Germany will not cooperate for confirming the solidarity of Europe, the rest of Europe will cooperate to preserve it in spite of Germany. This may not prevent an ultimate explosion, but it will delay it. We may see the curious spectacle of British Tories collaborating with Russian Communists while the League of Nations Union thunders applause. There may be no other course, but will it ensure peace? I most gravely doubt it.⁵³

There is apparent in Simon's musings the rather half-formed notion that the League of Nations might prove useful in organizing a united response to a German threat, should it come to that. His journey to Italy in April, however, offered the chance to establish a much more manageable form of constraint.

V

It is an historical commonplace that the British delegation to the Stresa conference in April 1935 missed an excellent opportunity to clear up Britain's position on Abyssinia and the League in direct conversation with Mussolini. The usual assumption is that some plain talk at Stresa would have made an important difference.⁵⁴ This

⁵³ March 27, 1935, Diary 11, Simon Papers. The entry is also printed, in substantially the same form, in Viscount Simon, Retrospect (London: Hutchinson, 1952), p. 203.

⁵⁴ Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, Vol II: Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 148-49; R. W. Seton-Watson, Britain and the Dictators (New York: Macmillan, 1938), p. 361; Viscount Cecil, A Great Experiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 266; A. J. P. Taylor The Origins of the Second World War (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), p. 87; Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, pp. 124-26.

assumption rests on the idea that Britain should have been willing to threaten Italy with overwhelming force for the sake of Abyssinia, an idea wholly foreign to British thinking.⁵⁵ Without such a threat, it is hard to imagine that Mussolini would have sacrificed the pride and the expense which he had invested in east Africa by April.

Simon lost what was, in fact, a much more promising opportunity to influence the course of the dispute during the month prior to his visit to Stresa. Until March 17, Abyssinia had not made a formal claim on League procedures. Although Abyssinia certainly would have turned to the League for some sort of help before accepting a military defeat, there obviously was little hope for effective League action without the active support of London and Paris. Had Britain and France plainly warned Abyssinia at the beginning of 1935 not to rely on the League, Abyssinia might not have invoked the Covenant, and might have been more receptive to Italian demands. Such a warning, however, would have required a willingness to accept some responsibility for the outcome of

⁵⁵In his account of the Stresa conference, Lord Vansittart wrote that "the humiliations consequent on unilateral disarmament were unimaginable to those who had not to wade through them"; The Mist Procession (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 519. Vansittart makes a point which could be applied to any of the crises faced across the 1930's: British statesmen felt themselves to be dealing from weakness rather than strength. Vansittart's observation can be misleading, however, if it is taken to imply that only military weakness prevented Britain from drawing the line at Stresa. No one, certainly not he, journeyed from London to Stresa with any desire to dictate to Mussolini.

the general

responsibility

illnesses.

The first

Italy and France

less serious

supporting

permanent

and under

will under

European

thought for

the crisis

developing

that with

of

unacceptable

offered

from the

that all

the the

this is an

to burden

however

they are

attention

the and

the same

to be

of

rather

should

the letter

obtained

to be

possibly

material

the quarrel. Simon was not the man to shoulder unnecessary responsibilities, nor was he prodded to do so by his colleagues.

The British delegation to the Stresa conference with Italy and France was led by Simon and by Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald.⁵⁶ The dominant figure in the supporting staff was that of Sir Robert Vansittart, the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office. The common bond uniting these three dissimilar men at Stresa was the tacit understanding that Italian cooperation was vital to European peace. MacDonald, whose curious mental processes brought forth both very good and incredibly bad advice during the crisis, was concerned more with what he saw as the developing Italian challenge to British imperial interests than with the threat to the League.⁵⁷ The Prime Minister's

⁵⁶ MacDonald replaced Eden, who had been temporarily incapacitated by what was apparently a mild heart attack suffered during a stormy flight from Prague. Eden's absence from the Stresa conference opens the door to speculation that all might have come right if only Eden had been able to make the trip. Campbell-Johnson, Sir Anthony Eden, p. 103. This is an attractive line of conjecture in that it imposes no burden of evidence, and can be applied to any and all, however unlikely. The authors of a recent biography of Stanley Baldwin argue, for example, that had Baldwin led the delegation to Stresa, he would certainly have played the man and set the Italians straight. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 831.

⁵⁷ MacDonald laid out his concern over the growing Italian challenge in a letter to Hoare later in the crisis. MacDonald to Hoare, August 13, 1935, FO 800/295. Hoare found this letter to be "curious and almost unintelligible." It contained "the amazing suggestion that the Italians are likely to be our great Empire rivals in the future and will almost certainly be stronger than ourselves." Hoare to Neville Chamberlain, August 18, 1935, FO 800/295.

socialist ideals were a dim memory at Stresa. He wanted only a satisfactory agreement which he could take back and lay before the Parliament.⁵⁸ Simon, on the other hand, recorded in his memoirs that his objectives at Stresa related to developing a balanced approach to the German threat:

One objective was to show the solidarity of the three Powers in the face of Germany's announced increase in military strength, and the other to keep the door open for Germany to return to Geneva and play her proper part in the⁵⁹ creation of collective security for Europe.

Vansittart's memoirs are more forthcoming. He admitted that he was concerned about the growing Abyssinian problem, and that he recognized the opportunity to confront Mussolini at Stresa. But Vansittart took the line that it was better "to land Mussolini first and lecture him later," lest the conference break up abortively, with no agreement on the German problem.⁶⁰ It was not hard to sell such advice to MacDonald and Simon.

The conference at Stresa opened on April 11 and lasted four days. Throughout the conference the subject of Abyssinia was studiously avoided by the chiefs-of-state

⁵⁸Vansittart told Randolph Churchill that MacDonald was unconcerned that the agreed formula at Stresa embraced only Europe. 'What we want,' MacDonald told Vansittart, 'is an agreement that we can put before the House of Commons.' Randolph Churchill, The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1959), p. 85.

⁵⁹Simon, Retrospect, pp. 203-04.

⁶⁰Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 520.

and foreign ministers assembled. The silence on Abyssinia reflected the common desire for a unified front on the German question. The great unknown at the conference was the British attitude. Having been warned by his ambassador in London that the British would broach the Abyssinian question, Mussolini came prepared to argue the case for his ambitions there.⁶¹ Prodded by Eden and by the Italian ambassador, Count Dino Grandi, Simon also brought along an Abyssinian expert, but he was not anxious to try to spell out a position which he had not yet formulated.⁶²

The warning issued at Stresa came from Italy rather than Britain. On the afternoon of April 12, Geoffrey Thompson, Britain's Abyssinian expert, met with Leonardo Vitetti, counselor of the Italian embassy in London, and Giovanni Garnaschelli, an Abyssinian specialist from the Palazzo Chigi. Thompson had been included in the British party at the last moment, and he had no authority to deal with the Italians on matters of substance.⁶³ Garnaschelli and Vitetti were not bound by such strictures. During an informal exchange of some three hours, Thompson was given

⁶¹Mussolini berated Grandi after the conference for having supplied him with faulty intelligence. Ivone Kirkpatrick, Mussolini: A Study in Power (New York: Hawthorn, 1964), p. 303.

⁶²Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 179; Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 119.

⁶³Geoffrey Thompson, Front Line Diplomat (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 97.

to understand that Italy 'could not exclude the possibility of solving the Abyssinian question by force.' In diplomatic usage, this was a blunt statement of intent, and Thompson quickly drew up a memorandum for the Foreign Secretary warning that the Italians were talking openly of war.⁶⁴

Mussolini dramatically underscored the private warning passed by his experts when he pointedly inserted the words "of Europe" into the final declaration.⁶⁵ By specifying that the declaration be limited to threats to European peace, Mussolini served the British with direct notice of his African intentions and invited a challenge. All eyes turned to Simon at that point, and his silence gave mute testimony of London's unwillingness to antagonize Rome.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 97-98. In light of Thompson's account, it would seem that Simon told the House of Commons a half-truth, at best, on May 1 when he stated that conversation among the experts at Stresa was limited to minor matters, and Hoare passed along another half-truth on October 22, when he told the House of Commons that the experts at Stresa had made their respective positions clear. 301 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 348; 305 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 25-26.

⁶⁵ The joint statement of April 14 closed with a declaration of general intent: "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." John Wheeler-Bennett and Stephen Heald (eds.), Documents on International Affairs, 1935, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 82.

⁶⁶ Ian Colvin, None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 61.

The encounter with Mussolini at Stresa demonstrated only that Simon saw no point in a confrontation. It would have been completely out of character, and of questionable diplomatic wisdom, for Simon to have improved upon the moment of drama created by Mussolini at the closing session. The object of the Stresa conference was to develop an agreed line on Germany. Once an agreement of sorts had been safely pocketed, Simon felt free to return what answer he had to Mussolini's challenge.⁶⁷ An extraordinary session of the League Council had been arranged to follow the Stresa meetings, to lend the League's blessing if it was required.⁶⁸ Simon took advantage of the opportunity to reemphasize his approach to the Abyssinian problem.

The specific purpose of the extraordinary session of the League Council was to deal with the French complaint concerning Germany's recent violation of the Versailles treaty. Council President Rüstü Aras of Turkey opened the session on April 15 by suggesting that consideration of the Abyssinian requests of March 17 and after could well be postponed until

⁶⁷British reluctance to assume concrete Continental responsibilities prevented an agreement on what the Italians still considered to be the critical issue of Austria. The Stresa 'front' was, thus, of reduced importance in Rome.

⁶⁸In view of his importance throughout the Abyssinian crisis, it is worth noting that Sir Robert Vansittart witnessed the League in action during this extraordinary session for the only time during his career. His principal impression was of the unreality of the Geneva atmosphere. Colvin, None So Blind, p. 46.

the regular May session in view of the stated determination of both parties to pursue the agreed arbitration process.⁶⁹ Simon concurred, but with a rider which added a spark of excitement to the proceedings. Would it not be possible, Simon asked, for both parties concerned to assure the Council that the President's suggestion could be accepted with the confidence that before the May session the arbitrators on both sides would be appointed and the terms of reference fixed?⁷⁰ The Abyssinian representative, Teclé Hawariate, sought to improve upon this opening by asking as well for assurances that no military preparations would go forward in the meantime. Britain's military adviser at Geneva, General A. C. Temperley, recorded that Hawariate's suggestion was "received in stony silence."⁷¹ Simon explained that he did not want to suggest too much. He was merely anxious that the Council in May be "in a position to know whether something practical could be undertaken."⁷² Coming after his silence at Stresa, Simon's suggestion surprised and outraged the

⁶⁹League of Nations, Official Journal, May 1935, p. 548.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 549.

⁷¹Temperley, The Whispering Gallery of Europe, p. 310.

⁷²League of Nations, Official Journal, May 1935, p. 549.

Italians.⁷³ Baron Aloisi was put in an embarrassing position and could only try to parry Simon's suggestion by promising vaguely that Italy would pursue the process of arbitration and conciliation as rapidly as possible.⁷⁴ It is clear from the Italian indignation that if it did nothing else, Simon's unexpected suggestion on April 15 served to dispel the impression that Britain's silence at Stresa constituted a wink and a nod to Italy's Abyssinian ambitions.

Sir John Simon returned from Geneva generally pleased with his week's work. A united front had been established at Stresa, and the Geneva session had been managed so as to blunt the anti-German tone which the French would have taken, and to put Stresa "into a framework of the League."⁷⁵ The

⁷³Baron Aloisi considered Simon's move to be 'underhanded', and Mussolini later described it as indicative of the British 'inclination to block off every just demand of Italy's for satisfaction.' Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 134. Despite the open Italian indignation, Simon told William Crozier, editor of the Manchester Guardian, that he felt that he had done the right thing at Geneva. W. P. Crozier, Off the Record, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (London: Hutchison, 1973), p. 39.

⁷⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, May 1935, p. 549.

⁷⁵Simon to J. I. Garvin April 18, 1935, Simon Papers, Mixed Bag 1925-1935. The extraordinary session at Geneva, arranged to put Stresa "into a framework of the League," points up the occasional utility of the League, which lent to the British unwillingness to see the structure collapse. By arranging for the League's blessing, the government could silence domestic criticism that Stresa smacked of a return to alliance diplomacy. Viscount Cecil to Stanley Baldwin, March 29, 1935, Cecil Papers, Add. 51080. More importantly, the government hoped that by putting the Stresa agreement into a League context they could dilute the impression that Germany was being isolated in Europe, and leave the door open for fresh negotiations. Cab 23/81 21(35)5.

1954

1955

1956

1957

1958

1959

1960

1961

1962

1963

1964

1965

1966

1967

1968

1969

1970

1971

1972

1973

1974

1975

1976

1977

1978

1979

1980

Stresa front was flawed, however, by Italy's African intentions and Britain's conflicting commitment to the League. Mussolini's dream of an enlarged east African empire was beginning to drive a wedge between the two traditional allies.

VI

According to Simon's account, the Abyssinian problem was "hardly on the international horizon" in May of 1935.⁷⁶ Simon would have been much more accurate if he had written that the Abyssinian problem was hardly on the visible horizon in London in May of 1935. By May the problem was five months old, and Italy's intentions were abundantly clear. The British approach continued to rest on the hope that if undue fuss could be avoided, the problem would somehow resolve itself. The cabinet was content to leave the matter to Simon, and Simon was considerate enough not to trouble either the government or Parliament with it. On May 2 the House of Commons was still able to discuss foreign affairs generally without considering Abyssinia.⁷⁷ Even within the Foreign Office, the problem was a current concern only of a handful of experts in the Egyptian department, except when Eden or Mussolini forced the issue.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Simon, Retrospect, p. 204.

⁷⁷301 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 569-688. Significantly, this debate did focus on the central place which the League of Nations occupied in British foreign policy.

⁷⁸Sir Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain (London: Constable, 1950), p. 112.

1

09
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

As the May session of the League Council approached, with the British attitude still in doubt, Mussolini found it necessary to force the issue once again. On May 3 Grandi gave Simon a message from Rome which depicted the situation in Abyssinia as a cancer which had to be cut out.⁷⁹ Grandi removed any doubt which may have remained that Italy was contemplating war, and solicited a friendly attitude on the part of Britain. In the course of the conversation, Grandi spoke of the Italian desire to unite Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, and thus gave Simon the first indication of Italy's specific ambitions. Simon returned what Eden has aptly termed a weak reply. He spoke of the bad effect which Italian action in Africa would have on British public opinion and on the Stresa front, and he appealed to the traditional bonds of Anglo-Italian friendship. Until the government was faced with the problem and compelled to settle on a position, Simon could do no more than speak of general dangers, in the tones of an anxious friend. This type of warning, Simon was forced to confess, seemed to have little calming effect on Rome.⁸⁰

The League Council was scheduled to meet on May 20, and the Abyssinian question was definitely on the agenda. In a speech to the Italian senate on May 14, Mussolini sought to

⁷⁹Simon's May 3 conversation with Grandi is drawn from Cab 24/255 C.P.98(35), and Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 202-03.

⁸⁰Cab 24/255 C.P.98(35).

deflate Abyssinian expectations by noting that there had been no Anglo-French démarche against Italy's impending action in Africa.⁸¹ The impression conveyed by Mussolini's speech was that Britain and France would do nothing to prevent the rape of a member of the League. At this, even Stanley Baldwin took alarm.⁸² Baldwin's alarm was a signpost, since his interest and concern usually extended no further than Britain's shores.

Under the pressure of the impending League Council meeting, the cabinet discussed the Abyssinian problem on May 15. Simon outlined the problem in a memorandum which characteristically proposed no solution. He had to admit that his approach of urging upon Italy and Abyssinia the importance of arriving at a detente had been "unhappily without good result."⁸³ The situation had developed to the point where there were "the clearest indications from the Italian Government that they contemplate military operations on an extended scale against Abyssinia as soon as climatic conditions permit and Italian preparations are complete."⁸⁴

⁸¹W. N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy since Versailles, 1919-1963 2d. ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1968) p. 143.

⁸²Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 832.

⁸³Cab 24/255 C.P.98(35).

⁸⁴Ibid.

As a result, Simon noted, the government faced an extremely difficult decision:

If they support against Italy a practical application of League principles, their action is bound greatly to compromise Anglo-Italian relations and perhaps even to break the close association at present existing between France, Italy and the United Kingdom. Indeed, Italy's reaction, in Signor Mussolini's present mood, is incalculable; the possibility of Italy retorting by leaving the League must not be overlooked. In any event, the European situation would be most seriously affected, and it would, in fact, be hard to imagine a state of affairs which would be more welcome to Germany.

On the other hand, if the United Kingdom acquiesce in what would be a misuse of the League machinery by acting in a manner acceptable to Italy, but certainly unjust towards Ethiopia, His Majesty's Government will undoubtedly lay themselves open to grave public criticism. Apart from the possibility indicated above, the League itself seems bound to lose, whatever happens; if it opposes Italian policy, it will be flouted by Italy, which has before it the example of Japan; if, however, the Ethiopian appeal is once again postponed on some unconvincing excuse for a period of months, while Italian military preparations are matured, further proof of the League's inability to afford justice to a small country will be provided.⁸⁵

Simon's memorandum finally brought the cabinet up against the situation which they faced. Italy seemed bent on war in Africa at the end of the rainy season in autumn, and had ignored all British warnings of the pitfalls involved. Mussolini was in a dangerous mood, and would certainly view any British opposition as unfriendly. The

⁸⁵Ibid. There is no indication in this memorandum that British thinking was motivated by imperial concerns.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

French were much attached to their new Italian friends, and to the Stresa grouping. Any approach which split Britain and Italy was certain to impose a strain on Anglo-French relations. The Germans would smile to see the Stresa front dissolve, and the likelihood of another German move to achieve Anschluss would increase if Italy's strength were tied up by a long war in Africa.

Since France was reluctant to act forthrightly, it would fall to Britain to provide a lead in charting a League course in the face of outright Italian aggression. To do so was certain to cost Italian friendship and strength in Europe. To fail to do so, with the memory of Manchuria fresh, would raise a great outcry in Britain. By May the much-publicized Peace Ballot was being concluded, and there could be little doubt of the political dangers of abandoning the League in an election year.⁸⁶ Beyond that, the League still figured as a practical matter in government thinking as the appropriate framework for pacts of regional security, as the forum into which to draw Germany once again in the interest of European cooperation, as the necessary cover for the rearmament program, and as the only cause for which the

⁸⁶The evolution of the Peace Ballot is traced in Dame Adelaide Livingstone, The Peace Ballot: The Official History (London: Victor Gallancz, 1935).

1951

1952

1953

1954

1955

1956

1957

1958

1959

1960

1961

1962

1963

1964

1965

1966

1967

1968

1969

1970

1971

1972

1973

1974

1975

1976

1977

1978

1979

1980

British people would undertake Continental responsibilities.⁸⁷

It would not do to stand idly by while the League of Nations collapsed.

The cabinet was no more anxious than Simon to choose between unattractive alternatives. But the pending League Council discussion made some sort of decision imperative. An Italian offensive in Abyssinia was evidently set for the fall. If Italy was permitted to continue to prevent League consideration of the problem by transparent delaying tactics, war would develop before the League could take up Abyssinia's months-old request that Article 15 be invoked, and League advocates would raise a din. In addition, the opportunity to organize international pressure in the interest of conciliation might be lost before it became necessary to consider collective coercion. There was general agreement in the cabinet that British concern for the League should be made known at Geneva. The months between the May and September meetings of the League could not be wasted if some solution short of war, and the prospect of imposing sanctions on a friend, was to be found.

With only these stars to guide him, Eden was "given

⁸⁷In a conversation at the end of April, Vansittart had explained to Grandi the attachment which the British people had for the League, and the fact that it was the only instrument for which they would accept military obligations on the Continent. Could Italy not see how necessary it was to settle the matter by arbitration without involving the League? Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, pp. 136-37.

wide discretion on the handling of the crisis at Geneva."⁸⁸ This proved to be the least thoughtful way to put an end to the drifting which had been taking place in London and Geneva. Before giving Eden his head to go off to Geneva, and to force the problem into a League timetable of his own devising, the cabinet would have done well to consider the young man's known enthusiasm for League procedures, and to keep him on a tighter leash. The time to consider whether the League could survive a direct confrontation with Italy, and what such a confrontation would require of Britain, should have been before Eden departed for Geneva, bound only by his principles, to begin to furnish the British lead in applying League pressure on Italy.

At Geneva, Eden closeted himself on the evening of May 19 with the Italian representative, Baron Aloisi, and succeeded in convincing him of Britain's determination to see the problem solved through the League.⁸⁹ Aloisi passed along word of Eden's stance to Mussolini, who answered through Sir Eric Drummond, the British ambassador in Rome, with an open threat to resort to war in Africa if necessary 'to clarify the situation and to obtain security.'⁹⁰ Mussolini

⁸⁸ Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 205.

⁸⁹ Eden to Simon, May 21, 1935, copy in the Baldwin Papers, Vol. 123, Cambridge University Library.

⁹⁰ Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 209-10.

dismissed Drummond's concern over the effect on the League by arguing that all of this should have been pressed months earlier. He now had too much invested to withdraw. Eden bristled at this response, telegraphed his indignation to London, and persuaded Laval, for the moment, that his first concerns should be for the League and for French relations with Britain. Between them, Eden recorded, he and Laval agreed that they could no longer wait upon events, but must force the pace at Geneva.⁹¹

At the instigation of Eden and Laval, the French delegation drew up a draft resolution bearing upon the arbitration procedure for League Council consideration. The resolution as finally hammered out reflected the Abyssinian desire to see arbitration embrace all of the incidents which had occurred since November 23, rather than just the WalWal clash. The resolution also expressed a desire for an undertaking by both parties not to resort to war, and, most significantly, set a timetable for the arbitration proceedings, after which the League Council would consider the matter.⁹² Eden and Laval convinced Aloisi to forward the text to Mussolini, and Eden rejected an Italian counter-proposal which sought to limit the arbitration to WalWal and

⁹¹Ibid., p. 211.

⁹²Ibid.

which contained no assurances as to force.⁹³ Mussolini grumbled, but finally accepted the terms as the price necessary to buy additional time.

On May 25, the League Council took formal note once again of the agreement of Italy and Abyssinia to seek a peaceful solution of their quarrel under Article 5 of the Treaty of 1928. The Council observed that efforts to settle the dispute through diplomatic channels had been exhausted, and provided that if no agreement on the fifth arbitrator had been reached by July 25, and if no settlement had been reached by August 25, the Council would meet again to consider the problem.⁹⁴ Eden recorded, with real satisfaction, that this was "as good as we had a right to ask and better than the world had expected."⁹⁵

Eden's success at Geneva was taken to mean that the old British lion could still rouse itself in the interests of justice. League enthusiasts applauded Eden's stand on behalf of Abyssinia and the Covenant.⁹⁶ More significant was the applause of Neville Chamberlain, who was beginning to take offense at the arrogant Italian manner.⁹⁷ While Eden was in

⁹³Ibid., p. 212.

⁹⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, June 1935, p. 640.

⁹⁵Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 213.

⁹⁶Eden to Cecil, May 29, 1935, Cecil Papers, Add. 51083.

⁹⁷Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1970, first published in 1946), p. 265.

Geneva, tying the League's fortunes to the Abyssinian problem, Baldwin had reinforced the importance of the League in domestic politics by speaking of rearmament as "more than a question of national defence." It was, he said, "a question of the ability of this country to fulfil its obligations under the Covenant."⁹⁸ By the end of May, the uncomfortable likelihood was developing that Britain's oft-cited obligations under the Covenant would soon be put to the test.

Mussolini flatly told the Italian Chamber of Deputies on May 25 that no one should harbor unnecessary illusions about the proceedings being recorded at Geneva that day. Abyssinia was a problem on which his mind had been working since 1925, and with the soldiers of the motherland in a position to take whatever military measures were necessary, the outcome was calmly and clearly foreseen.⁹⁹ Simon recorded in his diary on May 27 that "we have warned Italy in plain terms that if it comes to a choice between Italy and the League we shall support the League."¹⁰⁰ On the evidence of Simon's handling of the problem from December through May, it is hard to see that much that merits the description "plain terms" passed from London to Rome. Italy did not get a clear indication of the British response to Italian

⁹⁸May 22, 1935, 302 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 365.

⁹⁹Heald (ed.), Documents on International Affairs, 1935, II, 25.

¹⁰⁰Simon Papers, Diary 11,

2011
2012
2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
2026
2027
2028
2029
2030
2031
2032
2033
2034
2035
2036
2037
2038
2039
2040
2041
2042
2043
2044
2045
2046
2047
2048
2049
2050
2051
2052
2053
2054
2055
2056
2057
2058
2059
2060
2061
2062
2063
2064
2065
2066
2067
2068
2069
2070
2071
2072
2073
2074
2075
2076
2077
2078
2079
2080
2081
2082
2083
2084
2085
2086
2087
2088
2089
2090
2091
2092
2093
2094
2095
2096
2097
2098
2099
2100

ambitions until the middle of April, by which time Mussolini's investment in east Africa was such that he would give no thought to turning back.

If Britain had any genuine opportunities to influence the course of the Abyssinian crisis, and to stave off the final debacle, they fell to Sir John Simon during the first three months of 1935. Even these may not have been good opportunities. The student of British policy during the Abyssinian crisis must bear in mind that, as in the situation faced by Sir Edward Grey in July of 1914, any position taken by Britain in 1935 may have failed to prevent a confrontation. Mussolini saw a great chance for an uplifting military adventure. Haile Selassie seemed little inclined to deal for a half-loaf and would have been hard pressed to sell a major territorial concession to his semi-independent rases. Nonetheless, Simon was at fault for failing to press the problem on his colleagues at a time when a firm British position might still have made a difference. And the cabinet was at fault for complacently abandoning what was obviously a major and growing problem to Sir John. No one who knew him could have imagined that Simon was, or wanted to be, a Palmerston.

For six months the matter drifted while the government paid scant attention to the implications of a confrontation between Italy and the League. Both Italy and the League figured in the British program for security. The government was loath to consider losing either. British statesmen had

1

never been fond of the coercive provisions of the Covenant, but, partly because it was popular, government spokesmen continued to speak broadly of upholding the Covenant, without differentiating among the obligations assumed. Of the leading figures of the government, only Anthony Eden was a genuine League enthusiast. The cabinet gave him such wide discretion, however, that by the time that Simon handed over gratefully to Sir Samuel Hoare in June, the Abyssinian problem had been forced squarely into a League context and the impression had been created that with a firm hand Mussolini could be managed in such a context. Hoare had to deal with a pot threatening to bubble over, with few remaining ways to turn down the heat.

CHAPTER II
DUAL POLICY BOX

On June 7, 1935 Stanley Baldwin shuffled the personnel of the National government and formed his third, and final government. An effect of the reorganization was to invigorate the British handling of the Abyssinian problem. Sir Samuel Hoare became the new Foreign Secretary and took up the burden of the Abyssinian crisis. Although he brought little knowledge and no direct experience to the management of foreign affairs, he was expected to protect conflicting British interests in the matter. In spite of his inexperience, Hoare leaned on the best advice he could muster and converted Simon's tendency to drift with events into an active dual policy of attempting to conciliate Italy while upholding the authority of the League.¹ There was little that was new in Hoare's dual policy, beyond a determination to see it succeed. But there was little that was new in the character of the revised government, and scant inclination to scrap and start fresh. Although the National government had been plagued

¹Evidence of the new spirit which Hoare brought to the Foreign Office is to be found in the note which Baldwin passed to Ramsay MacDonald during the cabinet meeting of June 26. Baldwin wrote: "It is very refreshing to hear 'I strongly advise-' from the F. O.!" MacDonald agreed. Templewood Papers, General Political Box VIII, file 1.

1

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

from the first with problems of foreign policy, Baldwin embarked upon the reconstitution of the government in response to political pressures only generally related to foreign affairs. Removing Sir John Simon from the Foreign Office was considered enough of a nod to critics of British foreign policy.

Baldwin became Prime Minister in an effort to revitalize the government's image in anticipation of the impending general election. Ramsay MacDonald had been an ineffectual leader for some time. By 1935, he was the object of ridicule on one side of the House of Commons, and of scorn on the other. The heavily Conservative backbenches had become increasingly restless. To stave off the threat of a backbench revolt of the type he had once led, Baldwin gave up his comfortable position as the power behind the throne and exchanged places with MacDonald.²

Baldwin's reorganization served to put a more logical face on the National government and to open a number of places to the restless young men among the government's supporters.³ But the most important posts within the

²Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 803-04.

³Among the younger Conservatives, places in the cabinet went to Anthony Eden as Minister without Portfolio for League of Nations Affairs, and Lord Eustace Percy, as Minister without Portfolio. Alfred Duff Cooper would join the government as Secretary for War in November. Ramsay MacDonald's very able son Malcolm entered the cabinet as Colonial Secretary to offset the loss of Viscount Sankey to the ranks of National Labour within the government. And Ernest Brown added a new National Liberal member to the government as Minister of Labour.

government remained in familiar hands. Neville Chamberlain elected to remain at the Exchequer, and he and Baldwin continued to provide the leadership for the Conservative element within the coalition. The leaders of the other political factions making up the National facade also remained the same. Ramsay MacDonald stayed in the government as Lord President of the Council, and Sir John Simon moved from the Foreign Office to the more congenial position of Home Secretary.

Baldwin had only two significant trouble spots to deal with in forming his third government. The Air Ministry and the Foreign Office both seemed to require more decisive leadership.⁴ Baldwin handled the problem at the service ministry by elevating Lord Londonderry to the leadership of the House of Lords as Lord Privy Seal and moving Sir Phillip Cunliffe-Lister in as Secretary for Air. His handling of the problem at the Foreign Office was not so adroit.

Sir Samuel Hoare succeeded Simon as Foreign Secretary, a dubious reward for four strenuous and successful years of work at the India Office. Hoare's appointment disappointed Anthony Eden, one of the bright young men whom Baldwin was concerned to placate. Despite Eden's relative youth, his ability and political appeal were such that Baldwin gave serious thought to promoting him into Simon's place, until

⁴Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, pp. 804-05.

Neville Chamberlain and Geoffrey Dawson convinced Baldwin that Hoare had a better claim.⁵ Ever the sensitive party manager, Baldwin soothed Eden and his supporters by creating for him the position of Minister without Portfolio for League of Nations Affairs and endowing it with cabinet rank.⁶ Thus Eden entered the cabinet at the age of thirty-seven and was given broad, undefined responsibilities drawn from another's portfolio.

Winston Churchill condemned the awkward situation created by Baldwin at the Foreign Office as tending further to confuse the state of foreign affairs by creating dual allegiances and dual responsibilities.⁷ Baldwin's handling of the Foreign Office at a very difficult juncture in British foreign affairs merited criticism, but in practice the relationship between the two cabinet ministers in the Foreign Office worked out better than might reasonably have

⁵The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 217.

⁶Eden was reluctant to stay on at the Foreign Office in any capacity other than Foreign Secretary, but was convinced by Hoare's hint that the unsatisfactory arrangement created by Baldwin might be only temporary. Ibid., pp. 216-18.

⁷Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. I, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 137.

been expected.⁸ Eden's familiarity with the Foreign Office gave him a clear appreciation of the disruption which could be wrought in the carefully layered structure by competition for authority at the top. Consequently, he made no effort to challenge Hoare's authority within the Foreign Office. For his part, Hoare was receptive to Eden's knowledge and his enthusiasm and allowed him considerable latitude to manage affairs at Geneva. Throughout Hoare's brief tenure at the Foreign Office, he and Eden enjoyed a generally good working relationship.

II

Even though the competition between Eden and Hoare which might have developed within the Foreign Office did not materialize, it must still be said that Sir Samuel Hoare took up his new office in the face of conditions which could scarcely have been less promising. He came to his post thoroughly exhausted from his long labors on the India Bill.

⁸Baldwin's creation of a second cabinet minister charged with responsibility for foreign affairs may have struck those concerned with the logical management of foreign policy as unsound, but it answered a political need by satisfying the desire of the increasingly evident and vocal supporters of the League of Nations to see Eden in the cabinet, connected with the League. Viscount Cecil to Stanley Baldwin, June 6, 1935, Cecil Papers, British Museum, Add. 51080. Nothing could have been better calculated to appeal to the thousands of people just completing their work on the Peace Ballot than Baldwin's upgrading of both Eden and the affairs of the League of Nations.

His absorption with the concerns of the sub-continent had been such that he had lost touch with the intricacies of foreign policy.⁹ He brought to his new responsibilities nine years of cabinet-level experience and a reputation as a skillful conciliator.¹⁰ But he stepped into the middle of a mounting crisis and had little opportunity to grow into his position, or to build upon his experience and ability.¹¹

The Abyssinian crisis, which would soon be identified as Hoare's great failure, passed fully matured into his hands. The possibility of finding a reasonable compromise, acceptable to all of the parties involved, had virtually disappeared by June of 1935. Mussolini had staked his prestige on a great success in east Africa, and the League was directly involved in what was clearly becoming the ultimate test of whether the Geneva system of collective security could function to protect a member from aggression. Hoare did not bring anything new to bear on this quandry. Even if he had come to the Foreign Office with some notion of how to improve British policy, it would have been hard

⁹Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 108-09.

¹⁰Hoare had been Secretary for Air in the first two Baldwin governments, entering the cabinet in 1923 when the position was upgraded. When the National Government was formed in 1931, Hoare went to the India Office, and remained there as Secretary until he replaced Simon in 1935.

¹¹In Hoare's words, he entered upon "a field that had already been trodden flat by marching and counter-marching." Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 149.

to move away from either of the paths marked out during the first six months of the quarrel between Italy and Abyssinia.

One of the first things impressed upon Hoare by his staff at the Foreign Office was that British policy in general had to take account of the state of Britain's armament, as well as the threat posed to British interests by Germany and Japan.¹² It made little sense to invite the enmity of Italy in such circumstances. Yet Britain had already begun to live up to its oft-cited commitments to the League of Nations, and was providing in the person of Eden the leadership which was necessary at Geneva if the League was to survive its confrontation with Mussolini. It would have required considerable political courage to reverse that beginning just as the "Peace Ballot" was recording broad, popular support for British participation in the League.¹³ Public opinion counted for much on the eve of a general election. Hoare was expected to keep that opinion well in mind, while somehow preserving Italian friendship. The dual approach which had evolved under Simon had much to recommend it to British policy-makers, despite its inherent contradiction.

¹²Ibid., pp. 152-53.

¹³The National Declaration Committee recorded 11,559,165 ballots cast in the "Peace Ballot" exercise by the end of the count in June. Dame Adelaide Livingstone and Marjorie Scott Johnston, The Peace Ballot (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), supplementary sheet included to update the figures given on p. 34.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

Each aspect of Simon's approach to the Abyssinian problem came to Hoare with its respective champion within the Foreign Office. Eden stood for the honor of the League. Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under Secretary, was ready at any time to sacrifice Abyssinia in the interest of an independent Austria.¹⁴ Both men exercised a strong and steady influence on Hoare. Each brought to bear on the new Foreign Secretary a powerful personality, thorough knowledge, and deep conviction.¹⁵ Between them, they gave Hoare his initial understanding of the principal problem which he faced. According to Hoare's memoirs, he devoted the first few days in his new office to "long discussions with Vansittart and Eden as to what, if anything, we could do."¹⁶ Vansittart was certain that whatever could be done with the Abyssinian problem had to be done with the German menace in mind. Because Eden and his new Parliamentary Private Secretary,

¹⁴Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 522.

¹⁵The effort required to master a Foreign Office containing two such powerful and independent personalities must be counted as one of the burdens which Hoare had to bear, despite the efforts made by both Eden and Vansittart to support the Foreign Secretary. Eden's strength within the Foreign Office was such that, as Leo Amery has noted, even before he was promoted into the cabinet, he had almost displaced Simon in function and influence. Leopold S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol. III, The Unforgiving Years, 1929-1940 (London: Hutchinson, 1955), 154. Vansittart has been aptly described by Eden as "much more a Secretary of State in mentality than a permanent official." Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 242.

¹⁶Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 152.

Lord Cranborne, were so straightforward in their conviction that Britain must uphold the Covenant against the Italian threat, Vansittart found it necessary to keep before Hoare the danger of losing Italian strength as a check on Germany.¹⁷ For Vansittart, it was a case of priorities. While his assertion that he "had full sympathy for the League" must be taken carefully, there is nothing to suggest that Vansittart was anxious to see the League collapse.¹⁸ He was hard-headed enough to realize, however, that many people in Britain seriously over-valued the League as a guarantor of universal peace, and he "could never see the League's components tackling an aggressor of weight."¹⁹ Consequently, the League had little if any place in Vansittart's program to contain Germany, while Italy, on the other hand, bulked very large. Italy, as Vansittart saw it, could be handled so as to keep the Anglo-Italian friendship intact if only Britain had a statesman who could impress Mussolini.²⁰ If Hitler had failed

¹⁷As Vansittart saw it, the real crux of the difference between himself and the "Leaguers" was that they "were anti-Italian while I was anti-German." Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 522. It is much safer to say that the "Leaguers" were, at least initially, much more pro-League than anti-Italian. Vansittart was solidly anti-German though, and had been since Hitler became Chancellor. On July 7, 1933, he drew up a memorandum for Sir John Simon in which he laid out his misgivings about Germany. Ian Colvin, None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 26.

¹⁸Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 522.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 502.



to impress Mussolini, it was altogether unlikely that the rather undynamic Sir Samuel Hoare would do so. Vansittart no doubt saw great possibilities, however, in a Foreign Secretary who was so willing to accept his advice.²¹

Until the end of August Hoare had to manage his new problems with no more than the advice he received in the Foreign Office, or solicited from confidantes in the cabinet. For as long as was possible, the cabinet preferred to leave the Abyssinian problem to the Foreign Office. This was particularly true during the month of August, when the rest of the cabinet scattered during Parliament's summer holiday, leaving Hoare behind in London.

The tendency to leave what was obviously a complex, important, and pressing concern to a new and inexperienced Foreign Secretary reflected Baldwin's style of leadership. As Conservative leader, Baldwin reassumed the position of Prime Minister with an authority which MacDonald had not known since 1931. He made only limited use of that authority during the Abyssinian crisis, however. It was his settled habit to leave matters of foreign policy to his Foreign Secretary, and he saw no reason to alter that habit in 1935.²²

²¹Ibid., p. 522.

²²Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 839.

His only significant contribution to the management of the Abyssinian crisis was to establish the general limits within which Hoare had to operate.

The one requirement which Baldwin laid on Hoare's handling of the problem with Italy was that he manage the affair so as to keep Britain out of war.²³ Baldwin's injunction grew from his conviction that the country was not ready for war, as well as from his personal horror of war. He saw war as a 'most fearful terror,' and he was convinced that 'the bomber will always get through.'²⁴ Baldwin's abhorrence of war formed the basis for much of his participation in the National government but did not convince him that Britain should qualify its commitments under the Covenant.

The Manchurian crisis gave Baldwin a grasp of the hard fact that the British fleet would have to carry the burden of enforcing economic sanctions against an aggressor of weight.²⁵ From this he drew the conclusion that sanctions carried the serious threat of war, as well as the possibility of misunderstanding with the great and sensitive naval power across the

²³On January 7, 1936, just after Hoare had stepped down in disgrace, Baldwin told his close friend, Thomas Jones, that he had repeatedly instructed Hoare to 'keep us out of war, we are not ready for it.' Thomas Jones, A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950 (London: Oxford University Press, 1969, first published in 1954), p. 159.

²⁴Quoted in F. S. Northedge, The Troubled Giant. Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-1950 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 385.

²⁵Where, as in the Far East, the fleet was no longer a dominating factor, Baldwin was convinced that all thought of sanctions was a mistake, Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 30.

Atlantic. He expressed his view of sanctions in May of 1934 when he noted that "there is no such thing as a sanction that will work that does not mean war...."²⁶ In November of the same year he added that 'never so long as I have any responsibility in governing this country will I sanction the British Navy being used for an armed blockade of any country in the world until I know what the United States of America is going to do.'²⁷

In spite of his misgivings about sanctions, Baldwin gave steady public support to the League's position throughout the crisis and contributed much to the impression that Britain would play a firm role at Geneva despite the risks involved. When he was presented on July 23 with the results of the Peace Ballot by a delegation of the National Declaration Committee, Baldwin responded by referring to the League as the 'sheet-anchor of British policy.'²⁸ Of course, the Peace Ballot, and the subsequent general election stimulated statements of loyalty to the League from virtually all political quarters. Baldwin however, as recent biographers

²⁶H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 2139.

²⁷Quoted in A. W. Baldwin, My Father: The True Story (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), p. 207.

²⁸Lest there be any question of what he meant by the term, Baldwin also noted in his reply that 'the foreign policy of the Government is founded upon the League of Nations,' and he spoke of the efforts which the government was making 'to maintain the authority of the League of Nations.' Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, Vol. II: Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 52-53.

have pointed out, was "an old and genuine supporter of the League."²⁹ He had his doubts about the League's ability to function as had been intended, but he believed that the League served an invaluable function in encouraging statesmen to meet and to know each others' minds.³⁰ And beyond the practical functions of the League, he seems to have participated to at least a modest degree in the vision of the League of Nations as an integral part of a better world.

Baldwin's political genius lay in the extent to which he sensed and shared the prejudices and the aspirations of the British people. In common with them, he would not lightly dismiss an idea which held out the hope of controlling the scourge of war. When he spoke with feeling of the League as a shield for his beloved English countryside, the words may have been written by his friend, Thomas Jones, but the sentiment was his.³¹ The difference between Baldwin and Eden, in this respect, lay in the difference between the desire and the determination to see the League succeed. Both sentiments contributed to British pledges of support for the Covenant which completed the box within which Hoare had to work.

²⁹Middlemas and Barnes, Baldwin, p. 837.

³⁰Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 93; The Times, November 10, 1928. Baldwin, however, never attended a League session himself.

³¹A copy of Baldwin's speech to the Peace Society at the Guildhall on October 31, 1935 can be found at FO 371/18851, C7474/55/18.

III

Baldwin was scarcely alone in pressing the new Foreign Secretary to chart a course which would stop short of war. Vansittart steadily emphasized the uncertain character of Britain's defenses.³² The Dominion High Commissioners gave Hoare the impression that the Dominions would not go to war for the sake of Abyssinia.³³ And King George pleaded to be spared the ordeal of another war.³⁴ There was a note of pressing anxiety in these expressions of concern which Hoare quickly absorbed. He became convinced during his first few days at the Foreign Office that it was essential "to find a card of re-entry at a hand that was almost lost."³⁵ The best hope of salvaging what was possible of Abyssinia's independence and the League's honor seemed to be to try to convince Mussolini to accept a reasonable return on his investment in east Africa. Accordingly Eden set out for Rome on June 23 to see if Italy could be coaxed into a settlement.

³² Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 152-53. Vansittart kept up this refrain throughout the crisis. On September 30, on the eve of the Italian drive into Abyssinia, for example, he warned Hoare that 'We are in no condition for any adventures.' Quoted in Ian Colvin, None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 71.

³³ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 159.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 155.

Eden's visit to Rome on 24-25 June in search of a compromise solution was the first British attempt to mediate directly in the Abyssinian dispute since Simon's initial effort at Geneva in January. According to Hoare's memoirs, the notion of approaching Mussolini directly with what was hoped would be an attractive offer originated and took shape in the discussions which he, Vansittart and Eden had at the home of Philip Sasson at Trent during the week-end of 15-16 June.³⁶ On June 19 the proposal was sprung on the cabinet, who were "somewhat taken aback by the suddenness of the move," but lent their full approval.³⁷

The common understanding underlying Eden's mission to Rome was that Italy had legitimate interests to protect, and justifiable grievances to be met in the Abyssinian affair. Indeed, Hoare explained the mission to the House of Commons several days after it failed by stating categorically that "We admit the need for Italian expansion. We admit again the justice of some of the criticisms that have been made against

³⁶ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 155. Eden did not discuss the evolution of the offer in his account, beyond noting that he was not enthused about it, "still, less so when it was suggested that I should be its sponsor in Rome." Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 221. Eden's reservations may have developed after the fact out of his difficulty in fitting the leading role which he played in this effort to appease Mussolini into his account of his adventures in "facing the dictators." Nonetheless, considering his role throughout the Abyssinian crisis, it is not difficult to believe that he was less-than wholehearted in his enthusiasm for a solution which would have rewarded Mussolini.

³⁷ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 155.

the Abyssinian Government.³⁸ The mission also rested on the fact that Britain's interests in the matter related much more to Europe and to the League of Nations than to Africa.³⁹

Britain had considerable interests in east Africa and the Indian Ocean, but it was not felt that Italian expansion into Abyssinia would do much to prejudice those interests. This conclusion was argued compellingly by the Maffey Commission which finally completed its task of defining British interests in Abyssinia on June 18.⁴⁰ An independent Abyssinia was rated by the Commission as preferable to an Italian Abyssinia, but so long as British interests in Lake Tana were secured, or at least recognized, there was no reason to be particularly concerned about the prospect of an

³⁸Hoare could not see, however, that the situation need lead to war. "We have surely found in the past that it is possible to adjust demands and differences of this kind without recourse to war, and I am not prepared even now to abandon any chance that may present itself for averting what I believe will be a calamity...." July 11, 1935. 304 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 519.

³⁹In order to make certain that Mussolini was not absorbing his own propaganda, Eden opened his conversations in Rome by explaining that "our reasons were neither egoist nor African, but European. His Majesty's Government were irrevocably committed to the League, upon which their foreign policy was founded. They could not therefore remain indifferent to events which might profoundly affect the League's future." Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 222. In virtually the same words, Eden explained his mission to the House of Commons on July 1. 303 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 1521. Even making allowance for Eden's personal enthusiasm for the League, there was a large kernel of truth in this rendering of British interests in the Abyssinian affair. Mussolini may well have made the mistake of judging Britain's commitment to the League in the light of his own convictions.

⁴⁰Cab 24/256 C.P.161(35).

Italian flag flying over Addis Ababa. The Italians were not, after all, a new and unknown factor in east Africa. Eritrea and Italian Somaliland were well-established Italian colonies. There was a certain danger that Mussolini's grandiose vision of a revived Roman empire would be enhanced by the absorption of the makings of a large native army, and concern was expressed by at least two members of the cabinet over what they saw as the challenge posed by Italy to the British Empire.⁴¹ It is understandably tempting to ascribe the

⁴¹Ramsay MacDonald suggested at one point that Italy was becoming Britain's great imperial rival and might well prove stronger than Britain in the future. J. Ramsay MacDonald to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 13, 1935, FO 800/295. MacDonald's suggestion should probably be taken as a passing tribute to Italian propaganda. William Ormsby-Gore's letter to Baldwin of September 8 is more important in that it reflects not only a tendency to frame the problem in terms of imperial competition, which was unusual among cabinet members, but also because it reflects the disinclination to let Mussolini ignore Britain and "get away with it" which grew among members of the government as the crisis progressed. The letter is worth quoting in full:

"I am afraid I cannot contemplate with equanimity letting Mussolini get away with it and conquering and annexing Abyssinia in the teeth of our clearly expressed wishes - and I believe ultimate interests in Africa. The blow to our national prestige throughout the coloured world will be really serious. Mussolini openly says we are either too weak or too craven and cowardly to resist him, that he is the coming Imperial power and we the declining. Quite apart from the crash of the League of Nations I am convinced that sooner or later we shall have to meet the Italian challenge to our prestige, power and interests by force or go under in Africa and the Mediterranean." Baldwin Papers, Vol. 123.

Ormsby-Gore's reading of the situation was balanced by the approach taken by such other accepted champions of the empire as Winston Churchill and Leo Amery, who were convinced that the empire would be best served by staying right with Italy.

opposition of a largely Conservative government to Italian aggression in Abyssinia to such concern for empire.⁴² The burden of evidence suggests, however, that concern for Europe and for the League far outweighed imperial considerations. Indeed, from a strictly imperial point of view, there was much that argued against opposing Italy's Abyssinian ambitions. An unnecessary quarrel with Italy posed a threat to imperial lines of communication, as well as raising the specter of complications with the Dominions in the event of an unpopular war.⁴³ Perhaps the most compelling evidence that the government gave only secondary consideration during the crisis to British imperial interests in east Africa and the Indian Ocean is to be found in the offer which Eden took to Rome, involving, as it did, the sacrifice of a piece of British Somaliland for no tangible return.

On June 24 Eden met with Mussolini at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome to lay out the British proposal for a solution to the Abyssinian problem. The proposal proved to be a measure of the British misunderstanding of Mussolini's

⁴²The tendency to dismiss British concern for the League as a cynical cover for imperial motives is best illustrated in Henderson B. Braddick, "The Hoare-Laval Plan: A Study in International Politics," Review of Politics, XXIV (July, 1962), pp. 342-64.

⁴³On August 20, 1935 J. H. Thomas, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, addressed a letter to Hoare on problems which could develop with the Dominions should Britain be drawn into a war with Italy as the Chiefs of Staff were warning. Thomas' letter was considered important enough to be circulated as a Cabinet Paper. Cab 24/256 C.F.168.



ambitions. Eden proposed that Britain cede the bay of Zeila and a connecting corridor to Abyssinia, to satisfy Heile Selassie's long-standing desire for an outlet on the sea, in return for which Abyssinia would make substantial concessions to Italy, such as a portion of the Ogaden, certain economic concessions, and 'other advantages to be determined.'⁴⁴ He reinforced what he no doubt considered a fair and large-minded proposal by warning that the British people were deeply committed to the League, and that anything which Italy did to menace the League would be certain to disturb relations between Britain and Italy.⁴⁵

Eden had anticipated that Mussolini might press for somewhat better terms, but he was dismayed to discover that the Italian dictator refused to consider the British proposal as even a reasonable starting point for negotiations.⁴⁶ The Italians had been led by the British ambassador, Sir Eric Drummond, to believe that the proposed British solution

⁴⁴Mario Toscano, "Eden's Mission to Rome on the Eve of the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict," Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in honour of G. F. Gooch, C. H. (edited by A. O. Sarkissian, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), p. 135.

⁴⁵Avon, Facing the Dictators, n. 223.

⁴⁶Ibid. Eden had been warned by Geoffrey Thompson, the Foreign Office's Abyssinian expert, that Mussolini would never consider the offer, but Vansittert's Italian sources indicated that Italy was anxious for a deal, and Eden harbored real hope for the plan which Mussolini bluntly rejected. Geoffrey Thompson, Front Line Diplomat (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 103; Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 530.

would satisfy half of Italy's demands, and would create conditions which would further tend in Italy's favor.⁴⁷ On this favorable basis, Mussolini, who had been waiting since January for the British to define their interests, authorized Eden's visit. The suggestion that Italy should be satisfied with a stretch of desert and some economic privileges as a fair return on the huge investment involved in building up and maintaining an army in Eritrea confirmed the worst Italian suspicions created by the unauthorized publication of the plan in a Sunday newspaper in London on June 23.⁴⁸ The British proposal was totally unacceptable to Italy from several points of view.

Mussolini explained to Eden that he was opposed to making Abyssinia a maritime power, and he could not countenance concessions through the intermediary of a third power,

⁴⁷George W. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 193. Baer notes that Drummond committed in this instance the cardinal sin of painting an exaggerated picture of his government's intentions, thereby raising false hopes in Rome.

⁴⁸Both Eden and Hoare have expressed the opinion that this leaking of the plan to the press seriously prejudiced their chance of convincing Mussolini. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 221; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 155. It is evident, however, that the plan would have failed to approach Mussolini's expectations in any case. It is not known if Mussolini had seen a copy of the Maffey report, which was photographed by Italian intelligence in the British Embassy, by the time of Eden's visit. If he had, he must have been doubly determined not to allow the British to stand in his way on a matter which posed no real threat to British interests in east Africa. On the other hand, the Maffey Report should have reinforced Eden's argument that Britain's real interest related to the League. There is a good discussion of Sir Eric Drummond's negligence in handling sensitive materials at the Embassy in Rome in Colvin, None So Blind, pp. 58-59.

particularly in that the proposal would have the effect of making Britain the protector of Abyssinia. He went on to crush what he considered the amazing British proposal by outlining his minimal ambitions. Italy could be satisfied with no less than the surrender by Abyssinia of all of the territory conquered during the past fifty years which was not inhabited by Abyssinians, and Mussolini made a circular gesture to indicate that he considered that such territory existed on all sides of the Abyssinian state. The remaining central plateau could continue as a nominally independent entity, but it would have to come under Italian control.⁴⁹

Mussolini's rejection of the British proposal was so complete, and his alternative terms were so far divorced from those which Eden was authorized to discuss, that there was really little to be gained in prolonging the talks beyond the initial exchange on June 24. Nonetheless, Eden continued through the evening discussion on June 25 to try to convince Mussolini that Britain could do no less than follow a League course in the matter, and Mussolini just as stubbornly insisted that Italy was far too deeply committed to settle for anything less than what he had outlined, whatever the effect on Anglo-Italian relations or the League of Nations.⁵⁰ There were no angry exchanges in these discussions, as was

⁴⁹Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 222-23.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 223-28.

later imagined, but there was equally no meeting of minds.⁵¹ As the established champion of all that Mussolini was flouting, Eden was the worst possible choice of mediators.⁵² Hoare later noted that, as might have been anticipated, Mussolini and Eden "did not conceal the extent of the differences that separated them or the personal dislike that they felt for each other."⁵³ Each was deaf to the argument which was pressed so earnestly by the other. Baron Aloisi whispered in entirely the wrong ear when he suggested to Eden that the matter could be settled if Britain and France would join with Italy in condemning Abyssinia as an unfit member of the League.⁵⁴

A significant byproduct of the talks between Eden and Mussolini was the discovery that French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval was adept at telling his friends in London and Rome what they wanted to hear with scant concern for consistency. On January 7, 1935 Laval had arranged a colonial detente with Italy by secretly promising French disinterest

⁵¹Ibid., p. 224; Toscano, "Eden's Mission to Rome," pp. 135-38.

⁵²According to Vansittart, the fascists "mocked the champion of Geneva Utopia, and called him Paradiso." The Fascist Procession, p. 530.

⁵³Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 156.

⁵⁴Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, pp. 197-98.

in the pursuit of Italian ambitions in Abyssinia.⁵⁵ In a private conversation with Laval, Mussolini formed the firm impression that the French Foreign Minister had promised him a completely free hand in the management of the Abyssinian affair.⁵⁶ The British subsequently were given to understand, however, that Laval had promised no more than that France would smile upon the Italian pursuit of economic advantages in Abyssinia.⁵⁷ From Eden's account, it is clear that Mussolini was amazed at the British understanding of French intentions, and it is equally certain that, although he did not fling himself back in his chair with appropriate gestures, as Mussolini did, Eden was also startled to discover that Laval could convey such divergent impressions on a matter as critical as French intentions in the Abyssinian dispute.⁵⁸

The question of whether Laval did in fact wink at Mussolini's Abyssinian ambitions during their conversation

FOH 300: 57
SECRET
FOH 300: 57
⁵⁵In return for the relinquishment of Italian claims in Abyssinia, Laval agreed in an exchange of letters with Mussolini January 7 that French interests in Abyssinia would be limited to the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway, and that France would pose no obstacle to the settlement of outstanding differences between Italy and Abyssinia. William C. Askew, "The Secret Agreement between France and Italy on Ethiopia, January 1935," Journal of Modern History, XXV (1953), pp. 47-

⁵⁶Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 224.

⁵⁷Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 515.

⁵⁸Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 224.

1

on the night of January 6 is not as important as the fact that he clearly gave Mussolini one impression and the British another.⁵⁹ It is hard to imagine that he did not realize what he was doing. Laval was a man placed in an unhappy position between two necessary allies with his eye fixed on the German menace. His concern was to offend London and Rome as little as possible, and to avoid being caught in an exposed position between them. His nimbleness during the crisis saved Paris from having to choose between Britain and Italy, but it also prevented France from taking the stand which might have warned either the British or the Italians away from a collision course. The British mission left

⁵⁹What Laval and Mussolini said to each other in a quiet corner on the evening of January 6 is the subject of one of those minor controversies which will probably never be settled. Vansittart's indictment of Laval has been popular for its nice turn of phrase: "a wink is as good as a nod, and Laval had a drooping lid." In support of his implication, Vansittart noted that Alexis Léger, his opposite number in the Quai d'Orsay, was convinced that Laval had promised Mussolini a completely free hand. Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 515. Vansittart's judgment has been supported by William Askew's reading of an Italian foreign office document which he found among the captured Italian documents in the National Archives in Washington. Askew, "The Secret Agreement between France and Italy on Ethiopia, January 1935," pp. 47-48. D. C. Watt, on the other hand, examined materials from the captured German archives and concluded that Askew had misinterpreted the Italian narrative account. His conclusion is that Mussolini had not yet formulated his Abyssinian ambitions with any precision in January, and that it was unlikely that Laval was asked to acquiesce in the annexation of all or most of Abyssinia at that time. Rather, Watt notes, the question was probably "tacitly left in that grey and cloudy limbo where one assumes one has been understood for fear that direct enquiry may show that one has not." D. C. Watt, "The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia," The Middle East Journal, XV (1961), pp. 69-78.

Rome on June 26 with a new appreciation of Mussolini's ambitions and his determination, and with increased doubts about Iaval's willingness to oppose them.⁶⁰

Eden stopped in Paris on his way home, as he had on his way out. It was not, however, the moment to upbraid Iaval for his subtlety. The French were still deeply disturbed by the recent anglo-German naval agreement, which Eden had attempted to explain before moving on to Rome.⁶¹ In London, the German willingness voluntarily to limit naval construction of all classes except submarines to thirty-five per cent of the British tonnage was viewed as an important

⁶⁰ Eden and his staff "could find no comfort in the situation" when they reviewed the conversations in the Embassy in Rome. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 228.

⁶¹ The naval agreement with Germany had been anticipated in London well in advance of the Stresa meetings, and was also meant, in British eyes, to restrain Germany. A report submitted to the cabinet by the Foreign Office and the three defense services on January 25 laid down as guidelines for armaments agreements with Germany maximums of 178,000 tons for German naval construction, 300,000 daily effectives for the German army, and metropolitan equality with France, Italy and Britain, or approximately 1000 first-line aircraft for the German air force. Cab 24/253 C.P.23(35). Although the French might not have been comfortable with these British calculations, they do make it clear that London was not out to make a lone, self-serving agreement at the expense of friends. It is no doubt true, however, as Professor Watt has noted, that uneasiness over Britain's military situation, as well as the political need to record a disarmament success prompted the government to make the naval agreement while it was possible, and to leave for the future agreements relating to land and air forces. D. C. Watt, "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935: an interim judgment," The Journal of Modern History, XXVIII (1956), p. 162.

first step

but the

listed agree

agreement

In Paris

Hitler's

The French

readily dis

in clear co

In order to

to the Brit

agreement,

Berlin to

42. Lord
 thinking be
 the Anglo-
 under a
 ficed En
 he had no
 the First
 side, court
 and his
 enforced
 stabilize
 secret cor
 and Defeat
 Haldermann,

43. Lord
 virtually
 signature
 communicati

first step in limiting the budding arms race.⁶² The hope was that the Nazi government could be drawn into freely negotiated agreements on the basis of an equitable recognition of sovereign rights which Germany would exercise in any event.

In Paris, the naval agreement which Hoare and Ribbentrop signed on June 18 was seen in a different light.⁶³ The French could not help but feel that the British had off-handedly discarded the Versailles safeguards, and had acted in clear contradiction to the spirit of the Stresa meetings, in order to secure a bilateral agreement which contributed to the British sense of security. The effect of the naval agreement, the French were sure, would be to encourage Berlin to concentrate on building an army rather than a

⁶² Lord Chatfield, the First Sea Lord, has explained the thinking behind the British willingness to negotiate and sign the Anglo-German naval agreement: "When, ... in May 1935, Hitler in an oration at Nuremberg, announced that he recognized England's right to superiority on the seas, and that he had no desire for a naval armaments race, it was clear to the First Lord and myself, that the wise, indeed the inevitable, course was to come to an agreement on the matter; to try and bind Germany to this public declaration - not "enforced on her," but voluntarily made - and so to try and stabilize naval construction in Europe and call a halt to secret construction and suspicion." Lord Chatfield, The Navy and Defence, Vol II: It Might Happen Again (London: William Heinemann, 1947), pp. 73-74.

⁶³ Hoare inherited the Anglo-German naval agreement virtually complete and contributed little to it beyond his signature. In effect it constituted another of the factors complicating his handling of the Abyssinia crisis.

nam. Ir di
Altover to
a falling
next serv
ship. Con
June 19 by
Generals
France wou
an attack
Eden
time faced
away another
stop in Pa
intended to

41
A S
fatal agree
as Edward
Block, "The
ment of 193
Ratzke,

42
42
AVC
discussed
involved
fatal had
conspiracy
none of
General, in
between
the General
may have
was the
British
number

navy. Indignation in France was general and strong.⁶⁴ Although the French government could ill-afford the luxury of a falling out with the British on the matter, the naval agreement served to emphasize in Paris the value of Italian friendship. That friendship, by way of contrast was reinforced on June 19 by the signing of a secret military convention by Generals Gamelin and Badoglio, according to which Italy and France would march together against Germany in the event of an attack upon Austria.⁶⁵

Eden returned to Paris after his unsatisfactory visit to Rome faced with the unpleasant task of trying to explain away another shock to Anglo-French relations. On his initial stop in Paris, Eden had told Laval no more than that he intended to discuss the Abyssinian situation in Rome.⁶⁶ The

⁶⁴A survey of the French reaction against the Anglo-German naval agreement, which swept up such stout friends of England as Edouard Herriot and Alexis Léger, can be found in Charles Bloch, "Great Britain, German Rearmament, and the Naval Agreement of 1935," European Diplomacy between Two Wars (ed. Hans W Gatzke, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 144-49.

⁶⁵Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 187.

⁶⁶Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 231-32. Had Eden discussed the British proposal with Laval, he might have been inclined to recommend to London that the mission be cancelled. Laval had learned from Rome on June 18 that Italy's aim in Abyssinia was to gain direct control over the 'peripheral' zone of the Abyssinian empire, and a protectorate over the central, Amharic plateau. Askew, "The Secret Agreement between France and Italy on Ethiopia, January 1935," p. 48. The French also knew from their soundings in Addis Ababa that Haile Selassie felt that his rases would drive him off of his throne if he should succumb to the demand for an Italian protectorate. Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 194.

Branch W

education

a railroad

with the

to offer

to know

to come

that is

have been

In

in the

opening

is such

of alter

under S

sense of

beneficial

events.

Agreed

concrete

and gain

of the o

that, th

(p

n

French were amazed to learn that the British had proposed a solution which would have countenanced the construction of a railway in Abyssinia in direct competition with the French Djibouti line. The profits from the Djibouti railway helped to offset French colonial expenses, and Laval was concerned to know how the British had calculated that France need not be consulted. Eden could make no answer beyond intimating that if the offer had averted a serious crisis, it would have been worthwhile.⁶⁷

In many respects, Eden's mission was the pivotal point in the British handling of the Abyssinian affair. It was the opening move by the new foreign affairs team in London, and as such was an indication that they would hold to the pattern of alternately warning and coaxing Mussolini which had evolved under Simon. Eden's mission demonstrated, however, a new sense of urgency in London and a willingness to seize the initiative rather than to continue to drift with threatening events. At one stroke, London defined its interests in the Abyssinian affair for Rome, drew for the first time a concrete and depressing measure of Mussolini's ambitions, and gained a new appreciation of the quicksilver qualities of the critical man in the middle, Pierre Laval. For all of that, the undertaking was ill-conceived and costly.

⁶⁷Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 233.

Foreign
ready at the
given, per
his pains
he succeed
situation
high-level
With no mo
still hand
France war
to Berlin
in the Hou
he had pro
The public
court reject
raising th
British pr
disappointm

69
69
69

Foreign Secretary Hoare later confessed that he was too ready at the outset to believe that he could build upon a minor, personal wartime association with Mussolini.⁶⁸ For his pains in putting forward his first attempt at a solution he succeeded only in further complicating the serious situation with which he had to deal. In making a direct, high-level approach to Rome, Hoare played an important card with no more effect than to goad Mussolini to set his face still harder and to step on British pride. Relations with France were strained by the independent British approaches to Berlin and Rome, and Hoare had to spend a bad afternoon in the House of Commons trying to explain how it was that he had proposed to give away part of a British colony.⁶⁹ The publicity which attended Eden's mission and Mussolini's curt rejection of the British proposal had the effect of raising the Abyssinian problem to banner level in the British press, and leading articles began to express general disappointment and indignation over the unreasonable Italian

⁶⁸ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 154.

⁶⁹ July 1, 1935. 303 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 1522-24.

attitude.⁷⁰

If the intelligence which Eden brought back to London was not sufficiently depressing, it was compounded by the knowledge that the mission had been undertaken at a cost of irretrievably involving British prestige in the matter. The irony of the situation seems to have been lost on London. The white knight of the forces of the League in Britain had undertaken a mission to do an old fashioned imperial deal with a potential aggressor in order to protect what remained of the illusion that a new and better day had dawned in the

⁷⁰Eden's mission to Rome was prominently covered in the British press, and most of the larger papers made the failure of the undertaking the subject of a leading article. A sense of dismay and indignation pervaded the leaders which appeared in London on June 26 and 27. The Times leader of June 27 was addressed largely to the contention put forward in the Manchester Guardian on the previous day that Eden's mission had been an attempt to arrange any satisfaction which Mussolini might demand short of a mandate over Abyssinia. The Times argued that Eden's mission was "a brave attempt in Rome to find a way of avoiding the threatened war between Italy and Abyssinia; and, even though it has apparently failed, the British Government were clearly right to make it." Most other papers bypassed the motivation of the British government to try to fathom the Italian rejection of a reasonable solution. Most telling were the leaders of papers which had previously indicated some sympathy for the Fascist regime. The News Chronicle of June 27 wrote "it is distressing to find the Duce's habitual commonsense and realism giving way so apparently completely," and the Morning Post of the same day noted its disappointment in Mussolini despite its usual admiration for the work which he had done for the resuscitation of Italy. The Daily Telegraph on the same day bristled that Eden's trip to Rome had proven that "Signor Mussolini is resolved to settle his differences with Ethiopia in his own way, without any interference from any quarter whatsoever...." The Daily Mail, on the other hand, passed over Mussolini's attitude in silence, demonstrating that anyone who kicked at the supports of the League of Nations could be certain of at least one friend in England.

conduct of
surrender the
responsibility
was a risk
the offer
clear that
to placate
what was
of British
Mussolini
about the
of the
of the
expression

On the
gathered
the final
disarmament
under his

72-
Mussolini
of the
a similar
will be
George C.
suffered
with the
did not
tive act

conduct of international affairs.⁷¹ There is little to suggest that Hoare, or anyone else in a position of responsibility in London, recognized that Eden's mission was a risk taken on behalf of an illusion. On the contrary, the offer which was pressed upon Mussolini in Rome made it clear that Britain was willing to go to considerable lengths to placate Italy in good part because Italy was threatening what was seen as an essential nerve interwoven in the fabric of British foreign, security and domestic affairs. If Mussolini's intransigence did raise any doubts in London about the stakes involved, they were quieted by the results of the Peace Ballot, which gave some measure of the commitment of the British people to the inflated expectations which found expression in the Covenant.

IV

On the evening of June 27, 1935, an enthusiastic crowd gathered in Albert Hall to hear Lord Robert Cecil announce the final results of the massive, national referendum on disarmament and the League of Nations which had been conducted under his leadership by the National Declaration Committee.

⁷¹Interestingly, Eden's part in this effort to appease Mussolini did not damage his reputation with those proponents of the League in Britain who would so roundly damn Hoare for a similar undertaking at the year's end. On July 11, Lord Cecil wrote to tell Eden that the Executive Committee of the League of Nations Union deplored the attacks which he had suffered because of the attempt to reach an understanding with Italy. At the same time, however, Cecil noted that they did not generally approve of unilateral rather than collective action in the matter. Cecil Papers, Add. 51083.

Lord Cecil

table the

shown the

ballot.

but that

Britain's

hundred of

and Lord

tion of an

public opti

have the a

end of Jun

a full acc

Peace Ball

account of

polled by

participat

From

to infuse

Government

Lord Cecil

72-

73-

Secretary S

Lord Cecil reported that 11,627,765 people, more than double the number anticipated, had taken the time and had shown the interest to answer the questions set out in the ballot. There was no question, he added triumphantly, but that the results demonstrated that the people of Great Britain stood squarely behind the Covenant.⁷² Some five-hundred thousand volunteers had worked on the 'Peace Ballot,' and Lord Cecil could well congratulate them on the completion of an unprecedented venture in shaping and measuring public opinion just at the moment when it was certain to have the greatest impact upon government policy. By the end of June, the National Declaration Committee had published a full account of the development and the results of the Peace Ballot, and the National government had to take account of the fact that 11,090,387 of 11,559,165 people polled by mid-June had indicated that they favored British participation in the League of Nations.⁷³

From the first, the Peace Ballot had been an effort to infuse a new enthusiasm for the League into the National government. In a letter to Baldwin in November of 1934, Lord Cecil explained that the Peace Ballot grew out of

⁷²The Times, June 28, 1935.

⁷³Livingstone and Johnston, The Peace Ballot, Supplementary sheet included to update the figures given on p. 34.

concept of

reality

write the

the court

encourage

still be

national

local

which act

assumption

largely on

Such an a

in the ha

fore or re

committee

never to

Europe ar

that that

the Learn

The

The

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

concern over indications of "a terrible reversion to pre-war mentality."⁷⁴ At the conclusion of the Peace Ballot, Cecil wrote that the National Declaration Committee had begun with the conviction that "if the British Government could be encouraged to resume its leadership at Geneva, much could still be done to arrest the threatened relapse into international anarchy."⁷⁵

Lord Cecil and his friends in the League of Nations Union acted, throughout the inter-war period, on the insular assumption that the peace and well-being of the world hinged largely on the attitude and the zeal of the British government. Such an assumption would have been open to serious question in the halcyon years before Bismarck; in 1935 it scarcely bore on reality at all. Nonetheless, the National Declaration Committee began its huge work with the conviction that the answer to the distressingly familiar problems arising in Europe and the Far East lay in convincing a doubting government that the people of Great Britain were determined to see the League of Nations succeed.

The inspiration for the Peace Ballot was provided by a

⁷⁴Viscount Cecil to Stanley Baldwin, November 26, 1934, Cecil Papers, Add. 51080. The collapse of the Disarmament Conference seems to have been the principle factor which moved the leadership of the League of Nations Union to mount a campaign to convince the government to pursue "a really vigorous League policy." Viscount Cecil, A Great Experiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 257-58.

⁷⁵Livingstone and Johnston, The Peace Ballot, p. 60.

carriage of
and the
invest
of London
of the
churches,
organiza
grant and
With the
stalled
of foreign
Declarati

The
to inc
throughou
clearly or
to be abo
ballot, or
achieve.
supporti
Peace or
sent the
judgment
were the

24
25

canvass of opinion on the League of Nations, disarmament, and the Locarno system conducted in January 1934 by the Ilford branch of the League of Nations Union in that section of London. The results encouraged the national leadership of the League of Nations Union to enlist the support of the churches, the major political parties and various civic organizations in conducting a national referendum on disarmament and British participation in the League of Nations. With the exception of the Conservative Party, which quickly smelled the obvious challenge to the government's handling of foreign policy, the response was general and the National Declaration Committee was well and impressively fleshed out.⁷⁶

The effect of broadening the sponsorship of the referendum to include many of the high-minded and moral leaders throughout the nation was to place the undertaking very clearly on the side of the angels. There was never any doubt about the sentiments of the sponsors of the Peace Ballot, or about the result which they were laboring to achieve. In many cases, the ballot was distributed with supporting literature, such as the pamphlet entitled "Peace or War?"⁷⁷ However much Lord Cecil sought to represent the results of the referendum as the well-considered judgment of the British people, the entire venture had much more the flavor of a recruiting drive for the League of

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 7-11, Cecil, A Great Experiment, pp. 257-58.

⁷⁷Livingstone and Johnston, The Peace Ballot, p. 12.

121

122

123

124

125

126

127

128

129

130

131

nations Union than of an impartial survey of public opinion. The ballot itself was framed, in the manner of all effective referenda, to solicit the desired responses:

1. Should Great Britain remain a Member of the League of Nations?
2. Are you in favor of an all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement?
3. Are you in favor of the all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement?
4. Should the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement?
5. Do you consider that, if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by
 - (a) economic and non-military measures?
 - (b) if necessary, military measures?⁷⁸

The questions virtually demanded 'yes' answers, and the National Declaration Committee got them in impressive numbers. Walter Ashly, the Assistant Secretary of the Committee, calculated that 37.9 per cent of the population over 18 years of age responded to the ballot.⁷⁹ More than 80 per cent of those voting were persuaded that the abolition of national military and naval aircraft was a good idea, more than 90 per cent were in favor of prohibiting the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit, more than 90 per cent

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 33-58.

would have welcomed an all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement, and some 96 per cent favored Britain's continuing membership in the League.⁸⁰ The fifth question offered an element of choice, which built in less impressive results. Still, better than 90 per cent of those responding considered that economic and non-military measures should be used to stay the hand of an aggressor. The positive responses dropped to 60 per cent when the question posed concerned the use of military measures.⁸¹ Nonetheless with the memory of the 'Great War' still fresh, the fact that six of ten British citizens polled were willing to apply military measures in support of the Covenant may well have been the most significant statistic produced by the Peace Ballot.⁸²

The results of the Peace Ballot obviously were colored by its tendentious character. Much of the contemporary newspaper comment fastened on the extent to which the ballot begged the question. A common conclusion was that the

⁸⁰The calculations here were made on the basis of the voting returns given in ibid., supplementary sheet included to update the figures given on p. 34.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²It is likely, however, as Professor Medlicott has noted, that most of those responding to the Peace Ballot failed to equate either economic or military sanctions with the serious possibility of a major war. W. M. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 1919-1963 (London: Methuen, 1968), pp. 144-45.

referendum thus lost much of its significance.⁸³ This was hardly the case. However the results of the Peace Ballot were achieved, they were a political fact of life. It mattered little that the referendum merely restated the assumptions of the Covenant, as though they promised an answer to the threats developing in 1935. The government had to deal with the enthusiasm regenerated by the Peace Ballot exercise for the notion that the League system of disarmament and sanctions could still function to protect peace.

From the standpoint of the National government, the nature and the timing of the Peace Ballot could scarcely have been worse. The results which the National Declaration Committee began to release in a steady stream after November of 1934 bore unfortunately on the two problems pressing most urgently on the government. What was wanted during the first

⁸³Purveyors of Liberal or Labour sentiment, such as the Manchester Guardian, the News Chronicle, and the Daily Herald, tended to accept the Peace Ballot at face value as a successful experiment in democracy; Manchester Guardian, June 28, 1935, News Chronicle, June 28, 1935, Daily Herald, June 28, 1935. Most of the other leading London dailies greeted the results of the ballot with either skepticism or scorn. The Times felt that if fact and sentiment were separated it would be hard to find much value in the ballot. The Times, June 28, 1935. The Daily Telegraph styled the ballot "a most misleading questionaire," and added that it had been put forward by those people called loudest for war against an aggressor but fought against the necessary armaments. The Daily Telegraph, June 1935. The Morning Post dismissed the domestic significance of the ballot, but worried that it would be received abroad as an indication that Britain had suddenly gone 'soft.' The Morning Post, June 28, 1935. The Daily Mail thundered against what it called "the booby-trap ballot." The Daily Mail, June 1935.

months of 1935, in the light of open German rearmament and the clear challenge to League procedures being posed by Mussolini in east Africa, was an effort to educate the public to the need for rearmament and to the obvious limitations of a system of sanctions which had been predicated upon a universal League of Nations and general disarmament. Instead, the National Declaration Committee held the field and reinforced just the opposite point of view.⁸⁴ Privately, Neville Chamberlain wrote of the ballot as "terribly mischievous," and Vansittart described it as "a free excursion into the inane."⁸⁵ But beyond an occasional sally in the House of Commons, the government left the debate over the Peace Ballot to the National Declaration Committee and its shrill opponents

⁸⁴What fresh thought there was at the time did not extend to the League of Nations. On July 2, Lloyd George announced the establishment of the "Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction," on which he spent some £400,000 in an effort to promote his concept of a "New Deal" for Britain. A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 357. On July 26, the Next Five Years volume appeared under the signature of 153 well-known political and literary figures, assembled in good part by Lord Allen of Hurtwood. Martin Gilbert (ed.), Floughly Cwn Furrow (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965), p. 305. Lloyd George and the Next Five Year Group argued creatively for new solutions to the economic ills which beset the nation, but the faith expressed in each case in collective security through the League of Nations was so orthodox that Lord Cecil shared the platform with Lloyd George on July 2, and lent his signature to the volume which appeared on July 26.

⁸⁵Vansittart, The Mist Procession, p. 503; Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961), p. 181.

of the Leaverbrook and Rothermere press.⁸⁶

The effect of the Peace Ballot was to reinforce the limitations operating on Hoare's handling of the Abyssinian crisis. However colored, the results which Lord Cecil announced on June 27 could not be ignored.⁸⁷ The impending general election magnified the weight of the Peace Ballot, and, in the words of Leo Amery, the government found it comfortable to "swim with the tide"⁸⁸ It is off the mark, however, to suggest that the ballot converted the government to a sudden affection for the League, or persuaded them to a

⁸⁶ Lord Cecil noted that Sir John Simon had some hard things to say in the House of Commons about the Peace Ballot's bearing on rearmament, but he added that Simon afterwards withdrew his "intemperate words." Cecil, A Great Experiment, 259. Cecil felt that what he styled the "isolationist Press" gave the ballot an excellent advertisement by sensationalizing it as the "Blood Ballot." Ibid.

⁸⁷ On April 12, 1935 Professor Gilbert Murray wrote with dissatisfaction about the impact which the ballot seemed to be having on the government: "It is all to the good that the Prime Minister at last should wish to be civil to us and could recognize the force that the League of Nations Union has in the country. No doubt it is the effect of the Ballot." Gilbert Murray to Lord Robert Cecil, April 12, 1935, Gilbert Murray Papers, Box 16a and 16d, Bodleian library. On June 26, the completion of the ballot, Lord Cecil, buoyed by the results, called on Foreign Secretary Hoare to explain how he felt the Abyssinian affair should be managed. FC 800/295. The ballot increased the weight of the League of Nations outside of the government, it must also have strengthened the government's hand within the government.

⁸⁸ Amery, My Political Life, III, 169.

policy which they would not have otherwise followed.⁸⁹ The Peace Ballot was only one, albeit an important one, of several factors bearing on the significance which the League of Nations still had for the National government in 1935. And, in spite of a general skepticism about the League's current capabilities, the government tended to share the half-digested conviction, implicit in the ballot, that the League of Nations was altogether too valuable to be abandoned without at least an honest test.

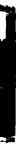
⁸⁹In assessing the impact of the Peace Ballot, C. I. Mowat concluded that "late in the day the government became a convert to the League." C. I. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940 (London: Methuen and Co., 1966, first published in 1955), p. 542.

CHAPTER III
THE MOUNTING CRISIS

In the wake of Anthony Eden's unhappy mission to Paris and Rome, Sir Samuel Hoare faced a disturbing prospect as he mulled the major policy statement he would soon have to make to the House of Commons.¹ In Italy, Mussolini was talking and acting as though Eden's visit had removed his final doubts about a military adventure in east Africa.² In Britain, Mussolini's open disdain for the League of Nations and for British mediation was breeding resentment inside as well as outside of the government. The best solution for the National Government remained a compromise settlement of the Abyssinian dispute. But as the summer wore on and the rainy season in Abyssinia drew toward a close it became increasingly doubtful that such a settlement would be found before Mussolini sent the army which he had been gathering in Eritrea and Italian

¹No one could better appreciate the dilemma which Hoare had to wrestle with than his predecessor at the Foreign Office. On July 7, Simon noted in his diary that it had not taken the new Foreign Secretary long to discover how difficult it was to handle international affairs to the general satisfaction. See the Simon Papers, Diary II.

²George W. Baer concluded that Mussolini "had passed the point of no return" by the beginning of July, and he noted that Mussolini's speeches thereafter "became ever more uncompromising." George W. Baer, The Coming of the Italian - Ethiopian War (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967, p. 181.



Somaliland into Abyssinia. In July, the cabinet began to consider the unpleasant question of the role which Britain would play in the event of a clear case of Italian aggression upon another member of the League of Nations.

On July 3, the cabinet met in London to hear Eden's account of his conversations with Mussolini in Rome. The implications of the demands which Mussolini had outlined to Eden were depressingly clear. Abyssinia could not accept such demands, Mussolini would have his war, and Britain would have to face up to its obligations under the Covenant. The position in which the government found itself had been the secret nightmare of British statesmen since the establishment of the League of Nations.³ Britain was being drawn

³From the first, British statesmen tended to view the peace-keeping function of the League of Nations as essentially conciliatory rather than coercive in nature. In this, they differed consistently from their French counterparts. As Professor Medlicott has observed, the British recognized that with the rejection of the Covenant by the United States Senate, Britain clearly became a 'producer' rather than a 'consumer' of security under the League system. In addition, the nature of economic sanctions was such as to impose the heaviest burden on the British fleet. During the first decade of the League's existence, British governments of every political stripe sought to define the coercive function of the League in cautious and narrow terms. In 1921, the Lloyd George government proposed amendments to the Covenant which had the effect of interpreting the imposition of economic sanctions to mean a gradual process. The MacDonald government in 1924 rejected the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance as tending to place an undue burden on British naval power. And the Baldwin government in 1925 declined to ratify the Geneva Protocol providing for compulsory arbitration of disputes. The arguments which Arthur Balfour put to the League Council on March 12, 1925, stressed that in view of the incomplete nature of the League, Britain could not afford to take the 'strong' view of the Covenant. Unfortunately, Balfour failed in his effort to show that line of reasoning to a logical conclusion within

toward the imposition of sanctions upon a friendly European power on a matter of only limited British interest. Short of unsaying all of the things said by British governments over the previous fifteen years about steady support of the Covenant, there seemed no help for it. No one in the cabinet suggested that Britain could, in the circumstances, begin the job of pulling the League's teeth. Neither was it argued that the government should face facts and qualify its obligations, as was done during the Manchurian crisis. But the idea of sanctions was sobering. Baldwin warned again that economic sanctions carried the strong possibility of war. Since such sanctions amounted in essence to blockade, it was only too clear that any hostile reaction would fall most heavily upon the British fleet. Nonetheless, after a long discussion, the cabinet decided to explore the effect which economic sanctions might have upon Italy, and the question was referred for study to a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. There was no thought of

the Baldwin government. In Lord Cecil's view, one of the best day's work that he did as a member of the second Baldwin government was to block Balfour's proposal that the coercive aspects of the Covenant should be declared inoperative. The Manchurian crisis pointed up the ambivalence of the official British position on the League, but it did not force the government to choose between its fidelity to the Covenant and its aversion to sanctions as the Abyssinian crisis would do. Arnold Wolfers, Britain and France between Two Wars (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940), p. 153; W. N. Medlicott, British Foreign Policy since Versailles, 1919-1963, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1968) pp. 147-48; Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, All the Way (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), p. 187; Christopher Thorne, The Limits of Foreign Policy (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), p. 110.

entering upon a dangerous program of economic sanctions alone, however, and Eden's accounting raised grave questions about the vital support of France. Considering the character of Laval, who on June 7 had become premier as well as foreign minister of France, the cabinet judged that any action taken by the League in response to Italian aggression would probably hinge upon the attitude of Paris.⁴

Within the cabinet, an important effect of Eden's mission to Rome was that it roused Neville Chamberlain to begin playing a leading role in the management of the Abyssinian crisis. Chamberlain, who was the strongest figure within the National Government and often the bellwether of cabinet opinion, reacted sharply to the rejection of the offer which Eden had tendered to Mussolini. On July 4, Chamberlain had a discussion about Abyssinia with Baldwin and Sir Warren Fisher which so disturbed Fisher that he wrote Baldwin to ask if England was 'really prepared not merely to threaten but also to use force.'⁵ On July 5, Chamberlain wrote in his diary of closing the Suez Canal as a reasonable response to Mussolini's intransigence.⁶ Even assuming French support, it was

⁴Cab 23/82, 35(35)2.

⁵Quoted in Ian Colvin, None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 67. Sir Warren Fisher was, from 1919 to 1939, permanent secretary to the Treasury and head of the civil service. The tenor of his advice during the Abyssinian crisis, like that of Vansittart, was that Britain was in no position to take a hard line against Italian ambitions.

⁶Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1970, first published in 1946), p. 265.

approximate

partial work

Mediter

farther

he was

Allyson

cal eye

In comm

security

undue re

by Miss

tions or

no more

the in t

were der

to stop

maintain

His sket

Intende

tant to

2

ASSUMED

COMMUN

WAR

of 1901

1902

1903

1904

1905

1906

1907

commonly accepted within the government that to close the canal would be to virtually insure an Italian attack on the Mediterranean fleet.⁷ That Chamberlain considered such a dangerous option, however fleetingly, is instructive in that he was not by nature the man to champion the cause of either Abyssinia or the League of Nations. To Chamberlain's practical eye, the weaknesses of the League were glaringly apparent. In common with many Conservatives, he felt that Britain's security could best be enhanced by rearmament rather than undue reliance upon collective security. Yet he was provoked by Mussolini's attitude and he felt bound by Britain's obligations under the Covenant. When it came to the point, he was no more willing than Eden to see the League finally collapse. 'If in the end,' Chamberlain warned his colleagues, 'the League were demonstrated to be incapable of effective intervention to stop this war, it would be practically impossible to maintain the fiction that its existence was justified at all.'⁸ His skepticism about the League's ability to function as intended was balanced by his feeling that it was still important to keep a reasonably credible League in being. For one

⁷On July 30 the service chiefs lent their weight to this assumption by stating that any steps taken to interrupt Italian communications with Abyssinia 'would almost invariably lead to war.' Arthur Marder, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," American Historical Review, IXXV, 5 (June, 1970), p. 1327.

⁸Quoted in Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961) p. 185.

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185
186
187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295
296
297
298
299
300
301
302
303
304
305
306
307
308
309
310
311
312
313
314
315
316
317
318
319
320
321
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365
366
367
368
369
370
371
372
373
374
375
376
377
378
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390
391
392
393
394
395
396
397
398
399
400
401
402
403
404
405
406
407
408
409
410
411
412
413
414
415
416
417
418
419
420
421
422
423
424
425
426
427
428
429
430
431
432
433
434
435
436
437
438
439
440
441
442
443
444
445
446
447
448
449
450
451
452
453
454
455
456
457
458
459
460
461
462
463
464
465
466
467
468
469
470
471
472
473
474
475
476
477
478
479
480
481
482
483
484
485
486
487
488
489
490
491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567
568
569
570
571
572
573
574
575
576
577
578
579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594
595
596
597
598
599
600
601
602
603
604
605
606
607
608
609
610
611
612
613
614
615
616
617
618
619
620
621
622
623
624
625
626
627
628
629
630
631
632
633
634
635
636
637
638
639
640
641
642
643
644
645
646
647
648
649
650
651
652
653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661
662
663
664
665
666
667
668
669
670
671
672
673
674
675
676
677
678
679
680
681
682
683
684
685
686
687
688
689
690
691
692
693
694
695
696
697
698
699
700
701
702
703
704
705
706
707
708
709
710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763
764
765
766
767
768
769
770
771
772
773
774
775
776
777
778
779
780
781
782
783
784
785
786
787
788
789
790
791
792
793
794
795
796
797
798
799
800
801
802
803
804
805
806
807
808
809
810
811
812
813
814
815
816
817
818
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826
827
828
829
830
831
832
833
834
835
836
837
838
839
840
841
842
843
844
845
846
847
848
849
850
851
852
853
854
855
856
857
858
859
860
861
862
863
864
865
866
867
868
869
870
871
872
873
874
875
876
877
878
879
880
881
882
883
884
885
886
887
888
889
890
891
892
893
894
895
896
897
898
899
900
901
902
903
904
905
906
907
908
909
910
911
912
913
914
915
916
917
918
919
920
921
922
923
924
925
926
927
928
929
930
931
932
933
934
935
936
937
938
939
940
941
942
943
944
945
946
947
948
949
950
951
952
953
954
955
956
957
958
959
960
961
962
963
964
965
966
967
968
969
970
971
972
973
974
975
976
977
978
979
980
981
982
983
984
985
986
987
988
989
990
991
992
993
994
995
996
997
998
999
1000

thing, he mused in his diary, if Mussolini were allowed to 'torpedo' the League, 'the small States in Europe will just race one another to Berlin.'⁹

On July 5, Baldwin followed logically upon the decision of two days earlier and asked the chiefs of staff to consider the military implications of Britain's responsibilities under Article 16.¹⁰ This additional evidence that the government was beginning, albeit reluctantly, to consider the imposition of economic sanctions failed to satisfy Anthony Eden. Eden had returned from Rome and Paris with his jaw set, and he pressed for a stiff note to be despatched to Rome endorsing the warning he had given Mussolini that Britain meant to stand by its obligations under the Covenant.¹¹ Hoare warned the Italian ambassador, Grandi, on July 5 that Mussolini's attitude pointed toward a great calamity, but he held up the note which Eden wanted to see despatched in order to try to improve upon a suggestion made by Grandi. Sensing that British patience was wearing thin, Grandi cleverly suggested that a meeting of the signatories of the tripartite treaty of 1906 bearing on Abyssinia might yet produce the settlement

⁹Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain., p. 265.

¹⁰Marder, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," p. 1327.

¹¹The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), pp. 239-40.

with
The
dr
pre

con
obv
inc
pro
the
tra
The
for
Pas
str
nee

Dec
sion
tree
ests
ies
the
which
faro
tree
2 70

which Britain wanted.¹² Hoare eagerly grasped at the straw. The decision to begin considering economic sanctions did not drive out the hope that an eleventh-hour agreement might prevent the need to impose them.

II

Grandi's suggestion of another possible basis for conciliation was skillfully timed. By July 9, it was very obvious, if it had not been before, that Mussolini had no intention of submitting his aspirations to the arbitral process established to consider the WalWal incident under the Italo-Abyssinian treaty of 1928. On June 25, the arbitration commission met at Schweningen in the Netherlands. The arbitrators appointed by Mussolini, drawn respectively from the Italian diplomatic establishment and from the Fascist government itself, arrived at Schweningen bound by strict instructions from Rome.¹³ The commission did not meet in formal session until July 4, and then only to establish

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY
¹²Ibid. In several respects, the tripartite treaty of December 1906 was ideally suited to form the basis for discussions relating to the Italo-Abyssinian crisis of 1935. The treaty established that Britain, France and Italy had interests to protect in Abyssinia, bound each of the three signatories to support the independence of Abyssinia, yet recognized the protocols signed by Britain and Italy in 1891 and 1894 which had defined Abyssinia as an Italian protectorate.
 Harold G. Marcus, "A Preliminary History of the Tripartite Treaty December 13, 1906," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, XI (July, 1964), pp. 21-40.

¹³Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 209.

that a
appoint
open to
the Wal
der not
for the
to with
adjourn
ments in
had the
commissi
well aff
Within t
effect o

The

Hoare un
an oppon
of Musso
did not

14

Carnegie

15

Montana
establi
expand
framewo
Aldrova
contin
profess
for a w
appoint
detala

that a complete impasse existed between the arbitrators appointed by the opposing sides. Abyssinia was anxious to open to arbitration the root question of the 'ownership' of the WalWal region, while the Italian arbitrators would consider nothing more than the narrow subject of responsibility for the WalWal incident.¹⁴ The Italian arbitrators threatened to withdraw over the issue, and the commission was forced to adjourn on July 9 and report the impasse to the two governments involved and to the League of Nations.¹⁵ Italy clearly had the situation well in hand. If the considerations of the commission were limited as Italy required, Mussolini could well afford to agree to the appointment of a fifth arbitrator. Within the limits laid down by Italy, the only significant effect of the proceedings would be to consume more time.

The survey of British foreign policy which Sir Samuel Hoare undertook for the House of Commons on July 11 offered an opportunity to emphasize that Britain took a serious view of Mussolini's transparently belligerent intentions. Hoare did not warn, in the course of his survey, that the government

¹⁴Pitman B. Potter, The WalWal Arbitration (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1938), pp. 13-14.

¹⁵The award signed by Count Luigi Aldrovandi and Raffaele Montagna put the Italian position that the commission had been established under explicit terms and was not authorized to expand its considerations beyond those terms. Within the framework of what they considered to be the original terms, Aldrovandi and Montagna declared themselves to be ready to continue. In their turn, the arbitrators appointed by Abyssinia, Professors Pitman B. Potter and Albert de La Pradelle, argued for a wider scope for the proceedings and called for the appointment of a fifth arbitrator. League of Nations, Official Journal, August 1935, pp. 973-74.

was being

applied

to throw

clear the

issue in

posed to

his father

House of

In a par

warning

as a uni

a full s

in the e

warning

settlem

felt in

noted a

Address

24

24

was beginning to give serious thought to the imposition of economic sanctions. That, he no doubt felt, would have been to throw down the gauntlet to Italy. He did make it very clear that from the vantage point of London, the central issue in the Italo-Abyssinian quarrel was the threat which it posed to the League of Nations. In terms which anticipated his famous speech at Geneva by two months, Hoare told the House of Commons that:

we are ready and willing to take our full share of collective responsibility. But when I say collective responsibility, I mean collective responsibility. Over and over again we have stated, and no one better than the Prime Minister, our fidelity to the League and its principles, and I reaffirm it today.¹⁶

In a carefully qualified way, Hoare meant to convey a clear warning to Italy. While Britain had no intention of acting as a universal policeman, the government was ready to shoulder a full share of collective responsibility under the Covenant in the event of Italian aggression. Hoare tempered his warning by reiterating Britain's desire to see a peaceful settlement of the dispute. He referred again to the sympathy felt in London for Italy's desire to expand overseas. He also noted that some of the complaints made by Italy against the Abyssinian government were well taken.¹⁷ There was, however,

¹⁶304 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 518.

¹⁷Ibid., col. 519.

no reason for a war which would call into question the post-war structure of collective security. It was this structure alone which prevented a reversion to the disastrous alliance system of the past. For his part, Hoare concluded, "I am not prepared even now to abandon any chance that may present itself for averting what I believe will be a calamity, whether it be through the machinery of the 1906 Treaty, or whether it be through the machinery of the League, or whether it be through both."¹⁸

Virtually all of the leading figures of the House of Commons, other than those sitting on the government front bench, spoke in the debate which followed. The boundaries of the debate were established, on the one hand, by Attlee's denunciation of the government's endorsement of Italian imperialism, and on the other, by Churchill's fear that the government would take the lead in opposing Italian designs.¹⁹ Within those bounds, there was almost no opposition to Hoare's position that Britain had to support the League, but could not be expected to do so alone.²⁰ Austen Chamberlain captured the mood of the House when he spoke of the Abyssinian dispute as the ultimate test of the system of collective security:

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., cols. 537 and 545.

²⁰Ibid., cols. 519-630.

We are coming very near to what may be a test case for the League as to whether it does mean collective security; whether it does mean anything for any one or nothing for any one. It is not to be supposed that the League can be flouted under the eyes of Europe, that League methods can be repudiated, a policy of force and conflict engaged in, and that the League can pass all that by, because it happens to occur in Africa and not in Europe without thereby destroying the value of collective security not for Africa only but for Europe.²¹

No one raised the question of the price that Britain would be willing to pay to underwrite the role of the League as the international guarantor of peace. The widely-held assumption was that an aggressor would be hard put to withstand the combined censure and the collective economic weight of the total membership of the League.

Hoare considered it necessary to warn Mussolini of Britain's fidelity to the League, but he had no taste for a direct confrontation with Italy. He recognized the problem posed by the extent to which Italian prestige had become engaged in the Abyssinian dispute, and he was concerned not to humiliate Italy.²² However dim the prospects, Hoare continued to feel that a negotiated settlement held out the only

²¹Ibid., col. 566.

²²In the course of explaining the offer which Eden had put to Mussolini in Rome, Hoare wrote the king that "Your Majesty's Ministers have for some time past been considering the possibility of finding some means which would enable the Italian Government to compose their differences with Abyssinia without any loss of prestige." Sir Samuel Hoare to King George V, July 4, 1935 FO 800/295.

hope of averting an international calamity. Accordingly, he pursued all possible avenues of conciliation. Experience had shown that Mussolini looked with scorn on both the League of Nations and the arbitral commission set up to consider the WalWal incident. Hoare therefore pressed for a meeting of representatives of Britain, Italy and France to consider the problem within the framework of the treaty of 1906. Although Grandi had put the suggestion of a tripartite meeting forward in London, he apparently did so on his own authority for Mussolini received the idea coldly in Rome. On July 10, Mussolini replied to Laval, who had been persuaded to forward the suggestion to Rome, that he could see no reason for a meeting of the signatories of the treaty of 1906.²³

Exasperated, Hoare turned again from coaxing to warning. He reinforced his policy statement of July 11 by instructing Ambassador Drummond to inform Mussolini that the government viewed with grave anxiety the effect on Anglo-Italian relations should Italy's obvious intentions be carried out.²⁴ To insure that his warnings were being pressed in Rome with sufficient vigor, Hoare reminded Drummond on July 27 that Britain could not participate in an arrangement which would destroy the sovereignty of Abyssinia. He added his concern that Drummond might be allowing the Italians to "get away

²³Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 216.

²⁴Sir Samuel Hoare to Lord Wigram, July 12, 1935, FO 800/295.

with 1
replie
to Mus
He con
the Br
soluti

S
hardly
Mussol
This o
could
ordina
conside
Hoare t
that it
ment of
signato
League.

Th
commiss
23
1935,
2
PC 801
2

with their case more easily than they deserve."²⁵ Drummond replied by return post that the warnings which he had conveyed to Mussolini had been forthright enough to anger the dictator. He concluded bleakly that in view of Mussolini's response to the British warnings, he frankly saw no chance of a peaceful solution.²⁶

Sir Eric's assessment of the situation in Rome was hardly cheering, but at least Hoare could be certain that Mussolini was being made aware of the depth of British concern. This contributed to the cautious expectation that some progress could be made toward a negotiated settlement at the extraordinary session of the League Council called for July 31 to consider the impasse in the arbitral proceedings. On July 29 Hoare told the American ambassador, Bingham, that he hoped that Italy could be brought at Geneva to agree to the appointment of a fifth arbitrator, and to a conference of the signatories of the treaty of 1906 under the aegis of the League.²⁷

III

The appointment of a fifth arbitrator to the WalWal commission, while not completely discounted, did not hold

²⁵Sir Samuel Hoare to Sir Eric Drummond (Rome), July 27, 1935, FO 800/295.

²⁶Sir Eric Drummond to Sir Samuel Hoare, July 31, 1935, FO 800/295.

²⁷Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 620.

out much prospect of producing a solution to the crisis. At best, the revival of the arbitral process would delay the outbreak of hostilities and gain additional time for direct negotiations among the principal European powers involved.²⁸ What hope there was for the tripartite talks which Hoare had in mind would depend, if the Italians could be brought to the table, on the extent to which the French could be convinced to come down hard on the side of the Covenant. Given Laval's concern to maintain his new-found relationship with Rome, it did not seem likely that France would take a strong stand.

Hoare could sympathize with the delicacy of the French position, but he could not allow the matter to go by default. The issue was considered to be too important in London. Britain figured, even more than Italy, as a vital factor in French considerations of national security. Hoare pressed this advantage as hard as he thought wise in an effort to convince Laval to take a stand strong enough to persuade Mussolini to accept a negotiated settlement.

In Hoare's view, there were logical limits to the pressure which should be focused upon France. Despite the urging of Eden, he could not see that Anglo-French cooperation, or the cause of the League of Nations would be served by putting the French into the dock.²⁹ Pointing the finger at

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 243-44.

the
to
posi
hand.
relat
did n

ment
Sir
was to
in som
ordina
arrupe
tent w
letter

Hoare's
laid o
Italy a
victory
Italy
polic
war, o
the be
class

the French would not win their support. The government refused to grant Eden the authority he wanted to state the British position at Geneva in such a way as to force the French hand.³⁰ The result could only have been a further strain on relations between Paris and London. Hoare pressed Laval but did not push him into a corner.

On July 29, Hoare addressed a carefully drafted assessment of the perils involved in the Abyssinian crisis to Sir George Clerk, the British ambassador in Paris. Clerk was to pass it on to Laval. The letter is worth considering in some detail. It was drafted to convince Laval and would ordinarily be suspect as a piece of special pleading. The arguments put forward in the letter are, however, so consistent with Hoare's attitude throughout the crisis that the letter represents quite possibly the clearest statement of Hoare's view of the concerns posed by the crisis. The letter laid out in full the dangerous potential of a war between Italy and Abyssinia. Hoare noted that even a quick Italian victory in such a war would have the effect of discrediting Italy internationally, and would very likely make Italian policy more uncertain and venturesome. A long, indefinite war, or an Italian defeat, would have disastrous effects upon the balance of power in Europe, and might lead to a first-class crisis over Austria. Considering the war as a war of

³⁰Ibid.

aggression by a white imperial power upon a smaller, black, independent nation, Hoare pointed out that Britain and France, with smoldering nationalist sentiment within their empires to consider, could only lose. The reaction would be bad if Italy won, and bad if Italy lost, in that the latter eventuality would tend to point up the vulnerability of the European imperial powers. For all of that, Hoare made it clear that his main concern was with the impact which a war would have upon the League of Nations, and upon the appeal of collective security in Great Britain:

...we must expect that the effect of war upon the influence of the League of Nations will be wholly bad. The origins, character and purpose of such a war would not, outside Italy, be regarded as doubtful in the light of Signor Mussolini's own statements. It would by all ordinary persons be held to be a plain war of aggression for the purpose of annexation by a strong member of the League upon a weaker member. One of three results would then be liable to ensue. If the League acquiesced in such a purpose, it would fall into universal and lasting contempt. Secondly, if it were divided against itself, it would for the future be viewed not as an organ of peace with a will of its own, but merely as the one theatre for the interplay of self-regarding national policies. Thirdly, if it were formally but ineffectually to condemn the action of the Italian Government--and many members are indisposed to, or incapable of, effectual condemnation--Italy would join the growing number of scoffing dissenters. In any event, another and inglorious chapter would have been closed in the history of attempts to substitute a regime of law for international anarchy, and there would have been destroyed one of those factors--and that a very important factor--which join the United Kingdom with France in the political and moral leadership of Europe. In such circumstances the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, filled already with apprehensions at

the growing might of Germany, might well be excused for feeling that a term had been set to whatever stability this leadership had secured to them, and for looking elsewhere than to the League and to the two great conservative democracies for support and guidance.

The inevitable damage to the influence of the League of Nations is the most powerful reason why His Majesty's Government and the French Government should, in co-operation with each other, use all possible means to avert a war in Abyssinia.... I would wish to point out to M. Laval certain considerations which apply more particularly to the effect on the foundations of British policy of a serious impairment of the League's position.

Should Great Britain unhappily, in the future, be called upon to go to war in defence of international order, it would be essential that she should do so with the unanimous assent--or practically unanimous assent--of the British people. It is unlikely that such assent would be forthcoming unless it were clear that the cause for which Great Britain was engaging herself was in defence of international order under the authority of the League of Nations, and when I say League of Nations, I mean, not so much the organization as set up by the Covenant of 1919, as the spirit and principles which inspired the Covenant and have on the whole guided its activities since that date. If these are compromised, that element will disappear which, as I have just explained, is more than anything else requisite for unanimous support for any war in which this country might in future tend or intend to engage. The present crisis is widely regarded in this country as a test not only of the ability of the members of the League to make their own Covenant respected, but as a test of whether the words "collective action" which are often, and rightly, on our lips, really mean collective action in defence of law and order against aggression from any quarter, or whether the security which is being sought is security against Germany alone. The popular movement in this country in support of the principle of security by collective action might well be arrested unless the principles of the League were steadfastly upheld

Heare

his of

part b

securi

receiv

the in

next i

British

up and

valued

all, th

stated

was to

Italy.

the med

do to a

effort

1935,

for ex

British

refery

cover

the L

suppl

sever

recei

even at the cost of the apostasy of one more of its principal members.³¹

Hoare's concern to preserve the League was quite genuine. In his view, an Italo-Abyssinian war would be a disaster in good part because of its effect upon the system of collective security which formed the foundation of British policy. If nothing else, Hoare expected that the French would recognize the importance of the League as a bridge for British involvement in Continental affairs. Laval could not expect the British people to blink at Italian aggression and later rise up against a German violation of the Covenant. If the French valued the League and the concept of collective security at all, they had to recognize the grave threat posed to the system by an Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Hoare's object was to avert a confrontation between the League powers and Italy. France was in a position to contribute powerfully to the mediation process. Hoare emphasized that it would not do to guide Italy through the "gap" in the Covenant, in an effort to create the fiction of a legitimate war.³² The effect

³¹Sir Samuel Hoare to Sir George Clerk (Paris), July 29, 1935, Cab 24/256 C. P.162(35) annex I.

³²Ibid. Under certain circumstances, the Covenant allowed for an act of war as a legitimate exercise of national sovereignty. Hence, the "gap" in the Covenant to which Hoare referred. The paragraph usually identified as 'the gap in the Covenant' was paragraph 7 of article 15 which stated that if the League Council failed to reach agreement on a dispute submitted to it, "the Members of the League reserve to themselves the right to take such action as they shall consider necessary for the maintenance of right and justice."

would
and to
treat
that
member

the
the
establi
on the
failed
Council
ment,
a comp
time,
to the
inc.

sessio
Address
Address
action
proce

would be to destroy the remaining credibility of the League, and to call collective security into serious question in Great Britain. Hoare left Laval to decide for himself what that would mean to French plans for containing the German menace.

IV

On July 31, the League Council met in Geneva to consider the Abyssinian dispute. The meeting came at the request of the Abyssinian government in accordance with the timetable established by the Council on May 25. The Council had agreed on that day to meet at the end of July if the arbitral process failed to produce agreement on a fifth arbitrator.³³ The Council session began with little apparent prospect of agreement, yet it produced results sufficient to sustain hope of a compromise settlement. Mussolini was still playing for time. British and French concern to find a painless solution to the Abyssinian problem left ample room for Italian maneuvering.

The Council began its deliberations on July 31 in private session. The first meeting established the gap between the Abyssinian and Italian positions. Gaston Jeze spoke for Abyssinia and called upon the Council to broaden its considerations beyond the procedural aspects of the arbitration process. He asked the Council to consider whether the Italian

³³League of Nations, Official Journal, June 1935, p. 640.

revert

revert

in to

ation

proce

postp

appear

to re

recon

inter

Italia

arbitr

advan

iane

as the

in the

the re

tripar

government was proceeding in a dilatory fashion in order to prevent a solution.³⁴ Aloisi protested for Italy that according to the Covenant the Council could not broaden its considerations since the dispute was still the subject of arbitral procedure.³⁵ At Laval's suggestion, the Council decided to postpone discussion in order to allow for efforts to find agreement outside of the Council chamber.³⁶

Three days of tense negotiations produced enough accord to revive the arbitration commission. When the Council reconvened on August 3, Abyssinia accepted the narrow Italian interpretation of the matter under arbitration in return for Italian agreement to proceed with the designation of a fifth arbitrator.³⁷ Jeze reiterated that Abyssinia would accept in advance the decision of the arbitrators.³⁸ To prod the Italians into serious negotiation, the Council fixed September 4 as the date on which it would meet again to consider progress in the dispute. The establishment of a definite date for the next Council meeting also provided a time frame for the tripartite meeting which, Eden announced, had been agreed

³⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, August 1935, p. 966.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 967-68.

³⁸Ibid., p. 968.

upon b
Eden e
agree
to fin
of a m
betwe
outcom
met an

E
Geneva
tunate
ance o
of the
would
outsid
succes
crisis
Eden b
he had
He re

upon by the representatives of Britain, Italy and France.³⁹ Eden explained to the Council that the signatories of the agreement of 1906 had decided upon conversations "with a view to finding a solution acceptable to all for the difficulties of a more general nature which have unfortunately arisen between Italy and Ethiopia."⁴⁰ He promised to report the outcome of the three-power meeting to the Council when it met again on September 4.

Eden again was the motive force in the negotiations at Geneva. Between the Council meetings, Eden pressed the unfortunate Aloisi until he secured Mussolini's reluctant acceptance of a tripartite meeting under the express authority of the League of Nations.⁴¹ Eden later recorded that Hoare would have been happy to see the Three-power meeting develop outside of the League's purview.⁴² Not so Eden. He saw his success in keeping the League firmly yoked to the Abyssinian crisis as a personal triumph.⁴³ On the evening of August 3, Eden broadcast back to Britain on the accomplishments which he had helped to engineer during the Council meeting just past. He referred to the negotiations as the most difficult he had

³⁹Ibid., p. 969.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 247.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

ever exp

were wor

the agre

direct m

He added

Eda

upcoming

Eden may

intended

nothing

Laval's

French

which m

ment.

Laval a

they wo

in each

Covenan

and wa

member

with t

Abyssi

Stutch

9-9-

ever experienced at Geneva, but he implied that the results were worth the effort. He placed particular emphasis upon the agreement reached by Britain, Italy and France to begin direct negotiations to try and arrive at a peaceful solution. He added that nothing would be done behind Abyssinia's back.⁴⁴

Eden's August 3 broadcast held out more hope for the upcoming tripartite meeting than circumstances warranted. Eden may have been trying to emphasize that his government intended to take the meeting very seriously, but he could do nothing to guarantee the attitude of the French. Indeed, Laval's actions on August 3 offered further evidence that the French would be very unlikely to exert the pressure on Italy which might persuade Mussolini to accept a compromise settlement. Before the August 3 meeting of the League Council, Laval and Eden had agreed upon texts for the speeches which they would make before the Council.⁴⁵ The idea was to close in each case with a strong statement of fidelity to the Covenant, meant to give Italy pause. Eden played his part and warned that Britain was mindful of its obligations as a member of the League, and would look to see the Council "deal with the whole question" if an agreed settlement of the Abyssinian dispute failed to eventuate.⁴⁶ When it came his

⁴⁴The Listener, August 14, 1935, p. 264.

⁴⁵Geoffrey Thompson, Front Line Diplomat (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 105.

⁴⁶League of Nations, Official Journal, August 1935, p. 969.

turn

He e

and

the

wer

in

peo

whi

Gra

Ab

Fai

Ab

Ab

ide

peo

Mus

dis

des

of

no

Co

turn, Laval omitted the pungent last paragraph of his speech. He explained afterwards that he had shown his speech to Aloisi and had dropped the final paragraph on Aloisi's advice.⁴⁷

The elusive Laval was in himself good reason to doubt that the three-power meeting would be productive. There were also continuing indications that positions were hardening in Addis Ababa and Rome. On July 17, Haile Selassie told George Steer of The Times that he would accept the proposal which Britain had made in June. He would exchange most of the Ogaden for a seaport, but he ruled out the cession of any Abyssinian territory in the north.⁴⁸ On the following day, Haile Selassie delivered a rallying speech to an assembly of Abyssinian notables in Parliament House. He declared that Abyssinia would stand against any invader, he rejected the idea of a mandate or protectorate, and he called upon his people to unite in the country's defense.⁴⁹ In Rome, Mussolini spoke on July 21 of Italy's colonizing mission. He discounted the League of Nations as an organization apparently designed to preside over the decadence of Europe. The moment of decision had come, Mussolini said, and to meet it he had mobilized two more divisions.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Thompson, Front Line Diplomat, p. 105.

⁴⁸The Times, July 18, 1935.

⁴⁹The Times, July 19, 1935.

⁵⁰Gaetano Salvemini, Prelude to World War II (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1954), p. 243.

Dee
ment sa
tripart
Mussolin
cess mi
set a d
sation,
Italia
the thr
a compr
be disc
H
and Pr
danger
partit
ment b
matter
reason
the si
to the
to lay
"in t
ready
which

Despite the signs of impending war, the British government saw no point in being pessimistic about the forthcoming tripartite meeting. Eden had arranged the meeting over Mussolini's objections. With some French support, that success might lead to another. Mussolini's public pronouncements set a difficult tone for the meeting, but in private conversation, away from the atmosphere of Rome or Geneva, the Italians could be expected to be less rigid. In any case, the three-power talks opened up a new possibility of arranging a compromise settlement and, for that reason alone, could not be discounted.

Hoare hoped that Mussolini would recognize that Britain and France were anxious to help Italy climb down from a dangerous situation without any loss of prestige. The tripartite talks offered an opportunity to work out a settlement before the League convened in September and took up the matter. If the talks did nothing more than establish a more reasonable attitude on Italy's part, it was possible that the situation could be managed at Geneva. In a statement to the House of Commons on August 1, Hoare urged the Italians to lay their complaints against Abyssinia before the League "in the proper and regular manner. They will find the League ready to give full and impartial consideration to the case which they put before it."⁵¹ To emphasize British good will,

⁵¹304 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 2933.

Hoare r

expansi

should

British

tion to

under t

was app

relucta

be bad

exagger

Hoare s

would r

to offe

neant d

adjour

worry

at the

plann

Hoare reiterated his sympathy for the Italian "need for expansion."⁵² He made it clear on the other hand, that should Italy continue to ignore the voice of reason, the British government would be "second to no one in our intention to carry out our obligations under the Treaties and under the Covenant."⁵³ From the context of his remarks, it was apparent that the Foreign Secretary's warning was as reluctant as it was unequivocal. War, he emphasized, would be bad for Italy, bad for Abyssinia, and "harmful beyond exaggeration to the League...."⁵⁴ Speaking for the government, Hoare said "we are determined to take no rash steps which would make the situation irredeemable."⁵⁵ Had he been able to offer that assurance on behalf of Mussolini, it would have meant a good deal more. On August 2, the House of Commons adjourned for the summer recess and left the government to worry over the implications of their dual policy.

V

The tripartite talks were scheduled to begin in Paris at the end of the second week in August. Eden and Vansittart planned to go over for preliminary conversations with French

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., col. 2932.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

off

It's

jo

in

co

co

th

ti

co

ne

in

al

Ap

mi

pr

Al

ch

it

fr

ho

sa

day

officials to try to establish an agreed position before the Italians arrived. Somehow, the idea that the French would join in the effort to put pressure on the Italians took root in London in spite of the wriggings of Laval.

On August 6, Baldwin, Hoare and Eden met in London to consider the line that Eden should take in the three power conversations.⁵⁶ Eden was authorized to threaten Italy with the procedures outlined in the Covenant, but the authorization was carefully hedged. No doubt Baldwin and Hoare had come to recognize the danger of giving Eden his head in negotiations relating to the Abyssinian crisis. Eden was instructed to "do his utmost to maintain the close relations already established with the French Government on the Italo-Abyssinian dispute."⁵⁷ On that questionable premise, the ministers agreed that Eden should seek to establish a joint program for later discussion with the Italian representative, Aloisi. The object was to bring home to Aloisi "the ultimate choice before Italy."⁵⁸

Mussolini's choice, as Baldwin, Hoare and Eden defined it, lay either in accepting certain reasonable concessions from Abyssinia, or in facing a League of Nations left with

⁵⁶The rest of the cabinet had scattered for their summer holidays. Eden and Hoare thought themselves fortunate to coax Baldwin into a meeting in London before he left for his holiday in France. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 248.

⁵⁷Cab 24/256, C.P.159(35).

⁵⁸Ibid.

no optio

Covenan

support

violatio

He was

and rea

Abyssin

Italian

Abyssin

propos

of the

conces

approa

the ap

extra

minis

forth

was a

contr

never

cessi

no option but to consider the obligations imposed by the Covenant.⁵⁹ Eden was given discretion to offer British support for the Italian position on frontier and treaty violations, insofar as a case could be made in each instance. He was also authorized to support Italian demands for "usual and reasonable" facilities for trade and habitation in Abyssinia. And Britain obviously had no objection to the Italian insistence on the elimination of the slave trade in Abyssinia.⁶⁰ The ministers recognized that such modest proposals would hardly meet Mussolini's demands. The success of the conversations would turn on the question of territorial concessions.

There were indications that the French intended to approach the matter of territorial concessions by proposing the application of joint Anglo-French pressure on Abyssinia to extract the "maximum offer" in the interest of peace. The ministers agreed that Abyssinia should be encouraged to be forthcoming on the matter of territorial concessions. Eden was also authorized to remind the French that they too could contribute to the territorial offer. France, after all, had never conceded anything to Italy comparable to the British cession of Jubaland.⁶¹

If the Italians refused to accept a reasonable package

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

of economic and territorial concessions they were to be left with no illusions about the decision which they would be forcing upon the member-states of the League of Nations. Eden was to underline the clear danger, but he was expressly instructed to give the French no reason to complain to the Italians that Britain was pressing for a French commitment on sanctions. Any detailed discussion of sanctions was to be avoided, "as this does not arise at present and, if it arises at all, belongs rather to discussions at a later stage."⁶² Eden was further instructed to bear in mind that the cabinet had decided that, in discussions with the French, "the underlying assumption would be that both Powers realised their obligations and were jointly interested to find a way out of the difficulty."⁶³

Eden's instructions represented another victory for him. He gained the authority to imply very strongly in Paris that Britain would press for sanctions in the event of Italian aggression. Nonetheless, his instructions were shot through with caution and a reluctance to believe that the matter would come to the point of sanctions. The dread word sanction was to be scrupulously avoided, and Eden was to keep carefully in step with Laval. The ministers recognized, however, that even the implied threat which they were authorizing carried real danger. As a concomitant to the instructions given to

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

Eden, the ministers directed the Chiefs of Staff to consider the military implications "if Italy took the bit between her teeth" and attacked the Mediterranean fleet.⁶⁴

The advice tendered to the cabinet by the Chiefs of Staff was hardly encouraging. By July 30, the Chiefs of Staff had completed their consideration of the problem posed for them by Baldwin on July 5.⁶⁵ The problem was to weigh the implications of applying the economic sanctions outlined in Article 16 of the League Covenant. The military experts judged that Italy was "particularly vulnerable to economic pressure," but they added that the stocks of war materials which had been accumulated in Italy made it unlikely that economic pressure would be effective for several months.⁶⁶ They concluded that in order for economic pressure to be effective at all, Britain and France would have to give a vigorous and sustained lead to the smaller countries at Geneva, and the participating navies would have to exercise belligerent rights in the blockade of Italy, at least to the extent of examining neutral shipping for contraband.⁶⁷ In the opinion of the military chiefs, such a blockade would "almost inevitably lead to active hostilities, most probably at sea,

⁶⁴Cab 24/256, C.P.166(35).

⁶⁵Marder, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," p. 1327.

⁶⁶Cab 24/256, C.P.169(35).

⁶⁷Ibid.

and thus involve the Naval Powers in the first instance."⁶⁸

The Chiefs of Staff were even more emphatic about the dangers posed by a sudden Italian attack on the Mediterranean fleet. By August 9, Vansittart had in hand a copy of the report prepared by the Chiefs of Staff in response to the August 6 instructions from Baldwin, Eden and Hoare.⁶⁹ In the gravest tones, the military chiefs warned against taking any action likely to cause Italy "to take the bit between her teeth."⁷⁰ The fleet was not on a war footing. A full week would be required to bring the fleet up to full effectiveness, and that was assuming authority to take the politically sensitive step of mobilizing the reserves.⁷¹ Beyond that, the chiefs noted, it would take at least two months "before all our forces can be considered as able effectively to co-operate... on a war basis."⁷² If the government expected the Services to meet an Italian threat in the Mediterranean, adequate prior notice was all-important.

The Chiefs of Staff made no effort to hide their concern over the militarily unrealistic obligations imposed by the Covenant. "Any idea," they warned, "that sanctions can be

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Sir Robert Vansittart to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 9, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁷⁰Cab 24/256 C.P.166(35).

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

enforc

from

it cla

force

leagu

provin

Brita

that

ill a

ment

aded

simil

Germa

cover

Itali

that

warni

brief

that

cauti

Crisi

enforced whenever diplomatically desirable is highly dangerous from the point of view of the Services...."⁷³ The chiefs made it clear that, in their opinion, the war which Britain was forced to contemplate because of its connection with the League could seriously affect the government's programs to provide for British security. They had no doubts about Britain's ability to win a war with Italy, but they argued that the fleet would inevitably suffer losses which it could ill afford.⁷⁴ They pointed out that plans for the reinforcement of Singapore would be disrupted by such losses, and they added that if, as expected, a British air contingent suffered similar losses, the objective of achieving air parity with Germany by April, 1937 would also be undercut.⁷⁵ If the government decided to run the risks involved in opposing Italian ambitions in east Africa, the Chiefs of Staff stressed that the assured military support of France was essential.⁷⁶

Only Hoare and Vansittart were in London to receive the warning of the Chiefs of Staff. When Eden returned from a brief holiday in Yorkshire, he found Hoare and Vansittart agreed that the arguments of the military dictated additional caution in the impending tripartite talks.⁷⁷ Eden was

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.; Marder, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," pp. 1338-39.

⁷⁵Cab 24/256 C.P.166(35).

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 249.

thro

Gore

and a

Eden

to th

Alois

Hoare

Rome,

becam

senio

humil

posit

isola

gambl

resis

that

Augus

that

told

thoroughly depressed. He wrote bitterly to William Ormsby-Gore that he was faced with 'vague instructions from home and a thieves' kitchen in Paris.'⁷⁸ In the circumstances, Eden felt that there was little hope of a successful outcome to the talks.⁷⁹

In Rome, Mussolini was also in a black mood. On July 31, Aloisi received from Laval a copy of the memorandum which Hoare had sent to Paris on July 29. Aloisi passed it on to Rome, where Mussolini brooded over Hoare's arguments and became convinced, for the first time, that the British seriously intended to stand in his way.⁸⁰ A terrible humiliation suddenly loomed. The British navy was in a position to control the bottlenecks of the Mediterranean and isolate the Italian army in east Africa. Mussolini had gambled that the British would offer nothing more than passive resistance to his colonizing venture. Grimly he determined that war with Britain would be preferable to disgrace. On August 3, he told the German ambassador, Ulrich von Hassel, that he could not accept a second Adowa.⁸¹ On August 13, he told the French ambassador, Charles de Chambrun, that he

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 252.

⁸¹Documents on German Foreign Policy, ser. C, IV, 533.

would make war on the British before he allowed them to force a humiliating settlement upon Italy as they had done to France at Fashoda.⁸² Aloisi was sent to Paris under a strict charge to uphold the full letter of Mussolini's demands upon Abyssinia.⁸³

As Mussolini expected, and as Eden feared, the tripartite talks which began in Paris on August 16 only served to underline the mounting crisis. The discussions were hopeless without an agreed common ground. The British and French delegations had in mind a settlement which would be acceptable in Addis Ababa as well as in Rome. The Italian delegation was authorized to accept nothing less than effective political control of Abyssinia. On August 18, Mussolini put an end to the talks by rejecting out of hand the settlement proposed by the British and the French.

From the British point of view, a critical aspect of the Paris talks took place before the Italians arrived. Eden and Vansittart left London on August 13 to have a day alone with Laval and his advisers. They found that Laval conceived of the tripartite conversations as an opportunity to mediate in a dispute between Britain and Italy.⁸⁴ Eden had anticipated

⁸²Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 630-31; Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 255.

⁸³Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 254.

⁸⁴Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 628.

that it would prove difficult to make Laval "face realities."⁸⁵ He and Vansittart devoted the rest of the day to the task. Their key argument was that if the League of Nations was discredited in the Abyssinian affair, public opinion in Britain might turn against continued British participation in Continental affairs.⁸⁶ Hoare had touched on the same nerve in his memorandum of July 29, and Laval began to take the repeated British warning seriously.

On August 15, it was Aloisi's turn to warn about his government's determination. The tripartite talks did not begin formally until August 16, but Aloisi outlined Italy's position in advance in separate conversations with Laval and Eden. Aloisi proposed three bases for the tripartite conversations:

1. French and British recognition of Italian political and economic preponderance in Abyssinia.
2. A declaration by both countries of their recognition of Italian need of expansion.
3. In the event of agreement on the above two points, an assurance of Italian cooperation at Geneva.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Anthony Eden to Stanley Baldwin, August 13, 1935, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 123.

⁸⁶Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 250.

⁸⁷Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 629

Alois

over

Italy

the p

he ac

peace

to Al

might

was n

agree

The t

Varsi

with

the s

Eden a

Alois

uncom

the e

Aloisi explained that what Italy wanted was a class C mandate over Abyssinia.⁸⁸

Laval was taken aback by Aloisi's bold statement of Italy's requirements. He could not, he told Aloisi, accept the points proposed as the bases for conversation, nor could he accept the idea of a mandate. He was anxious to find a peaceful solution to the problem, however, and he suggested to Aloisi that cooperation among the three powers involved might secure most of what Italy wanted without a war.⁸⁹ Eden was more direct and less encouraging. He told Aloisi that no agreement was possible on the basis of the Italian demands.⁹⁰ The talks were effectively deadlocked before they began, and Vansittart was openly gloomy. In a late evening conversation with the American Charge J. T. Marriner, he spoke direly of the situation as more dangerous than any since 1914.⁹¹

The tripartite talks began formally on August 16, with Eden and Laval arguing against a fixed Italian position. Aloisi made it plain that he was under instructions to be uncompromising.⁹² Throughout the morning session and on into the evening, Eden and Laval tried to convince Aloisi that a

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 250.

⁹¹Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 626-27.

⁹²Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 250.

solution
was an in-
advantage
fully con-
by an up-
refined
proposal
of Nation
economic
Britain,
the bless
independ
but Brit
"special
role in
posed.
bility c
ation i
port of
rent. 94

Alc

93

94

The Com
proposal
in food
Assessing

solution based upon Italian political control of Abyssinia was an impossibility.⁹³ Instead, they proposed a variety of advantages for Italy and Italians in Abyssinia, to be peacefully conceded by the Abyssinian government and guaranteed by an updated version of the tripartate treaty of 1906. As refined for the evening session, the British and French proposals envisioned an Abyssinian request to the League of Nations for the foreign assistance necessary for the economic development and administrative reform of the country. Britain, Italy and France would provide the assistance with the blessing of the League and the consent of Abyssinia. The independence and sovereignty of Abyssinia would be guaranteed, but Britain and France were prepared to recognize Italy's "special economic interests" and to concede to Italy the major role in shaping the economic and administrative changes proposed. The proposal made specific reference to "the possibility of territorial rectifications," and the British delegation indicated that Britain remained willing to cede the port of Zeila to Abyssinia in order to facilitate an agreement.⁹⁴

Aloisi steadily refused to consider the suggestions put

⁹³Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 629-30.

⁹⁴Ibid., 631.; Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 250; Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, pp. 264-65. The proposals made by Eden and Laval on August 16 had been approved, in good part, in advance by Haile Selassie, Eric Virgin, The Abyssinia I Knew (London: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 159-60.

forward
with un
policy
League
governm
sion of
affairs
telepho
to warn
mitted
beside
Aloisi
tion. 9
August
port w
Carrut
felt s
for a

Miss
Will
sta-
RAT

forward by Eden and Laval. But Laval pressed his arguments with unexpected vigor. He stated flatly that the foreign policy of France, like that of Britain, was based upon the League of Nations.⁹⁵ Beyond that, he noted, the French government could not countenance the possibility of a revulsion of British public opinion from cooperation in European affairs.⁹⁶ To emphasize his concern, Laval went to the telephone, called the French Chargé in Rome, and told him to warn Mussolini that if Italy rejected the proposals submitted to Aloisi, France would have no choice but to stand beside Britain in the matter.⁹⁷ Laval's strong stand persuaded Aloisi to send the proposals to Mussolini for his consideration.⁹⁸ In Rome, Laval's arguments in Eden's presence on August 16 were weighed against the private assurance of support which he asked the new Italian ambassador, Vittorio Cerruti, to pass along to Mussolini on August 15.⁹⁹ Mussolini felt secure enough to leave the proposals lying on his desk for a day while he attended a series of military reviews.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 630.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 250.

⁹⁸Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 630.

⁹⁹In offering the reassurance of his support, Laval asked Mussolini not to jeopardize the League or to speak of war. William C. Askew, "The Secret Agreement Between France and Italy on Ethiopia, January 1935," Journal of Modern History, XXV (1953), p. 48.

¹⁰⁰Baer, The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War, p. 266.

All call

the word

kick the

On

Italian

rejected

respects

telegraph

the break

hard to

forge a

sinia h

during

'Anthon

are fac

Be

Laval.

his own

assume

1

1

1

1

Hoare,

in 1900

which

1901

1902

1903

All calls from Paris were refused, and Eden and Laval, in the words of the correspondent of The Times, were left "to kick their heels" until Mussolini saw fit to return a reply.¹⁰¹

On the morning of August 18, Aloisi brought Laval the Italian reply. It came as no surprise that Mussolini had rejected the proposals as being 'unacceptable in all respects.'¹⁰² The discussions were broken off, and Eden telegraphed to Hoare: 'We are now therefore in presence of the breakdown which we have always foreseen.'¹⁰³ It was hard to avoid the conclusion that the last opportunity to forge a compromise settlement before war developed in Abyssinia had been lost. Vansittart pointed up the obvious during a post-mortem at the British embassy that night. 'Anthony,' he told a tired and rather petulant Eden, 'you are faced with a first-class international crisis.'¹⁰⁴

Before leaving Paris, Eden had a final conversation with Laval. Laval agreed that Mussolini seemed determined to go his own way without any regard for world opinion, and he assumed that some form of condemnation of Italian aggression

¹⁰¹The Times, August 19, 1935.

¹⁰²Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 251.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Thompson, Front Line Diplomat, p. 107. In a letter to Hoare, Vansittart attributed the failure of the Paris talks in good part to the deterioration of British military strength, which led the Italians to scoff and the French to doubt. Sir Robert Vansittart to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 19, 1935, FO 800/295.

by th
that
but h
repor
secun
had n
courc

the F
reite
with
to Ho
consi
Hoare
burden
to the
to enf
friend

1

2

3

by the League of Nations would be inevitable.¹⁰⁵ Laval said that he had no intention of turning his back upon the League, but he begged Eden to make the French dilemma clear when he reported to his colleagues in London. Italy was the one secure ally that France had on the Continent, and Mussolini had made a pointed reference to that relationship in the course of rejecting the Anglo-French proposals.¹⁰⁶

In his concluding message from Paris, Eden characterized the French attitude as indecisive and embarrassed, and he reiterated that virtually all possibility of negotiation with Italy had vanished. In the circumstances, he suggested to Hoare that it was time to call the cabinet together to consider the military implications of the situation.¹⁰⁷ Hoare no doubt welcomed the idea of sharing the Abyssinian burden again, but he must have shuddered at Eden's reference to the growing likelihood that the British fleet would have to enforce the provisions of the Covenant upon a European friend.

¹⁰⁵Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 251-52.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 253.

partite
of reas
comple
plans
The th
the le
taken
of mos
point
If the

1
Some t
Abyss
had sp
ruin h
1935,

2
the le
intern
either
Walter
Univer
in Bri
remark
A repr
on App
-talia
and th

CHAPTER IV
THE BRITISH LEAD

There could be little remaining doubt after the tripartite meetings in Paris that Mussolini was beyond the appeal of reason. Italian military preparations were virtually complete in east Africa, and Mussolini boasted openly of his plans to conquer Abyssinia as soon as the climate allowed.¹ The threat of Italian aggression posed a direct challenge to the League of Nations, a challenge which would have to be taken up when the League convened in September. In the eyes of most observers, the League of Nations had reached the point at which its success or failure would be determined.² If the League were to meet the Italian challenge, Britain

¹On August 19, Mussolini told the American Chargé in Rome that it was too late to avoid an armed conflict with Abyssinia. Italy, he said, had mobilized a million men and had spent two billion lire. Any alteration in purpose would ruin his government. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 739-40.

²From his vantage point as Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Frank Walters witnessed a surge of international opinion in support of a Covenant "about to be either decisively reinforced or fatally discredited." F. P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford University Press, 1967, first published in 1952), pp. 646-47. In Britain, the sense of crisis produced, inter alia, a remarkable correspondence published in the columns of The Times. A representative example was Lord Snowden's letter, printed on August 14, warning that unless the League took up the Italian challenge "there is an end to the League of Nations and the world sinks back to the rule of the beast."

and France would have to show the way. The French were clearly reluctant to offend Mussolini and would do little at Geneva unless pushed from London. Foreign Secretary Hoare called his colleagues back to London at the end of August to face a decision which they had earnestly hoped to avoid. When the cabinet gathered on August 22, they were aware that it lay in their hands to determine whether the existing system of collective security would be put to the test or effectively abandoned.

One of the letters which Hoare wrote to call the cabinet back from holiday went to Neville Chamberlain in Switzerland.³ Chamberlain was Hoare's principal confidant in the cabinet, and the Foreign Secretary unburdened himself about the dangerous problem which he was trying to manage. Mussolini had proven completely unreasonable and there looked to be a first-class crisis when the League met in September. The military were gravely concerned about the risks involved in the situation, and Hoare complained that he was receiving no help from his senior colleagues.⁴ It was vitally necessary, he felt, for the cabinet to meet

to consider what in these circumstances our attitude should be on two assumptions (1) that

³Sir Samuel Hoare to Neville Chamberlain, August 18, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁴Hoare was particularly critical of Baldwin, who, he said, "would think about nothing but his holiday and the necessity of keeping out of the whole business almost at any cost," ibid.

H
sancti
any mo
lini t
was no
Italia
next d
in a s
first
crisis
Athert
was wi
would
S
from s
On Aug
which
that t
force,
accept

1935,

the French are completely with us (2) that the French have backed out. It is equally urgent for the Cabinet to consider what preparations should be made to meet a possible mad dog act by the Italians.⁵

Hoare's tone was rather desperate. A decision on sanctions could hardly be avoided, and Hoare was afraid that any move to impose significant sanctions would prompt Mussolini to attack Britain's Mediterranean fleet. The question was no longer one of merely authorizing Eden to threaten the Italians with the procedures outlined in the Covenant. The next decision, the hard decision, might well involve Britain in a serious war. With that prospect in mind, Hoare thought first of the escape route which had been open throughout the crisis. On August 20, Hoare told the American Charge, Ray Atherton, that "at Geneva England would go as far as France was willing to go, but no further."⁶ The French, of course, would do nothing unless compelled to do so.

Significantly, Hoare apparently saw no way to draw away from sanctions other than to take shelter behind the French. On August 13, Ramsay MacDonald wrote a letter to Hoare in which he argued that sanctions against Italy made no sense in that there was no League machinery for meeting force with force, and that, in any event, Britain was not prepared to accept the possible consequences.⁷ Hoare dismissed these

⁵Ibid.

⁶Foreign Relations of the United States, 1935, I, 633.

⁷J. Ramsay MacDonald to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 13, 1935, FO 800/295.

obvie
surre
avoi
of Ma
that
of a
crisi
to th
Itali
Musso
appan
if, a
repu
the E

Hoare
Parli
lain,
David
by tu
press
with
advic
by i-

1935

obvious arguments as "Ramsay's alarmist and pusillanimous surrender to the Italians."⁸ Considering his own desire to avoid a military confrontation with Italy, Hoare's judgment of MacDonald's reasoning was harsh. He no doubt felt, however, that it was rather late in the day to advance a general line of argument about the League's limitations. Throughout the crisis, the government had chosen to emphasize their fidelity to the League and its procedures, while hoping that the Italian-Abyssinian quarrel would be settled peacefully. As Mussolini's determination to have his war become increasingly apparent, public opinion in Britain hardened against Italy. If, at the eleventh hour, the government were to appear to repudiate the Covenant, they would lose very heavily with the British people.

Before putting the question of sanctions to the cabinet, Hoare and Eden sounded some of the more important leaders of Parliamentary opinion. At Hoare's invitation, Austen Chamberlain, Herbert Samuel, Winston Churchill, George Lansbury, David Lloyd George, and Lord Cecil visited the Foreign Office by turns on August 20 and 21. Hoare would have been hard pressed to assemble a more varied group of politicians, but with remarkable accord they offered much the same kind of advice. To a man, they felt that the government had to stand by its commitments under the Covenant but had no obligation

⁸ Sir Samuel Hoare to Neville Chamberlain, August 18, 1935, FO 800/295.

to do s

if the

Cecil r

French

sanctio

machine

spoke o

point e

the vul

sympath

import

honor

course

which

strate

econom

effect

would

take

Geneva

polit

real

the c

Heare

the c

to do so alone.⁹ They saw French cooperation as all important if the League were to move against Italian aggression, and even Cecil recognized that it was important to avoid pushing the French so hard that they would back out altogether. As to sanctions, Lloyd George and Lansbury felt that the League machinery had to be tried out, while Chamberlain and Samuel spoke of the need to work through League channels to the point of economic sanctions. Churchill, who worried about the vulnerability of the Mediterranean fleet and whose sympathies lay generally with Italy also emphasized the importance of making it clear that Britain was prepared to honor the obligations outlined in the Covenant. Cecil, of course, was keen to see the effectiveness of the organization which he had helped create finally and conclusively demonstrated. Significantly, only Churchill seemed concerned that economic sanctions might lead to the point of war. The net effect of the interviews was to establish that the cabinet would enjoy broad support in Parliament if they elected to take the lead in proposing economic sanctions at Paris and Geneva.

Had the question been one of simply following the politically popular course, the cabinet would have faced no real problem when they met on August 22. Hoare's report on the conversations which he and Eden had just completed at

⁹There are identical sets of memoranda, drawn up by Hoare and Eden, of these conversations in FO 800/295, and in the Templewood Papers, General Political, VIII, 1.

the For
mind co
one tha
had to
put by
month.
they r
that s
tain a
the th
milita
rememb
compro
and, a
League
diffi
force

to be
On t
net
and
whic
spe

na
12

the Foreign Office confirmed that the Peace Ballot frame of mind continued to predominate in Parliament. The issue was one that involved the threat of war, however, and the cabinet had to look beyond popular sentiment and consider the warnings put by the Chiefs of Staff in their report earlier in the month.¹⁰ Most of the cabinet ministers did not know until they returned to London that the military chiefs considered that sanctions carried the grave threat of a war between Britain and Italy which could cripple British efforts to meet the threats being posed by Germany and Japan. Beyond the military aspect of the situation, the cabinet also had to remember that their principal interest lay in promoting a compromise solution which would give Italy some satisfaction and, at the same time, do the least possible damage to the League of Nations. All in all, it represented the most difficult and dangerous decision which the cabinet had been forced to make during the life of the National government.

The question of sanctions was apparently too important to be left to an unstructured discussion of the full cabinet. On the evening of August 21, a group of the principal ministers met at the Prime Minister's residence, thrashed out the issue and then led the cabinet on the following day to a decision which had already been made. The ministers involved in the special meeting were Baldwin, Ramsay MacDonald, Simon, Hoare,

¹⁰The report, Cab 24/256 C.P.166(35), was one of the papers considered at the meeting on August 22, Cab 23/82 42(35)1.

Chamber

partici

sanctio

Th

establi

with an

emphasi

and wo

nearly

French

demand

Hoare

he and

was no

of Nat

in eff

fleet,

implic

1935

that

the F

membe

that

Harol

ather

and w

appar

Chamberlain and Eden. The decision which they reached was to participate, if necessary, in the imposition of economic sanctions upon Italy.¹¹

The orientation of the key meeting of ministers was established at the outset by Eden and Hoare. Eden began with an account of the tripartite discussions in Paris. He emphasized that the Italians had been thoroughly intransigent and would be satisfied with nothing less than dominion over nearly all of Abyssinia. He noted that the British and French delegations had acted together to resist the Italian demands but added that the French were privately wavering.¹² Hoare followed and said that, despite the French attitude, he and Eden "were clear in advising their colleagues that it was nothing less than essential to follow the regular League of Nations procedure in this crisis."¹³ Hoare was arguing, in effect, for authority to make use of the Mediterranean fleet, and his colleagues were well aware of the dangerous implications of his advice.

¹¹The minutes of the meeting of ministers on August 21, 1935 are found at Cab 23/82 F.A./H/7.

¹²Earlier in the day, Eden told Harold Nicolson over lunch that the entire Abyssinian problem "would be simple enough if the French were really with us." Eden was no doubt the only member of the group that met later that evening who thought that there was only one important complicating consideration. Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters, 1930-1939 (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 212.

¹³Cab 23/82 F.A./H./7. Hoare's conversations with Eden and with the parliamentary leaders at the Foreign Office apparently tempered his anxiety about sanctions.

In
follow
however
rather
to be
most p
a corn
ularly
observ
great
were t
worrie
react
of ma
Counc
about
Musso
sanct
seric
agre
prev
the
faci
econ

In the end, the ministers agreed that they would have to follow the advice of Hoare and Eden. Their conclusion, however, was forced and unhappy, their reasoning agonized rather than decisive. It is difficult, from their discussion, to be certain which of several considerations contributed most prominently to their decision. They found themselves in a corner partially of their own making, and they were particularly conscious of the aroused British public. As MacDonald observed, "if Italy proceeded to extremes, it would be a great shock to British public opinion if no outward action were taken by His Majesty's government."¹⁴ But they also worried about the undependability of the French, the uncertain reaction of the important non-member states, and the problem of maintaining control of British policy once the League Council took the matter in hand. They were especially concerned about the threat of war. Chamberlain emphasized again that Mussolini's unpredictability would make the application of sanctions extremely dangerous. The risks involved were very serious and there was considerable doubt that the French would agree to help shoulder them.

Ironically, the feeling that the French might ultimately prevent the League from imposing sanctions made it easier for the ministers to support the use of sanctions. Hoare also facilitated the difficult decision by explaining that if economic sanctions were called for they could be applied

¹⁴Ibid.

gradu
inter
Assen
decis
self-
relat
howev
the m
the d
shoul
sanct

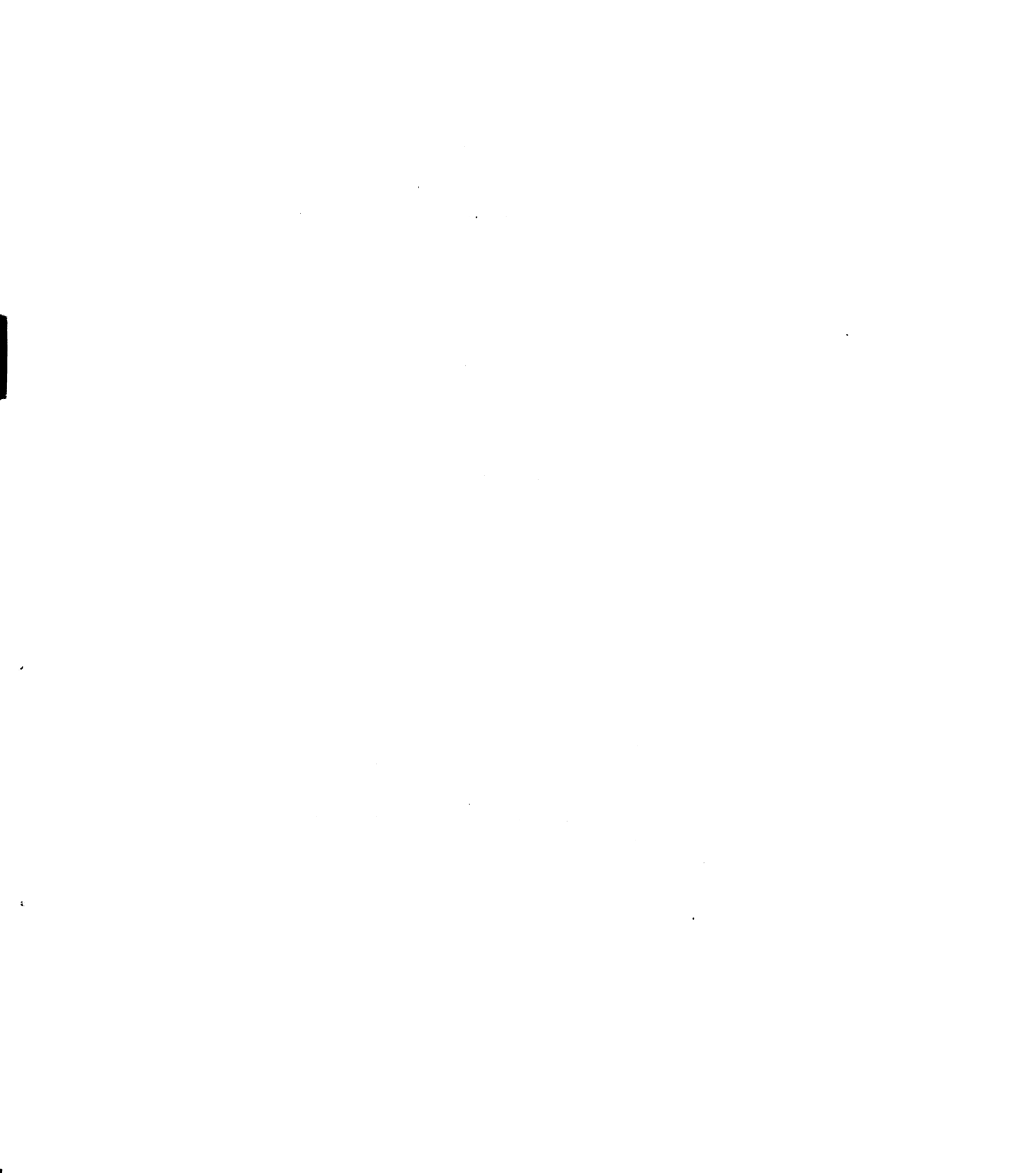
for t
at Be
shoul

1921,
down
the U
might
Unite
resol
appli
compl
by th
Counc
rever
rati
pp.

gradually and carefully in accordance with the resolutions interpreting Article 16 which had been adopted by the League Assembly in 1921.¹⁵ To a certain extent, then, even the decision to support the use of sanctions was based upon the self-delusive expectation that there might still be a relatively painless way out of the crisis. It was impossible, however, to ignore the risks involved in sanctions. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the discussion which led to the decision was that no one suggested that Britain could or should refuse to accept the heavy burden which economic sanctions might place upon the British fleet.

The full cabinet met on August 22 to draft instructions for the delegation which would attend the forthcoming meetings at Geneva. After lengthy discussion, they agreed that Britain should lend cautious support to a call for economic sanctions

¹⁵At the second Assembly of the League of Nations in 1921, the point was made that the system of sanctions laid down in Article 16 had been adopted before anyone knew that the United States would not be a member. The dangers which might be involved in interfering with a trade which the United States saw as legitimate led the Assembly to adopt resolutions stipulating that economic sanctions could be applied gradually and partially rather than suddenly and completely. Pending the ratification of these amendments by the member states, the Assembly directed that the League Council should be guided by their substance. The amendments never formally came into force because the French refused to ratify them. Walters, A History of the League of Nations pp. 147-48.



in the event of Italian aggression.¹⁶ The British delegates were to reaffirm the statements that had been made in Parliament about British support for the Covenant, but they were not authorized to take the lead in proposing sanctions. The guiding principle for the delegation would be to keep in close step with the French, and to avoid any commitment which the French were not equally prepared to assume. If a policy of economic sanctions was to be adopted and implemented, it would have to be done collectively by the entire membership of the League. And if the League did elect to impose sanctions, the cabinet cautioned that the procedure laid down in the Covenant, as interpreted by the Assembly in 1921, should be followed closely, "not in any quixotic spirit, and with due regard to the many difficulties."¹⁷ With the warnings of the Chiefs of Staff on the table before them, the cabinet members were especially conscious of "the grave effects on our diplomacy of our present military weakness."¹⁸

¹⁶Cab 23/82 42(35)1. At the same meeting, the cabinet decided not to lift the embargo which had been in effect on the sale of British manufactured arms to either Italy or Abyssinia. It was Abyssinia, of course, that was anxious to buy the arms, but, as Hoare explained in a letter to Lloyd George, the information available to the cabinet suggested that the Abyssinians were not really in the position to buy very much, while a unilateral lifting of the embargo might cause a rift with the French which would destroy any prospect of joint Anglo-French pressure on the Italians. Sir Samuel Hoare to David Lloyd George, August 28, 1935, FO 800/295.

¹⁷Cab 23/82 42(35)1.

¹⁸Ibid.

On August 24, Hoare wrote to Sir George Clerk in Paris to explain the cabinet's decision. His letter throws additional light on the cabinet's reasoning:

The general feeling of the country, fully reflected in the Cabinet, can, I think, be summarised as one of determination to stick to the Covenant and of anxiety to keep out of war. You will say that these feelings are self-contradictory. At present at least the country believes that they can be reconciled. Most people are still convinced that if we stick to the Covenant and apply collective sanctions, Italy must give in and there will be no war. You and I know that the position is not as simple as this and that the presumptions that, firstly, there will be collective action including full collective action by the French, and, secondly, that economic sanctions will be effective are, to say the least, very bold and sanguine. None the less, whatever may develop it is essential that we should play out the League hand in September. If it is then found that there is no collective basis for sanctions, that is to say in particular that the French are not prepared to give their full cooperation, or that the action of the non-member States, for example Germany, the United States and Japan, is so unhelpful as to make economic sanctions futile, the world will have to face the fact that sanctions are impracticable. We must, however, on no account assume the impracticability of sanctions until the League has made this investigation.¹⁹

Hoare speculated that the League Council would make an inquiry into the question of sanctions and added that Britain would participate in such an inquiry "with the bona fide intention of seeing what can be done in face of the actual facts."²⁰

¹⁹Sir Samuel Hoare to Sir George Clerk, August 24, 1935, FO 800/295.

²⁰Ibid.

The cabinet obviously were determined not to be responsible for the decisive failure of the League. The decision to support sanctions was not willingly taken, nor was there much optimism that sanctions would succeed, or, indeed, that they would even be imposed. If it did come to sanctions, however, the cabinet were agreed that it was important to see if the League system would work to control aggression without necessitating recourse to war. In the threatening circumstances developing in Europe and the Far East, it was essential to know how to structure a program for British security. If the League system did not work, it was necessary to recognize that fact and to redouble the efforts being made in the direction of rearmament.²¹ From the cabinet's point of view, then,

²¹Hoare stopped short of explaining to Clerk that an unsuccessful attempt by the League to control Italian aggression would mean an increased emphasis upon rearmament in Britain. The conclusion was obvious, however, and Neville Chamberlain drew it for J. L. Garvin and George Lloyd when he discussed the Abyssinian crisis with them at about the same time. According to Lloyd, Chamberlain suggested that the government could afford the luxury of a strong stand in support of the Covenant since the French were certain to make sanctions impossible, and Britain could then embark upon a large program of naval reconstruction.

Lloyd's account of his conversation with Chamberlain opens up a critical question of interpretation. If accepted at face value, it creates the impression that Chamberlain, and by implication his colleagues, were frankly cynical in their support for the League and looked to turn a difficult situation to profit by sheltering behind the French. That impression is reinforced by Leo Amery's account of a similar conversation with Chamberlain on September 24. Both Amery and Lloyd had axes to grind, however, and each may have put his own reading on what Chamberlain had to say. Lloyd was President of the Navy League and a loud thumper for naval rearmament in Conservative circles. Amery had long been an open opponent of Britain's connection with the League of Nations. The conclusions drawn by Chamberlain's biographers have been sharply

the decision to support sanctions represented an experiment, not undertaken "cleverly", as A. J. P. Taylor has suggested, but rather with the feeling that there was little else that could be done.²² Essentially, the decision was, as Hoare

at variance with the impression created by the accounts of Lloyd and Amery. Keith Feiling and Iain Macleod noted that Chamberlain was well aware of the limitations imposed by British military weakness and by the incomplete nature of the League, but each emphasized a letter which Chamberlain wrote to his wife in September in which he reasoned that sanctions might force Mussolini to halt and Hitler to waver. Macleod also pointed to the fact that Chamberlain became a leading advocate of the dangerous oil sanction when the question arose in November. William Rock's conclusion was that Chamberlain had no set views on sanctions, but developed his thinking in response to the crisis from a variety of general premises. Rock's interpretation seems to accord best with a consideration of the cabinet materials. The League was still seen as important to the British people, and its potential for British security had yet to be disproved. Chamberlain and his colleagues were dubious that the League system would work as intended, but they decided to 'try it out.' Had the government really been determined to shelter behind the French, it is altogether unlikely that the League would have had the leadership or the support necessary to impose sanctions upon Italy. Colin Forbes Adam, Life of Lord Lloyd (London: Macmillan, 1948), pp. 267-69; L. S. Amery, My Political Life, Vol III, The Unforgiving Years (London: Hutchinson, 1955), 174; Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1970, first published in 1946), p. 268; Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961), p. 187; William R. Rock, Neville Chamberlain (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 99-100.

²²Taylor felt that Hoare was responsible for the cabinet's decision to support collective action by the League; "Hoare always suffered from excessive cleverness, and never more so than on this occasion. He seemed to be betting on a certainty either way. If collective security worked, the prestige of the National government would be enhanced and the League could then be used effectively against Germany; if it failed, others could be blamed and the way would be open for rearmament." A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 380. Taylor's analysis converts the cabinet's agonized decision into one that was cynically calculated. Hoare and his colleagues may have been guilty of a number of sins during the Abyssinian crisis, but cleverness was not among them.

noted, a reflection of the confusion which had been typical of the British view of sanctions from the first. Despite the obvious danger, it was difficult for even a largely Conservative government to accept that the system which had been created to guarantee peace could in itself spawn a war.

II

On September 4 the League Council met in Geneva and began consideration of the long-postponed Abyssinian case. The Council had in hand, as a point of departure, the final report and award of the arbitral commission which had been meeting since August 26 in Paris.²³

The findings of the commission pointed up the obvious futility of the arbitral effort. The commission had been compelled to limit its concern to the WalWal incident as the price of Italian agreement to the appointment of a fifth arbitrator.²⁴ The end result of the commission's careful considerations was to establish that it was impossible to be certain who had fired the first shot at WalWal. Therefore the commission was unable to fix the blame for the incident on either Italy or Abyssinia. The commission's findings were predictable and of consequence only in so far as they served

²³The Italo-Ethiopian Commission of Conciliation and Arbitration rendered its decision on September 3. Baron Aloisi submitted the commission's findings to the Secretary-General on September 4, and they were printed as part of Annex 1571, League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, pp. 1351-55.

²⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, August 1935, pp. 967-68.

to place the matter back into the hands of the League Council. Once the commission had rendered its award on September 3, it was no longer possible for the Italian delegate to argue that the Council could not consider the dispute while it was the subject of an arbitral procedure.

Eden opened the Council's deliberations by reviewing again the failure of the tripartite meetings in Paris. As he had done in the critical meeting of ministers, Eden took the opportunity to set the tone for the meeting. He detailed the proposals put forward by the British and French, noted ruefully that the Italian delegation had rejected them, and then underlined what he saw as the significance of the problem:

I am sure that all of us, as Members of the Council of the League, must be fully alive to our responsibilities at this time. World opinion is watching us... if in the judgment of world opinion the League fails in this dispute, its authority for the future will be grievously shaken and its influence gravely impaired. The collapse of the League and of the new conception of international order for which it stands would be a world calamity.²⁵

Eden had been authorized to support rather than propose sanctions in the event of Italian aggression, and he was determined to make the Council face its responsibilities.

Laval, in his turn, was much more restrained than Eden. He pledged French loyalty to the Covenant, but focused his remarks on what he still saw as the prospects for a peaceful solution to the dispute. "I refuse to believe," Laval said,

²⁵League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, p. 1134.

"that this supreme effort is doomed to failure and that an equitable settlement cannot be found, one affording Italy the satisfaction she can legitimately claim without disregarding the fundamental rights of Ethiopian sovereignty."²⁶

Laval's determined optimism must have sounded foolish. The Italian foreign ministry had drawn up and circulated to the Council members an elaborate indictment depicting Abyssinia as barbarous and unfit for membership in the League.²⁷ Aloisi followed Laval and expanded on the Italian memorandum in terms which left no question about Italy's intentions. Italy, he said, could no longer adopt a "passive and forgiving" attitude towards an uncivilized state which was threatening Italian frontiers. Abyssinia had not measured up to the standards of the League and did not merit the rights of membership. Italy could not continue a discussion in the League on a footing of equality with Abyssinia, and had to reserve "full liberty to adopt any measures that may become necessary to ensure the safety of its colonies and to safeguard its own interests."²⁸

Aloisi's menacing statement lent weight to Gaston Jeze's

²⁶Ibid., p. 1135.

²⁷The Italian memorandum was 63 pages in length, and was accompanied by 272 supporting documents and a collection of photographs selected to depict Abyssinian barbarity. The memorandum drew tellingly upon British reports of the slave trade in Abyssinia and quoted with relish Lady Simon's condemnation of the practice. Ibid., Annex 1571, pp. 1355-1583.

²⁸Ibid., p. 1137.

call for the Council to "endeavor to effect a settlement of the dispute" in accord with Article 15 of the Covenant.²⁹ Jeze warned that there was no longer any time for dilatory measures. The question the Abyssinian government wanted the Council members to keep before them was whether Italy was to be allowed to conduct the "war of extermination" which was imminent. On September 6, the Council responded to the Abyssinian appeal by establishing a Committee of Five, composed of representatives of Spain, Turkey, Poland, Britain and France, "to make a general examination of Italo-Ethiopian relations and to seek for a pacific settlement."³⁰ In its ritual fashion, the League had begun the final process which would lead to its collapse.

Frank Walters, the British Deputy Secretary-General, later wondered why only Maxim Litvinov, of the representatives of the major powers on the Council, took up the challenge posed by the Italian memorandum.³¹ He felt that Litvinov's words on Eden's lips would have aroused great enthusiasm among supporters of the League. Walters did not know that Eden was'

²⁹Ibid., p. 1140.

³⁰Ibid., p. 1145.

³¹Walters, A History of the League of Nations, pp. 645-46. Litvinov, the representative of the Soviet Union, rejected the Italian arguments on the obvious grounds that the League was not formulated to pass judgment on the internal regimes of its members. A representative of the Soviet Union could hardly allow such arguments to go unchallenged. League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, p. 1142.

bound by cabinet instructions to keep closely in step with the French. That limited Eden's options, for Laval told him two days before the Council meeting that the main French concern was to gain time to postpone a confrontation between Italy and the League.³² Eden argued that it was more important to dispel the notion that the League was ineffective. Laval would not consider taking such a high line unless Eden could promise that Britain would be as enthusiastic in support of the League in the future. The key question for France was whether Britain would go to the point of sanctions if a comparable violation of the Covenant occurred in Europe. Eden could only answer with generalities. Laval's remarks reconfirmed the unwillingness of France to provide the leadership which might rally the League. Indeed, it seemed evident that Laval could only be brought to support a British call for sanctions by a commitment of the type that British governments had long avoided. Laval's attitude frustrated Eden, but it offered a logical retreat which the British government could have taken at any time until Hoare dramatically took the lead at Geneva.

The League Assembly convened on September 9, and the most important item scheduled for the opening sessions was, without question, the speech which Foreign Secretary Hoare was

³²Eden met with Laval in Paris on September 2 on his way to Geneva. His account of their conversation is found in The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs, Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), pp. 257-58.

due to make on September 11. Throughout the Abyssinian crisis, Eden had furnished most of what little effective leadership there had been at Geneva. Eden was, however, a young and junior minister, whose open devotion to the League system made it evident that he was as much a representative of the League in London as he was of Britain in Geneva. When Hoare mounted the rostrum of the Assembly on September 11, he did so with the full authority of his office and his remarks were received as the considered judgment of his government. Seldom had a speech been anticipated at Geneva as eagerly as Hoare's was, and he rewarded the League supporters crowded into the Assembly hall with a statement of Britain's position which went beyond anything they had hoped for.³³ In his flat, unemotional way, Hoare delivered a carefully worded speech which nonetheless had the effect of electrifying his listeners. The speech built to an unequivocal pledge, and he paused to lend particular emphasis to his words:

In conformity with its precise and explicit obligations, 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.³⁴

There was a good deal in Hoare's speech which merited

³³The Times, September 11, 1935.

³⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, 1935, Special Supplement No. 138, p. 46. There is also a copy of Hoare's speech in FO 800/295.

notice

He poi

vigoro

ance o

oft-pr

govern

to a

tivel

natio

view

that

would

secti

thing

is a

prob

of e

The

poli

Eri

of

notice beyond his emphatic pledge of support for the Covenant. He pointed out, for example, that his government had the vigorous support of the British people "in the full acceptance of the obligations of League membership, which is the oft-proclaimed key-note of British policy."³⁵ The British government, he said, felt that small nations were entitled to a life of their own "and to such protection as can collectively be afforded to them in the maintenance of their national life."³⁶ But he repeatedly stressed his government's view that the League was a collective undertaking, and added that if any burdens were to be borne by the League, they would have to be borne collectively. The most interesting section of his speech related to his statement that "something must also be done to remove the causes from which war is apt to arise."³⁷ He hopefully essayed the thesis that problems such as that between Italy and Abyssinia grew out of economic rather than political and territorial causes. The answer lay, he argued, in eliminating the fear of monopolistic control of essential raw materials, and he offered British participation in an investigation into the problem of assuring uniform access for all countries to such commodities.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 45.

³⁷Ibid.

All C

poss

Hoar

neces

appa

incl

appe

the

corr

was

whic

leag

teen

firs

his

gene

Sir

spe

eye

the

pa

on

de

tr

1

All of this was meant to give Italy pause and to suggest a possible solution, but the central impression created by Hoare's address was that Britain had decided to do what was necessary to stop Italian aggression.³⁸ That impression was apparently confirmed when units of the British Home Fleet, including the battle cruisers Hood and Renown, began to appear in the Mediterranean soon after the speech.³⁹

Hoare's speech prompted a two-minute ovation and left the Assembly hall buzzing with comment. The diplomatic correspondent of the Daily Telegraph reported that the speech was "universally acclaimed as the most important pronouncement which has been made by a British Foreign Secretary to the League since its formulation."⁴⁰ Vernon Bartlett, who had been reporting from Geneva for the News Chronicle since the first sessions of the Assembly, enthused that neither he nor his colleagues could remember a speech which had "such a general and vitalising effect as that made this morning by Sir Samuel Hoare."⁴¹ Foreign Ministers and delegates clustered

³⁸The experienced diplomats with whom Eden discussed the speech concluded that Britain had decided to stop Mussolini, even if it meant using force. Eden himself felt that that was the only possible interpretation of the speech. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 262.

³⁹The fleet units began to appear in the Mediterranean on September 12. Geoffrey Thompson, who was with the British delegation, observed that the news of their sudden appearance had an immense impact at Geneva. Geoffrey Thompson, Front-Line Diplomat (London: Hutchinson, 1959), p. 109.

⁴⁰Daily Telegraph, September 12, 1935.

⁴¹News Chronicle, September 12, 1935.

around

and t

almos

filbe

the I

Winst

Italy

poli

dail

duct

him

of

sar

re

ret

rea

ord

re

sic

ing

lit

u

u

23

23

23

23

23

23

23

23

23

23

23

23

around Hoare after the speech to offer their congratulations and to promise their support.⁴²

In Britain, the response generated by the speech was almost as enthusiastic as it had been in Geneva. Professor Gilbert Murray reflected the delight of the supporters of the League when he described the speech as "magnificent."⁴³ Winston Churchill, who had opposed taking the lead against Italy, was "stirred" by what he saw as the enunciation of a policy combining righteousness and strength.⁴⁴ All of the daily newspapers gave the speech banner attention. The Times quoted Hoare's pledge to uphold the Covenant and congratulated him on "expressing the views, not only of the Government, but of the country as a whole."⁴⁵ The Daily Telegraph took the same line and the Manchester Guardian pointed out that the pledge was made with the knowledge that the Committee of Five

⁴²In the letter which Hoare wrote to the king on his return, he said that "one of my chief troubles was that the head of almost every delegation wished to see me to take my orders." He had neither the time nor the inclination to relieve them of their responsibility to make their own decisions, but their response to his speech showed "what a great position we have in the world if we are ready to make use of it." Sir Samuel Hoare to Lord Wigram, September 14, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁴³Gilbert Murray to Lord Robert Cecil, September 12, 1935, Gilbert Murray Papers, Box 16 a d.

⁴⁴Churchill was actually on the Riviera rather than in Britain at the time of Hoare's speech, but because of his convictions, he offers a particularly good example of the domestic reaction to the speech. Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. I, The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 173.

⁴⁵The Times, September 12, 1935.

had
dow
the
in
sit
but
gen
suc
lec
for
Bri
bec

ent
tha
The
whi

19

13

Co

had made no progress with the Italians and was therefore doubly significant.⁴⁶ The speech even drew applause from the staunchly Conservative Morning Post, which took comfort in the emphasis which Hoare placed upon collective responsibility, and from the Daily Herald, which spoke for Labour but conceded that on this occasion Hoare had represented the genuine "voice of Britain."⁴⁷ Only the isolationist press, such as the Daily Mail, and like-minded politicians, such as Leo Amery, grumbled that Hoare's speech had decreased chances for a negotiated settlement and increased the prospect that Britain would be drawn into a general European conflagration because of an African dispute.⁴⁸

According to his memoirs, Hoare was surprised by the enthusiasm generated by his speech.⁴⁹ He admitted, however, that he set out to produce a revival of spirit in the League.⁵⁰ The speech had been worked up in the Foreign Office along lines which he laid down, then carefully considered and revised in

⁴⁶Daily Telegraph and Manchester Guardian, September 12, 1935.

⁴⁷Morning Post and Daily Herald, September 12, 1935.

⁴⁸Daily Mail, September 12, 1935; Amery, My Political Life, III, 171.

⁴⁹Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), pp. 169-70.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 166.

accord

Hoare

work

thou

and s

been

adhe

cont

by t

very

a so

grea

the

mat

ing

for

the

awa

red

in

du

co

fo

ar

wh

no

wi

g.

accordance with suggestions made by Neville Chamberlain.⁵¹ Hoare cannot have been very surprised at results which he worked so carefully to achieve. He may well have expected, though, that more attention would be paid to the reservations and suggestions made in the speech. For as long as he had been Foreign Secretary, he had emphasized that Britain's adherence to the obligations imposed by the Covenant was contingent upon a collective acceptance of those obligations by the other members of the League, and he made that point very clear again. He also put forward a possible basis for a solution to the crisis, which he hoped would be given greater consideration than it received. In an immediate sense, the proposal to investigate the problem of access to raw materials was another effort to bring Mussolini to the bargaining table. Beyond that, the Foreign Office had been concerned for some time about the tendency of the League to underwrite the status quo, and the proposal was meant to suggest a British awareness of the need to evolve new procedures to facilitate

⁵¹Chamberlain's account of the part that he played in helping Hoare to develop the speech offers a valuable insight into the influence which he exercised over foreign policy during the critical phase of the crisis: 'We discussed at considerable length what he should say at Geneva and as usual found ourselves in agreement. He first asked me my opinion and then, when I had given it, he produced bits of his draft which showed that he had been on the same idea. He then modified the emphasis or elaborated the argument in accordance with my suggestions.' Quoted in Macleod Neville Chamberlain, p. 186.

into

of

ing

sto

col

tha

lea

mer

Mus

agg

ho

ma

ca

Sp

CO

W

H

E

L

T

S

T

C

T

T

T

international change.⁵² The speech was, therefore, a blend of Hoare's dual policy of offering the carrot while threatening the stick, but it was his emphasis upon the stick which stood out, despite the cautionary note about a necessarily collective effort. Hoare and Chamberlain clearly expected that the speech would cause a stir among supporters of the League, since only by rousing the League with a strong statement of British determination could they hope to persuade Mussolini to pause and consider the certain implications of aggression.

It is easier to piece together the impression which Hoare hoped to make with his speech than to explain why he chose to make it. The cabinet had agreed on August 22 to support a call for economic sanctions in the event of Italian aggression,

⁵²The raw materials proposal was the one aspect of the speech that Hoare made a significant effort to clear with his colleagues. The proposal grew out of a similar suggestion which had been put forward at the Economic Conference of 1931. The idea seemed to hold the potential to meet some of Italy's economic grievances, as well as to defuse the issue of Germany's lost colonies. Interested ministers were asked to comment on the proposal, and, although Walter Runciman and the Board of Trade objected that effective free access to raw materials already existed, Hoare succeeded in obtaining general approval for the proposal. Among the experts, Frank Ashton-Gwatkin of the Foreign Office observed that nothing short of actual colonial control was likely to satisfy the Germans, but Lord Lugard, the great colonial administrator, lent his blessing to the raw materials proposal. Short-term considerations aside, Hoare was moved to include the proposal in his speech in the expectation that it might lay the basis for what Orme Sargent argued was a necessary effort on the part of the League to adjust to the building pressures for international change. Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 165-66. The memoranda prepared by Ashton-Gwatkin and Lugard on the subject are found in FO 800/295. Sargent's memorandum is filed at FO 371/19687 W8174/2304/98.

bu

in

ge

wa

it

we

in

an

Ch

hi

am

Ch

un

re

te

a

re

"e

as

but they had not been thinking in terms of a British lead. Indeed, there was no real need to provide a strong lead at Geneva until the aggression actually occurred.⁵³ Even Eden was surprised by the strength of the speech when Hoare showed it to him at Geneva.⁵⁴ The practical effects of the speech were to rouse League supporters everywhere, to predetermine in large measure the League's response to Italian aggression, and to lock Britain into a leading posture. Hoare, with Chamberlain's support, took responsibility for the speech himself. The cabinet was not reconvened to consider it, and among his senior colleagues, Hoare saw fit to consult only Chamberlain.⁵⁵ Baldwin was not given the speech to review until after it was in finished form. The Prime Minister returned it after a cursory reading with a spare and characteristic comment: 'That is all right. It must have taken you a long time to make it up.'⁵⁶

Vansittart, who had helped to draft the speech, later recorded that Baldwin and Chamberlain endorsed it for "electioneering" purposes.⁵⁷ There can be little doubt that

⁵³The Covenant made no provision for dealing with aggression until it was an established fact.

⁵⁴Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 260-61.

⁵⁵Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 165-66.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁷Lord Vansittart, The Mist Procession (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 532.

a

l

a

p

r

s

e

H

h

a

th

"

g

ha

in

me

da

in

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

—

all of the moves made by the government during the crisis, at least until the general election in November, were made with a keen awareness of the public mood. But it is not enough to put Hoare's speech down to the impending election alone.

There were more pressing considerations at the beginning of September, and Hoare's own explanations, which varied in emphasis somewhat, do a good deal to round out the picture. He wrote the king on September 14 that his principal concerns had been to establish a solid understanding with the French, and to secure the fullest possible measure of agreement with the other members of the League.⁵⁸ His success meant that a "mad dog" Italian attack upon the British fleet would be met by the combined weight of the League.⁵⁹ Intelligence reports had persuaded Hoare that such an attack was becoming increasingly likely.⁶⁰ Collective support for the Covenant also meant that the League might survive the crisis with little damage. Hoare told the House of Commons when it reconvened in October that part of the surprised reaction to his speech

⁵⁸Sir Samuel Hoare to Lord Wigram, September 14, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁵⁹Hoare was confident that he had been successful in securing the support that he wanted. Ibid.

⁶⁰Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 163. Hoare noted that it was fear of an Italian attack which prompted the reinforcement of the Mediterranean fleet, ibid. Arthur Marder's well-grounded conclusions support Hoare's statement, "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," American Historical Review, LXXV, 5 (June 1970), pp. 1333-34. The fleet movements were not authorized, therefore, to support Hoare's bluff at Geneva, but it is hard to imagine that he was unaware of the impact which they would have.

grew out of the fact that other members of the League:

did not realize the depth of the faith and hope that we have in the League as an instrument for bringing about a better ordered world. They underrated our feeling for the League as an impartial organization rather than as an organization directed against this or that group of countries. They failed also to understand that we look to the League as an instrument not only for preventing war but for removing the causes of war. And, lastly, they failed to understand that most of us regard the League as the bridge between Great Britain and Europe and that if this bridge is gravely weakened or destroyed, cooperation between us and the Continent will become difficult and dangerous.⁶¹

Hoare would have been a poor politician had he passed up an opportunity to get additional mileage out of his triumph, but there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of his concern to preserve the League. He seems, in particular, to have accepted the idea that the League represented the necessary bridge between Britain and the Continent.⁶² It was, unfortunately, a bridge which could open the way to otherwise unnecessary danger, and Hoare has confessed that he also saw

⁶¹October 22, 1935. 305 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 19.

⁶²The final point made by Hoare in his speech to the League Assembly was that the British attitude towards the Covenant was unlikely to change "so long as the League remains an effective body and the main bridge between the United Kingdom and the Continent remains intact." League of Nations, Official Journal, 1935 Special Supplement No. 138, p. 46.

th

It

th

re

in

ed

by

sh

th

wa

fi

mi

un

of

ta

un

an

in

de

—

s

—

s

—

s

—

s

—

s

the speech at Geneva as a last opportunity to "bluff" the Italians into negotiating a settlement which would prevent the need for sanctions.⁶³ Hoare knew, as Eden quickly recognized when he read the speech, that his strong statement implied a more vigorous reaction to aggression than the limited, gradual and cautious approach which had been authorized by the cabinet.⁶⁴ The risk of encouraging undue expectations should have been obvious. Hoare either failed to recognize the risk or felt that the dangers involved in sanctions warranted taking it.

In order to make his bold speech to the Assembly, Hoare first had to agree with Laval to avoid doing anything which might spark a European war. The contradiction between his understanding with Laval and the deliberate implications of his speech may well have been lost on the Foreign Secretary. He knew that his speech would have a reduced effect unless it was seconded by a similar statement from Laval, and he was bound by repeated cabinet instructions to keep in close step with the French. Hoare spent most of the day before he delivered his speech in long meetings with Laval,

⁶³Hoare wrote of his speech that "if there was any element of bluff in it, it was a moment when bluff was not only legitimate but inescapable." Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 166.

⁶⁴Eden concluded that after he left London for Geneva his colleagues had been "brought up against the character of the obstacle which faced them and had decided to make a clean leap over it." Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 261.

trying to develop the firm understanding on which it would be safe to proceed.⁶⁵ Laval had been reluctant to subject himself to additional pressure on the Abyssinian issue, but Hoare enticed him to Geneva earlier than he had intended with a promise to discuss the entire range of Anglo-French relations.⁶⁶

The conversations which took place alternately in the hotels occupied by the British and French delegations at Geneva offered the two men their first opportunity to meet and assess each other. Hoare's impression of Laval was hardly flattering. "His greasy hair, dirty white tie and shifty look did not prepossess me," Hoare wrote.⁶⁷ He told the king rather disdainfully that Laval was by origin a peasant from the Auvergne.⁶⁸ It was hard not to admire the quickness of Laval's mind, however, and Hoare decided that the French premier's "peasant cunning" might prove very useful. As the personal friend of Mussolini, he was in a good position to make use of his wits.

Hoare found that Laval's cunning made him a difficult man to pin down. Several members of the French delegation,

⁶⁵ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 167.

⁶⁶ Sir Samuel Hoare to Lord Wigram, September 14, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁶⁷ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 167-68.

⁶⁸ Hoare to Wigram, FO 800/295.

notably Edouard Herriot and Joseph Paul-Boncour, were eager to see a strong French statement in support of the Covenant.⁶⁹ Laval, on the other hand, refused to commit himself until the last possible moment. "The usual course of events," Hoare wryly observed, "was that he agreed entirely with me in the morning but by tea-time he would begin to wonder whether he would not be wise in trying to get more out of me."⁷⁰ It reminded him of trying to deal with Lloyd George.

The lever that Hoare used in his conversations with Laval was the open French fear of Germany. The French emphasized their fear by making, at the outset, a formal request for a firm British commitment in the event of a future violation of the Covenant.⁷¹ Hoare lacked the cabinet authority to respond categorically to the French request, but he argued that the necessary deterrent to German aggression was the establishment of a united front at Geneva.⁷² With that basis to build upon, it might be possible to draw Germany into a pact limiting air armaments, and into Eastern and Danubian agreements along the lines of the Locarno agreements. Laval pointed out that Mussolini represented an

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹The French submitted their request in a memorandum, 24/256 C.P.177(35).

⁷²Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 168.

established check on German ambitions.⁷³ French public opinion was bound to react against any move which would have the effect of driving Mussolini into Hitler's arms. The answer, Hoare suggested, lay in his double approach.⁷⁴ While working to create a united front against aggression at Geneva, it would be necessary to continue the patient and cautious negotiation which might produce the agreement which would preserve the Stresa front.

Laval finally agreed to cooperate with the British approach, but only on the condition that there would be no war. Hoare was happy to agree. "We both," he wrote, "excluded the idea of war with Italy as too dangerous and double-edged for the future of Europe."⁷⁵ They agreed to avoid provoking Mussolini into open hostility and concluded that any economic pressure on which the League agreed would have to be applied cautiously and in stages, with due regard for the fact that some of the most powerful nations in the world were not members of the League.⁷⁶ Hoare wrote later that he sensed the

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Eden, who was present, observed that Hoare emphasized that the League should not limit itself to face-saving, ineffective measures. But his notion of what might be effective was limited, at least initially, to a proposal that League members refuse to accept Italian exports. Laval was loath to go even that far. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 260.

reservations which lay behind Laval's words, but his conclusion at the time was that "there is now no danger of our finding ourselves in an isolated position without French support."⁷⁷ Laval seemingly confirmed that conclusion when he delivered to the Assembly, two days after Hoare's address, a statement of French policy which, while not as strong as Hoare's, nonetheless gave the impression of solid French support for the British position.⁷⁸

Hoare and Laval would have made a very different impression on the League had their cautious agreement been common knowledge. League supporters were deliberately led to expect that Italian aggression would be blunted by the vigorous opposition of a united League of Nations. Such expectations were bound to be disappointed unless the pressure mounted by the League brought Mussolini to his knees. Hoare should have known that there was very little chance that Mussolini could be bluffed by the threat of League action. On August 27, Sir Eric Drummond had written from Rome that Mussolini and the Italian people were capable of committing suicide rather than climbing down.⁷⁹ If the bluff failed, Hoare and Laval were agreed that the League's reaction to Italian

⁷⁷Hoare to Wigram, FO 800/295.

⁷⁸League of Nations, Official Journal, 1935, Special Supplement No. 138, 65-66.

⁷⁹Sir Eric Drummond to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 27, 1935, FO 800/295.

aggression would have to be limited and safe. Unless Mussolini weakened in his resolve, a safe approach was not likely to be effective.

It is not clear that Hoare saw the contradiction between his speech and his agreement with Laval. He and his government never viewed the possible imposition of sanctions as more than an opportunity to determine whether the League system could restrain aggression without recourse to war. It is hard to imagine, however, that Hoare did not realize that he was encouraging expectations which were hardly warranted. He must have been aware that his speech did not accord with his sympathy for Italian grievances, and with the British and French determination to pursue an agreed settlement by which Italy was bound to profit. Hoare's concern to preserve the League and his fear of being caught out alone by a 'mad dog' attack did provide some justification for his speech. Nonetheless, his decision to rouse the League with a strong British lead proved to be a serious mistake. It was a mistake which ranked with Simon's failure to respond to the Italian démarche in February, and with the wide discretion which the cabinet accorded to Eden during the early stages of the crisis. Given Mussolini's firm determination, Hoare's bold speech to the Assembly pointed directly to the debacle which occurred in December.

III

Hoare came away from Geneva with a clear mind. He had no sense of having made a mistake. On the contrary, he was

elated by the enthusiastic reception accorded his speech. At a minimum, he felt that he had won sufficient support to make an Italian attack on the Mediterranean fleet unlikely. On September 15, he wrote to Eden that it was essential for Britain to continue to show as much strength as possible in the Mediterranean.⁸⁰ In a similarly positive vein, he asked Eden to consider how soon he could begin discussions at Geneva on economic sanctions.⁸¹ The Italians had been predictably cold to the conciliatory efforts of the Committee of Five, and Hoare was finally convinced that Mussolini had "burnt his last boat."⁸² The problem, then, was to prevent the League from wasting the time that remained before the outbreak of war. Before aggression became an established fact, Hoare wanted to know how many of the delegates at Geneva had the authority to translate the enthusiasm they exhibited on September 11 into firm support for economic sanctions. "For what it is worth," he wrote to Eden, "my mind is moving in the direction of bringing things to an issue quickly."⁸³

Having set Eden to work at Geneva, Hoare turned to the task of consolidating his support at home. In the wake of his success at Geneva, he found it easy to draw in most of

⁸⁰ Sir Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, September 15, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

the previous critics of his policy. The League of Nations Union was so well pleased with his efforts to shore up the Covenant that Cecil agreed to cancel a rally which had been scheduled at Albert Hall.⁸⁴ Hoare also was gratified to find that the military leaders were impressed by the support which he had garnered at Geneva and moderated their objections to opposing Italy. On September 17, he put the case for a vigorous British lead at Geneva to the Defense Requirements Committee, and he reported to Neville Chamberlain that even Walter Runciman and Philip Cunliffe-Lister were enthusiastic.⁸⁵ "The general conclusion," he noted, "was that now that an isolated act against us seems almost inconceivable, the more strength we show in the Mediterranean the better."⁸⁶ In high spirits, he wrote to Eden that "the soldiers, sailors and airmen are gradually beginning to show signs of no longer being the worst pacifists and defeatists in the country."⁸⁷ On the strength of the support he was receiving from all sides, Hoare called in the French ambassador, Charles Corbin, and warned him that from the British point of view the League was at the critical testing point. "I told him rather bluntly

⁸⁴Sir Samuel Hoare to Viscount Cecil, September 16, 1935, FO 800/295.

⁸⁵Sir Samuel Hoare to Neville Chamberlain, September 17, 1935, Templewood Papers, General Political, VIII, 1.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Sir Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, September 17, 1935, FO 800/295.

that if everything now ended in delays and futilities I should have no more use for it, nor, I felt sure, would the British public."⁸⁸

Hoare's desire to press on with the start he had made at Geneva was tempered by his continuing concern to avoid a military confrontation with Italy. The threat of a sudden attack on the Mediterranean fleet seemed much reduced, but Mussolini was still dangerous. His response to the reinforcement of Britain's Mediterranean fleet was to order Italian troop movements in Libya to menace Egypt, where Britain was already confronted by nationalist unrest.⁸⁹ Unlike Hoare's effort to bluff Italy, Mussolini's move was better calculated and more successful. On September 18 Fulvio Suvich, the Italian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, approached Charles de Chambrun, the French ambassador in Rome, and asked for an assurance that any sanctions which might be contemplated would not represent a military or economic menace to the life of Italy.⁹⁰ If Italy received such an assurance, Mussolini would consider a mutual reduction of force in the area. Laval relayed the Italian proposal to Eden on September 20.⁹¹ He

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹On September 14, the Italian Council of Ministers issued a communique noting in part that owing to "the unrest manifested by certain native exiles of Cyrenaica" Italian forces in Libya were being reinforced. The Times, September 16, 1935.

⁹⁰Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 265.

⁹¹Ibid.

no

na

a

h

t

i

u

w

a

r

w

r

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

a

noted that Suvich had specifically pointed to the British naval reinforcements and the Italian troop buildup in Libya as offering the basis for a military trade-off. Laval gave his blessing to the idea and asked Eden for an assurance, for transmission to Rome, that the League powers were not considering military sanctions, the closing of the Suez canal, or the use of blockade.⁹² Eden passed Laval's request on to London, with his own vigorous arguments against offering the Italians any assurances concerning sanctions. According to his account, he maintained an unbending stance on the matter at Geneva and was not compelled by the Foreign Office to change it.⁹³ Hoare merely bypassed Eden and offered an assurance to Mussolini through the British ambassador in Rome. On September 20, ambassador Drummond called on Suvich to explain that the reinforcement of British forces in the Mediterranean was simply a defensive reaction prompted by the violent campaign against Britain conducted by the Italian press.⁹⁴ Suvich in

⁹²Laval added that, in his opinion, sanctions should be limited to the refusal to sell certain products to Italy, and the refusal to take Italian exports as a whole, ibid.

⁹³Eden's first instructions from London were to allow Laval to take the lead in answering Mussolini's request and to adjust the British position to that of the French. He refused those instructions with the argument that Hoare's speech of September 11 had placed Britain in a leading posture which could not be relinquished. Ibid., pp. 266-67.

⁹⁴On September 22, the British government issued a communique on the exchange between Drummond and Suvich, which was published by The Times on September 23, 1935.

turn

Medi

Drum

mess

anxi

the t

Russe

They

influ

have

actio

Frenc

but h

creat

the M

purpos

compre

Commis

6 hel

in an

were c

18, th

9

9

of a co

by The

turn stated that the Italian military preparations in the Mediterranean basin were of a purely precautionary nature.⁹⁵ Drummond offered the same assurance to Mussolini as a personal message from Hoare and added that the Foreign Secretary was anxious to eliminate all possible misunderstandings between the two countries.⁹⁶ Drummond's exchanges with Suvich and Mussolini reduced the danger of a major European conflict. They also had the effect of eliminating whatever restraining influence the reinforcement of the Mediterranean fleet might have had on Italian operations in east Africa. Again, Hoare's action was consistent with the desire of the British and French governments to avoid war with Italy if at all possible, but hardly consistent with the bold impression which he had created at Geneva on September 11.

While Hoare was in the process of assuring Italy that the Mediterranean fleet was intended only for defensive purposes, Mussolini was laying to rest the notion that a compromise solution might prevent the outbreak of war. The Committee of Five appointed by the League Council on September 6 held eleven meetings between September 7 and September 24 in an effort to promote a compromise. The committee's efforts were completely wasted on the Italian government. On September 18, the committee gave up the attempt to promote an agreement

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Drummond's interview with Mussolini was the subject of a communique issued in London on September 23 and published by The Times on September 26, 1935.

behind the scenes, and chairman Madariaga submitted the committee's recommendations to Italy and Abyssinia in identical notes which the League made public.⁹⁷ The plan outlined by the committee was similar to that which had earlier been pressed upon Aloisi by Eden and Laval in Paris. It called for the League to provide funds and supervision for an overall reform of Abyssinian administration and police, for the management of the Abyssinian economy, and for the upgrading of the services provided by Abyssinian courts, schools and medical facilities.⁹⁸ By the terms of the committee's proposal foreign economic participation would be encouraged, and foreign advisers would play a large part in the program, subject to the Emperor's concurrence.⁹⁹ All of this was largely a warmed-over version of the plan which Mussolini had already rejected in August.¹⁰⁰ On September 19, an official spokesman in Rome declared that the committee's

⁹⁷League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, pp. 1621-24.

⁹⁸Specific reforms contemplated under the improvement of Abyssinian administration and police included the final suppression of the slave trade, the policing of frontiers, and the protection of European settlers. Ibid.

⁹⁹The only specific reference to Italian participation in the committee's program came in the final paragraph of the note which stated that the British and French governments recognized a special Italian interest in the economic development of Abyssinia and were prepared to facilitate territorial adjustments between the contending parties. Ibid., p. 1624.

¹⁰⁰The committee's plan actually offered Mussolini less control than the plan which he had rejected in August in that the League would be directing the program of reform, and Haile Selassie would have to approve of the advisers who would be appointed.

proposal was unacceptable to Italy, and on September 22, Aloisi officially rejected the plan at Geneva.¹⁰¹ From the British point of view, the most significant upshot of the deliberations of the Committee of Five was the recognition and, by inference, the approval which the committee gave to the proposal that Britain and France continue to seek a territorial solution to the dispute.¹⁰²

Two days after Aloisi rejected the proposal of the Committee of Five, the cabinet met in London for the first time in a month. By September 24, it was no longer possible to pretend that war might be prevented in east Africa by a last minute agreement. Despite the certainty of war, Hoare gave his colleagues an optimistic appreciation of the crisis.¹⁰³ In his opinion, the British position had improved significantly since the cabinet had last met in August. Mussolini, he said, had been "clearly impressed" by the unanimity of British public opinion and the strengthening of the Mediterranean fleet. The possibility of an isolated Italian action against British interests was much less probable than it had been. Italy was, according to Hoare's intelligence, without a remaining friend in Europe. Mussolini seemed to recognize the

¹⁰¹Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, Vol II: Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 196; League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, pp. 1624-25.

¹⁰²League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, p. 1624.

¹⁰³Cab 23/82 43(35)1.

bind in which he found himself and had recently told Drummond that he appreciated the British position and did not want to embroil himself in a conflict with Great Britain. If, as seemed likely, the crisis matured to the point of collective action by the League, Hoare calculated that even Austria and Spain could be brought to cooperate, the United States might prove helpful, and Germany would adopt a discreet attitude and do nothing to render League action futile. The Italians, Hoare said, were apprehensive of sanctions, and "even modest sanctions might be more effective than had hitherto been thought."¹⁰⁴.

Hoare had good reason to put the best possible reading on the situation. He had to explain to the cabinet how Britain had emerged as the determined leader of the opposition to Italy at Geneva despite the cautious conclusions which the cabinet had reached at the end of August. The explanation which he offered for his bold speech to the Assembly was ingenious rather than frank. The speech, he said, was prompted by the French request for an assurance that Britain would be as vigorous in support of the Covenant in the event of a future violation of the Covenant.¹⁰⁵ The speech offered an opportunity to answer the French request in positive but general terms. With the speech on record, it was possible to

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

respond to the French by merely restating the points made in the speech, while emphasizing that the question of aggression would have to be carefully considered in context in any future situation.¹⁰⁶ Hoare proposed that such an answer be authorized, and, at the same time, suggested that the French be asked to return an assurance of full support in the event that war developed with Italy out of the present crisis.¹⁰⁷ The cabinet accepted the proposed exchanges and made no quarrel with Hoare's explanation of his speech.¹⁰⁸

The cabinet did not press Hoare about the decision to take the lead at Geneva, but they had a number of questions concerning the implications of his decision.¹⁰⁹ Britain was now certain to be in the forefront of any effort to impose sanctions on Italy. Hoare's assertion that even very limited sanctions were likely to be effective was challenged by more than one member of the cabinet. A cabinet committee had previously studied the problem and Hoare was reminded that

¹⁰⁶Hoare said that it was important to return a quick answer to the French in order to prevent the conclusion that Britain was interested in Abyssinia alone, and to avoid a charge from Lloyd George that Britain was undertaking new commitments to France. Ibid.

¹⁰⁷The answer which Hoare proposed to send to Paris had been drafted in the Foreign Office and carefully considered by Baldwin, MacDonald, Simon, Chamberlain and Hoare on September 23. Cab 24/256 C.P.179(35).

¹⁰⁸Hoare gave the note which the cabinet approved to ambassador Corbin on September 26 and then released it for publication. The Times, September 30, 1935.

¹⁰⁹Cab 23/82 43(35)1.

the conclusion reached by the committee was that minor sanctions could only reduce Italy's capacity to wage war in Abyssinia from twenty-four to twenty-one months. The cabinet also questioned Hoare's optimism about the attitude of the United States, and wanted to know if the Foreign Office could be certain that Mussolini would content himself with a mere protest in response to sanctions. Britain had interests and trade in the Mediterranean which were particularly vulnerable. The navy was as yet unsure of its ability to use critical French ports. Monsell spoke of the Admiralty's concern about keeping the fleet on a war footing while the League hesitated over the issue of sanctions.¹¹⁰

It took a strong, positive review of the situation by Chamberlain to bring the discussion back to something like the level of optimism which Hoare had hoped to create.¹¹¹ Once again it was pointed out that if it was necessary to try out the machinery of the League, there could be no better test case to determine whether the system could function to control aggression. It was important, however, that the test be carefully conducted and controlled. The cabinet were concerned that the League Council might prove so rigid as to destroy all possibility of a compromise settlement. Hoare was instructed to advise Eden to take care at Geneva not to

¹¹⁰Sir Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, September 24, 1935, FO 800/295.

¹¹¹Ibid.

be stampeded in the direction of immediate strong measures against Italy.¹¹²

Hoare wrote to Eden after the cabinet meeting and his tone was not as confident as it had been. Some of the ministers, he wrote, had been in a mood to murmur, and he had only secured their support with "some invaluable help from Neville."¹¹³ The discussion, he noted, reinforced an impression which he had about opinion in Britain. "Feeling here is a very long way behind feeling in Geneva. Up to the present we have the country solidly behind us but if it came to a question of war, we should see many breaches in the united front."¹¹⁴ The situation would improve, he felt, if he could pin down the French. Eden's task should be to consider what could be done to avoid delay on the part of the League, while guarding against the emergence of an intransigent attitude at Geneva.¹¹⁵

Eden returned a reassuring letter on the following day. He reported that the Dominions were at one with Britain on the question of sanctions. "If anything they want the League to be more vigorous than it is."¹¹⁶ Eden also noted that

¹¹²Cab 23/82 43(35)1.

¹¹³Hoare to Eden, September 24, 1935, FO 800/295.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Anthony Eden to Sir Samuel Hoare, September 25, 1935, FO 800/295.

"Laval is now working very closely with us."¹¹⁷ He had had a long conversation with Laval that morning and felt that "we should now enter upon a period when, having made all allowances for Laval's natural tendency to zig-zag, the French will move in step with us."¹¹⁸ Eden's letter was bolstering and Hoare recovered much of his positive outlook.

When the cabinet met again on October 2, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia was imminent. Eden returned for the meeting and outlined the probable procedures which the League would adopt once aggression became an established fact.¹¹⁹ An investigation would be made to confirm the aggression, and the League would then take action according to the provisions of Article 16. The question no longer was whether the League would agree to impose sanctions, but rather what type of sanctions would be imposed. Eden noted that Laval wanted to limit sanctions to two stages; first, a refusal by League members to sell war material and certain "key" minerals to Italy, and second, a refusal to take Italian goods.

By and large, the cabinet accepted the premise that sanctions were inevitable. The discussion which followed Eden's remarks focused on the effectiveness and implications of the various possible sanctions.¹²⁰ Hoare let the discussion

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Cab 23/82 44(35)1.

¹²⁰Ibid.

continue until a suggestion was made which, he felt, had to be qualified. According to the cabinet minutes

It was suggested that if the ultimate object was merely to save the face of the League of Nations and eventually to let Italy down lightly, small sanctions would suffice; but that if the aim was to strengthen the League and to prove its efficacy it would be desirable to aim at the larger economic sanctions.¹²¹

Hoare did not quarrel with the logic of the suggestion, but he pointed out that the French would not agree to severe sanctions. He was convinced that Laval would refuse to carry sanctions to the point of blockade, and he added that the French would never consider military sanctions. Hoare suggested that even minor economic sanctions, of the kind proposed by Laval, might prove to be effective in view of Italy's weak economic state. Once Italy felt the pinch of economic difficulties, he was convinced that Mussolini would be prepared to accept some kind of settlement. The danger was that the members of the League might become too intransigent before Mussolini recognized the necessity of compromise.

The cabinet agreed that military sanctions were out of the question, and also concluded that any consideration of economic sanctions would have to take into account the attitudes of non-members of the League, as well as the members. With those limitations, the ministers decided that the government's policy should be "to advocate at Geneva the imposition

¹²¹ Ibid.

of the maximum of economic sanctions on which agreement could be secured."¹²² In considering Laval's proposals, the cabinet felt that a refusal to sell to Italy would not mean much, but that if such a refusal were coupled immediately with a refusal to accept Italian goods, a considerable impact could be made upon a "nervous" Italy.¹²³

On the eve of the Italo-Abyssinian war, then, the cabinet were prepared to advocate the imposition of economic sanctions, despite the fact that their weight would fall in good measure upon the Mediterranean fleet. And Hoare, at least, had some confidence that even minor sanctions would produce a settlement and confirm the value of the League.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

CHAPTER V
TRIAL AND ERROR

Three days after crossing into Abyssinia, Italian soldiers brushed aside light Abyssinian resistance and entered the provincial capital of Adowa.¹ Among those who watched as the Italian flag was hoisted over Adowa on October 6 were several veterans who had been at Adowa when the Italian army was humiliated in 1896. It was a moment of jubilation and vindication for the Italian people, a moment which Mussolini had been dreaming of since 1925 and actively planning for since 1933.² To insure his moment of revenge, Mussolini had sent an army of soldiers and another of workers through the Suez canal. In Eritrea, Italian engineers had worked for nine months to prepare the harbor and roads necessary for a major campaign. Mussolini was determined to avoid the type of mistakes which had led to the Italian humiliation of 1896. If necessary, he told Emilio de Bono, he would commit the

¹Emilio de Bono, Anno XIII: the Conquest of an Empire (London: the Cresset Press, 1937), p. 243.

²Ibid., p. 13.

sin of excess rather than fail for want of men or materiel.³ Before DeBono's army pushed into Abyssinia, therefore, it was provided with every requirement other than a plausible causus belli. The WalWal incident had grown cold long before the Italian preparations were completed, and Haile Selassie had carefully removed any other pretext for war by agreeing to the arbitration of any issue other than the existence of his state. As a final earnest of peaceful intent, Haile Selassie had informed the League of Nations on September 25 that he was withdrawing his forces thirty kilometers from the Eritrean frontier.⁴ Italy was left with no justification for the invasion which was launched on October 3 beyond Aloisi's weak reference to Haile Selassie's last minute mobilization order.⁵ After months of Italian boasts and preparations, the watching world could only conclude that, by any of the varied definitions of the term, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia constituted open, unvarnished aggression.

The Italian aggression was so blatant and so long trumpeted in advance that the Council of the League reacted

³Ibid., p. 119. DeBono was Minister for the Colonies when Mussolini began to plan the operation in Abyssinia with him in 1933. In January, 1935, Mussolini sent DeBono to Eritrea as High Commissioner for East Africa. On March 28, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces in east Africa, and he retained command until relieved by Pietro Eadoglio on November 26, 1935.

⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, p. 1602.

⁵Ibid., pp. 1211 and 1603.

within five days of the invasion. On October 5, the Council met to consider the failure of the League to promote a peaceful settlement of the problem. Council President Ruiz Guiñazú of Argentina took up at the same time the Abyssinian complaint of an Italian invasion and appointed a committee of six members to investigate and report on the facts.⁶ By the afternoon of October 7, the committee, consisting of representatives of Chile, Denmark, France, Portugal, Roumania and the United Kingdom, had completed their report and submitted it for Council consideration. The findings of the committee were unequivocal:

After an examination of the facts,... the Committee has come to the conclusion that the Italian Government has resorted to war in disregard of its covenants under Article 12 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.⁷

The committee reminded the Council that Article 16 of the Covenant was equally unequivocal:

should any Member of the League resort to war in disregard of its covenants under Article 12, 13 or 15, it shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League.⁸

With the import of their decision clearly in mind, then, the full membership of the Council, other than the parties to the dispute, accepted the conclusions of the committee's report.⁹

⁶ Ibid., p. 1213.

⁷ Ibid., p. 1225.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The unanimous decision of the Council brought the provisions of Article 16 into effect. It remained only to inform the other members of the League and to invite coordinated action under the Covenant. For the League Council, this was a virtually unprecedented show of speed and vigor, doubly remarkable in that the issue involved nothing less than the continued viability of the League itself.

In Baron Aloisi's mind, there was no doubt about the cause of the stinging rebuke which his country suffered at Geneva on October 7. The English, he noted bitterly in his journal, had pressed from the first for the earliest possible application of sanctions.¹⁰ Frank Walters, who saw things from a different perspective, drew the same conclusion. Eden, he observed, was once again the necessary "driving force" behind the Council's response to the Italian challenge.¹¹ Although Eden was not chairman of the committee appointed on October 5 to consider the Italian invasion, he took it upon himself to schedule the first meeting of the committee for that evening.¹² Eden had come to Geneva under a cabinet injunction to avoid a "quixotic" approach, but he had a tendency to interpret cautious cabinet instructions to mean full

¹⁰Pompeo Aloisi, Journal, 25 juillet 1932 - 14 juin 1936, Maurice Vaussard, trans. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), p. 312.

¹¹F. P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford University Press, 1967, first published in 1952), p. 654.

¹²League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, p. 1213.

speed ahead. It was only by a stroke of luck, however, that he succeeded in obtaining a quick condemnation of Italian aggression. When he discussed the situation with Laval in Paris before the Council meeting, Eden found the French premier inclined to think in terms of another effort to promote a compromise solution rather than League action to contain aggression.¹³ Eden knew that if Laval maintained that attitude in the Council room, it was unlikely that the League would react with any speed. Fortunately, from Eden's point of view, Laval appointed Alexis Léger to represent France on the committee which drafted the condemnation, and Eden was able to carry Léger with him in his determination to force the issue. Laval was disturbed by Léger's independence but he accepted the committee report as a fait accompli.¹⁴

The Council's spirited reaction to Italian aggression carried over into the League Assembly, which took up the Council's findings on October 9. The Assembly had completed the work of the sixteenth session on September 28, but under the adroit hand of Assembly President Eduard Beneš, the delegates elected to adjourn rather than conclude the session, pending developments in Abyssinia.¹⁵ As a result, Beneš, who

¹³The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs, Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 273.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 276-77.

¹⁵League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 138, 1935, p. 95.

maintained close contact with the members of the Council, was able to bring the Assembly into session again within two days of the conclusion of the Council's deliberations. By the close of debate on October 11, fifty of the fifty-four delegations in the Assembly had followed the lead of the Council and committed their governments to sanctions against one of the principal members of the League.¹⁶

In the heady atmosphere of the Assembly debate, a number of brave speeches were made. Among the most rousing was the fighting speech made by the representative of Haiti, General Nemours. It was vital, Nemours told his colleagues, that the League establish beyond question that

There are not two truths -- one for Africa and the other for Europe. On either side of the Mediterranean aggression must be defined in the same way. The same bombs, the same shells produce the same effects, and whether the dead and wounded be black or white, the same red blood flows from their wounds.¹⁷

General Nemour's speech was a good indication of the depth of feeling aroused in a small, black nation by Italian aggression, but small nations could offer little more than brave words to support their indignation. Any significant program of sanctions had to rest in large measure on the strength and determination of Great Britain and France. The essential lead in the Assembly hall remained in the hands of Eden and Laval.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁷Ibid., p 107.

Their statements to the Assembly reflected the differing attitudes which each had maintained throughout the crisis. Laval pledged that France would "meet her obligations" under the Covenant, but he added:

Friendship also lays a duty on me. We are not repudiating our faith in the authority of the highest international institution if, simultaneously with the application of its law, we continue to seek a solution by conciliation.¹⁸

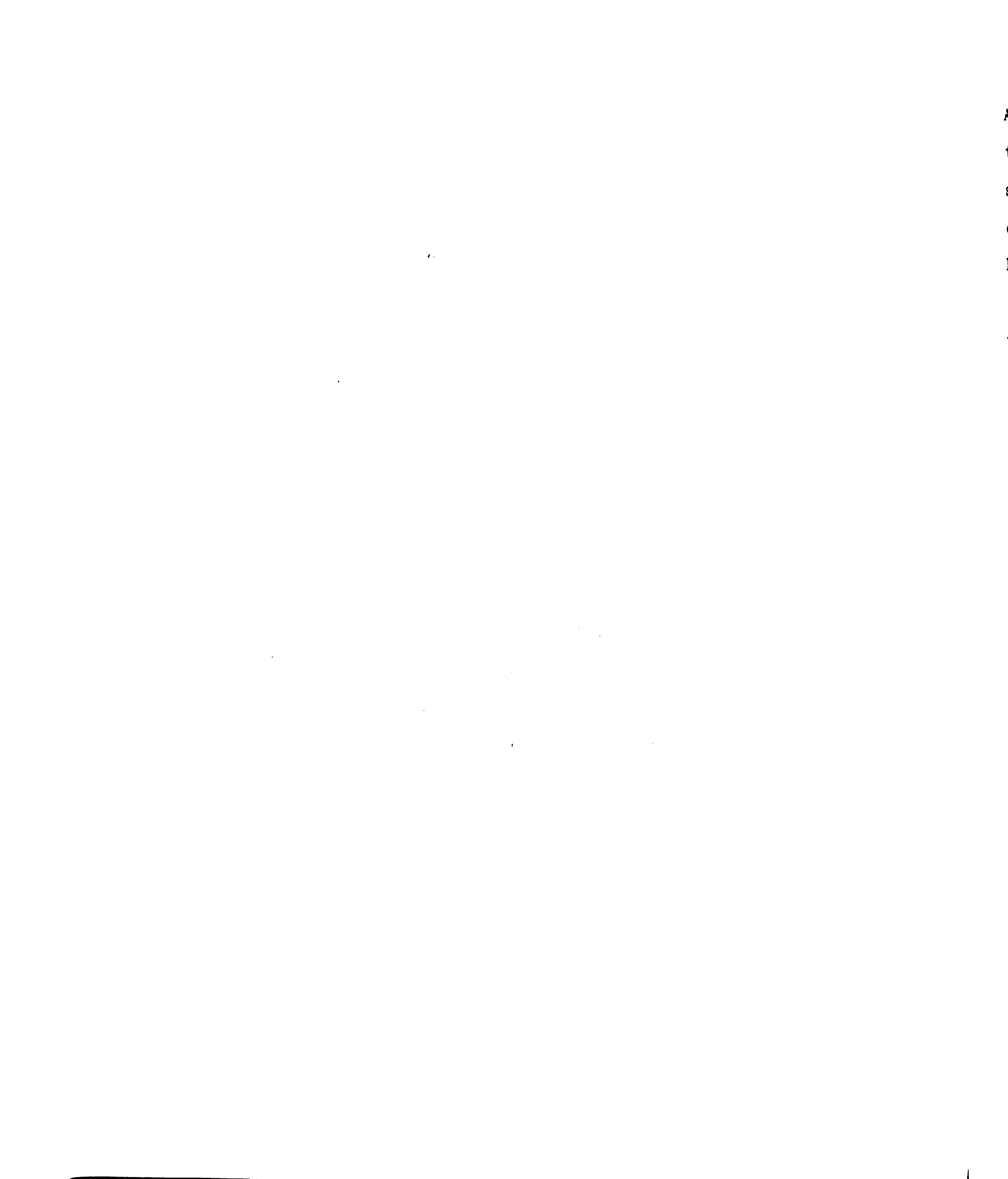
There was no suggestion of conciliation in Eden's remarks. He reiterated that Britain's foreign policy was based upon membership of the League of Nations, and went on to define the responsibilities of the League:

The League has two main tasks. First to avert war by the just and peaceful settlement of all disputes. Secondly, if we fail in our first objective, to stop war. It is with the second of these two tasks that we, as Members of the Assembly, are now concerned, and it is by the League's effectiveness in realising this aim that the League will be judged. We cannot neglect our duties and responsibilities. Action must now be taken. It is for the Members of the League of Nations collectively to determine what that action should be. On behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom I declare our willingness to take our full part in such action.¹⁹

Eden stressed that the League's action would have to be prompt to be effective. His strong call for swift action offset Laval's qualified commitment, and seemed to confirm the bold British lead established by Hoare in his speech to the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁹Ibid.



Assembly on September 11. With the British firmly committed to oppose the aggressor, and the French pledging grudging support, the only opposition to the application of sanctions came from Italy and the Italian client states of Austria, Hungary and Albania.²⁰

In London, the cabinet's reaction to the Italian invasion was much more guarded than Eden's attitude at Geneva. In one respect, the Italian invasion and the League Council's quick condemnation simplified matters for the cabinet. When the Italian columns moved into Abyssinia, Britain was relieved of the burden of trying to prevent a war. And, since the cabinet had already decided to support a League decision to impose sanctions, the Council's action on October 7 focused concern in London on the way in which sanctions would be applied. That was a serious concern, however, and Eden's eagerness did nothing to diminish it.

The decision to support the use of sanctions was beyond review by the time the cabinet met on October 9 to consider the crisis. Hoare and Eden had firmly established the British commitment at Geneva and Baldwin reinforced it in a speech at the annual conference of the Conservative party on October 3.²¹

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 101-05, 114.

²¹ The Times, October 4, 1935. In the course of his speech Baldwin offered another explanation of the value of the League for Britain: "we believe that in true collective security in the League of Nations we have to our hand the best means of preserving or of exercising some measure of control over events."

It wa

Octob

Fathe

which

Ital

after

sugg

demo

Hoar

a se

pres

thei

rane

the

sens

Cove

tio

was

whi

bea

bas

to

say

an

me

It was politically impossible to back away from sanctions on October 9, and the cabinet showed no inclination to do so. Rather, there was some evidence of the determined attitude which prevailed at Geneva. Hoare told the cabinet that the Italian ambassador in London had been to see him on the day after the Italian offensive had begun in Abyssinia, and had suggested private negotiations to effect some measure of demobilization in the Mediterranean. The cabinet instructed Hoare to "receive any Italian overtures for negotiations for a settlement outside the League of Nations very coolly at the present time, and treat them with caution."²² Considering their desire to avoid a military confrontation in the Mediterranean, the cabinet's refusal to discuss demobilization with the Italians was an act of courage as well as political common sense. The ministers held to their decision to uphold the Covenant and to act through the League, but they had reservations about underwriting the kind of enthusiasm which Eden was working to create at Geneva. Very few of the states which supported sanctions at Geneva were in a position to bear any part of the military burden of imposing them. The basis for the cabinet's decision to participate in an effort to suppress Italian aggression was the understanding that sanctions could be applied gradually. There had never been any support in the cabinet for drastic, or precipitate measures, such as a blockade or the closing of the Suez canal,

²²Cab 23/82 45(35)1.

which British military advisers were convinced would lead to war between Britain and Italy. The cabinet could see little profit in trying to stop one war by starting another. The problem which the cabinet faced on October 9 was to define a reasonable program of sanctions which they would be prepared to support, and to convey to Eden their concern to see such a program adopted at Geneva.

The full range of economic and financial sanctions possible under Article 16 of the Covenant was examined for the cabinet by an Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War. The committee recommended that Britain should continue the embargo on the export of arms and munitions to Italy, and should concur in any proposal to prohibit loans and credits to Italy. In addition, the committee suggested that Britain should be prepared to participate in a refusal to accept Italian imports, and an embargo on the export of essential materials to Italy, with special emphasis upon coal and oil.²³ Of the committee's recommendations, the cabinet settled upon the proposal to refuse Italian imports as the most effective way of "applying pressure without raising the question of belligerent rights."²⁴ Beyond that, the cabinet were no longer as ready as they had been on October 2 to support "the imposition of the maximum of economic sanctions

²³Cab 24/257 C.P.186(35).

²⁴Sir Samuel Hoare to Anthony Eden, October 9, 1935, FO 800/295.

on
wh
Ed
th
ra
fo
on
me
th
th
ma
do
mi
an
pra
sar
que
fac
the
dur
Fra
sou
wor

on which agreement could be secured."²⁵ The fighting spirit which had developed at Geneva made the cabinet nervous that Eden might be able to secure agreement to much more than they had anticipated. The committee's recommendations also raised a domestic consideration which the cabinet had not foreseen. The suggestion that the cabinet consider an embargo on the export of coal raised the specter of further unemployment among British miners, and the cabinet calculated that the government would have to answer at the polls. In general, the cabinet's desire was to begin the test of the League's machinery in the safest possible way, from the standpoint of domestic politics as well as with an eye to diplomatic and military repercussions. The ministers were particularly anxious to avoid an over-commitment until it was clear in practice that those countries which had voted to support sanctions would in fact do so. France remained the great question mark. The French had replied in generally satisfactory terms on October 5 to the formal question of whether they would lend support in the event of conflict with Italy during the period before sanctions came into effect, but France still was unwilling to provide the military facilities sought by the British services, and Laval was clearly untrustworthy.²⁶ There were, the cabinet felt, several reasons to

²⁵Cab 23/82 44(35)1.

²⁶The Times, October 8, 1935.

begin cautiously at Geneva, and they accepted the Admiralty's argument that there was too much risk in the suggestion that League ports should be closed to Italian shipping. For the moment, the cabinet agreed to limit their approval to a refusal to take Italian imports, a prohibition of loans, credits, arms and munitions to Italy, and, if general agreement could be reached, a prohibition of the sale or chartering of ships to Italy.²⁷ Hoare wrote to Eden after the meeting to explain the cabinet's concerns and to outline the program of sanctions which would command cabinet support. He pointedly instructed Eden to keep in mind that "the discussions should start with (1) an undertaking by all members of the Committee that we stand together in the event of an attack upon any one of us, (2) a discussion of the League data that is available upon the subject of sanctions. This course would obviate the necessity of our having to start with some British proposal."²⁸

II

The instructions Hoare sent to Geneva on October 9 had the effect of spurring Eden rather than restraining him.²⁹

²⁷Cab 23/82 45(35)1.

²⁸Hoare to Eden, October 9, 1935, FO 800/295.

²⁹Eden wrote of the cautious instructions which he received from Hoare: "Even allowing for the novelty and the risks entailed in trying to constrain a man like Mussolini, I was too often first given my head and then curbed." Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 279. Eden would have been closer to the mark had he written that the cabinet no longer had any inclination to give him his head, but found that he was very difficult to curb.

Ed
th
th
ca
es
pa
Mo
de
ca
th
ho
ar
th
ot.

pa
On
tee
fir
it
Cor
to
wh
Ee
No

Eden read in the instructions a growing sense of caution which threatened to weaken the cabinet's determination to carry through with the sanctions experiment. He interpreted the cabinet's concern as additional reason to press for the establishment of sanctions before a nervous reaction on the part of the League membership prevented effective action. Most of the Foreign Ministers who had participated in the debate on Italian aggression were still in Geneva, and Eden calculated that there was only one week in which to push through a program of sanctions before the ministers returned home to domestic considerations which might dampen their ardor.³⁰ Accordingly, he chose to ignore Hoare's suggestion that specific proposals for sanctions should come from the other delegations at Geneva.

With Eden showing the way, the League maintained the pace set by the quick condemnation of Italian aggression. On October 10, the Assembly established a fifty-member committee to coordinate action by the participating states.³¹ The first order of business for the Coordination Committee when it met on October 11 was to create a 'little Coordination Committee' of seventeen members to make recommendations and to monitor the crisis. The little Coordination Committee, which consisted of delegates from South Africa, Argentina, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, Greece, the Netherlands,

³⁰Eden to Hoare, October 14, 1935, FO 800/295.

³¹League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 138, 1935, p. 114.

Pola

Sovi

on C

Eigh

sibi

cris

larg

opin

woul

Mr.

is a

the

sugg

outs

rece

comm

tech

pro

com

of

tin

pro

Met

Vo

19

Poland, Rumania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia, coopted a delegate from Mexico on October 12 and was known thereafter as the Committee of Eighteen.³² The Committee of Eighteen had day-to-day responsibility for managing the League's activities during the crisis, and its recommendations were normally adopted by the larger Coordination Committee with little debate. In the opinion of Professor Toynbee, "the Committee of Eighteen would have accomplished much less than it did accomplish if Mr. Eden had not been serving on it."³³ Toynbee's observation is a model of understatement. Eden was the driving force on the Committee of Eighteen. He put forward most of the suggestions which were adopted by the committee. He worked outside of the committee room to insure that his suggestions received prompt consideration. And he helped to prevent the committee from becoming sidetracked by unnecessary legal or technical debate.

Eden allowed one week for the structuring of a sanctions program if it was to succeed, and, at his prodding, the committees completed their work in eight days. The Committee of Eighteen met in committee and subcommittee two and three times a day from October 11 to October 19 to produce five proposals, which the Coordination Committee adopted as the

³²League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 145, 1935, p. 35.

³³Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, Vol. II: Abyssinia and Italy (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 230.

pro

th

co

th

an

ba

on

Ed

ea

be

ori

tun

tha

sug

Art

ris

add

ing

fin

—

No

of

in

to

Co

Pr

program to contain Italian aggression.³⁴ Of the five proposals, three were suggested by Eden. At the first meeting of the committee on October 11, he proposed that League members lift the arms embargo which was still in effect against Abyssinia and impose a comprehensive embargo on arms shipments to Italy, based on the list which President Roosevelt had established on August 31 to implement the American neutrality legislation.³⁵ Eden's proposal was a step which should have been taken months earlier if it were to aid Abyssinia. But it was a necessary beginning which forestalled a sterile debate over the proper orientation of the committee's work, and established a momentum which carried through the week. Eden went on to propose that League members refuse to take Italian exports, and suggested a formula to give effect to the provision in Article 16 which called for mutual support in shouldering the risks and burdens involved in sanctions.³⁶ The committee adopted Eden's suggestions and also drafted a proposal detailing the measures to be taken to limit Italian credit and financial dealings, and another which established a prohibited

³⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 145, 1935, pp. 14-141.

³⁵Ibid., p. 31. At Eden's suggestion, a sub-committee of military experts was established to study and refine the American list. The military experts expanded the list to include, among other things, "all appliances and products for use in chemical or incendiary warfare." The Coordination Committee approved the revised list on October 16. Ibid., pp. 19 and 140-41.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 36-37.

list of strategic materials which participating members were to withhold from Italy.³⁷

When the Coordination Committee approved the last of the proposals on October 19, the sanctions program was complete and ready to be submitted to the governments pledged to enforce it. Members of the Coordination Committee had only to wait for their governments to indicate when they would be ready to apply the sanctions and the League could begin to act to contain Italian aggression. Eden proposed that the committee meet again on October 29 to set a date on which sanctions would come into effect, but the committee felt that October 31 was the earliest that replies could be expected from the participating governments.³⁸ Eden had hoped that sanctions would come into effect more quickly, but he was not disappointed with what he, more than anyone else, helped to achieve at Geneva. In the space of two weeks, the League had condemned Italy as an aggressor, had agreed almost unanimously to take action under Article 16, and had devised the measures designed to stay the hand of the aggressor.

The action taken by the League was particularly impressive against the backdrop of the League's failure to respond to the

³⁷Ibid., pp. 32-83. As accepted by the Coordination Committee on October 19, the list of strategic materials to be withheld from Italy included rubber, bauxite, aluminum, iron-ore, scrap iron, chromium, manganese, nickel, titanium, tungsten, vanadium, tin, and related ores, as well as transport animals of all types. Ibid., p. 24.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 65 and 69.

Japa

was

to

and

to

so

wou

the

but

san

wer

car

res

ly

co

of

es

Ed

th

ec

or

sa

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

II

Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The bold impression created was misleading, however. The League had mustered the courage to challenge a major aggressor, but the challenge was weak and ineffective. The sanctions devised at Geneva did little to hamper the Italian war effort, and were not designed to do so until they had been in effect for several months.³⁹ It would have required a naval blockade or a decision to close the Suez canal to force a quick halt to the Italian campaign, but neither proposal was raised in the committees considering sanctions. Some of the more fervid supporters of the League were prepared to run the risks involved in closing the Suez canal but they spoke without the burden of governmental responsibility.⁴⁰ "Never fire over the heads of rioters" was

³⁹The sanctions considered and adopted were self-evidently gradual in nature. Maxim Litvinoff, of the Soviet Union, commented on the "mild" nature of the sanctions at the time of their adoption, and expressed the hope that the precedent established would not apply in future cases of aggression. Eden, who took the lead in proposing sanctions, was aware that the British Chiefs of Staff had studied the question of economic sanctions and had concluded that accumulated stocks of war materials would make Italy immune to the type of sanctions adopted by the League for at least several months. Ibid., pp. 27-28; Cab 24/256, C.P.169(35).

⁴⁰Lord Cecil felt that closing the Suez canal would be "the most merciful as well as the most effective peace policy." It is hard to see that closing the canal would have been either merciful or peaceful, but it did promise to be effective and had an obvious appeal for those willing to risk all for the League. It also appealed, for a different reason, to a consistent critic of British involvement in the League. Lord Lothian had opposed the idea of sanctions, but once the step was taken he felt that there was no option but to go for Italy's throat if Britain was to avoid a terrible humiliation. He advised Hoare to close the canal, but to do so tactfully so as to avoid a war and leave open the possibility of a compromise settlement. The cabinet may have been guilty of a

the advice Lord Cecil gave to Eden's Parliamentary Private Secretary, Lord Cranborne, but Cranborne knew that there was no hope of securing general support for more than a modest program of economic sanctions.⁴¹ The program adopted by the Coordination Committee commanded broad support at Geneva in good part because it was gradual in effect, and unlikely to prompt a violent Italian reaction.⁴² The program reflected a fear that the war in Abyssinia could spread to the Mediterranean, and a general desire not to alienate Italy beyond

good deal of fuzzy thinking during the Abyssinian crisis, but they did not set the standard for what Vansittart referred to as the "muddle-headedness" which developed in Britain in response to the crisis. Lord Cecil to Gilbert Murray, November 1, 1935, Gilbert Murray Papers, box 16a d. Lord Lothian to Sir Samuel Hoare, October 18, 1935, Templewood Papers, General Political, VIII, 3. There is a copy of Hoare's reply to the effect that he could not agree with Lothian's suggestion in the Lothian Papers, GD40/17/301. Vansittart minuted Lothian's letter in the Foreign Office, FO 800/295.

⁴¹Lord Cecil to Lord Cranborne, October 17, 1935, FO 800/296. Lord Cranborne to Lord Cecil, October 7, 1935, Cecil Papers, Add. 51087.

⁴²The minutes of the committee meetings are full of observations such as that made in the Committee of Eighteen on October 12 by Maurice Bourquin of Belgium: "every attempt must be made to avoid measures that would be unduly irritating, and hence to take, immediately, steps sufficiently effective to put an end to the conflict...." The contradiction in Bourquin's argument was common and grew out of a desire to be bold but not too bold. As Frank Walters remembered it, "there was anxiety not to suffer, or inflict, more loss and disturbance than were strictly necessary.... But all were confident that under the leadership of Britain the League would achieve its purpose." League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 145, p. 43. Walters, A History of the League of Nations, p. 658.

future

adopte

league

League

beyond

must b

made i

I

that M

drawin

the mo

posed

danger

rubber

which

Abyss

not s

inclu

Unite

delic

a blc

the I

There

by th

bers

the a

then,

future cooperation. To some extent the type of sanctions adopted also grew out of the nature and the procedures of the League itself. In a large, diverse organization such as the League, in which individual members are under no compulsion beyond their own bond to participate in activities which must be collective to succeed, difficult decisions tend to be made in terms of the lowest common denominator.

The economic sanctions imposed by the League were such that Mussolini could pursue his war and not have to consider drawing rein until he ran short of a necessary commodity, or the money or credit with which to buy it. The arms embargo posed no problem for Italy, and Mussolini had anticipated the danger of an embargo of such vital supplies as iron ore, rubber and aluminum and had stockpiled most of the things which Italy would need during the first several months of the Abyssinian campaign. The one critical item which Italy could not stockpile in adequate supply was oil, but oil was not included on the prohibited list. Italy imported oil from the United States, and the prospect of an oil embargo raised the delicate issue of maritime rights. Without an embargo on oil, a blockade of Italian ports, or a move to close the Suez canal, the League could not prevent an extensive Italian campaign. There was an outside chance that Mussolini would be frightened by the combined censure and united action of most of the members of the League, but from the tenor of his statements and the general Italian mood that was unlikely. It was evident, then, that unless Mussolini lost his nerve, or the League

de
wo
ar
te

sa
ne
sh
ne
co
th
be

Th
to
no
ar

—
al
st
wo
li
It
wi
It
Ab
bu
to
in

decided to escalate the measures adopted, Abyssinian forces would have to withstand a prolonged campaign by a modern army if Italian ambitions in east Africa were to be frustrated.⁴³

Mussolini might have been stopped by more stringent sanctions, but stronger measures meant greater risks, and neither of the League's pivotal members was in the mood to shoulder heavy risks. In London, cabinet members were nervous about the danger of pushing beyond the point of agreed, collective action.⁴⁴ The worst possible development, from their point of view would have been an isolated conflict between British and Italian forces in the Mediterranean. The guiding light for the cabinet was their earlier decision to move in tandem with the French. The French, in turn, had no taste for sanctions. Laval only grudgingly accepted the argument that sanctions had become unavoidable. He remained

⁴³Most observers expected, on the basis of the traditional fighting qualities of the Abyssinian soldier, and the steep, rugged, roadless terrain of much of Abyssinia, that it would take the Italians a long time to conquer Abyssinia. In light of the Italian preparations and the superiority of Italian weapons, few expected another Adowa, but it was widely anticipated that it would take up to three years for Italy to conquer Abyssinia. The tendency to overrate the Abyssinian ability to withstand an Italian assault contributed to, and offered a rationale for the gradual approach to sanctions adopted at Geneva. A. J. Barker, The Civilization Mission (New York: Dial, 1968), p. 149.

⁴⁴Cab 23/82 45(35)1.

convinced that the solution to the problem lay in a compromise settlement.⁴⁵ Laval felt that his view of the crisis, which was that France had much to lose and little to gain from a confrontation with Italy, was shared by most Frenchmen.⁴⁶ The French delegation at Geneva pleaded for time to educate French public opinion to the need for even the most modest of sanctions.⁴⁷ Throughout the Committee of Eighteen's

⁴⁵Laval made no secret of his continuing determination to promote an agreed settlement. He explained his point of view to Eden on October 3 as the Italian invasion was getting under way, he told the League Assembly on October 10 that he planned to "continue to seek a solution by conciliation," and he defended French participation in a limited program of sanctions in a statement released at Clermont-Ferrand on October 12, in which he assured the French people that he was still anxious to find an amicable solution to the problem. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 273; League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 138, 1935, p. 106; Le Temps, October 14, 1935.

⁴⁶As Franklin Laurens pointed out, France faced a far graver threat from across the Rhine than Britain faced in the Mediterranean, and the German threat in part justified French vacillation over the implementation of sanctions. But Laurens conceded that single-minded efforts by Laval to settle the crisis by conciliation while sanctions were being imposed were self-defeating attempts to 'square the circle.' Franklin A. Laurens, France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936 (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp. 172 and 205.

⁴⁷Eden to Hoare, October 14, 1935, FO 800/295. Opinion in France on the issue of sanctions was seriously divided, with organizations, journalists and politicians on the left calling for full participation in League efforts to contain Italian aggression, while those on the right argued that it made no sense to alienate Italy for the sake of Abyssinia. Feelings ran high and demonstrations occurred daily during the first weeks of October. On October 7, for example, the Socialist Trade Union of Port and Dock Workers instructed its members not to handle cargoes bound for Italy. On October 12, a group of rightist deputies directed an open letter to Laval protesting the notion of sanctions against Italy when none were imposed against Germany for reintroducing conscription in March. On the same day, political and veterans organizations on the right and the left demonstrated in Paris

d
o
M
I
C
t
c

R
t
R
R

s
s
L

R
C
C
S
R
S
L
R
R
R
C
L

deliberations, the French delegate, Robert Coulondre, spoke of French loyalty to the Covenant, but his proposals were more often designed to forestall Eden than to restrain Italian aggression.⁴⁸ Eden had to agree privately with Coulondre to slow the pace of the committee's deliberations to secure French support for the limited program which the committee adopted.⁴⁹

In his reports to Hoare from Geneva, Eden put the best possible reading on his dealings with the French. He knew that the cabinet's persistent fear was that France would pull back at the critical moment and leave Britain to face Italy in the Mediterranean. On October 14, Eden assured

and Nice and the police struggled to maintain order. In such a volatile climate of opinion, Laval and his government felt that they had no option but to walk a careful middle line on the issue of sanctions. Ibid., pp. 172-78.

⁴⁸When Eden proposed that participating members should refuse to accept Italian exports, for example, Coulondre countered with the proposal that the most effective way to curb Italian aggression would be to control the flow of strategic supplies to Italy. Both proposals were sensible and were ultimately adopted by the Committee of Eighteen, but Coulondre put forward his proposal as though it were an alternative to the proposal advanced by Eden. Coulondre suggested that both proposals be submitted to a sub-committee for study, with the French proposal to be given first consideration. Eden argued that his proposal needed no study, but he accepted Coulondre's suggestion after reaching an agreement with the French delegation, outside of the committee room, on the pace of the committee's work. Ibid.; League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 145, 1935, pp. 37-38, 42, 56-57.

⁴⁹Eden to Hoare, October 14, 1935, FO 800/295.

Hoare that he was working with the French representative on the Committee of Eighteen, but he had to admit that the French were balky and inclined to slow the pace of the proceedings.⁵⁰ The French could be managed, Eden thought, if they were given time to educate French opinion, and if Laval was compelled to understand that a failure on his part to cooperate during the crisis would break the Anglo-French front. Eden noted that he had warned Laval of the danger of a breach in Anglo-French relations during a conversation at Geneva, and he implied that Hoare should do the same.⁵¹

Eden thought to control Laval by frightening him, but Laval had the same card to play, and he did so more effectively. On October 14, Ambassador Clerk conveyed to Laval a British request for a specific assurance of French military support during the crisis.⁵² Laval replied in terms which met French requirements under the Covenant but with reservations which frightened the British cabinet:

The French Government fully considers article 16 as implying complete solidarity of each of the members of the League of Nations in respect of that one of them who may have been attacked by the Covenant-breaking State if this attack has been clearly brought about by the application of the provisions of the said article, the execution of which shall have been decided upon in common.⁵³

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Cmd. 5072, Ethiopia No. 2(1936), p. 3.

⁵³Ibid.

The language was convoluted but the meaning was clear. France reserved the right to decide whether an Italian attack upon Britain had been prompted by actions taken in support of the Covenant. Laval's reply implied that France would support only those actions which the French government had approved in advance. Laval explained that his government's reservation stemmed from the recent reinforcement of the British Mediterranean fleet. He suggested that Mussolini could justifiably represent the increase of British strength in the Mediterranean as a provocation rather than an agreed measure taken in support of the Covenant.⁵⁴

The cabinet's reaction to the French reply was all that Laval might have hoped for. The mood in the cabinet room on October 16 was grim.⁵⁵ Laval, it seemed, was capable of playing Britain false at any turning. He knew that the additional fleet units had been despatched to the Mediterranean to dissuade an Italian attack. Yet he spoke though Britain harbored a hostile intent. It was obvious that Mussolini had Laval's ear. Eden's reports from Geneva made it clear that Laval was still actively working to promote a compromise settlement. The cabinet had decided on October 9 to respond coolly to Italian suggestions for a military trade-off in the Mediterranean, but Laval's reservation altered the

⁵⁴Ibid., Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 281.

⁵⁵Hoare to Eden, October 16, 1935, FO 800/295.

situation. The harbor at Malta was vulnerable to an Italian air attack, and unless the fleet received permission to use the French ports of Bizerta and Toulon, it would be difficult to operate against Italy in the Mediterranean. If Britain was to press on with the sanctions experiment, it was essential, in the cabinet's view, that the French be persuaded to substitute cooperation for minimal support.⁵⁶

To meet Laval's objections, the cabinet agreed to consider withdrawing two cruisers from the Mediterranean. At the same time, however, they decided to impress upon Laval that a failure on the part of the French government to provide a firm assurance of cooperation and support would undoubtedly become public and have the gravest effect on Anglo-French relations.⁵⁷ While the French reservation stood, the cabinet felt that it was dangerous to push ahead on sanctions at Geneva. Hoare wrote to Eden that there was considerable sentiment in the cabinet that he had taken the initiative too often at Geneva. The cabinet's feeling was that Eden should "go as slowly as possible and take the initiative as little as possible until Laval has withdrawn his reservation." From Hoare's perspective, it was critical that "we should not remain in the dangerous position of making initiatives whilst we are still running the risk of being stabbed in the back."⁵⁸

⁵⁶Cab 23/82 47(35)1.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Hoare to Eden, October 16, 1935, FO 800/295.

Eden, at that point, was in the midst of his strenuous efforts to bring the Coordination Committee to the point of recommending sanctions, and he was not to be headed by the cabinet's last-minute qualms.⁵⁹ Fortunately, Sir George Clerk secured the assurance which the cabinet required from Laval on October 18, after some plain talk about Anglo-French relations.⁶⁰ The cabinet did not have to pull back from the position which Eden had taken at Geneva, nor did they have to pillory the French for lack of support. But they were a good deal more anxious about future developments in the Mediterranean than they had been. Laval's assurance of October 18 was satisfactory, but it did not dispel the fear that he might yet 'stab Britain in the back.' By October 19, Eden had succeeded in organizing remarkably broad support for sanctions at Geneva, but Laval undermined the entire effort by unnerving the British cabinet. The cabinet remained committed to the sanctions experiment, but after the disturbing cabinet on October 16, the instinct to seek a compromise solution to the crisis came to the fore again. The effect of the exchanges between London and Paris on military cooperation was to transfer the initiative which Eden had seized at Geneva into

⁵⁹Eden later justified his independence by arguing that "if a leading power does not lead it is not likely to see its policies to succeed." Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 282.

⁶⁰Cmd. 5072, Ethiopia No. 2(1936), pp. 3-4; Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 283.

Laval's hands, where it remained through the debacle which occurred in December.

Laval viewed himself as the necessary mediator between Britain and Italy. The cabinet's willingness to consider withdrawing naval units from the Mediterranean gave him an opportunity to mediate. When the cabinet met again on October 23, they had word that Italy was prepared to withdraw one division from Libya in return for a corresponding withdrawal of two British cruisers from the Mediterranean.⁶¹ The cabinet were sufficiently broken to the need to reduce tensions in the Mediterranean that they did not debate the merits of a proposal to reduce the pressure on Italy just as sanctions were coming into effect. The only requirement laid down by the cabinet was that the cruisers were not to be withdrawn until the French agreed to allow the British fleet to use Bizerta and Toulon. Hoare suggested that negotiations relating to a military standdown would offer an opportunity to seek a basis for an end to the crisis, and the cabinet authorized him to undertake the diplomatic effort required. The French had received indications from Rome that Mussolini was ready to consider a reasonable solution.⁶² Accordingly, Maurice Peterson, the Foreign Office specialist on Abyssinia, was sent to Paris to consider with Ambassador Clerk and French officials

⁶¹Cab 23/82 48(35)2

⁶²Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 285.

the possibilities for a negotiated settlement.⁶³ The cabinet stipulated, however, that "nothing would be settled except within the framework of the League of Nations."⁶⁴ Baldwin had decided upon a general election for mid-November and cabinet had no desire to weaken their record of support for the League.

III

On October 22, Parliament reconvened to discuss the international crisis. One day into the debate, Baldwin made the expected announcement that he had decided to call a general election. The election was set for November 14 and Parliament was scheduled to be dissolved on October 25. Baldwin explained that the autumn season offered a rare opportunity to conduct an election without disrupting essential parliamentary business, and added that the lull in the international crisis, following the agreement reached on sanctions at Geneva, might not reoccur.⁶⁵ The lull which Baldwin saw was visible only to his eyes. The actual and obvious reason for the election was to take advantage of the enviable position in which the government found themselves. The attention of the nation had been diverted from economic issues and was riveted on the Abyssinian crisis. The government's policy of support for the League commanded almost

⁶³Maurice Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain (London: Constable, 1950), p. 115.

⁶⁴Cab 23/82 48(35)2.

⁶⁵305 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 153-56.

universal approval, and the applause for Hoare's speech and Eden's efforts at Geneva was loud and general. From a political standpoint, there could hardly have been a better moment for the National government to go to the polls.

The state of the British economy, coming slowly and unevenly out of the depths of the depression, gave Labour and Liberal opponents of the government a good deal to work with in an election campaign. But domestic considerations paled in contrast with the drama unfolding on the international stage. The possibilities involved in the Abyssinian crisis included nothing less than war on the one hand, or a convincing vindication of the League system on the other. And the National government held the center of the stage as the unlikely hero of the piece. Baldwin had a unique opportunity to go to the polls in shining armor. The opportunity was too tempting to pass by.

With the government comfortably established in the forefront of the defenders of the Covenant, opposition politicians were left with little in the area of foreign policy with which to take issue. Much of what debate there was on the government's handling of the Abyssinian crisis took place in Parliament during the brief four day session called to consider the international situation. The debate gave the government an opportunity to review British triumphs at Geneva, to dismiss suggestions that the cabinet's handling of the crisis had been slow or uncertain, and to renew previous pledges of fidelity to the Covenant. Hoare led for

the government. He surveyed the development of the crisis, denied that the Italians had been left guessing as to British policy, and gave an account of his success at Geneva. He spoke of the government's "unchanged" policy of loyalty to the League and added that Britain was steadily "determined to uphold the letter and the spirit of the Covenant."⁶⁶ The League was involved, he said, in a "great experiment."

For the first time the system of collective action and collective security is being tested in the face of a great crisis...If it succeeds, an immense gain will have been achieved for the peace of the world. If it fails, a heavy disappointment will have fallen on all those who desire to eliminate war as an instrument of national policy, and a heavy responsibility upon those who have wavered in the cause. Whichever of these results ensue...I am certain we must not live in a world of illusion. If we can depend upon collective action, let us know it; if we cannot depend upon it, let us also know it.⁶⁷

Hoare's reference to the importance of discovering whether or not the League system would work should have been highlighted, in that it summed up the government's approach to the crisis. Like his emphasis at Geneva upon collective action, however, Hoare's frank indication that the government approached the crisis as an experiment rather than a crusade was hidden in verbiage about the worth of the League and British fidelity to the Covenant, and did little to temper the impression that Britain was determined to make the system work.

⁶⁶ 305 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 18-20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., col. 32.

Baldwin, in his turn, said that the only possible course of action for Britain was "absolute loyalty to the Covenant." He added, as Hoare had on the previous day, that Britain would be prepared "to assist...any legitimate opportunity for a settlement," but he promised that any such settlement would be developed within the framework of the League and would be "fair alike" to Italy, Abyssinia and the League.⁶⁸ Simon took up the same issue and emphatically denied that the government had any intention of negotiating a settlement outside of the League. Neither the League nor Abyssinia, he pledged, would be asked to accept an accomplished fact.⁶⁹

Any doubts which may have been created by talk of a settlement were offset by Eden's declaration of faith and determination. He and his colleagues, he said, could feel no enthusiasm for the task of restraining Italy:

here is a duty which has to be done, which must and will be done....There has been and will be no change in the policy of His Majesty's Government, in which, as a loyal member of the League, we will persevere....

We have tried in these post-war years to build up a new order by means of which we hope to spare mankind in the future the scourge of war....If we fail, even though that failure be not final, we shall have shattered for a generation, and it may be more, the hopes which mankind has placed in this new endeavour. Who can tell what the consequences of such disappointment may be? If, on the other hand, the League of Nations can on this occasion prove itself able to withstand the strain placed upon it--and I believe it will--then, even

⁶⁸Ibid., col. 150.

⁶⁹Ibid., col. 457.

though many serious problems will yet surround us, the world will face them fortified in its faith and inspired to fresh endeavour by the victory of its own ideals.

For the first time, I believe, in the history of the world, an attempt is being made to operate an international system based not merely upon power, but upon certain fixed principles of equity. This is an adventure in which we may all be proud to play our part.⁷⁰

Eden's idealism and enthusiasm were contagious. The House rang with cheers when he sat down.⁷¹ Unlike his colleagues, Eden was embarked upon a genuine crusade, and his zeal convinced many who might otherwise have questioned the government's commitment.

Eden was an incalculable political asset for the National government. Isaac Foot pointed up the difficulty faced by the opposition when he noted that Eden enjoyed a position in the country "beyond anything that he can himself estimate." People of all parties, Foot conceded, looked to Eden "with great admiration because of the courage and the devotion that he has shown in a very difficult task."⁷² It was hard, in the circumstances, to assail the work of Eden and nearly as hard to attack Hoare, whose stock stood almost as high as Eden's with the British public. Clement Attlee, the new leader of

⁷⁰Ibid., cols. 224-25.

⁷¹The Times, Oct. 24, 1935.

⁷²305 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 169-70.

the Labour Party, criticized British efforts at Geneva as slow, and bristled at the suggestion that the government was prepared to "buy off" the aggressor with a generous settlement. But he was compelled to endorse the efforts being made to strengthen the League, and he agreed that the Labour party would support the government's program of rearmament, to the extent necessary to defend the League.⁷³

Baldwin used the election to reopen the rearmament issue.⁷⁴ The White Paper debate in March had been a first step in the process of educating Parliament and the public to the need to rearm. Baldwin took the second step on October 23 by appealing for a mandate to restore British strength to at least the minimal level necessary for national safety. The Abyssinian crisis offered an opportunity to argue that strengthening the British defense services was

⁷³Ibid., cols. 33-47.

⁷⁴On November 12, 1936 Baldwin "confessed" to the Commons that he had hesitated in calling for rearmament because of pacifist sentiment in the country. His confession was taken by "Cato" and Churchill to mean that he had shirked the rearmament issue in the 1935 election. Reginald Bassett demonstrated, however, that Baldwin was referring to a hypothetical election in 1933 or 1934 rather than the election in 1935. Baldwin did not fight the 1935 election on the rearmament issue alone, but he did make it an important part of the campaign. 317 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 1144; "Cato," Guilty Men (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1940), p. 37; Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol. I: The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 216; Reginald Bassett, "Telling the Truth to the People: the Myth of the Baldwin 'confession,'" Cambridge Journal, II (November 1948), 84-95; H. Montgomery Hyde, Baldwin (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973), pp. 459-62; Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, Baldwin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. 864-66, 969-73.

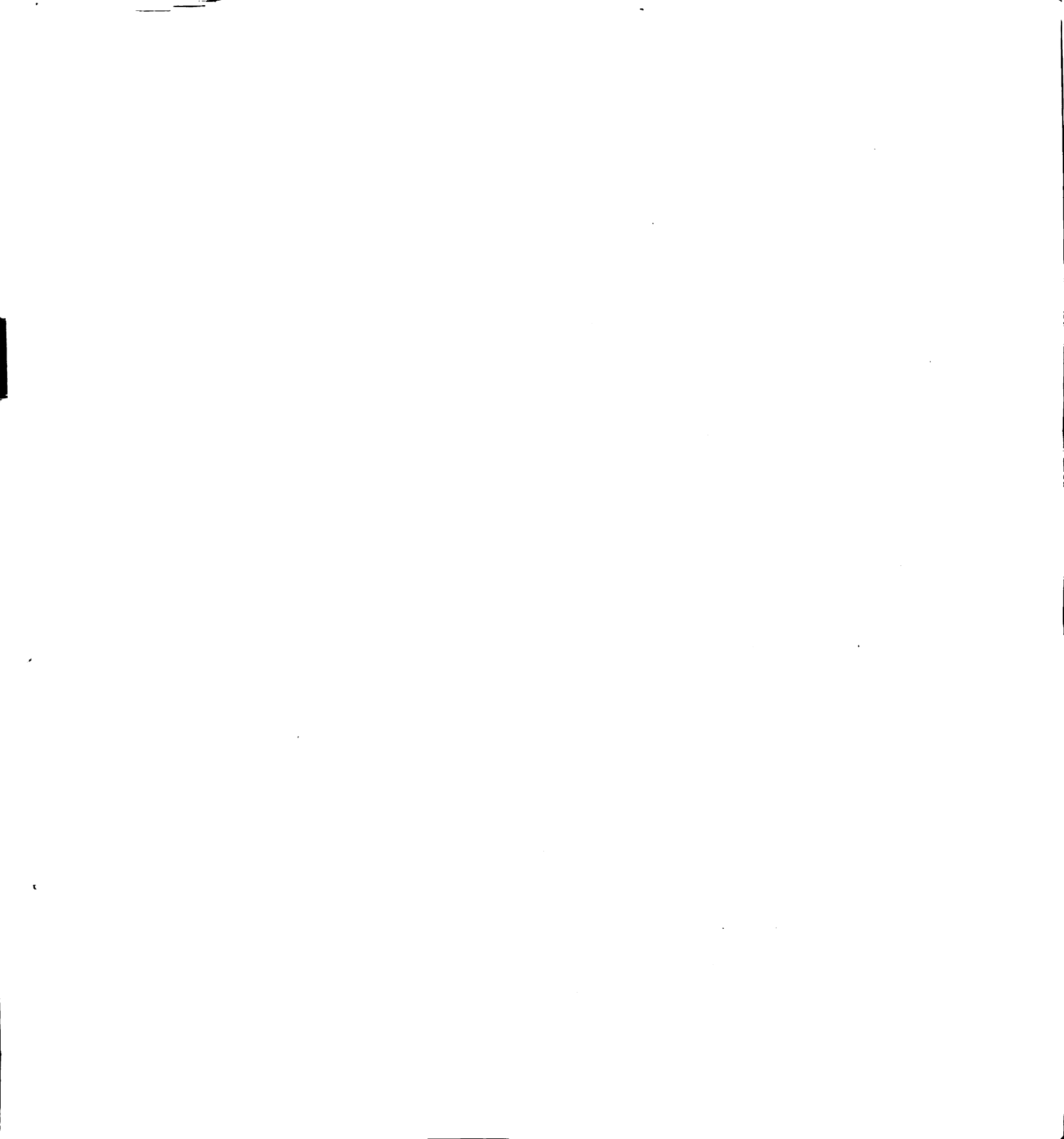
essential to world peace. Baldwin maintained, with questionable logic, that any such strengthening would take place "within the framework of the League." The Covenant mandated disarmament, but Baldwin argued, in effect, that the experience of the Abyssinian crisis had demonstrated that, in an imperfect world, the Covenant required military support if it was to be enforced. The government were ready to take risks for peace, but only on the understanding that the strength of the nation would be brought into harmony with its responsibilities. "I will not be responsible," Baldwin said, "for the conduct of any Government in this country at this present time, if I am not given power to remedy the deficiencies which have accrued in our defensive services since the War."⁷⁵

Baldwin repeated his appeal for a mandate to rearm in a radio broadcast from Chequers on October 25. He did not want "huge forces," he said, but felt that "modernization" was necessary to meet the burdens imposed by "full-hearted" support of the League.⁷⁶ Neville Chamberlain had suggested in August that the government fight the coming election on the rearmament issue.⁷⁷ Baldwin did not reject Chamberlain's advice, but he tempered it to meet the mood of the country, and wrapped his appeal securely in the mantle of the Covenant.

⁷⁵305 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 152.

⁷⁶The Times, Oct. 26, 1935.

⁷⁷Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1970; first published in 1946), p. 266.



The Peace Ballot demonstrated that there was still a great deal of sentiment in the country in favor of disarmament. A straight fight on rearmament alone, without reference to the League would have been divisive at a time when it was important to change the mood of the country and build a consensus in favor of rearmament. From the standpoint of restoring the armed services, the Abyssinian crisis was a godsend. Baldwin took advantage of it in good conscience, knowing that his government were taking what they viewed as considerable military risks in order to give the League system a full test. Politically, it would have been worse than foolish to raise the rearmament issue in anything other than the context of the government's support of the Covenant. The opposition were waiting to pound away on economic issues, and Baldwin had no desire to put another club into their hands. He had reconciled his party, in good measure, to what Churchill styled "arms and the Covenant," and, if he made no mistakes, he could expect to profit from the difficulty which the Labour party faced in doing the same.⁷⁸

⁷⁸On October 4, Baldwin addressed the annual conference of the Conservative party for the first time in seven years. According to Thomas Jones, he "spoke for an hour and had a great ovation. Denounced the isolationists, reconciled the Party to the League by supporting rearmament, and reconciled the pacifists to rearmament by supporting the Covenant." Baldwin skillfully blended support for the League with the rearmament issue, but his concept of "arms and the Covenant" differed sharply from Churchill's. Churchill seized upon the theme of "arms and the Covenant" with characteristic enthusiasm during the debate on international affairs in Parliament on October 24. Churchill conceived of the League as a 'grand alliance,' designed to blunt the Nazi threat. Baldwin and his

For the Labour party, the Abyssinian crisis was a crisis of conscience as well as international affairs. It was also a piece of political bad luck. The League's hour of trial brought the Labour party up against hard choices for many of its members. Throughout the lifetime of the League, Labour had adhered to the theory, embodied in the Covenant, that wars would not be possible without arms. Overlaid on that theory was the conviction that the last war had been an imperialist venture, fought at the expense of the interests and the blood of workers of many nationalities, who had no logical quarrel with one another. The Labour movement was determined to prevent another such war--by working for disarmament, and, if necessary, by participating in an international general strike. Until the collapse of the Disarmament conference and Mussolini's challenge to the League, it was possible for Labour to hold to the Covenant and disarmament as the inextricably entwined bases of a correct foreign policy. The Abyssinian crisis gave the National government the opportunity to preempt Labour's role as parliamentary champion of the Covenant in Britain. As Professor Mowat put it, Baldwin stole his opponents' clothes and left them to protest that he would never wear them.⁷⁹ The crisis put Labour onto the

colleagues viewed the League as an agency of conciliation rather than an armed alliance. Thomas Jones, A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 155; 305 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 361.

⁷⁹C. L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940 (London: Methuen, 1966; first published in 1955), pp. 553-54.

defensive, and forced Labourites to decide whether they would countenance the rearmament necessary to support the Covenant, and be prepared to see the arms used if it came to the point of military sanctions. The rearmament issue may have been bogus, insofar as the crisis with Italy was concerned, but the National government successfully presented it as a test of loyalty to the League. And the question of sanctions posed a real moral dilemma for pacifist elements in the Labour party.

The Labour party held its annual conference at Brighton on October 1 and 2, on the eve of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. Labour leaders thrashed out but did not bury their differences over sanctions at the conference. The trade unions came into the conference committed to support for sanctions, and with the votes necessary to impose the same commitment on the party. Trade union leaders, such as Ernest Bevin and Walter Citrine, viewed membership and participation in the League of Nations in the same way that they looked upon membership in their own unions.⁸⁰ They had little patience with the moral qualms of the pacifists or with the intellectual arrogance of the Socialist League. Like a labor union, the League of Nations depended upon solidarity for success, and the union leaders were ready to stand with the government against the challenge mounted by the hated fascists. At the T.U.C. conference held at Margate at the beginning of September, the trade

⁸⁰ Bevin said of membership in the League: 'It is like a man entering a Union, you cannot enter with reservations. You have got to be straight.' Quoted in John F. Naylor, Labour's International Policy (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 94.

unions voted overwhelmingly to support the government in any action taken to uphold the League.⁸¹ The T.U.C. resolution was endorsed by the national executive of the party, prompting Sir Stafford Cripps to resign from the executive, and Lord Ponsonby to resign as leader of the opposition in the Lords.⁸²

The resignations of Ponsonby and Cripps set the stage for the debate on sanctions at Brighton. On October 1, Hugh Dalton moved a resolution supported by the national executive proclaiming Labour's support for any measure outlined in the Covenant necessary to restrain Italian aggression.⁸³ Cripps answered for the intellectual Left, denouncing the League as an 'International Burglar's Union' which threatened to involve Labour in another imperialist war.⁸⁴ Ponsonby opposed sanctions on pacifist grounds, and was supported by George Lansbury, the Christian pacifist leader of the party, who made a moving appeal for a policy of moral rather than physical defiance.⁸⁵ Lansbury's speech brought the delegates to their feet, cheering, but Bevin put them back in their seats with a harsh rebuttal. Bevin was furious that Lansbury was opposing a proposal which he had not opposed in the executive.⁸⁶ Lansbury's qualms,

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 98-99.

⁸²Daily Herald, Sept. 20, 1935.

⁸³Hugh Dalton, The Fateful Years (London: Frederick Muller, 1957), pp. 67-69.

⁸⁴Mowat, Britain Between the Wars, p. 551.

⁸⁵Naylor, Labour's International Policy, pp. 104-05.

⁸⁶Alan Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. I: Trade Union Leader, 1881-1940 (London: Heinemann, 1960), p. 562.

added to those of Ponsonby and Cripps, threatened to divide the party just as it was heading into an election. Bevin argued bluntly that the party could no longer afford the luxury of Lansbury's conscience:

It is placing the Executive and the Movement in an absolutely wrong position to be taking your conscience round from body to body to be told what you ought to do with it.⁸⁷

Bevin felt betrayed and he did not shrink from what he saw as necessary. His rough treatment of the revered old party leader offended many in the hall, but it effectively closed the debate. When the vote was taken on October 2, ninety-five per cent of the delegates supported the resolution which Dalton had moved.⁸⁸ Labour went on record as supporting the government's policy in the crisis, but the issue continued to trouble the party. It was not the position from which to fight an election.

Lansbury resigned after he was repudiated at Brighton. He was succeeded by his deputy, Clement Attlee, and the party went into the election with the additional handicap of a new, untested and relatively unknown leader. The election manifesto issued on October 25 put the best possible face on a bad situation. Labour condemned the election as an "attempt to exploit for partisan ends a situation of grave international anxiety," and pointed up the ills of the country after four years of rule by the National government -- two million unemployed,

⁸⁷Quoted in ibid., p. 568.

⁸⁸Naylor, Labour's International Policy, p. 109.

the "deepening tragedy" of the depressed areas, a "harsh and cruel" household means test.⁸⁹ The government, Labour argued, were trying to cling to power on the strength of their eleventh-hour conversion to faith in the League. Labour dismissed the government's conversion as a sham designed to cover a vast new rearmament program. In a broadcast addressed on October 31, J. R. Clynes denounced the government's approach to peace:

We are to have peace by millions of bayonets; peace by a strong Navy; peace by a greater Air Force; and having talked peace, with a background of gunpowder, we are asked to believe that all these armaments are assembled to be ready not to use them.⁹⁰

The government, in reply, stood on their record. The government's manifesto, signed by Baldwin, MacDonald and Simon, contended that the country was steadily recovering its prosperity, and needed only a further measure of "stability and confidence" to complete the process. But the government did not want the election to focus on domestic issues. Pride of place in the election manifesto was given to an unqualified pledge of fidelity to the League:

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

⁸⁹The Times, Oct. 26, 1935.

⁹⁰The Times, Nov. 1, 1935.

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. In the present unhappy dispute between Italy and Abyssinia there will be no wavering in the policy we have hitherto pursued.⁹¹

The manifesto set the tone for the government's campaign. On November 9, Hoare addressed a banquet at the Guildhall and promised that the government would carry out Britain's obligations "wherever they exist" and strive for peace "wherever peace is threatened." Hoare assured his listeners that the government's policy had not changed since his speech at Geneva, and would not change after the election.⁹² Neville Chamberlain dismissed allegations about vast new armaments as unfounded propaganda. The government, he said, was only interested in "repairing the deficiencies in our defences."⁹³ Baldwin told the annual meeting of the Peace Society, "I give you my word that there will be no great armaments."⁹⁴

Baldwin typified the government's advantages in the election. The government was familiar, experienced, comfortable

⁹¹The Times, Oct. 28, 1935.

⁹²There is a copy of Hoare's speech in the Templewood Papers, General Political, VIII, 2.

⁹³The Times, Oct. 31, 1935.

⁹⁴Baldwin's speech can be found at FO 371/18851 C7474/55/18, and is also printed in Stanley Baldwin, This Torch of Freedom (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), pp. 319-39.

and moderate. The polling on November 14 returned 432 members pledged to support Baldwin, 21 opposition Liberals and 154 Labourites.⁹⁵ Labour increased its strength by almost 100 members and became a credible opposition, but the National government retained a sizable majority and gained a fresh mandate for government policies. The election gave the government a claim to popular support for a limited program of rearmament, and constituted a clear endorsement of the government's handling of the Abyssinian crisis. To insure popular support, the government repeatedly protested their determination to uphold the Covenant. The effect of the election on the Abyssinian crisis was to confirm Britain's commitment to the League, and to reinforce the impression that the government would do what was necessary to make the League system work.

IV

Baldwin notwithstanding, there was no lull in the Abyssinian crisis during the British election. Rather, the crisis developed at an accelerating pace while the cabinet was distracted by the election. On November 2, the Coordination Committee met in Geneva and established November 18 as the date by which the agreed sanctions should be put into effect.⁹⁶ The deadline served to prod those governments

⁹⁵David Butler and Jennie Freeman, British Political Facts, 1900-1968 (London: Macmillan 1969), p. 143.

⁹⁶League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 146, p. 8.

still considering the application of sanctions, but a number of sanctions had been put into effect by November 2. According to information furnished to the committee by October 31, some four-fifths of the participating governments were applying, or were prepared to apply the measures outlined in proposals II, III and IV.⁹⁷ The League was fully embarked upon the critical test of the sanctions machinery.

Hoare and Laval were in Geneva on November 2, and their presence lent weight to the decision reached by the Coordination Committee. In their remarks to the committee, however, they stressed conciliation rather than coercion. Laval reminded the committee that the League had a duty to seek a peaceful settlement of the dispute. For his part, he said, he would "stubbornly pursue" his efforts to find a basis for negotiations.⁹⁸ Hoare reaffirmed Britain's commitment to the Covenant, but emphasized his interest in a "speedy and honorable settlement of the controversy." He referred to the conversations which had been taking place in Paris and promised that any settlement of the crisis would take shape within the framework of the League. "Nothing is farther from our minds," he said, "than to make and conclude an agreement behind the back of the

⁹⁷By October 31, thirty-nine governments had imposed the restrictions outlined in proposal II, forty-three governments were prepared to accept proposal III, and forty-four were willing to accept proposal IV. Virtually all of the remaining governments represented on the Coordination Committee had indicated that they were giving the proposals favorable consideration. Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

League."⁹⁹ Van Zeeland, the Belgian Prime Minister, proposed, in response, that the League entrust to Hoare and Laval "the mission of seeking... the elements of a solution which the three parties at issue... might find it possible to accept."¹⁰⁰ The Coordination Committee enthusiastically adopted Van Zeeland's proposal. There was an obvious contradiction involved in authorizing negotiations for a settlement certain to reward the aggressor at the same time that the decision was taken to implement sanctions, but the contradiction was lost on the committee. The League, to many of its participants, was first and foremost an agency of conciliation, with procedures to hinder aggression only if conciliation failed. On November 2, Laval and conciliation held sway at Geneva.

Hoare's statement to the Coordination Committee contrasted sharply with his earlier speech to the Assembly. The attempt to dissuade Mussolini from war had failed, and Hoare was eager to find a solution which would preserve the League and release Britain from an embarrassing and dangerous situation. The government was committed to the sanctions experiment, but the French attitude made the undertaking hazardous. Laval argued that the French people could not be brought to support sanctions until it was demonstrated that Mussolini was deaf to all reasonable offers.¹⁰¹ After the unnerving exchange between London

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Jones, A Diary with Letters, pp. 158-59.

and Paris on the question of military cooperation, Hoare and his colleagues were easily persuaded that another effort to placate Italy was necessary. Eden and, to a lesser extent, Chamberlain were the only members of the cabinet group managing the crisis who had any stomach for a fight. Hoare's temperament was much better suited to conciliation than conflict, and Baldwin could not tolerate the idea of war. Baldwin dictated that the crisis not be allowed to blossom into a European war, and Hoare acted on the authority granted to him by the cabinet and the Coordination Committee to try to prevent such a war.

Hoare anticipated that the discussions in Paris would be based upon the report of the Committee of Five, but Laval supported the terms outlined by Mussolini on October 16 to the French ambassador in Rome.¹⁰² Mussolini indicated that he would consider an agreement which granted Italy a mandate over all of the non-Amharic areas of Abyssinia, and which assured Italy of predominant influence over the remaining central highlands. The effect of such an agreement would have been to grant Italy most of the fruits of victory without the trouble of conquest. Ambassador Clerk and Maurice Peterson argued for more reasonable terms. In a series of drafting sessions, Peterson and his opposite number in the Quai d'Orsay, the Comte de St. Quentin, worked up a proposed settlement which

¹⁰²Viscount Templewood, Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954), p. 174; Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 285. For the proposal of the Committee of Five vide supra. pp. 176-78.

stood somewhere between the earlier proposal of the Committee of Five and Mussolini's demands. The Peterson-St. Quentin draft suggested that Italy be accorded a privileged position in the Abyssinian economy and that Italian advisers be granted an important share in the administration of the non-Amharic provinces in the south of Abyssinia. Overall authority would be vested, however, in advisers in Addis Ababa appointed by the League and supported by an international rather than an Italian military force.¹⁰³

Hoare and Eden took up the Peterson-St. Quentin draft with Laval in Geneva on November 1. The Foreign Office had studied the draft and Hoare said that Britain would prefer proposals based on an exchange of territory rather than an Italian mandate over large areas of Abyssinia.¹⁰⁴ Laval, however, continued to argue for Mussolini's demands. In his opinion, reinforced by his contacts with Rome, the draft did not go far enough to meet Italy's requirements. He suggested that the scheme of administration for the southern provinces be extended to include Tigre', where Italian forces were solidly entrenched. Eden responded sharply that there was a difference between an exchange of territory promoted by Britain and France and a proposal which asked the League to bless the aggressor's

¹⁰³ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 174; Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, pp. 115-16; Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 285.

¹⁰⁴ The discussion among Hoare, Eden and Laval on November 1 is drawn from Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 286.

every demand. Eden and Laval yielded nothing to each other in the certainty with which each pursued his solution as the only solution to the crisis. Laval found that he could make no headway with Hoare while Eden was at his side. Eden should have drawn the same conclusion.

Eden presented an obstacle to the French effort to promote a settlement, but events at Geneva during the first week in November reinforced Laval's arguments. On November 2, Hoare met with Baron Aloisi to discuss the proposed military reduction in the Mediterranean. The terms of the understanding had been arranged by Laval and Aloisi seemed to be prepared to confirm them, although he later told Laval that he did not feel that demobilization would succeed.¹⁰⁵ Mussolini, however, had been assured by Drummond that Britain had no intention of going beyond economic sanctions and he had no reason to reduce the incentive for London to agree to the kind of settlement which Laval was promoting.¹⁰⁶ When the agreement for a Mediterranean detente reached Mussolini's desk, he disdainfully "brushed it aside."¹⁰⁷ On November 6, Laval's point of view

¹⁰⁵Aloisi, Journal, p. 320.

¹⁰⁶Ian Colvin, None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p. 72.

¹⁰⁷Cab 24/257 C.P.220(35). Eden felt that his role in helping to structure the sanctions front at Geneva prompted Mussolini's more rigid attitude, and it well may have. It is likely, however, that the interception of a telegram from Hoare to Clerk, outlining the proposed military understanding between Britain and France, contributed at least as much to Mussolini's ire. Aloisi, Journal, pp. 317-19; Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 285-87.

received another strong boost in London when the Committee of Eighteen decided to recommend the extension of the embargo upon goods supplied to Italy to include a variety of strategic materials, including oil.¹⁰⁸ An oil embargo, if it could be made effective, would destroy the Italian potential to continue the war in Abyssinia as certainly as a move to close the Suez canal. In that event, there was every indication that Mussolini would extend the war to the Mediterranean rather than relinquish his ambitions in east Africa.

The proposal to embargo oil brought the Abyssinian crisis to a head. The gradual approach to sanctions, which won general support from League members in October, was effectively challenged by the simple device of adding a single commodity to the proposed embargo list. The League had slightly more than a month in which to decide whether to force the issue and run the risk of an expanded war. The Committee of Eighteen was scheduled to meet again on December 12 to establish a date for implementation if there was agreement on the proposed list of commodities to be embargoed. The easy objection to an oil

¹⁰⁸In addition to petroleum and petroleum derivatives, the Committee of Eighteen proposed to expand sanctions to include an embargo on coal, iron, cast iron and steel. The proposal was put forward on November 2 by the Canadian representative, Dr. Riddell. Riddell was later censured by the Canadian government for acting without instructions, but, as Eden has noted, the decision to consider an oil sanction grew logically from the mandate given the sub-committee, and the proposal could easily have originated with any of the representatives assigned to consider the question. League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 146, pp. 37-38 and 46-47; Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 287.

sanction was that it could not be effective while American tankers continued to supply Italy, but on November 15 Secretary of State Cordell Hull issued a statement on behalf of the American government denouncing the expanded trade between the United States and Italy in war supplies. Hull expressly included oil among the "essential war materials" involved, and stated:

This class of trade is directly contrary to the policy of this government as announced in official statements of the President and Secretary of State, as it is also contrary to the general spirit of the recent Neutrality Act.¹⁰⁹

Hull's statement made it appear that an oil sanction could be effective. An effective oil sanction was an unsettling prospect in London, Paris and Rome.

In retrospect, it seems unlikely that the Roosevelt administration could have persuaded the American oil companies to pass up the opportunity for enhanced profits, and it is certain that Baldwin would not have sanctioned the use of the British fleet to interfere with American trade.¹¹⁰ In all probability, then, the imposition of an oil sanction would not have prompted the 'mad dog' Italian attack which the British

¹⁰⁹New York Times, November 16, 1935.

¹¹⁰For an insider's view of the dilemma created for the United States government by sanctions in general, and by the oil sanction in particular, see Herbert Feis, Three International Episodes Seen from E. A. (New York: Norton, 1966; first published in 1946), pp. 228-42, 254-60.

cabinet feared, despite Mussolini's bluster. The cabinet, however, took the threat very seriously. Hull's speech, following after the Committee of Eighteen's recommendation, prompted a number of governments to speak out in favor of an oil sanction, and by the end of November it was clear that the proposal would be given a strong hearing at Geneva.¹¹¹ On November 25, Hoare advised Alfred Duff Cooper, the new Secretary of State for War, to look to his guns lest an Italian attack, prompted by the proposed oil sanction, catch him off guard.¹¹² The threat posed by an oil sanction was particularly disturbing in that the French had yet to agree to coordinate military preparations, or to make essential military facilities available, in spite of the conversations between British and French military experts which had taken place since the end of October.¹¹³

On November 26, the sub-committee on Defence Policy Requirements of the Committee of Imperial Defence, including all of the key members of the cabinet, met to consider the dangerous situation created by the oil sanction proposal.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹Sir Samuel Hoare to Walter Runciman, November 22, 1935, Templewood Papers, General Political, VIII, 3.

¹¹²Sir Samuel Hoare to Alfred Duff Cooper, November 25, 1935, *ibid.*

¹¹³Cmd. 5072, Ethiopia No. 2(1936), p. 4.

¹¹⁴Those present included Baldwin, both MacDonalDs, Simon, Chamberlain, Hoare, Eden, Runciman, Eyres Monsell, Duff Cooper and Cunliffe-Lister from the cabinet, and Vansittart, Sir Warren Fisher, Admiral Chatfield, Air-Marshal Ellington and General Dill as advisers. The minutes of the meeting are found at Cab 24/257 C.P.220(35).

The Italians were spreading rumors of a possible "sortie" against British forces if an oil sanction was imposed, and ambassador Grandi had described a recent visit to the Foreign Office as his "last visit." Hoare said that Italian bluster should be recognized for what it was, but added that "in view of the existence of the proposal for oil sanctions the threatening attitude of Italy could not be ignored." It was especially hard to ignore the Italian threats in light of the attitude of the French. The French had done nothing to prepare for a possible war. At Toulon, the French anti-aircraft defenses were unmanned. French military authorities maintained that mobilization of French forces could not begin until after an act of aggression had occurred. Beyond that, the French government had yet to agree to make Bizerta and Toulon available to the Mediterranean fleet, and they were unlikely to agree to British use of the aerodromes in the south of France which Cunliffe-Lister felt were essential to a British air offensive against Italy. It was clear, then, that if an oil sanction brought Britain and Italy to blows, Britain would have to stand alone, at least initially. Duff Cooper and Eyres Monsell reported that the anti-aircraft ammunition available to British forces in the Mediterranean "was not sufficient for prolonged operations," and production could not be quickly increased. If the Italian air force was free to concentrate on British forces, without worrying about the French, it would undoubtedly do considerable damage. The unescapable conclusion was that an oil sanction carried with it heavy military risks,

which could only be reduced if the French were brought to the point of active military cooperation.

The essential meeting with the French to discuss the implications of an oil sanction was scheduled for November 29, but Laval pleaded a ministerial crisis and postponed the discussion until December 6.¹¹⁵ The delay gave the cabinet additional time to mull over the problem. The Foreign Office pointed out, in a memorandum circulated by Hoare on November 27, that Italy had storage accommodation for no more than three or four months' supply of oil, but added that "it is during those three or four months that our weakness is greatest."¹¹⁶ On November 29, Chamberlain, Hoare, Runciman, Simon and Eden met in the Chancellor's room in the House of Commons to discuss the problem in advance of the full cabinet's deliberations. The discussion brought Chamberlain to the fore. He felt that Secretary Hull's initiative was a departure from the usual practice of American neutrality which should not be discouraged. There were risks involved in pressing forward with an oil sanction, but there were equally grave risks involved in allowing Mussolini to carry the day with his threats:

in such circumstances U.S.A. should decline in future to help us in any way, sanctions would crumble, the League would lose its coherence, and our whole policy would be destroyed.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Cab 24/257 C.P.212(35).

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Quoted in Feiling, Life of Neville Chamberlain, p. 272.

If necessary, Chamberlain argued, Britain ought to give the lead rather than allow the question to go by default.

Chamberlain's attitude reinforced Eden's arguments and fortified Hoare in his determination to see the sanctions experiment through. Hoare recognized the necessity to endorse the oil sanction proposal, but he feared the danger of war.¹¹⁸ When the cabinet met to decide the oil sanction issue on December 2 Hoare was ready with a compromise proposal.¹¹⁹ He reminded the cabinet that Britain was almost alone among the concerned League powers in having expressed no opinion on the oil sanction, and that there was grumbling in the French press and elsewhere that the cabinet was hesitating in order to protect the financial interests of the Anglo-Iranian oil company. It was necessary to dispel that rumor, and to demonstrate that the government was prepared to play a full part in the effort to restrain Italian aggression. But the risks were daunting, and Britain was alone in preparing to shoulder them. The only assurance the government had of French support was Laval's promise, which was no assurance at all. Hoare recommended therefore that Britain support the oil sanction proposal, but

¹¹⁸ Despite his concern about the dangerous implications of an oil sanction, Hoare remained convinced that it was necessary to uphold the League in the crisis. On November 25, he told Hankey that to back away from the oil sanction would be to ruin the government and to smash the League. If the oil sanction was not accepted by the cabinet, he said, he would resign. Stephen Roskill, Hankey, Man of Secrets Vol. III: 1931-1963 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), pp. 186-89.

¹¹⁹ The minutes of the meeting are at Cab 23/82 50(35).

delay the establishment of a date for implementation. Any time gained would be time which could be devoted to the search for a satisfactory solution. Hoare noted that the Paris talks had not produced a likely solution, but "he himself had to go away for reasons of health for a short time and he proposed on his journey to see M. Laval and to try and press on his talks with him."

Hoare's suggestion appealed to the cabinet as a compromise between duty and prudence. The principle of collective security had to be maintained, but Mussolini's attitude threatened a war which Britain was ill-prepared to fight. Secret intelligence showed that Italy had made serious preparations for war in the Mediterranean. The service ministers laid heavy emphasis on the danger posed by the Italian air force, which, they said, could do heavy damage and put back the programs designed to strengthen Britain's defense posture in Europe and the Far East. But it was difficult to pull back from the oil sanction proposal. Public opinion was aroused, most of the oil-producing members of the League had already indicated their support, and, as Baldwin put it in summing up a long and tense cabinet, if aggression succeeded and the League was discredited, who would face Hitler?¹²⁰ On the other hand

¹²⁰The Abyssinian crisis pointed up rather than obscured the growing German menace. On November 25, Hoare circulated to the cabinet three despatches from Sir Eric Phipps in Berlin describing the rearmament of Germany and German expansionist aims. In his covering note, Hoare wrote that "the present imbroglio in Abyssinia is mere child's play compared to the problem with which these German claims will in some not very distant future confront His Majesty's Government." Cab 24/257 C.P.217(35).

if the crisis led to a war with Italy, which demonstrated and aggravated British military weaknesses, the same question would apply -- who would face Hitler? The answer, for the cabinet, was to support the League but avoid war. It was becoming increasingly difficult to do both, but the cabinet preferred to defer, for as long as possible, a hard choice between the League and war in the hope that Mussolini would finally yield to reason. Again, as with the earlier decision to support sanctions, the cabinet looked for the safest way to run a dangerous risk and settled upon a contradictory half-measure.

When Hoare left for Paris, then, on December 7 for the discussions with Laval which produced the ill-famed Hoare-Laval plan, he did so with the express authority of the cabinet. Indeed, the cabinet looked upon the Paris talks as the best hope that the oil sanction would not have to be put into effect. The cabinet did not, however, discuss the details of the proposed settlement in authorizing Hoare's trip. The Paris talks had not reached the point of an agreed proposal, and it was understood that any such proposal would be developed ad referendum to London and subject to ultimate approval by the parties involved. The cabinet had no reason to fear that they would be confronted with an accomplished fact.

Most of the preliminary work on the Anglo-French proposal had been completed before Hoare took the negotiations into his own hands. Peterson and St. Quentin spent two weeks reworking the earlier draft and by December 3 were close to agreement.

By the terms of their revised proposal, the Emperor would lose control of most of the southern provinces of Abyssinia as well as part or all of Tigre' province in the north, leaving him to govern a truncated but ethnically consolidated state. To compensate for his losses, the Emperor would receive a port in either British or, preferably, Italian territory.¹²¹ By the time that Peterson cabled for additional instructions on December 3, he and St. Quentin had reduced the remaining points of difference to a question of whether Italy should be granted all or only the eastern half of Tigre' province, and a question as to what type of restrictions, if any, were to be placed upon the Abyssinian acquisition and development of a port.¹²² The French wanted to protect the monopoly enjoyed by their Djibuti-Addis Ababa railway, and they were insistent that Italy would be satisfied with nothing less than all of Tigre' province. Since Laval was in regular contact with Mussolini by telephone, his grasp of Italian requirements could hardly be questioned, but Peterson was limited by his instructions. Laval was anxious to clear away the remaining questions before the oil sanction proposal came up again at Geneva, and he suggested a meeting with Hoare in London to settle upon an agreed proposal. Hoare did not want to bring the negotiations on a compromise settlement to London, where they would generate controversy before

¹²¹Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, pp. 118-19; Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 174-75; Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 291-92.

¹²²Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, pp. 118-19.

a settlement was reached. Instead, he agreed to meet with Laval in Paris on his way to a skating holiday in Switzerland.¹²³

In his account of the weekend which ruined him as Foreign Secretary, Hoare conceded that he made a number of mistakes. He felt that he should have delayed the meeting with Laval until he was stronger, physically and mentally, or, if the meeting could not have been delayed, he should have agreed with Laval's suggestion that their discussion be held in London, where he would have had his colleagues close at hand. At the very least, he felt, he should have taken the precaution of requiring the cabinet to consider and define a British position on the proposed settlement before discussing it with Laval. He did not take the obvious precautions because he did not expect the meeting to produce anything more than a provisional proposal, and he had no intention of committing the government to a final plan. According to his account, he did not expect to stay in Paris for more than a few hours, but was reluctantly persuaded to remain for what became definitive talks. The implication, in Hoare's version of the talks, is that he was led in a weakened state to discuss and accept much more than he had anticipated when he left London.¹²⁴

There is no reason to doubt that Hoare was sincere when he told Eden, before leaving for Paris, "I am not going to

¹²³ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, pp. 177-78.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 178-80.

commit you to anything."¹²⁵ He did expect, however, that his trip to Paris would be important. The meeting with Laval was not something squeezed incidentally into a holiday trip, nor was Hoare the reluctant participant portrayed in his memoirs. Rather, the available evidence suggests that, by the beginning of December, Hoare, with Vansittart prodding him, had become nearly as eager as Laval to find a settlement to the crisis, and that the express purpose of the trip to Paris was to pull together the Anglo-French proposal. In a letter to Ramsay MacDonald, dated November 27, Hoare wrote:

The real problem, I think, is to know how far the other members of the League will be prepared to go in the way of concessions once they realise that we are not prepared to do the fighting for them. We shall then know how far we must go towards meeting Mussolini and getting a concrete settlement. Such a settlement, when we arrive at it, may well be not glorious but equally I hope not inglorious.¹²⁶

The way to test the reaction of League members was to put a proposed settlement before them. Hoare and Laval had a standing invitation from the Co-ordination Committee to submit a proposal, and there was a clear precedent in the work of the Committee of Five. Without a negotiated settlement, it seemed likely to Hoare that the oil sanction proposal would lead to a rupture in Anglo-French relations, and to war between Britain

¹²⁵Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 298.

¹²⁶Sir Samuel Hoare to James Ramsay MacDonald, November 27, 1935, Templewood Papers, Gen. Political, VIII, 3.

and Italy in the Mediterranean. Baldwin's instructions to Hoare continued to be, "avoid war." Just before Hoare left for Paris, Baldwin told him:

Have a good leave, and get your health back. That is the most important thing. By all means stop in Paris, and push Laval as far as you can, but on no account get this country into war.¹²⁷

Hoare's expectation that the Paris talks would succeed derived in part from the conversations which he and Vansittart had during the last week in November with Mussolini's personal representative, General Garibaldi. Garibaldi had called on Vansittart at the Foreign Office on November 25 to convey an offer and a threat. Mussolini, he said, regretted the adventure which he had undertaken, and would not have begun it if he had not been misled by Grandi about the state of British public opinion. Mussolini's concern was "to get out of the imbroglio as well and as speedily as possible." Garibaldi handed Vansittart a brief outline of Italy's terms for peace, and said that he had been authorized to state categorically that if Italy could be assured in advance of such an arrangement, Mussolini was prepared to cease hostilities and send a representative to Geneva to put Italy's case to the League again. The terms outlined in the note were similar to those that Britain had already rejected: Italy wanted outright control of Tigré and the territories of Ogaden and Danakil, and a direct or indirect

¹²⁷Quoted in Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 178.

mandate over the rest of Abyssinia. In return, Italy was willing to see Abyssinia gain either the British port of Zeila or the Italian port of Assab. Garibaldi conceded that the terms were virtually identical to those communicated to Laval some time earlier, but he added that they were not final and were subject to any reasonable modification. Without an agreement, Garibaldi warned, an embargo on oil would drive Mussolini to an act of calculated desperation, which would widen the conflict. Vansittart responded that neither Britain nor the League could accept such terms, but he set up an interview for Garibaldi with Hoare.¹²⁸ Hoare listened to Garibaldi on November 28, and his response was also that Mussolini's terms would destroy Abyssinia and the League. Garibaldi stressed again, however, that the Italian terms were only a bargaining position, and Hoare noted in his memorandum of the conversation that he had been impressed by Garibaldi's sincere desire to find some basis for an agreement.¹²⁹

If Mussolini was prepared to bargain in good faith, there was reason to believe that the Paris talks might lead to an end of the crisis. In a letter to Lord Wigram on December 2 for the king's information, Hoare took a very positive view of his impending talks with Laval. 'We intend,' he wrote 'to go

¹²⁸Record of conversation between Sir Robert Vansittart and General Garibaldi, November 25, 1935, Cab 24/257 C.P.225(35).

¹²⁹Record of conversation between the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and General Garibaldi, November 28, 1935, Cab 24/257 C.P.225(35).

all out for bringing the conflict to an end.' For that purpose, he planned to take Vansittart, a private secretary and a cipher with him to Paris. And he expected to succeed: 'If as I hope M. Laval and I agree upon a basis for a peace negotiation, Vansittart will stop on in Paris for a day or two in order to clinch the details.'¹³⁰ On December 5, Hoare reviewed the crisis for the House of Commons, and stressed that the League had granted specific approval to Britain and France to seek a settlement within the framework of the Covenant.¹³¹ Vansittart was equally confident that the talks with Laval would result in an agreed proposal. Before he left London, Vansittart called senior Foreign Office officials Ralph Wigram and Rex Leeper to his office and asked how long it would take to alter public opinion on the Abyssinian crisis. Leeper, the head of the News Department, estimated that it would take three weeks, to which Vansittart responded 'we have only three days.'¹³²

¹³⁰Quoted in Keith Middlemas and John Earnes, Baldwin, p. 881.

¹³¹H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 342-47.

¹³²Quoted in Colvin, None So Blind, pp. 74-75. Vansittart was very active in the management of Paris talks, and he shared Laval's conviction that it was essential to resurrect the Stresa front. Years after the crisis, Dino Grandi referred to the Hoare-Laval plan as 'nothing more or less than the Grandi-Vansittart plan.' The evidence on the role which Vansittart played in preparing Hoare to accept Laval's proposals is not conclusive, but there was clearly substance in Eden's remark to Hoare that in Paris, Vansittart could be more French than the French. Nonetheless, Vansittart held to the government's position that the League had to be maintained. On December 6, he told the French ambassador in London that it was necessary to find a solution to the crisis which was reasonable, but that

Hoare arrived in Paris on the afternoon of December 7. He was met by Vansittart, Clerk and Peterson and taken immediately to the Quai d'Orsay, where Laval was waiting with his advisers, Léger, St. Quentin and René Massigli. Outside of the door of Laval's office, Hoare found a crowd of newspaper reporters and photographers, which should have given him some inkling of the prospects for secrecy.¹³³ Inside the room, Hoare found Laval attempting to play the role of mediator again.¹³⁴ France, Laval said, was not a supplier of oil and could not take the lead on the oil sanction issue. He knew, however, from his ambassador in Rome and from the Italian ambassador in Paris, as well as through the Veteran's Leagues of Italy and France that Mussolini viewed the oil sanction as a military measure and was prepared to reply in kind. If Britain pressed at Geneva for the application of an oil sanction, there would be war in the Mediterranean. France would not oppose the oil sanction proposal, Laval said, but he saw no reason to fix even a remote date for entry into force until the processes of conciliation had failed. The British cabinet had already decided to delay the implementation of an oil sanction, but Hoare tried to force Laval out of the

such a solution could not be so generous to Italy as to destroy the League, and with it the post-war structure of Europe. *Ibid.*, p. 74; Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 298; Cab 24/257 C.P.234 (35); Aaron L. Goldman, "Sir Robert Vansittart's Search for Italian cooperation against Hitler, 1933-36," Journal of Contemporary History, IX, 3 (July 1974), 93-130.

¹³³ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 179

¹³⁴ A record of the meeting at the Quai d'Orsay on December 7 was printed for the cabinet at Cab 24/257 C.P.233(35).

role of mediator before conceding the issue. Pointedly he asked whether there was any reason why France would be unable to come to Britain's aid if there was an Italian attack upon the British fleet. Laval replied vaguely that the French people habitually observed their obligations, but that they would have to be convinced that everything possible had been done to find a way out of the crisis before they would lend their full support. Hoare refused to leave it at that, and pressed for a French commitment to conversations on military coordination between the general staffs and air staffs of each country, to supplement the conversations which had been taking place between the naval staffs. To Hoare's surprise, Laval agreed without reservation. Feeling somewhat more secure about French military support, Hoare turned to the peace proposals on which Peterson and St. Quentin had been working for several weeks.

The discussion of the peace terms had only begun by the time that Hoare had planned to leave for Switzerland on Saturday evening, December 7. "Reluctantly" Hoare agreed to remain until the proposals had been completed.¹³⁵ Hoare's position on the peace terms was that it was essential not to create the appearance of rewarding aggression. He felt that the proposals should adhere, as closely as possible, to the report of the Committee of Five, with some allowance for Italy's gains

¹³⁵ Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 180.

in Tigré province. Laval argued that such an approach would be wholly unacceptable to Mussolini, and he appealed to Hoare to be more generous. To underline his arguments and heighten the drama of the situation, Laval kept a telephone by his hand and called Mussolini at several points during the conversations.¹³⁶ In spite of Hoare's best efforts to pull him off the fence, Laval persisted in viewing himself as the necessary mediator between Britain and Italy.

In the end, Hoare accepted what he thought of as a reasonable balance between his position and Laval's point of view.¹³⁷ In terms of territory to be exchanged, the French insisted upon the cession of the whole of Tigré to Italy, but Hoare managed to reduce the area proposed to include Adowa, Adigrat and Makale, but to exclude the sacred city of Axum and the western portion of the province. In addition, frontier "rectifications" to Italy's advantage were proposed for the Ogaden and the Danakil. In return, Abyssinia was to receive the port of Assab in Italian Eritrea, along with a connecting corridor; or, if the Emperor preferred, Britain would cede the port of Zeila on a similar basis.¹³⁸ To win Laval's approval for the proposals respecting Assab and Tigré, which were more generous to Abyssinia than Laval felt Mussolini would like, Hoare had to agree

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 179

¹³⁷Hoare's report to the cabinet at the conclusion of his talks with Laval can be found at Cab 24/257 C.P.235(35).

¹³⁸Ibid.

to an expansion of the area to be set aside for Italian economic development in the south and southwest of Abyssinia. Specifically, Hoare and Laval agreed to propose that the area of Abyssinia south of the 8th parallel and east of the 35th meridian be established as a zone in which Italy would enjoy "exclusive economic rights," under the nominal sovereignty of the Emperor, but with a predominantly Italian administration appointed by the League. The effect of this proposal would have been to extend virtual Italian control over an additional third of Abyssinia. The only compensation proposed for the Emperor, to offset the loss, was the scheme of League assistance which had been drawn up previously by the Committee of Five.

The Hoare-Laval plan was a compromise between Mussolini's earlier demands, which envisioned the Italian annexation of all of the non-Amharic areas of Abyssinia and an Italian mandate over the central highlands, and the terms put forward by the Committee of Five. As such, it was viewed as realistic by the two statesmen. In fact, the plan confronted Abyssinia and the League with a defeat which neither could have accepted and hoped to survive. Hoare, however, did not see the proposals which he initialed as a blueprint for the destruction of Abyssinia and the League. He saw only the immediate threat of a wider war, and felt that the proposals represented the best that could be done for Abyssinia in the circumstances. Beyond that, the understanding with Laval smoothed over a threatening rift in Anglo-French relations, and created the possibility

that the structure of European security would survive to blunt the German menace. Hoare's staff assured him, at the conclusion of the negotiations, that the proposals represented 'the best thing that he had done.'¹³⁹ Peterson told Eden on the following day that he felt he could have gotten better terms on his own, and he wrote later that he had had an uneasy feeling about the proposals from the first, but no one marred Hoare's sense of achievement on December 8.¹⁴⁰ He left that evening for Switzerland and a much needed rest. Hoare's judgment during his talks with Laval may well have been affected by the precarious state of his health, but at the time he was untroubled by doubt. Before he left Paris, he and Laval issued a statement to the press which indicated that they felt they had worked out a formula to preserve European peace:

Animated by the same spirit of conciliation, and inspired by close Franco-British friendship, we have in the course of our long conversations of to-day and yesterday sought the formulas which might serve as a basis for a friendly settlement of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute.

There could be no question at present of publishing these formulas. The British Government has not yet been informed of them, and once its agreement has been received it will be necessary to submit them to the consideration of the interested Governments and to the decision of the League of Nations.

¹³⁹Quoted in Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 159.

¹⁴⁰Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 301; Peterson, Both Sides of the Curtain, p. 120.

We have worked together with the same anxiety to reach as rapidly as possible a pacific and honorable solution. We are both satisfied with the results which we have reached.¹⁴¹

Hoare's skating holiday began on a perfect day in the Swiss mountains. The air was crisp, the sky was clear, and the ice was deep and hard. Shortly after Hoare stepped onto the ice, however, he suffered one of the fainting spells which had been troubling him for months, fell on his face and severely fractured his nose.¹⁴² In London, the cabinet was confronted with a similar fate. The proposals which Hoare approved in Paris struck an unexpected blow at the new government which Baldwin had just put together after the November election, and threatened it with a disastrous fall.

Before any of the cabinet ministers beyond Eden and Baldwin had learned of Hoare's understanding with Iaval, the details were published in the Paris press. The Quai d'Orsay was notorious for its inability to preserve a secret, and on December 9 a substantially accurate version of the Hoare-Iaval plan was printed in L'Echo de Paris and I'Ceuvre.¹⁴³ On December 10, The Times reprinted the details of the plan in London.¹⁴⁴ Whether the leak was deliberate on Iaval's part

¹⁴¹The Times, December 9, 1935.

¹⁴²Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 184.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁴⁴The Times, December 10, 1935.

or not, the effect was all that the French Prime Minister could have asked for. The cabinet was faced with a fait accompli, and had to decide, under public scrutiny, whether to support or repudiate the absent Foreign Secretary and his understanding with France.

The cabinet had little to work with in deciding what to do. Maurice Peterson brought a copy of the proposals to Eden's house on the morning of December 9, along with a covering memorandum by Hoare urging the cabinet to approve the terms as quickly as possible and to convey a copy to Rome for Mussolini's consideration. Curiously, Hoare recommended the proposals, in his memorandum, as a way of placing the matter back in the hands of the League.¹⁴⁵ Eden read the proposals with disbelief and growing horror. He took them to the Foreign Office, where he met Baldwin and explained, with the aid of a map, what Abyssinia was being asked to give up in return for a port. The only possible interpretation, he felt, was that aggression had succeeded and was being rewarded.¹⁴⁶ But the cabinet, which met in response to Baldwin's urgent summons, were loath to repudiate Hoare and did not want to offend the French. The proposals, after all, were meant only as a basis for discussion among the parties involved. Hoare had a reputation for being a clever and cautious man. Perhaps he had had a good reason for accepting the proposals, and would explain

¹⁴⁵ Cab 24/257 C.P.235(35).

¹⁴⁶ Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 300-02.

his reasoning when he returned. Even Eden shared in the cabinet's loyalty to an absent colleague, but he said that there were conditions attendant to the proposals which required immediate change. Hoare had accepted Laval's suggestion that Mussolini be informed of the proposals before they were sent to Abyssinia, in order to enhance the possibility that Italy would accept them. Eden stressed that from every point of view it was essential that any proposals adopted be sent at the same time to Addis Ababa and to Rome. Laval wanted the proposals withheld from Abyssinia until the Committee of Five took up the matter on December 12, by which time Italy could have considered and accepted them. If Abyssinia refused to accept the proposals, Laval could then denounce the Emperor as unwilling to end the war and announce that France would no longer participate in sanctions. The cabinet saw the force of Eden's arguments and agreed that Italy and Abyssinia would have to be dealt with even-handedly if the proposals were to go forward. They also agreed that an Abyssinian refusal to accept the terms proposed would have no effect upon British support for sanctions. But they did not reject the proposals.¹⁴⁷

It proved, however, to be politically impossible for the cabinet to stand by Hoare and his proposals. Newspaper accounts had alerted the country to the proposals, and hard questions

¹⁴⁷The cabinet met to consider the proposals on Monday evening, December 9, and reconvened on the following morning after Eden had telephoned their objections on procedure to Vansittart in Paris, who secured Laval's grudging approval of the changes suggested. Cab 23/82 52(35) and 53(35); Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 305.

were asked in the House of Commons as early as December 10. Attlee, for example, pressed to know whether the proposals published in the papers, which in his opinion would "overthrow the whole basis of the League system," were similar to those approved by the Foreign Secretary.¹⁴⁸ Baldwin evaded the question by saying that he had not read the newspaper accounts, but he was hard pressed to evade the demand from several sides for information. H. B. Lees-Smith, an opposition member from the West Riding of York, took up the question again later in the day during the debate on the address from the throne. The government, he noted, had just gone to the polls on the issue of support for the League of Nations. They had gained a mandate to support the League, but, he said, if the proposals published in the newspapers were even half correct, Hoare and his colleagues were in violation of that mandate.¹⁴⁹ Eden reminded the House that Britain and France had been invited by the League to find a solution, and he explained that the proposals were based on three broad principles: an exchange of territory, League assistance to Abyssinia, and special economic facilities for Italy. He declined to be more specific for fear of prejudicing the proposals.¹⁵⁰ Eden's explanation did not satisfy League supporters in the House, nor did Baldwin's mysterious reference to his difficulties in meeting the general demand for information:

¹⁴⁸ 307 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 717-18.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., cols. 817-18.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., cols. 821-26.

I have seldom spoken with greater regret for my lips are not yet unsealed. Were these troubles over I would make a case, and I guarantee that not a man would go into the Lobby against us.¹⁵¹

Baldwin's sealed lips did not meet the demands of the situation. If anything, the government's refusal to release the terms of the Hoare-Laval plan lent to the growing fear that Hoare had agreed to scuttle the League. Letters poured in to Parliament from every part of the country. One member reported receiving four hundred angry letters in a single morning.¹⁵² On December 13, the terms of the proposals were released in Geneva and the fears of many in Britain were confirmed. The League of Nations Union sent a delegation to Baldwin to protest against the proposals.¹⁵³ The executive committee of the Council of Action took steps to organize a nation-wide protest against the proposals, the National Council of Labour denounced the proposals as a gross violation of the Covenant, and the newspapers took up the hue and cry with almost one

¹⁵¹Ibid., col. 856. Thomas Jones later asked Baldwin what he had meant by his reference to sealed lips. Baldwin replied that he had in mind the menace of war and the unprepared state of British defenses. According to his son, however, Baldwin meant that he was morally sure that Laval had been bought by Mussolini, but could not say so. Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 160; A. W. Baldwin, My Father: The True Story (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 291.

¹⁵²The Times, December 13, 1935.

¹⁵³Stanley Baldwin to Viscount Cecil, December 17, 1935, Cecil Papers, Add. 51080.

voice.¹⁵⁴ In the space of a few days, a popular reaction built which was virtually unprecedented. On December 17, Simon noted with awe in his diary that "a storm has broken over the Government's head which in suddenness and intensity must be almost without parallel."¹⁵⁵ The only friends left to the government in the press, he mourned, were Rothermere, Beaverbrook and Garvin.¹⁵⁶ Geoffrey Dawson of The Times was an old, established friend of the government, but Baldwin refused to take Dawson into his confidence on the delicate matter of the proposals, and on December 16 The Times blasted the proposals in a devastating leader entitled "A Corridor for Camels."¹⁵⁷ The leader was based upon a report from Paris that the French intended to invoke the provisions of an understanding dating from the turn of the century to prevent Abyssinia from building a competing railway through the corridor which would connect Abyssinia with the sea.¹⁵⁸ Neither Hoare nor the

¹⁵⁴Helen Hiatt, "Public Opinion and the Italo-Ethiopian Dispute: The Activity of Private Organizations in the Crisis," Geneva Special Studies, VII, 1 (Geneva Research Center, 1936), p. 21; Ernst L. Presseisen, "Foreign Policy and British Public Opinion: The Hoare-Laval Pact of 1935," World Affairs Quarterly, XXIX, 3 (October 1958), 268-77.

¹⁵⁵Simon Papers, Diary No. 11.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 161; The Times, December 16, 1935.

¹⁵⁸Toynbee, Abyssinia and Italy, p. 297.

British government was a party to the French plan to reduce the Abyssinian corridor to a corridor for camels, but that fact did not emerge from the leader, which, if Parliamentary debate is any measure, had a considerable impact upon informed opinion.

Parliament was the focus of the storm which the government had to face. On December 11, Vyvyan Adams tabled a resolution, signed by a number of the more fervid supporters of League, condemning any settlement which granted the aggressor greater concessions than could have been obtained by peaceful negotiations.¹⁵⁹ On December 12, Lord Davies gave notice of his intention to move a similar resolution in the Lords, and the Liberal Opposition, headed by Archibald Sinclair, handed in a motion of censure denouncing any settlement which violated the integrity of Abyssinia and rewarded the aggressor "as a betrayal of the League of Nations and as an act of national dishonour."¹⁶⁰ The government could not discount the angry attitude of the opposition or the anguish of those government supporters who were devoted to the League, but the main concern of the government whips was the growing revolt among rank-and-file supporters of the government who were being pressed by their constituents to remember their election pledges. On December 12, C. M. Patrick outlined the problem in a letter to Hoare:

¹⁵⁹The Times, December 12, 1935.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., December 13, 1935.

Of course, one can only generalise when it comes to a question of the opinions of 600 members. But I have talked to scores of them in the past forty-eight hours, having tried to pick them out so as to get a fair cross-section of opinion. I needn't bother you with the views of Socialists, or of people like Mander; nor with those of the Liberal Nationals who seem profoundly disturbed. The trouble lies with our own Party and with few exceptions a state of acute discomfort seems to prevail among them, down from some, at least of the Under-Secretaries, through people like Spender Clay... down to the most obscure, and the "new boys." The exceptions I have come across are a few backwoodsmen who told me that they didn't know what it was all about but they supposed it would be all right; some weightless die-hards like Herbert Williams; and Edward Grigg, who almost alone of informed people seems to be pleased. There may well be many more of these "exceptions," but I haven't struck them so far.¹⁶¹

On December 17 Austen Chamberlain found the Committee of Conservative Members in the Commons ready to disown Hoare and the proposals.¹⁶²

In the face of the mounting tide of opposition in Parliament and in the country, the cabinet backed away from the Hoare-Laval plan. On December 10 the Foreign Office sent the proposals to Addis Ababa and Rome, with a note to Sir Sidney Barton instructing him to twist the Emperor's arm.¹⁶³ But on December 11, the cabinet weighed the public reaction and authorized

¹⁶¹C. M. Patrick to Sir Samuel Hoare, December 12, 1935, Templewood Papers, General Political, VIII, 1.

¹⁶²Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 161.

¹⁶³Cmd. 5044, pp. 13-19.

Eden to use his discretion in deciding how far it was necessary to go in championing the Hoare-Laval agreement at Geneva.¹⁶⁴ Eden found, predictably, that the proposals had been received with dismay in Geneva, and on December 12 he dropped a strong hint to the Committee of Eighteen that his government was prepared to abandon them:

These conversations in Paris were begun with the approval of the members of the League, and neither the French Government nor ourselves have at any time had any other intention than to bring the outcome of our work to the League for the League's information and judgment. The proposals now put forward are neither definitive nor sacrosanct. They are suggestions which it is hoped may make possible the beginning of negotiations. If the League does not agree with these suggestions, we shall make no complaint.¹⁶⁵

When he arrived in Geneva, Eden called Hoare and advised him to break off his convalescence and return to London.¹⁶⁶ Hoare was under doctor's orders to remain where he was, however, and he had received word from Baldwin that everything was under control.¹⁶⁷ But by December 15, the sound of the political crisis in London had become impossible to ignore, and on the following day, in spite of his doctor's instructions, Hoare was back in his house in Chelsea. As soon as he returned, Hoare sent a note to Baldwin explaining that he

¹⁶⁴Cab 23/82 54(35)1.

¹⁶⁵Cmd. 5044, p. 21.

¹⁶⁶Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 308.

¹⁶⁷Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 184; Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 161.

was confined to his house because of his nose and asking Baldwin to "look in."¹⁶⁸ Baldwin came and reassured Hoare that 'We all stand together.'¹⁶⁹ He said nothing about the footing, however.

When the cabinet met on December 17, it was clear that it would be difficult, if not impossible to organize sufficient support for the proposals in the Commons. A motion of censure was pending and the cabinet had to decide how to meet it. Chamberlain, who was inclined to stand by Hoare and see it through, gave the cabinet a summary of the defense Hoare intended to make when the Commons debated the issue. Essentially, he planned to stress the threat of war and the unwillingness of any member of the League, save Britain, to prepare for it. His line would be that the nation and the League should face up to the realities of the situation. Unfortunately for Hoare, there was no indication that his view of reality would prevail. The cabinet gave Eden the authority to bury the proposals at Geneva, but they put off until the last moment the painful decision of whether to feed Hoare to the angry mob, or go down together.¹⁷⁰ In the end, the instinct for self-preservation prevailed. Hoare, after all, had brought his troubles on his own head. The cabinet confronted the problem squarely on

¹⁶⁸Sir Samuel Hoare to Stanley Baldwin, December 16, 1935, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 123.

¹⁶⁹Templewood, Nine Troubled Years, p. 185.

¹⁷⁰Cab 23/82 55(35)3.



December 18, and the general feeling was that Hoare ought to resign. Baldwin said that the situation in the Commons was the worst that he had ever known, and Halifax added that the moral authority of the government would be destroyed if Hoare did not step down.¹⁷¹ Hoare could make his defense, but it would have to be from the back benches.

When Hoare rose to defend his proposals on December 19, his resignation had been tendered and his plan was dead. The House was placated by the sacrifice, and the members gave Hoare a sympathetic hearing as he stood in his old place in a corner, with a bandage on his nose, and made his case. He told them that the League system would not work if only one country shouldered the burdens, and he tried to convince them that he had done the best that could reasonably have been done.¹⁷² But he could not make them understand, and at the end, he sobbed and sat down. His venture in foreign affairs was over, and with it ended, for all practical purposes, the British experiment in collective security through the League of Nations.

Eden succeeded Hoare as Foreign Secretary. League supporters everywhere assumed that Eden's promotion signalled a return of Britain to the fold after the aberration of the Hoare-Laval agreement. In fact, Eden assumed authority for

¹⁷¹Cab 23/82 56(35). The minutes of this meeting were considered so sensitive that they were placed in a sealed envelope which was not opened until August, 1967. The minutes were then refiled at Cab 23/83 5(37)10B.

¹⁷²307 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 2007-17.

a policy which, despite his best efforts to revive it, was effectively dead. The British government continued formal support for a sanctions policy, and the Geneva-based effort limped on for another six months, but for all of the cabinet, save Eden, the conclusions to be drawn from the sanctions experiment were clear by the end of December. Baldwin drew his conclusion for Thomas Jones on January 7, 1936:

One thundering good thing we have got out of it is the realisation of what sanctions mean. They mean that we have got to be much more self-contained. Europe has to be rearmed and to be ready, that is the conclusion which follows upon collective security.¹⁷³

It was folly to expect that a heavily armed aggressor could be drawn up short by anything other than matching arms and determination. The combined moral authority of the League counted for nothing against tanks, submarines and airplanes. Economic sanctions could force an aggressor to change course, if the embargo affected the aggressor's ability to fight a modern war -- as an oil embargo would -- but it required the determination to face the aggressor's wrath to impose a sanction which confronted the aggressor with humiliation or defeat. If taken to their logical conclusion, sanctions necessarily implied a willingness to contemplate war. Conventional wisdom in League circles held that no aggressor would risk a military confrontation with the combined might of the League membership. The British cabinet learned during the Abyssinian crisis that the might of fifty nations was not

¹⁷³Jones, A Diary with Letters, p. 160.

easily or readily combined, that relatively few countries had the capacity or inclination to share in a confrontation with a major power, and that it was easy, in the midst of a crowd of sanctionist nations, to stumble into an isolated confrontation with an aggressor. Laval's behavior during the crisis was in part a facet of a devious character, but in a larger sense his policy of avoiding a confrontation with Italy conformed to French interests as he saw them, and pointed up the fundamental weakness of the League. No nation, in the last analysis, would submerge national sovereignty in a collective effort to the extent of risking serious injury unless there was an immediate national interest involved. The overall objective of sustaining a system to control the scourge of war did not provide an adequate, or logical, reason for suffering the consequences of war. The British interest in the sanctions experiment was to discover whether the system would work to contain aggression without raising the specter of war. The Italian response to the threat of an oil sanction convinced the cabinet that the League system could indeed spawn a war, and the French response to British requests for military cooperation demonstrated that a war fought on behalf of the League could be a lonely war.

In terms of genuine British interest and participation, the sanctions experiment endured for little more than a month. The cabinet scarcely gave the system a fair test before concluding that it would not work as intended. It did not require a lengthy test, however, to see that the burden which

was placed upon the British fleet was not what the cabinet felt to be equitable, or in Britain's interest. Britain had no desire to be the policeman for the League. Better to revert to regional security arrangements. The Hoare-Laval debacle cost the government heavily in national popularity and international prestige, but it had the effect of clearing away a good many illusions concerning the bases of British foreign policy.

It was clear when Hoare fell that the sanctions experiment had failed, and the cabinet were prepared to learn from that failure. But they were generally unclear as to why Hoare had failed. It was obvious that there had been a great spontaneous outcry against what was seen as the desertion of Abyssinia and the League in order to reward the aggressor. But, as Halifax pointed out in a letter to Chamberlain, there had been efforts made throughout the crisis to find a compromise settlement, and all of those efforts proposed advantages for Italy at Abyssinia's expense. The Hoare-Laval plan, he thought, did not differ very radically from the plan put forward earlier, without arousing any particular outcry, by the Committee of Five. But the parentage of the later proposal was more respectable.¹⁷⁴ Without entering into a debate about the degree to which the Hoare-Laval plan deviated from the plan adopted by the Committee of Five, it is easy to agree that Halifax put his finger on one cause of Hoare's downfall. He had negotiated

¹⁷⁴ Feiling, Life of Neville Chamberlain, p. 275.

what seemed like an old-fashioned deal, done secretly and cynically to protect the interests of Britain, France and Italy, at the expense of a small nation and the ideals of collective security and open diplomacy. But Hoare's failure, and that of the government extended well beyond the immediate 'deal.' They reaped, in the public and international reaction to the Hoare-Laval plan, what they had sown, in the form of Hoare's speech to the General Assembly, Eden's brave statements, the government's election manifesto, and the steady stream of pledges of fidelity to the Covenant. The British people and the League delegations were led to believe what they wanted to believe, which was that with a firm British lead the League would face down the Italian aggressor and collective security would prevail. But neither the British people nor the League knew what the government knew about the qualms of the military concerning a 'mad dog' Italian attack, and the damage which such an attack could do to British plans to meet the greater threats emerging in Europe and the Far East. The government did not explain that they saw sanctions as an experiment in which it was logical to draw a prudent line. When they drew that line, by accepting Hoare's agreement with Laval, the public failed to understand, and Hoare paid the price for contributing to undue expectations.

Hoare has received his full measure of condemnation from those who felt that he contrived with Laval to destroy the League, but he has failed to receive much credit for helping to organize the sanctions experiment. The sanctions organized

by the League were, in the long run, mild and ineffective, and the League suffered a crushing defeat in the crisis, but at least in 1935 the League made an effort to face up to the aggressor, and to see if the system would work, which was in sharp contrast to the League's reaction to the Manchurian crisis in 1931. It is fair to say, from the evidence, that without the lead which Britain gave at Geneva, it is unlikely that the League would have reacted with any more vigor to Italian aggression than it had to Japanese aggression. The question which arises at a remove of more than a generation, is why did Britain take the lead at Geneva? A governmental inquiry demonstrated that Britain had no vital interests in Abyssinia, save possibly Lake Tana, which the Italians in all probability would have been prepared to safeguard. Italy was an old friend, figured importantly in plans to contain Germany, and had long-standing grievances against Abyssinia with which many in the British government could sympathize. To give a lead to the League in the sanctions experiment, the Mediterranean fleet had to assume risks which neither the military nor the cabinet felt that it should assume. Yet the government pushed forward and sanctions were imposed. They did so in part because of the pressure of public opinion, stirred up by the Peace Ballot and roused by Mussolini's swashbuckling disdain for civilized values. They did so in some considerable measure because of the latitude which they granted to Anthony Eden to exercise his sense of international morality and dedication to the League. Eden forced the pace in London and Geneva. And the momentum of

events to some extent simply carried the cabinet along, hoping that at some point short of disaster Mussolini would come to his senses and accept a reasonable compromise which would end the crisis. But it was primarily to preserve the League, and to give the League system a reasonable chance of success that the cabinet tentatively and grudgingly shouldered what they saw as dangerous risks. They were, after all, part of the same generation which had suffered through the horrors of the Great War. Until the concept was conclusively disproven, they shared, in varying degrees, with their countrymen the hope that the League of Nations, which was so valuable in many other ways, might also realize its basic goal.

CHAPTER VI
END OF ILLUSION

Anthony Eden became Foreign Secretary on December 22, 1935. Ironically, he took over the management of British policy just as the cabinet lost faith in the sanctions experiment. Eden's efforts to breathe new life into the League front were fruitless in the face of the offensive which the Italians mounted in Abyssinia and the pessimism which prevailed in Geneva as well as in London. In terms of enthusiasm and confidence, the shock of the Hoare-Laval proposals had an effect on the sanctions experiment like that of a pin on a balloon. The popular reaction in Britain to the Hoare-Laval plan left the government with no option but to carry through with the collective effort to contain Italian aggression, but the cabinet became even more chary of taking the initiative at Geneva. Laval's role in the debacle reconfirmed the cabinet's conviction that the French would not play up in the event of a military confrontation with Italy. Laval followed Hoare into the political wilderness on January 22 when his government was pulled down and replaced by a government headed by Albert Sarraut. The new French government did not mean a new French policy, however. Sarraut and the new Foreign Minister Pierre-Etienne Flandin were no more willing than Laval had been to alienate Mussolini.

The French attitude remained a determining factor in London. Without firm French support, the cabinet were loath to consider additional sanctions. And without effective opposition from the League, Mussolini and his generals had only to carry the fighting in Abyssinia to an assured conclusion to establish an Italian imperium in east Africa.

The sanctions established by the League in November imposed an uncomfortable austerity upon Italy, but essential supplies continued to flow in a steady stream through the Suez canal to the Italian forces in east Africa. In Abyssinia, the approach to Addis Ababa was blocked only by the hastily organized and ill-equipped levies which the Negus was able to pull together. Unlike the encounter in Tigre a generation earlier, the question no longer was whether the Abyssinian armies could defeat and drive out the Italian aggressor, but whether they could survive until the rainy season slowed operations and allowed the effects of economic sanctions to begin to tell. To forestall that possibility, Mussolini replaced the plodding DeBono, as commander of the Italian forces in east Africa, with the best of his generals, Pietro Badoglio.

Badoglio arrived in Eritrea to relieve DeBono on November 26.¹ By the beginning of 1936, Badoglio had completed his preparations and was ready to move against the Abyssinian positions. His forces enjoyed the advantages of superior command, sound organization, aerial support, modern transport and artillery,

¹Emilio de Bono, Anno XIII: the Conquest of an Empire (London: the Cresset Press, 1937), p. 312.

as well as the great advantage accorded by the machine gun. The Abyssinian armies, by contrast, suffered from poor command, had no modern organization or training, and little in the way of sophisticated weaponry. But the Abyssinian soldier was a legendary fighter, defending a rugged and largely trackless homeland. To neutralize the fighting qualities of the Abyssinian soldier, and to demoralize the civilian population, Badoglio used his command of the air to spray mustard gas on the Abyssinian forces, and to bomb civilian as well as military targets, with scant regard for hospitals or Red Cross emblems.² Badoglio's tactics facilitated his battlefield successes, but made a mockery of Italy's "civilizing mission" in Abyssinia.³

Badoglio began his offensive on January 19 near Makale in the Tembien. The first battle of Tembien lasted four days and was inconclusive. On February 10, however, Badoglio attacked the well-entrenched troops of War Minister Ras Mulugeta on the mountain of Amba Aradam and, making good use of air support and artillery, drove them in disarray from the

²A. J. Barker, The Civilizing Mission (New York: Dial, 1968), pp. 241-42.

³Badoglio later published an account of his campaigns and offered a soldier's justification for using the means at hand. Pietro Badoglio, The War in Abyssinia (London: Methuen, 1937). The Italian government felt compelled to offer more than a pragmatic justification for the use of tactics generally thought to be criminal. Putting on a bold front, the fascist government admitted the use of gas and the bombing of Red Cross hospitals. Italian spokesmen argued that it was a case of fighting fire with fire, and they accused the Abyssinians of mutilating the wounded and the dead, and of sheltering anti-aircraft positions beneath Red Cross emblems. League of Nations, Official Journal, November 1935, pp. 1604-05; February 1936, pp. 242-45; April 1936, pp. 413-15; June 1936, p. 579.

strongest position on the Abyssinian front. On February 19 the twenty-third March Division was in control of the summit of Amba Aradam. Mulugeta's defeat allowed Badoglio to turn the Abyssinian line and drive the armies of Ras Kassa and Ras Seyoum out of the Tembien.⁴ According to A. J. Barker, "all that remained of the armies of Ras Kassa and Ras Seyoum by the end of the first week in March were a few organized detachments and a large disorganized rabble."⁵

With the Tembien in Badoglio's hands, only the army of Ras Imru stood in the way of Italian control of the north. On March 1, the Italian Second Corps engaged Ras Imru's army in the battle of Shire. Imru's troops put up a fierce fight, highlighted by suicidal charges into Italian machine gun positions. Abyssinian losses were heavy and within a week Imru's army was in rout; the last Abyssinian army on the northern front had been defeated. By the middle of March, the whole of Tigre' was in Italian hands, and the only army standing between Badoglio and Addis Ababa was that under Haile Selassie at Dessie. In the three battles of Amba Aradam, the Tembien, and Shire, the Abyssinians lost over 15,000 men killed and wounded, while Italian casualties were just under 2,600.⁶

Badoglio's rout of the Abyssinian armies in Tigre' provided

⁴Barker, The Civilizing Mission, pp. 250-52.

⁵Ibid., pp. 256-57.

⁶Ibid., p. 259.

conclusive evidence that the economic sanctions in effect against Italy were doing little to impede Italian progress in Abyssinia. Nor, from the pace of Badoglio's offensive, were they likely to prove effective before Abyssinia was defeated. In the circumstances, the oil sanction which Hoare and Laval had maneuvered to avoid emerged, in the eyes of League advocates, as the one shining hope for Abyssinia and the League. And those looking to the application of an oil sanction expected that the initiative would come from London.⁷

II

In London, Anthony Eden, in his new role as Foreign Secretary, was in a stronger position to press for a British lead at Geneva. On January 9, Eden circulated a note to his colleagues in the cabinet arguing that, since the Anglo-French attempt to mediate in the crisis had failed, the British representative on the Committee of Eighteen should move to support the application of an oil sanction. British support for an oil sanction would have to be conditioned, he conceded, upon a reasonable expectation that the sanction could be made effective, and upon firm assurances of military collaboration should the oil sanction lead to war.⁸ The cabinet took up Eden's proposal on January 15, but the threat of war in the Mediterranean weighed more heavily with them than Badoglio's

⁷F. P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford University Press, 1967; first published in 1952), pp. 675-76.

⁸Cab 24/259 C.P.5(36).

preparations in Abyssinia. The ministers vetoed the idea of a British initiative on the question of an oil sanction. But, with the popular uproar over the Hoare-Laval incident in mind, they agreed that, at the forthcoming meeting of the Committee of Eighteen, Eden should not oppose discussion of the question. He could support, but not propose, the establishment of an expert inquiry into the probable effectiveness of an oil sanction.⁹

On January 20, the League committees charged with responsibility for the Abyssinian crisis took up their duties for the first time in a month. The first order of business was to dispense formally with the Anglo-French conciliation effort which had failed so resoundingly. The Committee of Thirteen, which was created to promote a settlement, met on January 20 and drafted a report to the effect that there was currently "no opportunity of facilitating and hastening the settlement of the dispute through an agreement between the parties within the framework of the Covenant."¹⁰ The Committee of Thirteen's finding paved the way for the Committee of Eighteen to proceed with the discussions which had been postponed in November on an oil sanction. On January 22, the Committee of Eighteen met and created a Committee of Experts to study and report on the feasibility of an embargo on petroleum products.¹¹

⁹Cab 23/83 1(36)4.

¹⁰League of Nations, Official Journal, February 1936, p. 106.

¹¹League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 148, pp. 7-8.

The experts appointed by the Committee of Eighteen gathered at Geneva on February 3. By February 12, they had completed their report. In admirably clear, non-technical language, the experts explained that, unless replenished, Italian oil reserves would last no longer than three or four months, in light of increased Italian military and industrial activity. The largest exporters of oil to Italy, however, were Venezuela and the United States. The United States, which was not a member of the League, could more than meet Italy's entire requirements for oil products. The experts noted that before the Abyssinian conflict relatively small quantities of oil products had been exported from the United States to Italy, but "during the last few months these exports have shown a very large increase." The effectiveness of an oil embargo against Italy would depend, therefore, upon "the reduction of exports to the normal level of the United States exports prior to 1935"¹²

If the success of the League depended, as many thought, upon the application of an effective oil sanction, the report of the Committee of Experts should have been a sobering document. Even the most effective oil embargo would work no immediate miracle. Italian reserves were sufficient to carry the offensive in Abyssinia for three or four months without

¹²"Report of the Committee of Experts for the Technical Examination of the Conditions Governing the Trade in and Transport of Petroleum and its Derivatives, By-Products and Residues," *ibid.*, pp. 64-85.

additional supplies. And, unless the League chose to interdict American shipping, Italy would continue to receive additional supplies. The best that could be hoped was that the American government would take the steps necessary to limit the export of American oil to Italy to pre-1935 levels. In that case, Italy might be limited to a campaign of five or six months, and Abyssinia could conceivably survive if the Negus could fight a holding action until the rainy season. Everything depended, however, upon the supply of oil from the United States, and, as the experts noted, the level of American exports to Italy had risen sharply since the war began, despite public pronouncements by President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull urging the American oil companies to hold exports down.

There did seem to be some prospect of American cooperation in an oil embargo at the beginning of 1936. The Hoare-Laval plan was generally thought to have dampened American sympathy for the sanctions program, but President Roosevelt, in his first message to Congress of the year, spoke out strongly against the "twin spirits of autocracy and aggression" which, he said, were jeopardizing world peace and progress.¹³ The neutrality legislation of 1935, which narrowly defined the limits which the president could place on trade with combatants, was due to expire on February 29, and the administration proposed broader legislation, to give the

¹³New York Times, January 4, 1936.

president the discretion to restrict the export of any commodity which contributed to an existing conflict. Oil and oil products would have fallen within the compass of the proposed legislation. But isolationists in the Senate, led by Gerald Nye, Bennett Clark, William Borah and Hiram Johnson, forced the administration to withdraw the discretionary proposal. All prospect of American cooperation in an oil embargo vanished on February 12 when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with the grudging acquiescence of the administration, voted to extend the existing neutrality legislation.¹⁴ On February 29, President Roosevelt signed a neutrality act which merely extended the narrow provisions already in effect.¹⁵ At the same time, Roosevelt released a statement which again indicated that he sympathized with the League effort to control aggression:

It is true that the high moral duty I have urged on our people of restricting their exports of essential war materials to either belligerent to approximately the normal peacetime basis has not been the subject of legislation. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that greatly to exceed that basis, with the result of earning profits not possible during peace, and especially with the result of giving actual assistance to the carrying on of war, would serve to magnify the very evil of war which we seek to prevent.¹⁶

¹⁴For a discussion of the development of the Neutrality Act of 1936 see Brice Harris, Jr., The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 114-28.

¹⁵New York Times, March 1, 1936.

¹⁶Department of State, Press Releases, XIV (March 7, 1936), 198.

Similar statements by Roosevelt had done nothing to hinder the flow of oil to Italy in the past, and there was no reason to expect that presidential sentiment would be more successful in the future, particularly in light of the refusal by Congress to broaden the scope of the neutrality legislation.

It should have been apparent on February 12, when the Committee of Experts submitted their report and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted to extend the American neutrality legislation, that there was virtually no possibility that an effective oil embargo could be imposed. Nonetheless, supporters of the League seized upon the report of the experts as though it were a promise of certain success. In London, the Labour and Liberal opposition called for an end to the government's vacillation and demanded that Britain take the lead in proposing an oil sanction when the Committee of Eighteen met on March 2. The opposition pressed their demands in an angry debate in the House of Commons on February 24.¹⁷ Eden answered for the government but was constrained by the cabinet's continuing hesitation and could only reply that the question of an oil sanction was still under consideration. He pledged that Britain would play a full part in any collective measures adopted by the Co-ordination Committee, but it was common knowledge that the Co-ordination Committee would do nothing unless Britain took the lead.¹⁸ Reports of Badoglio's

¹⁷H. B. Lees-Smith opened and laid out the opposition demands. 309 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 67-76.

¹⁸Ibid., cols. 78-80.

campaign in Abyssinia, complete with graphic descriptions of the Italian use of gas and the deliberate bombing of Red Cross hospitals, dominated the news and created a climate of anger and frustration among League supporters in Britain. Not even Eden's well-established reputation as a champion of the League was proof against such frustration. Arthur Henderson expressed his deep disappointment with Eden's response to the demand for a British initiative on an oil sanction, and Colonel Wedgwood read "treachery" into Eden's remarks.¹⁹

Had Eden's critics been privy to the cabinet's deliberations on the question of an oil sanction, they would have reserved their ire for the other members of the cabinet. Within the cabinet room, Eden was still the champion of the League and took every opportunity to press his colleagues to accept the necessity of an oil embargo. On February 19, he told the cabinet that he had received information from Italy which made it appear that the Italian government would be unlikely to react violently to an oil sanction, despite Mussolini's bluster. He added that, from all indications, an oil sanction would have a serious impact upon Italian morale.²⁰ On February 21, the Foreign Office received a personal plea for British help from Haile Selassie, and the Emperor's plea

¹⁹Ibid., cols. 110 and 127.

²⁰Cab 23/83 8(36)3.

spurred Eden to press the cabinet still harder to support an oil sanction.²¹ On February 22, he circulated a memorandum on the subject. He pointed out that the report of the Committee of Experts which had studied the question for the Committee of Eighteen had not been very encouraging. The report made it plain that, unless the United States chose to cooperate, an oil sanction was unlikely to be effective, and there did not seem to be much prospect of American cooperation. Nonetheless, Eden argued, there was still a strong case to be made for applying even an ineffective oil sanction. The Emperor's plea for help, in which he went so far as to suggest a British mandate for Abyssinia, was a measure of the desperate situation which was developing in Abyssinia.²² In the circumstances, Eden felt that it was important that the Committee of Eighteen act as vigorously as possible in support of Abyssinia when it met again on March 2. He argued that the British government should "make it clear that they are willing to participate in an embargo on the export of oil to Italy and in a prohibition of the transport of oil to Italy in British tankers if the other members of the Committee are ready to do likewise." If such a sanction failed for lack

²¹Cab 24/260 C.P.53(36).

²²The cabinet were completely cold to the idea of a British mandate as a solution to the Abyssinian conflict. Eden stressed that an acceptable solution would have to be grounded upon conciliation through the agency of the League. Cab 23/83 9(36)5.

of support or proved ineffective, Eden felt that the League should push forward with other sanctions which might have the desired effect -- such as a sanction prohibiting all shipping by League members to Italy.²³

The cabinet took up Eden's memorandum on February 26. The Committee of Eighteen was scheduled to meet within the week, and it was essential to define a British position on the proposed oil sanction. The arguments outlined in Eden's paper framed the problem, and Eden warned that if the League failed to act on the oil sanction proposal the entire idea of collective security would be called into question. In spite of Eden's warning, however, the cabinet were seriously divided on the issue and inclined to be cautious. There was little remaining fear of a 'mad dog' Italian attack upon the Mediterranean fleet, but there were other considerations which troubled the cabinet. The most telling objection raised against the oil sanction was that it would be ineffective. Britain was bearing a heavier burden than any other League member because of sanctions, and if this new sanction further estranged the Italians, British trade and investment interests might never recover. Beyond that, an oil sanction might drive Mussolini into Hitler's arms. Viscount Eyres Monsell, the First Lord of the Admiralty, added that the navy was seriously overtaxed by the burden placed upon it without mobilization, and he maintained that it made no sense to add to that burden

²³Ibid.

in the interest of an ineffective sanction. Against such objections, it was argued that even an ineffective oil sanction would drain dwindling Italian gold supplies. As for driving Mussolini into Hitler's arms, it was noted that Hitler's contempt for Mussolini was such that he probably would not have him. The oil sanction was thought to be of paramount importance by significant blocs of opinion in the United States and in the Dominions, as well as in Britain, where the trade union movement was devoted to collective security. If Abyssinia were to collapse without additional British support, the repercussions could be heavy.

The danger of re-arousing public opinion decided Baldwin, and he framed a conclusion for the divided cabinet. He said that his position as prime minister, and the government's position in general, would be seriously affected by the decision to be taken, and he concluded that a refusal to impose an oil sanction would have a disastrous effect upon both. The people, he said, had shown themselves during the recent general election to be in favor of trying out the League system, and, though he had made it clear that he would never agree to anything in the nature of a blockade, he felt that the whole of Europe was entitled to know whether collective economic sanctions would work so that each country could decide how far to cooperate in a system of collective security. Baldwin's arguments were decisive. The cabinet agreed that Eden should indicate to the Committee of Eighteen that Britain favored the imposition of an oil sanction at as early a date

as the other members of the committee would agree to. But, again, Eden was instructed to avoid taking a lead on the question at Geneva. Even with that reservation, First Lord Eyres Monsell and Walter Runciman, the President of the Board of Trade, dissented so strongly from the decision to support an oil sanction that they had formal note taken of their dissent.²⁴

As it developed, the cabinet could have spared themselves the difficult decision which they took on February 26. The French were adamantly opposed to the imposition of an oil sanction and, given the British determination not to move without France, they were able to prevent any serious consideration of the measure by the Committee of Eighteen. On March 7, the Rhineland crisis developed and it was the end of March before the League powers were able to concentrate on Abyssinia again, by which time the Italian conquest had clearly become irreversible. The cabinet meeting of February 26 was, therefore, the last at which serious consideration was given to the question of drawing up the aggressor. As such, it is particularly interesting to the student of British policy. It is instructive to compare the decision taken in February to support but not propose an oil sanction with the decisions

²⁴Cab 23/83 11(36)5. The procedure adopted by the cabinet to smooth over the dissent of Monsell and Runciman was unlike the 'agreement to differ' over the question of protection adopted by the National government in January 1932 in that there was apparently no threat of resignation involved in the dissent from the decision concerning an oil sanction and the dissidents in 1936 were not authorized to make their disagreement public.

taken by the cabinet during the earlier stages of the crisis to support and, if necessary, propose economic sanctions. The difficult decisions taken before December 1935 were also troubled half-measures, but the cabinet's motivation was discernibly different before and after the Hoare-Laval debacle. A wide range of influences bore on cabinet considerations throughout the crisis, but, until Hoare-Laval, the cabinet's primary concern was to preserve the League if possible, and, at a minimum, to give the League system of collective security a fair test. There was still evidence of the cabinet's concern for the League in the decision taken on February 26, but only Eden seemed to believe that the aggressor could still be stopped and the League system preserved. In essence, the decision to support an oil sanction was taken, as Baldwin made clear, because of a concern for domestic and international opinion. There was some possibility that the League would impose the sanction, which might have caused additional problems for Britain, but that danger was minimized by prohibiting Eden from taking the lead at Geneva.

The prohibition which the cabinet laid on Eden left the field at Geneva to French Foreign Minister Flandin. When the Committee of Eighteen met on March 2 to consider the report of the petroleum experts, Flandin intervened with a suggestion. The Committee of Eighteen, he noted, had always worked closely with the Committee of Thirteen. The Committee of Thirteen, at its last meeting, had "affirmed its resolve not to neglect any opportunity of facilitating and hastening

the settlement of the dispute by agreement between the parties within the framework of the Covenant."²⁵ Flandin conveniently overlooked the committee's finding that there was no reason to expect such a settlement. He suggested that the Committee of Thirteen should "meet again and consider if it would not be possible to make another urgent appeal to the belligerents to put an end to the war." Before the Committee of Eighteen continued its discussions, he said, the Committee of Thirteen should hold an "urgent" meeting to consider his suggestion.²⁶

Eden spoke for Britain and supported Flandin's proposal. He thought that the Committee of Thirteen's deliberations need not cause undue delay, since the Committee of Eighteen still had work to do to improve the operation of existing sanctions. But he added that he wanted to make it clear that:

having considered the findings of the experts report, His Majesty's Government was in favour of the imposition of an oil embargo by the Members of the League, and was prepared to join in the early application of such a sanction if the other principal supplying and transporting states who were Members of the League of Nations were prepared to do likewise.²⁷

Eden's statement met the political needs of his government, but it brought the committee no closer to recommending

²⁵League of Nations, Official Journal, February 1936, p. 106.

²⁶League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 149, pp. 12-13.

²⁷Ibid., p. 13.

an oil sanction. With Britain and France agreed, the Committee of Eighteen had to defer consideration of the oil sanction again while the Committee of Thirteen made one more effort to promote a solution. The Committee of Experts on petroleum was put back to work to define the methods and products which would be involved in an oil embargo, but their efforts were wasted.²⁸ The Committee of Eighteen never reconvened after it adjourned on March 4.

On March 5, Eden explained to the cabinet why he had agreed to postpone consideration of an oil sanction again. It was a familiar story. Flandin told him that Mussolini had warned that if an oil sanction was imposed, Italy would withdraw from the League, denounce the Locarno agreements, refuse to sign a naval treaty, and consider as void the military agreement concluded by Marshal Badoglio and General Gamelin. Before agreeing to proceed with an oil sanction, therefore, Flandin argued that the Committee of Thirteen should be given another opportunity to promote a settlement. He added that the French government wanted to know what Britain would do if Italy withdrew from the Locarno agreements. Would Britain still come to the aid of France in the event of a German violation of the provisions governing the demilitarized zone? Eden's instructions left him no option but to agree with Flandin's proposal for another effort to promote a

²⁸Ibid., pp. 16-22.

settlement of the Abyssinian crisis.²⁹ He could not answer Flandin's question concerning Locarno, however, without consulting the cabinet. As it developed, Flandin's question was very timely, but the cabinet did not think so on March 5. They knew that Hitler wanted to reestablish German control over the demilitarized zone, but they did not expect a unilateral move and they were impatient with the French request for an assurance. If Italy denounced the Locarno agreements, they decided, the other signatories could confer together on a proper course in the changed situation.³⁰

III

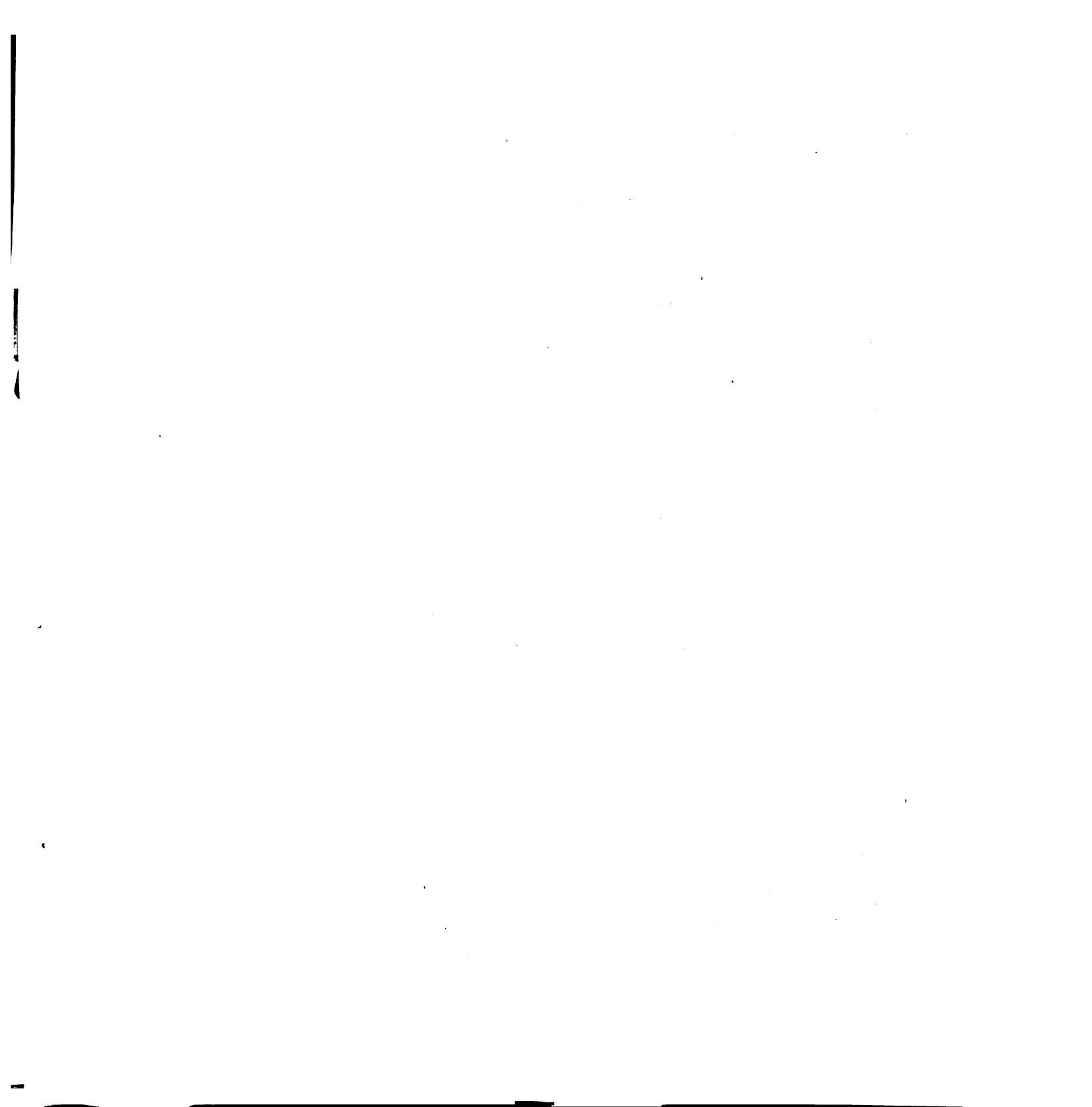
Hitler did not wait for Mussolini to denounce the Locarno agreements. On March 7, he sent German troops into the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland and reestablished German control.³¹ The German action constituted a flagrant violation of the Versailles treaty and the Locarno agreements and opened Hitler to a sharp rebuff.³² In spite of the

²⁹Cab 23/83 15(36)1.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹The demilitarized zone consisted of an area from Germany's western border to a line drawn fifty kilometers east of the right bank of the Rhine.

³²Articles 42 and 43 of the Versailles treaty stipulated that the demilitarized zone could not be fortified or occupied by military forces. The Versailles treaty was a 'dictated peace,' but Germany freely participated in the Locarno agreements of 1925 by which Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Italy guaranteed the territorial status quo on Germany's western frontier, as well as the maintenance of articles 42 and 43 of the Versailles treaty.



reintroduction of conscription the year before, the forces which Hitler had at hand in March 1936 could not have successfully resisted a French counterthrust into the demilitarized zone. Hitler's generals were certain that he was inviting disaster, but he proved a better judge of the situation than his generals.³³

Hitler recognized that the Abyssinian crisis had destroyed the Stresa front, and had rendered the implementation of the Locarno agreements unlikely. The British and French had shown themselves unwilling to offer serious resistance to Italy; Hitler calculated that they would not cross swords with a revived Germany. Italy, the other guarantor of the demilitarized zone, could be discounted. Italian strength was tied up in Africa, and Mussolini would scarcely cooperate in a French and British effort to restrain Germany while the sanctions imposed on Italy by the League were in effect. Hitler also knew that he could count on the broad sympathy

³³A common misconception concerning the German move into the demilitarized zone was that Hitler had agreed with his generals in advance to withdraw from the Rhineland at the first sign of a strong French reaction. D. C. Watt has demonstrated, however, that in the event of a French attack, German orders called for a fighting withdrawal to the Roer-Rhine-Black Forest line, and determined resistance along that line. D. C. Watt, "German Plans for the Reoccupation of the Rhineland: A note," The Journal of Contemporary History, I, 4 (October 1966), 193-99.

which existed in Britain for the German desire to revise the inequitable provisions of the Versailles treaty.³⁴

To cushion the shock of his coup, and to allow scope for the British inclination to countenance 'legitimate' German aspirations, Hitler offered a new basis for European security when he announced the remilitarization of the Rhineland. Germany, he said, was prepared to see a demilitarized zone recreated on both sides of Germany's western frontier. Germany was also prepared to negotiate a twenty-five year non-aggression pact with France and Belgium, to be guaranteed by Britain and Italy, to replace the Locarno agreements. If desired, he said, Germany would extend the new agreement to include the Netherlands, and would negotiate similar agreements with interested states bordering Germany on the east. Finally, with the particular interests of the British government in mind, Hitler offered to reenter the League of Nations,

³⁴The widespread conviction that Germany was wronged by the dictated peace of Versailles took hold in Britain during the decade following the Great War. It was reinforced by an efficient German propaganda program, and by a variety of influential British citizens who sought, for a number of reasons, to promote better Anglo-German relations. The best treatment of the development of British sympathy for German grievances is Martin Gilbert, The Roots of Appeasement (New York: New American Library, 1966), pp. 22-125. D. C. Watt analyzes the success of the German propaganda effort and the impact of the friends of Germany in Britain in "Influence from Without: German Influence on British Opinion, 1933-38, and the Attempts to Counter it," Personalities and Policies (London: Longmans, Green, 1965), pp. 117-35.

and to conclude the air pact which the British so ardently desired.³⁵

The British reaction to Hitler's weekend surprise demonstrated that he had calculated well. There was little inclination in Britain to fight to maintain the restraints imposed on Germany to protect France. The German ambassador, Leopold von Hoesch, reported to Berlin that friends such as Lord Londonderry, Lord Lothian, Sir Ian Hamilton and Colonel Thomas Moore rallied immediately to Germany's support, and he added that the British people did not seem to "care a damn" if German forces reoccupied their own territory.³⁶

³⁵Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on March 7 is printed in Norman H. Baynes (ed.), The Speeches of Adolph Hitler, April 1922-August 1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), II, 1271-1302. The memorandum delivered to Britain, France, Italy and Belgium on the same day is printed in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, C, 5, pp. 15-19. Hereafter cited as DGFP. The ostensible reason for ambassador von Hoesch's interview with Eden on March 7 was to discuss the air pact which the British had proposed. Hoesch was instructed in delivering the memorandum, to "emphasize particularly that the Reich Government's decision to declare themselves prepared to return to the League of Nations was not an easy one, and that the desire to meet as far as possible the British Government's policy... was a consideration of no small weight." DGFP, C, 5, pp. 14, 24-26, 41. Gerhard Weinberg concludes, from a study of German documentation, that Hitler was not serious in offering to return to the League. Gerhard L. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970), p. 251.

³⁶DGFP, C, 5, pp. 92, 94-95, 102-03. According to Churchill, Lothian's view was that the Germans were "only going into their own back-garden," Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, Vol I: The Gathering Storm (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp. 196-97. Lothian was weekendening with like-minded people, including Thomas Jones, Norman Davis, Vincent Massey, Lord Astor, Sir Thomas Inskip, Sir Walter Layton and Arnold Toynbee, when news of the German coup was received. The group viewed Hitler's move as a 'last bus' which Britain had to catch to win German cooperation in

Duff Cooper told Hoesch that "though the British people were prepared to fight for France in the event of a German incursion into French territory, they would not resort to arms on account of the recent reoccupation of the German Rhineland."³⁷ On March 10, the News Chronicle published a sampling of opinion and drew the same conclusion.³⁸ The Times counseled moderation and emphasized the possibilities opened up by the German proposals.³⁹ In Parliament, Lloyd George said that in a court of equity, Germany "could call evidence which any judge would say provided some mitigation of her folly."⁴⁰ Austen Chamberlain, on the other hand, insisted that an act of aggression had occurred, and Winston Churchill sought to encourage a firm British reaction, but theirs were isolated voices.⁴¹ In Eden's judgment "there was not one man in a thousand in the country... prepared to take physical action with France against a German reoccupation of the Rhineland."⁴²

Europe. Jones telephoned Baldwin on March 8 and advised him that the group felt he should welcome the German declaration and bury the corpse of Versailles. Thomas Jones, A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 178-81.

³⁷DGFP, C, 5, p. 57.

³⁸News Chronicle, March 10, 1936.

³⁹The Times, March 9, 1936.

⁴⁰309 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 2035.

⁴¹DGFP, C, 5, pp. 75-76; Churchill, The Gathering Storm, pp. 195-97.

⁴²The Earl of Avon, The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators. (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 338.

Eden's own reaction to Hitler's memorandum was in keeping with the general British attitude. He protested "the unilateral repudiation of a treaty freely negotiated and freely signed," but told Hoesch that he would give Germany's alternate proposals careful consideration. He added that he considered the new German attitude towards the League of Nations to be "most important."⁴³ After Hoesch left, Eden called in French ambassador Corbin and told him that Germany's repudiation of solemn agreements was deplorable, but Hitler's proposals merited careful consideration. Therefore, Eden said, he was certain that France would not do anything to make the situation more difficult.⁴⁴ In effect, Eden warned Corbin against a military reaction to the German fait accompli. Eden took a great deal on his own shoulders in his conversations with Hoesch and Corbin, but the danger of war was obvious, and he knew that neither the cabinet nor the country would fight to drive Germans out of Essen and Cologne.

Eden laid out the details of the crisis, along with his recommendations, in a memorandum which the cabinet considered on March 9.⁴⁵ He pointed out that the German action was particularly unfortunate in that Britain had been willing for some time to consider renegotiation of the terms of the

⁴³DGFP, C, 5, pp. 41-43; Avon, Facing the Dictators, pp. 340-41.

⁴⁴Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 341.

⁴⁵Cab 24/261 C.P. 73(36).

Locarno agreements, and Flandin had indicated that France was prepared to do the same.⁴⁶ Germany should have demanded arbitration of the question of the compatibility of the Locarno pact with the recently ratified Franco-Soviet agreement.⁴⁷ Instead, Hitler chose to use the Franco-Soviet pact to justify the repudiation of a freely negotiated treaty which bore importantly upon European security. It was, Eden felt, "the manner of their action" which Britain must deplore.

⁴⁶ Eden noted that an unfortunate aspect of the precipitate remilitarization of the Rhineland was that it removed an important bargaining counter in the general negotiations which the government had hoped to initiate with Germany. Hitler had put Britain on notice in December 1935 that he considered it necessary to end the demilitarized status of the Rhineland. Within the British government, discussion during the first months of 1936 focused on the question of which concessions should be made to satisfy German aspirations, not whether such concessions should be made. Even Vansittart was persuaded that it was necessary to return some of Germany's former African colonies in order to coax Germany back into the League of Nations. And, as Harold Nicolson observed after a conversation with Eden, the Foreign Secretary was "prepared to make great concessions to German appetites provided they will sign a disarmament treaty and join the League of Nations." *Ibid.*; Cmd. 5143; FO 371/19885 C979/4/18; Cab 24/260 C.P.42(36); Cab 23/83 3(36)4; Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters, 1930-1939*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 243.

⁴⁷ The Franco-Soviet agreement was signed in Paris on May 2, 1935 and ratified by the French Chamber of Deputies on February 27, 1936. The pact called for consultation and cooperation within the framework of the Covenant of the League in the event of threatened aggression by a European state against either party, and, in the case of unprovoked attack, it provided for immediate mutual assistance regardless of the position taken by the League. The agreement was directed in all but specific language against Germany, and was regarded as such in Berlin.

Germany's action meant that Hitler henceforward could be expected to repudiate any treaty which he found inconvenient when he considered the time ripe and German strength sufficient. Nonetheless, Eden argued, "owing to Germany's material strength and power of mischief in Europe, it is in our interest to conclude with her as far-reaching and enduring a settlement as possible whilst Herr Hitler is still in the mood to do so." The cabinet agreed and concluded that it was necessary to discourage military action by France against Germany, while reassuring the French and Belgians that they would not suffer if they agreed to tear up the Versailles and Locarno agreements. The cabinet also approved the statement which Eden proposed to make in the House of Commons explaining that Britain was prepared to honor the obligations laid down by the Locarno agreements, but looked to a peaceful solution based on the proposals transmitted by Ambassador Hoesch.⁴⁸

The French, on the other hand, were much more disposed to invoke the provisions of the Locarno agreements than to trade their security for a fresh batch of German promises. On March 8, France and Belgium addressed telegrams to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, requesting that

⁴⁸Cab 23/83 16(36)1. Eden delivered the statement approved by the cabinet later that evening. He had intended to emphasize to the Commons that Germany was prepared to return to the League of Nations "now," but Hoesch was shown a copy of the statement before delivery and, on instructions from Berlin, persuaded Eden to revise his statement to exclude any reference to a time frame. The German reservation should have warned Eden that there was little reason to expect that Hitler was sincere in offering to return to the League. 309 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 1808-13; DGFP, C, 5, pp. 55-56.

a meeting of the Council be convened as soon as possible to consider the German violation of the Versailles treaty and the Locarno agreements.⁴⁹ That same evening, French Premier Sarraut addressed the nation by radio and rejected the German memorandum of March 7 as a basis for negotiations. Before any negotiations could be considered, he said, German troops would have to be evacuated from the Rhineland.⁵⁰ On March 10, Flandin convened a meeting in Paris of representatives of France, Britain, Italy and Belgium to consider the crisis.⁵¹ Eden and Halifax represented Britain and found the French and Belgians altogether unwilling to fall in with the British inclination to put the best possible face on things and concentrate upon Hitler's proposals. Rather, the French and Belgians were united in their desire to force the issue through the League Council to the point of economic and financial sanctions in an effort to compel the Germans to withdraw their military forces from the Rhineland. They were convinced that Hitler was not in a position to fight over the issue, and that he had acted against the advice of the German General Staff and Dr. Schacht. If the crisis did lead to

⁴⁹League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, p. 312.

⁵⁰Royal Institute of International Affairs, Documents on International Affairs, 1936 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 46-51.

⁵¹Italy was represented by the Italian ambassador in Paris who was instructed to limit himself to observer status and merely note the positions taken by the other Locarno powers. DGFP, C, 5, pp. 50-51.

hostilities, Flandin and Van Zeeland argued that it would be better to face such a confrontation in 1936, rather than in two or three years, when German rearmament would be complete and Hitler could be expected to seek a war. Eden and Halifax disagreed, and in two stormy sessions held to the position that negotiation to find a reasonable middle ground was essential.⁵²

France was, of course, free to act alone to reverse the German violation of the demilitarized zone, and the French had the means and the justification to do so. But, perhaps with the 1923 occupation of the Ruhr in mind, the Sarrault government elected to limit their response to Hitler's challenge to those measures which would command firm British support, much in the same fashion as the Baldwin government tied British policy throughout the Abyssinian crisis to French cooperation. Thus, the French government made brave noises during the early stages of the Rhineland crisis and later blamed Britain for the failure to force Germany to retreat from the demilitarized zone, just as British ministers later blamed France for the failure to contain Italian aggression in Abyssinia. And there was a kernel of truth in each assertion. The failure of Britain and France to act together during the Abyssinian and Rhineland crises converted gambles taken by Mussolini and Hitler into easy successes which

⁵²The details of the discussions in Paris are drawn from the report made by Eden and Halifax to the cabinet on March 11. Cab 23/83 18(36)1.

destroyed the established pillars of European security. But the results would have been the same in each case unless Anglo-French determination had been buttressed by a willingness to fight. The Baldwin government was not willing to fight to preserve Abyssinia and the League of Nations, and, despite Flandin's brave talk, the Sarraut government was not willing to fight to preserve the demilitarized zone. The Sarraut government was essentially a caretaker government facing new elections at the end of April, and the mood of the government, the military, and the French people was largely defensive, with little inclination to initiate military operations against Germany, whatever the provocation.⁵³ The attitude of the military was particularly limiting. The threat of German action to remilitarize the Rhineland had been evident for some time, but French military authorities had done nothing to prepare to meet it. Such central figures as General Maurin, the Minister of War, and Generals Gamelin and Georges were imbued with the 'Maginot mentality' and insisted that an order for general mobilization would be necessary in order to intervene

⁵³J. B. Duroselle reviewed the published documentation, the memoirs of Flandin, Herriot, Gamelin and Francois-Poncet, and the French press and concluded that "France almost unanimously refused to act." Timidity within the government was reinforced by "the absolute inertia of the French people in the face of danger." Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, "France and the Crisis of March 1936," in E. M. Acomb and M. L. Brown, eds., French Society and Culture Since the Old Regime (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 244-68.

militarily in the Rhineland.⁵⁴ Flandin and Léger knew, therefore, that, despite their brave front, there was little likelihood that the French government would push for military action to reverse Hitler's coup.⁵⁵

Eden suspected that there was more smoke than fire in the strong stance taken by Flandin and Van Zeeland in Paris on March 10. But neither he nor the cabinet could discount the danger of war implicit in the French and Belgian attitude. Flandin had chosen to act through the League, however, and there were no reports of significant military preparations in France when Eden and Halifax reported to the cabinet on March 11. Eden arranged to have the League Council meeting called to consider the crisis transferred from Geneva to London, and he felt that if he could secure a German understanding to withdraw all but a token military force from the

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 248-54. The military concept of "immediate attack," which underlay the establishment of the demilitarized zone, had been abandoned by French military planners for a purely defensive strategy years before the Rhineland crisis. The demilitarization of the Rhineland therefore had lost much of its military importance by 1936. The eastern alliances were valued in Paris for the number of German troops which they would tie down during an invasion of France -- a reversal of roles which became apparent after France declined to fight to preserve the demilitarized zone. W. F. Knapp, "The Rhineland Crisis of March 1936," St. Anthony's Papers, V (1959), 74.

⁵⁵Alexis Léger, the Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, warned that if strong action were not taken by either the Locarno powers or the League, France would lose all confidence in the idea of collective security. Léger was convinced that if forced to, the British would honor their commitments. FO 371/19890 C1734/4/18; Elizabeth R. Cameron, "Alexis Saint-Léger Léger," in Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds., The Diplomats, 1919-1939 (New York: Atheneum, 1965, first published in 1953), II, 390.

Rhineland until the non-aggression pacts mentioned in the German memorandum were negotiated, he could defuse the crisis.⁵⁶ Even without the danger of war, however, the problem posed by the French determination to press for economic sanctions against Germany remained. Eden conceded that he could see the force of the argument that a British refusal to live up to the commitments outlined in the Locarno agreements would knock the heart out of the notion of collective security. But he had no sympathy for Flandin's suggestion that the sanctions in effect against Italy should be dropped in order to fashion a solid front against Germany. For their part, the cabinet were irritated that the French refused to take a constructive view of the possibilities inherent in the crisis, and Baldwin grumbled that people in Britain would be slow to forget the awkward position forced upon Britain by France.⁵⁷

As it developed, the cabinet need not have worried. Flandin made a valiant effort to recover by diplomatic maneuver the security which his country was unwilling to restore by force, but he could not lead where Britain would not follow. On March 12, the cabinet discussed the impending meeting of the League Council and agreed that it was France

⁵⁶ Eden's memoirs convey the impression that he viewed the German offer of new non-aggression pacts as a poor substitute for the Locarno pact, but the cabinet minutes do not bear out that impression. Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 354; Cab 23/83 18(36)1.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

rather than Germany which needed restraint.⁵⁸ When the Council met in London on March 14 to consider the crisis, Flandin tried to convince the Council members that nothing less than the peace and security of Europe was at stake. He demanded the withdrawal of all German forces from the Rhineland before negotiations could be considered. And he proposed a draft resolution condemning the remilitarization of the Rhineland as a breach of the treaties of Versailles and Locarno.⁵⁹ The French position was supported by the Turkish and Soviet representatives on the Council, but it was evident that Britain, as the principal guarantor of the Locarno agreements in light of Italy's African distraction, held the key to the Council's response.⁶⁰

Flandin circulated throughout the political society of London in an effort to win British support for a strong stance against Germany, but to little avail. Baldwin sympathized but gave him no encouragement, and Neville Chamberlain's attitude was that it would be dangerously speculative to assume that Hitler would yield to pressure without resort to war.⁶¹

⁵⁸Cab 23/83 19(36)1.

⁵⁹League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, pp. 313-14, 317.; Cab 23/83 20(36)2.

⁶⁰League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, p. 319.

⁶¹Churchill and Ralph Wigram of the Foreign Office arranged many of Flandin's contacts. Churchill, The Gathering Storm, pp. 195-97; Keith Feiling, The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1970, first published in 1946), p. 279.

Flandin's efforts did succeed in convincing the German service attaches in London that the situation had become "exceptionally grave."⁶² But within the British government there was no inclination to take up arms against Germany for the sake of France.

The cabinet did recognize, however, that a sense of security would have to be restored in France and Belgium before any progress could be made on the proposals put forward in the German memorandum of March 7. The cabinet saw in the German proposals the basis for the long desired general understanding with Nazi Germany. To win French support for negotiations with Germany, the cabinet grudgingly agreed that Britain would act again as guarantor of the proposed non-aggression pacts between Germany, France and Belgium, and would be prepared to supplement those agreements with a pact of mutual assistance between Britain, France and Belgium, to be implemented by General Staff talks. Such a commitment cut against the grain, and the cabinet stipulated that any British assurance be strictly limited to instances of unprovoked aggression.⁶³

Eden outlined the British position for the League Council on March 18. He agreed that a breach of the Versailles treaty

⁶²DGFP, C, 5, p. 134.

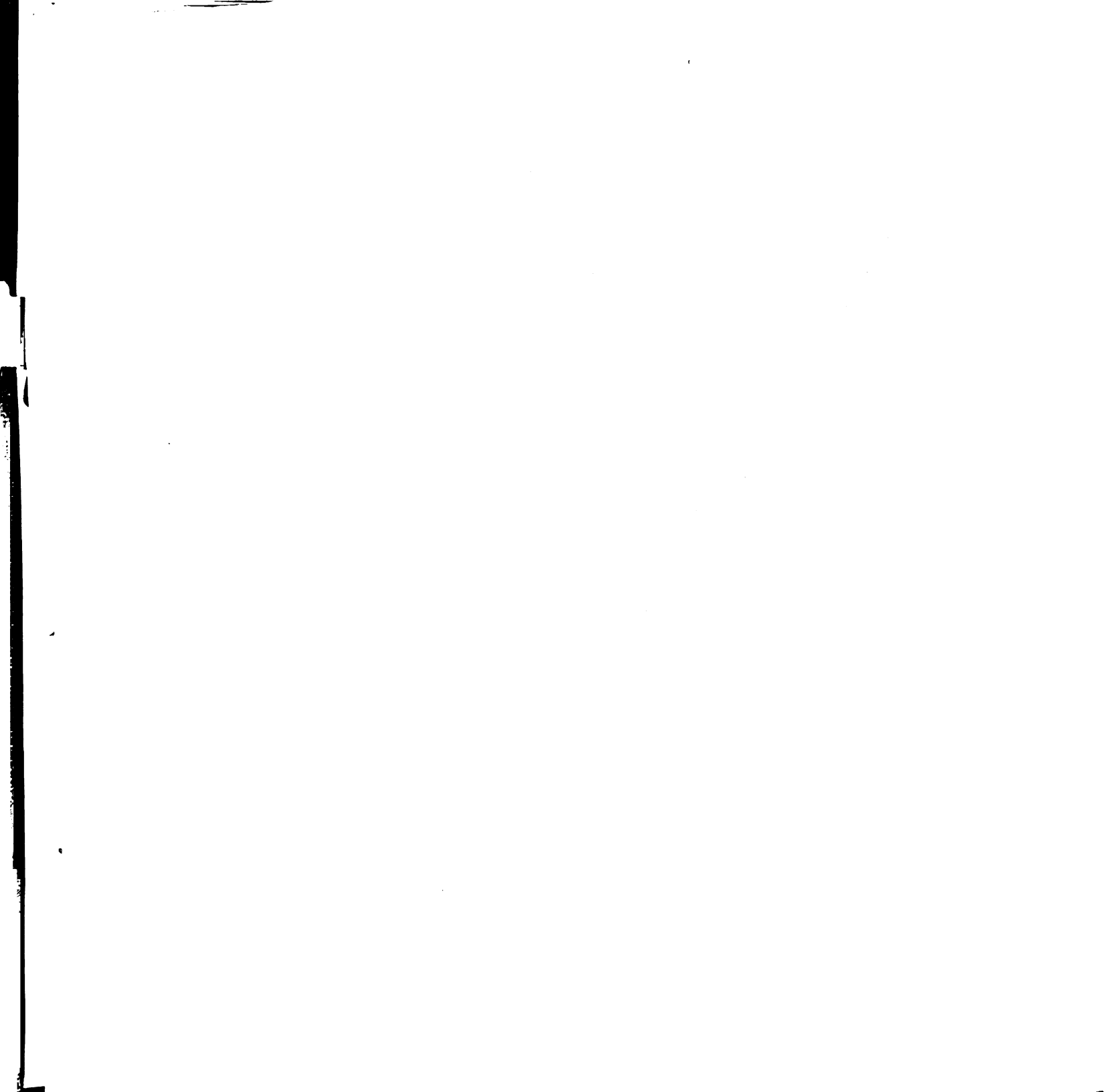
⁶³Cab 23/83 20(36)1, 20(36)2, 20(36)3, 21(36)6, 21(36) appendix I. The position adopted by the cabinet was initially developed by Eden in a memorandum on March 16, Cab 24/261 C.P.79(36).

had occurred and should be condemned by the Council. But, he added, the Council's responsibilities extended beyond such a finding. The League had a duty not only to maintain peace but to remove the causes of war. "To that end," Eden argued, "all lines of approach should be examined." Britain, he said, would be prepared to play a full part in the work of rebuilding the security of western Europe.⁶⁴ Flandin continued to press for the implementation of economic sanctions against Germany, but the offer which Eden made of an expanded British commitment to French security represented a bird-in-hand in an otherwise dubious situation, and on March 19 he agreed to support the solution worked up by the British Foreign Office.⁶⁵ The Council voted on March 19 to condemn the German violation of the treaties of Versailles and Locarno, and to inform the signatories of the Locarno agreement of that finding.⁶⁶ That met French requirements to some extent. On March 20 Eden conveyed to the Council the proposals which Britain, France, Belgium and Italy intended to put to Germany. The proposals called for the submission of all grievances concerning the Locarno agreements to the Hague Court, the reestablishment of a demilitarized zone twenty kilometers wide to be patrolled by an international force while

⁶⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, pp. 326-27.

⁶⁵Avon, Facing the Dictators, p. 359; Cab 23/83 23(36)1.

⁶⁶League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, p. 340.



the proposed non-aggression pacts were being negotiated, and a prohibition of all additional military activity within the former demilitarized zone until a mutually satisfactory solution was devised.⁶⁷

After March 19, the Rhineland problem no longer merited the term "crisis," and the German fait accompli gradually became an accepted political fact of life. Flandin's acceptance of the proposals drafted on March 19 meant, in effect, that France was prepared to settle for what comfort there was to be had from the fresh British commitment to come to the aid of France and Belgium in the event of German aggression.⁶⁸ The British government, in turn, felt that the price paid for French cooperation was not too high if it put an end to talk of military action and sanctions, and opened the way for German cooperation in a new system of European security. It soon became evident, however, that Hitler had no desire to press ahead with negotiations to limit his freedom of action. The German memorandum of March 7 was a smokescreen,

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 348-50. The idea of temporarily reestablishing a narrow demilitarized zone was Neville Chamberlain's contribution to the proposals. Cab 23/83 20(36)1.

⁶⁸The text of the British assurance to France and Belgium was submitted to the Council along with the proposals to be sent to Germany. The letter of assurance promised British support in the event of aggression and provided for military staff talks, but it was limited by the stipulation that the assurances would come into force only if the effort to negotiate new non-aggression agreements with Germany failed. League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, p. 351.

not the foundation stone for European security, as the British cabinet preferred to believe.

On March 20, Eden handed the proposals accepted by the other Locarno powers to special German envoy Joachim von Ribbentrop, who was in London to represent Germany during the final sessions of the League Council meetings.⁶⁹ Ribbentrop immediately responded that Germany would not submit its case to the Hague Court, nor would the reestablishment of a demilitarized zone under any guise be acceptable to Berlin.⁷⁰ On March 25, the German government rejected the proposals out of hand, but, in response to British pleas, agreed to submit counter-proposals.⁷¹ Ribbentrop warned, however, that under no circumstances would his government accept a limitation of German sovereignty.⁷² On April 1, Ribbentrop presented to the Foreign Office a nineteen-point German "Peace Plan," which essentially repeated the proposals made in the memorandum of March 7 and expanded them with references to general disarmament.⁷³ The German "Peace Plan" made it clear, if it

⁶⁹DGFP, C, 5, pp. 208-14.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 214.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 286-87.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 355-63.

had not been before, that the object of German diplomacy was delay rather than negotiations.⁷⁴ The passage of time cooled passions, which suited British policy as well, but the cabinet persisted in trying to tie Germany down to the proposed negotiations. To prod Germany, Eden announced in Parliament on April 3 that on the previous day he had handed to the Belgian and French ambassadors in London letters of assurance in regard to the action to be taken if negotiations for a new settlement failed.⁷⁵ On April 10, France, Belgium and Italy agreed that Britain should seek amplification from Germany of a number of points raised in the German memorandum of March 31.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the Foreign Office prepared a "questionnaire," which was delivered by the British ambassador in Berlin on May 7.⁷⁷ The German government simply chose not to respond to the British questionnaire, and the transmission of the questionnaire became the final response to the remilitarization of the Rhineland -- a fitting anti-climax to a drama which saw Britain and France waste the best opportunity which they would have to rebuff Hitler and restrain Nazi ambitions.

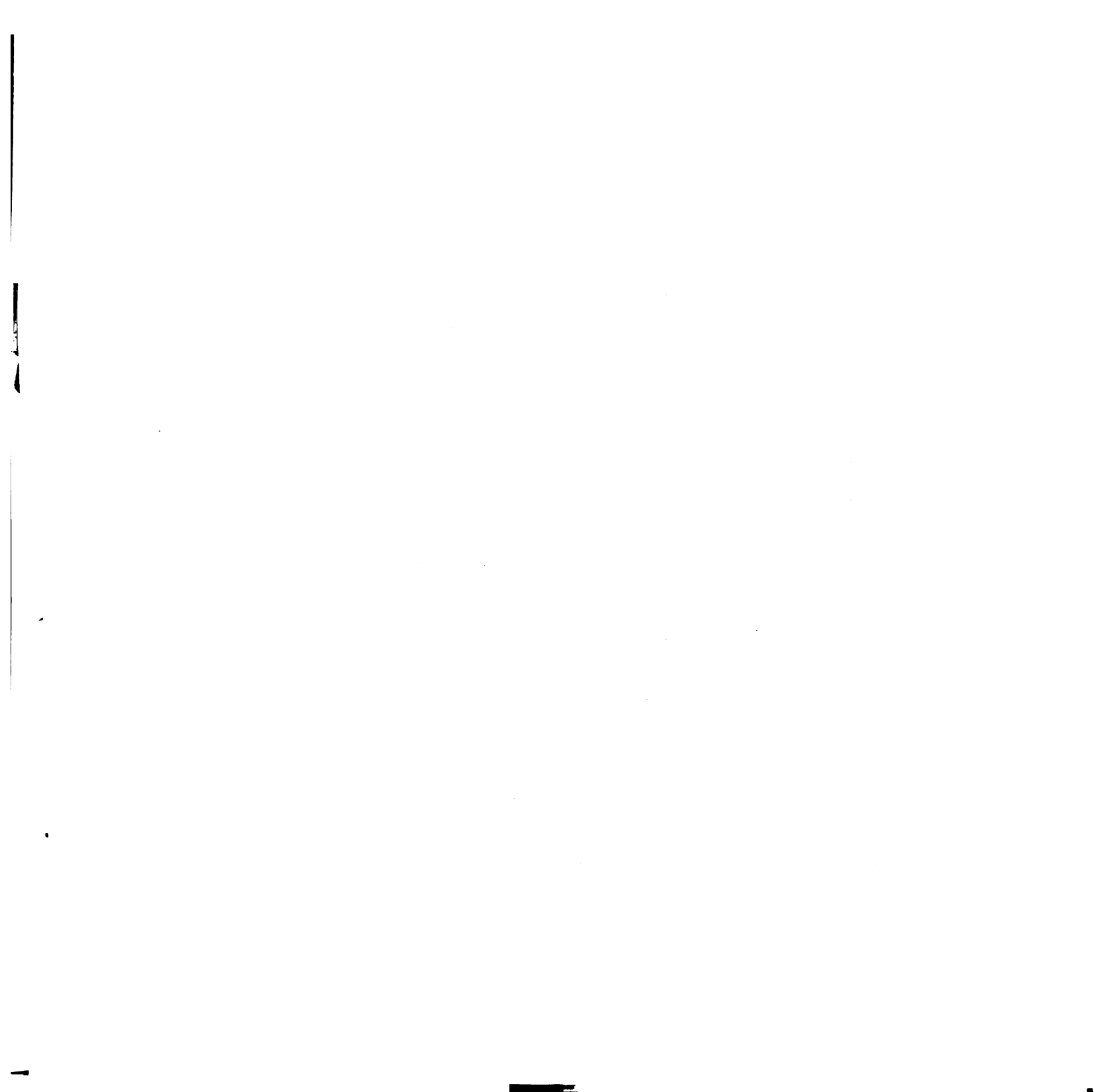
⁷⁴Gerhard Weinberg notes that delay was "the main object of German policy" throughout the later stages of the Rhineland crisis. Weinberg, The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany, p. 260.

⁷⁵310 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 2309-12.

⁷⁶The Times, April 11, 1936.

⁷⁷DGFP, C, 5, pp. 513-17.

While it lasted, the Rhineland crisis was an all-absorbing preoccupation for the governments of western Europe. As such, it imposes a necessary digression upon any treatment of the Abyssinian crisis. For France and Britain, the Abyssinian crisis virtually ceased to exist for two weeks in the middle of March. During those two weeks, Hitler forced an answer to a question which had worried French governments since the end of the First World War. Would the League function to restrain German efforts to revise the structure of European security established after the war? The answer, not unexpectedly, was no. For France, the Rhineland crisis cleared away any remaining doubts about the value of the League. If it would not function to restrain Germany, it made no sense to continue to use it to alienate Italy. When the Locarno powers first met in Paris to consider the German remilitarization of the Rhineland, Flandin, to Eden's dismay, spoke out in front of the Italian representative for an end to the sanctions against Italy and a resurrection of the Stresa front. In a reversion to previous form, France again took up the demand for coercion under the banner of the League, and Eden found himself in the uncomfortable position of arguing that negotiation rather than sanctions was the best answer to a challenge posed to the established order. But Eden refused to see in the Rhineland crisis a reason for discontinuing sanctions against Italy, and he did not agree that the failure of the League Council to do more than condemn Germany's action meant that



the League system would not function in Europe. It was hard to gainsay, however, that on the one issue of major importance to France the League had failed to act. There was a rich irony in the situation, given the backdrop of Anglo-French differences over the correct response to Italian aggression, but the result of the failure of Britain and France to agree upon measures to preserve the security of Europe was, in each case, the same. Germany took advantage of the opportunity created by the Abyssinian crisis to remilitarize the Rhineland, and Italy all but completed the conquest of Abyssinia while Britain and France argued over the proper response to Hitler's coup. The net effect of the Rhineland crisis was to encourage the revisionist dictators, dismay those who looked to the western democracies for support, and force a reassessment of the basis of security in eastern as well as in western Europe. It was not, therefore, under the happiest of circumstances that the League powers turned their attention to the Abyssinian crisis again at the end of March.

IV

Abyssinia was in desperate straits by the end of March. Marshal Badoglio had destroyed the bulk of the Abyssinian armed forces during the fighting in Tioré and was pushing toward Addis Ababa. On March 21, the Abyssinian government pleaded for League action to halt the damage being done by

Italian bombs and poison gas.⁷⁸ The League, however, was impotent. At French instigation the Committee of Eighteen had handed over responsibility for the crisis on March 2 to the Committee of Thirteen, which was charged with the task of conciliation. The Committee of Thirteen again sought to promote a settlement, and Italy reverted to the comfortable diplomatic game of delay. On March 23, the Committee of Thirteen met to consider the replies to the appeal which had been addressed to Italy and Abyssinia on March 3.⁷⁹ Italy agreed "in principle" to the opening of negotiations to settle the conflict, but Abyssinia insisted upon an assurance that Italy contemplated a settlement within the spirit and framework of the Covenant. Abyssinia feared, with good reason, that Italy intended to use the negotiations to prevent the application of an oil sanction.⁸⁰ The committee, however, was in no position to do other than accept the Italian response at face value.⁸¹ The Italian representative, Baron Aloisi, did not arrive in Geneva until April 15. When he did arrive, it was to state the Italian position, not to negotiate. Italy insisted upon direct negotiations rather than negotiations through the League. Aloisi said that Abyssinia

⁷⁸League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, p. 456.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 398. The Committee of Thirteen had been scheduled to meet on March 10, but the meeting was delayed because of the Rhineland crisis.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 395-97.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 486.

would have to recognize the situation created by Italian victories in the field, and he intimated that the League would be wise to do the same if it looked for a return to Italian participation at Geneva.⁸² But the Abyssinian delegation continued to insist upon the support pledged to Abyssinia by the terms of the Covenant, and on April 18 the Committee of Thirteen had to report another failure to the League Council.⁸³

In London, it was evident before the Committee of Thirteen renewed their efforts that nothing could be expected from another attempt to mediate. Italy had little to gain by compromise, and the French were in a mood to talk of dropping sanctions rather than imposing new ones. On March 19, Eden asked the cabinet for guidance in the event of French pressure to end sanctions when the Committee of Thirteen took up the question of Abyssinia again. The cabinet felt that it was premature to consider the lifting of sanctions. Chamberlain observed that "if sanctions were taken off before peace were in sight there would be political trouble in the country."⁸⁴ But the cabinet no longer were willing to think in terms of additional pressure upon Italy. On April 6, Eden reported that he had received word that the position of the Abyssinians

⁸²Ibid., p. 361.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 359-64.

⁸⁴Cab 23/83 23(36)3.

had become desperate, and he suggested summoning the Committee of Eighteen to consider additional sanctions, including, if necessary, the closing of the Suez canal. In raising the question of the canal, Eden played his trump card, possibly with the intent of jolting the cabinet into some sort of action.⁸⁵ As he must have expected, the cabinet reacted with one voice against the idea of closing the canal, and expressed grave doubts about additional sanctions of any type. Eden did win approval to put the notion of additional sanctions forward in debate, but only to avoid domestic recriminations in the likely event of a collapse of the sanctions experiment.⁸⁶

When the League Council met in Geneva on April 20 to consider the failure of the efforts of the Committee of Thirteen, Eden made full use of the latitude accorded him by the cabinet. Addressing the Council, he warned that the future confidence and participation of member states depended upon the success of the League in containing aggression in

⁸⁵Opinion in the Foreign Office was divided on the wisdom of closing the Suez canal in order to save Abyssinia and the League. Owen O'Malley, Maurice Peterson and William Strang argued in a joint memorandum that it was worth the risk involved in closing the canal in order "to deprive Mussolini of the full fruits of aggression." Rex Leeper, Frank Ashton-Swatkin, Ralph Wigram, Sir Lancelot Oliphant and Orme Sargent responded that the risk of a war which Britain was not in a position to fight was too great to consider such a drastic alternative. Vansittart concurred with the later opinion in a minute which he attached to the memoranda. FO 371/20411 R2877/226/22; FO 371/20181 J5034/216/1 and J5035/216/1.

⁸⁶Cab 23/83 27(36)1.

Abyssinia. He urged the Council to press on with existing sanctions and to expand League action against Italy:

At this solemn hour, when we must each of us be conscious of the gravity of our decision, Governments must be prepared to shoulder their responsibilities and clearly to state the policy which they are prepared to pursue. In the view of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, it is our manifest duty as Members of the League at least to maintain those economic and financial sanctions which have been put into force in connection with this dispute. In order, however, that there may be no shadow of doubt about the position of His Majesty's Government, I must make it clear that, in addition to the action under Article 16 which has already been taken, His Majesty's Government, as has previously been stated, are ready and willing to consider, together with their fellow-Members of the League, the imposition of any further economic and financial sanctions that may be considered necessary and effective for the fulfillment of the obligation which we all of us bear, whether we like it or not, in this dispute.⁸⁷

Eden's statement to the Council was a good deal stronger than most of his colleagues in the cabinet would have been comfortable with, but there was little prospect that additional sanctions would be adopted at the end of April. Eden discovered, to his chagrin, that, apart from the representatives of Portugal, Denmark and Australia, no one at Geneva was giving much thought to Abyssinia and Africa.⁸⁸ Events in Europe held the attention of most people, and there was a general feeling that it was time to reassess the system

⁸⁷League of Nations, Official Journal, April 1936, p. 378.

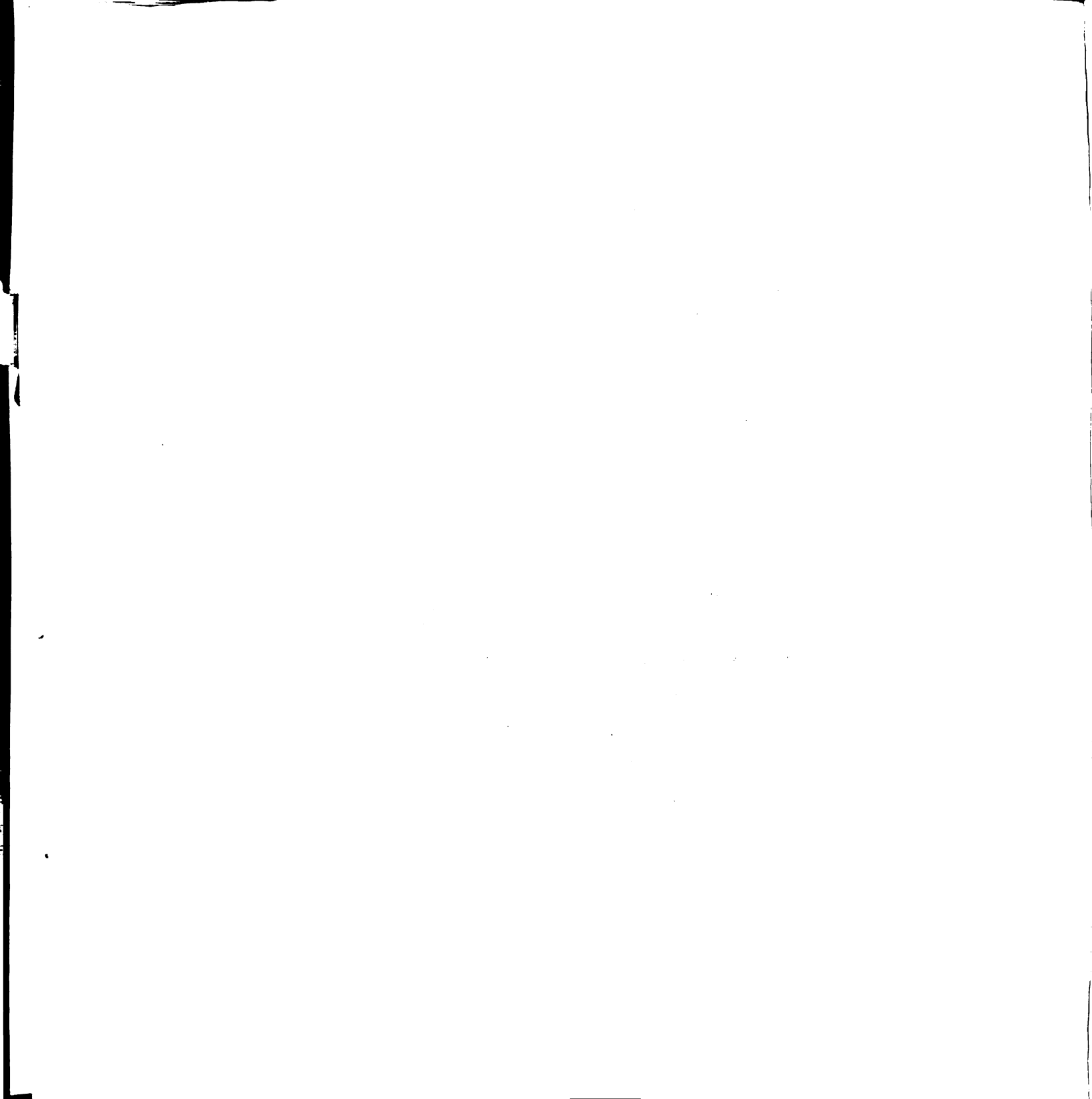
⁸⁸Cab 23/84 30(36)3.

of collective security. Eden was discouraged and he painted a grim picture when he reported to the cabinet on April 22. He felt that while Hitler and Mussolini held the initiative in Europe every country would be inclined to structure decisions with an eye to the desired effect on one or the other of the dictators, and collective security would be a forgotten ideal. Another problem to consider was the effect of the Italian success upon British prestige. Italian propagandists were crowing that Britain's sun had set in the Mediterranean while Italy's was rising. Eden said there were signs that public opinion in Egypt was responding to the Italian propaganda, and he added that more trouble could be expected if Italy successfully challenged the British interest in Lake Tsana.⁸⁹

Eden's gloomy prognostications gave the cabinet food for thought. The French still had hopes that Mussolini would be satisfied with a settlement that the League could live with, but there was no such optimism in London.⁹⁰ When the cabinet took up the question again on April 29, Eden continued to outline what he anticipated would be the impact of the impending Italian triumph. Italy, he said, might raise a large native army in its African empire and menace the British position in the Sudan and Egypt. The loss of British prestige could

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰FO 371/20367 R2426/1884/3.



be expected to have an unsettling effect upon India and the 'black races' of Africa. In Europe, the Italian success would probably have the effect of encouraging German ambitions in that Mussolini would no doubt choose to develop his new empire rather than defend Austria. And the Italians could be expected to continue to challenge British supremacy in the Mediterranean. Beyond all of that, an Italian triumph over the League would call into question the basis of British and European security. Could the League of Nations survive the failure of the sanctions experiment? If so, could it survive in its present form? Could it ever impose sanctions again? Should it be made clear that Britain, after the Abyssinian failure, no longer felt any obligation to apply sanctions? If the League was to be reformed, should reform be linked to the reentry of Germany into the League? Should Britain continue to try to negotiate a new Locarno treaty regardless of the future of the League? The cabinet were agreed on the wisdom of proceeding with the effort to achieve detente with Germany, but they had no ready answers for the larger questions relating to the vacuum which would be created in British policy if the League collapsed. Baldwin appointed a cabinet committee, consisting of himself, Ramsay MacDonald, Chamberlain, Simon, Eden, Halifax and the new Minister for the Coordination of Defense, Sir Thomas Inskip, to examine the questions which Eden raised.⁹¹

⁹¹Cab 23/84 31(36)4 and 31(36)5.

The assumption underlying the cabinet's discussion on April 29 was that sanctions had failed. Therefore it was necessary to begin to draw the unpleasant conclusions which followed from that fact. To do so meant to concede defeat at the hands of Mussolini, however, and that was a difficult and galling concession to make. Chamberlain's attitude, as outlined in a letter dated May 2, illustrates the difficulty of the decision which faced the cabinet and the ambivalence which still existed in Chamberlain's mind:

the Italian success will encourage the French to urge that, now everything is finished, we ought to lift the sanctions, let bygones be bygones, and get Italy back to the Stresa front at once. That seems to me intolerable... I am sure the time has not yet come for the League to own⁹² itself beaten. All the same, it is beaten.

On May 2 Haile Selassie fled Addis Ababa for Jibuti and ultimate asylum in Britain, and it became even more difficult to avoid the conclusion that the League had been beaten.⁹³ Italian forces entered Addis Ababa on May 5, and on May 9 Mussolini proclaimed the annexation of Abyssinia and the succession of the king of Italy, as emperor, to its vacant throne.⁹⁴

⁹²Feiling, Chamberlain, p. 281.

⁹³The Times, May 3, 1936. After consolidating his position in Tigré, Badoglio drove quickly through what remained of the Abyssinian forces. On April 1, Haile Selassie's army was defeated near Kworam. Gondar fell on April 2 and Dessie, the emperor's headquarters, was captured on April 15. The defense of Addis Ababa was abandoned on April 30, two days before the emperor fled the country. The Times, April 2, 3 and 16, May 1.

⁹⁴The Times, May 6 and 10.

The flight of Haile Selassie and the fall of Addis Ababa confirmed the outcome in Abyssinia, but the cabinet still were not ready to consider the lifting of sanctions when they met on May 6. Rather, they decided that Eden should take no initiative on sanctions when the League Council convened on May 11. The sanctions in effect were viewed as a bargaining counter and the cabinet were prepared to wait for Mussolini to come forward with his terms.⁹⁵ On May 12 at Geneva, Eden, in his capacity as President of the Council, put forward a resolution calling for the League to continue to apply the sanctions which were in effect and to meet again on June 15 to consider the situation at that time.⁹⁶

The resolution proposed by Eden was adopted by the Council, but there was considerable danger that the sanctions front would disintegrate before the next meeting of the Council. Except for some desultory fighting in outlying regions, the Italian conquest of Abyssinia was complete. Ecuador and Chili had already decided to discontinue the application of sanctions, and there were growing indications that other member-states might follow suit.⁹⁷ Within the British

⁹⁵Cab 23/84 34(36)4.

⁹⁶League of Nations, Official Journal, June 1936, p. 540.

⁹⁷Stephen Heald (ed.), Documents on International Affairs, 1935 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), II, 478, 480-82.

cabinet, Viscount Eyres Monsell, the First Lord of the Admiralty, led in pushing for an end to sanctions. On May 13, he complained that the Mediterranean fleet was overtaxed and in need of relief, and he repeated the complaint on May 18 after Eden's return from Geneva. Eyres Monsell felt that if the strain on the fleet were to be maintained, it would be necessary to call up some 6,000 pensioners. Eden was prepared to support such a step to maintain British strength in the Mediterranean, but the cabinet were not.⁹⁸

On May 27, there was a full cabinet discussion on the question of raising sanctions. Eden put the case for maintaining sanctions, arguing that the continuing application of sanctions would buoy up the League, and would ultimately force Italy to recognize the authority of the League and come to Geneva to discuss a permanent settlement. He added that, according to Foreign Office estimates, Italy would be in a serious position if sanctions were maintained until September. Eden conceded, however, that the maintenance of sanctions depended upon French support, which was doubtful, despite speculation that the newly elected Popular Front government of Leon Blum might take a stronger stand to uphold the Covenant. There was little support for Eden's position among the other members of the cabinet. The Italian embassy in London had dropped several hints that relations between Britain and Italy could be rapidly restored if sanctions were

⁹⁸Cab 23/84 36(36)2 and 37(36).

lifted and there was an increasing inclination to improve upon those hints. Walter Runciman, the President of the Board of Trade, called attention to the losses being suffered by British commerce, Ramsay MacDonald and Simon questioned whether concessions could be won through the maintenance of sanctions, and there was a general tendency to question the use of sanctions once the war they were designed to control had ended. It was also pointed out that the worst possible outcome, from the point of view of the League, would be a piecemeal collapse of the sanctions front through the gradual withdrawal of participating members. To avoid such an eventuality, Chamberlain favored direct negotiations between London and Rome. But Eden insisted that negotiations could only take place through the League.⁹⁹

While the cabinet struggled to reach a decision on sanctions, Mussolini, in effect, took a hand in the deliberations by granting an interview to a correspondent for the Daily Telegraph. The interview, which was published in London on May 28, contained a wide range of assurances that Italian good-will and cooperation with Britain, France and the League could be restored if sanctions were dropped. Specifically, Mussolini promised not to raise a large native army in Africa, nor to consider reprisals against any of the states which had participated in the sanctions program. He also offered to respect British interests in Lake Tsana, to negotiate an

⁹⁹Cab 23/84 39(36)8.

understanding with Britain and France, and to consider participation in a reformed League.¹⁰⁰

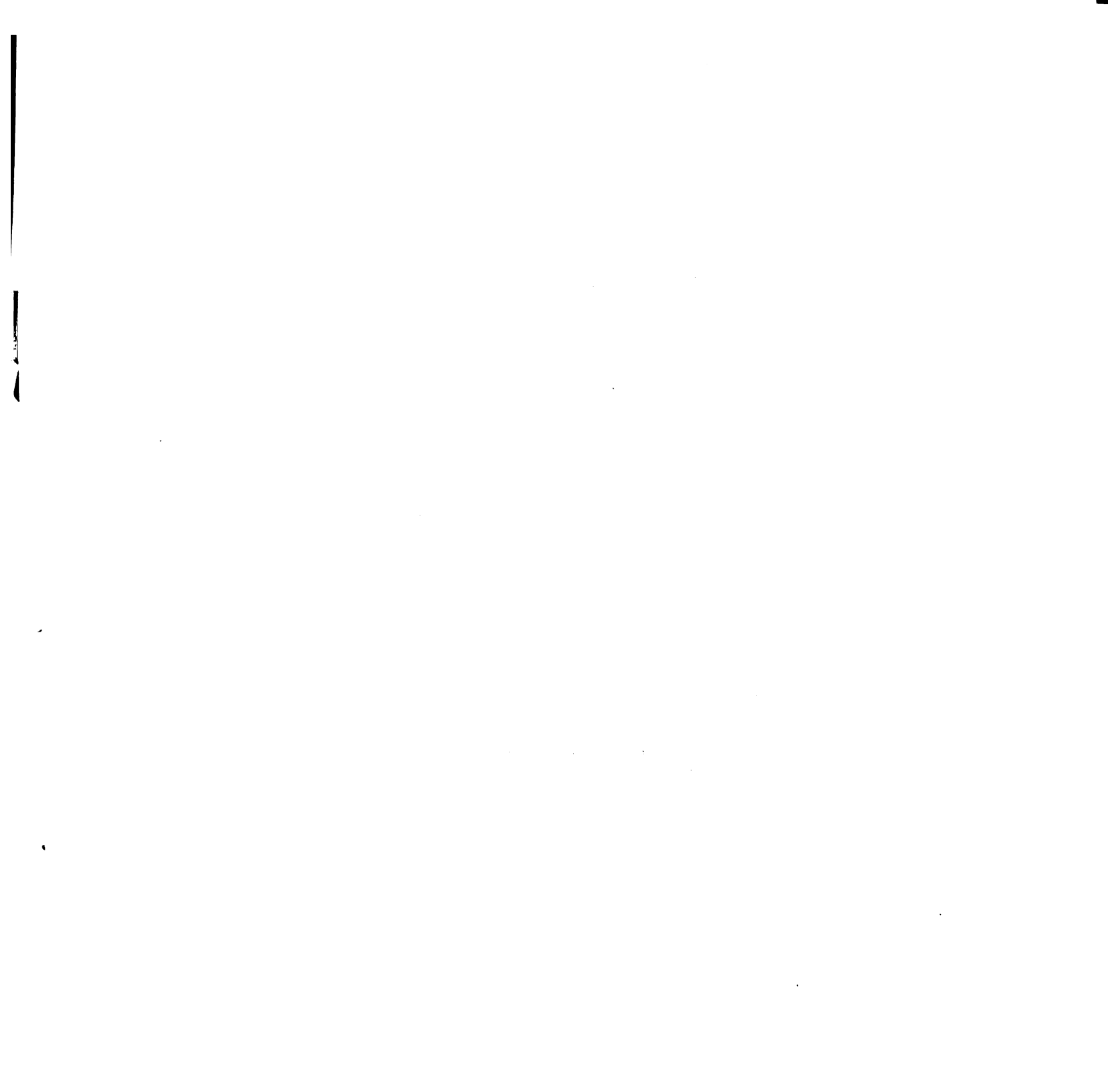
Eden continued his efforts to hold Britain to the sanctions program when the cabinet resumed their deliberations on May 29, but he was fighting a rearguard action. Baldwin asked for each member's opinion, and only Walter Elliot and Sir Kingsley Wood, the ministers of agriculture and health respectively, spoke out in support of Eden's position. On the other hand, Baldwin, Halifax, Swinton, Hailsham, Inskip, Duff Cooper, Malcolm MacDonald and Stanley came out in favor of removing sanctions.¹⁰¹ Ramsay MacDonald and Simon were already on record as favoring the same course of action.¹⁰² The cabinet, therefore, were overwhelmingly disposed to put an end to the sanctions experiment, but there remained, as Baldwin noted, the related problems of face-saving and public opinion.¹⁰³ Chamberlain returned to the

¹⁰⁰Daily Telegraph, May 28, 1936.

¹⁰¹The division of opinion on this question, as on several others during the Abyssinian crisis, demonstrates that, while there may have been a 'boys brigade' which tended to support Eden in the cabinet formed by Chamberlain in 1937, there is little evidence that all, or even most, of the younger ministers lined up behind Eden on key foreign policy issues in 1935 and 1936.

¹⁰²Cab 23/84 39(36)8.

¹⁰³Except for the staunchly Conservative and isolationist press, newspapers throughout the country focused heavy pressure on the government to maintain sanctions despite the Abyssinian defeat. Yorkshire Post, April 21, 1936; News Chronicle, April 28, 1936; Birmingham Post, May 11, 1936; Manchester Guardian, May 12, 1936; Liverpool Daily Post, May 12, 1936; Daily Herald, May 25, 1936.



idea of direct negotiations between London and Rome, and a grumbling Eden was instructed to sound Italian ambassador Grandi on whether Mussolini would be willing to facilitate a settlement by making a statement to the League along the lines of the interview granted to the Daily Telegraph.¹⁰⁴

Mussolini had no intention of making a conciliatory gesture to the League while sanctions were in effect, and Eden reported to the cabinet on June 10 that no reply to the suggestion which he had made to ambassador Grandi had been received. That opened the door for Eden to suggest again that there was no urgency about the decision to remove sanctions. The scheduled Council meeting had been postponed until June 26, and Eden proposed that sanctions be allowed to continue in effect at least until he had a chance to confer with the new French delegation at Geneva.¹⁰⁵ The cabinet reluctantly agreed, but at least one member did so with unspoken reservations. Neville Chamberlain was scheduled to address the 1900 Club that evening, and he resolved to use the opportunity to give the country a clear lead on the sanctions question and put an end to the business of drifting without an agreed policy.¹⁰⁶

For weeks the government had fought shy of recognizing the Italian success in Abyssinia, although the cabinet were

¹⁰⁴Cab 23/84 40(36)5.

¹⁰⁵Cab 23/84 41(36)1.

¹⁰⁶Feiling, Chamberlain, p. 296.

in essential agreement that the sanctions experiment had failed. The government's hesitation was meant to coax Mussolini to deal with the League in formulating his peace, as well as to allow time for public opinion in Britain to adjust to the Italian success. But the failure to act to impede or to recognize the Italian success laid the cabinet open to criticism from all sides, and gave Eden scope to work for the maintenance of a policy which no longer enjoyed majority support in the cabinet. Chamberlain put an end to all of that with his speech to the 1900 Club. To an approving Conservative audience, he said that the time had come to draw the obvious conclusions from the Abyssinian experience:

There are some people who do not desire to draw any conclusions at all. I see for instance, the other day that the president of the League of Nations Union issued a circular to its members in which he said that the issue hung in the balance and urged them to commence a campaign of pressure... with the idea that, if we were to pursue the policy of sanctions, and even to intensify it, it is still possible to preserve the independence of Abyssinia. That seems to me the very midsummer of madness.... There is no reason why, because the policy of collective security in the circumstances in which it was tried has failed, we should therefore abandon the idea of the League and give up the ideals for which the League stands. But if we have retained any vestige of common sense, surely we must admit that we have tried to impose upon the League a task which it was beyond its powers to fulfill.... Is it not apparent that the policy of sanctions involves, I do not say war, but a risk of war?... Is it not also apparent from what has happened that in the presence of such a risk, nations cannot be relied upon to proceed to the last extremity unless their vital interests are

threatened? That being so, does it not suggest that it might be wise to explore the possibilities of localising the danger spots of the world... by means of regional arrangements, which could be approved by the League, but which should be guaranteed only by those nations whose interests were vitally connected with those danger zones?¹⁰⁷

Chamberlain's first independent venture into the realm of foreign affairs was dramatic and effective. In a manner which would later become familiar, Chamberlain resolved an impasse in Britain's dealings with one of the dictators by taking the matter out of the hands of the diplomats and handling it himself. He did not give Eden any warning of what he intended to do because Eden would have disapproved.¹⁰⁸ But the substance of Chamberlain's speech cannot have come as a surprise to the Foreign Secretary. Chamberlain concluded in April that the League had failed, and he began at that time to press upon Eden the solution which he put forward in his speech.¹⁰⁹ The use of those arguments in a public speech without cabinet approval was a surprise, however, and it had the effect that Chamberlain intended. If the maintenance of

¹⁰⁷ The Times, June 11, 1936.

¹⁰⁸ Chamberlain noted in his diary on June 17 that he "did not consult Anthony Eden, because he would have been bound to beg me not to say what I proposed.... He himself has been as nice as possible about it, though it is of course true that to some extent he has had to suffer in the public interest." Quoted in Feiling, Chamberlain, p. 296.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 295-96; Iain Macleod, Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961), p. 194.

sanctions was "the very midsummer of madness," in the words of the strongest figure in the British cabinet, the conclusion invited was that British support for sanctions was at an end, and the sanctions front was about to collapse. Sanctions against Italy remained nominally in effect until formally removed by the League Assembly at the beginning of July, but the sanctions experiment was dead when Chamberlain pronounced it so on June 10.

Supporters of the League in Britain, who, as Chamberlain noted in his speech, had been railing at the government for their failure to act to save Abyssinia, were outraged by Chamberlain's dismissal of sanctions as a failure. On June 11, Baldwin was pressed at question time in the House of Commons by Attlee, Sinclair, Churchill and others to disavow Chamberlain's speech of the night before. Baldwin refused to do so, and defended Chamberlain's remarks as "provisional reflections on the experience gained by the Italo-Abyssinian dispute."¹¹⁰ On June 15 Baldwin and Eden again had to stave off demands by Henderson, Attlee and Dalton to explain and repudiate Chamberlain's speech. They won a temporary reprieve by promising a full debate on the issue on June 18.¹¹¹ On June 17, the cabinet considered the line to be taken in the impending debate and there was complete agreement that

¹¹⁰ 313 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 401-03.

¹¹¹ Ibid., cols. 617-21.

sanctions would have to be lifted. Baldwin indirectly rebuked Chamberlain by saying that in future all speeches touching on foreign affairs should be cleared with the Foreign Office before delivery, but Chamberlain had achieved his purpose. Even Eden, who would have to carry the burden in debate, now agreed that, in the existing circumstances, sanctions should be raised.¹¹² There remained the painful chore of conveying that conclusion to the country and the League.

Eden opened the debate on June 18 with a survey of the Abyssinian crisis and a promise. Britain, he said, had taken the lead throughout the crisis in supporting the principle of collective security, and the government intended to hold to that policy. But the time had come to put an end to an effort which had failed:

The fact has to be faced that sanctions did not realise the purpose for which they were imposed. The Italian military campaign succeeded. The capital and the most important part of Abyssinia are in Italian military occupation, and so far as I am aware no Abyssinian Government survives in any part of the Emperor's territory. That is the situation which has got to be faced. It is a situation which nothing but military action from without, from outside the country, 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?¹¹³

¹¹²Cab 23/84 42(36)1 and 42(36)12.

¹¹³313 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 1200.

The short answer to the questions which Eden posed was no. That did not prevent the supporters of the League in the House from roundly castigating the government, however. Nor was Eden's assurance that the government would "strive to restore to the League its full authority" proof against the outrage of the government's opponents.¹¹⁴

Arthur Greenwood led the attack for Labour, and his anger was obviously genuine. Referring to Eden's speech, he said "I am bound to say... that no more deplorable speech has ever fallen from the lips of a British Minister."¹¹⁵ He drew quotes from Hoare's speech at Geneva and the government's election manifesto and hurled them at the government front bench. He catalogued the government's sins since those lofty promises and concluded:

Gangsterdom is triumphant, and Abyssinia stands as a ghastly monument to the treachery of nations who were sworn to stand by her. No Government in this country... ever humiliated itself or the people it represented more shamefully and more completely than the Government has done today by the proposal to dispense with the one effective weapon in the hands of the League of Nations.¹¹⁶

Greenwood reflected the bitterness of League supporters throughout the country, but it was Lloyd George who put the stunning defeat which Britain had suffered into historical perspective:

¹¹⁴Ibid., col. 1206.

¹¹⁵Ibid., col. 1211.

¹¹⁶Ibid., col. 1216.

This is a unique occasion. I have been in this House very nearly half-a-century... and I cannot recall an occasion quite like this. I have never before heard a British Minister... come down to the House of Commons and say that Britain was beaten, Britain and her Empire beaten, and that we must abandon an enterprise we had taken in hand.... It is a unique occasion and may God never repeat it for this Empire.¹¹⁷

Shouts of "shame" and "resign" rang in the House, but, unlike the crisis in December, the government was in no danger. The fact of the Italian success was irrefutable, and the collapse of the sanctions front had been predicted for some time. Baldwin promised that the government would study the Abyssinian experience to determine what could be salvaged of the concept of collective security.¹¹⁸ That hardly satisfied his opponents, but there was little that they could do to prevent the government from raising sanctions. Nor could the League resist a British lead, since the application of sanctions depended upon British and French support. The final moment for the League's great test came on July 4, when the Assembly adopted a resolution which recalled "the previous findings and decisions" which had denounced Italian aggression, but called for the removal of the measures which had failed to contain it.¹¹⁹ Although it was not given a

¹¹⁷Ibid., col. 1223.

¹¹⁸Ibid., cols. 1232-39.

¹¹⁹League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 151, pp. 66-68.

decent burial at the time, the dream of many died on July 4 and a deep gloom prevailed at Geneva. No attempt was made to maintain a brave front, or to deny the self-evident fact that the League had suffered a disastrous fall. The only question that remained was whether it could be put back together again.

EPILOGUE: ALL THE KING'S MEN

The doubts about the League created by the Manchurian crisis were confirmed by the Abyssinian debacle. The one glimmer of hope remaining for League supporters amidst the wreckage of the Geneva system of collective security was that the League would learn from adversity and become the effective instrument originally intended. When the Assembly conceded defeat on July 4, it issued, at the same time, a call for all members to submit "any proposals they may wish to make in order to improve... the application of the principles of the Covenant."¹ The League had failed to control aggression and its raison d'etre was in doubt. To preserve the concept of the League, a new beginning was needed -- a reestablishment of the League on sounder bases to restore the credibility and enthusiasm on which it depended. But there was no firm or agreed ground on which to rebuild. In essence, the effort to revive the League after the Abyssinian crisis was a patently hopeless attempt to recreate something which had never been. But, for those who looked upon the institutionalization of peace as the only alternative to chaos and destruction, there seemed no choice but to make the effort.

¹League of Nations, Official Journal, July 1936, p. 769.

Revival of the League's fortunes, insofar as possible, depended upon significant change, but change carried with it the danger of discord. The Assembly agreed on July 4 that proposals for reform of the Covenant were in order, but it split along predictable lines on the type of proposals to invite. France, the Soviet Union, Poland and the Little Entente wanted to limit consideration to proposals to make the obligations laid down under articles 11 and 16 automatic and precise. Britain, the Dominions, the European neutral states and Hungary preferred to deemphasize the coercive provisions of the Covenant and open the discussion to proposals to make the League more attractive to the revisionist powers.² The Assembly agreed on a vague formula to paper over the dispute, but the differences expressed were long-standing, fundamental and firm. The gloomy but realistic assessment of the British Foreign Office on July 13 was that "there was no possibility of securing general agreement at Geneva to any substantial amendment of the Covenant."³ Nonetheless, the League pursued the goal of reform and revival throughout the remainder of its existence. Many of the League's staunchest supporters were convinced that the only change required was a change in the hearts and minds of the leaders of the western democracies, and they continued to hope, against all odds, that with a change of attitude or

²Ibid., pp. 751-56; FO 371/20474 W6019/79/98.

³Cab 24/263 C.P.210(36).

practice, the League would be restored to its proper stature. In Britain, official interest in the revival of the League coincided with Eden's tenure as Foreign Secretary.

Reform of the League was an idea as old as the League itself. Repeated attempts had been made during the first fifteen years of the League's existence to define, enliven, strengthen or temper the functions of the League. With few exceptions, the proposed amendments of the Covenant had been rejected. The most notable attempts to revise the Covenant were the 1921 resolutions dealing with article 16, the 1923 resolution treating article 10, the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the Geneva Protocol, the Treaty for Improving the Means of Preventing War, the Convention on Financial Assistance to the Victim of Aggression, and the efforts to incorporate the Kellogg Pact into the Covenant.⁴ Except for the resolutions designed to temper the functioning of articles 10 and 16, the major efforts to revise the Covenant during the 1920s were all framed to strengthen the capacity of the League to resist aggression. Article 19, which provided for orderly change, was a dead letter throughout the period.

Britain was largely interested in the League as an instrument of conciliation rather than coercion, and British statesmen became increasingly concerned, as practice determined the character of the League, that the Covenant was being

⁴All of these proposals failed of final adoption. Frank P. Walters, A History of the League of Nations (London: Oxford University Press, 1967; first published in 1952), pp. 148, 222-28, 258-59, 268-76, 377-83, 384-87.



used as a device to guarantee the status quo. Britain looked with particular concern upon the transparent French desire to use the League to contain Germany. Successive British governments shied away from proposals to make the coercive provisions of the Covenant automatic.

Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933 and the revisionist powers began to press their own demands for League reform. Japan was aggrieved by the League's refusal to recognize a change in the status quo in Manchuria and gave notice on March 27, 1933, of intent to quit the League.⁵ Hitler's Germany demanded full equality of treatment and insisted that the Covenant be divorced from the 'dictated' treaty of Versailles. When the Disarmament Conference failed to accede to Hitler's demand for equality, Germany withdrew, and on October 21, 1933, Germany gave notice that it would also withdraw from the League.⁶ Against that backdrop, Mussolini brought the issue of League reform to the fore. He proposed a four power pact among Italy, Germany, Britain and France which would have concentrated the effective direction of the League in the hands of the great powers, and given them authority to carry out the revision of the peace treaties. Germany welcomed the idea and Britain initialled a revised version, but the eastern European allies of France applied

⁵Arnold J. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1933 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 515.

⁶Ibid., p. 221.

pressure on Paris and France killed the proposal.⁷ In frustration, the Fascist Grand Council announced on December 6, 1933 that Italy would withdraw from the League unless it was radically reformed.⁸

Italy's demand prompted a full review of the question by the British Foreign Office. A memorandum drafted on January 4, 1934 by Herbert Malkin, Alexander Cadogan, Rex Leeper, William Strang and Skrine Stevenson concluded that the only proposal for reform which would command general support at Geneva was the separation of the peace treaties from the Covenant. That would meet a specific German demand, but it would not draw Germany back into the League, nor would it solve the League's other problems. There were a number of other proposals advanced over the years at Geneva which were attractive from a British point of view, such as the proposal to reconstitute the League Council to accord the great powers more authority, and the proposal to limit the coercive provisions of the Covenant, but such proposals were clearly unacceptable to other members of the League. And none of the proposed reforms seemed likely to satisfy the revisionist powers or draw them into contented participation in the League.⁹

⁷For a full treatment of the four power pact see Konrad H. Jaraush, The Four Power Pact, 1933 (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society Press, 1965).

⁸Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1933, p. 223.

⁹FO 371/18537 W260/129/98.

Nothing was done by the League to facilitate change or to strengthen the League's capacity to resist aggression before Mussolini forced consideration of both problems by posing a threat to Abyssinia. The Italian conquest of Abyssinia served to magnify and underline the problems of security and flexibility. But it left the League with little authority with which to manage them.

The Foreign Office considered the problem of reform at several points during the Abyssinian crisis, but the conclusion drawn was that the time was not right to raise the issue. That conclusion held until the final stages of the crisis. The one exception was the proposal advanced in Sir Samuel Hoare's speech at Geneva on September 11 to open access to colonial raw materials through the agency of the League. The raw materials proposal reflected the British desire to channel revision through the League and to meet the more reasonable aspirations of Italy and Germany, but Foreign Office officials recognized that an ambitious proposal to breathe life into article 19, or to suggest in other ways that the League accommodate itself to change would run afoul of France and the little Entente.¹⁰ On February 24, 1936 Foreign Secretary Eden spoke out against League reform.

¹⁰A memorandum on the question of reform by Orme Sargent on September 5, 1935, prompted extensive minuting within the Foreign Office. A letter from Sir Eric Drummond on September 16 led to another round of minuting on the subject. And a memorandum on November 19 by Foreign Secretary Hoare produced a full analysis by senior officials on the implications of the raw materials proposal. Foreign Office opinion on the

What matters, he said, "is not so much the wording of the Covenant as the will of the nations to work it."¹¹ The will shown by League members during the Abyssinian crisis was not sufficient to make the League work, however, and the question of reform resurfaced unavoidably during the final stages of the Abyssinian collapse.

On April 30, the new cabinet committee formed by Baldwin to consider the question of collective security met to weigh the implications of the failure of the League. Eden conceded the League's shortcomings but insisted that the government "must attempt to build our future policy on the basis of its continued existence." In his view, even a crippled League was of concrete importance to Britain. It provided a measure of security in the event of an attack on a British possession, it was a convenient instrument through which to exert British influence in every part of the world, it was a vital bridge to Europe, it facilitated the conduct of foreign policy and won support for it in Parliament, it provided a forum for close cooperation with the Dominions and obviated the difficult constitutional question of Dominion support in the event of war, it offered a rationale for rearmament, and, insofar

subject of League reform was ably summed up on January 18, 1936 by William Strang. Strang argued, and Carr, Sargent, Malkin, Collier, Mounsey, Vansittart, Cranborne and Stanhope agreed, that the Covenant could stand considerable improvement, but no major change was practicable. FO 371/19687 W8174/2304/98 and W8582/2304/98, FO 371/19692 W10033/7711/98, FO 371/20472 W1431/79/98.

¹¹ 309 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 82.

as it served to preserve peace, it also served British policy. The committee, which consisted of Baldwin, Chamberlain, Simon, Halifax, Hailsham, Inskip and Eden, agreed that the League was worth preserving, but they authorized an inquiry into the coercive provisions of the Covenant.¹² Eden translated the committee's conclusions in a memorandum on May 28 in which he instructed the Foreign Office to presume, in assessing the question of League reform, that there would be:

- (1) No amendment of the Covenant itself.
- (2) Amendment of the Assembly Resolutions of 1921 for the purpose of interpreting in a limitative sense the universal obligations assumed by members of the League under article 16.¹³

Consideration of the question of League reform was well under way in London, therefore, when the Assembly called for recommendations on July 4. The principal members of the cabinet were agreed that the League ought to be preserved, if possible, and Eden was determined to save as much of the original structure as he could.

The cabinet took a lively interest in the question of League reform during the summer of 1936, at the expense of a

¹²FO 371/20473 W3935/75/98; Eden's analysis of the value of the League was developed in FO 371/20472 W3851/79/98.

¹³FO 371/20473 W4815/79/98.

holiday which they all sorely needed. The future of the League was a serious and pressing question and most members of the cabinet worked out their ideas on the subject and submitted them to Eden. To give the cabinet a basis for assessment, the Foreign Office prepared a memorandum which laid out the various options open to the League. The Foreign Office dismissed as too radical all proposals to either strengthen or eliminate the coercive provisions of the Covenant. The only proposal for reform which the Foreign Office felt might command general support at Geneva would be an "intermediate" proposal to maintain the Covenant as it was but reduce the coercive responsibilities of League members by interpretive resolutions. Such a compromise proposal would not entirely eliminate the risk of being drawn into war on an issue not vital to British interests, however, and might irritate rather than conciliate Germany.¹⁴ Cabinet interest in revival of the League was based in good part upon a desire to draw Germany back to Geneva, and the Foreign Office warning about German sensibilities was taken seriously.¹⁵

By and large, the suggestions submitted by cabinet members to Eden were as cautious as the Foreign Office assessment. The ministers recognized that a proposal to alter the Covenant radically could split the League, but they felt that some change was necessary if the League was to survive. Only

¹⁴Cab 24/263 C.P.210(36).

¹⁵Cab 23/85 50(36)2.

Sir Thomas Inskip proposed the elimination of article 16, which he felt should be replaced by "a declaration of intention to cooperate with other nations in protecting common interests as to which each nation will be its own judge."¹⁶ Several other cabinet members also felt that the coercive provisions of the Covenant should be modified but they did not go so far as to suggest that the Covenant should be altered. Malcolm MacDonald, who had responsibility for coordination with the Dominions, warned that it would be virtually impossible to draft a proposal on which the Dominions could agree. Canada, at one extreme, favored the deletion of article 16 and the creation of a "consultative" League while South African officials favored strengthening article 16.¹⁷

It was evident, therefore, that the Covenant could not easily be revised, but the cabinet were almost unanimous in feeling that Britain should make it clear that the League would have to adopt a narrow interpretation of its peace-keeping functions. Runciman and Stanhope felt that by tempering the coercive provisions of the Covenant the League might be able to entice some of the important non-members to apply for membership.¹⁸ Hoare, who had returned to the cabinet as

¹⁶Cab 24/263 C.P.223(36).

¹⁷Cab 24/263 C.P.222(36).

¹⁸Cab 24/263 C.P.224(36); FO 371/20475 W11340/79/98.

First Lord of the Admiralty, felt very strongly that the government should issue a statement to the effect that Britain had neither the inclination nor the means to be the policeman for the League. Until the League became the universal body originally intended, Hoare felt that the government should publicly define those interests which Britain would fight to defend.¹⁹ Chamberlain agreed with Hoare but took his analysis a step further. Chamberlain had long been concerned about the inability of the League to function as intended and had previously proposed the establishment of an international police force to enable the League to enforce its decisions. By the end of the Abyssinian crisis, however, he was convinced that the coercive provisions of the Covenant could not be universally implemented by a truncated League. Consequently, he proposed that the obligations assumed by the League members under articles 11 and 16 be limited to areas of vital national interest as defined by regional pacts on the order of the Locarno agreements. He felt that Britain could thereby limit its liabilities to western Europe, the Mediterranean and the Far East. He also thought that some modification of League procedures should be established to "allow of easier discussion of territorial grievances," but he was not clear how that should be done.²⁰

¹⁹Cab 24/263 C.P.213(36).

²⁰FO 371/20475 W9131/79/98; Neville Chamberlain to Lord Iothian, June 10, 1936, Lothian Papers GD40/17/445; Feiling, Chamberlain, pp. 295-96; William R. Rock, Neville Chamberlain (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 102-03.

Chamberlain's views on reform of the League were well defined in his speech to the 1900 Club, but he repeated them in a memorandum to Eden. As he explained in a letter to Baldwin, he wanted to stress that no proposals for League reform should be advanced until they had been discussed in Berlin.²¹ Chamberlain's opinion counted for a great deal in the cabinet, and when Eden formulated his own proposal on August 20, in response to those which he had received, he noted that a meeting of the Locarno powers had been scheduled and he suggested that the British position on reform of the League should be withheld as long as possible. He was scheduled to deliver a speech to the Assembly at the end of September and he could outline the government's position at that point.²²

As it developed, Eden's speech to the League Assembly on September 25, 1936 was the only major pronouncement made by the British government on the question of reform. Since Britain did not submit a proposal to the Secretariat in advance of the Assembly meeting, Eden's speech, which opened the discussion of the question, was awaited with particular interest at Geneva. In essence, the speech which Eden delivered was refined from the suggestions advanced by cabinet members, overlaid by the act of faith which Eden felt was essential to the League's survival. But the speech was

²¹Neville Chamberlain to Stanley Baldwin, August 21, 1936, Baldwin Papers, Vol. 171.

²²Cab 24/263 C.P.219(36).

phrased in cautious, general terms, carefully weighed by the cabinet to avoid the impression that Britain was eager to take the lead in restructuring the League.²³

The pledge Eden offered to the Assembly on September 25 was that Britain's policy would "continue to be based upon its membership of the League of Nations." He added that in his view the machinery of the League was generally sound but could be improved without unnecessary amendment. The failure of the League during the Abyssinian crisis was owing, he said, to a lack of universality and to the failure of the League to play a more energetic role during the early stages of the crisis. To overcome the latter problem, Eden proposed that article 11 be interpreted so as to allow the Council to take action without the consent of the states in question. To make the League more attractive to non-members and to bring it into line with what he described as "the realities of the world situation," Eden proposed the separation of the Covenant from the peace treaties and suggested that coercive responsibilities under the Covenant be limited to areas outlined by regional pacts.²⁴

Eden's speech was one of several on the subject, collectively remarkable more for the variety of opinion expressed than for the light which they shed on the problem. The Argentine delegation favored the removal of most of the coercive

²³FO 371/20475 W9940/79/98; Cab 24/263 C.P.219(36); Cab 23/85 56(36)2.

²⁴League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 155, pp. 44-47.

aspects of the Covenant and insisted that any changes proposed be effected by amendment of the Covenant rather than interpretative resolution.²⁵ Halvdan Koht of Norway felt that a consultative League could be created without tampering with the Covenant if League members would concentrate upon removal of the causes of war in a spirit of "pacifism in the true sense of the word."²⁶ Yvon Delbos, of France, on the other hand, insisted that the primary duty of the League was to "guarantee the security of its members." Consequently, he argued, "the League's means of action -- preventive and repressive -- should be strengthened."²⁷ Maxime Litvinoff, of the Soviet Union, pointed to the storm clouds gathering over Europe and asked the League to "organize mutual aid" and "draw up its plan of action." The aggressor states outside the League were organizing for war, he said, and the League would be wise to begin organizing collective resistance.²⁸ Other proposals touched on disarmament, treaty revision, the elimination of economic sanctions, and definition of an aggressor.²⁹ The effect of the various proposals was to confirm that there was little basis for agreed reform of the League.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 86-87.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 52-54.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 51-52.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 61-64.

²⁹For an assessment of the various proposals see FO 371/20476 W11840/79/98.

Nonetheless, the Assembly established a committee, known as the Committee of Twenty-eight, to consider the question of reform and report at the next session of the Assembly.³⁰ The Committee of Twenty-eight appointed rapporteurs to prepare reports on the most significant proposals for reform. Eden's assistant Lord Cranborne acted as rapporteur on the question of universality and Paul-Boncour of France served the same function on the question of regional pacts of mutual security. The Foreign Office remained fully engaged therefore with the question of League reform and the preparation of Lord Cranborne's report throughout much of 1937. The cabinet, however, became increasingly wary of the issue, and, with the exception of Eden, showed less and less interest in the League.

Several factors combined to reduce cabinet interest in revival of the League. Most significantly, it finally became clear during the negotiations for the five-power talks that Hitler had no intention of negotiating a new Locarno agreement, nor of rejoining the League.³¹ Without German participation, the League lost much of its potential usefulness in the eyes of such senior cabinet members as Chamberlain, Simon

³⁰League of Nations, Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 162, pp. 28-30.

³¹Cab 23/85 58(36)3; Cab 23/86 60(36)1. This impression was confirmed by Lord Halifax's visit to Germany in November 1937. Cab 23/90 43(37)3.

and Hoare. And the dogged insistence of League supporters in Britain that the Covenant need only be applied to succeed compounded the cabinet's difficulty in adopting a more realistic policy with respect to the League.³² Organized support for the League began to wane in Britain after the Abyssinian crisis, but the League of Nations Union was still a political force to be reckoned with, particularly in Parliament where Lord Cecil and several other leading members were in a position to remind the government that they remained committed to the League as the basis of British policy.³³ In April 1936, leading supporters of the League in Britain and France organized the International Peace Campaign, which was an attempt to inject new life into the League movement by appealing for support from organizations such as trade unions, cooperative societies, church, professional, civic and farm groups around the world. In September 1936, the leaders of the campaign organized a World Peace Congress in Brussels and boasted of an affiliation of organizations representing some four million people.³⁴ But the Spanish civil war polarized political

³² Lord Cecil to Gilbert Murray, July 30, 1936, Murray Papers, box 16a+d; Lord Cecil to Lord Halifax, July 30, 1936, Cecil Papers, Add. 51084; Notes of a conversation between a League of Nations Union delegation and Foreign Secretary Eden, February 5, 1937, Cecil Papers, Add. 51083.

³³ 105 H.L. Deb., 5s., cols. 84-88; 322 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 167, 979, 1721; 323 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 536-37; 325 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 38-39.

³⁴ For a discussion of the development and significance of the International Peace Campaign see Donald S. Birn, "The League of Nations Union and Collective Security," Journal of Contemporary History, IX, 3 (July 1974), 148-50.

opinion in Britain and elsewhere, and the International Peace Campaign and, to a lesser extent, the League of Nations Union came increasingly to represent opinion on the left. Consequently, they lost what limited influence they had with the largely Conservative government.³⁵ The Spanish civil war, which captured international attention just as the Abyssinian crisis wound down, separated the government from supporters of the League in Britain in several respects. The government sought to confine the danger of war to Spain by sponsoring the Non-Intervention Committee in London. The Labour party and other supporters of the League denounced the Non-Intervention Committee as a charade and demanded that the government support action through the League to uphold the Spanish Republic against outside aggression.³⁶ Angry supporters of Spain and the League came to view the government as fascist in sympathy, and the government dismissed their critics as communists, fellow travelers or fools who refused to see that the League could not hope to manage the Spanish problem so

³⁵The leaders of the League of Nations Union recognized the problem created by the involvement of communists in the International Peace Campaign, and some, such as Maxwell Barnett, wanted to separate the League of Nations Union from the new organization. Gilbert Murray to Lord Cecil, October 12, 1936, Murray Papers, box 16a+d; Philip Noel-Baker to Gilbert Murray, December 13, 1937, Murray Papers, box 4.

³⁶Anthony Eden to Lord Cecil, September 17, 1936, Cecil Papers, Add. 51083; Gilbert Murray to Anthony Eden, March 18, 1937, FO 371/21328 W5916/7/41; 322 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 1131-34, 1332-83.

long as Germany was not a member. The fact that Germany was not a member of the League also created, in the eyes of the government, the danger that the League might be converted by the French and their allies into a grand alliance against Germany. The Government were determined not to become part of an anti-Nazi or anti-Fascist 'bloc,' and by November 1936 the inclination in London was to move slowly and cautiously on the question of reform of the League.³⁷

With appropriate hints from London, consideration of League reform went at a snail's pace. In December 1936 the French ambassador in London approached the Foreign Office to ask if Britain recognized the Little Entente, the Franco-Soviet treaty and the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty as regional pacts worthy of League support. William Strang responded that, on the contrary, Britain favored a move away from automatic guarantees of support.³⁸ On the question of facilitating change, the government backed away from Hoare's raw

³⁷ Cranborne was afraid that the League was in danger of becoming "the Front Populaire of nations," and he felt that the Soviet representative, Litvinoff, wanted to use the question of reform to drive Germany and Italy further from the League. He felt that, in the circumstances, the Committee of Twenty-eight "can do no good, and may do a great deal of harm." Strang, Cadogan and Vansittart agreed, and even Eden was not prepared to try to strengthen the League at the expense of universality. On December 16, 1936, Cranborne told the Turkish Foreign Minister, Rüstü Aras that Britain felt that the Committee of Twenty-eight "should proceed prudently and should not take too rapid decisions." FO 371/20477 W16909/79/98; FO 800/296.

³⁸ FO 371/20477 W17198/79/98.

materials proposal, and Cranborne wrote to Eden on March 9, 1937 that "it must be fairly obvious to all concerned that we are in fact playing for time and are largely engaged in stonewalling."³⁹ Cranborne's report on universality went through several drafts in the Foreign Office, and, as submitted to the League in September, was a comprehensive survey of the possibilities open to the League. The report pointed out the paradox involved in proposals to either strengthen or eliminate the coercive provisions of the Covenant. A "coercive" League had to be universal to be effective but could not achieve universality because of the coercive requirements. A "non-coercive" League could very likely achieve near universality but could do nothing to enforce peace. A third alternative, developed in the report, was an "intermediate" League providing for consultation in a crisis on whether coercive measures could be profitably applied in the given situation.⁴⁰

Although Cranborne's report made no recommendations, it was not difficult to discern that Britain leaned toward the compromise proposal outlined. Eden reviewed the question for the cabinet on December 17, 1937, and recommended such a proposal.⁴¹ Five days later, the cabinet, in their last

³⁹Lord Cranborne to Anthony Eden, March 9, 1937, FO 800/296.

⁴⁰There is a copy of Cranborne's report at FO 371/21242 W15139/250/98.

⁴¹Cab 24/273 C.P.315(37).

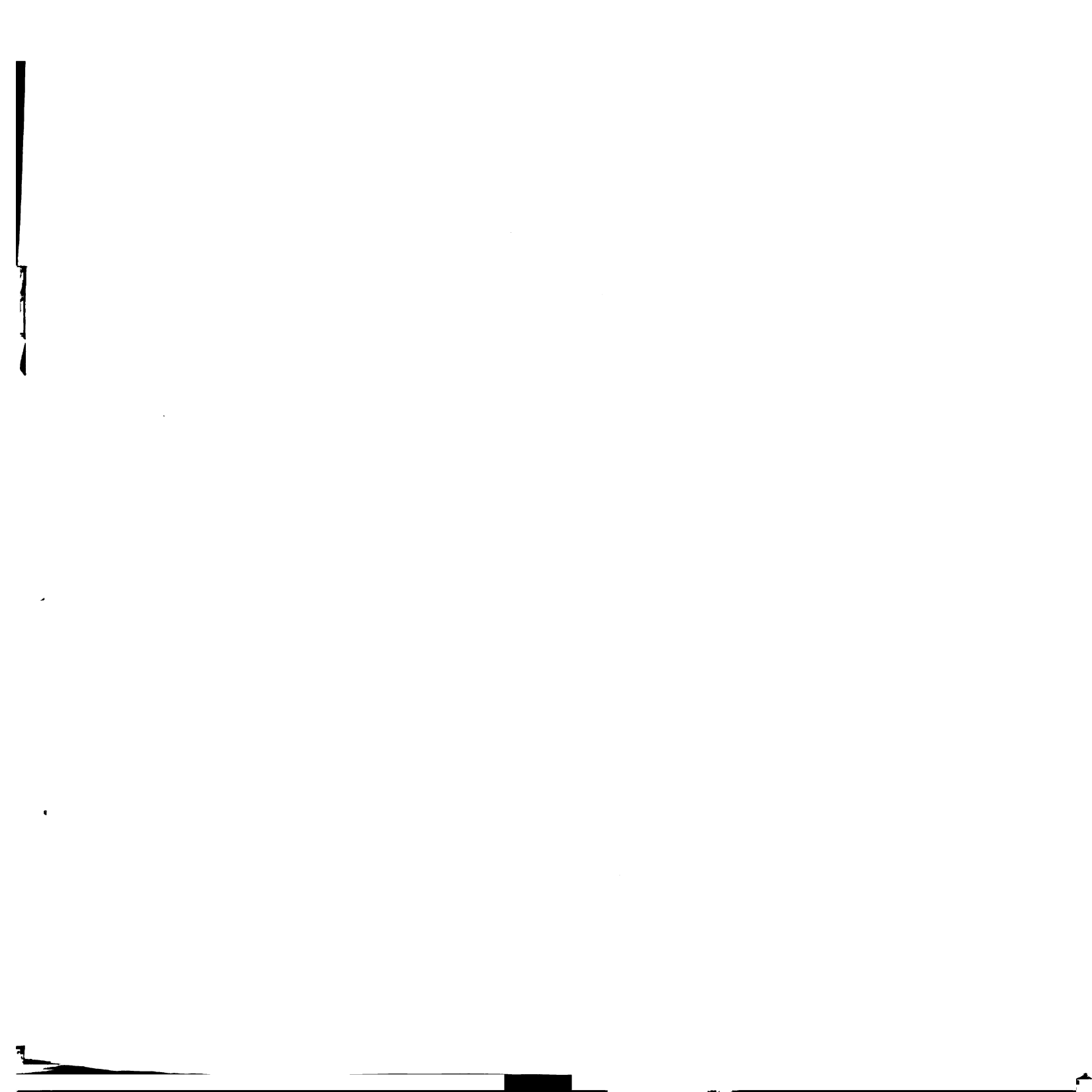
full consideration of the question, decided that "membership of the League should involve a general obligation to consult, and an additional obligation to take coercive action when, but only when, consultation between members of the League indicated that coercion might profitably be employed."⁴² Discussion on the topic was brief and desultory, despite the fact that the Committee of Twenty-eight had scheduled a discussion of Cranborne's report for January. It was clear from discussions at Geneva that the League would do little to reform itself.⁴³ Any proposal by Britain to moderate the burdens imposed by the Covenant would be offset by French and Soviet proposals to amplify those burdens. Cranborne's report was balanced against Paul-Boncour's report on regional pacts, which put the French position that all regional pacts should be supported by the establishment of automatic economic sanctions.⁴⁴ The cabinet's conclusion was that "the original conception of the League was impracticable so long as important nations remained outside," and they did not see any prospect of drawing those nations in.⁴⁵ Hence, they lost

⁴²Cab 23/90 48(37)6.

⁴³After submitting his report to the League on September 30, Cranborne recorded in his notes that there was a general understanding at Geneva that "the time was not ripe for the initiation of a discussion of the problem." FO 800/296.

⁴⁴There is a copy of Paul-Boncour's report at FO 371/21242 W15445/250/98.

⁴⁵Cab 23/90 48(37)6.



interest in the League, except to make certain that it did not become a holy alliance to preserve the status quo. The exception, as always, was Eden, who saw the weakness of the crippled League but held out hope that it could be revived. By December 1937, however, Eden's time in the cabinet was growing short.

While Eden remained in the cabinet he continued to be a useful foil against the ire of the opposition. League supporters no longer trusted him as they once had, but he was viewed as the best of a bad lot. The League of Nations Union hailed his speech at Geneva in September 1936 on the revival of the League.⁴⁶ When the opposition buzzed too loudly around the government, it was useful to have Eden on the front bench to proclaim his devotion to the League.⁴⁷ But, as rearmament became a largely accepted proposition, despite Labour's continuing protests, the League began to lose its domestic worth to the government. And the righteous attitude of League supporters grated on the nerves of the cabinet. Neville Chamberlain, who became Prime Minister in May 1937, became very tired of being accused of "treachery" for failure to pay full lip-service to the League.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Headway, October 1936.

⁴⁷ 328 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 594-96.

⁴⁸ On October 27, 1937, for example, Arthur Greenwood denounced the government for failure to make reference to the League of Nations in the King's Speech, reading into that omission a willingness to throw the League "to the wolves." 328 H.C. Deb., 5s., cols. 88-89.

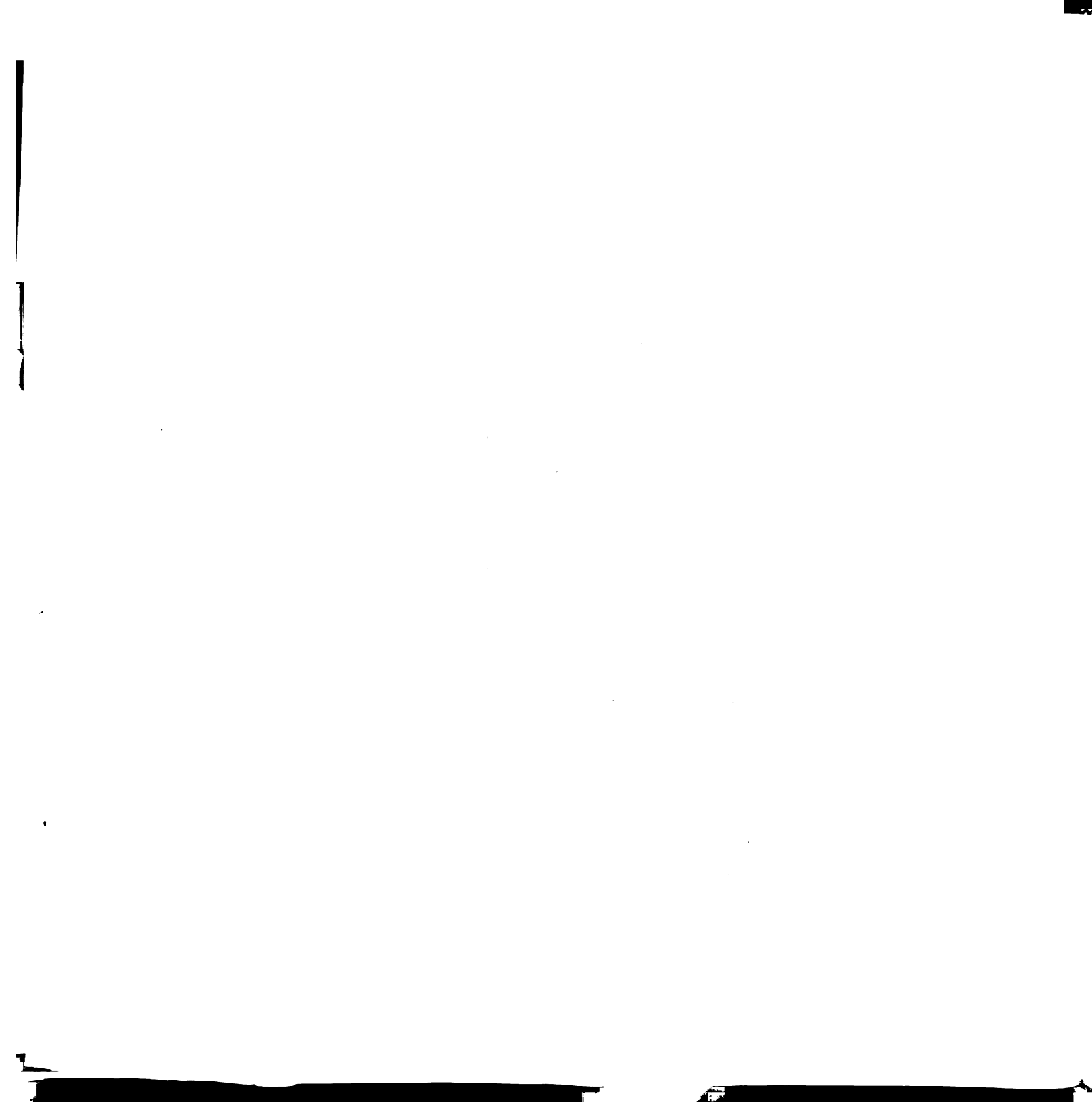
Chamberlain supported the compromise proposal on League reform advanced by Eden in December 1937, but, at the same time, began to move publicly away from what he saw as the dangerously unrealistic policy to which the government were still bound by membership of the League. On October 21, he pointed out that the League had demonstrated that it was not a guarantee against aggression. He added that "pending a regeneration of the League or its development into an effective instrument it is no use going on repeating 'the League.' We have to find practical means of restoring peace to the world."⁴⁹ He made the same point at the Lord Mayor's banquet on November 9, but noted that the government's policy remained to strengthen and use the League. He made it clear, however, that in preserving the peace of Europe he planned to rely upon "informal discussion" with Berlin and Rome rather than the League of Nations.⁵⁰

Chamberlain's inclination to manage relations with Hitler and Mussolini by means of "informal discussions" which circumvented the Foreign Office led to a falling out with Anthony Eden. Eden resigned from the cabinet on February 19, 1938, over the issue of restoring more cordial relations with Italy.⁵¹

⁴⁹327 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 166.

⁵⁰Neville Chamberlain, In Search of Peace (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 28.

⁵¹Of the several accounts of Eden's resignation, the best is Lord Halifax's detailed "Record of Events Connected with Anthony Eden's Resignation," a copy of which can be found in the Templewood Papers, General Political, X, 3. For cabinet discussion on the matter see Cab 23/92 6(38)1, 7(38)1, 8(38)1.



A number of factors figured into Eden's resignation, including Eden's unwillingness to recognize the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, which Chamberlain saw as essential to the reestablishment of normal dealings with Rome but which Eden opposed as another blow to the League. Abyssinia was an aspect of the differing views of the League maintained by Chamberlain and Eden which made it difficult for the two men to work together on foreign policy.

Before he resigned, Eden had an opportunity in January to make one final profession of faith to the League Council. He reassured the Council that the British government:

consider that the League despite its existing limitations is the best instrument which has yet been devised for giving effect to the principles of international co-operation and they are therefore determined to keep it in existence, to give it their full support, and to make use of its machinery and procedure to the fullest extent that circumstances permit.⁵²

The League by 1938 was beyond salvation by general professions of faith, however, and the Committee of Twenty-eight recognized as much in closing off its inconclusive discussions on February 1.⁵³ And any expectation that the issue could be

⁵²There is a copy of Eden's speech to the Council on January 27, 1938 at FO 371/22508 W1266/3/98.

⁵³Lord Cranborne's reports on the meeting of the Committee of Twenty-eight on January 31 and February 1, 1938 are at FO 371/22508 W1376/3/98 and W1524/3/98. Eden reported to the cabinet on February 2 that "the general sentiment at Geneva had been that on the subject of the future of the League of Nations the less said the better." Cab 23/92 3(38)3.

revived and the League restored as an instrument of collective security was effectively destroyed when Chamberlain pronounced the League dead during the debate over Eden's resignation:

At the last election it was still possible to hope that the League might afford collective security. I believed it myself. I do not believe it now.... I say we must not try to delude ourselves, and still more, we must not try to delude small weak nations into thinking that they will be protected by the League against aggression and acting accordingly, when we know that nothing of the kind can be expected.⁵⁴

In dismissing the League as an instrument of collective security, Chamberlain was merely drawing a conclusion which had been evident since the end of 1935. It was not a conclusion which was palatable to faithful supporters of the League, but even they were hard pressed to maintain that the League could handle the grave international problems on the horizon at the beginning of 1938. As it developed, Chamberlain's concept of forthright discussion and appeasement of grievances succeeded no better than the League had in preventing aggression. But he can hardly be faulted for failing to rely upon the League. The League was moribund after the Abyssinian crisis and, while the cabinet took some interest in reviving it while there seemed a chance of drawing Germany back to Geneva, it was evident from the outset that there was no possibility of achieving significant, agreed reform of the League. As to the conclusions which the government drew

⁵⁴ 332 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 227.

from the consideration given to reform of the League, perhaps the most significant, from a practical standpoint, was that it is virtually impossible to revise a multilateral international agreement unless there is a prior consensus on objectives. The League's experience with sanctions also suggested that universality and commitment were essential if the League was to exercise a police function. But unrestricted national sovereignty precluded full realization of the ideal developed in the Covenant. If that fact was still not evident to men such as Lord Robert Cecil and Anthony Eden, it was an established precept in the cabinet room in London after the departure of Eden.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Bibliographical Essay

As with most recent studies of British policy during the inter-war period, this study was made possible by the decision of the British government in 1967 to reduce the period of official documentation closed to scholars from fifty to thirty years. That decision opened up the entire inter-war period and offered scholars a vast new field of endeavor. Twentieth-century cabinet and Foreign Office materials are housed by the Public Record Office at its Portugal Street Annex, where an efficient and knowledgeable staff provides the researcher with easy access and sound advice. A complex system of indexing Foreign Office documentation can present a problem but is easily mastered. The documentation maintained by the Public Record Office on the Abyssinian crisis presents the student of British policy with an embarrassment of riches.

This study, which is essentially an analysis of policy formulation at the cabinet level, depends heavily upon the minutes of cabinet meetings, contained in the Cab 23 series, and upon the papers prepared for cabinet consideration, contained in the Cab 24 series. The basic FO 371 series contains all of the extensive Foreign Office files on the crisis. The Foreign Office files offer a wealth of detail and were essential to this study on several points. Much

of the important Foreign Office analysis and information on the Abyssinian crisis was drawn together and presented to the cabinet in the Cab 24 series, however. A cabinet level study of the crisis necessarily draws more from cabinet minutes and cabinet papers than from Foreign Office files. An assessment of the government's handling of the question of League reform, on the other hand, must rest directly upon the Foreign Office files since the cabinet gave over the task of analysis and recommendation very largely to the Foreign Office. The most important files on the question of League reform are FO 371/20472-20477, 21242 and 22508. The Public Record Office also maintains the valuable FO 800 series of semi-official correspondence of leading Foreign Office officials. Of interest to the student of the Abyssinian crisis in the FO 800 series are the papers of Hoare, Cranborne and Cadogan. The correspondence of Halifax is also included in the FO 800 series but does not begin until he becomes Foreign Secretary. Hoare's correspondence, with Eden in particular, is essential to any study of British policy during the crisis.

Copies of many of the items found in the FO 800/295 file may also be found in the Templewood papers at the Cambridge University Library. The Templewood papers cover the full range of Hoare's public career and are predictably rich on the Abyssinian crisis. The Baldwin papers, also at the Cambridge University Library, are less useful. The Baldwin papers reflect the limited role which Baldwin played in the

management of the Abyssinian crisis. Time did not permit the consultation of the Vansittart papers at Cambridge. The papers of Sir John Simon were consulted in the library of the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London by permission of the present Viscount Simon. The Simon papers are thin on the Abyssinian crisis but a diary, maintained intermittently by Simon, did provide valuable insight into Simon's point of view. There were two other members of the cabinet whose papers would undoubtedly be of considerable value to a study of British policy during the Abyssinian crisis. But Lord Avon is still alive and has not yet opened his papers to researchers, who must make do with his memoirs. And the papers of Neville Chamberlain were similarly closed to scholars when the author was in Britain.

Lord Robert Cecil and Professor Gilbert Murray were the leaders of the effort on the part of the League of Nations Union to push the government down the sanctions road. Their papers offer an insight into the League movement in Britain and the government's reaction to it. Lord Cecil's extensive papers are well organized and managed by the British Museum. The Gilbert Murray papers are in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University and are provisionally organized but readily useable. On the other side of the aisle, the most incisive critic of Britain's involvement in the League was Lord Lothian. The Lothian papers, at the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh, are full of debate among Lothian, Cecil, Murray and others on the proper role of the League and Britain's place in it.

Documentary collections treating Britain's role during the Abyssinian crisis are still very limited. Stephen Heald did an excellent job of editing the published sources available at the time for the Royal Institute of International Affairs in volume II of Documents on International Affairs, 1935 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937). The Foreign Office published a limited selection of documents bearing on the crisis in Cmd. 5044, Ethiopia No. 1 (1935); Cmd. 5071, Ethiopia No. 1 (1936); and Cmd. 5072, Ethiopia No. 2 (1936). And there is information on British policy in the American series Foreign Relations of the United States, in the French series Documents diplomatiques francais, and in Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945 which was edited jointly in the United States and Great Britain. The three volumes which will cover the Abyssinian crisis in the British series Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939 are still forthcoming but are expected soon.

Until the documentation from British archives appears in print, scholars without ready access to the Public Record Office will have to continue to depend, in part, upon a rich trove of memoir literature. This literature adds a dimension to the information available on policy formulation not found in official documentation. Of the memoirs published by British participants in the Abyssinian drama Lord Avon's The Eden Memoirs. Facing the Dictators (London: Cassell, 1962) offers the most information. Eden draws directly upon cabinet and Foreign Office files in developing his full account

of the crisis, but his use of the evidence is very subjective and his account must be used with care. The same can be said of Viscount Templewood's Nine Troubled Years (London: Collins, 1954) in which Hoare develops a defense of his role in the crisis. Hoare does not provide the detail that Eden does, and his account is occasionally inaccurate on matters of detail, but he does present a much clearer picture of the concerns which weighed upon the cabinet than is to be found in Eden's account. In contrast to the full accounts provided by Eden and Hoare, Simon, the other Foreign Secretary involved in the crisis, offers almost no information of value in his memoirs, entitled Retrospect (London: Hutchinson, 1952). Lord Halifax carried considerable weight in the cabinet on foreign policy matters, but his memoirs, entitled Fulness of Days (London: Collins, 1957), can be similarly dismissed as thin and uninformative. The recollections of some of the less important members of the cabinet, such as Lord Eustace Percy's Some Memories (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958), the Earl of Swinton's Sixty Years of Power (New York: James H. Heinemann, 1967) and Alfred Duff Cooper's Old Men Forget (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), are of limited but definite value. Of Foreign Office figures Lord Vansittart's The Mist Procession (London: Hutchinson, 1958) provides flashes of illumination overlaid by Vansittart's ornate style. Sir Maurice Peterson discusses his direct involvement in the crisis in Both Sides of the Curtain (London: Constable, 1950),

as does Sir Geoffrey Thompson in Front-Line Diplomat (London: Hutchison, 1959) but both accounts are rather thin.

Outside of the government, Thomas Jones may have enjoyed the most privileged view of the development of cabinet policy owing to his close friendship with Baldwin. Jones' A Diary with Letters, 1931-1950 (London: Oxford University Press, 1954) provides valuable insight into the working of Baldwin's mind. Two of the keenest observers of the debate in Parliament over Abyssinia and the League were Leo Amery and Harold Nicolson. Both sat on the government backbenches but were possessed of independent minds. Nicolson was a first-rate diarist whose Diaries and Letters, 1930-1939, edited by his son Nigel (New York: Atheneum, 1966) capture the flavor of the crisis. Amery was a persistent critic of Britain's involvement in the League, and the third volume of his memoirs, entitled My Political Life: The Unforgiving Years (London: Hutchinson, 1955), treats the crisis from that point of view. At the other extreme, Lord Cecil of Chelwood offers a different indictment of the government in A Great Experiment (London: Cape, 1941) and in All the Way (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949). The League of Nations Union's point of view can also be found in Lord Allen of Hurtwood's papers, edited by Martin Gilbert as Flough My Own Furrow (London: Longmans, Green, 1965). And for an insider's view of developments at Geneva, A. C. Temperley's The Whispering Gallery of Europe (London: Collins, 1939) is valuable.

For the details of the Italian management of the diplomatic aspects of the Abyssinian crisis, Baron Pompeo Aloisi's Journal, 25 juillet 1932-14 juin 1936 translated by Maurice Vaussard (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957) is essential. Emilio De Bono outlines the planning for conquest in Anno XIII: the Conquest of an Empire (London: the Cresset Press, 1937), and Pietro Badoglio's The War in Abyssinia (London: Methuen, 1937) takes up the story of the Italian campaign in Abyssinia where De Bono leaves off. Count Ciano was privy to much that went on in Rome and Abyssinia, but Ciano's Diplomatic Papers, edited by Malcolm Muggeridge (London: Odhams, 1948), is of little use on the Abyssinian crisis.

The Diary of Pierre Laval (New York: Scribner's, 1948) does not unlock the mystery of his motives or his character. A number of French memoirs do shed light on the quandry in which the French government found themselves during the Abyssinian crisis. Among the most important of the French memoirs are Charles de Chambrun, Traditions et souvenirs (Paris: Flammarion, 1952), Pierre-Etienne Flandin, Politique Francaise, 1919-1940 (Paris: Nouvelles, 1947), Edouard Herriot, Jadis, II: D'une guerre à l'autre, 1914-1936 (Paris: Flammarion, 1952) and General Maurice Gamelin, Servir: Le Prologue du drame, 1930-août 1939 (Paris: Plon, 1946).

The other primary sources essential to a study of British policy during the Abyssinian crisis and after are the Parliamentary Debates of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, published in the fifth series of Hansard, and the records of

the League Council and Assembly, published in the League's Official Journal. Public opinion during the crisis must be measured in good part by consulting the British daily press and periodic journals. The quality London papers, such as The Times, the Daily Telegraph, the Daily Herald and the News Chronicle were particularly important in that they, along with the Manchester Guardian, did much to shape and reflect informed opinion. The best barometer of the opinions and aspirations of League supporters in Britain was the journal of League of Nations Union, Headway.

Of the extensive secondary literature which exists on the Abyssinian crisis and the British role in it, it is safe to say that the best books have yet to be published. F. W. Deakin is working on a study of the Abyssinian question in Anglo-Italian relations during the inter-war period. And Esmonde Robertson is preparing a multi-archival study of Mussolini's foreign policy. Until these new studies appear, the best overall treatment of the Abyssinian crisis will remain Arnold Toynbee's Abyssinia and Italy, published as volume II of the Royal Institute of International Affairs' Survey of International Affairs, 1935 (1936). H. V. Hodson contributed a useful chapter on "The economic aspects of the Italo-Abyssinian conflict" to Professor Toynbee's study. Toynbee did a remarkable job of pulling together the available information at the time, but the study is necessarily provisional and marred by Toynbee's emotional involvement with the question. George W. Baer has written a more objective

assessment of The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), but his study, while useful, perpetuates many of the usual misconceptions about British policy. It is to be hoped that Professor Haer will take advantage of the opening of the British archives to continue his study through the Abyssinian conflict in a more balanced fashion.

Among the older accounts of the crisis, perhaps the most succinct and valuable as an introduction is in G. M. Gathorne-Hardy's A Short History of International Affairs, 1920 to 1938 (London: Oxford University Press, 1938). Gathorne-Hardy condemns British policy in fairly standard terms, but his account is more dispassionate than Toynbee's and is at a distant remove from diatribes such as "Cato's" Guilty Men (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1940) and "Vigilantes'" Why We Are Losing the Peace (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939). Two recent surveys of the Abyssinian crisis do little to shed additional light on the subject. Frank Hardie's The Abyssinian Crisis (London: B. T. Batsford, 1974) focuses on British policy and draws upon cabinet materials but is little more than a chronicle. James Dugan and Laurence Lafore's Days of Emperor and Clown (New York: Doubleday, 1973) is a disappointing updating of the standard interpretation which rests largely upon secondary materials and focuses more on the fighting in Abyssinia than on the diplomatic background.

The best recent study devoted solely to the war itself is Angelo Del Boca's The Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 translated

by P. D. Cummins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). A. J. Barker's The Civilizing Mission (New York: Dial, 1968) is less reliable. An important assessment of the military view of the crisis from London is Arthur Marder's "The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36," American Historical Review, LXXV, 5 (June 1970), pp. 1327-56.

Biographies are important for information on the role and attitude of Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain during the Abyssinian crisis. Neither Baldwin nor Chamberlain wrote memoirs. There is, unfortunately, still no satisfactory biography of Baldwin. G. M. Young's Stanley Baldwin (London: Hart-Davis, 1952) is a curiously unsympathetic authorized biography. H. Montgomery Hyde's Baldwin (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973) is a traditional life and times rather than a political biography. Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, on the other hand, went through an enormous amount of material to prepare the type of study that is needed but they apparently did so in great haste and their Baldwin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969) is full of errors. It is particularly unreliable on the Abyssinian crisis. Neville Chamberlain, by contrast, has been much better served by his biographers. Keith Feiling's The Life of Neville Chamberlain (London: Macmillan, 1946) is excellent, given the limited material available to the author. He did not have access to governmental archives nor to several private collections which have opened since 1946, but he made good use of the access which he was granted to Chamberlain's papers. His is an authorized

biography, and hence sympathetic, but fundamentally sound. Iain Macleod's Neville Chamberlain (London: Frederick Muller, 1961) is also good but adds little to Feiling's account. A new biography of Chamberlain incorporating the materials recently made available, is being prepared by David Dilks and Alan Beattie. David Carlton is doing the same thing for Lord Avon, who sorely needs a good biographer. Alan Campbell-Johnson's Sir Anthony Eden (London: Robert Hale, 1955) and Randolph Churchill's The Rise and Fall of Sir Anthony Eden (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1959) do not begin to take the measure of the man and his impact on foreign policy. The career of Lord Halifax also needs to be studied. The Earl of Birkenhead's Halifax (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965) is the work of a friend rather than a scholar. Ian Colvin's biography of Vansittart, entitled in its American version None So Blind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965) and published in Britain as Vansittart in Office, is the type of biography which could be usefully done on many of the leading advisers of the National government. Stephen Roskill's multi-volume treatment of the career of Lord Hankey, Hankey Man of Secrets (3 vols. London: Collins, 1970-74), is setting a standard for such biographies which will be hard to match. Biographies of Lord Cecil and Gilbert Murray are needed and are being prepared by Professors R. N. Swift and F. West respectively. A good biography of the principal intellectual adversary of Cecil and Murray is J. R. M. Butler's Lord Iothian (London: Macmillan, 1960).

Biographies are also of some use in determining what was happening in Paris, Rome, Geneva and Addis Ababa. Leonard Mosley has written a readable biography of Haile Selassie: The Conquering Lion (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964). The thesis of James Barros' study of Avenol's role as Secretary-General of the League is evident in the title: Betrayal From Within: Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 1933-1940 (London: Yale University Press, 1969). Ivonne Kirkpatrick's Mussolini: A Study in Power (New York: Hawthorn, 1964) is one of the better treatments of il Duce's checkered career. Alfred Mallet's Pierre Laval (2 vols. Paris: Dumont, 1955) and Hubert Cole's Laval (New York: Putnam, 1963) do not answer all of the questions posed by Laval's role in the Abyssinian crisis.

For an understanding of the pivotal position of France during the Abyssinian crisis, the best studies are Franklin D. Laurens, France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936 (The Hague: Mouton, 1967) and Arnold Wolfers' older but still very useful Britain and France between Two Wars (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940). And for a general feel for French tradition and policy, D. W. Brogan's The Development of Modern France, 1870-1939 (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1940) remains a standard work. Of the studies which focus on other countries, Erice Harris Jr's The United States and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) is a monograph which lays out American policy effectively. Luigi Villari's Italian Foreign Policy Under Mussolini (New York:

Devin-Adair, 1956) is a sympathetic account of limited use. And Nicholas Mansergh treats the impact of the Abyssinian crisis on the British Commonwealth in an impressive fashion in his Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, Problems of External Policy, 1931-1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

Alfred Zimmern's The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918-1935 (London: Macmillan, 1936) is an essential primer on the League, and F. P. Walters' A History of the League of Nations (2 vols. London: Oxford University Press 1952) provides the best overview of the League and the impact of the Abyssinian crisis. Walters was, however, a senior official of the League, and his account, which is critical of British policy, reflects his background. Walters' account compares favorably with very partisan pieces, such as Robert Dell's The Geneva Racket (London: Robert Hale, 1941), but a new general treatment of the League is needed. Neither George Scott's The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations (London: Hutchinson, 1973) nor Elmer Bendiner's A Time For Angels (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) does much to fill that need.

A few of the monographs and articles which treat limited aspects of the Abyssinian crisis are of particular use to the student of British foreign policy. Dame Adelaide Livingstone's The Peace Fallot: The Official History (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), Pitman B. Potter's The Wal Wal Arbitration (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1938), Helen Hiatt's, "Public Opinion and the Italo-

Ethiopian Dispute: The Activity of Private Organizations in the Crisis," Geneva Special Studies, VII, 1 (Geneva: Geneva Research Center, 1936), and Mario Toscano's "Eden's Mission to Rome on the Eve of the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict," in Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography in Honour of G. F. Gooch, C. H. A. O. Sarkissian ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962) fall into that category.

Finally, an understanding of British policy during the Abyssinian crisis depends upon a grasp of the hold which the League idea had on the popular imagination in Britain and a comprehension of the general search for peace and security which grew out of the experience of the First World War. Charles Loch Mowat's Britain Between the Wars, 1918-1940 (London: Methuen, 1955) is a good place to start for an understanding of inter war Britain. A. J. P. Taylor's English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) is provocative, and useful as such. W. N. Medlicott's British Foreign Policy Since Versailles, 1919-1963 (London: Methuen, 1968) and F. S. Northedge's The Troubled Giant. Britain Among the Great Powers, 1916-1939 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966) are sound surveys of British foreign policy which outline the problems facing British policy-makers during the inter war period and also draw the conclusions possible from the available research. Both surveys are refreshingly free of traditional misconceptions about British policy. John F. Naylor does a good job of developing the confusion of the British Labour movement on foreign policy issues during the

1930's in Labour's International Policy: The Labour Party in the 1930's (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969). And H. R. Winkler traces "The development of the League of Nations idea in Great Britain, 1914-1919," in the Journal of Modern History, XX (June 1948), pp. 95-112. Christopher Thorne sets the immediate background for the Abyssinian crisis with a masterly treatment of the Manchurian crisis in The Limits of Foreign Policy (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972). F. H. Hinsley illuminates the undue expectations created by the establishment of the League in Power and the Pursuit of Peace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). And Martin Gilbert's The Roots of Appeasement (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) does an excellent job of establishing the climate of opinion in which the British government worked, and of which they partook.



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES



3 1293 03175 0114