

Internationalism and Empire:  
British Dilemmas, 1919-1939

The Ford Lectures

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Note to readers:

These lectures were given in Spring 2014 at Oxford University. They incorporate material that was later included in my book, The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire, which was published by Oxford University Press in 2015. That book is a history of the origins and workings of the mandates system of the League of Nations and its impact on the international and imperial order as a whole. These lectures concentrate more narrowly on Britain's involvement in the construction of that system and on its unexpected effects on British strategy and power. The fourth lecture, on British dilemmas around the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, has not been published elsewhere; the third lecture (and to a lesser degree the first and sixth lectures) also incorporate material not found in that book. A fully international account of all the themes discussed can be found in The Guardians.

The lectures are based largely on politicians' private papers, especially those of Leo Amery, Maurice Hankey and Philip Noel-Baker (held at the Churchill Archives Center); William Ormsby-Gore (National Library of Wales); Robert Cecil and Eric Drummond (British Library); Alfred Milner and Arnold Toynbee (Bodleian Library); Lord Lugard, J.H. Oldham, and the Anti-Slavery Society (Rhodes House Library); Samuel Hoare (Cambridge University Library); and Winifred Holtby (Hull Central Library). They also draw on National and Foreign Ministry archives of Britain, France, Germany, and Namibia; on the archives and records of the League of Nations; and on the Central Zionist Archives (Jerusalem). These and other primary sources are cited fully; secondary authorities are cited only when directly quoted or relied upon. A fuller discussion of the historiography surrounding the mandates system of the League of Nations can be found in The Guardians.

### Abbreviations in the Notes

AMEL	Leo Amery Papers, Churchill Archives Center (Cambridge)
ANOM	Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer (Aix-en-Provence)
<u>BDFA</u>	<u>British Documents on Foreign Affairs</u>
BL	British Library
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science (London)
CAC	Churchill Archives Center (Cambridge)
CUL	Cambridge University Library (Cambridge)
CZA	Central Zionist Archive (Jerusalem)
<u>GDFP</u>	<u>Documents on German Foreign Policy</u>
<u>H.C. Deb.</u>	<u>House of Commons Debates (UK)</u>
<u>H.L. Deb.</u>	<u>House of Lords Debates (UK)</u>
HNKY	Maurice Hankey Papers, Churchill Archives Center (Cambridge)
<u>LPCW</u>	<u>Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann</u>
LNA	League of Nations Archives (Geneva)
<u>LNOJ</u>	<u>League of Nations Official Journal</u>
LNU	League of Nations Union
MAE	Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Paris)
NA	National Archives (London)
NAN	Namibian National Archives (Windhoek)
NBKR	Philip Noel-Baker Papers, Churchill Archives Center (Cambridge)
PA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (Berlin)
PMC	Permanent Mandates Commission/
<u>PMCM</u>	<u>Minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission</u>
RH	Rhodes House (Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies, Oxford)
WH	Winifred Holtby Papers (Hull)

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## Turning to Geneva

Lecture 1 (January 31, 2014)

In February 1919, Sir Maurice Hankey was offered the job of first Secretary General of the League of Nations. Hankey, 42 years old, a naval officer, had had a good war and an even better peace conference. Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defense from 1912, in 1916 he had become Cabinet Secretary and Lloyd George's right hand man. Highly efficient, he managed the British Empire delegation at the Paris Peace Conference and then much of the conference itself, imposing a modicum of order on its shambolic proceedings. President Wilson, South African Premier Jan Christiaan Smuts and British internationalist Lord Robert Cecil – the 'big three' of the Commission to draft the League of Nations Covenant – thus thought him the ideal person to become the new organization's head. Hankey, however, felt 'very skeptical' about the whole matter and asked the opinion of his sometime mentor from the Committee of Imperial Defense, Lord Esher.

Esher advised against it. The League would necessarily be a plant of slow growth, and if Hankey chose to devote himself to its cultivation he would 'be a wasted force for England.' This would be tragic, for 'the Empire has come of age.' 'I fervently believe that the happiness and welfare of the human race is more closely concerned in the evolution of English democracy and of our Imperial Commonwealth than in the growth of any International League,' Esher wrote his friend. He was skeptical too of the emphasis on public opinion and open diplomacy on which the new League planned to rely. The Secretary General might 'build a huge megaphone, through which he will blow across the continents and the oceans,' but 'power to influence great events does not reside in megaphones but in the still small voice that whispers in the ear of the Wilsons and the Lloyd Georges of this world.' The League, in other words, was too public. Secrecy was essential to the effective operation of power.<sup>1</sup>

Hankey's thoughts ran along the same lines, and a trip back to London sealed it. 'They are a sane sound nation over there – the sheet anchor of the world,' he wrote in his diary on April 18. 'The British Empire is worth a thousand Leagues of Nations.'<sup>2</sup> Concluding that he 'could do more for the peace of the world there than in Geneva,' Hankey wrote to Cecil that same day to turn the post down. American collaboration was looking increasingly unlikely anyway, and with plans for the institution moving 'steadily in a direction contrary to my conception,' he felt he was well out of it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill Archives Center (CAC), HNKY 4/11, Esher to Hankey, 19 Feb. 1919. This episode is covered, and much of the correspondence reprinted, in Stephen Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, vol. 2, 1919-31 (London: Collins, 1972), 64-80 passim.

<sup>2</sup> HNKY 1/5, Diary, 18 Apr. 1919.

<sup>3</sup> HNKY 4/11, Hankey to Cecil, 18 Apr. 1919.

## I

Why begin with this episode? First, because it is illuminating. It brings something out – a presumed tension between the League and the Empire – that troubled politics between the wars and will absorb us in these talks. For what Esher suggested, and what Hankey came to believe, was that the League and the empire were not just alternative possible career paths for the ambitious and talented, but alternative and indeed competing ways of ordering the world. They were different, and operated in different and even antagonistic ways. At points, then, not only individuals but states might have to choose – choose, let's say, between imperial and international loyalties, choose whether imperial interests must bend to international norms. I'll return to this point in few minutes.

But I begin with this episode for a second reason too: because it was consequential. For Hankey, having turned down the League, turned against it; and once he was out of the picture, it could develop on quite un-Hankey-like lines. True, the man chosen instead as Secretary-General, Sir Eric Drummond, a forty-three year old career foreign office official and Arthur Balfour's wartime private secretary, seemed no more of a radical. A gangly, droopy-eyed Scottish aristocrat, he was, to one catty observer, the only man he'd ever met who looked entirely natural in plus-fours. In public Drummond was self-effacing to a fault, much more the secretary than the general (as the joke went). Yet his diffident mien was deceptive, for he proved hard-working, meticulous, good at selecting staff, and quietly ruthless about disciplining them. Subject to intense political lobbying, his aloofness and caution (which was not servility) served him well. He left his office with a higher reputation than when he assumed it.

Moreover, that summer, Drummond had his own Wilsonian moment. Before he had turned the Secretary-Generalship down, Hankey had mapped out a plan for the Secretariat. He imagined it as a coordinating apparatus for the great powers. There would be separate bureaus for French, British, American, Italian and Japanese undersecretaries; each would bring their own national staff.<sup>4</sup> But Drummond, sitting in rooms near Whitehall, broke with that statist vision. Rather than structure the Secretariat by nation, Drummond organized it by function, with sections to deal with political questions, economics, legal issues, social questions, mandates, minorities, information, and so forth. Second, and even more boldly, instead of relying on seconded civil servants, Drummond decided to create a genuinely international officialdom, a body of men and women owing loyalty to the League alone. Not that that Secretariat was 'neutral' exactly, for Drummond brought in a group of tried allied officials to provide its spine, and in later years revisionist states would insert political appointees and even spies within its ranks. Yet, the knowledge that they were serving the League and not their state

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<sup>4</sup> HNKY 8/13, [Sir Maurice Hankey], 'the League of Nations: Sketch Plan of Organisation,' printed 31 Mar. 1919.

attracted men of a new type – idealistic, internationalist, and overwhelmingly progressive. Legions of well-educated Englishwomen with wartime experience in Whitehall begged Drummond for jobs too, and if he shunted most off into the clerical services, by doing so he secured the secretariat an enviable reputation for accuracy and professionalism. As anyone who has used League publications knows, it is almost impossible to find so much as a missing comma in the millions of pages that rolled off its presses.

At the end of October 1920, that incipient bureaucracy, complete with baggage and children, climbed aboard a special hired train at Victoria Station and set off for Geneva. Relocation to a placid Swiss town reinforced the Secretariat's sense of distinction and election. A League school and a League radio station were founded; affairs and marriages bloomed; international humanitarian lobbies and technical organizations moved their offices to Geneva; a Geneva press corps mushroomed. Each fall, delegations from some fifty member states took over the grand lakefront hotels for the extravaganza of the Assembly, turning Geneva, for three weeks, into the world capital of diplomacy and style. Even the Conservative Leo Amery, who loathed the League, remembered this 'esprit de Genève' fondly, recalling the Spanish delegate exclaiming, when a champagne cork went off with a loud pop at one festive lunch, 'Voilà l'artillerie de la Société des Nations!'<sup>5</sup> That was true: the League's power lay, not in arms, but in the simple fact that it brought the statesmen of the world, well-oiled by drink, into a public arena where they had to perform civility, whatever their private or even political inclinations.

Of course League politics had a hard edge as well. The League Council, dominated politically if not numerically by the great powers, met four times a year and decided which issues would be addressed – and, more particularly, not addressed. The scramble to secure Council seats among those states that weren't great powers, but sometimes thought they were, was brutal. Only the Scandinavians amicably rotated seats; other states refused to accept that they could be represented by another – to distant eyes almost interchangeable – country. Spain and Brazil both threatened to leave the League if they weren't given permanent seats when Germany got one on entry in 1926 (and Brazil did so); hyper-sensitive Poland retained a seat under various ruses for the whole of the League's life. Drummond, who thought the Council unquestionably the nerve center of the whole project, wearied himself with these negotiations, the Council growing larger and perhaps losing power as it grew.<sup>6</sup> But in truth the Secretariat was Drummond's real achievement, for endemic problems with spying notwithstanding, by the early twenties he had created something entirely new: a truly international bureaucracy, functionally structured, mostly loyal to an international charter, and with an

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<sup>5</sup> Leo Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. 2, *War and Peace, 1914-29* (London: Hutchinson, 1953), p. 332.

<sup>6</sup> See BL, Add Ms. 51110 and 51112 for Drummond's correspondence with Cecil about various states' requests for seats and Secretariat positions.

efficient multinational and multilingual staff capable of managing a complex program. This is the structure of the United Nations secretariat today.

Hankey, in London, watched the rise of what he called ‘Drummond’s League’ – and, still more, of Drummond’s salary – with resentment. The League was to be a tool for great-power negotiation, but with the US and the Soviets outside, the Germans excluded at French insistence, and people Hankey considered pacifists and ‘cranks’ holding the reins, he thought it could hardly play that role. ‘The real League of Nations will be the present Council of Three (or Four) and I shall always be its secretary,’ he had written to his wife right before the Treaty of Versailles was signed; he now tried to combat what he saw as ‘the dangerous tendency of the League secretariat to arrogate to itself too much power.’<sup>7</sup> Lloyd George was an ally: by late 1920 he too thought the League was ‘more likely to become a centre of intrigue than a real benefit to the peace of the world.’<sup>8</sup> The two floated schemes to replace it with a new great-power-centered organization and sought to bypass it through the ‘diplomacy by conference’ of those years – the Washington Conference, the Genoa Conference, and so forth.

Yet the League could not be sidelined. Partly this was because it had the only competent international staff around, so much so that Drummond, in 1922, was belatedly asked to dispatch his teams of translators and typists and précis-writers to Genoa to manage the conference that had tried to exclude them. Partly it was sustained by the hopes of so many people – by the millions who joined the organizations founded to support it, who signed petitions or protested when their governments violated its norms, who studied the Covenant text or went to lectures about its work, who reverently toured its headquarters in Geneva.

But the League also survived because it addressed – indeed, was forced by its member states to address – issues no government would or could take on alone. As I will be talking about this institution quite a lot over the next six weeks, let me remind you of what the League did. The Swiss League official William Rappard put it best in 1925, when he explained that there were really three separate Leagues of Nations.<sup>9</sup> The first was what he called the League to outlaw war. This was the League whose provisions absorbed governments and international lawyers, as they sought to give teeth to the Covenant, that brought statesmen and officials together to discuss disarmament, and that intervened with more or less success in territorial conflicts – between Sweden and Finland, Greece and Bulgaria, Columbia and Peru, and a host of others – before succumbing under the triple blows of the Manchuria Crisis, the Second Disarmament Conference, and the Italo-Ethiopian war. It is this League on which such hopes were pinned, that E.H. Carr pilloried, and that people today still have in mind when they say that the League ‘failed.’

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted Roskill, v. 2, p. 88, and HNKY, 1/5, diary entry Oct. 21, 1922.

<sup>8</sup> HNKY 1/5, Diary, Dec. 29, 1920.

<sup>9</sup> William E. Rappard, *International Relations as viewed from Geneva* (1925; rpt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).



But there was a second League, the one that worked to promote international cooperation. This League set standards for air traffic, radio transmission and child welfare, organized the Austrian bailout and standardized economic data, combated sexual and drug trafficking, dealt with Russian refugees and negotiated the Greece-Turkish population exchange, pioneered development missions to China and Liberia, set up research stations to track epidemic diseases, and ran institutes and conferences to promote economic and intellectual cooperation. This League never ‘declined’ and only expanded, steadily promoting the authority and elevating the role of those new international actors: the ‘expert,’ and what we would today call the NGO. The political scientist David Mitrany had this League in mind when he crafted his ‘functionalist’ theory of how cooperation on mundane activities might create networks that would promote peace. It is this League that laid the foundation for the institutions of global governance we have today, and that is now the focus of so much historical interest.

And, finally, there was a third League, which Rappard titled inelegantly, ‘the League to execute the Peace Treaties.’ That League ran plebiscites in or attempted to adjudicate certain disputed areas (Memel, Silesia, Vilna, Mosul, Alexandretta) and administered others (Danzig, the Saarland). It also ran two enormously consequential regimes set up to stabilize and legitimate the territorial decisions reached in Paris and Lausanne. One of these was the minorities regime, a system through which the League Council, guided by Secretariat officials, sought to hold a dozen new or reconstituted East European or Balkan states to promises of minority rights they had made as the price of sovereignty. The second was the mandates regime, that system of rudimentary international oversight grudgingly accepted by the allied powers as the price of retaining Ottoman provinces and German colonies in Africa and the Pacific seized in the war. That League, like the others, changed over time, especially in response to Germany’s entry and then exit. It became, in the eyes of some of its members, the League to overcome the peace treaties, with not only Germany but also other states and internationalists trying to use those regimes to change the territorial settlement. By the mid-thirties the minorities regime had crumbled under that revisionist onslaught but the mandates system continued, reemerging in 1945 as the United Nations Trusteeship System.

## II

I’m interested primarily in this third League, and especially in its mandates system, because I want to understand what the project of internationalism meant for the workings and stability not only of those specific territories but also of the interwar imperial settlement more broadly. Britain had much to do with setting the rules for that system, for it fell to Lloyd George to mediate between Wilson’s determined anti-annexationism and the allies’ desire to hang on to their conquests. We know quite a lot about how and why British statesmen agreed to accept that principle of anti-annexation, and to cede to the League the role of overseeing imperial powers’ administration of

transferred territories: this has been much studied. And yet, for all that, we know much less about how regimes nominally established in Paris actually worked, and still less about how they came reciprocally to affect British policy. I think that is because we've examined the creation of the League and its regimes largely from the standpoint of national politicians and statesmen, following the record found in national archives, without paying enough attention to the aims, actions, and rich archival records of the League itself. I don't intend so much to reverse that optic – say, to write the history of British politics from Geneva – as to make the case for an approach that begins from the complex dynamic between the national and the international. For, if British statesmen disproportionately shaped the character of the League, which is something many historians have noticed, the institutions, practices and sheer noise in Geneva also shaped and constrained Britain's opportunities and choices – especially in the realm of imperial politics.

The statesmen who outlined the mandates regime – Smuts, Lloyd George, and especially the former South African High Commissioner and now Colonial Secretary Alfred Milner – did not imagine this outcome. They had their doubts about the League – Milner especially had doubts – but so long as they had the Americans with them, they were willing to give it a try. Only the Chamberlainite imperialist Leo Amery, now Milner's undersecretary at the Colonial Office, thought the very idea of an institution in which 'every state is represented as an equal because it is a state and irrespective of its size or civilization' was all wrong. The only functioning 'League,' he thought – and in this respect his ideas prefigure those of Carl Schmitt – would be one composed of roughly equal 'blocs,' each with a major power exercising dominance – whether through empire or through diktats such as the Monroe Doctrine – within their sphere. Since Germany would always be such a power, Amery thus favored allowing her to rebuild hegemony over a Mitteleuropa from the Rhine to the Volga, provided Germany was first 'thoroughly beaten' and then kept away from Britain's imperial sphere.<sup>10</sup> Through the Peace Conference Amery pleaded with his chief to bind German East Africa into a new British East African federation, to resist Belgian claims to retain Rwanda and Burundi, even to try to hang on to Damascus, and to limit the League's authority over transferred territory as much as possible.<sup>11</sup>

What is interesting, though, is how little headway Amery made. Not even Milner really listened. British statesmen had often made flexible and pragmatic arrangements over sovereignty, conceding nominal independence to protectorates or princely states so long as British hegemony was secured. They expected the new enthusiasm to work in their favor – even Curzon expected that. For they believed that British rule was not only effective but desired: as one Foreign Office official put it, the main problem the British would face, would be that 'we cannot hope to take into the British sphere all the peoples

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<sup>10</sup> Leo Amery, letter to Reading, n.d. [probably 1918], quoted in *My Political Life*, vol. 2, p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> This correspondence is in CAC, AMEL 1/3/42.

in the world who would doubtless like to enter it.’<sup>12</sup> But mostly they were willing to gamble on the League because it was an Anglo-American project: the vehicle through which the two states would set the terms on which peoples would become nations, and nations would interact. The League could work, Milner told Lloyd George, only if it became the vehicle through which to ‘extend the pax Britannica into a pax mundi.’<sup>13</sup> They didn’t need to press Britain’s own imperial claims, in other words, because ‘the British Commonwealth of Nations’ was, as Smuts put it, the embryo for the League of Nations anyway.

But what would that new dispensation look like? Smuts, of course, thought of it in racial terms. Peoples left adrift by the dissolution of the great European land empires would become nations, associating through the League, but most non-white peoples would not. Those in the ex-Ottoman Middle East would be governed in trust and taught the ways of civilization, but Germany’s African and Pacific territories, being ‘inhabited by barbarians,’ would simply be annexed.<sup>14</sup> Wilson, of course, did not agree: the proscription on annexation and League supervision had to apply to those territories as well. Not, though, because the Americans had any more faith in the capacity those of non-whites. As Wilson’s colonial advisor George Louis Beer, the man slated to run the mandates regime, put it: ‘The Negro race has hitherto shown no capacity for progressive development except under the tutelage of other peoples’; the task was thus to provide such tutelage.<sup>15</sup> And who could better provide that than the British? Beer took it as axiomatic that ‘native rights were most carefully and effectively protected’ in the British colonies, and approved Britain’s commitment to free trade as well.<sup>16</sup> The mandates regime could be used to generalize the empire’s excellent practices.

The promise that ‘internationalization’ would extend and not constrain British norms and British power forced the reluctant dominions premiers in January 1919 to allow their conquests in the Pacific and South West Africa to come under the mandates regime. As Robert Cecil put it during those acrimonious meetings, Britain had nothing to fear from League oversight because the standards to be imposed were those prevailing in British colonies anyway: the system might, however, force reform on ‘the badly governed colonies of France and Portugal.’ The French, obviously, did not think their colonies badly governed; small wonder they considered the system a Trojan horse, one aimed at forcing other imperial powers to live by British rules. The proscription on military recruiting was especially resented, since the French recruited their troops in West Africa, whereas Britain, with India as their military reserve, could piously abstain.

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<sup>12</sup> NA, FO 608/215/955, Comment by Spicer, 29 Jan. 1919.

<sup>13</sup> Bodleian, MSS Milner dep. 46, ‘Extract from a letter written by Lord Milner of August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1919.’

<sup>14</sup> Jan Christian Smuts, The League of Nations: A Practical Suggestion (1918).

<sup>15</sup> Beer, George Louis, African Questions at the Paris Peace Conference, (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), 179.

<sup>16</sup> Beer, African Questions, 182.

The problem was, if the League system was to generalize Anglo-American preferences, its implementation would depend on Anglo-American power. The mandates regime was agreed to in January 1919, early in the peace conference, when Wilson's power was greatest: as it declined, the future of imperial oversight became much less certain. Only the German territories were actually allocated during the conference, and while texts outlining common administrative rules were supposed to have been included in the Treaty, disagreement made that impossible. The French objected to the ban on military recruiting and the Belgians to prohibitions on forced labor – and both understood that the tide was finally turning in their favor. By the end of the summer, the French were boycotting meetings with Milner and refused to discuss the Middle East settlement at all. 'The French are determined just to be squatters,' Milner reported to Foreign Secretary A.J. Balfour in August, and 'like other squatters they will, by mere lapse of time, become owners.'<sup>17</sup> Lord Robert Cecil had appealed to Milner to set an example by putting Egypt under mandate, but Milner was at the end of his patience. American support had evaporated, and, he wrote, 'we really cannot go on playing at this game of mandates all by ourselves.' 'At present, it is not too much to say that nothing has been done to make [the system] a reality except what we have done (I might almost say what I have done), and that we have not succeeded in imposing its restrictions upon anybody but ourselves.' He was not willing to put any British territory under mandate, he told Cecil shortly, until he felt much more certain that the system would survive.<sup>18</sup> In October, Milner gave up and sailed for Egypt, leaving the mandates system nothing more than an article in a treaty that, it was becoming clear, no-one much liked.

Let me be clear: by the end of 1919 the mandates project as an official Anglo-American endeavor, was over. And yet – and this is the paradox – the system of League oversight emerged anyway. Not, certainly, because of the force of anti-colonial sentiment, for by 1920 the crackdown on colonial nationalism was in full swing, and colonized peoples weren't clamoring for 'tutelage' anyway. Instead, the mandates system survived because of what I have called today the 'turn to Geneva' – a turn engineered by British internationalists and humanitarians over the objections of men like Esher and Amery and Hankey, but with the cautious toleration of Balfour and of the Foreign and Colonial Offices. Believing in the power of public opinion, and eager to force colonial administration along what they considered progressive lines, British supporters of the League allied with Drummond's officials to make international oversight a reality. But the regime they created was not what Smuts or Milner had imagined. It was not a structure for imperial collaboration but rather a polyvalent force-field of talk, one that amplified the voices of non-imperial states and even of colonized peoples. And while Britain was initially able to dominate that discursive arena, 'talk' would in time undermine the legitimacy and standing of the imperial order itself.

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<sup>17</sup> NA, FO 608/152/17580, Milner to Balfour, 8 Aug. 1919.

<sup>18</sup> LNA, R13, 1/1970/1970, Milner to Cecil, 2 Nov. 1919.

These lectures will elaborate these points. I shall describe the construction of that oversight regime during the rest of my time today. I shall turn next week to how the Geneva apparatus and various colonial scandals were exploited by Sir Frederick Lugard to promote his colonial ideals and to burnish Britain's reputation as the model colonial power. Yet that British advantage inevitably came under pressure when the force-field of Geneva shifted and Germany entered the League and, with Italy, tried to use its position to challenge the imperial settlement reached at Versailles. Henceforth, just as Hankey had feared and Amery had predicted, Britain would increasingly find itself caught between imperial and international ideals, League and empire loyalties. Lectures three through six will thus examine four such dilemmas. The third lecture will treat how the apparatus of League oversight was used during the League's 'German period' to set limits on imperial sovereignty, a battle fought out over Leo Amery's ambitious plans for imperial federation in East Africa. Yet, as the world economy faltered and once Germany left the League, revisionist powers turned their back on that goal of limiting imperial sovereignty, instead demanding sovereign territories of their own. The fourth and fifth lectures track Britain's incoherent response to these demands, examining how, first, the failed attempt to grant Italy concessions in Ethiopia without conquest, and second the failed effort to lure Germany into a new project of colonial cooperation, eroded the authority of the League, the empire, and 'white civilization' alike. But it was the experience governing Palestine in the late thirties, which I'll discuss in the last lecture, that ultimately convinced British statesmen that the regime they had created had turned against them: international norms and British interests could no longer be reconciled. This lesson – that the League, contra Smuts, was not the 'Anglosphere' writ large, that the imperial and the international were not one and the same – is, I think, one British historians have also been slow to learn. I'll thus close my last lecture with a few words about what the story of Britain's experience in Geneva might tell us about the practice of international history today.

### III

So let's return to that moment in 1919 when Milner gave up on the mandates system and headed for Egypt. Worse was to follow. In Spring 1920, the United States Senate would finally reject the Treaty of Versailles. As the US retreated, Britain, hitherto the League's main support, turned sharply pragmatic, for the French alliance now became essential. In a series of acrimonious private meetings in late 1919 and early 1920, the two squabbling imperial powers came to terms. At San Remo in April 1920, the Supreme Council finally allocated the Middle East mandates, with France tolerating Britain's Zionist pledge in Palestine and agreeing to British control in Iraq, and Britain confirming its disengagement from Syria. The swift creation of 'facts on the ground' followed. That summer, France ousted Faysal's fragile Syrian state, while Britain's Indian army put down a fierce rising in Iraq.

Yet, even amidst this violence, Wilsonian ideas in their British-inflected form began reasserting themselves. Through 1920, the Lloyd George government was buffeted by a wave of criticism for its seeming abandonment of the League of Nations. True, it paid homage to its promise to Sharif Husayn, and saved itself a great deal of money, by deciding, to France's outrage, to offer Faysal the throne of Iraq. But the apparatus laid out in Article 22 still hadn't been constructed. The oversight regime intended to absolve the allies of the sin of annexation was nowhere to be seen. And no national government would build it.

But a non-governmental alliance might. For new ties were forming, ones binding London to Geneva not Washington, and composed of international officials and activists, not national premiers. Let me pick out four figures. The first is John Harris, the indefatigable Organizing Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society, age 45 in 1919. Harris had come to his humanitarian convictions and learned his political skills in the campaign against Leopold's horrific regime in the Congo, where he and his wife Alice had served as missionaries. Harris had been persuaded during the war that Germany's colonies could not be returned, not because he thought German conduct any more egregious than Belgian or French, but rather because he feared that the Germans would retaliate against those Africans who had risen when the allied armies had invaded.<sup>19</sup> From 1917, the Anti-Slavery Society urged that those territories be placed under international supervision, with prohibitions on slavery, forced labor, military recruitment and the liquor traffic.<sup>20</sup> 1919 saw Harris pushing that agenda at the Peace conference – trying his best, one civil servant sourly remarked, to have the Anti-Slavery Society recognized as a great power.<sup>21</sup> The Society's ties to African churchmen and traders also turned Harris into the conduit for African grievances coming in thick and fast. 'We were expecting the League of Nations will send delegates out to ascertain our wishes but they have not done so,' the Duala leader Joseph Bell wrote from Cameroon in October 1919; Togolese traders too reported threats of deportation for failing to support French rule.<sup>22</sup> League oversight, Harris thought, should be established as quickly as possible.

Harris's most loyal ally and my second figure was the Conservative MP William Ormsby Gore, age only 34 in 1919. Ormsby-Gore had served with the Arab Bureau in 1916 and 1917 and the experience had been transformative. 'We rule here by fear & not by love or gratitude or loyalty,' he wrote to his mother from Cairo, but his work building the alliance with Husayn convinced him that a new approach was possible.<sup>23</sup> The secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, through which the British and French marked out their spheres of influence, profoundly shocked him. 'We make professions of defending and

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<sup>19</sup> RH, Brit. Emp. S22, G423, Harris to Lowes Dickinson, 27 June 1917.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, G437, 'Conference on German Colonies', and for earlier correspondence on 'native races and peace terms,' G128.

<sup>21</sup> For Harris's work at the peace conference, see esp. Brit Emp. S22, G401.

<sup>22</sup> RH, G401, Bell to Anti-Slavery Society, 30 Aug. 1919.

<sup>23</sup> National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn manuscripts, PEC 10/1/11, Ormsby-Gore to his mother, 2 Feb. 1918.

helping small & oppressed nations,' he protested to one of his superiors. If then 'we parcel out between our allies and ourselves vast tracts of countries which do not want us,...we shall have to admit that the Ramsay Macdonalds, Trevelyan & Shaws at home, and our doubting Indian critics in India, knew us better than we knew ourselves.' Britain should win friends by embracing self-determination, and should do so, he thought warmly, for both Arabs and Jews.<sup>24</sup> Recalled back to London as Milner's Parliamentary Private Secretary in 1917, he became part of the circle that crafted the Balfour declaration and in spring 1918 was sent with Chaim Weizmann as liaison officer to the Zionist Commission to Palestine. In 1919 he found Ormsby-Gore, of course, in Paris, on the fringes of the British delegation. Back in London in 1920, he too saw the West African protests through his ties to Liverpool merchants. As chairman of the 'Mandates Committee' of Cecil's exploding new League of Nations Union, he teamed up with J.H. Harris to press the government to get the mandates system going.

In the Secretariat, there were allies. Drummond cared little about the principle of international trusteeship, but he was concerned about the League's credibility should Article 22 become a dead letter. In October 1919, when the American Beer refused to return to London to restart Milner's abandoned negotiations, and then suddenly died, Drummond turned for help to a third figure – a bright young official (and later Labour MP and Nobel Peace Prize laureate), named Philip Baker (later Noel-Baker). Baker, just thirty in 1919, a Cambridge graduate and an Olympic runner, had been decorated for valor while serving with the Friends ambulance brigade in the war. Brought into the Foreign Office, he had been at Lord Robert Cecil's side during the peace conference and retained a filial devotion to the older man. Baker was far to the left of Drummond (a 'wild enthusiast' according to Hankey<sup>25</sup>), but Drummond knew he could be trusted to respect the enabling fiction of British government: that politicians take decisions and officials merely provide technical aid. None of the key documents about the mandates regime issued by the League in the early twenties carry Baker's name. In the archives, his initials are on every draft.

But Baker was only a stop-gap, since Drummond (unlike Milner) thought a Briton could hardly help oversee British rule. In late 1920 Drummond thus appointed our fourth co-conspirator, William Rappard, a liberal and perfectly trilingual young Swiss-American professor, as Director of the Mandates Section. Rappard protested that he knew nothing at all about 'backward peoples,' but with Baker to help him, he learned fast. France and Britain were using the excuse of American obstruction to avoid finalizing the mandates texts, and were creating regimes in Syria and Palestine that were directly opposed to the spirit of Article 22. Deluged with protests from Arab nationalists, it didn't take Rappard long to realize that British internationalists that were the best – almost the only – allies he had.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., PEC 11/1, Ormsby-Gore, Note, n.d.

<sup>25</sup> HNKY, 1/5, Diary entry for Oct. 17, 1920.

Not Smuts, not Lloyd George, not Milner, but these four men, rescued the project of international oversight. By cleverly exploiting their political contacts, the British press, and the opportunities for trouble making offered by open international meetings in Geneva, Baker, Rappard, Harris and Ormsby-Gore slowly brought the oversight apparatus into being. Note the following stages. First, when it became clear that France would never come to terms in private or bilateral talks, in the spring of 1920 Baker persuaded Drummond to use the League Council to force France and Britain to speak with small states in the room. An uncharacteristically sharp directive from Drummond (drafted by Baker) thus instructed the Council to set up the oversight regime;<sup>26</sup> two months later a set of rules, also drafted by Baker, were approved.<sup>27</sup> True, the American withdrawal dictated many concessions. The responsibility for drafting the mandate texts was ceded to the allied powers, and the League Council, not the more progressive Assembly, was charged with oversight. Behind the scenes, though, Baker mobilized Cecil to challenge the Council's exclusive authority at the first League Assembly that November, a public fracas that – to the delight of the packed Assembly – pitted Lord Robert Cecil (for the Assembly) against his cousin A.J. Balfour (for the Council). Balfour, unsurprisingly, won, but a precedent had been set. The Assembly would insist on publicly discussing the work of League oversight each year – a decision that allowed delegates – including the few nonwhite delegates – to criticize the imperial powers.

Our group of four also colluded to force publication of the mandate texts, for with the Americans out of the picture, every mandatory power was dragging their feet. The days were long past when Cecil could suggest that the first clause of the Middle East mandates read that the country was constituted as an independent state under guarantee of the League of Nations. By 1920, France had decided to create a morass of statelets in Syria, and Britain to administer its strips of Togo and Cameroon from neighboring colonies, while Belgium had sneaked changes into its Rwanda and Burundi mandate to allow their incorporation into Congo. Such moves compromised any future independence, but Drummond would not intervene. The Council had stated that the mandatory powers could set the terms, and he forbade Rappard from sharing the drafts of the mandate texts outside the Secretariat at all.<sup>28</sup> But Rappard could ask Harris's advice about what provisions those texts should contain (and did so),<sup>29</sup> and he could share his worries about the imperial powers' intentions. 'Never more than at the present moment,'

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<sup>26</sup> LNA, R1, 1/4862/161, The Responsibility of the League of Nations arising out of Article XXII of the Covenant: Memorandum by the Secretary-General, Council Doc. 48; the jacket indicates the author as Baker, date as 8 June 1920; distribution to the Council on 13 July 1920.

<sup>27</sup> LNA, S1608, No. 1 (1920-1939), Anon [Baker], 'Mandates Commission: Memo for the Secretary General,' 17 Sept. 1920, and P.J. Baker, 'Mandates Commission: Basis of Discussion,' 23 Oct. 1920.

<sup>28</sup> LNA, S1608 No. 1 (1920-1939), Rappard, 'Relations between the Secretariat of the League of Nations and the Permanent Mandates Commission,' 3 Mar. 1921, and LNA, R7, 1/11502/248, Ormsby-Gore to Rappard, 8 Mar. 1921, and Drummond to Rappard, 14 Mar. 1921.

<sup>29</sup> For this correspondence, RH, Brit Emp. S22, G401, Rappard to Harris, 2 Jan. 1921, and Harris to Rappard, 6 Jan. 1921.



he wrote Ormsby-Gore in March 1921, ‘have I felt that the future of the mandatory system and of the League of Nations as a whole rests primarily on the shoulders of their friends in Great Britain.’<sup>30</sup> Harris and Ormsby-Gore took the hint, swiftly organizing a public conference which called on the British Government to publish the mandate texts.<sup>31</sup> A circular pattern emerged, in which Secretariat officials shared confidential information with British League supporters, who then mobilized ‘public opinion’ to put pressure on their government.

And, finally, Baker and Rappard used their positions in the Secretariat to shape and alter the Permanent Mandates Commission, the body that was to advise the Council on how the imperial powers were doing. The American Beer had envisaged a group of government representatives, just as Hankey had done for the Secretariat. But Baker, drafting its constitution in November 1920, broke – as Drummond had before him – with that statist model. The Commission’s nine members were to be appointed as ‘experts’ and were barred from holding government office; a majority must hail from states without mandates; and their proceedings would be published.<sup>32</sup> Their establishment, Rappard told the first meeting, marked ‘the beginning of an epoch in colonial history,’<sup>33</sup> and he colluded with Harris to put controversial questions – land rights, petitioning – squarely on the agenda. It was thanks to Rappard, the Italian chairman quipped, that they ‘had enjoyed such a terrible visit in the beautiful town of Geneva, where his tireless activity had not given them a single day’s respite, but had supplied them every day with a newly prepared task.’<sup>34</sup>

Rappard’s efforts paid off, for the Commission asserted its independence from the start. This was not because it was a haven for humanitarians or anti-colonialists: to the contrary, the Council appointed mostly former colonial officials or seasoned diplomats. Yet, precisely for that reason, the Commission proved hard to contain. Colonial governors were accustomed to give orders, not to take them, and their mutual jealousy made them voluble critics of other administrations. Members from non-mandatory states – who included one woman – were eager to show they took the work seriously. With a fine disregard for the mandatory powers’ sensitivities, at that first meeting the Commission chose a president and vice-president from states without mandates, closed a textual loophole that would have allowed forced labor for private enterprises, came up with a comprehensive list of questions they thought the mandatory powers should answer, and gave the Australian representative a distinctly hard time over his country’s administration of Nauru.

The British member setting that critical tone, quite probably to his own surprise,

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<sup>30</sup> LNA, S284 1 (9), Rappard to Ormsby-Gore, 29 Mar. 1921.

<sup>31</sup> RH, Brit. Emp. S22, G 440, ‘Conference on Colonial Mandates, 1921.’

<sup>32</sup> LNA, S1608, No. 1 (1920-1939), Anon [Baker], ‘Mandates Commission: Memo for the Secretary General,’ 17 Sept. 1920, and P.J. Baker, ‘Mandates Commission: Basis of Discussion,’ 23 Oct. 1920.

<sup>33</sup> 1 *PMCM*, 2-6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

was none other Ormsby-Gore. He had not been the Colonial Office's choice. They had wanted the Council to appoint Sir Frederick Lugard, the renowned former governor of Nigeria, now retired but itching for the job. By the time the appointment came up, however, Churchill was Colonial Secretary, and needed to shore up support among those disgruntled young Conservatives on the back-benches, of whom Ormsby-Gore was one. It seems to have escaped Churchill's notice that 'Billy Gore', as he was known, hardly shared his hardline imperial ideals. 'You will probably think my ideas...revolutionary,' Ormsby-Gore had told Rappard eight months earlier, but he thought each imperial power 'merely the temporary guardian or trustee exercising such trusteeship on behalf of the League, with a view to the development of each mandatory area into an independent state' – a future he insisted was perfectly realizable in Africa as well.<sup>35</sup>

Ormsby-Gore, together with Rappard, also crafted the one mechanism that made the League accessible to those peoples under mandate: the petition process. No right of petition was foreseen in the Covenant; indeed, the ministers Milner consulted explicitly turned the idea down. If inhabitants had the right to appeal against governments, the French colonial minister objected, 'all administration would be impossible.'<sup>36</sup> Having read the protests arriving from Africa and the Middle East, however, Baker, Harris, Ormsby-Gore and Rappard were all determined they be heard.<sup>37</sup> Any resident of a British colony had a right to appeal to the Privy Council, Ormsby-Gore said; surely, then, an inhabitant of the mandated territory had the right to appeal to the League!<sup>38</sup> Ormsby-Gore then persuaded officials in the Colonial Office to draft a process they could tolerate and staged a discussion in the Second League Assembly to force the French to agree to it. True, that process was highly restrictive: petitions from a territory's inhabitants could not be anonymous, could not call the mandate itself into question, and had to be sent through the mandatory administration itself – a provision that, as the Haitian representative Dantès Bellegarde acerbically noted, meant that petitioners had to 'communicate their grievances to the very persons of whom they complain.'<sup>39</sup> Yet petitions could also be sent directly from persons outside the territory, a provision that turned Harris into a persistent and effective petitioner.

The petition process was, quite possibly, the single most important innovation of the mandates regime. This is not because it offered a medium for redress; it didn't. Rather, it is because it expanded the sphere of international politics. Petitioning taught the skills of organizing, networking and claim-making; it brought the voices of the system's subjects, however distorted, into the rooms in which their fates were decided. Duala elites in Cameroon, disaffected traders in Togo, Kurds and Assyrians in Iraq, South

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<sup>35</sup> LNA, S284 1 (9), Ormsby-Gore to Rappard, 17 Jan. 1921.

<sup>36</sup> LNA, R1, Minutes of the Commission on Mandates [Milner Commission], 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, July 9, 1919.

<sup>37</sup> Harris expounded on the need for 'some form of appeal tribunal...for advising and adjudicating upon alleged breaches of international engagement' in RH, MSS Brit. Emp. S22, G128, Anti-Slavery Society to Balfour, 5 Jan. 1918.

<sup>38</sup> 1 *PMCM*, 22-3.

<sup>39</sup> Third Assembly, *Minutes*, 22 Sept. 1922, 156.

West Africa's Rehoboth Basters, all manner of political factions in Syria and Palestine, and virtually the entire population of Western Samoa, as well as various Western humanitarian, political and revisionist lobbies, brought their grievances to Geneva. No innovation did more to open up imperial rule to scrutiny.

In 1922, Ormsby-Gore was appointed a junior minister in Bonar Law's Conservative Government and resigned from the Commission. Philip Baker headed back to London that year too, disappointed not to have been given charge of the disarmament section. But by the time they left the scene, the mandates system had become just that – a system. All but the Middle East mandates had been approved (and those were finally in process), the mandatory powers were submitting annual reports, the Mandates Commission was meeting. The League published all reports and minutes, distributing them to governments, libraries and journalists around the world. A petition process was in place, and the Commission's discussions of those appeals were published as well. The Council and the Assembly were watching the Commission's work, and newspapers around the world were publicizing it.

Remember what Esher told Hankey when he advised him not to take on the Secretary-Generalship? He said that the Secretary-General's powers would be only propagandistic; he might 'build a huge megaphone,' through which to broadcast the League's work.<sup>40</sup> But what was built at Geneva was not so much a megaphone as what one might call a force field, with different nodes and centers of power, shifting alliances, overlapping jurisdictions, and a cacophony of talk. The Secretary-General presided over that cacophony but did not control it. No-one did: that is the whole point.

The project of overseeing empire would be carried out within this force-field and by the institutions of the League. This is certainly not what Smuts or Lloyd George or Milner had imagined. They had in mind a vehicle for inter-imperial collaboration, one that would be in the hands of government officials, not activists or international officials or even retired governors, one that would generalize British norms. But those ostensible founders had lost interest after the Americans pulled out, and may never have even noticed the system's emerging shape. Smuts, its ostensible founder, never attended either a Council or an Assembly session. Lloyd George fell from power in 1922. Milner died in 1925. Of the British giants of the peace conference, only Balfour and Cecil played major roles in Geneva.

So the mandates system emerged, as so many League institutions did, not according to the founders' dictates, but out of a far messier process of argument, campaigning and negotiation one level down. It was much less statist and much more open to lobbying and pressure from below than anticipated. It was more dependent on the Secretariat than expected, and that Secretariat was more independent than expected as well. In telling the story of that system's construction, I've focused on six British figures – the sagacious and self-effacing Drummond, the skeptics Hankey and Amery, and the

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<sup>40</sup> HNKY 4/11, Esher to Hankey, 19 Feb. 1919.

triumvirate of Baker, Harris and Ormsby-Gore. I did this not only because they were the main architects; I also did it because, unlike our retreating founders, these six will be with us through the whole of these lectures. Two remained at the head of international and national bureaucracies: Drummond at the League Secretariat until 1933, Hankey at the Cabinet Secretariat until 1938. Two helped run the most important lobbying groups: Baker helping Cecil set the course of the League of Nations Union; Harris running the Anti-Slavery Society until he dropped dead in 1940. And two were in government. Amery and Ormsby-Gore would move through the Colonial Office, in harness and in tension, for much of the interwar period.

These men disagreed in the early twenties about the relationship between internationalism and empire, and the League's oversight of the imperial settlement was shaped by that disagreement. They would continue to disagree – over federation in East Africa, over the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, over returning colonies to Germany, over policy in Palestine. What they would discover, however, was that the apparatus they built in Geneva, at a moment of risk and freedom, would affect their options, choices, and even the way they thought. Recall Esher's other argument about why Hankey should turn the League down – because 'power to influence great events does not reside in megaphones but in the still small voice that whispers in the ear of the Wilsons and the Lloyd Georges of this world.'<sup>41</sup> But Esher was wrong. The power to set terms and norms, to compel public speech, is also a form of power, albeit one that Hankey, 'man of secrets,' never understood and certainly never mastered. But this was the power that the League had, and it came to affect what states and statesmen could say, and sometimes even could do. And that's why we can't understand their actions without sometimes turning to Geneva.

But how did that system of discussion, oversight and publicity affect British imperial ideals and policies? Did it work to 'improve,' legitimate, or undermine the imperial settlement? We have five more lectures in which to explore these questions.

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<sup>41</sup> HNKY 4/11, Esher to Hankey, 19 Feb. 1919.

## Lugard Sets the World To Rights

Lecture 2 (7 Feb. 2014)

In my first lecture I traced how a coterie of British internationalists, often involved in the war and the Peace Conference and mostly young, worked in Geneva and London to construct a set of institutions that opened up imperial rule to scrutiny, comment, and contestation. They did this because they believed in the internationalist project. If statesmen had to discuss problems openly, with experts to help them and democratic publics watching, they would choose collective benefit over narrow self-interest, the slow work of mutual collaboration over the quick fix of territorial conquest. But they also turned towards Geneva because they were certain that the British Empire had nothing to fear and much to gain from openness. Not only Milner and Cecil, but equally humanitarians like J.H. Harris of the Anti-Slavery Society and young League enthusiasts like Philip Baker and William Ormsby-Gore thought that Britain could act as ‘tutor’ not only to those ‘peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world’ but also to less internationally-minded and less progressive empires. The ‘Geneva system’ could be used to spread what they thought to be Britain’s excellent practices to the rest of the world.

For half a dozen years, the mandates regime worked very largely as its creators had hoped. It worked, that is, to legitimate the dispositions reached at Versailles in the eyes of Western publics, to constrain other mandatory powers’ behavior, and to enhance Britain’s imperial reputation. Simple good luck and the fact that British officials had authored the rules to which they held contributed to that success, but it also owed much to the industry and ability of the man appointed to succeed Ormsby-Gore as the British member of the Mandates Commission. This was none other than Sir Frederick Lugard, 64 years old in 1922, now retired from his last and grandest imperial appointment as Governor-General of Nigeria, and the man the Colonial Office had intended for the post all along. Lugard served on the Mandates Commission from 1923 until 1935 – that is, for about two-thirds of the League’s effective life. And for that dozen years, no-one did more to define the principles and practices, the scope and the limits, of what I’ve called the project of ‘internationalizing’ empire.

Lugard’s authority owed something to his nationality, for as Ormsby-Gore told his successor privately, ‘the whole Commission took anything from the British member largely because he was the British member.’<sup>42</sup> His personal qualities helped too, for his colleagues found the famous governor courteous, industrious, circumspect and disarmingly modest. As late as 1933, with Hitler newly in power and Germany attacking the League at every turn, the German member of the Commission still thought Lugard the epitome of ‘absolute impartiality, equity and justice.’<sup>43</sup> But the most important basis for

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<sup>42</sup> RH, Lugard 119/2, Ormsby-Gore to Lugard, 16 Feb. 1923.

<sup>43</sup> RH, Lugard, 151/1/16, Ruppel to Lugard, 24 Feb. 1933.

Lugard's authority was that he gave the Commission a doctrine and a cause. For Lugard saw imperial administration primarily in moral terms, an approach that dovetailed nicely with the language of the Covenant, reassured humanitarians growing skeptical of empire, and provided the Commission with a coherent rationale for their work. The essence of Lugard's approach was laid out most clearly in his master work, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, published one year before his appointment.<sup>44</sup>

The Dual Mandate is usually read as the classic statement of the doctrine of 'indirect rule' and as the blueprint for interwar British administrators throughout the empire. Yet to read it that way is, as Véronique Dimier has argued, to ignore the fraught international moment in which it was written and to overlook its very obvious political and international aims. For The Dual Mandate was more than a synopsis of Lugard's programmatic ideals. It was also a pitch for their extension throughout the globe, and – since Lugard was under consideration for appointment to the Commission when he wrote it – perhaps the longest job application in history. Many things about the book – its appropriation of the word 'mandate,' the date of publication, its extensive discussion of the emergence of the League regime, and especially its persistent denigration of French colonial practices and elision of British and international ideals – show how it worked to establish Lugard's leadership over the mandate project.

Note, for example, that Lugard identified the 'dual mandate' – the principle that African administration could at once promote the happiness and well-being of the inhabitants (the first mandate) and develop the continent's natural resources for the world as a whole (the second mandate) – as a 'European' and not specifically British project, tracing its roots to such international agreements as the Berlin and Brussels Acts.<sup>45</sup> Yet the international aspect of the mandates regime, Lugard made clear, was and should be limited to standard setting and oversight. The actual work of government must be left in national administrations' capable hands. And no country, Lugard transparently felt, had better claim to take on that work than the British. The system of 'indirect rule' – of administration through native chiefs and ostensibly along 'traditional' lines – that he had introduced in Nigeria was, Lugard insisted, the model best in line with the principles and obligations of the 'sacred trust.'<sup>46</sup> The British Empire provided the blueprint for what should become League-sanctioned imperial 'best practice.'

There was, obviously, a good deal of selectivity in all this, for Lugard's model hardly reflected governance across British Africa. In Kenya and Rhodesia, a very different type of settler-dominated rule had evolved, complete with the massive land alienation, coercive labor laws, and restrictions on African movement characteristic of South Africa. Even in West Africa, 'tribal' authorities were invented and reshaped as

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<sup>44</sup> Lord Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (1922; rpt. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1965).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48-58.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., esp. 197-229.

much as discovered.<sup>47</sup> Yet if ‘indirect rule’ was more ideal than real, William Rappard, Director of the Mandates Section in Geneva, was already a convert. The Dual Mandate had been ‘the bible of the Mandates Section ever since its publication,’ he wrote Lugard enthusiastically.<sup>48</sup> Nothing would boost the Commission’s prestige like the famous governor’s collaboration. This was correct, but not, obviously, because the Commission embarked on a diligent reading of Lugard’s tome, which sold a grand total of 2,242 copies over fifteen years. Lugard’s effect, rather, was established through argument and practice, especially as the Commission scrambled to define its doctrine and respond to crises of governance in several territories in the 1920s. If we track Lugard’s actions in Geneva, first over the inquiry into South Africa’s handling of its mandate in 1923, then in attempting to articulate international standards in the mid-twenties, and finally when confronted with claims to self-determination in Syria and Western Samoa in the late twenties, we will see how assiduously and successfully he used the new apparatus of imperial oversight to elevate the authority of the League and the British Empire alike.

Let me begin with the first real crisis of mandatory oversight, which was played out mostly in London and Geneva, but dealt with events that took place in the windswept scrubland just over the Orange River in South West Africa, many thousands of miles away. That South Africa would prompt that first crisis should not surprise, for of all mandatory powers it was the most bent on territorial expansion. War with Germany offered South Africa a great opportunity, for German South West Africa – enormous, thinly-settled – looked like the ideal territory, a potential ‘fifth province,’ on which to settle its troublesome ‘poor whites.’ A joint British and South African force seized the territory in 1915, but once Wilsonian sentiment swept the globe, Smuts understood that he would need to make a moral case to retain this prize. The territory’s military Administrator, Sir E.H.L. Gorges, thus repealed the most draconian German laws allowing ‘paternal chastisement’ (that is flogging) of Africans and restricting African movement and stock-holding; Gorges also compiled the notorious ‘Black Book,’ a 220-page heavily illustrated indictment of Germany’s harsh, even genocidal regime. Released in January 1918 and printed as a Parliamentary Paper, its revelations helped solidify sentiment against any return of Germany’s colonies. Yet Gorges, by that time, was suffering pangs of conscience. ‘To my amazement and dismay,’ he wrote Pretoria, he had discovered that his own officers were ‘dropping into the same reprehensible ways.’<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> A great deal has been written on British colonial administration, but for an especially astute summary of ‘indirect rule,’ see Karen E. Fields, Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 30-60, and for the articulation of the Kenyan model, Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, Unhappy Valley: conflict in Kenya and Africa (London: John Currey, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> LNA, R6, 1/10005/248, jacket 1, Rappard to Lugard, 12 Feb. 1923.

<sup>49</sup> NAN, ADM 157, File W41, Gorges to De Jager, 21 Nov. 1917. See also Gorges to Botha, 23 Nov. 1917; Report on the Conference of Magistrates and Police Officers, Windhoek, 28 Nov. 1917; Gorges to Minister of Defense, 20 Apr. 1918; and reports by E. Manning, Magistrate, Keetmansoop, 12 March 1918, and T.L. O’Reilly, Military Magistrate, Omaruru, 6 March 1918.

They too routinely took the side of the white farmers; they too felt all Africans needed occasional whippings. Much use was being made in Paris of his report, Gorges wrote in despair in April 1919, but what would happen if it were discovered that South Africa too was governing through ‘chains and the liberal use of the sjambok’?<sup>50</sup>

Once the Peace Conference confirmed South African control, the squeamish Gorges had served his purpose. Gysbert Hofmyer, a close friend of Smuts, replaced him, and Smuts himself traveled up to Windhoek to urge the remaining German settlers to stay. Hofmeyr’s administration swiftly began demarcating landholdings, arranging loans, and advertising for South African settlers. Within a year millions of hectares of land had been handed over on generous terms, and a white population estimated at 15,000 in 1913 (half of which then left during the war) had grown to 20,000, or nearly 10% of the total population.<sup>51</sup> Those settlers were soon desperate for labor, and Hofmyer set to work constructing a mesh of legal, financial and bodily controls to force Africans into their service. Although ‘native reserves’ were set aside, those were often too small and too arid to support flocks, and in 1921 Africans’ ability to live off the land was further curtailed by an enormously punitive tax, set at more than a man could earn in a month, for each of the dogs Africans used for herding and hunting.<sup>52</sup> Yet, when Africans did accept labor contracts, they found cash-strapped farmers very unwilling (and sometimes unable) to pay their wages at all. If they deserted, though, they could – in a particularly Orwellian stroke – be arrested for breach of contract or vagrancy (both of which were criminal offences) and ordered to serve out their sentences in unpaid labor on Government projects or on individual white farms. Hofmyer, like the administrators who came after him, considered this system entirely appropriate. As he told the Mandates Commission in 1924, the territory had to be developed, and whites needed African labor to develop it. It was his job to inspire natives ‘with that measure of respect for the supremacy of the white man which is essential in a land the vast majority of whose

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<sup>50</sup> NAN, ADM 157, W41, Gorges to Acting Prime Minister, 8 Apr. 1919.

<sup>51</sup> Until recently, most standard accounts of South West Africa under the mandate were based very largely on official publications; these provide much useful material on government policy but relatively little information on African responses. See, e.g., Gail-Maryse Cockram, South West African Mandate (Cape Town: Juta and Co., 1976); I. Goldblatt, History of South West Africa (Cape Town: Juta & Co., 1971); and John H. Wellington, South West Africa and its Human Issues (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). An exception is Ruth First’s vivid and impassioned South West Africa (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), which pays great attention to the histories and interests of various African groups. Much the best recent study is, however, Tony Emmett’s 1987 dissertation, now published as Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966 (Basel: P. Schlettwein, 1999), which thoroughly canvassed the Windhoek archives to provide a detailed portrait of labor and social relations on the ground, and on which I have relied. Figures for the German population from Goldblatt, 200; for 1921, from 3 PMCM, 106.

<sup>52</sup> The administration reported in 1923 that wages were 10-20 shillings per month, plus food, but that farmers were often unable to pay the wages; see Union of South Africa, South-West Protectorate, Report of the Administrator for the Year 1922 (Cape Town: Cape Times Ltd., 1923), 21. The dog tax, in other words, amounted to between one and two months wages for one dog, rising to the laughable amount of ten pounds, or as much as one or two years’ wages, for five dogs.



inhabitants are as yet uncivilized.<sup>53</sup>

By 1922, such policies had left the Bondelswarts, a group of Nama pastoralists near the Orange River, desperately poor and resentful. They remembered the era before the Germans, when they had controlled large herds and called no man master. Now their lands were being turned over to whites, and more than a hundred members of the tribe had been fined or imprisoned for failing to pay the dog tax. Worst of all, the administration insisted that they turn over one Abraham Morris, a renowned Bondelswarts fighter who had helped lead a failed African rising against the Germans early in the century, and who had returned from the Cape Colony with some companions and a few rifles in April 1922. Hofmeyr, aware of Morris's reputation as the doughtiest living Bondelswarts commander – indeed, the South Africans had used him as a scout during the 1915 campaign – sent police to arrest him. When the tribe refused to give him up, Hofmyer concluded they were bent on rebellion, assembled a posse of four hundred whites and rode out to force submission. In a move designed to foster terror and break the Bondelswarts' will, airplanes sent up from South Africa bombed their encampment, killing some women and children and maddening the corralled animals. The next morning, most of the population surrendered, and Hofmeyr's men burned their huts to the ground. Under cover of darkness, however, Morris and perhaps 250 men with some dozens of rifles set off for the Orange River. Not without difficulty, they were tracked down and when their ammunition ran out defeated. Morris and some hundred other Bondelswarts fighters lost their lives. Two were killed on the Government side.<sup>54</sup>

Southern Namibia was a thinly populated frontier landscape of isolated farmsteads and scattered native settlements, but when South Africa dropped those bombs, the explosions were heard around the world. The London *Times* printed a brief article on the bombing sent by their correspondent in Cape Town within the month. Newspapers from Ireland to India would then pick up the story.<sup>55</sup> Smuts, too, found himself facing sharp questions in the South African parliament. Worried of a coming storm among those who 'favour native interests & in League of Nations,'<sup>56</sup> in July he told his old friend not to seize the Bondelswarts' land (which Hofmyer had planned to do) and to

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53. LNA, R11, 1/37014/1347, 'Statement by Mr. Hofmeyr to the Permanent Mandates Commission,' 25 June 1924, 22, 25.

54. The Bondelswarts rising has received considerable scholarly attention. Arnold Toynbee discussed the event and the South African and League responses at some length in his account of mandatory administration in *Survey of International Affairs, 1920-1923* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1925), 404-417. In 1961, A.M. Davey surveyed contemporary and scholarly responses in *The Bondelzwarts Affair: A Study of the Repercussions, 1922-1959* (Pretoria: Communications of the University of South Africa, 1961). Most histories of Namibia also devote considerable attention to this rebellion. For an account that pays particular attention to the League response, see Cockram, *South West Africa Mandate*, 121-163; on the deterioration of the Bondelswarts' living conditions and the social causes of the revolt, see esp. Emmett, *Popular Resistance*, 111-124. The most gripping narrative account of the rising, one written with imaginative license but considerable sympathy for Morris and his followers, is Richard Freislich, *The Last Tribal War: A History of the Bondelswart Uprising* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1964).

<sup>55</sup> 'Hottentot Rising. Rebels Bombed,' *Times*, May 31, 1922, 9.

<sup>56</sup> NAN, ADM 158, W60, Smuts to Hofmeyr, 2 July 1922.

prepare for an inquiry.<sup>57</sup> By August, a three-member Commission was in Windhoek interviewing witnesses. Its minutes of evidence would run to some 1200 pages.

But the scandal spread anyway. By July, J.H. Harris of the Anti-Slavery Society had arranged for a Parliamentary question, a deputation to the South African High Commissioner in London, a blistering article in the New Statesman, and a formal letter to Sir Eric Drummond requesting a League investigation.<sup>58</sup> When the Assembly opened in Geneva that September, Dantès Bellegarde of Haiti, one of the very few black delegates, rose to denounce South Africa. The Bondelswarts, he said, had been harassed by the government but had not rebelled; nevertheless the administration had sent ‘all the materials of modern warfare – machine-guns, artillery, and aeroplanes’ against them. ‘That women and children should have been massacred in the name of the League of Nations and under its protection is an abominable outrage which we cannot suffer,’ he declared, to prolonged applause.<sup>59</sup> Thanks to Smuts’ quick action in setting up the South African inquiry, the South African High Commissioner Sir Edgar Walton could reply that the incident was under investigation, but the galvanized Assembly agreed that the Mandates Commission needed to look into the whole sorry situation.<sup>60</sup>

The Mandates Commission was meeting only annually in the early twenties, so that investigation had to wait almost a year, until the summer of 1923. That gave everyone time – Hofmeyr to organize his defense, and the Anti-Slavery Society to organize the prosecution. For more than a year, the Society’s speakers and publications harped on the scandal of the bombing of the Bondelswarts. ‘I think we can fairly say that it is due to this Society that attention was drawn to this matter,’ its President said at the annual meeting in 1923.<sup>61</sup> Arnold Toynbee, Gilbert Murray and other internationalists jumped on the bandwagon; so too did progressive African-American intellectuals; so too did those American academics who were finding the League such a fruitful subject for career advancement. The global web of ‘talk’ I described last week was expanding fast, even lapping beyond the circle of those who believed in the progressive potential of ‘trusteeship’. If anything, Johannesburg’s communist paper, The International, editorialized that May, South Africa’s handling of the Bondelswarts had proven that imperialists, driven into a corner, would always ‘drop that cant’ and bring out the guns.<sup>62</sup> Many eyes turned to Geneva when the Commission finally convened on July 20, 1923.

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<sup>57</sup> NAN, Acc. 312, Smuts to Hofmeyr, 5 July 1922. (FILE NO.)

<sup>58</sup> RH, ASAPS Archives, G402, M. Hoskens to Harris, 26 July 1922 and 3 August 1922.; LNA, R41, 1/22331/15778, Buxton and Harris to Drummond, 3 Aug. 1922, and enclosing ‘Crushing of the Bondelzwart Rebellion,’ The African World, July 29, 1922.

<sup>59</sup> Records of the Third Assembly, vol. 1, Minutes, session of 8 Sept. 1922, 76, 81; for Walton’s deposition of the report, see session of 5 Sept., 38-39. For Bellegarde, see, Patrick D. Bellegarde-Smith, ‘Dantès Bellegarde and Pan-Africanism,’ Phylon (1960-), 42: 3 (1981), 233-244.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 Sept. 1922, 142-3, and 20 Sept. 1922, 152-66.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Annual Meeting of the Society,’ ASRAF, V, 13: 2 (July 1923), 51.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Good old British Flag!’ The International (Johannesburg), May 25, 1923.

That session was Lugard's first. He arrived with his wife, the renowned journalist and African traveler Flora Shaw. He didn't like to be apart from her, and thought he might need help with the French that was the Commission's *lingua franca*. But he found he could handle the mix of French and English that was spoken, and Flora found herself 'more of a luxury than a necessity.'<sup>63</sup> 'Fred is in his element on this Commission,' she reported. He was deeply interested in the subjects discussed, and didn't mind the long working days – from 10 to 1 in the morning, 3:30 to anywhere from 6:00 to 8:00 in the evening, and then another three hours or more of reading and correcting proofs at night. He liked his new collaborators, finding Rappard zealous and uniformly helpful and the Belgian member Pierre Orts 'clear-headed, well-balanced, shrewd and just in his judgments and views.'<sup>64</sup> Already, what would become a twelve-year alliance between Orts, Rappard and Lugard was forming.

That session had to review all but the Middle East territories. But, no doubt to the relief of the other colonial officials cooling their heels in the corridors, almost half the commission's time was spent interrogating High Commissioner Walton and Major Herbst, Secretary of the South West African administration and part of the band that had carried out the campaign against the Bondelswarts. Those debates – published in full – deserve scrutiny, for through them we can see how hard Lugard worked both to constrain the South West African government and to promote the authority of the League and his own model of imperial administration.

Lugard's first act was to define and restrict the Commission's powers. It was not a court of law, able to place the mandatory power in the dock; nor was it a Commission of Inquiry, for it had no access to the kind of on-the-ground information essential to such a task. It could only examine the administration's own claims and justifications, and then advise the Council on whether these conformed to the Covenant and the mandate text. To make that decision, however, the Commission had to understand exactly what the South Africans thought their obligations were. Did the South African government consider Hofmyer's actions justified?

Smuts, of course, thought they were. But he was far too adroit a politician to say so publicly and make South Africa's name, as one of his parliamentary opponents pungently put it, 'stink in the nostrils of the countries of the world.'<sup>65</sup> So he dispatched Walton and Herbst to Geneva bearing the weighty but divided report by the South African Commission of Inquiry but without any statement about whether his government accepted the critical majority opinion and intended to change course. That prevarication annoyed the Commission and led it to try to elicit the government's opinions through discussion – a task that Lugard, at least, embraced. He and the Dutch member together drew up a comprehensive list of questions and over two weeks the Commission subjected

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<sup>63</sup> RH, Lugard 119/4, Lady Lugard to Major E.J. Lugard, 22 July 1923.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Lady Lugard to Major E.J. Lugard, 29 July 1923.

<sup>65</sup> LNA, R10, 1/29706/1347, CPM 49. 'Bondelzwarts Rising. Extracts from the Debate in the Union House of Assembly,' 2.

Walton and Herbst to a comprehensive grilling. The details of the expedition were gone into, with Hofmeyr's decision to call in airplanes sharply questioned (Britain was bombing tribesmen in Iraq as well, Herbst retorted).<sup>66</sup> Lugard also dragged forth a detailed portrait of the whole of the territory's native policy. All of it came out: the pass laws, the dog tax, settlers' steady encroachment on African land, the utter lack of schools, the avidity with which farmers hung around magistrates' offices hoping to pick up convict labor, the 'general feeling of the ignorant farmers...that the natives were there chiefly as laborers for themselves.' (Educated farmers thought that too, Major Herbst helpfully corrected.<sup>67</sup>) The Commission dutifully asked (as the Assembly had requested) what steps the government had taken to relieve and restore the Bondelswarts? Herbst confirmed that beyond telling the surviving men to seek work, nothing had been done.<sup>68</sup> Nor did the Government propose to reconstitute tribal institutions or transfer the officials involved in the repression. It was settled policy that all tribes in areas open to white settlement be 'broken', that is governed entirely by white officials, and public opinion would stand no censure of them.<sup>69</sup>

When the South African representatives left the room, the Commission began to discuss what to make of it all. Virtually all members agreed that there had been no mass insurrection and that the repression had been unnecessary and brutally severe. Only the Portuguese member, the former Governor of Mozambique Alfredo Freire d'Andrade insisted that when whites were in the minority, such punitive measures were necessary. When it grew clear he was outnumbered, he registered his dissent, leaked the Commission's views to the South Africans, and returned to Lisbon. But then a second disagreement arose – this one having to do with how the Commission should understand the standard to which Hofmyer ought to have adhered. That is, had Hofmeyr and his associates erred because they had treated the territory as if it were a colony when a mandated territory needed to be governed differently? Or had they erred because they had fallen below the standard to which the best colonial administrations adhered? Was mandatory administration, in other words, different in kind from colonial rule?

Unsurprisingly, men who had spent their lives governing colonies (and especially Lugard) were reluctant to say that it was. One, however, did so: the Commission's Chairman, the Marquis Theodoli, a politician and banker, rather younger than most of his peers, who had served in Nitti's liberal government and on the Commission on Ottoman Public Debt. And Theodoli insisted that the mandate regime was something entirely new. In a colony, Theodoli argued, the administration could pursue its own interests if it liked. In a mandated territory, however, the Covenant of the League 'has profoundly and

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<sup>66</sup> 3 PMCM, 123. South Africa continued to use airplanes to intimidate allegedly insurrectionary natives, for which see, Richard Dale, 'The Armed Forces as an Instrument of South African Policy in Namibia,' The Journal of Modern African Studies, 18: 1 (1980), 57-71.

<sup>67</sup> 3 PMCM, 120.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 131-4.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 128-30.

substantially altered colonial law and colonial administration,' laying down the principle that the interests of 'less advanced peoples' were paramount. 'First in importance come the interests of the natives, secondly the interests of the whites,' he wrote. 'The interests of the whites should only be considered in relation to the direct or indirect exercise of protection over the natives.' Yet the South West African administration had entirely ignored this new standard, governing through a policy of force, 'conceived and applied in the interests of the colonists rather than in the interests of the natives.'<sup>70</sup>

Lugard didn't disagree with Theodoli's condemnation of Hofmyer's policy. He too thought that the root cause of the affair was 'the practically universal feeling of the white population that the natives were to be regarded as their serfs and helots'.<sup>71</sup> What Lugard objected to, rather, was Theodoli's claims that incidents like the repression of the Bondelswarts had always occurred and would always occur in colonies precisely because they were not governed on the principle that indigenous rights came first – a statement that, Lugard protested, 'constituted a charge against every nation possessing colonies.' The mandates system was not based on a new principle, Lugard insisted; the requirement to protect the native population was one to which many colonial empires, and notably the British Empire, subscribed.<sup>72</sup> The League thus merely needed to generalize those excellent British practices. That the League might have constructed a superior and different system could not be contemplated.

Theodoli, however, would not recant. It was inconceivable, he stated, that the policy laid out in Article 22 was not 'an entire departure from precedent.' Theodoli would play many less principled roles within the League in future years. He would grow inured to the brutality of South West African policies; he would defend Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. In 1923, however, something – what he, a papal count, called his conscience – drove him to articulate the clearest defense of mandatory difference to appear in a PMC report. He insisted that his statement be published verbatim. Then, citing exhaustion, he too left Geneva.<sup>73</sup>

It was left to Lugard to marshal the rump of the Commission and get the majority report written. It was still a near-censure of the South West African regime. True, the Commission declined to implicate Smuts (as opposed to the local administration). Yet, it also stated that no local circumstances could justify the kind of treatment of natives that Herbst had disclosed.<sup>74</sup> Unsurprisingly, the report enraged the South African government, which retorted bitterly that white settlement was the only means through which natives could be gradually civilized. The report then had to go to the League Council, and Lugard worried that, once there, the British would intervene to protect Smuts and South Africa. As he wrote to Rappard privately, the Council would probably

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<sup>70</sup> 3 PMCM, 205-6; the draft of Theodoli's statement, mistitled 'Lugard,' is in LNA S298(7).

<sup>71</sup> RH, Lugard 136/6, Lugard, 'Bondelswarts'; a copy is also in LNA S298(7).

<sup>72</sup> 3 PMCM, 203, and see LNA S284 1 (14), Lugard to Rappard, 15 August 1923.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>74</sup> League Document A.47.1923.VI, PMC, Report on the Bondelzwarts Rebellion (Aug. 14, 1923).

just refer their report to South Africa itself, which would express itself mystified by the criticisms and insist they were doing their best. The matter would then die for another year, after which the Council likely would just ‘thank General Smuts for his promises and express complete confidence in his high ideals. And pigeon-hole the papers.’ Lugard thus tried privately to get Lord Robert Cecil to push Smuts on the matter but Cecil just wasn’t interested. Instead, the question ended as Lugard foretold: indeed it was Cecil at the League Council who silkily proposed the necessary form of words that referenced those ‘high ideals’ but promised nothing at all.<sup>75</sup> British imperial collusion at the Council level thus prevented matters from going further.

So what were the consequences of this very public scandal? In those grasslands north of the Orange River, it had very little impact at all. The dog tax was, for a time, lightened, but the Bondelswarts remained impoverished and threatened by steady encroachments on their land. The South West African administration held to its policies: white settlement expanded; Africans’ ability to survive outside the labor market narrowed. True, the administration grew cannier. When the Rehoboth Bastards, a mixed race community to the North, petitioned the League, planes were sent over their reserve but did not drop bombs.

But if consequences on the ground were slight, for the League regime and what we might call the international public sphere radiating out from Geneva, they were profound indeed. The scandal had trained the eyes of humanitarians and internationalists on the mandates system, and they would never entirely avert their gaze. The Geneva-London axis forged between the Anti-Slavery Society, the League of Nations Union and Secretariat officials grew stronger. And the Mandates Commission emerged as the linchpin of the whole system. The fact that it had virtually censured a mandatory power enhanced its reputation, with the Assembly congratulating it on its ‘zeal’ and ‘impartiality.’<sup>76</sup> Even the German Foreign Ministry, up to this point prone to think of the system as nothing more than a cloak for annexation, took notice. Internationalism perhaps meant something after all.

The Commission shared that estimation. Theodoli’s and Freire d’Andrade’s dissents notwithstanding, those grueling sessions had created an esprit de corps. Appointed (albeit only with their governments’ consents) as independent experts and not as government representatives, they began to think that they were in fact independent, that they sat (as Theodoli put it) as free men. To some extent, of course, the Commission members simply performed impartiality, for whatever their public stance, as colonial ministry archives make clear, all members from mandatory powers routinely strategized with their governments on policy. Yet for some, that stance of impartiality was sincere and heartfelt. And for no-one more than Lugard.

For Lugard emerged from the Bondelswarts affair with a new mission and

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<sup>75</sup> Minutes of the 27<sup>th</sup> session of the Council, 13 Dec. 1923, LNOJ, 5: 2 (Feb. 1924), 339-41.

<sup>76</sup> Fourth Assembly, Plenary Meeting, Sept. 26, 1923, LNOJ, Special Suppl. No. 13 (Oct. 1923), 92-3.

purpose. He could imagine nothing more important than to set colonial policy across the globe along what he thought were right lines. Having shown that he – the British member – didn't mind shaming a British Dominion, he had emerged as the Commission's authoritative voice. Now, he pressed home that advantage. He did so especially by challenging and isolating the Portuguese member Freire d'Andrade, an insistent defender of forced labor and the only Commission member to take the South African side. Freire d'Andrade's views alarmed his colleagues, but as the only ex-African governor on the Commission for the first two years (a qualification of which he boasted), the other members found it hard to challenge him.

But Lugard's appointment had shifted the balance of power, for with his string of colonial governorships and the prestige of the world's largest and richest empire behind him, he easily outranked Freire d'Andrade. Lugard also had the lowest possible opinion of Portugal's colonial record and little patience for his Portuguese colleague's views. In 1924 and 1925, the two men clashed sharply over whether Africans should control their own affairs through native councils and courts (Freire d'Andrade thought not), whether ambitious development projects should be restricted if they burdened the African population heavily (Freire d'Andrade thought not), and, of course, whether Africans were, in Lugard's words, on the whole 'industrious and hard-working' (Freire d'Andrade most emphatically thought not).<sup>77</sup> In the summer of 1925, perhaps wearying of the wrangling, Theodoli asked both men to put in writing their understanding of that crucial passage of Article 22 enjoining mandatory powers to promote the 'well-being and development' of the population. A battle through memoranda ensued.<sup>78</sup>

That there was a tension between 'well-being' and 'development' (or between what Lugard termed the 'philanthropic' and the 'utilitarian' approaches to policy) the two men could agree. In other respects, however, they were far apart. It wasn't just that Lugard thought 'well-being' should take precedence over 'development' and Freire d'Andrade thought the reverse. It was also that they had very different ideas of just whose 'well-being and development' they were charged to protect. Lugard assumed that those defined as 'not yet able to stand alone' were non-white natives, and that they were the mandatory power's first charge. As a result, while he agreed that public infrastructural projects were necessary, he thought governments should limit European economic concessions and land grants and also that African labor should remain 'free' and not compelled. Freire d'Andrade, by contrast, took the fact that the Covenant had laid stress on 'development' as clear evidence that Africans could legitimately be forced to work and that any restriction on white settlement and capital was out of the question.<sup>79</sup> Struggle between the races was simply nature's law; if African populations were mowed

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<sup>77</sup> The quotations are from Lugard. 5 *PMCM*, pp 27-8; 6 *PMCM*, 47-50.

<sup>78</sup> The original hand-written drafts are in LNA, R74. All four memoranda were printed as annexes to the 7 *PMCM*.

<sup>79</sup> Freire d'Andrade, 'The Interpretation of that Part of Article 22 of the Covenant which related to the Well-being and Development of the Peoples of Mandated Territories,' in *ibid.*, 197-205.

down by that onslaught, that was because nature dictated the survival of the fittest. Perfectly content to see racial mixing (or rather, unions between white men and black women), Freire d'Andrade hoped a robust creole population would supplant the continent's declining African peoples.

For Lugard, this was a nightmare vision and one paternalistic administration should work to prevent. African populations could become ever stronger and more populous, Lugard retorted – but only, he believed, if the races were kept apart, African institutions preserved, and Africans themselves shielded from European settlers' and companies' exploitative demands and carefully guided by sympathetic European administrators. Freire d'Andrade disagreed, not only because he thought African institutions incapable of political evolution but also because he was so certain that in any level playing field Africans would be – culturally, economically, biologically – swiftly submerged.<sup>80</sup> That Africans might flourish under a regime of equal rights was, to both men, unthinkable.

There is no question but that Lugardian paternalism was more attractive to the Commission than Freire d'Andrade's Darwinian fantasies. The more 'independent' and internationalist members rallied to the kind of attentive scrutiny of native conditions, sympathy for 'traditional' authority, and skepticism of aggressive plans for settlement or investment that Lugard favored. Such paternalistic oversight went down well with the Assembly and won commendation from scholars and from humanitarian organizations. Equally importantly Lugardian ideals offered the Commission a kind of yardstick or standard to which to refer as they moved from land laws in Cameroon, to race relations in Samoa, to economic concessions in Rwanda or Palestine. The Commission, one might say, began to grade on a Lugardian curve – but actually, it did more than that, for it also published the grades, in the process shaping how the newspaper-reading European public viewed and ranked not only the different mandate regimes but also, importantly, the imperial powers governing them. Virtually all the architects of the mandates system had anticipated just such an effect: Cecil, remember, had thought that League oversight would pose no problems for the British Empire, but would expose maladministration in the territories of other imperial powers. Cecil was right to predict that France and Belgium would face problems. Where he was wrong was in predicting that the dominions would be spared.

For as the commission began that work of comparative examination, the Dominions – and especially South Africa – looked worse and worse. South Africa never washed off the stain of the Bondelswarts affair; for fifteen years its relations with the Commission were tense and antagonistic. The Commission repeatedly criticized the mandatory power's harshly punitive treatment of Africans and solicitude for settlers; the South Africans responded with truculence and sometimes defiance. But Australia's

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<sup>80</sup> 'Note by Sir F. Lugard on the Memorandum of M. Freire d'Andrade,' and 'Reply by M. Freire d'Andrade on Sir F. Lugard's Note,' in *ibid.*, 206-9.



settler-oriented regime and harsh system of indentured labour in New Guinea also came in for sharp criticism, especially since Lugard had a private source of information about its deficiencies. This was Sir Hubert Murray, the reform-minded governor of the Australian colony of Papua next door, brother of none other than the Oxford Professor of Greek and League of Nations Union stalwart Sir Gilbert Murray. Hubert Murray strongly disapproved of the mandated territory's administration, and was happy to pass along accounts of flogging and labour coercion to his brother – who duly passed those accounts on to Lugard. The luckless Australian High Commissioner in London, who had no such inside information and knew little about mandated territory, found his annual interrogation in Geneva an exercise in ritual humiliation.

But Lugard's growing hold over the Commission didn't just wrongfoot the settler-oriented Dominions administrations; it also placed the less paternalistic French West African regimes on the defensive. This was not a foregone conclusion, for if Britain had the advantage of having engineered most of the rules of the League game, France's colonial establishment made a strong bid for international leadership in the immediate post-war years. Colonial Minister Albert Sarraut's massive 1923 tome, La Mise en Valeur des Colonies Françaises, laid out a comprehensive plan for colonial development that put the backward-looking pieties of The Dual Mandate to shame. Colored and creole intellectuals in the twenties found France's republican rhetoric and less segregationist practices more appealing than Lugard's deference to tribal chiefs,<sup>81</sup> and as Michael Callahan has shown, the French also made a serious effort in the early twenties to conform to international principles devised, after all, to suit British ideals. Although the French had forced British acceptance of a clause allowing the West African mandated territories of Togo and Cameroon to be administered jointly with neighboring colonies, France dutifully maintained separate administrations anyway and refrained from recruiting soldiers in their mandated territories.<sup>82</sup>

Yet the French found themselves hamstrung not only by the postwar budget crisis and by serious unrest in their territories but equally by their inability to use the Commission to good effect. The first French member, a career diplomat, could not rival Lugard's claims to expertise, and while his successor, the eminent African Governor Martial-Henri Merlin, ought to have been able to do so, in fact Merlin proved too pompous, indolent and transparently partisan to make any friends. And Lugard, who had been battling French influence in Africa on Britain's behalf since the 1890s, let no opportunity pass to accentuate supposed differences between British and French practices and to denigrate the latter. Nor was this just because he – together with the Anti-Slavery Society – wished to safeguard African land rights and prevent forced labour; it was also

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<sup>81</sup> Albert Sarraut, La Mise en Valeur des Colonies Françaises (Paris: Payot, 1923), and for the shift to 'association,' Alice L. Conklin, A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), ch. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Callahan, Mandates and Empire: The League of Nations and Africa, 1914-1931 (Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 104-121.

because he disliked the French administration's less segregationist racial ideals. In discussions in 1925 with Paul Bonnacarrère, who had come to Geneva to impress the Commission with his progressive French Togoland administration, Lugard went out of his way to disparage not only Bonnacarrère's use of labor levies but equally his ambitious educational and cultural plans. Bonnacarrère's claim that one could of course 'convert [the native] into a civilized man' raised Lugard's hackles; educated natives, the British member retorted, were 'imbued with foreign ideas and did not in any way represent' the native population.<sup>83</sup> Chastised for policies that seemed directly in line with the principles of Article 22, the French must have felt they could do nothing right.

By contrast, League oversight elevated British prestige, for Lugard could point to the British mandate of Tanganyika as the poster child for League ideals. Partly to make this point, the Colonial Office had drafted a stringent land law for Tanganyika – one that declared the community of Tanganyika, and not the Crown or the British Empire, the owner of the land. It helped too that both the Conservative and Labour governments willingly appointed Ormsby-Gore as 'accredited representative' and posted him regularly to Geneva to answer the Commission's questions. Unsurprisingly, Ormsby-Gore had little trouble persuading his former colleagues of Britain's good faith. The Labour government's appointment of Sir Donald Cameron as Governor of Tanganyika also won the enthusiastic endorsement of the PMC. For Cameron had worked under Lugard in Nigeria and spoke 'Lugardian': he intended, he insisted, 'to develop the native on lines which will not Westernise him and turn him into a bad imitation of a European.' Cameron thus sought to limit white settlement and to safeguard African use-rights to land while barring individual ownership; he also created a system of 'indirect rule' by native chiefs – a system that educated and urban Africans resented (and that historians have sharply criticized) but that the Mandates Commission unambivalently praised. Tanganyika, the Commission concluded, was the diametric opposite of South West Africa, the territory in which African interests were recognized as paramount and the 'spirit' of the sacred trust fulfilled. Even though many British colonies looked nothing like Tanganyika, Britain and Lugard reaped a reputational bonanza. Officials in London, tracking Lugard's work, had the wit to understand that it was precisely his seeming impartiality and willingness to criticize British (or rather Dominion) practices as well that made him 'very valuable.' Of course, one wrote in 1926, he was self-referential, and tended 'like all ex-Governors...to forget that there were stout men after Agamemnon,' but none could imagine anyone could represent Britain better.<sup>84</sup>

Let me pause, though, to clarify this picture. Lugardian paternalism genuinely was close to the spirit of Article 22. It is important to remember, however, that this vision of trusteeship was neither 'egalitarian' nor democratic nor even particularly

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<sup>83</sup> 6 PMCM, 17-19, 25-7, 37.

<sup>84</sup> NA, CO 323/956/32, Note by J.E.W. Flood, 15 Sept. 1926.

progressive. Indeed, in two crucial respects – in its attitude towards self-determination and in its racial assumptions – Lugardianism was if anything a retreat from the principles articulated in 1919. Only in the most remote sense, first, did Lugard think colonial policy should be oriented towards eventual self-government. In this respect, he was very unlike Ormsby-Gore, who had told Rappard in 1920 that he thought Tanganyika could quite readily become ‘an independent African native State.’<sup>85</sup> Lugard, by contrast, thought that ‘the danger of going too fast with native races’ was much greater ‘than the danger of not going fast enough’; one of the advantages of ‘indirect rule’ was that it could slow down the pace of change.<sup>86</sup>

And racial assumptions, too, undergirded Lugardian thought. Africans – having a distinct culture but not Europeans’ capacities – would require white guidance for a long time to come. Once again Ormsby-Gore, a generation younger, had not thought in such terms. ‘I feel that in the coming century Europeans will have to alter very substantially their fundamental attitude towards the colored peoples,’ he had told Rappard; white prejudices, not black aspirations, were the problem.<sup>87</sup> Lugard disagreed, and his paternalistic creed saved the Mandates Commission from embarking down this self-flagellating road.

It is these aspects of Lugardian paternalism, indeed, that help us understand why the response to the Bondelswarts affair was, in a sense, the Commission’s finest hour, and why other instances of state violence against inhabitants elicited much less condemnation. For the crucial point for the Anti-Slavery Society and indeed the Commission, the judgment on which they based their whole response, was that the Bondelswarts had not rebelled. Today, when Namibians claim this incident as an early battle in the liberation struggle, it is crucial to the narrative that the Bondelswarts did rebel: for J.H. Harris and Lugard, however, it was absolutely critical to agree that they had not. For their right to protection turned on their status as dependents; if they were rebels against the mandatory power’s authority – which the League had already declared legitimate – their repression would be entirely justified.

Hence the Commission’s response – and, still more, Lugard’s own crucial role – when populations in the mandated territories made clear that they were not content with protection and demanded rights. In the mid and late twenties the Commission confronted just that situation, first in Syria, where France put down a massive rising that had begun in the Jebel Druze in 1925 through bombardment, exemplary terror and the use of human shields, and second in Western Samoa, where a passive resistance movement by virtually the whole population was met by New Zealand with incomprehension and then repression, including police firing on unarmed demonstrators. In both cases these rebellions and their repression ‘internationalized’, with massive petition drives by exile

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<sup>85</sup> LNA, S284 1 (9), Ormsby-Gore to Rappard, 17 January 1921.

<sup>86</sup> *Dual Mandate*, 198.

<sup>87</sup> LNA, S284 1 (9), Ormsby-Gore to Rappard, 17 January 1921.

communities or (in the case of Samoa) the population itself, and ended up before the Mandates Commission.

In both cases, however, the Commission ended up defending the mandatory power and justifying the repression. Why? They did so because these movements called into question the foundational assumptions of the regime itself. That is, Syrians and Samoans appropriated the claim to ‘civilization’ and insisted squarely on their capacity for self-government, sending petitions and representatives to Geneva to argue their case. But the mandates system was founded on the argument that such peoples could not represent themselves; when they claimed that they could, those appeals were – in the Commission’s eyes – themselves in violation of the Covenant and hence inadmissible. The Mandates Commission could not, and did not, entertain such arguments. They refused to receive the representatives who had travelled halfway round the world to see them. They dismissed the Syrian petitioners as unscrupulous agitators and the 8000 Samoan male petitioners (that is, 90% of the territory’s adult men) as simple natives led astray by ‘half-castes’ out for material gain. (In the Samoan case, Lugard was especially offended by the wealth and political demands of the ‘half-caste’ population, and insisted on the need to keep races strictly separate.) In both cases, then, the Commission concentrated less on criticizing the mandatory power than on teaching the French and the New Zealanders how to play the mandates game. So long as those states cooperated – that is, sent full reports, replied to petitions, and assured the League of their devotion to the ideals of the sacred trust – the Mandates Commission would uphold their authority. The League’s publicity apparatus sent those deceptions winging around the world.

These incidents bring out clearly the centrality of Lugard’s role in the management of the mandates system; in brief, he made it possible for that system to be used at once to reconcile European interests, to turn Lugardian principles into a European standard, and to reinscribe civilizational and racial hierarchies. But precisely because of his centrality, I want to close by spending a few moments on his part in managing the League’s response to the great Syrian revolt of 1925-7. That role, indeed, caused him pangs of conscience. For Lugard, along with the British authorities in the Middle East, disliked the French approach in Syria, thinking it too sympathetic to the Maronites and too harsh on Arab nationalists. The Commission resented, too, that the French administration had not yet drafted a basic law (a requirement under the mandate) and insisted – unbelievably, given the depute of protests against French rule from a diasporic Syrian population around the globe – that its administration had received no petitions from the territory’s inhabitants at all. Syria in 1925 was a powder keg, and no-one was too surprised when it exploded.

No-one had much sympathy for the French response either. The French bombardment of Damascus, an undefended and historic city, became a cause célèbre, making headlines and drawing protests across the globe. French behavior had upended civilizational assumptions, for it was the French who had acted barbarically, whereas the

city's sizable European population had only escaped harm, so the Times reported, 'because Muslim notables had defended the Christian quarter and protected its inhabitants from molestation.'<sup>88</sup> That bombardment happened on October 19<sup>th</sup>, as luck would have it, the very day the Mandates Commission convened in Geneva for their seventh session. Daily, as they sat reviewing the annual reports from the mandated territories, frantic telegrams arrived from Arab organizations and simply interested bystanders; daily, ever more harrowing reports from Damascus appeared in the Times (the paper with the best coverage, as the French papers were censored). Early in the session, the Commission had agreed that, as they had no report on the situation from the French Government, they could not comment on the crisis, and had agreed instead to hold a special session in Rome in six months to examine it. Yet Lugard chafed under that decision. On October 28, not coincidentally the day after a full report on the French bombardment of Damascus appeared in the Times, he confronted his colleagues. Their silence was being taken for consent, he said; at least they should alert the League Council to what seemed a widening humanitarian crisis.<sup>89</sup> The Commission did not – clear evidence that they had come to see their role as reviewing, and not directing, policy – but all observers expected Lugard to take a prosecutorial stance when the Commission convened for that special session in Rome.

Yet he did not. In part, this was because, for the first and only time, the British government restrained his actions. Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain had in fact been quite shocked at France's behavior, calling in the French Ambassador to read out the most damning reports from the British Consul in Damascus and warning that the British intended to press for compensation for their nationals. But Chamberlain also thought that the whole sorry mess needed to be contained as quickly as possible, and that the British needed to help the French do that. French Prime Minister Aristide Briand was perfectly straightforward about what he wanted: Chamberlain had to muzzle Lugard at the forthcoming Commission meeting in Rome. That request caused much hand-wringing in the Foreign Office, for Lugard, as an independent 'expert' wasn't supposed to be under their control, and as Chamberlain told Briand, it was alien to 'traditions of English public life and service' and 'injurious and derogatory to the League' to seek to influence Sir Frederick in any way. Yet, he also let Briand know that he had met Lugard for lunch, 'as a personal friend and not in any sense as a Minister,' and had there spoken of French sensitivities.<sup>90</sup> Lugard, unsurprisingly, experienced this as pressure, especially when Leo Amery, now Colonial Secretary and a personal friend of Lugard's wife, called him in to repeat the lesson. He became thoroughly uneasy – he left the Colonial Office, Flora told Amery, 'murmuring to himself, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ass that treadeth out the French!"'<sup>91</sup> – and was tempted to plead illness and skip the session entirely.

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<sup>88</sup> 'Damascus Riots,' Times (London), 27 Oct. 1925.

<sup>89</sup> 7 PMCM, 129-33.

<sup>90</sup> NA, CAB 24/175, C.P. 496 (25), Chamberlain to the Marquess of Crewe (Paris), 23 Nov. 1925.

<sup>91</sup> RH, Lugard 119/4, Lady Lugard to Leo Amery, 22 Feb. 1926.

Flora's convictions and his own sense of duty made shirking impossible. 'Of course he realizes,' Flora wrote Amery, 'that higher issues must take precedence over lower' – one might say, great-power comity over Syrian rights – 'and he determined with your warnings in his mind to go and do his best.'<sup>92</sup>

So Lugard was, at first, uncharacteristically quiet at that Rome session, prompting jibes from Theodoli and puzzled questions from the press. Yet, in the end, he played a central role in the Commission's work of imperial rehabilitation. This was not because he doubted the harrowing reports coming in of French atrocities – indeed, as he told Flora privately, he believed them, 'because I know what they have done in similar circumstances in Africa'<sup>93</sup> – but rather because he was certain that 'there is no alternative to the French mandate.' Lugard took it as axiomatic that Syria could not govern herself, which meant that some other country would have to do so. And, as he told Flora: 'We do not want it and we do not want to see the Turks back again. I would like to see Italy burn her fingers over it but there is no possibility of that.' The French must therefore stay – and that meant that 'we must not make [their] position impossible.'<sup>94</sup>

What that meant in practice is that Lugard worked hard, did his promised 'best,' to bring France into the formal compliance with the mandates regime. Having elicited the statement that France fully understood its obligations under the mandate and saw its task as to 'enable populations which, politically speaking, are still minors to educate themselves so as to arrive one day at full self-government,'<sup>95</sup> Lugard helped draft the report that instructed those rebellious 'minors' to collaborate with the tutor the League had assigned them, since failure to do so 'far from hastening the day of complete emancipation, can only postpone it.'<sup>96</sup> Discussion of petitions alleging widespread atrocities – of bombardment of undefended villages, use of human shields, rape as a weapon of war, massive looting – were pushed off to a later session, a decision that gave the Foreign Ministry time to instruct officials in Syria to produce a report rebutting every charge – to rebut, I repeat, not to investigate them. That report received, the Commission, at their next session, happily confirmed that they now knew that 'no atrocities had been committed'<sup>97</sup> – indeed, that it was impossible that a nation like France, which had shown such 'glory and prestige in the history of civilization' could have used 'methods such as murder, burning, pillage and rape.'<sup>98</sup> Henceforth, the Commission would assume – to the surprised relief of the French representative, who noted privately that some evidence of atrocities came from letters from French officers themselves<sup>99</sup> – that all such allegations were calumnies. More strikingly, they would

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> RH, Lugard 119/4, Lugard to Lady Lugard, 2 Mar. 1926.

<sup>94</sup> RH, Lugard 119/4, Lugard to Lady Lugard, 2 Mar. 1926.

<sup>95</sup> 8 PMCM, 45, 61.

<sup>96</sup> 'Report,' in 8 PMCM, 198-208.

<sup>97</sup> 10 PMCM, 132.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 140, 146.

<sup>99</sup> MAE, SDN 568, De Caix to Briand, 2 Dec. 1926.

agree that bombing of civilians, the very method they had condemned in the Bondelswarts case, was allowable when repressing a genuine rebellion, provided the officers in charge were French and not ‘colonials.’<sup>100</sup> This was the reimposition of civilizational and racial hierarchies with a vengeance.

The period of the early twenties was thus of considerable significance for imperialism, as the mandates system, under Lugard’s entirely sincere leadership, worked to stabilize a highly contentious imperial settlement. As we have seen, the system enhanced Britain’s reputation in particular, while forcing the system’s skeptics – France, South Africa – into at least rhetorical compliance. Those efforts reassured the Western newspaper-reading public that was the League’s main audience; they did not persuade the populations under mandate, but amid the torrent of language generated by the League, those peoples had difficulty making themselves heard. So how did a regime, which worked so well for Britain in the 1920s, come to bite the hand that fed it? How did the mandates system come to constrain, rather than promote, Britain’s room to maneuver? I shall begin to tell that story next week.

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<sup>100</sup> LNA, R23, 1/47458/4284, Catastini to Dawson, 14 March 1927.

## At Odds Over Sovereignty

Lecture 3 (Feb. 14, 2014)

My first lecture traced how a group of British internationalists and humanitarians banded together to create an apparatus of imperial oversight at the League of Nations. We then looked last week at how Sir Frederick Lugard used that apparatus to promote a distinct set of norms and bring the imperial powers behind the League regime. ‘Trusteeship,’ as Lugard conceived it, would shield non-European peoples from European exploitation, allowing them to develop, slowly, along ‘native’ lines. Lugard’s moralism, as we’ve seen, sometimes irritated the colonial officials sent to answer his questions in Geneva, but his relentless focus on practical administration shielded them as well. Why? Because it pushed questions of sovereignty to the side.

Sovereignty – where it lay, who held it – was the great unanswered question of the League’s imperial oversight regime. It should be clear why sovereignty mattered. The sovereign can own and alienate the land and its resources; it can conscript the subject; it can change borders and boundaries; it can relinquish territory to another. But were the imperial powers sovereign in territories under League oversight? They held those territories under mandate, yes: but did that mean merely that they had made promises to observe certain rules of conduct in those territories, or that they were actually administering those territories on behalf of someone else?

Woodrow Wilson, certainly, had thought of the mandates regime as an alternative to, and a barrier to, imperial sovereignty. Conquest, he thought, would no longer confer sovereignty. Something else would be needed: the free choice of the people involved or, failing that, international agreement. But then the Americans withdrew, and a kind of hush descended. It wasn’t simply that the legal issue was complicated (although it was). It was also that the imperial powers wanted to leave the question alone. They thought time was on their side. ‘You will see what these mandates will develop into in ten years,’ one French official had said in 1919, certain that their distinction from colonies would disappear.<sup>101</sup> When the League Council established the system’s rules in 1920, it conferred ‘a full exercise of sovereignty, in so far as such exercise is consistent with the carrying out of the obligations’ of the Covenant on those holding B and C mandates, but explicitly declined to state where sovereignty – apart from its ‘exercise’ – actually resided.<sup>102</sup> On this point, even the League-friendly British were evasive and inconsistent. One junior minister assured the Commons in 1922 that mandated territories were

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<sup>101</sup> Library of Congress (Washington DC), MSS4954, Diary of George Louis Beer, Entry for Aug. 10, 1919, 131.

<sup>102</sup> See, ‘Obligations falling upon the League of Nations under the terms of Article 22 of the Covenant (Mandates),’ *LNOJ*, Sept. 1920, 334-341.



‘no...part of His Majesty’s Dominions,’<sup>103</sup> but that same year A.J. Balfour stated that mandates were only ‘a self-imposed limitation by the conquerors on the sovereignty which they exercised over the conquered territory’ –a far less restrictive formulation.<sup>104</sup> Which was it?

Absent political clarity, the jurists went to work. They could not agree either. When the University of Chicago Law Professor Quincy Wright published his classic study, Mandates under the League of Nations in 1930, he was able to identify ten separate theories about where sovereignty over the transferred territories lay. Wright was canny enough to notice the correlation between nationality and legal argument. Thus, British and American scholars tended to argue that sovereignty was held by the Allied and Associated powers, an alliance the US and Britain had dominated, and French experts to say it was shared between the mandatory power and the mandated population, a formula that wrote those troublesome allies out. German and Austrian jurists, by contrast, usually argued for League sovereignty, the only formula under which Germany could aspire to a share in their rule. No-one referred the question to the Permanent Court, so the theories kept coming.<sup>105</sup>

In the mid-twenties, that argument became politically fraught and consequential. There are three reasons for this. First, the Mandates Commission had encroached on the question, and by 1925 had made clear that they believed, wherever sovereignty lay, it was not with the imperial powers. Second, and even more importantly, in 1926 Germany joined the League, and was determined to prevent any power from claiming full sovereignty over territories it wished to reclaim. But the third reason the question of sovereignty blew up was because of the appointment as colonial secretary of the British politician most determined to safeguard British sovereignty from the Cape to Cairo. This was Leo Amery.

The question of whether and to what extent international oversight restricted imperial sovereignty was thus fought out on the field of British imperial policy, and especially over Amery’s plan to federate Kenya, Uganda and mandated Tanganyika, a project known as ‘closer union.’ I’m going to anatomize that fight today, first briefly sketching out what was at stake and then traveling to Geneva and Berlin to recover the how international mobilization affected that argument. As we shall see, a proscription on imperial sovereignty was strengthened, but not without some cost both to comity within the League and to Britain’s international reputation.

## I

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<sup>103</sup> H.L. Deb., vol 50, 21 June 1922, col. 1046-7.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes of the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the Council, 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, 17 May 1922, LNOJ, June 1922, 547.

<sup>105</sup> Long treatises could be written (and, in the interwar years, were written) about the jurists’ debate. For a cogent summary of the state of debate up to 1930, see Quincy Wright, Mandates Under the League of Nations (1930; rpt. New York: Greenwood, 1968), 314-44.

I assume you remember Leo Amery, the Milnerite imperialist whom we met in the first lecture. Since the Edwardian period, Amery had wished to see a new British dominion in East Africa, one stretching from the Zambezi to the border of Ethiopia. The war was for him a chance to realize that dream, and as Milner's under-secretary in 1919 urged his chief to incorporate Tanganyika into an East Africa federation. Milner thought that premature; he did, however, allow Amery to insert a clause into the Tanganyika mandate allowing 'a customs, fiscal and administrative union or federation' with neighboring British colonies. It's worth noting that the words 'political union' were not included – but Amery was not the sort of man to let this stand in his way. As he wrote in his diary, the mandate 'really makes no difference as long as we actually get our flag up and our administration in.' Possession, for Amery, was the whole of the law.<sup>106</sup>

Amery hoped to succeed Milner as Colonial Secretary, but it was not until the end of 1924, when he was over fifty, that he claimed this prize. His personality surely had something to do with that delay. Amery had some real strengths: he was energetic, fearless, a talented linguist, and probably the most original geopolitical thinker to sit in cabinet between the wars. But he was also prickly, combative, outspoken to the point of belligerence, and lacking in political skill. He didn't listen, and, sure he was in the right, he didn't compromise either. It's telling that Amery thought of himself as the champion of Kenya's white settlers, who were agitating for responsible government and access to Tanganyika's highlands, but his young fellow-Conservative, our old friend William Ormsby-Gore, who was actually in Nairobi when Amery's appointment was announced, reported that Kenya's whites were anxious about Amery and would have preferred 'a steady sort of man.'<sup>107</sup>

Ormsby-Gore might have preferred that too, for he returned from East Africa to find himself Amery's under-secretary. They might seem a particularly incongruous team. Amery was determined to flout the League; Ormsby-Gore had helped build it up. Amery was on the right of the Conservative Party; Ormsby-Gore on the soft left. Amery shared Smuts' belief in white superiority; Ormsby-Gore was unusually open-minded and optimistic about Africans' capabilities. Their personalities were different too, for Ormsby-Gore was emollient, consensus-oriented, good with staff, and impossible not to like. Even the last German governor of South West Africa, in London in June 1927 to press German colonial claims, found Ormsby-Gore sympathetic, but reported that while Amery 'spoke German like a German,' he had made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, there was no German colonial question at all. Germany had lost the colonies in war, and that was the end of it.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> For Amery's role, see, L.S. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. 2, *War and Peace, 1914-1929*, (London: Hutchinson, 1953), 360.

<sup>107</sup> National Library of Wales, Brogywtyn MSS, PEC 10/1/12 Ormsby-Gore to his mother, 8 Nov. 1924.

<sup>108</sup> Auswaertiges Amt, R29434, Seitz to Schubert, 4 July 1927.

And yet, from 1924 until 1929, Amery and Ormsby-Gore jogged along. Amery was busy setting up the Dominions Office and the Imperial Conferences, and left Ormsby-Gore plenty of room. Ambitious travels kept them apart. Amery went to the Middle East in spring 1925, Ormsby-Gore to West Africa in 1926, Amery on a seven-month Dominions tour in 1927 and early 1928, Ormsby-Gore to Singapore and Malaya later that year. Moreover, the two genuinely shared common ground. Both were early advocates of what would become the project of colonial development. The 1924 East Africa Commission, appointed by Labour and which Ormsby-Gore had chaired, proposed an ambitious plan of public health and infrastructural development, and Amery had no trouble agreeing with it.

And yet, the two men did disagree sharply on one thing: the constitutional future of East Africa and, in particular, of Tanganyika Territory, the largest area under League mandate. For if Ormsby-Gore thought Tanganyika's land and future belonged to its African population, that was not Amery's view. Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika should be bound together in a single federation; Tanganyika's fertile highlands reserved for white settlement; and political authority devolved, with the white population granted a measure of self-government. East Africa could, Amery hoped, become another white dominion – that is, it might still have a mostly black population, but one under white rule.

This was what Kenya's settler community wanted too, but two prior pledges stood in the way. The first was the Devonshire declaration of 1923, which had ruled out equal representation of Indians in Kenya on the grounds that Kenya was primarily 'an African territory,' one in which 'the interests of the African natives must be paramount.'<sup>109</sup> The second was Tanganyika's status as a mandated territory. Amery was determined to knock over both hurdles. In the spring of 1925, he told Tanganyika's governor Sir Donald Cameron to expect rapid movement towards federation.<sup>110</sup>

A year later, he went public. In June 1926, Ormsby-Gore was slated to speak at an 'East Africa' dinner held at the Savoy, but he came down with a bad case of flu. Amery stepped in, and used the opportunity to make clear exactly how committed he was to closer union and how little he cared what the League might say. 'Our mandate for Tanganyika,' he told a receptive crowd:

was in no sense a temporary tenure or lease from the League of Nations. It was rather what might be called in lawyers' language 'a servitude,' that was to say, an obligation to observe certain rules of conduct with regard to our administration in that territory.... The foundations of the East Africa of the future were as sure and as permanent in Tanganyika as they were in any other East African territory. British rule in Tanganyika, Amery added, was not 'based on ... West African principles' but rather on that same 'dual policy' applied in Kenya. Britain might be responsible for

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<sup>109</sup> *Indians in Kenya: Memorandum*, PP 1923, Cmd. 1922, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Entry for 2 March 1925, *The Leo Amery Diaries*, vol. 1, 1896-1929, ed. John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p. 399.

African well-being, but she was also responsible to the whole world ‘for the fullest development of those territories’ and especially to ‘those in particular of our own race who had undertaken the task of helping that development.’<sup>111</sup> As plainly as possible, Amery signaled his support for white settler rule. Lord Delamere, in England to represent the Kenyan settlers, was delighted.

But Amery’s speech wasn’t only heard in Britain: it echoed in Geneva and Berlin as well. Writing in the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung one week later, Germany’s last East African governor and now its main colonial campaigner Heinrich Schnee retorted that Britain held Tanganyika Territory only in trust – and, indeed, that when Germany entered the League, Britain might be expected ‘to return the territory for which she was trustee to its original owner’ – that is, to Germany. Was Amery speaking for the Cabinet as a whole, Schnee asked? If so, ‘Great Britain, while talking about a peaceful League of Nations policy, would actually be pursuing a policy of annexation.’ Amery stood by his words.<sup>112</sup>

The controversy over Closer Union in East Africa, which lasted as a live issue from 1925 until a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee decided against it in October of 1931, was one of the most significant stories in interwar British imperial history. No question save the six-year argument over Indian constitutional reform so dominated parliament and exercised public opinion.<sup>113</sup> Imperial and African historians have of course studied this important conflict, but mostly as an argument over the substance and principles of colonial policy – as a quarrel, let’s say, between those who supported white settlers’ claims and those who believed in ‘trusteeship’ ideals. The argument, seen from this perspective, was about administrative practice – that is, about how Africans would be ruled.

But what has been less noticed is that the conflict was not only about that. It was also, let’s say, about whether Britain – its parliament, its government – had the authority to set policy at all. It was, in other words, about sovereignty. To an extent, Lugard understood this. That is, he understood how jealous of British imperial holdings other powers – especially Italy and Germany – were. But he thought trusteeship was the

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<sup>111</sup> ‘A United East Africa: Mr. Amery on Recent Progress,’ The Times, 12 June 1926; also The Leo Amery Diaries, ed., John Barnes and David Nicolson, vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 457-8.

<sup>112</sup> ‘German Claim to Colonies,’ The Times, June 28, 1926.

<sup>113</sup> There are a number of accounts of the controversy over Closer Union. Amery, Cameron, and Grigg all told their side of the story in their memoirs: see, Amery, My Political Life, vol. 2, 360-2 and The Leo Amery Diaries, vol. 1, *passim*; Donald Cameron, My Tanganyika Service (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939), 223-235; and Lord Altrincham [Sir Edward Grigg], Kenya’s Opportunity (London: Faber & Faber, 1955), 189-220. Margery Perham sketched out Lugard’s very important role in Lugard: The Years of Authority (London: Collins, 1960), 673-92. Robert Gregory tracks Labour policy on the question in Sidney Webb and East Africa: Labour’s Experiment with the Doctrine of Native Paramountcy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962). Kenneth Ingham pays some attention to opinion within the various East African territories in A History of East Africa (London: Longman’s, 1962), 310-323. The only study of the significant influence that Tanganyika’s mandatory status exercised over the issue, to which I am indebted, is Michael D. Callahan, ‘The Failure of ‘Closer Union’ in British East Africa, 1929-31,’ The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, 25: 2 (1997), 267-293.

defense against those complaints. Thus, as he wrote to his co-conspirator J.H. Oldham of the International Missionary Council at the height of the ‘Closer Union’ controversy: ‘Unless we can show that our rule is disinterested, & that we are faithful to our pledges of Trusteeship it is difficult to justify our position; especially the immense area over which we hold control under mandate since the war.’<sup>114</sup> What Lugard was slow to realize, however, was that other countries might wish to limit British sovereignty whatever policies she pursued: good government was not the only criterion. Let me move first to Geneva and then to Berlin to track how the Mandates Commission and the German government came to think about imperial sovereignty, before turning to how that international mobilization affected Amery’s campaign.

Let me begin in Geneva, where the Mandates Commission by 1925 had been at work for five years. Each year, the Commission examined the reports submitted by each mandatory power; each year they debated whether government policies accorded with the principles laid out in the Covenant and mandate texts. Inevitably, they came up against questions of sovereignty – and, as they did so, they came to rely for legal advice on one member in particular, the former Dutch colonial official, Daniel François Willem Van Rees.

Pedantic, socially-awkward, and with apparently few other ties, Van Rees was by some distance the Commission’s hardest working member. Most of the PMC members came to Geneva twice yearly for the month-long sessions. Not Van Rees. When appointed, he rented a house in nearby Montreux, went to the Secretariat to meet the Mandates Section Director William Rappard, and instructed him to have all laws, administrative degrees and government reports relating to mandates sent to his new home. He then spent what were for him clearly many happy hours poring over documents, ringing up the secretariat for clerical help, and writing memoranda on one tricky issue after another in his almost illegible hand.<sup>115</sup> Van Rees was a great nuisance and no doubt a great bore, but no-one did more to establish the principle that imperial powers were not sovereign in mandated territories.

Van Rees did not come to this conclusion because he was in any way a critic of empire. The son of a governor of the Dutch East Indies, he had been in the Dutch colonial service his whole life. But like several other Commission members he was a lawyer and approached all questions not from the standpoint of ethics or administration (as Lugard tended to do) but textually, in light of those principles laid out in the Covenant and the mandate texts. Van Rees thought those documents clearly indicated that the mandatory power possessed, not sovereignty, but only administrative rights, and while his fellows may not have welcomed his conclusions they could not fault his reasoning.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> RH, MSS Afr. S 1829 Box 3/1, Lugard to Oldham, 24 Feb. 1929.

<sup>115</sup> See, LNA, R6, 1/10779x/249, Dossier on Van Rees.

<sup>116</sup> Van Rees, ‘The System of State Lands in B and C Mandated Territories,’ in 3 PMCM, Annex II, 216-239.

Reluctantly, and usually guided by Van Rees's reference to chapter and verse, the Commission built up a case against sovereignty.

Consider the following determinations. First, when France passed a law defining the public land of Cameroon as 'state land', the Commission suggested such language amounted to a claim to sovereignty, and asked all mandatory powers to make clear that land belonged to the territory and not the mandatory power (France did so).<sup>117</sup> And with land, so too with people: asked by the Council to advise on the 'national status' of the inhabitants of these territories, the Commission recommended that mandatory powers create a national status – such as the British category of 'protected persons' – which would make clear inhabitants were not imperial subjects,<sup>118</sup> a request with which all but South Africa complied. Third, the Commission asked all administering powers to keep entirely separate financial accounts for the territory; once again all mandatory powers complied. True, the Commission did rule that contracts agreed and property rights acquired would hold beyond the mandate's end – a decision that, one might argue, clawed back through economic entanglements the limitations placed on political sovereignty.<sup>119</sup> Yet when it came to sovereignty, the Commission was clear: it did not reside with the mandatory power.

The Commission might have had text on its side, but by 1925 it had annoyed one imperial power after another. France was irritated by that tussle over land laws, and Belgium by the Commission's adroit evisceration of a law intending to incorporate Rwanda and Burundi into Congo, but the Commission's worst arguments, predictably, were with South Africa. In 1922, South Africa passed a law claiming that it held the territory's ports and railways 'in full dominion' – language that Van Rees thought hardly compatible with the trusteeship regime. Every year, Van Rees asked the South Africa representative to confirm that South Africa meant only that it had full management of the territory's assets and not that it owned them; every year, that representative simply refused to answer that question. In 1926, the frustrated Commission asked the League Council to tell South Africa it had to revise its laws. At the same time, they expanded their questionnaire and asked the Council for permission to hear petitioners in person.

But when Van Rees walked into a meeting of the League Council that September (he was there to represent the Mandates Commission while its report was discussed), he found himself under attack. British Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain led off. The Commission seemed to be trying 'to extend its authority to a point where the government would no longer be vested in the mandatory power but in the Mandates Commission,' Chamberlain charged, a move that was 'not the intention of the Covenant.' Representatives from the other mandatory powers all jumped on the bandwagon, the South African representative telling Van Rees that the PMC had no business investigating

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<sup>117</sup> 4 *PMCM*, 156-7.

<sup>118</sup> 2 *PMCM*, 16-19.

<sup>119</sup> For that decision, see esp. Minutes of the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the Council, 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, Sept. 15, 1925, in *LNOJ*, October 1925, 1363.

what was done in South West Africa at all. Van Rees, visibly stunned by the wave of vitriol, retorted that the Commission had never gone beyond the duties entrusted to it and had done nothing to deserve such a rebuke.<sup>120</sup>

This was the most vituperative attack on its work the Commission ever suffered. It was coordinated in advance, and by Britain – hitherto the Commission’s patron and friend. Certainly Amery’s hostility to the League and the irritation of the Dominions had a role in driving Chamberlain to act. But Chamberlain was genuinely shocked by the independence the Commission was showing and by its seeming willingness to interfere not only in questions of native policy but equally in matters bordering on sovereignty. The whole mandates system, he wrote in a private minute, seemed to be headed down the wrong path. The allies had never intended ‘to create a superior Council of Administration’ over the European empires, but rather ‘to assure the world that the abuses of King Leopold II’s personal exploitation of the Congo are not being repeated elsewhere’ – a narrow description of their duties that would certainly have shocked the Commission.<sup>121</sup> The Legal Advisor to the Foreign Office, Sir Cecil Hurst, then drafted a note, approved by the Dominions premiers and then sent to the League, which insisted that the mandatory powers were to enjoy ‘a full exercise of sovereignty’ in their territory. While the Council was to oversee their work, it was ‘not called upon to check and examine every minute detail of administration, nor can it have the means to discharge such a Herculean task.’<sup>122</sup> Every mandatory power agreed, France even suggesting that it might be possible to stop publishing the Commission’s minutes and reports.

And yet – and this is the important point – Chamberlain’s attack backfired. For it took place in public. Newspapers across the globe covered the quarrel, the Washington Post, L’Humanité, the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung and the Indian Social Reformer all agreeing that it exposed the imperialist powers’ annexationist desires.<sup>123</sup> The Germans were especially certain that the main aim was to neuter the Commission before Germany could join. British internationalists were appalled and ashamed. The Anti-Slavery Society, the League of Nations Union, and the Union of Democratic Control condemned Chamberlain’s behavior in the press and planted questions in Parliament.<sup>124</sup> Revealingly,

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120. Minutes of the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Council, 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting, 3 Sept. 1926, LNOJ, Oct. 1926, 1233-37; also, Callaghan, Mandates and Empire, 123-9.

121. NA, CO 323/956/33, Copy of Minute by Sir Austen Chamberlain, 19 Oct. 1926.

122. ‘Questions connected with the work of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations: Memorandum Prepared for the Imperial Conference,’ (Oct. 1926), in Imperial Conference, 1926. Appendices to the summary of proceedings, PP 1926, Cmd. 2769, 222-7. For drafts of the minutes, see NA, CO 323/956/33.

123. See the extensive clippings in LNA, Box R52, File 1/55141/16466, especially ‘The League and the Mandates,’ Indian Social Reformer, 18 September 1926; ‘Quarreling about Mandates,’ The Washington Post, 8 September 1926; and the former German colonial Governor Heinrich Schnee, in the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 26 September 1926.

124. BLPES Archives, LNU Archives, Microfilm Reel 431, Minutes of the Mandates Committee for 22 Oct. and for 3, 17 and 30 Nov. 1926. See also the articles in the LNU paper, Headway: ‘Matters of Moment – Mandate Queries,’ Oct. 1926, 181; ‘Mandate Troubles,’ Nov. 1926, 212-3, and Warren Postbridge, ‘Mandates and Mandatories: Questions Great Britain does not like,’ Dec. 1926, 226; John Hills, ‘Mandates and the League’ [letter], The Times, 24 Nov. 1926; ‘Power of Mandates Commission’ [on the UDC protest], Manchester Guardian,

those critics deplored his attack not only because they wished to defend the League but also because they took for granted that Britain should ‘set the standard’ for colonial practice and ‘show the way’ to more ‘backward’ or ‘hesitating’ powers.<sup>125</sup> Domestic criticism on this scale forced a retreat. Lord Robert Cecil in the Lords and William Ormsby-Gore in the Commons were authorized to proclaim, as good League men, ‘that the British Government have no desire in the world to hamper, or interfere with, or do other than support to the utmost of their power, the work of the Permanent Mandates Commission.’<sup>126</sup>

But the damage – or, from the standpoint of internationalism, the good – had already been done. The League Council did not expand the Commission’s powers but it did not restrict them either, and the Commission would never be so deferential to the British again. Instead, it developed a new sense of solidarity and power. At the public meeting that opened the Commission’s next session, Van Rees’ colleagues warmly applauded his stand – and the watching journalists perceptively noticed that the even members from the mandatory powers joined in the tribute. Rappard then delivered a long speech defending the Commission’s actions, and the Italian chairman thanked the public and the press for their ‘assiduity and interest.’<sup>127</sup> The Commission had come to stand for the principle of international control. This was a body Germany wanted to join.

So let me now turn to Berlin, to examine Germany’s growing interest in the mandates regime. On one level, that interest is easy to explain, since the mandated African and Pacific territories had been German possessions. At the Peace Conference, British and French statesmen told themselves that Germany had been a latecomer to the colonial game and probably didn’t care much about their territories’ loss. They could not have been more wrong. Those seizures – and still more the charge that Germany had forfeited its moral claim to take part in the civilizing mission (a charge that became known as the Kolonialschuldlüge, the colonial guilt lie) – won popular support to the colonial project as never before. All parties save the Communists insisted on the territories’ return, and after 1920 the colonial associations regrouped and expanded. At first they could only harp on the injustice of the expropriations, hold revivalist meetings for old soldiers and settlers, and paint dire portraits of the incompetence of mandate rule, but in 1924, when the pragmatic Gustav Stresemann determined to bring Germany into

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20 Nov. 1926; ‘League’s Control of Mandates’ [on the LNU protest], Manchester Guardian, 6 Dec. 1926. For debate in Parliament, 65 HL Deb., 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 17 Nov. 1926, cols 644-72, and 200 HC Deb., 5<sup>th</sup> ser., 14 Dec. 1926, cols. 2876-99.

<sup>125</sup> The quotations are from BLPES Archives, LNU Archives, Microfilm Reel 431, ‘Statement on the British Memorandum to the League Regarding Mandates Procedure,’ 1 Dec. 1926, and Sir Robert Hamilton in the Commons debate above, cols. 2888-92.

<sup>126</sup> Quoting Cecil, 65 H.L. Deb., 17 Nov. 1926, col. 661.

<sup>127</sup> ‘The Criticism of Mandatories,’ Manchester Guardian, 5 Nov. 1926; and see 10 PMCM, 10-14.



the League, they found their moment. The return of the German colonies must be a condition of German entry.<sup>128</sup>

Bernhard Wilhelm von Bülow, head of the German Foreign Ministry's League of Nations section, had the good sense to realize this demand was, as he put it, 'not to be taken seriously and unrealizable anyway.'<sup>129</sup> But if the mandatory powers had been able to listen in on the discussions going on in the Wilhelmstrasse, they would not have been reassured. The colonial lobby wanted their territories back, but the Foreign Ministry's goal was rather different: to rebuild Germany's position as a great power in a globalizing world. In the past, colonies had been essential to that effort, but if colonial restitution was not possible, they would find another path. Between 1924 and 1926, officials hammered out their strategy.

That strategy was an economic one. Even before Germany joined the League, the Foreign Ministry had collaborated with the big Hamburg-based shipping consortia to rebuild the colonial trade and had provided loans to enable German owners to repurchase plantations in British mandated Cameroon. (The French colonial office was disgusted that the British let the German owners return.) But the German strategy was a League strategy as well, for German interests coincided nicely with the ideals of trade liberalization Geneva was seeking to promote. The mandates for Togo, Cameroon, Tanganyika and Rwanda and Burundi all contained clauses guaranteeing all League states equal economic rights – clauses that would enable German firms to establish local branches, bid for contracts, send settlers, possibly even buy land.

Now, that economic strategy might in time become a territorial one, for with equal economic rights Germany might well be able, as one ministry official put it, 'in short order to so economically penetrate our unreturned former protectorates... that the later transfer of their mandate to Germany would not be out of the question.'<sup>130</sup> But the Ministry did not intend to bank on that outcome: instead, cleverly, rather than reclaim sovereignty, it would try to make sovereignty matter less across the board. Annexations of all kinds had to be resisted, the realm of the international widened, and the autonomy and even future independence of the mandated territories safeguarded as much as possible. Having unwillingly become the first post-imperial great power, it was in

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<sup>128</sup> Former governor of German East Africa Heinrich Schnee was an especially prolific and exigent colonial revisionist; see his The German Colonies Under the Mandates. (Berlin, 1922), and German Colonization, Past and Future: the Truth about the German Colonies (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1926). The Koloniale Rundschau kept a watching brief over all the former German colonies and over the League's oversight regime. For German colonial revisionism more generally, see Wolfe W. Schmokel, Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), and for economic plans, Dirk van Laak, Imperiale Infrastruktur: Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas 1880 bis 1960 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004).

<sup>129</sup> PA, R95613, Von Bülow, 'Aufzeichnung,' 6 Jan. 1926.

<sup>130</sup> '...dass wir auch die uns noch nicht wieder zurückgegebenen früheren deutschen Schutzgebiete (abgesehen von dem japanischen Mandatsgebiet) wirtschaftlich in nicht zu langer Zeit so durchdringen, das seine spätere Mandatsübertragung auf Deutschland nicht ausgeschlossen ist.' PA, R29433, Von Brückner, 'Richtlinien unserer Kolonialpolitik' (1924); see also van Laak, Imperiale Infrastruktur, 204-5.

Germany's interests to lessen the benefits of empire, and expand international control, as much as possible.

To carry out these goals, however, Germany needed a seat on the Mandates Commission. At Locarno, Stresemann had raised Germany's claim to colonies but without any real conviction. When it came to the Mandates Commission, however, he made it clear he would not back down. Belgium, France and the dominions were all entirely opposed; as was so often the case, however, the British were already changing sides. Germany was 'likely to be less dangerous if represented...than if excluded,' the Colonial Office minuted, and League secretary-general Eric Drummond was in favor as well.<sup>131</sup> Privately, Stresemann agreed not to force the intransigent ex-governor Heinrich Schnee down the Commission's throat. Thus, with British support, in 1927, Ludwig Kastl, forty-nine, a lawyer, formerly of the German South West Africa administration and now the salaried Managing Director of the Federation of German Industries, joined as the German member.

Kastl's appointment was not popular with the German colonial lobby,<sup>132</sup> which had relished the prospect of pitting Lugard against one of their own ex-governors. But the Foreign Ministry found Kastl excellent, and rightly so. His presence strengthened the non-mandate bloc on the Commission, but his correct manner, good English, and entirely conventional views on 'native policy' shielded him from open attack.<sup>133</sup> Although intensely busy, Kastl prepared scrupulously for each session, challenged any aspersions on Germany's colonial record, fought to get German doctors into Rwanda and German archeologists into Iraq, scrutinized trade agreements and concessions to make sure they didn't exclude Germany and met regularly with Foreign Ministry officials and the ex-governors in Berlin to coordinate responses to any annexationist moves. And of those moves, none worried the Foreign Ministry more, or took more of Kastl's time than Amery's plans for 'Closer Union.'

By 1927, Amery was moving ahead. 'East African Federation from the frontier of Abyssinia to the Zambezi is...definitely on the map,' his under-secretary Ormsby-Gore told Lugard privately in April, 'and Amery means to achieve it if he can.'<sup>134</sup> That summer Amery recalled the East Africa governors to London, intending to hammer out legislation. The Governor of Kenya Sir Edward Grigg was a staunch ally; indeed, he was looking forward to being named Governor General of the new Federation.

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<sup>131</sup> NA, CO 323/965/6, Note by T.K. Lloyd, 22 Sept. 1926. A joint meeting between Foreign and Colonial Office officials, held to outline policy for the 1926 Imperial Conference, also came down cautiously in favor. See, NA, CO 323/956/33, 'Questions Connected with the Work of the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations: Memorandum Prepared for the Imperial Conference,' Oct. 1926, 9-12.

<sup>132</sup> PA, R29434, Seitz to AA, 9 December 1927.

<sup>133</sup> See comments on Palacios in PA, R96515, German Embassy (Madrid) to Foreign Ministry, 12 Mar. 1930, and on Rappard in PA, R96535, Dufour-Feronce to De Haas, 1 July and 2 July 1929.

<sup>134</sup> RH, Lugard 67/2, Ormsby-Gore to Lugard, 18 April 1927.

But there was plenty of opposition as well. Lugard, who insisted that British policy was founded on the principle that ‘native populations ought not be placed under the rule, direct or indirect, of a local oligarchy of alien nationality,’ felt (as he told Ormsby-Gore) ‘very depressed’ about Amery’s plans.<sup>135</sup> Ormsby-Gore, although unable to openly oppose his chief, was very anxious as well. Fortunately, they had one strong ally: the Tanganyika Governor Sir Donald Cameron. Cameron immediately made clear his own opposition to federation. ‘I care little,’ he wrote to Lugard, ‘as I am prepared at any moment to resign from Tanganyika if I consider that the interests of the natives are being made a pawn in any political game.’<sup>136</sup> Cameron also made a bid for international support, stopping off in Geneva to assure the Mandates Commission that Tanganyika ‘will always remain a predominantly native country, like Uganda’ and was not actually a British possession anyway.<sup>137</sup> Amery, assuredly, would not have said anything of the kind.

Cameron’s opposition delayed Amery’s plans. Another East Africa commission would have to be sent out to examine the question. But in a White Paper Amery laid out his own view that the claim of the settler communities ‘to share progressively in the responsibilities of government’ could no longer be ignored; indeed, their ‘share in the trusteeship for the progress and welfare of the natives must be developed.’ In other words, political control over Africans should be devolved onto white settlers. Amery insisted that no international obligations stood in the way. ‘The fact that we have undertaken mandatory responsibilities in respect of Tanganyika creates no difficulty or complication.’<sup>138</sup> Amery appointed a trusted confederate, Hilton Young, to head the new Commission, and then left for his Dominions tour.

That four-person Commission, which traveled through East Africa in the winter of 1928, had not been constituted simply to rubber-stamp Amery’s plans. It included, most importantly, the missionary official J.H. Oldham, a confidante of Lugard who had worked with Ormsby-Gore on an Advisory Committee on African Education in the mid-twenties. Oldham was known as a strong defender of ‘trusteeship’ ideals, and it seems fair to conclude that he had been placed on the Commission to counter Hilton Young’s pro-settler views. But Oldham’s position on Closer Union – and, for that matter, Lugard’s position – was not so antagonistic as might be supposed. In the spring of 1927, Oldham had made a bid to be involved in planning for East Africa by telling both Amery and Ormsby-Gore that he favored Closer Union provided some safeguards for native rights could be worked out.<sup>139</sup> Amery and Grigg favored Closer Union in part as a vehicle for devolving authority to white settlers, although Amery’s main concern was to

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<sup>135</sup> For Lugard’s statement of policy, see Mss. Afr. S. 1829, Oldham 3/1, Lugard to Oldham 1 June 1923 and Lugard 13/2, ‘The Kenya Question,’ (27 May 1923), sent to Ormsby Gore. For his response to Amery, Mss. Afr. S. 1829, Oldham 3/2, Lugard to Oldham, 4 June 1927.

<sup>136</sup> RH, Lugard 9/1, Cameron to Lugard, 31 Jan. 1927.

<sup>137</sup> 11 *PMCM*, 65-8.

<sup>138</sup> *Future Policy in regard to East Africa*, PP 1927, Cmd 2904, 5.

<sup>139</sup> RH, MSS Afr. S. 1829, Oldham 3/1, 8 Apr. 1927 and 27 May 1927; Oldham 6/4, Oldham to OG, 6 May 1927.

create an efficient structure for fostering imperial security and economic growth. Oldham, by contrast, thought Closer Union could be crafted to limit local whites' authority over Africans by placing any new representative body for settlers under the authority of a High Commissioner or Governor-General exercising control over all three East African territory. On its return from East Africa, the Hilton Young Commission proposed a bizarre compromise under which Kenya's white population would be granted further constitutional rights, but within a broader federal structure with a High Commissioner holding veto power over their decisions and controlling certain key questions, including native policy.<sup>140</sup>

No-one knew quite what to make of that recommendation. The Kenyan settlers, thwarted in their desire for responsible government, hated it. The Colonial Office, aware that it would devolve power away from Whitehall and onto a new local commissioner, disliked it as well. Anyone but Amery would probably simply have given up, but Amery – aware that an election was coming, and determined to push a version of Closer Union through if he could – once again recalled the East African governors and asked them, Ormsby-Gore, and his officials, for their views. That request elicited a remarkably hostile set of memoranda and finally brought Ormsby-Gore into open dissent. He and indeed most of the officials thought the three territories could indeed collaborate on questions of transport and communication, but they objected to any Governor-General being appointed in East Africa to exercise power without being directly answerable to Parliament, and, equally, to the Commission's proposal to have a consistent native policy across the three territories. That idea, Ormsby-Gore said bluntly, was one that 'I have spent my whole energies for six years in combatting.' Kenya's native policy was 'regrettable' but now entrenched; 'and the one thing I care about is to prevent Uganda and Tanganyika Territory become Kenya or like Kenya.'<sup>141</sup> And if any attempt were made to unite the three territories, that would be the most likely outcome.

It's fair to say that is what Amery wanted. In the margin of Ormsby-Gore's memo, he scrawled that he supported just that plan to standardize native policy that Ormsby-Gore had denounced – and he meant to standardize in a 'Kenyan' and not 'Lugardian' direction. The combined opposition of Cameron, Ormsby-Gore and the Colonial Office officials did drive Amery to compromise, and he then sent out a trusted official to East Africa to work out the details of a scheme to unify key services under a new High Commissioner while leaving native policy, at present, decentralized. That was not at all what Oldham and Lugard had wanted. They thought Closer Union could be a good idea if it finally forced Kenyan native policy down a new track. Much too late they realized what Ormsby-Gore had understood all along: that Amery would seize upon any

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<sup>140</sup> Report of the Commission on Closer Union of the Dependencies in Eastern and Central Africa, PP 1928-29, Cmd. 3234, 224, 228.

<sup>141</sup> CAC, AMEL 1/4/39, Memo by Ormsby-Gore, 16 Jan. 1929.

version of Closer Union, certain that time was on his side.<sup>142</sup> By early 1929, Oldham and Lugard were thus searching for some means – any means – to slow Amery down and to ensure that any scheme be submitted to a Joint Select Committee of Parliament. It took all Lugard's connections to extract a promise from Amery to allow such discussion. This was the state of play when the 1929 election removed the Conservatives from office; in June, Sidney Webb, now Lord Passfield, replaced Amery as Colonial Secretary. That change of government surely made the prospect for the kind of political devolution to white settlers that Amery and Delamere desired more remote. But, thanks in part to Lugard and Oldham's machinations, 'Closer Union' was still on the table.

What Lugard, Oldham, Passfield, and indeed all the apparatus of pro-League sentiment in Britain failed to grasp, however, was that neither the Mandates Commission nor (still more) the German government would be reconciled to Closer Union if it could be made compatible with the principles of trusteeship. 'Geneva' and still more Berlin would oppose Closer Union tout court. Why? Because these actors were concerned, not principally about native policy, but rather about sovereignty. Germany especially wanted to prevent any move that would bind Tanganyika more closely and irrevocably to the British Empire. Whether Tanganyika was governed in the interests of settlers or natives was a distinctly secondary concern. Indeed, insofar as former German settlers were now returning to Tanganyika under the policy of equal access and an 'open door' to investment from all League states, sympathies in Berlin lay rather with the settlers.

By the time the Labour Government took office, the German campaign against Closer Union was already far advanced. The Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft mobilized to combat British plans before the Hilton-Young Commission was even sent out, and Heinrich Schnee told Kastl to his face that he needed to be more outspoken on the PMC.<sup>143</sup> In February of 1929, after the Commission had reported, Stresemann called in the British Ambassador to tell him that the German public viewed Closer Union as an affront to the mandates system and as veiled annexation; in the Reichstag, he promised to resist the move.<sup>144</sup> Yet, in his conversations with the British, Stresemann stressed not German resentments but rather League ideals, telling the Ambassador that German colonial claims were not the issue here. What was at stake was the integrity of the

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<sup>142</sup> Correspondence in the Oldham papers shows clearly Oldham and Lugard's propensity to think Closer Union could be implemented in a form compatible with their principles about 'native policy.' Ormsby-Gore, by contrast, largely declined to conspire with them and simply stated that he trusted Cameron and believed Grigg and Amery's views had to be resisted tout court. See, RH, Mss Afr. S. 1829, Oldham Papers, 3/2, Ormsby-Gore to Lugard, 28 Nov. 1927, and 5/4, Ormsby-Gore to Oldham, 28 Nov. 1927. For Oldham's awareness that Amery intended to move fast once the Hilton Young commission had reported, see Oldham 5/5, Oldham to Schuster, 7 Feb. 1929 and 20 Feb. 1929, and Oldham 3/1, Oldham to Lugard, 19 Feb. 1929.

<sup>143</sup> PA, R96530, 'Aufzeichnung über ein Besprechung mit Herrn Geheimrat Kastl' (2 Apr. 1928). Kastl, it is worth noting, insisted on the value of building a common PMC front.

<sup>144</sup> Verhandlungen des Reichstages, vol. 425, 94 Sitzung, 24 June 1929, 2877-78.

mandates system itself.<sup>145</sup> The Ambassador responded that Britain too was committed to uphold the mandate and was submitting the Hilton Young report to the PMC to see whether it conflicted with its requirements – a move that Britain, as the League’s most committed member, was constrained to make, but that played nicely into German hands.<sup>146</sup>

For the whole of the Mandates Commission, Kastl had assured the Foreign Ministry more than a year earlier, were agreed that the mandatory powers were ‘not sovereign’ and could be brought to oppose not only Amery’s but equally Lugard’s and Oldham’s plans.<sup>147</sup> Through the spring of 1929, Kastl diligently worked up his case. That July, his argument that the plan to appoint an East African Governor-General was ‘fundamentally incompatible with the character of the mandates system’ was read into the record. Lugard disagreed. As long as Closer Union would not ‘deprive Tanganyika of its status as a constitutional unit’ or deprive it of the PMC’s supervision, there could be no objection; indeed, Closer Union might serve as a vehicle ‘to extend the principles of the mandates system’ to the adjoining territories. Yet the Commission’s vocal ‘independents’ now agreed that even innovations that were technically allowed but might compromise Tanganyika’s independence in the future should resisted.<sup>148</sup> It was not their job to do good to some neighboring territory. It was their job to safeguard the autonomy and integrity of the territories under their oversight.

After that July session, Kastl met with the colonial lobbyists and officials at the Foreign Ministry to plan the next step. The ex-Governors urged a formal German protest, but Kastl demurred. The Commission was likely to oppose the project, and rather than face that censure, he thought the British might choose to retreat.<sup>149</sup> At the League Council that September 1929, Stresemann thus contented himself with the statement that since the mandated territories were ‘international and independent units for the administration of which the mandatory Powers were responsible to the League’ (hardly a definition Amery or even Lugard would have accepted), any development that would damage that independence was of course inadmissible. ‘For the moment,’ he concluded rather ominously, ‘he would say no more.’<sup>150</sup>

If Stresemann intended to put the new Labour government on warning, however, Passfield didn’t get the message. True, the Labour Government endorsed the principle of ‘native paramountcy’ and promised that there would be no move towards settler self-rule,

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<sup>145</sup> PA, R29434, ‘Aufzeichnung für eine Unterhaltung mit dem englischen Botschafter über den Hilton-Young-Bericht’ (2 Feb. 1929), and Note (4 Feb. 1929).

<sup>146</sup> PA, R29434, Note (13 Feb. 1929). In an Aide-Memoire sent after the meeting, Britain denied that the Hilton-Young report was in violation of the mandate. See Ibid, Brückner, ‘Aufzeichnung über die derzeitige Lage in Bezug auf die ostafrikanischen Unionspläne’ (16 Mar. 1929).

<sup>147</sup> PA, R96530, ‘Aufzeichnung über ein Besprechung mit Herrn Geheimrat Kastl’ (2 Apr. 1928).

<sup>148</sup> 15 *PMCM*, 103-6, 167-70, 200-204, 292.

<sup>149</sup> PA, R96515, ‘Aufzeichnung für die 56 Tagung des Völkerbundsrates über die Britisch-Ostafrikanischen Unions-Bestrebungen’ (28 Aug 1929).

<sup>150</sup> Minutes of the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Council, *LNOJ*, Nov. 1929, 1470.

but in a White Paper issued in June 1930 Passfield also proposed to appoint an East African High Commissioner and unify key services.<sup>151</sup> Few of those involved in the Closer Union controversy felt much enthusiasm for this plan. Kenya's settlers were interested in Closer Union only if it put East Africa's lands and peoples at their disposal; Cameron and Grigg, both in the last days of their governorships, disliked one another and had no desire to collaborate anyway. True, Lugard and Oldham approved this new Labourite Closer Union plan, but their erstwhile collaborator Ormsby-Gore most emphatically did not. He had always thought that Kenya should simply be isolated and not allowed to infect other territories<sup>152</sup> and had become – as he told Lugard – ‘more than doubtful about Oldham's political, administrative, and financial judgment on these East African matters.’<sup>153</sup> And, though he didn't say so here, he didn't think much of Lugard's obsession with racial segregation and separate development either. Lugard and Oldham both thought racial segregation the only alternative to the kind of settler rule Amery favored, while Ormsby-Gore, most unusually, thought that a cross-racial unitary state might be hard to build but the only possible choice.<sup>154</sup> Lugard, Amery, Oldham, Ormsby-Gore, and virtually everyone else who had had anything to say on the question over the past four years would all find themselves on the Joint Select Committee set up to resolve the ‘Closer Union’ question.<sup>155</sup>

Since that Joint Committee had not started meeting, the Mandates Commission deferred discussion at their July 1930 session – although they did extract a promise that Britain would make no final decisions without consulting them.<sup>156</sup> In Germany, however, Labour's plans met with an immediate response. Passfield's White Paper was denounced strenuously in debates in the Reichstag and the German press.<sup>157</sup> That September the German Ambassador delivered a formal note to the Foreign Office, and Stresemann's successor as Foreign Minister reiterated those concerns in the League Council.<sup>158</sup> Two massive memorials sent to Geneva – one signed by economic and colonial associations

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<sup>151</sup> Statement of the Conclusions of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom as regards Closer Union in East Africa, PP 1929-30, Cmd. 3574, 16, and for the reiteration of ‘native paramountcy,’ see Memorandum on Native Policy in East Africa, PP, 1929-30, Cmd. 3573.

<sup>152</sup> Lugard 67/2, Ormsby-Gore to Lugard, 15 Aug. 1929.

<sup>153</sup> Lugard, 67/2, OG to Lugard, 30 Aug. 1930.

<sup>154</sup> Oldham 5/8, OG to Oldham, n.d. [1931?].

<sup>155</sup> Drummond thought that Lugard should not serve on the Joint Select Committee, since members of the Mandates Commission were not supposed to hold government office, but when Lugard retorted that he would resign from the PMC rather than from the Select Committee if membership, Drummond swiftly backed down. For this, see RH, Lugard 119/2, correspondence with Drummond from Oct.-Nov. 1930. 156. ‘Report,’ in 18 PMCM, 201-2.

<sup>157</sup> Verhandlungen des Reichstages, Bd. 428, 184 Sitzung, 26 June 1930, 5864, and 185 Sitzung, 27 June 1930, 5914-5; see British civil servants' notes about the depth of German concern in NA, FO 371/14948, W602.

<sup>158</sup> Minutes of the Sixtieth Session of the Council, Meeting of 9 Sept. 1930, LNOJ, Nov. 1930, 1304, and for the German note, see NA, FO 371/14948, W9126, ‘Aide Memoire’ (4 Sept. 1930), and Callahan, ‘Failure,’ 274.

across Germany, the other by some 74 German women's organizations – charged Britain with a violation of the Covenant.<sup>159</sup>

While the German colonial lobby mobilized, Kastl carried on behind the scenes. The November 1929 session of the PMC had been Kastl's last – very overworked, he had resigned and been replaced by an economist much like him. Nevertheless, before he turned his brief over, he wrote privately to Lugard, with whom he had been on good terms. Unifying administrative services under a High Commissioner necessarily would compromise Tanganyika's autonomy and was thus a violation of the Covenant, Kastl argued, but damage was being done to Anglo-German relations as well. Lugard replied politely that while he entirely agreed that Tanganyika's separate identity must be preserved, he thought the safeguards built into the Labour White Paper did ensure that autonomy.<sup>160</sup> Yet, Kastl had struck a nerve. Lugard was an administrator and not a lawyer, and had simply accepted the claim – made by Amery, and unthinkingly repeated by Labour – that Closer Union would not violate the mandate. But Kastl's conviction that he had international law on its side unsettled Lugard. First privately, and then on behalf of the Joint Committee, Lugard drafted a series of pointed questions for the Foreign Office about the legality of the plan.<sup>161</sup>

The answers that came back in early 1931 – albeit from the Colonial Office's own law officers rather than from the Foreign Office, which might well have disagreed – shocked Lugard, Passfield, Oldham, and the Joint Committee alike. A High Commissioner who exercised any legislative authority would be in breach of the mandate, and Germany would be within its rights to bring the issue to the Permanent Court.<sup>162</sup> Michael Callahan, who first followed the trail of Lugard's international ties and established the importance of the law officers' decision, thus concludes – rightly – that Closer Union in its political form was dead by 1931: Passfield could not introduce a High Commissioner over his own department's legal ruling.

But if the law officers took Closer Union off the table, it is also true that the Colonial Office declined to publicize that judgment, allowing the Joint Committee to carry on, and leaving the PMC and the Germans on tenterhooks, for another nine months. Moreover, when that Committee finally reported, it went out of its way to repeat that Britain's mandate over Tanganyika was 'absolute and not revocable,' that the formation of a 'customs, fiscal and administrative union or federation with the adjacent territories' was explicitly allowed, and that cooperation and coordination of economic and scientific services should be enhanced. True, the Committee also reported against political union, which the members now knew was open to legal challenge, but the form in which they

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<sup>159</sup> For the protests and petitions, see, *Protest der deutschen Wirtschaft gegen die Einverleibung von Deutsch-Ostafrika in das Britische Reich* (1931); Hedwig von Bredow to PMC, 1 Oct. 1930; Schnee to Secretary-General, 24 Jan. 1931; all in LNA, Box R2313, File 6A/21123/441.

<sup>160</sup> RH, Lugard 141/1, Kastl to Lugard, 30 June 1930, and Lugard to Kastl, 4 July 1930.

<sup>161</sup> NA, CO 822/28/4, Lugard to FO, 20 Oct. 1930, and Callahan, 'Failure,' 277.

<sup>162</sup> Callahan, 'Failure,' 278.



made that recommendation – ‘this is not the time for taking any far-reaching step in the direction of formal union’ – did not acknowledge that it was off the table forever.<sup>163</sup>

Indeed, the fact that the new National Government after 1931 went ahead with the more modest administrative collaborations, institutionalizing a regular governors’ conference and introducing a common postage stamp and a customs union among the East African territories without waiting for the Commission’s consent suggested that the British were inching towards Closer Union by stealth. The Commission had been assured that no changes would be made without consulting them, Rappard said angrily at the 1932 session. When the British Colonial under-secretary responded that he had understood British assurances to apply only to political and constitutional union and not to such purely administrative changes as postal unification, Rappard retorted that that had not been the Commission’s understanding. ‘Closer political and constitutional union would always strike the Commission as not even debatable,’ he said. ‘It would upset the mandate which it was the Commission’s business to defend.’<sup>164</sup> The danger, the new Governor, Stewart Symes, was told the next year, was that even minor administrative reforms might lead to Closer Union by degrees and hence endanger the sovereignty or economic well-being of the territory.<sup>165</sup>

Lugard, still in the room and well aware that Closer Union had been shelved, thought such fears exaggerated and politically motivated. Bitter debate ensued, and in one of their rare acts of public discord, members from the European mandatory powers dissented from the majority’s condemnation of Britain’s moves. Yet the ‘independent’ members of the Commission kept a beady eye on any contacts between Tanganyika and neighboring British administrations as the years went on. In 1937 Rappard was still haranguing British officials about the possible pernicious effects of the common postage stamp.<sup>166</sup>

The story of international involvement in the Closer Union debate is thus replete with ironies, for while the proscription on annexation was upheld and indeed strengthened, the resentment generated by the controversy persisted as well. The vigilance of the PMC and the German Foreign Ministry, Kastl’s adept personal diplomacy, and the genuine opposition of much of the British establishment (including, notably, his own under-secretary Ormsby-Gore) to Amery’s pro-settler plans, were all crucial to bringing the proposal down. But, since the British never publicly conceded, as the Commission put it, ‘that the mandate in itself, so long as it exists, may constitute an insuperable legal obstacle,’<sup>167</sup> those international critics never knew they had won. Privately, British officials admitted as much, but saw no need to humble themselves in Geneva. Accustomed to view the mandates regime as a lever to force lesser nations to

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<sup>163</sup> Joint Committee on Closer Union in East Africa, Report, PP 1930-31, 7, 8, 15, 16.

<sup>164</sup> 22 PMCM, 135.

<sup>165</sup> 23 PMCM, 46-52.

<sup>166</sup> 31 PMCM, 17.

<sup>167</sup> 22 PMCM, Annex 8, 324.

live up to British standards, they would not acknowledge that those ‘lesser nations’ had kept them from placing Tanganyika under the thumb of a Kenyan white settler class. Much goodwill was lost thereby; that common postage stamp came at a high price. Amery may not have created an East African Union, but the movement he unleashed seriously weakened Britain’s standing within the PMC and lowered Germany’s already shaky confidence in the robustness of the mandates regime. The proscription of annexation had been strengthened, but not in a way that strengthened the League.

Establishing that mandatory powers were not sovereign in the mandated territories, and forcing those powers to accept, however grudgingly, that norm, was the mandates system’s most significant achievement. By the time the later stages of the Closer Union controversy were playing out, ‘Geneva’ had declared itself. After further controversy with South Africa, with a Labour Government now in office, and with Germany now in the room, the League Council finally backed the Mandates Commission up. It was quite clear ‘that sovereignty, in the traditional sense of the word, does not reside in the mandatory power’ (my emphasis), the Council’s rapporteur stated in September 1929. The Council drew the attention of South Africa to that ruling.<sup>168</sup>

One might argue that this norm was established by the Covenant itself – that that text, and not the controversies I have detailed here, truly mattered. I think that misses something crucial about how such norms work. Many international agreements exist on paper only. They become meaningful, and gain force, through iteration and concession, when states, against a narrow conception of their interest but in order to gain legitimacy and repute, profess their allegiance and change their course. This is what happened here. For a variety of reasons – to safeguard its international reputation, to avoid conflict with a hyper-sensitive ex-enemy, even to live up to its own cherished image of itself – Britain decided to submit to a probably unenforceable norm. Publicity provided the context, German entry into the League the catalyst, and the PMC’s dogged persistence the fuel, for that decision.

But did it come too late? In the mid-twenties, under Stresemann’s leadership, Germany gambled on a pro-League strategy – on a campaign less to reclaim its territories than to use the League to make political sovereignty (as opposed to economic power) matter as little as possible. Germany’s strategy, in this respect, seems strikingly modern. But by 1931, when Closer Union was finally rejected, the global economy was in crisis and virtually all powers, including Britain, were re-imperializing as quickly as possible. Through the late twenties, the revisionist powers – Germany, Italy – had tried to use the League to limit imperial sovereignty, but the benefits of that strategy were now dwindling. In the early to mid thirties, Germany, Italy and Japan would all break with the League; giving up on deterritorialization, they would demand territories of their own.

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168. Minutes of the 56<sup>th</sup> session of the Council, session of Sept. 6, 1929, LNOJ, Nov. 1929, 1467.

My next two lectures will be about the dilemmas those revisionist claims posed for Britain and British internationalism.

## The Racial Order in Question

Lecture 4 (Feb. 21, 2014)

In January of 1933 the English novelist Winifred Holtby published a satire titled Mandoa, Mandoa – a book that I still think the most perceptive analysis of the ‘logic’ of the relationship between internationalism and empire between the wars. Holtby based her imagined state of Mandoa on Ethiopia, then much in the news as a picturesque land with a modernizing monarch and a bad record on slavery. In Holtby’s novel, remote ‘Mandoa’ is being opened to the West by an ambitious ruler and an entrepreneurial package tour company, when humanitarian crusaders raise the disturbing charge that the country is rife with slavery. In the ensuing battle for control of Mandoa, the forces of ‘profit, power and reform’ – as Holtby put it – become hopelessly entangled. And what is the outcome? The local ruler is pushed aside as politicians and reformers in London and Geneva collude to turn Mandoa into – what else? – a mandate under the League of Nations.

Winifred Holtby has been present in these lectures, although I haven’t pointed her out. But she was in the press gallery, reportedly ‘clapping like a lunatic’, when Germany was voted into the League, and in the stranger’s gallery of the Commons as Leo Amery, last week, sought to push Closer Union through. And I want to use her to introduce this lecture, for Holtby was an internationalist, if of a most unusual kind. She is the only major figure I shall discuss in these lectures who defined internationalism primarily as the pursuit of racial equality, a cause to which she devoted much of her much of her too-short life.

It is important to recognize just how unusual this was. True, as I discussed in my last lecture, there was a sharp divide between those (like Leo Amery) who thought white settlers should be given authority over native policy, and those (like Lugard) who thought settlers needed to be restrained so as preserve African institutions and land rights. But neither held any brief for multi-racial development. Even a convinced humanitarian like John Harris and progressives like Ormsby-Gore believed that Africans should live under separate ‘native institutions’ and the authority of customary law. Holtby disagreed. ‘The future is surely, whether we like it or not, with a homogeneous civilization.’ ‘I am looking ahead twenty, fifty, even a hundred years and seeing an African nation, black, white and brown, urban and rural, which by our legislation today we can either unite or divide. My argument is that we should do grievous wrong to the future generations to encourage... any division.’<sup>169</sup> Lugard hoped cautiously to build political institutions suitable to Africans by limiting interracial contact and bolstering tribal authority. Holtby

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169. Hull City Library, Holtby Papers (hereafter WH), WH/4/4.31/02a, WH to Owen, 17 Nov. 1931.

thought ‘race’ had no place as a political category at all.<sup>170</sup>

How did Holtby arrive at these views? Her feminism, surely, had something to do with it. It was ‘an advantage to be a woman,’ she told her dear friend, the anti-colonial activist Norman Leys, not because women had some special mission to the oppressed, but simply because they too had experienced the belittlement and patronage that coloured people routinely faced.<sup>171</sup> But her activism was also sparked by her encounter with the League of Nations. In 1925, having gained a history degree at Somerville and published her first novel, Holtby set off on a lecture tour of South Africa for the League of Nations Union. The experience gave her a cause. South Africa, she reported, was an explosive cocktail of an ‘indifferent and hostile’ white population, a Labour Party operating essentially as a ‘white workers’ protection agency,’ virulent and virtually unchecked racism and anti-Semitism, and a ‘huge mass of absolutely helpless people.’<sup>172</sup> ‘You have no idea of the race feeling here,’ Holtby wrote to her family from Durban. She had caused a small sensation simply by walking with an Indian down a city street.<sup>173</sup>

‘The problem of the twentieth century,’ the brilliant African-American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in 1903, ‘is the problem of the color line.’<sup>174</sup> For the next ten years, Holtby worked to blur that line. She and later Labour Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones raised funds to support early black industrial unionism in South Africa;<sup>175</sup> with the tiny London Group on African Affairs, she fought Amery’s ‘Closer Union’ plans. And, most remarkably, in 1931 she teamed up with the West Indian doctor and early anti-racist activist Harold Moody to battle the colour bar.<sup>176</sup> With no resources save their indignation and fifty pounds from the Buxton Trust, they took on hotels unwilling to accept coloured guests, hospitals unwilling to accept coloured probationers, university halls of residence unwilling to accommodate coloured students, and Stanley Baldwin over his use of the word ‘nigger’ at a constituency association dinner. For Holtby, who resigned in disgust from her club when asked to stop bringing non-Europeans to tea,<sup>177</sup> such matters were personal as well as political. For years, she met trains, found lodgings, hunted out jobs and scholarships, and advanced money to African students in 1930s England.

Yet Holtby remained, through these years, primarily a novelist, and her greatest contribution to her cause was, appropriately, the novel Mandoa, Mandoa. Holtby put everything she had into this book: sharp wit, deft plotting, political insight. She tried, in

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170. WH/4/4.5/03b.

171. WH/4/4.3/091, WH to Norman Leys, 9 July 1934, and see WH/2/2.16/07/03a, WH, ‘A Woman Looks at the News’, News Chronicle, 26 May 1934.

172. Letters to Vera Brittain from South Africa, in Selected Letters, pp. 101, 118, 137.

173. WH/5/5.3/03/03b, WH to her family, 25 Feb. 1925.

<sup>174</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), 19.

175. WH/4/4.34, Kadalie to WH, 25 Apr. 1927, and WH/3/3.7/01a, ‘Winifred Holtby’s connection with Africa’ [publicity materials for Mandoa, Mandoa!, 1934].

176. WH/4/4.21/3/01k, Transcript of the inaugural meeting of the Joint Council to Promote Understanding Between White and Coloured People in Great Britain.’

177. WH/4/4/31/01b, WH to Tennant, 1 Oct. 1934.

the novel, to do two things: first to unsettle the easy equation of whiteness and civilization, and second to show how bound up with other imperial motives such humanitarian projects as anti-slavery were. But while the book received respectful reviews, it never quite took off. Readers liked Evelyn Waugh's less-radical Black Mischief better. 'What's irritating me a little,' Holtby confessed to Creech Jones soon after publication, 'is that all the literary blokes only see in it a piece of fun. Of course it is that...but I meant it as political satire too.'<sup>178</sup>

I like to think that had Mandoa, Mandoa! been published two years later, readers would have got the message. For in 1935 an international crisis over Ethiopia exploded which made Holtby's points about the entanglements of power, profit and reform more directly and explicitly than a novel ever could. Holtby couldn't watch that terrible drama play out, for in 1932, at age 34, she had been diagnosed with Bright's disease, for which there was then no cure. In public she downplayed her illness; privately, she put her affairs in order. In the spring of 1934, as Mussolini's ambitions in East Africa became clearer, Holtby began what she probably knew was her last novel. She was 'loving it...crooning over it, as though it were a child,' she told a friend that April.<sup>179</sup> This was South Riding, published posthumously, which made her famous. Holtby died on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1935. Italy invaded Ethiopia five days later.

I'm going to talk today about the dilemmas British internationalists faced as a result of Mussolini's actions. As I do so, though, I want you to keep in mind Holtby's perceptive understanding of the role played by a kind of humanitarian racism in justifying empire. As we shall see, Holtby didn't get the outcome quite right – Ethiopia was turned into a colony, not a mandate – but she captured the logic that made Italy certain they'd get away with it. Let me explain.

Ethiopia was one of only two independent black states in Africa between the wars, Liberia being the other. But Ethiopia was 'free' in a way Liberia was not, for it had no white protector, having electrified the world in 1896 by defeating Italy, the state that aspired to that role. Emperor Menelik II then brought the country's feudal lords and hinterlands under control. Britain, France and Italy hardly expected his empire to last, however, and in 1906 met to settle their interests. Their Tripartite Agreement envisaged that France would build a railroad running from Addis Ababa to its port at Djibouti and recognized Britain's interests in the headwaters of the Nile, but gave special consideration to Italy. Italy could build a railway through Ethiopia itself to link its colonies in Somaliland and Eritrea, and when Menelik's empire disintegrated, the country would fall within Italy's sphere of influence.

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<sup>178</sup> RH, MSS Brit Emp s 332, 6/1/29, Holtby to Creech Jones, 23 Jan. 1933.

<sup>179</sup> Holtby to McWilliam, 10 Apr. 1934, in Alice Holtby and Jean McWilliam, eds. Letters to a Friend (London: Collins, 1938), p. 459.

Menelik, however, stubbornly failed to die. It wasn't until after the war that the three powers turned their attention back to Ethiopia. Italy had emerged from the war without the huge tracts in Anatolia she had expected and without an African mandate either. In private talks in London in 1919 Italian negotiators pressed for exclusive economic rights in Ethiopia, but with Egypt and the Middle East unstable, Britain was no longer willing to cede such domination.<sup>180</sup> Ethiopia thus remained precariously independent, albeit with those motives of power and profit swirling around her, as the League began to meet. It was at this point that a third motive came into play.

This was, exactly as Holtby could have told us, the motive of reform. The anti-slavery activist John Harris, recall, was determined to use the new mandates system to advance his humanitarian agenda, and thought Ethiopia the place to begin. Armed with an expose of Ethiopian slave-trading in 1921, Harris told Philip Baker at the Secretariat that the Anti-Slavery Society hoped to put together 'a very strong and influential movement...with a view to getting action by the League.'<sup>181</sup> Ormsby-Gore raised the matter in the Commons,<sup>182</sup> and Harris met with Lugard to make the case for action by the League.<sup>183</sup> That September, at Harris's urging, the New Zealand representative put anti-slavery on the Assembly's agenda.

Thus began the League of Nations efforts to combat slavery, which produced the conventions that undergird today's global anti-trafficking efforts. Instructed by the Council, Sir Eric Drummond asked all member states to report on the incidence of slavery and on their efforts to repress it. Unsurprisingly, few states owned up to slavery; Lugard and Harris, however, independently submitted a report exposing the extent of slavery in Ethiopia and making the case for administering the country under mandate from the League as a whole.<sup>184</sup>

But the League didn't take the bait. Italy and France – and, to Harris's irritation, the Pan-African Congress in Paris<sup>185</sup> – all thought Lugard's report nothing but a British ploy to secure Ethiopia for itself. This was not quite right, for the Foreign Office actually disapproved of Harris's machinations. Multinational administration, its Ethiopia expert noted, would be entirely unworkable, and foreign efforts at suppressing slavery would likely discredit Ras Tafari, the modernizing Ethiopian regent.<sup>186</sup> But the debate sent

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<sup>180</sup> This account of three-power diplomacy over Ethiopia relies on Antoinette Iadarola, 'Ethiopia's Admission into the League of Nations: An Assessment of Motives,' The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 8: 4 (1975), 601-22.

<sup>181</sup> RH, MSS Brit Emp S22, G444, Harris to Baker, 30 Mar. 1922.

<sup>182</sup> 153 H.C. Deb, 1 May 1922, col. 975.

<sup>183</sup> RH, MSS Brit Emp S22, G444, Harris to Lugard, 4 Apr. 1922.

<sup>184</sup> Harris and Lugard's collaboration is treated in detail in: Amalia Ribi, "'The Breath of a New Life'?" British Anti-Slavery and the League of Nations,' Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the Wars, ed. Daniel Laqua (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 93-113; the role of the slavery issue in undermining Ethiopia's position is also discussed in Jean Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations: Ethiopia as a Civilised Nation,' Journal of the History of International Law, 8 (2006), 213-44.

<sup>185</sup> RH, MSS Brit Emp S22, G444, Harris to Dr. Alcindor, 8 Nov. 1922.

<sup>186</sup> BL, Drummond Papers, Add Ms 51125, R. Sperling, Foreign Office, Memo, 29 Aug. 1923.

Italian diplomats hastening to London to reiterate that Ethiopia belonged in their sphere,<sup>187</sup> while the French angled for its admission to the League. Caught in the middle, the British decided to support Ethiopia's membership after all, however 'primitive' its government and fragile its borders. In 1923, Abyssinia became a member of the League of Nations.

But the tangle of motives at work in 1922 hardly went away. Italy continued to yearn for a larger empire, pressing Ethiopia in 1928 into an unwelcome Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. The Anti-Slavery Society continued to expound on the horrors of Ethiopian slavery. Ras Tafari trod a delicate, conciliatory line. He invited foreign dignitaries and the foreign press to Addis Ababa for his coronation as Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930. He brought in foreign advisors – Belgians to train his army, French to run his schools – and sent envoys to Japan to solicit economic investment and military supplies. And, in 1931, he invited the Anti-Slavery Society to help construct a plan for the suppression of slavery.<sup>188</sup> Sir Sidney Barton, British Minister in Addis Ababa, and indeed Lord Noel-Buxton, who headed that Anti-Slavery Society visit in 1932, thought matters were going as well as could be expected. 'The desire to stand well with the League is very strong,' Noel-Buxton reported. 'There has recently been a scare regarding the possible mandation of the country.... Such alarms, even if inspired by extreme ignorance, are perhaps wholesome.'<sup>189</sup>

So there matters stood in the early thirties, with all the motives Holtby outlined at work. They were just as entangled as she described, and outcome she predicted – turning Ethiopia into a mandate – had already been mooted. But in fact things did not work out that way, for by 1933 the worldwide depression and the Nazi seizure of power had utterly changed the framework in which foreign policy was made. The mandates system had been devised to lessen imperial rivalries: territories governed under mandate were to be open to all League states precisely so all could share the benefits of imperial rule. But as the global economic crisis worsened, even those empires that professed free trade turned protectionist, while those states without large colonial possessions – Germany, Italy – grew more resentful. German withdrawal from the League also strengthened Italy's hand, for Britain and France now needed their Mediterranean ally more than ever.

We know how this story ends. We know that French Premier Pierre Laval, desperately worried about the rise of Germany, would decide that he didn't much care about Ethiopian independence; in January 1935 France would tell Italy that she had no real interests in Abyssinia anyway. Britain did not quite say that, but at the three-party conference at Stresa in April of 1935 Ramsay MacDonald was too forgetful or too pusillanimous to raise the Ethiopian question at all, leaving Mussolini to conclude that Britain too had signed off. By the time he learned otherwise, he was too reckless, to

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<sup>187</sup> FO 141/446/7, Part 1.

<sup>188</sup> Rhodes House, MSS Brit Emp S22, File G276, Haile Selassie to Anti-Slavery Society, 12 July 1931.

<sup>189</sup> *British Documents on Foreign Affairs (BDFA)*, part II, ser. G, vol. 28, 'Report on Abyssinia by Lord Noel-Buxton and Lord Polwarth', p. 74.



change his mind. On October 3, 1935, Italian troops struck into Ethiopia and by May 1936 were in Addis Ababa.

From the summer of 1935 to the summer of 1936, the Italo-Ethiopian conflict preoccupied European publics and foreign ministries alike. This was the League's 'test case,' the only incident in which the procedures laid out in Article 16 of the Covenant were followed – the aggressor named, a coordination committee of League powers set up, sanctions imposed by 51 member states. Of course, that League action was partial, for great-power negotiations continued and Italy's oil supplies were never cut off, leaving historians to argue about whether such action could have brought Italy to heel.<sup>190</sup> We know that those great-power negotiations, which culminated in the Hoare-Laval proposal to give Italy a large Ethiopian zone for colonization and control, in the end aborted that League process, and we know why: Britain, while willing to expand League sanctions, did not wish to do so without France, and France would not support a course of action likely to induce Italy to cast its lot with Germany. But those Hoare-Laval proposals evoked such an outcry in Britain that they could not be pursued further: in 1935, unlike with the Sudetenland in 1938, the British public would not allow their government to broker such a deal. The result for Britain and France was, as the Foreign Office Permanent Undersecretary Robert Vansittart accurately put it, the 'worst of all possible worlds.' Ethiopia was destroyed, but Italy was alienated anyway. The League was destroyed as a security system, but nothing was put in its place. The world, in 1936, was a distinctly more dangerous place than it had been in 1934 – for the great powers, certainly, but also for the many small and vulnerable states who had looked to the Covenant to safeguard their independence.<sup>191</sup>

The tangled diplomacy of this episode is well known. What I want to do today is to delve into British handling of that crisis to show how it affected not the League's collective security regime – which, as I said, was destroyed by the failure of sanctions – but rather that project of imperial conciliation, legitimation and reform that I have been tracking in these lectures. That project, recall, had two ostensible aims: first, to bring imperial rule into line with certain humanitarian norms, a project promoted by Lugard in particular, and second, to lessen the importance of direct imperial sovereignty by giving all League states some stake in the mandates regime, a project driven forward by Germany in particular. It was, in other words, both to improve native administration and to pacify European rivalries. But Italy's war on Abyssinia caused what we might call

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<sup>190</sup> For two contrasting assessments, G Bruce Strang, "'The Worst of all Worlds': Oil Sanctions and Italy's Invasion of Abyssinia, 1935-1936,' *Diplomacy & Statecraft*: 19: 2 (2008), 210-35, and Cristiano Andrea Ristucci, 'The 1935 Sanctions against Italy: Would coal and oil have made a difference?' *European Review of Economic History*, 4 (2000), 85-110.

<sup>191</sup> The best accounts of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis remain: George W. Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia, and the League of Nations* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), which makes good use of British, Italian and League sources, and R.A.C. Parker, 'Great Britain, France and the Ethiopian Crisis, 1935-1936,' *The English Historical Review*, 89: 351 (Apr. 1974), 293-332, but Arnold Toynbee's opinionated *Survey of International Affairs, 1935*, vol. 2, *Abyssinia and Italy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), is still full of insight.

‘framework trouble’, precisely because it placed unbearable pressure on the claim – foundational to the mandates regime – that European rule would uplift backwards peoples. True, Italy freely adopted that argument, insisting that her war too was a ‘civilizing’ endeavor against a backward, disorganized, slave-trading state; she too would be happy to govern in line with the ‘sacred trust’. But while British internationalists had helped to make the case for Ethiopian backwardness and European trusteeship, Italian behavior stood those claims on their head. In the end, British statesmen and the League would have to choose whether white solidarity or international law mattered most. Let turn now to see how British statesmen and internationalists confronted – or really, struggled to avoid confronting – this question. In this journey, we will meet some familiar faces.

Sir Eric Drummond, for instance. By the early thirties, Drummond was determined to step down from the Secretary-Generalship of the League. He hoped to be named Ambassador to Washington, but Ramsay MacDonald spitefully placed him in Rome, where he was to put up with Mussolini’s bombast and keep Italy in the League camp. Sir John Simon, the uninspired Foreign Secretary in MacDonald’s National Government, was explicit on this point, instructing Drummond ‘that no Ethiopian or colonial question should be allowed to react adversely upon the general relations between His Majesty’s Government...and the Government of Italy.’<sup>192</sup> When Italy attacked an Ethiopian border post in December 1934, the Foreign Office tried to keep the issue away from Geneva, urging Drummond in Rome and Sidney Barton in Addis Ababa to press for direct talks.

The problem was that Mussolini didn’t want to talk. Italian officials insisted they had no aggressive plans, Drummond reported in February 1935, but troop mobilizations suggested ‘that ultimate Italian intentions are more far-reaching.’ Unless Britain took a strong League line, which would lead to ‘very strained relations between Italy and the League and even between Italy and ourselves,’ it looked as if Haile Selassie should be told to make the best terms he could as quickly as possible.<sup>193</sup>

But how could the Emperor come to terms, Barton protested from Addis Ababa, when what he was being asked to concede was the independence of his country? It was perfectly clear that Italy intended to absorb Ethiopia. ‘Personally,’ Barton wrote in some irritation, ‘I can think of only one course likely to prevent perpetration of what may be widely regarded as an international crime, and that would be for England and France to tell Italy that she cannot have Ethiopia.’<sup>194</sup> But Britain and France did not say that. Through the spring, Italy moved hundreds of thousands of troops and thousands of tons of ammunition through the British-controlled Suez Canal into Eritrea and Italian

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<sup>192</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 28, Simon to Drummond, 25 Oct. 1934.

<sup>193</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 28, Drummond to Simon, 11 Feb. and 17 Feb. 1935, pp. 325-7.

<sup>194</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 28, Barton to Simon, 18 Feb. 1935, pp. 327-8.

Somaliland. Not until May, when the Italian Ambassador Dino Grandi told Simon bluntly that Italy had territorial aims, was Drummond told to make Mussolini understand that Britain would stand by the League.<sup>195</sup>

Drummond did so, warning Mussolini not to place the British Government ‘in a position where they would have to choose between their old friendship with Italy and their support of the League.’ But that warning, Drummond reported back to Simon, just brought Mussolini ‘completely into the open.’ Abyssinia was not a European question, Mussolini retorted, and collective security should be confined to Europe. As for Abyssinia, it was ‘a blot on civilization... a collection of tribes, some warlike, who preyed on others, but all backward’ – some, he alleged, even cannibalistic. ‘Abyssinia was not worthy of being a member of the League’; the League should not object if Italy tried ‘to bring order and progress to such a state.’ Asked whether he would settle for something short of conquest, Mussolini said he could accept a status comparable to the British in Egypt or the French in Morocco – but that, Drummond reported, was ‘the lowest point to which I was able to bring him.’<sup>196</sup>

This is the imperialist argument at its most unvarnished, and Drummond probably didn’t enjoy listening to it. Yet, over the next ten days, with all the mental agility his years at the head of the Secretariat had taught him, Drummond burnished Mussolini’s case. Italy, Drummond pointed out to Simon in a long and closely argued memo of June 1, considered itself an ‘unsatisfied’ power, with a right to colonial expansion. The British especially were seen as hypocrites who, satisfied with their own vast colonial holdings, evoked general principles to oppose Italy’s just claims. The Italian people had also been prepared assiduously for war through a press campaign harping on the barbarous habits, slave-owning, warlordism and tribal heterogeneity of Abyssinia. ‘It would not be too much to say that Italy has latterly been staking out a moral claim to be the instrument whereby civilization shall be brought to a barbarous anachronism.’

How should Britain respond to that claim? Britain, Drummond said, had little interest in Abyssinia but a profound interest in the preservation of the League. But the League needing preservation was not, in Drummond’s eyes, the polyglot collection of nations of all colours: it was, rather, a European security compact, one that would only be effective if Italy remained within it and if Germany rejoined. And since ‘all British statesmen... would be prepared’ to make colonial concessions to bring Germany back, surely Italy’s colonial claims deserved consideration as well. Admittedly, turning, Ethiopia, a League member, into a dependency presented ‘peculiar difficulties’ (as Drummond delicately put it) but ‘I submit that the situation is so grave, and the threat to the League so serious, that every effort should be made to see whether, and if so, to what extent, it is possible to assist Signor Mussolini in the difficulties in which he now finds himself.’

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<sup>195</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 28, Simon to Drummond, 3 May 1935, pp. 366-7.

<sup>196</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Drummond to Simon, 21 May 1935, pp. 3-6.

*‘To assist Signor Mussolini in the difficulties in which he now finds himself’*: it seems worth pausing on this fascinatingly indirect construction. If anyone might be thought to ‘find himself’ in difficulties, it would seem to be Haile Selassie, with Italian troops massed on his borders north and south. Here, however, it is Mussolini who, through agents never specified, ‘finds himself’ in difficulties, and deserves France and Britain’s helping hand.

The rest of the memorandum explored what kind of help to offer. What would Italy accept? Nothing less than one of four things, Drummond thought: a mandate, some form of hegemony similar to British control in Egypt, a protectorate, or outright annexation. Drummond ruled the last two out, for after the Japanese conquest of Manchuria, the League could not survive another annexation. But Britain could try ‘overtly or covertly to assist Italy’ in gaining a mandate or some form of indirect control. After all, surely ‘to any impartial person it must be apparent that by no means all of the Italian complaints...are unfounded.’ The economic collaboration foreseen in the 1928 treaty hadn’t materialized; Italian colonies found the Abyssinians ‘unruly neighbours’; and then there was that ‘question of slavery and barbarism.’ That the Abyssinians were ‘in spite of their Christian beliefs...in essence barbaric, few, I imagine, will be ready to deny.’ Abyssinia was ‘an extremely backward country...far more backward than Syria or Iraq,’ both already mandated territories.

Should Abyssinia then be turned into a mandate? On balance, Drummond thought that option unrealistic, as the smaller League states, worrying about threats to their own sovereignty, had opposed such an option in the Liberian case. But steps were possible – say, replacing all foreign advisors with Italians and placing Italian garrisons in Abyssinia – to cement Italian unofficial control. The essential thing was to assure the Italian government that while Britain could not tolerate forcible conquest, it wanted to help Italy to achieve the influence it desired. One part of that help would be to make it clear to Abyssinia that, ‘if the worst comes to the worst,’ neither Britain nor France ‘has the slightest intention of backing her up.’<sup>197</sup>

Drummond’s memorandum is a document in keeping with Holtby’s clear-eyed understanding of how empires ‘think’, although I wonder if even she would not have been shocked by its unvarnished realism. Peace was peace among the great powers; the League could thus preserve peace only if the great powers remained within it. If Abyssinia had to pay the price for that comity, so be it: there were hierarchies of peoples and claims, and it had been a mistake to place Abyssinia in the ‘civilized’ camp. Such thinking echoed through the Cabinet. As Neville Chamberlain wrote in his diary in late July, ‘it was not [Italy’s] colonial aspirations, but her proposal to achieve them by war, that we objected to.’<sup>198</sup> But that conciliatory effort failed, partly because Mussolini

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<sup>197</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Drummond to Simon, 1 June 1935, pp. 6-16.

<sup>198</sup> Baer, *Test Case*, p. 4.

genuinely wanted war,<sup>199</sup> but also because of divisions within Britain itself. So let me turn to a second figure, the man who received Drummond's suggestions – Sir Samuel Hoare.

It is ironic that Hoare has gone down in history as the ultra-appeaser, the man who handed Ethiopia to the fascists, for the diplomatic record makes clear that he was the first person within the Cabinet to call a halt to the policy Drummond advised. Appointed in June 1935 to replace the weak Sir John Simon, Hoare warned Drummond privately that he thought 'we have sometimes let the Italians get away with their case more easily than they deserved.' Britain could not possibly support any arrangement that would compromise Ethiopia's sovereignty,<sup>200</sup> and Drummond must tell Mussolini so.<sup>201</sup> Hoare then worked with the service chiefs to prepare the Mediterranean fleet for a possible Italian attack, and with Anthony Eden, newly appointed as Minister for League of Nations Affairs, to elicit French support. And in memos outlining the policy to be taken with Laval, Hoare articulated a very different understanding of the League and indeed of civilization from that found in Drummond's dispatches.

Hoare did not describe the League merely as a European alliance or an arena in which the great powers could resolve their claims. It was, rather, an 'attempt to substitute a regime of law for international anarchy,' one whose rules applied impartially across the world. This was why the Italo-Abyssinian dispute was so important. Ordinary people thought the Italian case nothing but 'aggression for the purpose of annexation by a strong member of the League upon a weaker member,' Hoare wrote. If the League acquiesced in that, it would 'fall into universal and lasting contempt.' If it failed to pursue a united policy, it would be seen as merely a 'theatre for the interplay of self-regarding national policies.' Finally, if it were ineffectual in condemning aggression, Italy would simply join 'the growing number of scoffing dissenters.' The stakes could not be higher.<sup>202</sup>

Moreover, Hoare thought, British and French security and interests were bound up with the League's defense. It was the vehicle through which Britain and France exercised 'the political and moral leadership of Europe.' The League reassured the anxious Balkan and East European states of the great democracies' commitment to their security and prevented them from sliding into the German camp. And, outside Europe, it secured British and French imperial rule. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Hoare's

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<sup>199</sup> Mussolini told Eden in late June that while he would insist on annexing border regions, he would be content with the kind of control Britain exercised in Iraq or Egypt or the French in Morocco (a sign of how little he was persuaded by British arguments about Iraq's 'independence'), but then told Drummond on July 31 that 'the only remedy' Italy could contemplate to the threat posed by Abyssinia was 'to assure themselves of a full and absolute control over that country.' See BDF, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, 'Record of Anglo-Italian Conversation... Tuesday June 25, 1935, pp. 23-6, and Mussolini to Drummond, 31 July 1935, pp. 43-47.

<sup>200</sup> Cambridge University Library (CUL), Templewood Papers, Part VIII, File 3, Hoare to Drummond, 27 July 1935.

<sup>201</sup> BDF, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Hoare to Drummond, 6 July 1935, pp. 29-31.

<sup>202</sup> BDF, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Hoare to Clerk, 29 July 1935, pp. 35-8.

dispatches and speeches is the absence of the sort of civilizational argument to which Drummond turned. Instead, Hoare argued for the need to uphold international law across racial lines. The war was being seen as a conflict between the white and black races, Hoare told Laval, and any failure to demonstrate clear disapproval of Italy would thus ‘arouse the resentment of the coloured races.’ This was a risk neither France nor Britain, with their huge colonial empires, should run.<sup>203</sup>

In a riveting speech to the League Assembly on September 11, 1935, Hoare promised that Britain would uphold the Covenant. That same day he told Laval that Britain considered the Abyssinian dispute a test case, and would base its response to future crises on its outcome. This was a veiled threat – the threat that (as Cecil put it very bluntly), ‘what is sauce for the Abyssinian goose will be sauce for the French gander.’<sup>204</sup> If France didn’t fully support collective security in this dispute, Britain might not do so in disputes with Germany.<sup>205</sup> Hitler, marching into the Rhineland to British indifference six months later, unfortunately proved that point.

Thus Hoare, in September 1935. Yet Italy attacked Abyssinia that October anyway.<sup>206</sup> And, as we know, two months later Hoare and Laval produced a peace plan through which Selassie was requested to trade almost half his country for a Red Sea port – a proposal that slowed down the application of sanctions and cost Hoare his job. Historians have tended to blame Laval for this fiasco, and there is something to this, for certainly Laval was determined, as he said, not ‘to do anything that... would impair the present harmony between Italy and France.’<sup>207</sup> He thus tried to get the British to agree to an Italian protectorate over Abyssinia,<sup>208</sup> and, when the war broke out, used conciliation to delay League action. Yet, it would be wrong to attribute Hoare’s vacillation only to French pressure, for he was caught between two other forces – ‘public opinion’ on the one hand, and the officials (notably Sir Maurice Hankey) who assessed British interests on the other. These, too, had their views about how to reconcile imperialism and internationalism.

The Italo-Abyssinian crises took place at a moment when public support for the League – or at least public support for the League of Nations Union, the huge cross-party body that cultivated internationalist sentiment – was at its height. The LNU reached its peak membership of 400,000 organized into some 3000 branches in the early thirties. In late 1934, it lent its support to the ‘peace Ballot’ – an enormous effort through which some eleven million Britons were canvassed on their support for the League and the Covenant. Over 90% of respondents endorsed the League, disarmament, and the policy

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<sup>203</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Hoare to Clerk, 29 July 1935, pp. 35-8.

<sup>204</sup> BL, Cecil Papers, Add Mss 51083, Cecil to Eden, 6 March 1936.

<sup>205</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, ‘Record of Anglo-French Conversation... Geneva, Sept. 11, 1935,’ pp. 89-92.

<sup>206</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Drummond to Hoare, 14 Sept. 1935, pp. 92-4.

<sup>207</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Clerk to Hoare, July 4, 1935, p. 28.

<sup>208</sup> BDFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Clerk to Hoare, June 27, 1935, pp. 26-7.

of responding to aggression with economic sanctions; a smaller number, but still a majority, endorsed military sanctions as well. On June 27, 1935, four months before Mussolini attacked, the LNU presented those results to Baldwin's new Government. Hoare's appointment and that of Eden as Minister for League Affairs with Cabinet rank were one response. Government candidates fought and won the 1935 election in November, six weeks into the war, on a manifesto that placed the League at the center of British foreign policy.

But what did League support amount to? The Peace Ballot showed that the public was both profoundly pro-League and profoundly anti-war. Hoare understood exactly the problem this posed. As he told one colleague in late August, the country and the Cabinet alike wanted Britain to 'stick to the Covenant' and to 'keep out of war' – and assumed those two goals could be reconciled. People assumed, in other words, that Anglo-French solidarity was watertight and that if economic sanctions were applied Italy would concede, not realizing that both beliefs were 'to say the least, very bold and sanguine.' Nevertheless, Hoare thought, given the strength of public opinion, 'it is essential that we should play out the League hand in September.' If sanctions were to be found ineffective, 'it must be the League and not the British Government' that would say so.<sup>209</sup> Hoare's critics feared that his real intention was less to defend the Covenant than to absolve Britain of the blame for not defending the Covenant.<sup>210</sup> This is fair, but he operated under constraints which were not of his making.

The first constraint was this pro-League but anti-war public opinion. The second, however, was that both the Cabinet and key defense and foreign policy advisors ruled out war from the start. This was not because Britain feared defeat, for the General Staff had concluded by September that Italy would be forced to withdraw if Britain closed the Suez Canal and that they could defeat Italy even if French help did not materialize.<sup>211</sup> But the service chiefs, and even more Sir Maurice Hankey, the Cabinet Secretary who organized the work of the key defense committees, feared that the conflict would weaken Britain's position elsewhere to no real purpose. Through the summer, the Cabinet was inundated with gloomy Hankey-authored minutes about the effects of any conflict on Britain's military position and grew distinctly jittery. On October 2, the day before Mussolini's invasion, they agreed that military sanctions were not on the table. Having strengthened Britain's defenses against an unprovoked Italian attack, Britain then assured both Italy and France that they had no intention of acting alone. Tensions had been eased, the Director of Military Operations at the War Office reported on October 24, three weeks into the Italian campaign, 'so everyone is happier.'<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Cambridge University Library (CUL), Templewood Papers, Part VIII, File 3, Hoare to Clerk, 24 Aug. 1935.

<sup>210</sup> Churchill Archives Center (CAC), NBKR 4/1, File 2, 'Notes sent to Lord Cecil on October 23, 1935,' and BL, Add. Ms. 51114, Drummond Papers, Walters to Cecil, 25 Oct. 1935.

<sup>211</sup> National Archives (NA), WO 106/282, for these assessments.

<sup>212</sup> NA, WO 106/283, Dill to Bartholomew, 24 Oct. 1935.

But could Mussolini be stopped without war? True, a first set of sanctions – on military equipment, loans, and imports – had come into effect on November 18, and the more important oil sanctions were now pending. The service chiefs thought those could have a serious effect, estimating in November that Italy had no more than a month of supplies in Africa and perhaps another six months in Italy.<sup>213</sup> Yet Drummond in Italy, Vansittart at the Foreign Office, and Hankey in the Cabinet Office, all advised most strenuously against them. Hankey, meeting with Hoare on November 25<sup>th</sup>, outlined their objections. These were not that sanctions would be ineffective: to the contrary, Hankey thought they would ‘hit Italy hard.’ Yet, precisely for that reason, they should be shunned: they might provoke an Italian attack, and ‘we cannot afford to weaken ourselves by such a futile war, or to make a permanent enemy of a nation that lies athwart of our main lines of communication to the Far East.’ Put simply, the reason to oppose oil sanctions is that ‘we didn’t want war,’ period. True, one couldn’t say so openly, but since the election was now over, the Government ‘could do what it liked.’

Hankey, Hoare charged, was brushing ‘public opinion’ aside. Hankey retorted that ‘official’ opinion was actually anti-sanction; for him, this was the opinion that mattered. He denied he was anti-League, but argued that the League could not be a security arrangement – especially now that, with four of the seven great powers out or exiting, it was weaker than ever. If Hoare thought of the League as a system of international law and Drummond as (more or less) a European security pact, Hankey insisted that it could only be an arena for discussion. It should not affect calculations of British interests, which were based on imperial safety alone. Hoare disagreed. The Government was pledged, and Britain could not afford to back down. He would resign if oil sanctions weren’t accepted.<sup>214</sup>

As we know, Hoare didn’t resign over oil sanctions; instead, he was forced to resign over the Hoare-Laval proposal. The Cabinet and indeed the League conciliation committee had proposed an exchange of territory, and the Hoare-Laval conversations built on that history. When the terms were unveiled, however, they were too obviously unfair to be seen as anything but a reward for aggression. There was an enormous public outcry, spreading well beyond liberal internationalists and through the Conservative backbench.<sup>215</sup> When the Cabinet met, half the members – including, you won’t be surprised to hear, William Ormsby-Gore – said they would resign if Hoare did not. The LNU Executive urged Baldwin to proceed with further sanctions,<sup>216</sup> but Baldwin, briefed by Hankey, insisted that Britain could not risk ‘unilateral war.’ Since the LNU too assumed action would be collective, this argument hit home: not even Cecil was willing

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<sup>213</sup> NA, WO 106/283, Dill to Bartholomew, 28 Nov. 1935.

<sup>214</sup> Churchill Archives Center, HNKY 1/7, Diary, Nov. 25, 1935.

<sup>215</sup> See, CUL, Templewood Papers, Part VIII, File 1, Colin Mack Patrick to Hoare, 12 Dec. 1935.

<sup>216</sup> NA, PREM 1/195, Garnett, LNU, to Baldwin, 12 Dec. 1935.



to urge Britain to act alone.<sup>217</sup> But was the government just using French vacillation as an excuse? ‘The truth is that when Britain leads, the others do agree,’ Philip Noel-Baker wrote Hugh Dalton.<sup>218</sup>

Perhaps: but as countless Letters to the Editor showed, the public’s determination not to endorse any settlement that ‘fails to make it clear that aggression does not pay’ was unmatched by any willingness to use British power to prevent force from ‘paying’.<sup>219</sup> Thus the Times held that Britain ‘cannot...endorse an unjust peace,’ while also insisting that ‘no Englishman in his senses has ever contemplated hostilities with Italy or any with other nation.’<sup>220</sup> Hoare, reading these muddle-headed diatribes, clearly felt he had nothing to apologize for. Sympathy unbacked by power, he suggested in his resignation speech, would just leave Ethiopia to a fate ‘worse than it would [have been] without our sympathy.’<sup>221</sup>

He was right. Eden’s appointment, and the fall of Laval, brought no change in policy. True, in February 1936, with the Italians advancing, the Cabinet voted for oil sanctions, but French foreign minister Flandin – like Laval before him – consulted Mussolini and secured a delay. Oil sanctions were never imposed; the option of closing the Suez Canal never seriously discussed. The Ethiopians thus fought alone, disadvantaged by arms embargoes that hurt them but not the Italians (who had an arms industry).<sup>222</sup> If anything, sanctions made the Italians more determined to complete their conquest quickly. They relied heavily on aerial bombardment and on gas, which, the War Office’s intelligence summaries reported, ‘caused the greatest havoc upon Ethiopian morale.’ Italy ‘would not have obtained success before the rains,’ the War Office judged, ‘if they had not resorted to...gas warfare.’<sup>223</sup> By May, it was all over but the shouting.

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<sup>217</sup> NA, PREM 1/195, ‘League of Nations Union Deputation, 13 Dec. 1935.’

<sup>218</sup> British Library (BL), Add Ms 51083, Cecil Papers, Cecil to Eden, 10 Dec. 1935, and CAC, NBKR 4/1, File 2, Noel Baker to Dalton, 16 Dec. 1935.

<sup>219</sup> NA, PREM 1/195, ‘League of Nations Union Deputation, 13 Dec. 1935.’

<sup>220</sup> ‘A Corridor for Camels,’ The Times, Dec. 16, 1935, and see ‘The Way Out,’ The Times, Dec. 13, 1935.

<sup>221</sup> Hoare, 18 Dec. 1935, quoted in Toynbee, p. 318.

<sup>222</sup> The League introduced an embargo on arms shipments to both parties during 1934, when the parties were theoretically undertaking arbitration; that embargo was honored by Americans and the Japanese as well. Even the British General Staff thought the arms embargo ‘little short of openly siding with Italy,’ and although it was formally lifted in October, neither the Americans, nor the British, nor the Japanese, proved willing to sell Ethiopia arms. The small amount that came from Nazi Germany – given with Hitler’s consent in irritation at Italian pressure – may have been the only arms Ethiopia received. Barton worried in the war that Ethiopian independence was being ‘sacrificed by the Emperor on the altar of the Covenant’: he was right. For the General Staff comment, NA, WO 106/282, CIGS, ‘Note on the Italo-Ethiopian situation,’ 21 Aug. 1935. On Vansittart’s role in vetoing arms sales that had been agreed in Cabinet, see Baer, 78-80. There was much sympathy in Japan for Ethiopia, but Yotaro Sugimura, formerly Japanese Under-secretary in Geneva and now Ambassador to Rome, succeeded in keeping Japan ‘neutral’ and preventing any aid; see J. Calvitt Clarke III, ‘The Politics of Arms not Given: Japan, Ethiopia and Italy in the 1930s,’ in Girding for Battle: The Arms Trade in a Global Perspective, 1815-1940, ed. Donald J. Stoker, Jr. and Jonathan A. Grant (London: Praeger, 2003), 135-53. And, for German arms shipments, Ed Westermann, ‘The Most Unlikely of Allies: Hitler and Haile Selassie and the Defense of Ethiopia, 1935-36,’ in *ibid.*, pp. 155-75. Barton’s worries are contained in BDFA, Part II, ser. G, vol. 29, Barton to Hoare, 25 Oct. 1935, pp. 119-20.

<sup>223</sup> NA, WO 106/284, ‘Confidential Summary No. 44,’ 12 May 1936.

So what did it all mean, for the League, and for the relationship between the imperial order and internationalism that I have been exploring in these lectures? Those who founded the League had thought the two mutually reinforcing: indeed, during the crisis Cecil, Hoare, and Ormsby-Gore all repeated that Britain's imperial reputation and stability dictated a strong League stance. But Hankey disagreed, thinking imperial strategy need not take the League into account, while Drummond, seeing the League primarily as an instrument for European conciliation, was willing to go to almost any lengths to keep the Italians in the fold. This, obviously, was Laval's aim as well, but most League supporters thought placating Mussolini to strengthen the front against Hitler just wouldn't work. The League would be destroyed in the effort.<sup>224</sup>

Haile Selassie thought so too. In 'fighting on until the bitter end I am not only performing my sacred duty to my people but standing guard in the last citadel of collective security,' he told The Times in April. And indeed, the fall of Ethiopia marked the end of the League as a security system. Responses to the Spanish crises or the various German incursions were not organized from Geneva, nor could the institution be reconstructed as a European cabal. Loyalty to the League had been a sine qua non of British politics, but after 1936 politicians across the spectrum no longer pretended that the League Covenant would somehow keep security intact.

Some, notably Leo Amery, thought that was a good thing. The 'whole conception of the League as an instrument for the forcible maintenance of Peace, anywhere and everywhere, by economic and military sanctions,' was ludicrous, he wrote in 1935. The only sensible security arrangements were regional ones: Locarno, the Monroe Doctrine.<sup>225</sup> He saw no reason why Italy couldn't have its 'bloc' in North Africa and Germany its 'bloc' in Eastern Europe, and to the delight of Mussolini and Hitler, told both dictators as much.<sup>226</sup> Neither would threaten Britain's real interests, which lay with the Western alliance and the Empire.

Cecil, Gilbert Murray and other confirmed League internationalists wanted to rebuild the moral authority of the League instead. But Murray at least was not altogether certain how that could be done. The Italo-Abyssinian war taught them that the so-called 'have-not' powers would resort to force to achieve their ends: Mussolini had done so, and they now understood that Hitler likely would as well. For Murray and indeed many others, it was that willingness to wage war, and not the territorial claims themselves that were the problem. Recall Neville Chamberlain's summary of the Cabinet's view that 'it was not [Italy's] colonial aspirations, but her proposal to achieve them by war, that we objected to.'<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> CAC, NBKR 4/1, Noel-Baker to Dalton, 12 Dec. 1935.

<sup>225</sup> CAC, AMEL 1/5/6, Amery, 'The Abyssinia Crisis,' Daily Mail, 19 Oct. 1935.

<sup>226</sup> CAC, AMEL, 2/1/25, File 2, Mussolini to Amery, 15 Nov. 1935.

<sup>227</sup> Baer, p. 4.

German claims, after 1936, often met the same response, for by this point liberal internationalists had little attachment to the territorial agreements embodied in the Treaty of Versailles. Their aim wasn't to defend them but rather to figure out how to change them without war. What was needed, Murray wrote Neville's half-brother Austen Chamberlain, long the LNU's most distinguished Conservative supporter, was a serious effort at Anglo-German rapprochement, which would involve 'a really drastic arrangement for Collective Security and an honest effort to consider Peaceful Change.'<sup>228</sup> Austen Chamberlain, however, thought the LNU's demand that sanctions be continued against Italy as a punishment silly but considered Germany's open revisionism a serious threat.<sup>229</sup> Alarmed equally by Cecil's increasingly strident populism and by what he considered a sentimental attitude to German claims, that spring he resigned from the LNU Executive. The man who had negotiated Locarno, but who had hitherto thought such pacts could be embedded within a broader League framework, now concluded that that wider structure of collective security could not be rebuilt. He came around, reluctantly, to Amery's position, seeing 'nothing for it but to try for Regional Pacts, though I am under no misapprehension as to the extreme difficulty of arranging them.'<sup>230</sup>

But what would be the role of the empire – and, more importantly, of the non-white world – in this project? The League had linked collective security to trusteeship: with borders settled, colonized peoples would no longer be handed about to settle European quarrels. The men who had been involved in building the mandates regime – Noel-Baker, Ormsby-Gore – denounced the Hoare-Laval plan precisely because they thought it violated that promise, and would create 'a sense of rankling injustice and bitter anti-white propaganda throughout Africa.'<sup>231</sup> And indeed, nothing so aroused the rage and despair of colonial elites and non-white diaspora populations as the Italo-Abyssinian war. Demonstrations of support and solidarity campaigns sprang up from Harlem to Jamaica, Cairo to Natal. In London in the summer of 1935 – before the war began – George Padmore and C.L.R. James formed the International African Friends of Abyssinia and later the International African Service Bureau.<sup>232</sup>

For colonial nationalists, Italy's war on Ethiopia seemed confirmation of a racism they already knew. For white liberals, by contrast, the conflict shattered cherished assumptions, striking at the heart of those civilizational arguments that had served as the justification for imperial rule for so long. The Abyssinian war, like the Spanish civil war that followed, was a media extravaganza: 200 Italian journalists were 'embedded' (as we would now say) with the Italian army; 170 accredited foreign correspondents were in

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<sup>228</sup> Bodleian, Murray Papers, Box 224, Murray to Chamberlain, 4 April 1936.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., Chamberlain to Murray, 6 Apr. 1936.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., Box 225, Chamberlain to Murray, 25 June 1936.

<sup>231</sup> CAC, NBKR 4/1, File 2, Noel Baker to Dalton. 12 Dec. 1935, and for Ormsby-Gore, see Toynbee, p. 108.

<sup>232</sup> For that London-based activism, see S.K.B. Asante, 'The Impact of the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis of 1935-36 on the Pan-African Movement in Britain,' *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 13: 2 (Dec. 1972), 217-27, and for non-white response more generally, Toynbee, pp. 106-12.

Addis Ababa when the fighting began.<sup>233</sup> The war was photographed and filmed; rival charges of atrocities –Ethiopian use of dum dum bullets, Italian bombing of undefended town and Red Cross ambulances, and especially the Italian use of poison gas – winged their way around the world.

The Ethiopians lost the real war, in large part because of these methods: in the media, however, they unquestionably won. Much pamphlet literature was produced in Britain during the war – by the League of Nations Union, the Royal Institute for International Affairs, the churches – and almost all supported the Ethiopian case.<sup>234</sup> Leo Amery was one of the very, very few Britons to assert that it was not in the interest of ‘civilization’ to leave Ethiopia responsible for ‘vast regions only recently subjugated, and inhabited by non-Abyssinian tribes which it has enslaved, depopulated, and despoiled,’ and that those territories would be better off under Italian mandate.<sup>235</sup> In most comment, the Ethiopians appeared as the defenders of ‘civilization,’ and once the news of Italian use of gas became widespread, it became hard to use the term ‘civilization’ except ironically. Punch printed cartoons about ‘the Black man’s burden’ or showing ‘barbarism’ as a peaceful village and ‘civilization’ as a bombed and blighted moonscape; even The Times put the term ‘civilizing mission’ in scare quotes.

When the Italians tried to resurrect that language at the close of their conquest, then, it just didn’t work. The French Ambassador had suggested to Mussolini that he tell the League that he would administer Abyssinia according to the terms of Article 22 of the Covenant,<sup>236</sup> and Count Ciano – Mussolini’s son-in-law, air ace, the gratuitous bomber of Adowa, and now Foreign Minister – duly did so. Italy saw ‘the work that she has undertaken in Ethiopia as a sacred mission of civilization,’ he wrote; Italy would protect native well-being and suppress slavery, ‘a blot of infamy on the old regime.’<sup>237</sup> But against that note came the personal appearance of Haile Selassie at the Assembly on June 30. The Italian advance had been achieved primarily through gas attacks – a ‘very refinement of barbarism’ that had carried ‘devastation and terror into the most densely populated parts of the country.’ All the states of the world had an interest in repelling such brutality, for if it were allowed against Ethiopia, it would be allowed against other nations as well. ‘Apart from the Kingdom of the Lord, there is not on this earth any nation that is superior to any other,’ Selassie insisted.<sup>238</sup>

Italy had done everything it could to prevent Selassie from speaking. Selassie was no longer a head of state and represented no-one, they charged: he could hardly address the League. But the Assembly had not recognized the Italian conquest, and when it became clear that the guilt-ridden delegates would not bar Selassie, Ciano distributed

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<sup>233</sup> For the ‘mediatized’ nature of the war, see Baer, 43-5.

<sup>234</sup> Richard Pankhurst, ‘Pro- and Anti-Ethiopian Pamphleteering in Britain during the Italian Fascist Invasion and Occupation (1935-1941),’ International Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 1: 1 (Summer-Fall 2003), 153-76.

<sup>235</sup> L.S. Amery, ‘Letter to the Editor,’ The Times, 10 Dec. 1935.

<sup>236</sup> B DFA, Part II, Ser. G, vol. 29, Drummond to Eden, 6 May 1936, pp. 163-4.

<sup>237</sup> Toynbee, Abyssinia, p. 491.

<sup>238</sup> For Selassie’s speech, ‘A Poison Gas Victory,’ The Times, 1 July 1936.

whistles to Italian journalists in the gallery. Selassie's first words were drowned out in piping and catcalls, as the security officers bundled the Italians out. But the response of the Assembly was captured well by the Romanian delegate Nicolae Titulescu: 'A la porte, les sauvages!' – show the barbarians (that is, the Italians) the door!

Should we conclude, then, that the Italo-Abyssinian crisis, for all its horrors, did what Holtby's novel could not – explode the easy identification of race and civilization which was a sort of cultural default setting for white Europeans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Yes and no. Certainly, it made it harder to equate European values with 'civilization' tout court – a lesson that Gandhi and Hitler, in their diametrically different ways, were also teaching. But one can push this too far. For if some MPs and intellectuals formed an Abyssinia Association in 1936 to claim restitution for Ethiopia for the violence it had suffered at the hands of whites,<sup>239</sup> others did not respond quite that way.

Take, for example, the case of Arnold Toynbee. Toynbee was at the Royal Institute of International Affairs through the mid-thirties, producing his annual surveys of international relations. The Italo-Abyssinian crisis took up a whole volume. Toynbee had thought that Italian challenge to the Covenant could be easily handled – if Britain closed the Suez Canal, the Italians would swiftly back down – and he thought the Government's prevarication reprehensible. But he found he could not range himself with those liberal internationalists who condemned Hoare but refused to face the prospect of war. A hedonistic calculus had replaced the strict categorical imperative, he wrote: the Britons who forced the withdrawal of Hoare-Laval were 'not moved by the will to vindicate a principle at the risk of being called upon to make a sacrifice, but...merely wished to make a gesture so long as they could be certain of being able to make it without seriously imperiling their own comfort.'<sup>240</sup> If Britons really wanted peace, they needed to be willing to suffer: it was as simple as that.

Toynbee was in the midst of a religious crisis that certainly influenced his thought in the mid-thirties.<sup>241</sup> But he was in Berlin in February 1936, during the worst of the war, and was influenced too by the views of 'a German friend...deeply versed in the mysteries of international politics and intimately acquainted...with England,' with whom he discussed the matter.<sup>242</sup> That 'friend' was Friedrich ('Fritz') Berber, Director of the Berlin Institute for Foreign Policy Research and sometime advisor to Ribbentrop – a man who, part Anglophile internationalist, part political opportunist, has kept historians guessing about the nature and extent of his role in Nazi foreign policy. Berber told Toynbee that Abyssinia would be utterly defeated but that the British would do nothing, since the public wanted, not to pay the price for effective action, but rather 'to strike an

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<sup>239</sup> National Library of Wales, Herbert Stanley Jevons Papers, Jevons VI.193, Note.

<sup>240</sup> Toynbee, p. 449.

<sup>241</sup> William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 170.

<sup>242</sup> Toynbee, p. 453.

attitude and to discharge an emotion.<sup>243</sup> Toynbee concluded that Berber was right, and his account of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis reflects his shame and disillusionment.

But Toynbee had a plan for Britain's redemption. Britain could make peace – earn peace – by giving something up, by supporting a process of territorial revision that would at once rebuild Anglo-German friendship and demonstrate British and French good faith. Toynbee was in Germany to air his ideas, with Hitler among others, about a new 'internationalization' of empire, one designed to bring Germany back into the imperialist world and into the European fold. These ideas would spread like wildfire through British internationalist circles in the late thirties. Toynbee's father-in-law Gilbert Murray, Cecil, Noel-Baker, J.H. Harris – and, ultimately, Neville Chamberlain – would at one time or another sign on. Did they forget, or did they just not care, that the territories they planned so generously to sacrifice were inhabited by Africans, not Britons, so that non-whites would once again pay the price of European comity? I shall turn next time to the paradoxical and often overlooked attempt at colonial appeasement.

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<sup>243</sup> Toynbee, p. 453.

## The Chimera of Colonial Appeasement

Lecture 5 (Feb. 28, 2014)

We are tracking, as you know, the effort to ‘internationalize’ empire, which was undertaken largely by British intellectuals and statesmen working with and through the League of Nations. That effort had two aims: to improve the conditions of the world’s dependent peoples by spreading agreed international norms, and to abate great-power antagonism by giving all states a stake in dependent territories’ development. This project was crafted and pushed forward, I’ve argued, largely by British internationalists, humanitarians and politicians, who were certain that it posed no dangers to British imperial rule. British colonial administration rested on those same assumptions about trusteeship and the open door, so the generalization of those practices could only enhance British prestige and power.

I have begun in the last two lectures to trace the process by which that happy assumption came into question, and British statesmen became aware that they may have unleashed a power they could not control. ‘Internationalization’ meant, after all, to open imperial policymaking up to pressures from all sides: from resentful revisionist powers, from nationalists and radicals unreconciled to alien rule, and from the bureaucratizing forces of the League itself. Two weeks ago we examined how those pressures constrained claims to sovereignty and then political options in East Africa. Last week, we saw how Italy’s Abyssinian adventure and a trenchant critique of the racial paternalism further discredited the imperial powers.

One might have thus expected the project of internationalization to fade away. But it did not. Instead, the period from 1935 until 1938 saw a final attempt to promote the cause of internationalizing imperial rule. This was a particularly quixotic effort, not only because the imperial powers were simultaneously trying to tighten imperial economic and security links as global relations worsened, but also because it envisaged offering concessions to the Nazi regime which had never been offered the Weimar Republic.

Briefly, internationalists hoped to ‘appease’ the Nazi regime and to reknit international ties by brokering a new colonial settlement: one that would give Germany a colonial stake within an expanded system of international control. This movement for ‘colonial appeasement’ is usually dismissed as not very significant, mostly because it is clear that Hitler, while willing to use Germany’s colonial claims for propaganda purposes, was always primarily concerned with Eastward expansion. I think that judgment simply misses the point. The movement for colonial appeasement mattered for two quite different reasons – because it locked British intellectuals and statesmen into a

profound misreading of German aims, and because it greatly discredited the ‘internationalization’ project itself. Not only British statesmen, but equally British liberals and humanitarians, it became clear, could imagine handing Africans over to Nazis in order to preserve peace in Europe. They could not do so, however, through the League, for such repartition would require an entire recasting of the mandates regime. Those most loyal to the mandates regime were horrified by that prospect: Lugard and the other members and former members of the mandates commission watched erstwhile allies like John Harris and Gilbert Murray plan to hand territories over to Germany with rage and shame. The campaign for ‘colonial appeasement’ failed. In the process, it discredited the project of imperial collaboration entirely.

To track the genealogy of this particular effort, let us begin with Arnold Toynbee, ensconced at Chatham House in the early thirties writing the annual Survey of International Affairs. At the newly-established Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office in 1919, Toynbee, like so many of his liberal friends, had promoted the ideal of national self-determination. With the passage of time, and as he observed one ethnic nationalist conflict after another – Vilna, Corfu, Bulgaria – that enthusiasm palled: the Wailing Wall riots in Palestine in 1929, for example, persuaded Toynbee that any attempt to apply the doctrine there would result in bloodshed and violence. Instead, he argued in a lecture at Chatham House in 1930, the only honorable course in Palestine would be to build a state founded not on ‘the odious doctrine of Western Nationalism...that a country is the national home of one nationality only,’ but rather on the principle ‘that this doctrine of intolerance and fanaticism is not to prevail.’<sup>244</sup>

When it came to Europe, however, Toynbee could imagine no alternative to that ‘odious doctrine.’ Indeed, he thought the Versailles settlement faulty precisely because it had left too many ethnic Germans outside Germany’s borders. This is, of course, precisely what the Germans had been saying ever since 1919, and Toynbee was far from the only liberal intellectual to have come to regret the part he played in constructing that settlement. What is especially significant about Toynbee’s role, however, is how hard he worked to promote territorial revision after the Nazi seizure of power.

Toynbee undertook this work partly through the International Studies Conference – a scholarly organization initially founded under the auspices of the League of Nations Institute for Intellectual Cooperation that brought together scholars of international politics and law. Initially, these biannual conferences had tried to establish common disciplinary practices; as international tensions worsened in the 1930s, however, the conference became a forum through which well-connected liberal intellectuals in Britain, France and the United States sought to shape diplomacy and policy. Each conference took two years to plan, with national think tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations in the United States or the Royal Institute for International Affairs in Britain choosing

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<sup>244</sup> Toynbee, ‘The Present Situation in Palestine,’ International Affairs, 10: 1 (Jan. 1931), 49, 54.



national delegations and commissioning preparatory studies on the designated topic. The 1933 conference addressed international trade (a topic chosen at the depths of the slump in 1931); the 1935 conference dealt with collective security.

German political scientists had been avid participants in the International Studies Conference, but Germany's withdrawal from the League followed by the Nazification of all academic institutions threatened that participation. Toynbee tried to keep up contacts, and on a visit to Berlin in 1934 entered into conversations with Fritz Berber, an international lawyer now at its Institute for International Law. In the postwar period, Toynbee would downplay the extent of his contacts with Berber (quite possibly because, writing hundreds of letters monthly, he had simply forgotten them), but he took considerable trouble to secure Berber's welcome as an 'observer' at the 1935 conference.<sup>245</sup> That conference also agreed that their next topic would be 'peaceful change' – or, in other words, the process by which changes might be made in the international order without resort to war.

Everyone understood just why that question was urgent. Those states which were coming to be known as the 'have-not' powers – Japan, Italy, Germany – had made clear that they would resort to war if the balance of resources and territories were not shifted in their favor: Japan, indeed, had already done so; Italy was massing troops on Ethiopia's borders. That fall Toynbee thus sat down to think through just how the global order could be changed without war. By the time he gave that talk in December, it was too late: Italy had opted for war against Ethiopia anyway, and the Hoare-Level proposal had unleashed a tsunami of popular revulsion. Hoare would resign the morning after that Chatham House session.<sup>246</sup> But to Toynbee and the clutch of internationalists who gathered to hear him, that failure just made their task more urgent. If war was not to engulf the European continent, some mechanism had to be devised to adjust resources and boundaries to a shifting global balance of power.

How could that be done? As Toynbee saw it, internationalists needed first to recognize that they had left Versailles with their work unfinished. Yes, the Covenant had established a system of 'collective security' to safeguard that settlement against attempts to change it by force – but that was only half the battle. For, as the world changed, the

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<sup>245</sup> Bodleian, Toynbee Papers, Uncat Box 117 for correspondence related to Berber's involvement in the International Studies Conference.

<sup>246</sup> Britain and France had sound reasons to wish to appease Italy, being desperate to prevent it from slipping into alliance with Germany, but their inability either to restrain Italian aggression or to condone it (given their League commitments) produced a prevaricating policy that estranged Italy without protecting either Ethiopia or the League. For a thorough discussion of the diplomacy of the conflict and its implications for the League, see, George W. Baer, Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia, and the League of Nations (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), and Zara Steiner, The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933-1939 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), ch. 3. Michael Callahan emphasizes rightly that British diplomats in particular wished to find a solution compatible with 'mandate' ideals, but it is worth noting that by doing so they again exposed how easily 'trusteeship' could be used to cover nakedly imperial aims; after all, Italy too was eager to offer to abide by 'mandate principles' in Ethiopia. See, Michael Callahan, A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations and Africa, 1929-1946 (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 78-87.

international order had to change with it. Thus, argued Toynbee, ‘we have also...to work out some method of ‘peaceful change’ as an alternative to the violent method of change’ through war. ‘Dissatisfied’ powers were making open territorial claims, and although some of those were specious and exaggerated, some, like Germany’s claim for wider economic opportunities, were more justified. How could those grievances be met, and the world rendered less dangerous?

What is illuminating about Toynbee’s response to that question is that he first sought to shift the terms of debate altogether. International tensions and revisionist resentments would not be eased by nationalist moves. Rather, the best approach would be to make sovereignty and territory matter less tout court. Between the opposing but similar programs of colonial transfer and imperial annexation, Toynbee located a third alternative: that of ‘internationalizing’ all benefits of territorial control so that they could be enjoyed by the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ alike. Such had been the mandates system’s initial aim, and Toynbee, revealingly, looked back to that originary impulse. Rather than returning territories to their former sovereigns, why not bring all non-self-governing territories under the mandates regime? If colonial control were truly internationalized, all grounds for resentment would vanish.<sup>247</sup>

Toynbee did not see this proposal as a veiled apology for Italian or German aggression: indeed, while he was crafting his argument for peaceful change, he was also condemning Italian aggression in Ethiopia. His aim was to prevent such resorts to force, not to condone them. It is also true however that Toynbee was far more sympathetic to Germany than to Italy, and while he may not have sought to stoke German territorial demands, his interventions had that effect. German colonial lobbyists welcomed his ideas, registering his sympathy for their claims while ignoring his internationalism, and he became one conduit by which what we might call the project of ‘colonial appeasement’ gained international and national traction. But he was only one such conduit, so let me briefly sketch out how, over the next three years, that unthinkable proposal – giving colonies to Germany – became a popular cause.

To understand this, we need to return to Germany. Two weeks ago, I explained how Germany used its League membership in the late twenties to press the cause of ‘internationalization’. No state insisted more strenuously that the mandated territories were something new, held under international and not imperial sovereignty; no state had more success in using the system’s ‘open door’ requirements to gain a share of the economic pie. The Foreign Ministry was rightly pleased with these achievements: the problem was, the German colonial movement hardly felt the same way. Embittered ex-Governors and nostalgic old soldiers were not much interested in trade balances or

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<sup>247</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, ‘Peaceful Change or War? The Next Stage in the International Crisis,’ International Affairs, 15: 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1936), 26-56.

internationalist kudos; they just wanted the German colonies back. And there was no real sign, in 1933, that League membership had brought that goal any nearer.

Thus throughout the Weimar period, while the Wilhelmstrasse sought to cement Germany's position at the League, the colonial movement worked to remind Germans of the illegitimacy of that very organization. Exhibits, lectures, and articles strategically placed in the daily press hammered familiar arguments home – that Germany had been 'illegally' deprived of her property by the 'Diktat' of Versailles; that charges of colonial brutality were lies hypocritically leveled by those responsible for the Amritsar massacre or the Congo regime; that, to the contrary, the German colonies had been near-utopias of flourishing plantations and happy, productive natives; and that those territories and peoples were now going to rack and ruin under brutal or incompetent French or British or Australian rule.<sup>248</sup> 'It is no use saying that the old German colonies were only a source of expense and weakness, or that no German ever went to them, or that they served no really useful purpose in any way,' Britain's Ambassador in Berlin advised the Foreign Office as early as 1928. 'The fact remains that their loss is resented and their recovery is desired, and in the course of time the resentment is likely to become bitter and the desire more ardent.'<sup>249</sup> He was exactly right, and the fact that all great powers responded to the deep economic crisis of the early thirties by introducing tariffs or imperial preferences made German complaints of being unfairly deprived of raw materials and markets more strident and believable. In 1932 Heinrich Schnee, President of the Colonial Association, resigned from the Deutsche Volkspartei and cast his lot with the Nazis.

His followers, too, greeted the Nazi takeover enthusiastically. The Nazis might be lukewarm about the colonialists' cause but common loathing for the Versailles framework made them natural allies. The Nazis' flair for propaganda rubbed off. Brightly-colored posters in train stations reminded passers-by that 'their' colonies could provide raw materials and Lebensraum; striking charts compared the huge expanse of territory supporting each British or Belgian man with their German counterpart's sorry state; postage stamps bedecked with colonial 'heroes' dropped into letter boxes. Public statues of colonial conquerors were rededicated, colonial exhibitions mounted, films about German colonies produced, and in 1934 the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of

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<sup>248</sup> The best study of the German colonial movement between the wars, which has informed the account given here, remains Wolfe W. Schmokel, Dream of Empire: German Colonialism, 1919-1945 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), although recently scholars have begun to pay more attention to the colonial movement both in the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods. For an overview, see Gisela Graichen and Horst Gründer, Deutsche Kolonien: Traum und Trauma (Berlin: Ullstein, 2007); for women's activism, Lora Wildenthal, German Women for Empire, 1884-1945 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); for Nazi colonial activism, Karsten Linne's copiously illustrated Deutschland jenseits des Äquators? Die NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008); and for an intelligent contemporary assessment, Mary Townsend, 'The Contemporary Colonial Movement in Germany,' Political Science Quarterly, 43: 1 (Mar. 1928), 64-75. All mandatory powers also kept close tabs on German colonial revisionism through their ambassadors, consuls, and intelligence services.

<sup>249</sup> NA, AIR 2/1732, quoted in J.V. Perowne, 'Memorandum Regarding German Colonial Aspirations,' (20 June 1935), 14.

German South West Africa observed in the schools. All this did not win a mass following. French intelligence estimated total membership in the raft of German colonialist organizations at no more than 75,000 in 1935.<sup>250</sup> But, it nourished resentful fantasies about the joys of African life and turned the ‘unfairness’ of Germany’s lack of colonies into unexamined ‘common sense.’<sup>251</sup>

1936 was colonial revisionism’s high point – the year Hitler repeatedly stressed German colonial demands, sympathetic articles sprouted in the British press, and the British government began privately – and then not so privately – considering ways to meet them. Yet, like so many other right-wing movements initially euphoric about Hitler’s rise, the colonial movement found the Nazi embrace suffocating. 1936 was also the year that the old established colonial associations were disbanded, a new Nazi colonial association founded, and Schnee, protesting, pushed aside.<sup>252</sup> Henceforth, the movement would serve Hitler’s vision, which was never about restitution of some particular African land, but rather about Germany’s apotheosis as a racially purified self-actualizing global power. There was ‘no such thing as “colonial policy in itself,”’ the Nazi Party’s Office of Colonial Policy instructed its propagandists. ‘Colonial issues should be judged exclusively from the standpoint of Germany’s national needs.’<sup>253</sup> And in 1936 those ‘needs’ were to forge an Anglo-German alliance, disrupt the Anglo-French entente, and win Britain’s implicit consent to Germany’s expansion eastwards. If colonial propaganda sought to make Germans ‘colonial-minded,’ then, it was also, French intelligence reported, ‘always directed at London.’<sup>254</sup>

There was good reason for that, for Britain was revisionism’s most fertile ground. It wasn’t only that so many of the bright young men behind the scenes at Versailles came to feel that settlement too punitive, nor only that British statesmen across political lines were eager to avoid commitments in Eastern Europe, nor even that strong cultural prejudices against slippery Latins and primitive Slavs made many resist the close French alliance or prefer Germans to Poles and Russians.<sup>255</sup> Of course those factors mattered; more important, however, was the fact that Britain had a democratic political culture in

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<sup>250</sup> ANOM, AP 900, ‘Revendications coloniales allemandes,’ (1936), 14. Schmokel, 10, estimates total membership at only 40,000 at the end of 1935.

<sup>251</sup> Confidential reports sent to the French Colonial Ministry provide much information on the movement’s activities. This paragraph relies heavily on Kachinsky, ‘Rapport sur la question coloniale en Allemagne’ (25 Aug. 1936), in ANOM, 1040, file on ‘Revendications coloniales allemandes.’

<sup>252</sup> For Schnee’s objections to this plan, see GStA PK, VI.HA, Schnee Papers, Box 38, Schnee to Epp, 23 Nov. 1935.

<sup>253</sup> ANOM, AP 1040, File: ‘Revendications Coloniales Allemandes: Notes Rachinsky,’ Directives for colonial education issued by the Nazi Party’s Office of Colonial Policy, 1936.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid. These developments are covered in detail by Schmokel, but see also Mary E. Townsend, ‘The German Colonies and the Third Reich,’ *Political Science Quarterly*, 53: 2 (Jun. 1938), 186-206.

<sup>255</sup> Robert Boyce, rightly in my view, considers it impossible to explain the misguided policies of Britain and the USA during the twenties and early thirties without acknowledging the degree to which ‘racial’ assumptions about the superiority of Anglo-Saxons and Teutons to Latins and Slavs structured their thought. See, Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), esp. 26-8, 57-9, 428-9.

which foreign as well as domestic policy was scrutinized and debated by a vigilant parliament and press. So unlike in France, where the Foreign Ministry worked hard to keep policy out of sight and in expert hands,<sup>256</sup> in Britain a great number of ordinary people fell into the habit of thinking of themselves as policymakers, unselfconsciously using the word ‘we’ – just as Toynbee did – when they discussed Britain’s world role. And those volunteer ‘world-orderers,’ while anything but pro-fascist, nonetheless provided the grounds on which revisionism could flourish for the simple reason that they instinctively favored conciliation and sought internationalist responses to conflicts between states.

Take, for example, the treatment of German colonial claims in Headway, the house organ of the League of Nations Union. Headway printed a letter in March 1935 supporting the return of Germany’s ex-colonies, and for more than a year every issue contained correspondence on this question. First came the retorts that territories could no longer be handed about without regard to the interests of the inhabitants. Those then produced several interventions (including one from Heinrich Schnee) pointing out that African views hadn’t been considered when the mandates were distributed either.<sup>257</sup> What is striking, however, is how quickly correspondents tried to move the issue away from rival national claims. ‘A lasting solution of the whole problem will not be achieved until the Great Powers of Europe admit that two standards of behavior towards subject peoples are incompatible – the “Colonial Possession” standard and the “Mandate” standard,’ the former Iraq intelligence officer Philip Mumford argued; ‘the Mandates system must become universal.’<sup>258</sup> Although some correspondents contended that Germany’s ‘marauding instinct’ and loathsome racial policies disqualified her from ruling Africans at all,<sup>259</sup> others held out the hope that a universal system would induce her to adopt international humanitarian norms.<sup>260</sup>

Toynbee’s position, in other words, was widely shared, as League supporters looked to a new international agreement to ease European tensions. Indeed, the level of popular enthusiasm for various ‘world-ordering’ proposals greatly worried Lugard, who in September 1935 and January 1936 laid out his own views in four closely-argued letters to The Times. Lugard defended Britain’s colonial record and challenged the German case, but his main aim was to expose how impractical the proposals for international administration (as opposed to oversight) really were. Whether Britain held its own territories under sovereignty or under mandate was a matter of supreme indifference to

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<sup>256</sup> For which, see Anthony Adamthwaite, France and the Coming of the Second World War, 1936-39 (London: Frank Cass, 1977), 111-72.

<sup>257</sup> The first letter from Kelsall is in Headway, March 1935, 56. For replies, see (among others) ‘Mandates are a Trust,’ April 1935, 62, and Lord Olivier, ‘The Ex-German Colonies,’ June 1935, 112-3, and for pro-German statements, Elizabeth Yandell, ‘Germany Must Expand – Or Disrupt the World!’ June 1935, 115, Yandell ‘Those German Colonies,’ August 1935, 146, and Schnee, ‘The German Colonial Problem,’ Oct. 1935, 196.

<sup>258</sup> Mumford, ‘The Mandates System and Germany,’ Headway, August 1935, 146-7.

<sup>259</sup> See, e.g., the letters from Henry T. Roberts, Oct. 1935, 198 and Wm J. Pearce, Feb. 1936, 37.

<sup>260</sup> This was implied by Leonard Barnes, ‘Germany’s Colonial Claims,’ Headway, Sept. 1935, 165-6

Germany or Italy, he pointed out, while the idea that inexperienced powers or, still less, committees of international bureaucrats could do a better job administering dependent territories than experienced colonial officials was downright absurd. Lugard, an old free-trader, did think the ‘open door’ should apply to all African colonies, but he viewed proposals to ‘internationalize’ all dependent territories as so much moonshine, and said so.<sup>261</sup>

As the debate heated up, die-hard imperialists mobilized as well. When Lloyd George blurted out in the Commons that he ‘did not believe they would make peace in the world until...the British Empire was willing to reconsider the question of mandates,’ he was sharply rebuked by Leo Amery, who retorted that Germany had lost her territories in a war she had herself provoked and should look to the ‘great markets of Central Europe’ and not to Africa for an economic zone.<sup>262</sup> Like some others concerned above all about Soviet expansion, Amery didn’t think Britain should object to German dominance in Central Europe (in August 1935 he had told Hitler so<sup>263</sup>), but he insisted that Britain’s security rested on tightening imperial ties. Five days later, Amery, Churchill’s son-in-law Duncan Sandys, and a dozen other MPs gave notice of a motion opposing the transfer of any British colonies or mandated territories.<sup>264</sup> As an issue, ‘colonial revisionism’ had well and truly arrived. The Times would publish 160 articles on the subject in 1936 alone.<sup>265</sup>

What was new about this public discussion? First, it preceded Cabinet consideration; ‘public opinion’ raced ahead of official plans. Second, virtually all policy options were on the table from the start. There were, after all, only three possible responses to German colonial demands: to surrender the ex-German territories, to incorporate them more fully into the empires, or to try to find a ‘third way’ by tying the issue to other internationalist goals – economic liberalization, say, or the crafting of a ‘general settlement.’ Of these three, however, in Britain ‘internationalist’ arguments predominated. They were clever, interesting, and appealed equally to well-connected liberal intellectuals and a public desperate to avoid war. Over the course of 1936 and 1937, a network of liberal intellectuals, loosely coordinated by Toynbee and the Labour peer Noel-Buxton, promoted the plan to conciliate Germany by redistributing colonies

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<sup>261</sup> Lugard, ‘Africa and the Powers,’ The Times, Sept. 19 and 20, 1935, and Lugard, ‘The Claim to Colonies,’ The Times, Jan. 13 and 14, 1935. Lugard gave a talk making similar points to Chatham House on Dec. 3, 1935; this was printed as ‘The Basis of the Claim for Colonies,’ International Affairs, 15: 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1936), 3-25. The January Times articles were reprinted as, ‘The Claims to Colonies,’ Journal of the Royal African Society, 35: 139 (Apr. 1936), 115-22.

<sup>262</sup> House of Commons debate of 5 Feb. 1936, quoted in The Times, Feb. 6, 1936, 7.

<sup>263</sup> Amery noted in his diary that he had ‘got on well’ with Hitler, ‘owing to the fundamental similarity of many of our ideas.’ Entry for 13 August, 1935, in The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929-1945, ed. John Barnes and David Nicholson (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 397.

<sup>264</sup> ‘An Inalienable Trust,’ The Times, 11 Feb. 1936, 8. Amery put much work into challenging the German case (see, e.g., ‘General von Epp’s Case Examined,’ Journal of the Royal African Society, 36: 142 [Jan. 1937], 10-22) and cultivating joint Anglo-French resistance to revision (see CAC, AMEL, 1/5/51-2).

<sup>265</sup> The count is from Schmokel, 90.

under an expanded system of international control. Both men made trips to Germany, and in late February 1936 Toynbee – through Fritz Berber’s mediation – was granted a 90-minute audience with Hitler, during which Hitler insisted on the need for a restoration of German colonies and told Toynbee ‘very explicitly’ that he had no ambition ‘to conquer a great empire for Germany in Eastern Europe.’ Toynbee gave an account of that meeting a week later to some like-minded politicians at Blickling, the estate of the pacifist peer Lord Lothian, and its substance was transmitted to Eden as well.<sup>266</sup> British revisionists were, of course, hardly willing to turn over colonial territories without conditions: all powers administering dependent peoples were to enforce principles of trusteeship and the ‘open door’; no transfers were to be made without the inhabitants’ consent. But the crucial point is that, for more than a year, those who sought conciliation with Germany dominated the airwaves, and a new colonial settlement was central to their plans.<sup>267</sup>

These internationalist proposals were hardly what German colonialists had in mind, and they quickly grew frustrated with their self-referential British counterparts. Theodor Gunzert, former head of the Foreign Ministry’s Colonial Bureau, told a French informant in late 1936, and again in January 1937, that he had lost all confidence in Toynbee. British revisionists seemed unable to grasp what to the French was crystal clear: since the Germans were interested in less international constraint rather than more, expanding the mandates system was no longer a basis for discussion. But if British liberal intellectuals were deluded to think the Nazis might be interested in their internationalist fixes, the Nazis were equally deluded to think the British might accept transfers outside an internationalist frame. Once the negotiations started, that incompatibility would become apparent.

The British government’s consideration of German claims can be divided into three episodes: the secret review conducted by a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defense between March and June 1936; the intermittent Anglo-French consideration of the economic case for transfer during the winter and spring of 1936-7; and finally the period leading up to Chamberlain’s colonial offer of early 1938. Prior to those investigations, when asked about German claims, British ministers had stated bluntly that no such transfers could be contemplated. When Hitler raised Germany’s

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<sup>266</sup> Bodleian, Toynbee Papers Box 76, Transcript of Toynbee’s interview with Hitler on 28 Feb. 1936, contained in Thomas Jones to Eden, 9 March 1936.

<sup>267</sup> Toynbee played a key role in this campaign, not only because he had the intellectual agility necessary but also because of his close contacts with German academics and officials whom he thought sympathetic to ‘internationalization.’ See especially, Bodleian, Toynbee Papers, Box 76, which contains correspondence with Fritz Berber and other German interlocutors, as well as with Noel-Buxton and other British allies. For one crucial intervention, see Noel-Buxton’s motion in the Lords urging ‘mandation’ of colonies, 104 H.L. Deb., 17 Feb. 1937, cols. 172-222, the ‘National Memorial on Peace and Economic Cooperation’ signed by some 400 public figures, which included support both for a revision of the Ottawa accords and for an extension of the mandates system, in The Times, Feb. 11, 1937, 9, and the deputation to the Prime Minister in support of those aims, The Times, 23 Mar. 1937.

‘moral and legal’ claim to colonies with Sir John Simon in March 1935, Simon said flatly that he could not hold out hope of concessions.<sup>268</sup>

But there was cautious movement behind the scenes. In early 1935 the Foreign Office conducted a long review of the question,<sup>269</sup> for some ministers and officials thought that, if peace could be bought by handing over one of the ex-German colonies, it would be cheap at the price. Sir Robert Vansittart, the powerful Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, for example, thought Britain would have to allow German expansion either in Eastern Europe or Africa and much preferred the latter. That would come, he said, ‘at our own expense’, while concessions in Eastern Europe would be ‘absolutely immoral and completely contrary to all the principles of the League.’<sup>270</sup> Neville Chamberlain and J.H. Thomas (then Chancellor and Colonial Secretary respectively) also told a Cabinet subcommittee in February 1936 that they’d be happy to trade Tanganyika for a lasting settlement.<sup>271</sup> A European peace was well worth a few African territories.

This should not surprise us: this is how empires think. They often buy good will by handing dependent bits and their inhabitants around. But could they do so in this case? Vansittart recognized that ‘League principles’ might make it hard to hand Hitler the Ukraine; he failed, however, to realize that they might make other territorial transfers tricky as well. For if Britain was not ‘sovereign’ in (say) Tanganyika and took trusteeship seriously, how could transferring African populations to Germany be a private, even a generous, act? British consideration would founder, over and over, on this question.

Britain’s first examination of the German claim was sparked by Hitler’s so-called ‘peace offer’ of March 7, 1936, the day German troops reoccupied the Rhineland – and, interestingly, exactly one week after Toynbee’s meeting with Hitler. That document laid out the conditions under which Germany might return to the League and referred to the hope that ‘the question of colonial equality of right’ could be settled ‘through friendly negotiation.’ If Hitler’s aim was to throw sand in the eyes of the Locarno powers he achieved it, for the next day Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden told Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin that the time had come to consider the question of transferring a mandate or mandates to Germany. One day later, Baldwin turned over that task to a secret subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defense with representatives from the service ministries, the Colonial, Dominions and Foreign Offices, and the Board of Trade.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> 301 *H.C. Deb.*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., May 2, 1935, col. 687; Crozier, 105-6; Callahan, *Sacred Trust*, 81.

<sup>269</sup> NA, AIR 2/1732, J.V. Perowne, ‘Memorandum Regarding German Colonial Aspiration’ (20 June 1935).

<sup>270</sup> Vansittart, Nov. 1935, quoted in Crozier, 126.

<sup>271</sup> Crozier, 133.

<sup>272</sup> The Plymouth Committee is discussed by Crozier, ch. 6, and by Callahan, *Sacred Trust*, 94-6, but see also the useful article A. Edho Ekoko, ‘The British attitude towards Germany’s Colonial Irredentism in Africa in the Inter-war years,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14: 2 (Apr. 1979), 287-307. The Committee’s records can be found in NA, CO 323/1398.



Unsurprisingly, the Foreign Office representatives were the most favorable to transfer, thinking restitution worth doing if it contributed to a general settlement. The service ministries, although pessimistic, were not obstructive, with the Admiralty stating that German overseas possessions would not pose any problems Britain hadn't faced before.<sup>273</sup> It was the Colonial Office, now under William Ormsby-Gore, that objected, arguing that the very notion that one could transfer people was 'obsolete.' But the more the committee talked, the more problems arose.<sup>274</sup> A June 1936 report laid all those out. Terminating a mandate would require consent of the League, and since Germany was not even a League member, raising this in Geneva might destroy the mandates system altogether. It would be a retrograde step, 'a retreat from the enlightened principles enshrined in the mandates which the United Kingdom Government have always claimed are applied already throughout the Colonial Empire.' And inevitably, it would be interpreted as a sign of weakness, not only by Britain's imperial allies and the British dominions, but equally by colonial peoples themselves.

Yet, the committee didn't feel able to abandon the question. Instead, since 'wider considerations' might necessitate concessions anyway, they took it upon themselves to lay out the minimum requirements such a transfer must meet. These were, first, that it should not endanger the principles of trusteeship; second, that it should not be achieved through a German *fait accompli*; third, that it should be conditional upon Germany's continued good behavior; and finally, that it should be part of a wider global settlement. Loosing some speculative hares that would never be run down, they also suggested that if some concession had to be made, Togo and Cameroon would be much more easily relinquished than Tanganyika – unsurprisingly, since those territories were largely in French hands.<sup>275</sup> While insisting that territorial transfer was a terrible idea, the Committee thus went quite far towards making it imaginable.

This was especially so because its deliberations could not be kept quiet. On April 6, 1936, MPs on the Conservative right asked for reassurances that no territorial transfers were contemplated. Neville Chamberlain prevaricated. Although the surrender of British colonies was unthinkable, 'mandated territories were not colonies' and their disposition was, in part, a matter for the League.<sup>276</sup> The sound barrier had been broken. Eden would inform the Commons that July that the Government had decided that transfer of mandates raised too many problems, but his regretful tone revealed how much the Foreign Office at

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<sup>273</sup> NA, AIR 2/1732, E.N. Seyfret (Admiralty) to L.G.S. Payne (Air Staff), 21 Mar. 1936. For Foreign Office views, see Crozier, 142-3.

<sup>274</sup> NA, CO 323/1398, Note by Eastwood, 17 June 1936.

<sup>275</sup> NA, CO 323/1398, CID, 'Transfer of a Colonial Mandate or Mandates to Germany: Report of a Sub-Committee' [Plymouth Committee Report] (June 9, 1936).

<sup>276</sup> 310 *H.C. Deb.*, 6 Apr. 1936, cols. 3556-8; and see, e.g., Amery's plea for a categorical refusal to consider such claims in a deputation to the Prime Minister, CAC, AMEL 1/5/50, Statement, 'Deputation to the Prime Minister,' 19 May 1936.

least wished otherwise. The government could see no way forward but refused to shut the door.<sup>277</sup>

As a result, for the next year, proposals for colonial restitution proffered by an assortment of real and would-be diplomats piled up on Whitehall desks. Some reached for the panacea of a 'general settlement,' but the most serious – which sparked a second round of official consideration – sought to reknit frayed European economic ties. Liberal economists within the League's Economic and Financial Organization and advising the British government were by the early thirties very worried about how protectionist policies had deepened global antagonisms and guiltily aware that the United States Smoot-Hawley tariff of 1930 and the Ottawa agreements on imperial protection in 1932 had been among the worst offenders. They knew Germany, a trading power without a dependent empire, had fewer options, and now tried to use international organizations to promote trade liberalization.<sup>278</sup>

The man who did the most to insert German colonial claims into these economic discussions was Reichbank President and Nazi regime's Minister of Economics in the mid-thirties, Hjalmar Schacht. Schacht was one of Germany's most powerful men, having not only helped orchestrate its economic recovery from the nadir of 1934 but done so in such a way as to lessen its dependence on American loans, hold down domestic consumer spending, and make possible the hothouse arms build-up to which Hitler was absolutely committed. Schacht refused to allow Germany's choices to be constrained by its serious foreign exchange problems, taking a hard line with its creditors and negotiating clearing arrangements that drew Southeastern Europe ever closer into its economic orbit.<sup>279</sup> Always on the lookout for ways to aid Germany's growth, Schacht updated the colonial case to fit a protectionist, bloc-oriented world. The prewar world had enjoyed free trade, ready credit, open emigration, long-term commercial treaties, and a universal gold standard, he pointed out in a much-cited article in *Foreign Affairs*, but the great trading powers were now throwing protection around their empires. Germany thus needed colonies not to recover the products those territories had once supplied, but rather to build up comparable markets within its own currency area.<sup>280</sup>

That move towards move towards imperial protection that Schacht noted was quite real. The proportion of French exports going to its colonies rose from just over a fifth in 1931 to almost a third in 1935, by which point just under half of British exports

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<sup>277</sup> So many MPs wished to speak, including about the prospect of territorial transfer, at that key foreign policy debate in July that the government scheduled a supplementary session. For those debates, see, 315 *H.C. Deb.*, 27 July 1936, cols. 1115-1224, and 31 July 1936, cols. 1904-74; the quotation from Eden is at col. 1132.

<sup>278</sup> For the League Economic and Financial Organization, Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: Understanding the Work of its Economic and Financial Organization,' *Contemporary European History*, 14: 4 (Nov. 2005), 465-92.

<sup>279</sup> Schacht's strategies and achievements are clearly explained in Adam Tooze's marvelous history of Nazi economic policy, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking, 2006), chs. 2-3.

<sup>280</sup> Hjalmar Schacht, 'Germany's Colonial Demands,' *Foreign Affairs*, 15: 2 (Jan. 1937), 223-34.

went to imperial destinations.<sup>281</sup> But it was less that economic shift than the advent of the Popular Front government in France that won Schacht a hearing. Beset by domestic difficulties, the new Socialist Prime Minister Leon Blum told Schacht he would contemplate concessions if Britain would as well, and in early 1937 Chief Economic Advisor Frederick Leith-Ross met with Schacht. That March and April, the British cabinet reviewed Schacht's proposal to Blum offering arms limitations and Germany's reentry into the League in exchange for Togo and Cameroon, a reduction of interest on debt, and other economic concessions. The Cabinet then decided that if France wished to enter into negotiations, Britain would go along. Yet, this proposal went no further, for there were numerous practical impediments. Timing was a major problem. By the time the British government considered Schacht's case, the Blum government was in crisis (it would fall in July 1937), and Schacht's star was in decline as well. Divisions within the French and British governments also mattered, for if the Foreign Ministries wanted to make a deal, French Colonial Minister Marius Moutet was horrified and his British counterpart Ormsby-Gore felt much the same way.

Had negotiations proceeded, they would also likely have quickly foundered, for if Schacht and his Anglo-French interlocutors had similar understandings of the ways in which the global economy had changed, they had diametrically opposite ideas about what to do about it. Liberal economists at the League and advising the Western Governments tended to argue, as the economist J.B. Condliffe put it, that the grouping of nations into empires or trading blocs was itself the problem, not only because that move limited global investment and trade, but also because it increased the risk of inter-bloc war. As a result, 'the most promising road to lasting peace and fruitful co-operation among the nations is not the further aggrandizement of great states, but the limitation of state rights in a world community.... A first step in that direction might well be a reversal of the recent tendency to close colonial markets for the benefit of the governing power.'<sup>282</sup> The problem was that this was just the liberalizing program in which Schacht had no interest – and, it is worth adding, that the British government (as opposed to British liberal internationalists), proved unwilling to pursue either.

But the final reason why Schacht's proposals could not succeed is simply because they were not what Hitler wanted. Yes, Germany needed Lebensraum and subject territories to provide raw materials and agricultural supplies, but those territories should directly adjoin the Reich. In a now-famous meeting on 5 November 1937, Hitler made clear that Eastern Europe and the Balkans were to be Germany's 'colonies.' Those states, thanks to Schacht's hard-driven bargains, were already bound to the Nazi economy, and Hitler instructed his military chiefs to prepare for the Drang nach Osten that would soon

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<sup>281</sup> Plymouth Committee Report, 28-9; for British imperial economic integration in the 1930s, see also John Darwin, The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 431-9.

<sup>282</sup> J.B. Condliffe, Markets and the Problem of Peaceful Change (Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1938), 55-6.

follow.<sup>283</sup> But if Schacht had helped secure that economic hinterland, by doing so he had worked himself out of a job. One month after that meeting, he was dismissed as Minister of Economics.

If Hitler's eastern plans were set, however, he managed to keep the British and French in the dark. In public, he still harped on colonies, and British internationalists fell lemming-like into line. On October 7, only days after his bitter attack on those powers who insisted that colonies were only a burden but nevertheless refused to share them, Toynbee, Gilbert Murray, Noel-Buxton and Vernon Bartlett (liberal internationalists all) published a collective letter urging some effort to satisfy German colonial claims.<sup>284</sup> Amery and other anti-appeasers swiftly mobilized in response: as Amery wrote Murray privately, the only statement he thought the Germans would understand is, 'we took your colonies in war and we have kept them for our security and mean to keep them, and anyhow we object to surrendering people for whom we have once become responsible.'<sup>285</sup> This plain-spoken view was, however, the minority. Three weeks later the Times called for 'a genuine attempt to find for Germany some acceptable field for development,' and two weeks after that the Manchester Guardian, usually a fierce critic of the Nazi state, published a self-flagellating argument for concessions as well – one reprinted, the French Ambassador reported, in every Berlin newspaper.<sup>286</sup> In the House of Lords an odd alliance of progressive peers and isolationist or Francophobe backwoodsmen joined together to urge the government to consider German claims in the context of a 'general settlement,'<sup>287</sup> while the Council of the League of Nations Union called for the transfer of all non-self-governing territories to the mandates regime.<sup>288</sup> This was the high-water-mark of British colonial revisionism, the enabling context for the British government's third and final initiative – that pursued by Chamberlain himself.

On November 19, 1937, Chamberlain's closest ally Viscount Halifax met with Hitler at Berchtesgaden to test the ground. Hitler was alternately aggrieved and self-justifying, complaining of the attacks upon him in the British press, and showing very little interest in Halifax's suggestion of a four-power conference. Yet, perhaps because Hitler said that 'there was only one difference, namely the colonial question,' marring Anglo-German relations,<sup>289</sup> and perhaps because he met the colonies-obsessed Schacht the next day, Halifax left Germany persuaded that 'a colonial settlement on broad lines'

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<sup>283</sup> For that meeting, see Schmokel, 104-6; Tooze, 239-43.

<sup>284</sup> 'German Claim to Colonies: Führer's Renewed Demand,' The Times, Oct. 4, 1937, 14; Vernon Bartlett, Gilbert Murray, Noel-Buxton, and A.J. Toynbee, 'The Question of Colonies,' The Times, 7 Oct. 1937, 15.

<sup>285</sup> Gilbert Murray papers, Box 379, Amery to Murray, 9 Oct. 1937.

<sup>286</sup> 'The Claim to Colonies,' The Times, Oct. 28, 1937, 17; 'A Sacred Trust,' The Manchester Guardian, Nov. 10, 1937, 10; and for German reception of the latter article, MAE, SDN 547, François-Poncet to MAE, 11 Nov. 1937.

<sup>287</sup> 107 H.L. Deb., 17 Nov. 1937, cols. 115-72.

<sup>288</sup> For that text, see BLPES, LNU Archives Reel 431, Meetings of the Mandates Committee, 1 March 1938.

<sup>289</sup> 'Memorandum: Conversation with Herr Hitler,' included in Neurath to Henderson, 20 Nov. 1937, DGFP, ser. D. vol. 1, 55-67, here at 62.

might be used, as he inelegantly put it, ‘as a lever upon which to pursue a policy of real reassurance in Europe.’<sup>290</sup>

This was what Neville Chamberlain wanted to hear. Ignoring Eden’s warning that ‘Germany clearly did not now wish to connect Central Europe with the colonial question,’ Chamberlain speculated that the ‘*quid pro quo* for colonies’ might include ‘not only Central Europe but also some agreement on the League of Nations and on armaments.’<sup>291</sup> He met immediately with the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and, buoyed by a surprisingly restrained reception in the Commons, began to sketch out a plan. His plan was ‘imperial’ in that horse-trading over Africa was to do the work of European reconciliation. The whole of Central Africa – essentially everything below the fifth parallel (including Cameroon but excluding the Sahara and most of West Africa) and above the Zambezi – would be put in a common pot and then distributed among all interested European powers. Yet, the plan was also ‘international’ in that all powers would be obliged to administer their territories under common economic and humanitarian norms. In other words, Chamberlain was planning to reform the mandates system to reflect the realities – and, he hoped, abate the dangers – of the shifting European balance of power.<sup>292</sup>

Chamberlain’s colleagues reacted cautiously at the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy on January 24, 1938. Eden doubted ‘that we could get away with this question on the backs of other powers,’ and indeed, British machinations worried and angered the Portuguese and Belgians. Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore, once again the only member with any sensitivity to non-white feeling, also warned that ‘the whole of the coloured world... would intensely resent the idea of our handling over native populations to another Power.’<sup>293</sup> But if Chamberlain was playing fast and loose with the interests and loyalties of Britain’s European allies and the inhabitants of the African territories alike, he was also willfully ignoring what the Nazis were saying. Von Ribbentrop, convinced (like Hitler) that the eastern settlement could only be undone by force and determined to do nothing to restrain Germany’s freedom of action, had told Halifax and Chamberlain point-blank in mid-December that the German colonial claim was not a bargaining point<sup>294</sup> – a message that Neurath repeated to British Ambassador Sir Nevile Henderson

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<sup>290</sup> ‘Account by Lord Halifax of his Visit to Germany, November 17-21, 1939,’ *B DFA*, Part II, Ser. F, vol. 48, 360-70, here at 365. Andrew Roberts argues that Halifax let Hitler see how reluctant Britain was to try to restrain him in Eastern Europe; see ‘The Holy Fox’: *A Life of Lord Halifax* (1991; rpt. London: Papermac, 1992), 67-75.

<sup>291</sup> NA, Cab 23/90A, Cabinet 43, 24 Nov. 1937.

<sup>292</sup> The evolution of Chamberlain’s plan is discussed by Crozier, ch. 8, and by Callahan, *Sacred Trust*, 141-6; for Schacht’s proposal, see ‘Account by Lord Halifax,’ 368.

<sup>293</sup> Eden and Ormsby-Gore, quoted in Callahan, *Sacred Trust*, 144. There is some discussion of the Portuguese response in Crozier, 231-2, but diplomatic correspondence reveals considerable anxiety and anger in Brussels as well. Only the Czechs, menaced by Germany and grasping at anything that might placate it, gave eager support to the prospect of colonial concessions – a stance that might have softened their French ally. See the various reports to the MAE in SDN 547, esp. Delacroix (Prague) to Delbos, 3 Dec. 1937.

<sup>294</sup> Ribbentrop to Neurath and Hitler, 2 Dec. 1937, and to Neurath, 14 Dec. and 17 Dec. 1937, in *DGFP*, ser. D, vol. 1, 91, 124-5, 131-4.

in the most explicit way in late January.<sup>295</sup> Yet, Chamberlain proceeded anyway, recalling Henderson to London in early February to discuss the proposal and then instructing him to request an early audience with Hitler to present it. On March 1, when Henderson asked for that meeting, he was again told that Germany's colonial demands were non-negotiable.<sup>296</sup>

Henderson dutifully met with Hitler on 3 March 1938 anyway. 'There was no question of a bargain,' he (implausibly) insisted, 'but rather of an attempt to create the basis for a real and sincere friendship with Germany.' German co-operation on arms agreements and on Czech and Austrian politics was essential to European peace, but the British Government was also ready to make progress on the colonial question; indeed the Prime Minister 'had devoted his personal attention to this matter.' With the aid of a globe, Henderson explained Chamberlain's proposal, assuring Hitler that while all powers would be asked to subscribe to common principles about demilitarization, free trade and native welfare, Germany would hold some territory 'in sovereignty' – a term worth noting, given that, as I explained in my third lecture, in the Locarno period all imperial powers had agreed that they were not, repeat not, sovereign in territories held under international mandate. Effectively tossing away that agreement, Henderson asked Hitler whether Germany would be ready to take part in such a regime. And, if so, what contribution would she make 'for general order and security in Europe'?

Hitler responded truculently. Central Europe was no concern of Britain at all. Just as Germany 'would never think of interfering in the settlement of relations between England and Ireland,' so too 'Germany would not tolerate any interference by third powers in the settlement of her relations with kindred countries or with countries having large German elements in their populations.' As for Chamberlain's cherished colonial plan, Hitler failed to see the point. 'Instead of establishing a new and complicated system,' he asked Henderson, 'why not solve the colonial problem in the simplest and most natural way, namely, by returning the former German colonies?' That was all Germany wanted, and if France and Britain were not interested, Germany would prefer to wait quietly 'for 4, 6, 8, or 10 years' until they might change their minds. Henderson patiently ran through the whole thing again, adding that that if Germany were interested, he believed that the other colonial powers would come round. Hitler made no reply, but promised a written response.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Memorandum by Neurath, 26 Jan. 1938, in *ibid.*, 190-1.

<sup>296</sup> Memorandum by Ribbentrop, 1 Mar. 1938, in *DGFP*, ser. D, vol. 1, 228.

<sup>297</sup> One record of this critically important conversation can be found in, 'Notes of the Conversation between the Chancellor and the British Ambassador in the Presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Herr von Ribbentrop, on March 3, 1938, in Berlin, in *BDF*, Part II, Ser. F, vol. 49, 360-70, 47-52. I have, however, used the more direct and unambiguous English text sent to Henderson by the German Foreign Ministry, for which see, 'Memorandum of the conversation between the Führer and the Royal British Ambassador in the Presence of Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop on March 3, 1938,' enclosed in Ribbentrop to Henderson, in *DGFP*, ser. D, vol. 1, 240-9.

That missive never arrived. German troops marched into Vienna instead. Hitler, Chamberlain learned the hard way, would not be deflected from his eastern plans; indeed, the Munich accords were built on that realization. Yet, Hitler's response signaled not only a refusal to trade eastern for African 'colonies.' It was also an absolute rejection of the international order the British had been trying desperately to reconstruct. From 1936 until 1938, British politicians and the British public had tried to use the colonial issue to lure Germany into a program of trade liberalization, 'de-territorialization' and 'peaceful change.' That effort failed in part because Britain was now protectionist as well, but also because Germany was never interested. The whole purpose of colonies, for Schacht as well as Hitler, was to limit German dependence on an Anglo-American international economic and political order.

After this debacle, the British government gave up on colonial conciliation. Instead, that October, Chamberlain forced the Czechs to play the Africans' role. Since Hitler kept harping, public interest lasted a little longer. Indeed, distressingly, on the night of November 9, as mobs rampaged through German cities attacking Jews and sacking their properties, the Mandates Committee of the League of Nations Union was putting the finishing touches on their proposal for drawing Germany into a system of international colonial control.<sup>298</sup> Those pogroms shattered those illusions. As the French Ambassador to London reported with some relief, Left and Liberal opinion was now strongly opposed to turning native peoples over to a totalitarian state.<sup>299</sup> 'Don't let Neville underestimate the profound change... caused by the revelation of the Nazi character,' Amery wrote Halifax on November 15; "'appeasement" had better lie low for some time to come.'<sup>300</sup> The French had always been less optimistic about colonial Danegeld anyway, and on November 16 Daladier stated, firmly if mendaciously, that 'no cession has ever been considered, nor can it be.'<sup>301</sup> But by that point, the mandates system was coming apart at the seams.

This was the case partly because internationalism was everywhere in retreat by the late thirties. The European empires had turned protectionist; now, they began tightening their security arrangements as well. But the debate over colonial appeasement worsened matters, for it sowed discord among the mandatory powers and threw almost every territory under League supervision into crisis. Mandatory administrations that had allowed German settlers to stay on after 1919 or had welcomed them back in the Locarno period now found themselves with irredentist Nazi movements on their hands. Nervous non-German populations began to appeal to the imperial power for direct annexation,

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<sup>298</sup> BLPES, LNU Archives, Reel 431, Mandates Committee meeting, 9 Nov. 1938; see also the copy in Lugard 141/10, which also contains Lugard's note (read at the meeting) dissenting.

<sup>299</sup> MAE, SDN 548, Corbin to MAE, 15 Dec. 1938.

<sup>300</sup> CAC, AMEL 2/1/28, pt. 2, Amery to Halifax, 15 Nov. 1938; see also LP 141/9, Lugard to MacDonald, 18 Nov. 1938, and his blunt chastisement of Harris for continuing to put forward proposals for colonial transfer, Lugard to Harris, 19 Dec. 1938.

<sup>301</sup> Quoted in Adamthwaite, 297.

although Germanophile South Africa muddied the waters by saying they'd be happy to see Germany back on the continent, just not in South West Africa. That beggar-my-neighbor response was all too common: British officials too tended to offer up French Cameroon whenever they were asked for a concrete proposal. Unsurprisingly, French mandate governors dissented and stepped up surveillance of German and British agents and visitors alike. Indeed, colonial governors across the board made clear how entirely they disapproved of their governments' seeming willingness to barter away the very ground beneath their feet.

They had metropolitan allies too, not least among the Colonial Ministers and League officials who ran the mandate regime. Lugard and the Belgian chairman of the Mandates Commission Pierre Orts both spoke out against any possibility of territorial transfer; so too did French colonial minister Marius Moutet and British colonial secretary Ormsby-Gore. Unsurprisingly, Lugard and Ormsby-Gore sprang to the defense of Tanganyika in particular, the territory that had always been the flagship for mandatory trusteeship, the territory cited by those who claimed to put 'native paramountcy' first. For anyone who took that language seriously (as Lugard did), to turn five million Africans over 'like cattle' to a formally racist state was 'simply unthinkable.'<sup>302</sup> Yet what the 'colonial appeasement' debate exposed – including to a growing educated African population – was that turning over Africans to Nazis to solve European problems was 'thinkable.' And that fact, more than anything else, discredited internationalism and brought the ghosts of 1919 back.

Let me close, then, by looking at what happened when that International Studies Conference convened in June of 1937, before this denouement, for that discussion of 'peaceful change.' Much work had been done – preparatory studies of population pressures and raw materials written; memoranda from the various national coordinating committees submitted; delegations of economists, political scientists, lawyers and politicians chosen. An astonishingly distinguished phalanx of liberal academics – Henri Labouret, Hersch Lauterpacht, James Shotwell, Quincy Wright – attended; statesmen who had led some of the League's most high-profile efforts at 'peaceful change' – Count Paul Teleki of the Mosul Commission, Lord Lytton of the Manchuria Commission – showed up as well. And thanks to Toynbee's intervention, the maverick Nazi law professor Fritz Berber represented Germany.

Territorial transfer, at that point the hottest of hot topics, was discussed by the round-table on colonial questions. Revealingly, however, when the debate opened, another option had been added to the agenda. As the chairman explained, while at the outset only two models for colonial 'peaceful change' had been envisaged, 'the transfer of the territory of a colonial Power to some other national sovereignty, and of a colonial Power to an international sovereignty,' it had later been thought worthwhile to consider a

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<sup>302</sup> RH, Lugard 141/9, Lugard to Joelson, 16 Nov. 1938, and Lugard to Himbury, 16 Nov. 1938.



‘third solution, which consists in the progressive disappearance of the colonial status as the result of the emancipation of the tributary populations.’ Rather than transferring sovereignty, sovereignty – or, we might say, a form of sovereignty – would be conferred on the native population itself.<sup>303</sup> ‘Self-determination’ was back on the table.

With an almost audible sigh of relief, many of the conference’s Anglo-American scholars and statesmen swung behind this ‘third way.’ Already in 1936 the American professor of international law Quincy Wright had written to Toynbee to say that ‘since the so-called ‘dissatisfied’ powers are both economically and politically better-off than three-quarters of the states of the world’ it was hard to see just why their grievances were so pressing; indeed, it seemed to him ‘that international change should be in the direction of general limitations of sovereignty’ not territorial transfers.<sup>304</sup> At the conference Wright rose to argue that since there was no reason save ‘historical accident’ and rapid Western technological advance for the current distribution of colonies anyway, the fifty or sixty countries who lacked them found the empires’ rhetoric about their ‘burden’ unpersuasive at best. ‘There is something inherently unnatural in the government of a people of very different culture by a metropolitan center,’ he insisted.<sup>305</sup> Professor Richardson from the University of Leeds eagerly agreed, but worried that process might take a long time. Labour’s former colonial under-secretary Drummond Shiels demurred. If a real effort at education were made, ‘the period need not be so long as is sometimes thought.’<sup>306</sup>

No one invited W.E.B. Du Bois or now exiled Haile Selassie to the conference. It was a very white event indeed. The colonized populations whose interests were so freely cited were not represented either; in the eyes of the conference-goers, they were clearly peoples still unable to stand – or indeed speak – on their own. But buried in League of Nations and Colonial Ministry archives in Geneva, Paris and London we find plenty of evidence of ‘voice.’ Just before the conference gathered, members of the Negro Welfare Association in Port of Spain wrote to denounce ‘the plotting of British, Italian and French imperialism for the handing over of African colonies to the Fascist Nazi gangs of Germany,’ while making clear they were not so thrilled with the current regimes either. ‘The Negro people of the former German Colonies who are struggling against their present British and French exploiters must be given the right to determine their own form of Government.’<sup>307</sup> Right after the November

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<sup>303</sup> Peaceful Change: Procedures, Population, Raw Materials, Colonies, Proceedings of the Tenth International Studies Conference, Paris, 28 June – 3 July 1937 (Paris: International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation, 1938) 417-8.

<sup>304</sup> Toynbee Papers Box 86, Wright to Toynbee, 27 Jan. 1936.

<sup>305</sup> Peaceful Change, 459-62.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 450-1.

<sup>307</sup> This from LNA, R4137, 6A/27984/27984, Negro Welfare Association, London, to PMC, 7 Apr. 1937, transmitting a protest from the Negro Welfare and Cultural Association, Port of Spain, but see also ANOM, AP 900/1, Comité National de Défense des Intérêts du Cameroun to Moutet, 12 Nov. 1937, and S.M. Kumaramangalam and K. Alleyne, ‘What Mandates Mean,’ Headway, Jan. 1939, 21-23, and, more generally, Susan Pennybacker, From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), esp. ch. 2.

pogroms, the West African Students Union in London passed a resolution saying much the same thing. For those nationalists-in-formation, the haggling over colonial transfer was a shock, but also an illumination.

## The Limits of International Turns

Lecture 6 (Mar. 7, 2014)

Like everyone who prefers a quiet life, I would rather these lectures ended with a whimper than a bang. But historians who work on the interwar years don't have that privilege. I know I left you, last week, at a depressing and disillusioning moment – for Britain, for Europe, and for the liberal internationalist project. Of the three 'Leagues of Nations' that I tracked in the first lecture, only that League to promote international cooperation over issues ranging from infectious diseases to radio waves was still going strong. The second League, which looked to collective security and sanctions to enforce the principles of the Covenant, had expired with the Italo-Ethiopian war: none of the major European crises of the late thirties were handled through Geneva. And the third League, the League to manage the dispositions over sovereignty reached at Versailles and Lausanne – that too was in crisis.

It had begun well, with the euphoric emergence of a swathe of new states from the rubble of the great European land empires and with the construction, largely under British auspices, of an oversight regime for the transferred German and Ottoman territories. As we've seen, for ten years, first under the leadership of Sir Frederick Lugard, and then under pressure from Germany, that oversight project worked to enhance ideals of indirect rule and the open door favored by most British imperial statesmen. And yet that project, too, reeled under the twin onslaughts of economic crisis and the strident territorial claims made by the revisionist states. The move to internationalize European imperialism foundered as Europe turned protectionist and as the so-called 'have not' powers claimed subject territories of their own.

But that project hadn't quite died in 1938, for two reasons. The first was that oversight had become a routinized part of international practice, involving mechanisms that persisted even as the League spun into crisis. But the second reason was because it still had, in 1938, the protection and support of the imperial power that had done most to craft it. Japan withdrew its Commission member only in 1938, and the other mandatory powers continued to send reports and representatives – partly out of habit, but partly because Britain sheltered the League regime.

In 1939, however, that alliance finally shattered. It broke down over Palestine. The political history of interwar Palestine is too often seen, I think, either through the presentist optic of rival Israeli and Palestinian claims, or simply as an arena of British colonial activity. But Palestine was not a colony: it was a mandated territory under League oversight. And it was, in fact, the mandated territory in which policymaking was most thoroughly internationalized and League oversight had the greatest effect. Thus, it

was also where Britain statesmen came to understand that ‘internationalization’ had become a force they could not control. Today I’m going to use Palestine as an optic through which to track the end of Britain’s Geneva project. I’ll begin by noting some practices routinized by the League. I’ll then sketch briefly how those came to affect British policy towards Palestine. Finally, I’ll look more closely at the conflict between Geneva and London over the handling of the Arab Revolt of the late thirties. You won’t be surprised to learn that William Ormsby-Gore, Colonial Secretary from 1936-38 and a constant presence in these lectures, will accompany us. Whether his experiences over Palestine would confirm or confound his earlier convictions we have yet to discover.

So let me begin with the effects that the turn to Geneva had had on international relations. I want to note the significance of three practices, which we might call publicness, legalism, and routinized consultation.

Certainly openness or publicness was a League aim from the start. Publicity, the early League official Philip Noel-Baker wrote in a memorandum for Secretary General Sir Eric Drummond in October of 1921 was important for two reasons: first because full discussion was likely to lead to the right outcome (precisely the argument that John Stuart Mill made in *On Liberty*, and one that remained a tenet of liberal internationalism), and second because publicity would mobilize people behind the League.<sup>308</sup> Running against the inclinations of the secrecy-obsessed Cabinet Secretary Sir Maurice Hankey, British internationalists like Robert Cecil, Philip Noel-Baker, and William Ormsby-Gore wrote stipulations requiring publication of League documents and the right of petition into the oversight regime. Cecil spent two decades building up the League of Nations Union, which tried to ensure that the governments meeting in Geneva kept ordinary but mobilized citizens in view.

I hope you’ve noticed the many ways in which that publicness enhanced the League’s capacity and prestige, with European newspaper-reading publics raising their voices against South Africa’s repression in South West Africa or British plans for Closer Union in East Africa. But it’s important to note that publicness created problems as well, especially as European relations worsened. Indeed, in the mid thirties, publicity-defending Cecil, secrecy-obsessed Hankey, and Drummond, the man fated to manage their quarrel, argued bitterly about whether excessive publicity or excessive secrecy was responsible for the League’s various failures. When Cecil blamed the failure of the 1933 disarmament conference on secrecy, Hankey disagreed. The disarmament negotiations held in Washington in 1921 and in London in 1930 had produced real agreements, he stated, but only because negotiations had been conducted in private; by contrast, Geneva’s open processes had led all to play to their domestic audiences and produced nothing at all.<sup>309</sup> Publicness just led governments to say things they didn’t mean, and in

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<sup>308</sup> CAC, NBKR 4/444, Baker, ‘Press publicity for the League,’ 6 October 1921.

<sup>309</sup> BL, Add. MS 50188, Hankey to Cecil, 27 Oct. 1933.

any case public opinion was more variable, more easily manipulated, and often more nationalist, than British internationalists were willing to admit. Drummond understood that, and had earlier mildly reproved Cecil for thinking that Japanese ‘public opinion’ would surely force Japan to comply with League directives about Manchuria.<sup>310</sup> As Ambassador to Italy, watching Italian matrons strip the rings from their fingers to support the fascist cause, he would warn his government that British internationalists did not represent the ‘public opinion’ of the world. This was a lesson Cecil never learned.

And if publicity turned out to have ambiguous effects, the same proved true of a second practice, which we might call legalism or textualism. League politics turned on words: on the carefully drafted communiqué, the painstakingly agreed convention, the minutes checked by each speaker before released to the press. The sensitive nature of so much League business deepened textualism, for vulnerable experts or squabbling states defended their authority by citing chapter and verse. We’ve seen that textualism, like publicity, mattered. The League’s ruling that imperial powers were not sovereign in territories held under international mandate, the British Law Officers’ ruling that Closer Union in East Africa would violate the Covenant, Hoare’s argument that Britain was pledged to sanctions against Italy: all of these were enabled by careful textual scrutiny.

And yet textualism, like publicity, created problems, for the British in particular. Intense public scrutiny and strong-state administrative traditions made Britain reluctant to make pledges it had no intention of honouring, but especially because they thought the League biased towards Britain anyway, not all states had such scruples. In 1924 Drummond discovered that his French Under Secretary thought Council decisions only recommendations, which member states were free to comply with or not. Drummond, cautious as he was, disagreed: Council decisions certainly bind member states.<sup>311</sup> But plenty of Britons disagreed: Amery, certainly, did, and Hankey, the spider at the center of the Cabinet web, did too. Geneva, Hankey insisted, was only an arena for discussion; if Britain would come to binding agreements it would do so through diplomatic channels and in lockstep with its imperial partners, not with the motley assortment of countries that, by the late thirties, made up the membership of the League.

Which brings me to the third consequential and hard-to-manage practice instantiated by the League: regular meetings of the Council. This was not ‘summitry’, great-power collaboration to address particular crises. It was, rather, regular consultation among selected states to manage the routine business of the world. Initially, the British government had let its League enthusiasts – Balfour, Cecil – represent it on the Council, but from the mid-twenties, Britain was represented by the Foreign Secretary himself. Prime Ministers often came for the smaller European states, and in its heyday, the period of German membership, the Council did act as a venue for pragmatic international conciliation and problem-solving.

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<sup>310</sup> BL, Add MS 51112, Drummond to Cecil, 29 Dec. 1931 and Cecil to Drummond, 31 Dec. 1931.

<sup>311</sup> BL, Add MS 51110, Drummond to Cecil, 24 July 1924.

But that consultation also created problems. Nothing discussed in the Council could be kept secret; worse, as Japan, Germany and Italy exited the League, the Council ceased to be a venue through which the great powers, usually having first met privately, could manage global relations. Instead, it became a space where small states formed alliances and where medium-sized states bid for a larger role. British officials found Poland especially vexing. The Poles were ‘impudent’ and full of ‘fantastical jealousy,’ Cecil fulminated in 1926 when Poland demanded a permanent Council seat. ‘The Poles are the champion bluffers and beggars of Europe, and the more you give them, the more they ask.’ ‘They make me perfectly sick.’<sup>312</sup> When Germany left, Poland – quite understandably, given its vulnerable position – became still more demanding, but Cecil no more sympathetic.

But how did those practices of publicness, legalism and consultation affect Palestine? Briefly, they constrained British policy, first by shifting debate and scrutiny from London to Geneva, second by proliferating the groups involved in that oversight, and finally by making it possible for European interests to trump imperial and local interests. Let me explain.

That policymaking would be especially ‘public’ and especially international for Palestine should not surprise, for no other transferred territory had quite the range of vocal states and communities interested in its fate. The United States, virtually all European states, various diasporic Jewish Zionist and non-Zionist organizations, Sharif Husayn and the Hashemite interest, a host of pan-Arab and Palestinian Arab organizations, the Catholic church, various Christian organizations and missions, and simply interested parties of all stripes, claimed the right to be heard. The fate of Palestine was a major subject of contestation in Paris in 1919, at San Remo in 1920, at the July 1922 meeting of the Council in London at which the Palestine mandate was finally approved, and that strife recurred at League Assemblies and conferences thereafter. The balance between rival Arab and Jewish claims to national self-determination within this territorial space was always the most hotly contested issue, but other controversies proliferated as well.

Over time, that international ‘publicness’ came to work to the Zionist advantage. Initially, that was not the case. Once the Balfour declaration had been incorporated into the mandate, the Zionist Organization had concentrated on building up the Jewish presence and Jewish institutions; it worked in collaboration with the British government and not the League. Only in late 1924 did the Organization’s president Chaim Weizmann wake up to the fact that, as he put it to a friend, ‘We have neglected Geneva, and the Arabs have been hard at work there.’<sup>313</sup> Arab nationalists organized in a Syro-Palestinian Congress had established an office in Geneva, headed by the Syrian Druze politician,

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<sup>312</sup> BL, Add MS 51111, Cecil to Drummond, 10 Sept. 1926.

<sup>313</sup> Weizmann to Rothenberg and Neumann, 9 Nov. 1924, in *LPCW*, vol. 12, 249.

Shakib Arslan; they were also inundating the League with petitions. The Mandates Commission appeared pro-Arab at their first serious review of Palestine in 1924.

What is striking, however, is how effectively the Zionist Organization responded to this political challenge. After using Weizmann's excellent private networks to bring Britain to reaffirm its support for the Jewish national home in the Council, the organization too established a Permanent Office in Geneva, appointing the convivial and well-liked Victor Jacobson and then the highly capable Nahum Goldmann to handle relations with the League. Henceforth, Jacobson would keep the Commission, the Council and sympathetic journalists well-supplied with the Zionist Organization's comprehensive memoranda and his own advice, would apprise colleagues in London and Palestine about upcoming Geneva meetings, and would induce the Secretariat to treat him, as it did not treat Arslan, if not exactly as the delegate of a member state, then at least as the representative of an organization textually entitled to the League's benevolent support. Weizmann too cultivated the Commission members and some became personal friends, especially William Rappard, who was initially sympathetic to the Arab position but who, by his own admission, entirely changed his mind after attending the opening ceremony of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem at Weizmann's invitation. The members of the Commission and the Zionist leaders were, after all, men of much the same type. Cultivated, cosmopolitan, liberal and European, they shared a common culture and orientation – a common habitus, one might say – that made collaboration easy and natural.

Of course, Arslan and the Syro-Palestinian Congress were trying to influence the League too, but the Zionist organization was more effective. It had better political networks and skills: strong organizations, a raft of law professors skilled at drafting memoranda, sympathizers in key official positions, an intelligence network as effective as that any state deployed. Historians have long known that the Zionist organization had access to Palestine High Commission documents, including the Commissioner's private correspondence, as they were written; records in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem make clear that they gained access to uncorrected Mandates Commission minutes and memoranda as well. Importantly, they used such secret information to inform their public diplomacy without ever letting on that they held it: thus, as with the Anti-Slavery Society, confidential correspondence underwrote public activity and made it more effective. Weizmann, for example, routinely sent Commission members both 'official' and 'confidential' letters about the same matters; over time, the Commission came to be guided by that 'private' advice. And much of that advice was about the meaning of texts.

For textualism was crucial to mandate administration: every territory was administered, in theory, according to a mandate text. And the Palestine mandate was a particularly thorny document. True, as the great historian J.C. Hurwitz noted, it was

‘framed unmistakably in the Zionist interest,’<sup>314</sup> with precise clauses stipulating Britain’s obligations towards the Jews, and the Arab population referred to only as ‘existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.’ But it was ambiguous nonetheless. Britain was to place the country ‘under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home’ (Article 2), and thus to ‘facilitate Jewish immigration’ and to encourage ‘close settlement by Jews on the land’ (Article 6). Yet it was also to foster ‘the development of self-governing institutions’ (also Article 2) and to ensure ‘that the rights and position of other sections of the population are not prejudiced’ (also Article 6). From the start, those clauses elicited a riot of interpretation. Natasha Wheatley, in a recent study of all of the Palestine petitions, has shown just how hard Arab and Jewish interpreters worked to force the mandate to speak on their behalf.<sup>315</sup>

For the Commission and for the British, however, the heart of the matter was how those pledges to facilitate the Jewish ‘national home’ and to protect the local population’s rights could be reconciled. Initially, the Commission had worried they could not be, but once Britain stated categorically that they could, the Commission was forced to accept that claim too as ‘text.’ It then had to ‘interpret’ how that reconciliation might happen.

It would be wearying to trace every twist and turn in the Commission’s thought. Briefly, it first followed the joint British and Zionist argument that Jewish immigration would promote economic development, which would benefit the Arab population too. The problems began in the late twenties when the Labour government concluded that Jewish immigration had caused land hunger among the Arab peasantry, and proposed restrictions on immigration and land sales, and moves towards representative government. Those plans, as we know, were reversed, but they led the Commission to issue its own interpretation of how the mandate’s dual obligations might be reconciled. Hitherto they had simply endorsed both Arab aspirations to self-government and Jewish aspirations to a national home; now, however, they distinguished between immediate obligations and ultimate goals. Maintaining Jewish immigration, the Commission decided, was an immediate obligation; introducing self-government, however, was an ultimate goal – a ruling that made it possible to imagine ‘reconciling’ the two obligations simply by putting representative government on hold until the demographic balance had swung in the Jewish favor. Weizmann had always argued that since the Balfour pledge had been made, not to the Jews of Palestine but to the Jews of the world, Palestine’s existing inhabitants could not ‘be considered as owning the country in the sense in which the inhabitants of Iraq or of Egypt possess their respective countries,’ and that any form of self-government that would privilege their claims over those of the Jewish world population was thus out of the question.<sup>316</sup> The Commission’s redefinition of self-

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<sup>314</sup> J.C. Hurwitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (1950; new ed. New York, 1976), 18.

<sup>315</sup> Natasha Wheatley, ‘Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,’ *Past and Present*, 227 (2015), 205-48.

<sup>316</sup> Weizmann to Shuckburgh, 5 Mar. 1930, *LPCW*, vol. 14, 239-43.



government as only a remote object did not endorse that interpretation, but it kept it on the table.<sup>317</sup>

And in 1932, the PMC finally (if narrowly) agreed to put self-government indefinitely on hold. By a 6 to 5 vote, the Commission declined to support a British government plan to introduce a Legislative Council, even though it had endorsed progress toward self-government only the previous year. It had been hard to bring them round, Jacobson in Geneva wrote to the Zionist Executive in London, but the majority had come to accept that, since democratic institutions might endanger the national home, they could not yet be introduced.<sup>318</sup> British officials were dismayed: great effort had been put into cultivating Arab support, and moving towards self-government was, after all, one of the obligations of the mandate. But that was no longer the way Geneva saw it. By 1933, the point at which the world changed, under the Commission's close scrutiny, the mandate text had come to mean, above all, the requirement to facilitate Jewish immigration.

Now, there is a menacing international context for this shift, and it is crying out for acknowledgement. The Nazi seizure of power in 1933 utterly transformed the situation of European Jews and with it the politics of Palestine. Once a magnet for convinced Zionists, the territory now became a potential refuge for hitherto unanticipated numbers of Jews. Jewish immigration to Palestine, stagnant in the late twenties, now rose rapidly. Between 1931 and 1936 the Jewish population more than doubled, from 175,000 to 370,000 (that is, to 27% of the population); and the Jewish share of the economy topped 50%.

But if that immigration dramatically altered the composition and character of Palestine, as a response to the European crisis it was a drop in a bucket. For, the Nazi revolution not only imperiled Germany's own relatively assimilated Jewish population but unleashed a wave of copycat and competitive anti-Semitism, as other East European states scrambled to show how eager they too were to rid themselves of their (much larger) Jewish populations. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Jews found their civic status eroding, discriminatory measures and practices proliferating, and demagogues blaming them for everything from the economic depression to the deteriorating international situation. In Poland, where the government became explicitly anti-Semitic in May 1935, the Socialist party and the Jewish Bund put up a brave fight against the ethnic nationalist tide, but the Zionist argument that Jews could never achieve

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<sup>317</sup> That crucial interpretation was hammered out in the context of a PMC review of British policy following the 1929 Western Wall conflict; see 'Report,' in 17 *PMCM*, 140-43. The 'twists and turns' of British and PMC policy are more extensively summarized in Pedersen, 'The Impact of League Oversight on British Policy in Palestine.' In *Palestine, Britain and Empire: The Mandate Years*. Ed. Rory Miller. London: Ashgate, 2010, 39-65.

<sup>318</sup> For the fierce debates over that issue, see 22 *PMCM*, *passim*, and report at 194-201. For Jacobson's perceptive account of PMC deliberations, see esp. *CZA*, L22/856, Jacobson to Brodetsky, 5 Oct. and 8, 16, and 20 Nov. 1932.

full freedom except in a state of their own began to seem incontrovertible.<sup>319</sup> Even hitherto critical European and American liberal and assimilationist Jews moved into sympathy with Zionism.<sup>320</sup>

Which brings me to my third practice: the practice of regular inter-state consultation. I have said that no major European political crisis was handled through the Council after the Italo-Ethiopian fiasco, but that is not quite right, for British handling of the Arab Revolt in Palestine – in so many ways a European political crisis – was open for comment. Britain’s loyalty to the mandates regime meant that Commission reports, and hence Palestine policy, were reviewed regularly at Council meetings. And here the composition of the Council mattered very much. It wasn’t that Palestine’s Arabs had no international allies, for some Indian leaders and the formally independent Arab states of Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and (from 1937) Egypt all sympathized with the Palestinian cause. But those states were not represented on the Council.

By contrast, an array of European states always were. Some European Council members – horrified, like the Mandates Commission, by the worsening situation of European Jews – supported League efforts to find refuge, including refuge for some in Palestine. More ambiguous is the role played by Poland and Romania, states reborn under the sign of ethnic nationalism, eager to reduce their ‘minority’ populations, and both on the Council for much of the interwar period. Very much for their own reasons, they too were staunch supporters of the Zionist cause. During the communal violence in Palestine in 1929-30, both had pushed Britain to restore order so that Jewish immigration could continue; during the Arab rising in the late thirties, they said the same. Palestine must have ‘a maximum capacity of absorption,’ Poland’s Colonel Beck said in 1937.<sup>321</sup> Immigration to Palestine, Romania’s Nicolas Comnene added the following year, not knowing the future resonance of his language, would ‘assist appreciably in relieving the congestion in the Central and Eastern European countries, and would thus make it possible to look forward to a final solution’ to Europe’s Jewish Question.<sup>322</sup> Now shamelessly aping both Germany’s demand for colonies and its drive to purge itself of Jews, Poland also put in a bid for membership on the Mandates Commission and advertised its willingness to take over the Palestine mandate.<sup>323</sup> On the Council, states concerned to save Jews and states eager to rid themselves of Jews together pressed

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<sup>319</sup> For that deteriorating situation, see esp. Bernard Wasserstein, On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2012), and for Poland in particular, Edward D. Wynot, Jr., “‘A Necessary Cruelty’: The Emergence of Official Anti-Semitism in Poland, 1936-39,” AHR, 76: 4 (Oct. 1971), 1035-58.

<sup>320</sup> For which, see Robert S. Wistrich, ‘Zionism and its Jewish “Assimilationist” Critics (1897-1948),’ Jewish Social Studies, new ser., 4: 2 (Winter, 1998), 59-111.

<sup>321</sup> Poland urged Britain to grant more immigration permits to Palestine at the League Assembly in 1934; see ‘The Palestine Mandate,’ The Times, 22 Sept. 1934, 11. See also Beck’s statements at the 98<sup>th</sup> Council, Sept. 14, 1937, in LNOJ, 18: 12 (Dec. 1937), 889, 903.

<sup>322</sup> See Statement by Comnene at the 102<sup>nd</sup> Council, Sept. 17, 1938, in LNOJ, 19: 11 (Nov. 1938), 850.

<sup>323</sup> See Statement by Komarnicki at the 97<sup>th</sup> session of the Council, 27 May 1937, in LNOJ, May-June 1937, 300, and Weinbaum, Marriage, 110-16.

Britain to keep the Arab population under control so that Palestine could take in as many Jews as possible.

But if the League's oversight regime, and especially its publicness, textualism and consultation, applied within the context of the rise of the Nazi state and of worsening anti-Semitic violence, worked to define Palestine in terms of Europe's so-called 'Jewish question', by the thirties imperial interests were pushing Britain in the other direction. For the global balance had shifted. There were now a host of independent states in the Middle East. They were monarchies under British patronage, but their populations were anti-Zionist. Nor had the Arab population in Palestine ever become reconciled to the Jewish national home: if anything it had become more bitter. In 1936, that anger would explode. As fate would have it, the Colonial Secretary during that crisis was William Ormsby-Gore, who, recall, had been at the Arab Bureau when promises of Arab independence were made to Sharif Husayn, who had been at the Colonial Office when the Balfour declaration was delivered to Chaim Weizmann, and who had been one of the architects of the League's oversight regime. Now, Ormsby-Gore would have the job of making peace in Palestine with the international tools he had forged. How well did he manage, and what did it teach him?

The Arab revolt which began with a general strike in April 1936 and lasted until British troops mopped up the last pockets of rural resistance in 1939, did not 'internationalize.' It was international from the start. Born of Arab disillusion after the failure of the Legislative Council proposal, and drawing heart from the successful example of the general strike in Syria next door, the revolt was seen across the Moslem world as an anti-imperialist cause. Volunteers arrived from Iraq, Transjordan and Syria; neighboring Arab governments, who negotiated the strike's end, claimed an interest in the matter.<sup>324</sup> The Arab Revolt was fought as an insurgency, against the British Army and not primarily against the Jews, but the status of the Jewish population of Palestine was at stake from the start. And that made the Revolt an international question for the whole of Europe as well.

Britain tried to restore order. Ormsby-Gore, taking over as Colonial Secretary two months into the crisis, swiftly introduced censorship, curfews, collective punishments, the destruction of houses found harboring weapons, and the death penalty for bombing.<sup>325</sup> Although it took years, harsh counterinsurgency techniques, a massive troop presence, and ultimately the unwillingness of the exhausted rural population to tolerate the exactions and bloodletting of increasingly out of control bands any longer,

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<sup>324</sup> For the role of the Arab states, see esp., M.J. Cohen, 'Origins of the Arab States' Involvement in Palestine,' *Middle Eastern Studies*, 19: 2 (Apr. 1983), 244-252, and Norman Anthony Rose, 'The Arab Rulers and Palestine, 1936: The British Reaction,' *Journal of Modern History*, 44: 2 (June 1972), 213-231.

<sup>325</sup> 312 *H.C. Deb.*, 18 May 1936, cols. 317-8, and 313 *H.C. Deb.*, 19 June 1936, cols. 1313-96.

finally drove the rebels to the wall.<sup>326</sup> If anything, the revolt weakened the Arab population; by contrast, the Yishuv emerged more productive, better armed, and more ‘state-like’ than ever.

Yet the Arab Revolt achieved one thing: it finally convinced the British that the Arab population would never be reconciled to Zionism. A Royal Commission appointed under Lord Peel which visited Palestine in the winter of 1936 surveyed virtually every aspect of the territory’s life, but only two conclusions in its massive report truly mattered. The first was that the mandate was unworkable and would have to be abandoned. As the report put it bluntly, ‘we cannot – in Palestine as it now is – both concede the Arab claim to self-government and secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home.’ The argument that the Arabs would grow reconciled to Jewish immigration had been proven false; to the contrary, economic improvement had merely deepened communal antagonism. Both communities had become irredeemably ‘national’; violent outbreaks had become common. Moreover, things were only likely to get worse,’ for Palestinian Arab claims to sovereignty and pressures to grant refuge to Europe’s hard-pressed Jews could only grow stronger. Peace of a sort could be maintained through repression, but, as the report put it, ‘the moral objections to maintaining a system of government by constant repression are self-evident.’ Practically, too, repression would lead nowhere. It would further exacerbate relations between Arabs and Jews; it would damage British interests in the world; it would alienate ‘two peoples who are traditionally our friends.’ No more devastating indictment of the mandate could have been imagined.<sup>327</sup>

Indeed, so desperate was the situation, so deep the wound, that a more drastic remedy – what the report called a ‘surgical cut’ – might be necessary. This was the second conclusion. As there was no hope of peace under the mandate, ‘the Government should take the appropriate steps for the termination of the present Mandate on the basis of Partition.’ That alone offered some chance of meeting both communities’ national aspirations. A further inquiry on the ground would work the details out; provisionally, however, the Commission suggested that the northern coastal areas and Galilee become a Jewish state, the interior and the Negev be joined to Emir Abdullah’s Transjordan as an Arab state, and a final region around Jerusalem with a corridor to the sea remain under mandate. Adjustments and inducements would be necessary. Since the Jewish population was better off and the Jewish state would contain the better land, it should provide a subvention to the Arab state. Some economic benefits would need to be shared

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<sup>326</sup> Much has been written on the 1936-39 Arab revolt. For an account stressing the British authorities’ unsystematic response and reluctance to crack down, see Charles Townshend, ‘The Defence of Palestine: Insurrection and Public Security, 1936-1939,’ *The English Historical Review*, 103: 409 (Oct. 1988), 917-949; for a more recent revisionist account stressing the brutality of Britain’s response, Matthew Hughes, ‘Lawlessness was the Law: British Armed Forces, the Legal System and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936-1939,’ in *Britain, Palestine and Empire: The Mandate Years*, ed. Rory Miller (London: Ashgate, 2010), 141-56. For Arab casualties, see Walid Khalidi, ‘Note on Arab Casualties in the 1936-39 Rebellion,’ in Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest*, Appendix IV, 846-9.

<sup>327</sup> Palestine Royal Commission, *Report*, PP 1936-37, Cmd. 5479, 363-4, 370-4.

and trade relations regularized. Most critically, since there were some 225,000 Arabs within the proposed Jewish state and the much smaller figure of some 1250 Jews in the proposed Arab state, those populations would need to be transferred. ‘In the last resort the exchange would be compulsory.’<sup>328</sup>

Partition had been in the air for some time and was after all a tried and true imperial method of abating communal strife through ‘territorialization.’<sup>329</sup> In Ireland, however, partition had been used to give territorial expression to a communal division that was three hundred years old, while in Palestine it was proposed to create a state for a community that, while possessing an indisputable historical connection, had in 1919 made up no more than 10% of the population. True, that population was now rapidly expanding, but because Jews needed refuge from European – not Arab – violence and hatred. The Peel Commission admitted this, but pointed out that while the sacrifice demanded of Palestine’s Arabs might be great, ‘it is not only the people of that country that have to be considered.’ For:

The Jewish Problem is not the least of the many problems which are disturbing international relations at this critical time and obstructing the path to peace and prosperity. If the Arabs at some sacrifice could help to solve that problem, they would earn the gratitude not of the Jews alone but of all the Western World.<sup>330</sup>

That the Peel Commission would in the end conclude that Arabs should ‘sacrifice’ to solve a ‘problem’ of European invention should not surprise; this was the logic of the colonial appeasement plan I discussed last week as well. But nor should we be surprised to learn that the Arab national movement rejected this call to sacrifice.

British colonial policy was usually made in Cabinet and in confidence, and then discussed in Parliament. But Cabinet discussion and Parliamentary review of the partition proposal was brief and inadequate. This was because the Mandates Commission had called a special session, and Geneva trumped London. As Ormsby-Gore later complained, he knew he needed Cabinet support, but ‘the parties at Geneva had...demanded...an immediate statement. I had to go hot foot to Geneva...in order to produce something.’<sup>331</sup> And in Geneva, policymaking turned into an international free for all. Ormsby-Gore found rival Jewish and Arab delegations – as he put it, ‘the Jews bad and the Arabs impossible’ – and an avid crop of journalists.<sup>332</sup>

For three weeks, in the summer of 1937, Ormsby-Gore, an advocate of self-determination for both Arabs and Jews since his days at the Arab Bureau, did his best to muster support for partition.<sup>333</sup> For seventeen years, he stated, the British had sought to

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 375-6, 380-93.

<sup>329</sup> For that background, see Penny Sinanoglou, ‘British Plans for the Partition of Palestine, 1929-1938,’ *The Historical Journal*, 52: 1 (2009), 131-152.

<sup>330</sup> Palestine Royal Commission, *Report*, 395.

<sup>331</sup> 111 *H.L. Deb.*, 8 Dec. 1938, cols 412-67; Ormsby-Gore at col. 438.

<sup>332</sup> NA, CO 733/326/6, Martin to Downie, 8 Aug. 1937.

<sup>333</sup> National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Brogyntyn Papers, PEC 10/1/15, Ormsby-Gore to his mother, 16 Aug. 1937.

reconcile Arab and Jewish aspirations but had failed, and current conditions – that is, the urgent search for Jewish refuge in the face of European anti-Semitism, and the growing force of Arab nationalism – made any prospect of success recede further. Partition was ‘the best and most hopeful solution’ to this deadlock.<sup>334</sup>

And what did he learn from that grilling? Essentially, as he wrote to the High Commissioner, that Palestine ‘has become an ‘international’ problem, and Geneva will treat it as such.’ It was not seen as a British territory, or placed in the context of imperial interest or even regional security; indeed, the Commission greatly resented the Arab princes’ claim to be heard on Palestine. For they thought of Palestine as international – really European – property, as a ‘refuge for persecuted Jews of Central Europe.’ They were ‘vividly conscious’ of Poland’s desire to get ‘as many Jews out of Poland and into Palestine as possible’ – and indeed, precisely at that moment, the Polish Foreign Ministry was busy calculating the number of Jews that could be shoehorned into the proposed Jewish area.<sup>335</sup> The Commission was making the same calculations: indeed, the day before the session had opened, its chairman Pierre Orts was in intense discussions with Nahum Goldmann about precisely how many Jews could be brought to Palestine if the proposed Jewish state were enlarged to include the whole coastal area and the Negev, and if those 225,000 Arabs could be transferred to Transjordan.<sup>336</sup>

Yet, except for the prospect it offered of granting refuge to Jews, Ormsby-Gore found the Commission very grudging about the partition plan. It had no real faith in the capacity of either Arabs or Jews to govern themselves, and preferred continued British and League control. Its main concern, indeed, was to contest the British conclusion that the mandate was impossible. What had caused all the trouble, the Dutch member insisted, returning to textualism, was simply the view that there was a ‘dual obligation’ when the mandate’s purpose had clearly been to create a Jewish state – a declaration of ‘original intent’ in keeping with Zionist interpretations and the humanitarian needs of the thirties but at odds with virtually every official clarification Britain had made. What had failed, the Commission insisted, was simply Britain’s policy of ‘extreme conciliation.’ Had the mandatory Power supported the Zionist project more strenuously, violence might never have broken out. The administration should have imposed martial law immediately; it should have replaced Arab policemen, imported more troops and armed Jews; it should have exercised stricter censorship and shut down opposition newspapers; it should have arrested and tried Arab officials who criticized government policy; it should have imposed the death penalty more readily; it should have threatened to bomb villages that harbored rebels.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> For that statement, 32 PMCM, 14–25; ‘The League and Palestine,’ The Observer, Aug. 1, 1937; ‘Mr Ormsby-Gore on Partition,’ The Manchester Guardian, Aug. 2, 1937.

<sup>335</sup> Weinbaum, Marriage, 106-110.

<sup>336</sup> NA, CO 733/326/6, Ormsby-Gore to Wauchope, 24 Aug. 1937.

<sup>337</sup> The PMC spent the whole of its 32<sup>nd</sup> session reviewing the government’s partition plan: see 32 PMCM, with Van Asbeck’s comments about the mandate’s original intent at 162-5.

Ormsby-Gore, clearly unhappy with the harsh measures he had already imposed, denied that such repression would have been effective. Most likely, he said, it would spread Moslem-Jewish antagonism beyond Palestine, and was in any case unjust. There genuinely were two communities in Palestine, and no amount of legalistic interpretation of an inherently ambiguous founding text could make one disappear or reconcile their conflicting, but equally legitimate, claims. Nor could that be done by force – at least, not by a democratic government. ‘For better or worse, the people of Great Britain were a liberal and democratic people,’ Ormsby-Gore insisted, and would not ‘for long be persuaded to use military force to settle a conflict between right and right.’<sup>338</sup>

And yet, Ormsby-Gore remained a League loyalist, accepting that the British government could not impose partition without the League’s approval.<sup>339</sup> His attempt to win international backing made sense, for with strong support Britain could perhaps have forced partition through. But it was not successful. The opposition of the Arabs, the hostility of the League, and the carping response from Weizmann and liberal internationalists in Britain itself, doomed the proposal. Nahum Goldmann, who was presciently and strenuously supportive from the start, always saw this as a lost opportunity, believing the plan offered the only real prospect of refuge in Palestine for a considerable number of Jews; Zionist leaders were also eager to have Britain, and not the new Jewish state, bear the opprobrium of forcible population transfer. But there was no groundswell of support for a plan that, at least in some measure, recognized and sought to reconcile both Jewish and Arab claims.<sup>340</sup>

The failure of the partition plan spelled the end of Ormsby-Gore’s career as a front-rank politician. ‘A broken reed,’ in Blanche Dugdale’s words,<sup>341</sup> in May 1938 he went off to the Lords as Lord Harlech. Ormsby-Gore, who has been with us through almost every one of these lectures, was, I would argue, not only the most capable and imaginative Colonial Secretary of the interwar period but also the only one willing to gamble on the international ideals and practices that grew out of the Wilsonian moment. Now angry and humiliated, in a speech in the Lords he placed the blame on Geneva. The mandate text had been ‘the bane of all administration by successive governments in Palestine,’ he said, while the oversight apparatus had usurped parliamentary prerogatives

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<sup>338</sup> 32 PMCM, 170.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 14, 186–7; Minutes of the 98<sup>th</sup> session of the League Council, Sept. 14, 1937, LNOJ, 18: 12 (Dec. 1937), 901.

<sup>340</sup> Weizmann’s letters to Ormsby-Gore immediately after the Peel report set strict conditions for Jewish consent to the partition plan; by December, with that plan in danger, he was telling Leon Blum that the proposal was ‘our greatest triumph since the Balfour Declaration.’ See, Weizmann to Ormsby-Gore, 15 June 1937, 118–19, 14 July 1937, 154–6, and 20 July 1937, 179–80; and Weizmann to Leon Blum, 31 Dec. 1937, 277–9, in LPCW, v. 18. For the counterproductive results of Zionist diplomacy over partition, see Norman A. Rose, The Gentile Zionists: A Study in Anglo-Zionist Diplomacy, 1929-1939 (London: Routledge, 1973), esp. 139–40; Michael Cohen, Palestine: Retreat from the Mandate: The Making of British Policy, 1936-45 (New York: P. Elek, 1978) 34–8; and for Goldmann’s illuminating account of this ‘missed opportunity,’ Nahum Goldmann, The Autobiography of Nahum Goldmann: Sixty Years of Jewish Life (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 179-81.

<sup>341</sup> Rose, Gentile Zionists, 152.

and made government impossible. What Ormsby-Gore could not bring himself to say was that he had hung his noose himself.

But if the failure of the partition project meant the defeat of Ormsby-Gore, it also spelt the end of British deference to the League. In Geneva, at first, no-one quite realized that. The Mandates Commission, determined for humanitarian reasons to keep the gates of Palestine open, ruled that the suspension of Jewish immigration to Palestine amounted to a partial suspension of the mandate – further evidence of the way that text’s meaning had narrowed.<sup>342</sup> The anti-Semitic states were blunter. Jews would have to suffer a good deal if the Western powers failed to arrange their emigration, the Polish representative to the League told the Zionist Organization’s representative after the November 1938 German pogroms. Poland too was prepared ‘to make the situation of the Jewish diaspora in Poland as difficult as possible’ in order to force the Western powers to act.<sup>343</sup>

Britain, however, was no longer inclined to listen. And this was not simply because Malcolm MacDonald, who succeeded Ormsby-Gore as Colonial Secretary, also found the prospect of indefinitely ‘slaying Arabs’ (as he put it) intolerable. Nor was that just because, as David Ben Gurion grasped, Britain would see the Polish threat of copycat persecution as ‘a case of pogromists preaching morality.’<sup>344</sup> It was also that, if war was genuinely coming – and it looked as if it was – Britain could no longer afford to tie up troops, and alienate Arab opinion, to placate Geneva. Thus in 1939, for the first time, Britain made policy for Palestine without worrying what the League would say. Arab and Jewish leaders were brought to London for a fractious Round Table conference; MacDonald then issued a White Paper. Following one final allowance of 75,000, further Jewish immigration would be contingent on Arab consent, and Britain would, within ten years, build a unitary state based on the existing, that is majority Arab, population.<sup>345</sup> A wave of domestic and international protest against these plans, and the explicit condemnation of a majority of the Mandates Commission, had no effect. The Government did not believe their policy in violation of the mandate, the Colonial Office spokesman stated in the Lords, but if the League Council did not agree, the Government would ask for a revised mandate. There was not ‘a shadow of a hope that this policy will not go through.’<sup>346</sup> Publicness, legalism and consultation would have to bend to imperial security after all.

I am coming to the end of my story, but it resists conclusion, for its ramifications are as extensive and weblike as the patterns of causation I’ve traced here. So let me

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<sup>342</sup> ‘Report,’ in 34 *PMCM*, 228.

<sup>343</sup> *CZA*, L22/960, M.K. [Meir Kahany], ‘Aus einem Gespräch mit dem polnischen Gesandten Komarnicki,’ 23 Nov. 1938.

<sup>344</sup> Howard (Chanoch) Rosenblum, ‘Promoting an International Conference to Solve the Jewish Problem: The New Zionist Organization’s Alliance with Poland, 1938-1939,’ *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 69: 3 (July 1991), 478-501, here at 487, 493.

<sup>345</sup> *Palestine Statement of Policy*, *PP*, Cmd. 6019 (May 1939).

<sup>346</sup> 113 *H.L. Deb.*, 23 May 1939, col. 89.



offer, briefly, four endings, which trace out some implications.

The first has to do with Palestine. At the time, and later, the White Paper policy was seen as a cruel betrayal of promises Britain made to shelter the Jewish nation-building project. Ironically, in retrospect, that project itself has been seen as a form of British imperialism through surrogacy. I think both of these rather miss the point. For, viewing this from the standpoint of Geneva, what is striking is how very deferential to League views and European public opinion Britain was, and how belated its break with the Zionist program. For Britain held to this policy through the thirties, essentially against the advice of every High Commissioner on the ground. Its patronage of the Zionist project, maintained through international pressure long past the sell-by date of British interest, did not create a Jewish state – that state made itself – but it made that outcome possible. It also enabled some European Jews to find refuge in Palestine from the hatred of non-Jewish fellow Europeans, if against the will of an existing population afire with those same ideals of self-determination. How one evaluates that complicated history depends, I should imagine, partly on where one stands in relation to what Ormsby-Gore so presciently called the ‘battle between right and right.’ But there is room for contextual understanding, and tragedy enough to go around.

My second ending, more central to these lectures, is about the consequences of Britain’s sponsorship of the League project, and especially the project of overseeing empires. The government’s bitter quarrel with the members of the Mandates Commission over Palestine mattered, because it finally prompted a shift back to what one might call entirely Whitehall-centered policy-making, and indeed a repudiation of the oversight regime itself.

None of you will be surprised to hear that Sir Maurice Hankey was the tool of that attack. For in the spring of 1939, when the Colonial Office had to recommend a new British member for the Mandates Commission, they asked the League Council to appoint Hankey, newly retired from his Cabinet post and hence eligible. The appointment was fiercely criticized in the Commons, for Hankey had no experience of colonial administration: he had been chosen, MPs charged, simply to defend the government over the White Paper. That was of course quite right, and at Geneva, through days of unrelenting private wrangling, Hankey battled the Commission’s liberal majority. He would not concede that the White Paper was in violation of the mandate but that, he insisted, was hardly the main point. The point was the mandate had been written to be flexible, precisely because effective administration required flexibility. Legalism was no basis for government.

Hankey returned from Geneva, a month before the Second World War broke out, with the lowest possible opinion of Rappard, Orts, and what he called ‘the whole narrow-

minded, legalistic crew.’<sup>347</sup> The Colonial Office, smarting from their treatment, turned against the Commission as well. They took part in the fall 1939 session only reluctantly, telling the Foreign Office that the Commission was now a ‘feeble and unrepresentative body’ of no significance.<sup>348</sup> When plans for a spring 1940 meeting began, they could see no point. The Foreign Office, aware that the Colonial Office was now trying to ‘pay off old scores against the Mandates Commission,’ insisted that planning continue, but the session was aborted by the German invasion of France.<sup>349</sup> ‘The Mandates Commission was a wholly redundant piece of international machinery more calculated to create friction than to do any good,’ Hankey advised when the question next came up. ‘I should like to see it abolished.’<sup>350</sup> By 1944, the Foreign Office was of the same mind.

Yet, the British government did not get its way. It did not get to abolish the regime it had created. This was because – as I’ve repeated too many times – international ideals and practices are hard for a single power to control. The period of the Second World War, like the first, saw a great outburst of publicness on this question of the future of the international order, with claims for self-determination once again coming up against imperial desires; this clash would generate new plans for universalizing trusteeship. The British government, this time, held back, but since the Americans were interested, in the end, Britain had to go along. The oversight regime thus reemerged as the United Nations Trusteeship system, run from New York. But the United States turned out to be a canny patron than Britain had been, for while the oversight regime was applied to almost all the former mandated territories not granted independence, the Americans made an exception for themselves. The Japanese mandated islands they had seized would be put in a separate category, that of the ‘Strategic Trust,’ not subject to the Trusteeship Council’s scrutiny. Some of those islands were used for above-ground atomic testing that rendered them poisonous and uninhabitable.

So Britain handed over to the Americans, and certainly some thought the effort to mitigate imperial antagonisms through international oversight and collaboration had failed. But I hate to end on this note, with – we might say – the triumph of Sir Maurice Hankey over William Ormsby-Gore. For that international project did have a lasting impact on the global order, bringing the world of normative statehood nearer, albeit because of the difficulty of administering empires under international oversight and not because that was the intended outcome. And if it didn’t prevent war, it’s worth noting that Hankey’s program of limiting Britain’s foreign policy commitments and binding its empire closer together – which was closer to the policy actually followed – hardly achieved its goals either. In the summer of 1939, Hankey seems to have suddenly

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<sup>347</sup> NA, CO 733/390/5, Hankey to MacDonald, 30 June 1939.

<sup>348</sup> FO 371/24022/W14147, Note by Randall, 3 Oct. 1939.

<sup>349</sup> FO 371/24433/C6462, Note by R. M. Makins, 11 June 1940.

<sup>350</sup> FO 371/24433/C9954, Hankey to Makins, 20 Sept. 1940.

realized that. So, as a third ending, let me tell you what Hankey did when he saw war coming.

What he did was stay up all night, the night of August 28, 1939, drafting an appeal to ‘public opinion’ for the British and the German papers. After all, he had met lots of Germans, and he was sure they didn’t want to go to war. So why not have all Britain’s manifold civic organizations – the Boy Scouts, the Mothers Union, the churches, the trades unions – contact their German counterparts and appeal for peace? The next morning, Hankey trotted around to the Foreign Office to talk to someone about it.

That person was the inescapable Sir Eric Drummond, now Lord Perth, now handling publicity for the government. Drummond had someone look at Hankey’s plan, or at least he said he did, and in his usual imperturbable way told Hankey that it just wouldn’t do. The Foreign Office thought the time for such appeals had past, and it was inconceivable that they would pass the German censor.<sup>351</sup>

I hope you appreciate the multiple ironies of this episode. For twenty years Hankey had disparaged public opinion and insisted on secrecy. The public was ignorant: it should be educated, but not allowed to impinge on policymaking. Its advice should be discounted; institutions that magnified its voice – that megaphone of Geneva – should be kept in their place. And yet, faced, finally, with the prospect of war, Hankey came up with a plan that was, frankly, exactly what Robert Cecil would have written or the League of Nations Union proposed. And it had the very flaw that beset that otherwise admirable group. That is, it spoke too readily, and to unselfconsciously, for the universal. Hankey, like Cecil, like so many of the men we’ve met, assumed he had the imagination and capacity to speak for ‘the public’ across the world.

This could be my fourth conclusion, one about the particular culture of British internationalism. For, working on this subject, I was struck over and over by my subjects’ propensity to confuse national and international interests, their assumption that British norms and values were universal, their readiness to speak for the world. This was not only true of men like Cecil and Toynbee; it was also true of the thousands of individual citizens who joined League of Nations Union chapters and who wrote to the papers. I found that orientation both admirable and infuriating, for the League experience would teach these men a hard lesson about the variety of ‘publics’ in the world. I think, however, that you’ve got that point. So instead, as a fourth ending, I’ll offer one brief historiographical reflection.

For as I listened to British internationalists speak I also seemed to hear something else – odd echoes of discussions that were going on in my field, that is, in British history, today. Now, as you probably know, in the United States at least, British history is a field under pressure. It is not really where the action is, and has seen its share of department

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<sup>351</sup> Hankey’s plan and his correspondence with Drummond (now Lord Perth) is in CAC, HNKY 8/32.

posts and undergraduate courses diminish. This decline has been reasonable and inevitable, a consequence of America's pivot towards the Pacific, the change in the composition of its student body, and the erosion of its reflexive Anglophilia. But for British historians, it has caused much anxiety and soul searching. For this is a field, rather like the culture it studies, long accustomed to seeing itself as central and indispensable, its moves and preoccupations as universal and not particular. As pressure for resources and jobs mounted, although for good intellectual reasons as well, British historians made an 'imperial turn' – and, once that happened, it was a short step to an international one. British historians, a North American Conference on British Studies report stated as long as decade ago, were well placed to move into world and global history; because of their reach, they could save themselves by teaching the global surveys universities wanted. Our shelves fill up with books by British historians writing international history.

I know I've done that too. But I want to register my discomfort with the form that turn has sometimes taken. For international history is not just the history of Britain's projection into the world; indeed, as I've shown, even an international institution shaped heavily by Britain became one it could not control. We can only understand such international arenas by approaching them on their own terms, seeing them whole, with other states and actors fully in view. This requires languages and comparison and a certain humility towards other fields. In my recent work, I've thus tried to show how that might be done, writing a book centered on Geneva, and not on London; one that tracks whatever blew up there, and not whatever Britain or any other state cared about or happened to pursue. Any other approach struck me as replicating that core hubristic belief: that British preferences were universal norms; that its empire was the global order in embryo. Britain played a part in shaping the international order in this era, yes, but only a part – and relativizing its claims strikes me, for anyone who genuinely would like to do international history, as the indispensable beginning of wisdom.